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Wch Way

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Wch Way #6

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# Wch Way 6

## New Wilderness Letter 13





# **Wch Way 6**

**Don Byrd, Jed Rasula, eds.**

# **New Wilderness Letter 13**

**Jerome Rothenberg, ed.**

**1985**

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WICH WAY NEW WILDERNESS LETTER

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Charles Stein

*from the forest forthetrees*

When people talk  
it isn't all  
that interesting. The small  
raccoon  
in tremendous forest light  
awed before  
the goddesses.

The Bear

of a man  
and his attitudes.

And what I want to tell my students is, listen:  
a bear walked into the smallest  
place  
and the smallest creatures  
in their piety  
believed. Taking to  
the thoughts which  
stirred within them.

This is for you, Alison Dale—

The bears walk all over the pavement

The bears walk all over the sky



I was sitting  
quiet  
on my mountain  
when the Grandparents came out  
of obscurity to warn me  
about Metis, my first wife,  
at that time pregnant with the goddess  
Athena

And I fooled her, getting her to go  
into my body, I swallowed her up  
so that her wisdom  
became  
a factor of my own  
autonomic functioning  
and Athena  
got born  
from my sky

the sky  
converts people  
to believe in  
the sky  
from being  
independently minded  
persons in  
a darkness  
of their own

I am too plump  
    and shapeless  
    underneath  
        and covered with hair  
and still within  
    an impossible  
organic  
    order and chaos . . . .

I found a new hat  
on the pavement  
made out of elephants.  
Don't panic:

The roots of simplicity  
    are sufficient thereunto—  
Who said that?

want to go SOME place  
you can't  
    GET to  
        from here

blank space  
    “knocking a cloud of insects  
        out  
        of the elephant grass”

river flowing around  
the disk  
and cutting  
into itself at the point  
where it  
began



what kind of birds exist?

the red one swooping across the road in the rain in  
the morning myself

swooping across mind-structures  
the beaded metal creature in the fork  
the molded golden elephant or owl  
or whatever it is, lost in the shadows of the “western plateau”  
and bells are birds whose sounds compose the only flight they  
know

they ring in the ceremony  
and a lake goes out on their swells

and I swell, uniting soul to spirit soul to land  
become the land swell, the ground swell, the roots  
of ancient trees I see moving in the heavy black earth of the  
field

one perfect oak where the forest used to be  
beyond memory the forest of oak grew in the field

. . . .  
later I saw mist in the oak  
and actually it was grey against a hill full of forest  
for the trees, all over the place, bare mostly standing  
where animals still live in pasture lands

aristocrats of up state  
continue to practice their being  
they occupy place  
naked in front of his private pool  
being old and of that class  
you have the right to obey  
creedless impulse

IT ISN'T A MATTER OF REPETITION:  
THE THING THAT EXCITES NARRATION  
HASN'T  
happened yet



Across the white table  
the sad man turns  
his engines  
against himself.

A part of the sky  
does not wish  
to occupy  
the space it has.

A part  
of the surface  
of the sea  
would cease to be  
subject to waves and water.

The largest house  
on the block  
becomes disconsolate:  
It doesn't wish to suffer from the light  
of an alien moon  
which  
penetrates the window one night monthly.

Huge dim moods move into its roomy parlors  
and the people only come there to be sad.

A stone  
alone  
among all the other  
stones  
doesn't wish to be a stone anymore:  
It wishes to be washed in the sea.

The doctor lives in a rocker  
across the harbor

And shall I find you  
    milky arms  
        and just the right  
    kind of emotional  
constititution to respond  
        to the way I actually am  
travelling towards non-entity  
        not yet now  
            non-  
            entity

Let light spread out on the water

Let space release the stone...

          tigers    sprinting in the plane  
they carry themselves unmistakably. That's a wish.  
          baffling the surface of our constantly undulant mirage

                    actually, confusion  
          returns  
against a simultaneous background  
of uninheritable perspicacity

what will the notebooks tell us?

instead of Priests, Large Stones  
to wield a neutral  
authority over

*all*

the moieties

the matrices  
are shifting  
in the plane

recourse to vessels      in the absence of the fatal glimpse

the purchase of excellent-  
ly spherical gazing crystals

□

literally because I want to

one has always been rooting about in the closets  
of authority

there is going to be a certain package  
on the black steps

inside the radio cabinet jewels and weapons

a certain handkerchief of softest saffron silk  
with furry fringe

friends from many years ago the connectedness  
is forbidden  
the chattering rabbits and heavy minded squirrels  
pretend to serve me  
rushing from quarters that it is not *our* nature  
to reinvent an image for  
dank muck  
dry needles  
bad light  
companions        that come at you from *angles*

□

“a retardation of the light”  
creation composed entirely of out-takes

but in the end the massive existences contrive  
to bring about a healing of the breach  
which *our* existence occupies  
and the wager rages between the Talkers-Who-Must-  
Talk-On  
in hopes of talking through  
the self-inflected woods-mass to the clearing  
— the beautiful forest light of goddesses  
the pulsing of slow sap and little creature cries  
And the Dissolutes-Who-Must Recapture-Velocity  
by slowing down to hear the whirr of size...



let us come off together well  
let us come off it together well  
let us off it together come what well will  
come let us off it together well  
let us come together  
well let us come up  
together well  
let us come off  
together well come let us off it  
together well it let come it together it  
well it let come it together it  
well it let come it together it  
let us come off together well  
let us come off it together well  
let us off it together come what well will  
come let us off it together  
let us come off together well  
let us come off it together well  
let us off it together come what well will



effort to think  
finished

the little bell  
at the back of the world  
surprised

□

I am going to become my cat  
in my next life [tonight]  
because the  
Jailors of Perfection  
are watching the force  
of my eyes

□

the future people are going to live forever  
determined by an anxiety which must grow  
as age advances  
as the railroad train accumulates its future  
and the parts  
replace each other part *by* part  
and the central kernal of selfhood  
cashes in for another dose  
structural features will appear to be exchangeable  
within an empty medium sustaining change  
the boundaries of the particle will grow to seem  
unnecessary to the marking of each one  
the marking of each thing shall grow to seem  
unnecessary  
and the entities won't have to live  
forever any more



deities look funny to  
the  
people in the city they  
engage  
protecting each other  
from mutual contempt  
and oblivion

eyes on absent  
faces

a cloud  
between deities  
[what is a cloud  
between deities?

your particular moments  
poised  
in formed space

the exercise which yields these views

each of us  
the exigent machinery producing  
each of us

the river over which large carriers  
accelerate towards light  
waiting  
forever  
for you



□

a bell to mark the moment of going in  
when the liquid drops to the puddle in the middle  
of the concept they take of the ground they hold

the bell-tones emanating across the room  
pursuing themselves in rings and swells  
jiggling the walls a minute amount  
passing wounded into the balmy hallway

□

sampling the evidence of thought by means of  
jagged scattered  
text production  
moments

□

the logic no longer manages  
the house it  
roosts upon

so saying so succeeds despair of saying so

□

certain properties. in the structure of things

in total darkness

want us

only

to know them

□

thought can be shown to have physical  
properties but

it is not these

which give it

power to move

the balanced stones)

□



that we are all standing in the simple newspaper printout  
because one of the things that has to be done is to accumulate  
facts about the difficulties these beings construe  
inherent properties of the world they think  
they have        moving about inside them  
each being and its arrogant trucking  
they want to get up and go now  
have a little lunch  
a package with definite and permanent symbolic credentials  
that some time or other it        is bound to occur  
to take them out of the middle of the muddle  
and place them into Life  
hot with continuity and perfection all night long  
anticipations of the epoch's finale  
stashed away somewhere  
so that bliss entails its own ignorance  
enlightenment confines its own rebuke  
sitting comfortably on the top of its mountain  
while certain business is conducted in the mines  
shrouded in golden clouds while towering cumuli  
menace the mountain villages

□

Hermes The Cop turns out to be a large  
athletic Black Woman with a Hat  
and dressed in White

standing on the side of the parkway she intends  
to distract me  
with her flag  
marking FALSE

CONSTRUCTION

MAINTENANCE

□

on the field  
of no field  
how can these little  
flowers  
fail to bloom

An enormous old oak tree was listening  
and the side of a hill  
and the mound of it  
covered with dark and close-cropped sapplings of pine  
which bowed to each other as if blown by the wind  
but there was no wind and in fact they were nodding  
cognizance of the capture  
of the children by the beasts  
which hunted their covered pathways

The shapes they had  
dogged them  
in the very place they were  
and the locks of gold and the bright eager faces  
and a moon went up the lanes of the west  
and a planet came into position over the mounds



the unusual pine trees clipped to make way for the phone wires  
many years ago  
survive in an unusual shape  
and growths of branches and needles compensate for the loss  
and it appears natural after all those years  
to have those shapes  
pillars in front of the water of the fair night's sky  
with its planet and perfect moon  
the sky the color of water

and the horses are asleep on the edge of the sloping field  
asleep in themselves

And you my sweetest, similarly vanish  
into your nearest whatever  
closer than all you imagine yourself to be  
seated in your small nobility of carriage  
entoning the monosyllables

you are doubled in each detail

it is the *third day*

it is raining lightly

haunted thoughts

and worldly thoughts

fit themselves uncomfortably like large wet scarves

about our heads as we pace

attempting to solve the enigmas which have been posted

an enormous pine trees looms on the lawn

its lowest branches swoop out into early morning

it keeps on saying the same thing

but there is no repeating

its roots are not in the ground...



Susan Howe

*from My Emily Dickinson*

*Trumpets sing to Battle:*

Many have spoken of it, but none can tell  
what the valley of the shadow of death should  
mean until they come in it themselves.  
The heart knows its own bitterness.

John Bunyan

‘CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME’  
(See Edgar’s song in LEAR)

Glou. No words, no words: hush.

Edg. *Child Rowland to the dark tower came,  
His word was still: Fie, foh, and fum,  
I smell the blood of a British man.*

SHAKESPEARE, *King Lear*, III, iv

One of the strangest passages in *King Lear*, even the Arden edition footnotes are at a loss to locate any one source for Shakespeare here. The little babblesong sung by sane-mad-Edgar-Tom to Gloucester, his father, who hears but doesn’t know him, first recalls Charlemagne’s Roland, and through him, bravery, self-sacrifice and chivalry. Second, Jack the Giant Killer—through him the nursery. Finally, when mythic Helen was carried away by a sea

monster, her brother Childe Roland crossed the sea in search of her. She hid him while the monster was gone; when he returned he smelled the blood of a Christian man.

What Dark Tower? Why did Robert Browning structure his enigmatic poem around this one line, then direct his readers to the rest of Edgar's mad song? Both "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and "My Life had stood — a Loaded Gun —", written in the latter half of the nineteenth century, are triumphantly negative poems. Their authors, alien explicators of ruin after the Tablets of the Law were broken, live on in archaic time beyond future. At the end of each poem, austere originators have unselfed identity, memory, poetic origins — Originality. Each lyrical "I", liberated from individual will, will die into action.

Two nameless narrators in the middle of life were set on their path to the questionable freedom of paralysis in power by a nameless, vaguely threatening Guide/Owner. Exiles, they wander a wilderness of language formed from old legends, precursor poems, archaic words, industrial and literary detritus. Cynical and gleefully aggressive, these travellers now know that Beauty is allied to Blasphemy, and Danger, a wise interpreter. Here is *Pilgrim's Progress* and Pilgrim isn't Christian. In this predatory old/New World of hunter and hunger, communal identity has been lost, time lost, specificity of place lost, sure belief lost, purpose lost. These wayfarers are free — too free. Outside, alert estray... Only a sublime and sovereign sun kindles and dives malevolently down. Night has come. The lure-dark Tower, blind as the fool's heart was a squat mirage too late. At the edge of unknown, the sacred inaccessible unseen — Lyric "I" is both guard and hunter. *We* and *We* prey on each other. Absence is the admired presence of each poem. Death roams the division — World's november. Two separate Questors have found nothing but noise of their own aggressive monologues echoing. Firm allegory has escaped into the heart of human cruelty, Love's unfathomable mystery. Into the desolate attraction of annihilation, dauntless they will turn and turn again telling.

\*

ad

“Because I could not stop for death” (712), and “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—”(754), were probably written around 1863. The relationship of the first of these poems to Robert Browning’s “The Last Ride Together” has already been established. When the poems are put next to each other, the similarities are obvious. With a few images from *Aurora Leigh* and her own wit and terse urgency, Dickinson re-wrote his poem. Changing Browning’s “Mistress” to her “Master”, Death, she wrote an American woman’s version. “The Last Ride Together,” “Childe Roland,” and “Memorabilia” were all published in Browning’s collection *Men and Women*, 1855. Dickinson of all people would have read “Childe Roland” as a poem of anxiety over poetic origins. It was indebted to Elizabeth Barrett’s earlier and far weaker “A Vision of Poets,” 1844. Dickinson had already responded to that poem with “I died for Beauty”(449) in 1862. In this case she would have heeded Browning’s specific instruction to “see Edgar’s song in LEAR.”

\*

Dickinson and Browning were both instinctive masters of the art of dramatic Monologue. Their secretive natures knew soliloquy’s power to conceal as it reveals messages. Anonymous shape-changer, she carried the concealing farther. Her poems are monologues without a named narrator; their supreme source—Shakespeare. *Lear* is a play charged with linguistic energy, dissimulation, consecration, invocation, quibble, sleight-of-hand, and illusion; constant reversals of meaning, constant wordplay on ‘seeing’ and ‘nothing.’ The good, Kent and Edgar, must resort to exile, disguise, and cunning, while Edmund, the villain, is witty, attractive, and beguiling. LEAR dark pastoral. Men and women thrust out of Society, find desolation, destruction, and renewal in the mystic forest of the heart.

\*

Robert Browning said he wrote “Childe Roland” in one day. He said it came to him in a kind of dream and he simply wrote it down. The careful use of several outside literary sources makes the drama of this statement suspect, but the poem certainly is dreamlike. Living with his wife and small son in Paris, Browning had just finished a long essay on Shelley, for a new edition of the poet’s *Letters* when on December 2nd 1851, Louis Napoleon seized power in a coup d’état. On December 4th, the last of the

Republican opposition was mowed down in violent street fighting. This was the first time Robert and Elizabeth, witnesses of the violence, disagreed politically. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, an outspoken champion of political liberty, and women's rights, thought that Louis Napoleon would change Europe for the better.

Emperor, Emperor!  
From the center to shore,  
From the Seine back to the Rhine,  
Stood eight millions up and swore  
By their manhood's right divine  
So to elect and legislate,  
This man should renew the line  
Broken in a strain of fate  
And leagued kings at Waterloo,  
When the people's hands let go.  
Emperor  
Evermore.

(Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Napoleon III. In Italy," v.1)

Her husband considered Louis Napoleon just another petty tyrant, and distrusted the violent tactics he had employed to grasp power. Nearly a month after the coup d'Etat Browning wrote "Childe Roland." At the time, although he was at work on one of his finest collections of poems, his writing had been ridiculed by English critics, and ignored by the reading public. "Sordello" had made him a laughing-stock. Compared to his wife, whose money supported him, whose work he always said he preferred to his own, and whose literary reputation was enormous; compared with the achievement of his favorite poet, Shelley, who had drowned at only thirty — thirty years earlier, the forty-year old Browning must have been bitter about his own poetic future.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,  
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope  
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope  
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,  
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring  
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

Robert Browning, "Childe Roland," v.IV

\*

When Emily Dickinson wrote "My Life had stood — A Loaded Gun —", about eleven years later, she was in her early thirties, unmarried, virtually house-bound by what was probably a severe case of agoraphobia, living with her parents and one unmarried sister in

the small New England college town of Amherst. She had been writing hundreds of poems at white heat, in total obscurity. The Civil War was in progress, North and South severed by violence. She had recently made her first move toward an outside reading public by sending a letter, including some of her poems, to the writer and abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson. She must have been wrestling with the knowledge of her extraordinary ability, and the contradiction between visionary illumination — Grace, and simple longing for worldly recognition.

I took my Power in my Hand—  
And went against the World—  
'Twas not so much as David—had—  
But I—was twice as bold—

I aimed my Pebble— but Myself  
Was all the one that fell—  
Was it Goliah— was too large—  
Or was myself— too small?  
(540)

8. was myself] just myself — /only me — I—

\*

As John Brown was led out to be hanged, after the abortive raid on Harper's Ferry, he handed this note to one of his jailors.

I, John Brown, am now quite *certain* that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with *blood*.

"My Life had stood — a Loaded Gun —" was written during the Civil War. Dickinson, who is so often accused of avoiding political issues in her writing, certainly did not avoid them here. As she well knew, the original American conflict between idealism and extremism was being acted out again. Brown was simply another puritan zealot invoking Jehovah, set to fight the Lord's battle, the Bible's way. "Liberators" and the righteous were as ever, brother against brother, burning and destroying. *This* Civil War broke something loose in her own divided nature. Now like Edwards, her intellectual forebear, she explored the links between service and servitude, without the locks of custom.

## ARCHITECTURE OF MEANING

My first thought was, he lied in every word,  
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye  
Askance to watch the working of his lie  
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford  
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored  
Its edge at one more victim, gained thereby.

Browning, "Childe Roland To The Dark Tower  
Came", v.I

### I

*My life had stood – a Loaded Gun  
In Corners – till a Day  
The Owner passed – identified –  
And carried Me away –*

My and Me. In this unsettling New England lexical landscape nothing is sure. In a shorter space (woman's quick voice) Dickinson went further than Browning, coding and erasing – deciphering the idea of herself, dissimulation in revelation. Really alone at a real frontier, dwelling in Possibility was what she had brilliantly learned to do.

### POSSIBILITIES:

*My Life:* A Soul finding God.

*My Life:* A poet's admiring heart born in to voice by idealizing a precursor poet's song.

*My Life:* Dickinson herself, waiting in corners of neglect for Higginson to recognize her ability and help her to join the ranks of other published (identified) American poets.

*My Life:* The American continent and its westward moving frontier. Two centuries of pioneer literature and myth had insistently compared the land to a virgin woman (bride and queen). Exploration and settlement was pictured in terms of masculine erotic discovery and domination of alluring/threatening feminine territory

*My Life:* The United States was in the grip of violence that threatened to break apart its original Union.

*My Life:* An unmarried woman (Emily Bronte's Catherine

Earnshaw) waiting to be chosen (identified) by her  
Lover-husband-Owner (Edgar Linton).

*My Life: A Slave.*

*My Life: A Gun.*

\*

The emblematical Gun escapes its emblem from word one. When MY is identified and carried away, MY becomes anonymous and refuses to budge. Progress seems to be forward but where forward is — uncertain. The first two lines suggest suspended motion, the second two, moving suspension. These first four lines join two souls as they split asunder. Say one thing and mean another. Strange absence of this presence MY is following, or Absence carrying. The only constant is motion and identification of nothing. Symbol is concealment and revelation.

We do not think enough of the Dead as  
exhilarants — they are not dissuaders but  
Lures — Keepers of that great Romance still to us  
foreclosed — while coveting (we envy) their wisdom we  
lament their silence. Grace is still a secret.  
*Prose fragment (50)*

God is hidden. Random subtraction of Love across infinite Empty. Ferocious contradiction. The nuptial Yes, communion confiding, connecting — union with another soul is only another illusion. Humanity must obey mechanical and supernatural necessity. Obedience is necessary for survival, obedience and docility like the lily who toils not. Eve, Lucifer, Edmund, Heathcliff, and Pleasure are reckless and disobedient. I must be obedient to the dominant social system until Death blows the door open. Liberation from life is Death. Will that annihilation be an Orphic transformation or another prison? Was Psyche's lover Eros, or a monster? Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson, educated, reclusive, visionary women, rebels from a sin-obsessed Fundamentalist religion, *felt* God and Nature separating from each other.

Each Life Converges to some Centre —  
Expressed — or still —  
Exists in every Human Nature  
A Goal —

Embodied scarcely to itself — it may be —  
Too fair

For Credibility's presumption  
To mar —

Adored with caution — as a Brittle Heaven —  
To reach  
Were hopeless as the Rainbow's Raiment  
To touch —

Yet persevered toward — surer — for the Distance —  
How high —  
Unto the Saints' slow diligence —  
The Sky —

Ungained — it may be — by a Life's low Venture —  
But then —  
Eternity enable the endeavoring  
Again.  
(680) about 1863

5. Embodied] Admitted

7. presumption/[To mar] temerity to  
dare —

9. Adored] Beheld

11. the] a

13. surer] stricter —

15. diligence] industry

17. by] in —

\*

Wrenched from the Heights, turned aside into an ominous tract, carried from Corners; *unsafe* — the exiles of *Wuthering Heights*, “Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came,” and “My Life had stood — A Loaded Gun” all exist in a phantom and desolate world where life is a void labor, and Death, Desire's dream. LEAR's world of monstrous necessity where union with Nature means living outside comfort with the forces of destruction.

\*

Nor is there the slightest foundation for the supposed editorial prejudice against new or obscure contributors. On the contrary, every editor is always hungering and thirsting after novelties. To take the lead in bringing forward a new genius is as fascinating a privilege as that of the physician who boasted to Sir Henry Halford of having been the first man to discover the Asiatic cholera and to communicate it to the public...

...Do not waste a minute, not a second, in trying to demonstrate to others the merit of your own performance. If your work does not vindicate itself, you cannot vindicate it, but you can labor steadily on something that needs no advocate but itself... Yet do not be made

conceited by obscurity, any more than notoriety. Many fine geniuses have been long neglected; but what would become of us if all the neglected were to turn out geniuses? It is unsafe reasoning from either extreme.

T.W. HIGGINSON, "A Letter to a Young Contributor," *Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1862

T.W. Higginson wrote his ironic "Letter to a Young Contributor" while waiting to join the Union Army. So far he had been disappointed in his wish for a regimental appointment. On the day he received Emily Dickinson's first letter in response to the above, he had earlier introduced a Miss M.A. Drake to a gathering at the Worcester Gymnasium. Miss Drake was there to put a group of girls through their paces in a wooden dumb-bell exhibition. Higginson was an ardent believer in the beneficial effect of physical exercise for women.

Higginson was interested enough in Dickinson's letter and enclosed poems to reply immediately by mail, with some show of encouragement and advice. Although during her life-time he never published even one of her poems, his importance to her was real and abiding. Their correspondence continued for as long as she lived. Higginson carefully saved her letters and the poems she sent him, but his answers have been lost. "My Life had stood — a Loaded Gun —" in its most literal sense, can be read as her psyche's startled response to her own boldness in hunting him down.

\*

## II

*And now We roam in Sovereign Woods —  
And now We hunt the Doe —  
And every time I speak for Him —  
The Mountains straight reply —*

Conversion is a sort of Death, a falling into Love's powerful attraction. Power is pitiless once you have put it on. The poet is an intermediary hunting form beyond form, truth beyond theme through woods of words tangled and tremendous. Who owns the woods? Freedom to roam poetically means freedom to hunt. Is the territory Shakespeare roamed in sovereign, untouched since and still untouchable? Dickinson antiquely spelt Sovereign as she capitalized the 'S' to both fracture and fuel its power. Sovereign — European origin.

The Sovereign is the whole country.  
J. ADAMS, Def. Constit. Gov. USA

The United States, peopled by citizens fleeing into freedom, had no sovereign after the Revolution. Some of these citizens, escaping religious and political persecution, brought the institution of slavery along with them.

Over himself, over his own body and mind,  
the individual is Sovereign.  
J.S. Mill, *Liberty*, 22

Amerindians found, to their cost, trust in the code word SOVEREIGN could mean all or nothing.

SOVEREIGN: Signification.

A. *sb* 1. One who has supremacy or rank above, or authority over, others; a superior; a ruler, governor, lord or master (of persons etc.). Freq. applied to the Deity in relation to created things. In later use suggestive of sense.

b. A husband in relation to his wife.

O.E.D.

“*God’s arbitrary and sovereign good pleasure*”—Jonathan Edwards.  
Dickinson Takes Sovereignty away from God and bestows it on the Woods.

\*

Most sacred vertue she of all the rest,  
Resembling God in his imperiall might;  
Whose soueraine powre is herein most exprest,  
That both to good and bad he dealeth right,  
And all his workes with Iustice hath bedight.  
That powre he also doth to Princes lend,  
And makes them like himselfe in glorious sight,  
To sit in his owne seate, his cause to end,  
And rule his people right, as he doth recommend.

SPENSER, *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, Proem v.10

The ancient concept of legitimate sovereignty was sacred and sublime. A king, representing God, ruled his subjects by a divinely ordained decree, the allegorical point where God, the State, and human life met. True sanctity surrounded him. Allegiance to this hereditary authority was offered freely by his people, apart from self interest or arbitrary coercion. Obedience was selfless, idealistic, unquestioning.

Dread Souerayne Goddess, that doest highest sit  
In seat of iudgement, in th’Almighties place,  
And with magnificke might and wondrous wit  
Doest to they people righeous doome aread,  
That furthest Nations filles with awfull dread,  
Pardon the boldness of thy basest thrall,

That dare discourse of so diuine a read,  
As thy great iustice prayes ouer all:  
The instrument whereof ioe here thy *Artegall*.

Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book V, Proem v.ll

During the sixteenth century England was engaged in a battle for survival against the Catholic powers of Europe. Edmund Spenser and many other Elizabethan intellectuals ardently believed in the rightness of Britain's hereditary nobility. Spenser's ceremonial dedications to Elizabeth in the separate books of the *Faerie Queene* extend their shadows and symbols over one another. Illumination of divine influence presiding over human, these paeans of praise to his feminine sovereign were more than mere flattery, and were essentially unaffected by the real neglect, both literary and political, he suffered at the hands of his thrifty monarch.

Protestant Elizabeth Tudor, was enthroned in Spenser's imagination as defender of the Faith, and emblem of England's power. All pre-connected things of nature moved for him in the holy mystery of her chaste sovereignty. As Gloriana, Una, Belpheobe, Florimell, and Britomart, she rejoins the mystic radiance of the Rose that once was Mary. *Eli sabbath* means Sabbath God in Hebrew. As Britain's sovereign, she was the mediator between man and heaven.

“ Elizabeth the Queene of Loue & Prince of Peace”  
was also a virgin. Visible symbol of space, finite and feminine, she represented intelligence, chastity, and grace. For Elizabethan poets memory of devotion and willing submission to something ancient, autarchic, and feminine, was still an active element of consciousness, in spite of Protestant historical and religious revision of biblical texts. Elizabeth represented Venus, Diana, Mary, Isolde, Laura, Beatrice—, Elizabeth androgynous, even the lost splendor of Isis. In the pre-encyclopaedic sixteenth century ancient writers, buried cultures, and undreamed of civilizations were being discovered. Language was spoken against an ideal of lost perfection.

Plutarch, who had been initiated into the secret mysteries of Dionysus and believed the soul was imperishable, once translated an epigraph from an Egyptian statue of the Goddess Isis: “I am all that is and all that was and shall be, and no mortal hath lifted my veil.” At the blind point between what is said and meant, who is sounding herself? Words open to the names inside them, course through thought in precarious play of double-enchantment,

distance. Sovereign secret of initiation. . . Once the mountains were feminine.

Sweet Mountains— Ye tell Me no lie—  
Never deny Me— Never fly—  
Those same unvarying Eyes  
Turn on Me— when I fail— or feign,  
Or take the Royal names in vain—  
Their far— slow— Violet Gaze—

My strong Madonnas— Cherish still—  
The Wayward Nun— beneath the Hill—  
Whose service— is to You—  
Her latest Worship— When the Day  
Fades from the Firmament away—  
To lift Her Brows on You—  
(722)

\*

Elizabeth had seen that in a world of hereditary authoritarianism, marriage was destructive for a female monarch. After her death, the long European savagery of the Thirty Years War wasn't far off. During the seventeenth century in England and in her North American colonies, the words *sovereign* and *sovereignty* were essential to the intellectual and political battles taking place in philosophical, scientific, and religious debate and rebellion. Old paradigms were being broken, new ones forming. In the wake of profound change came manic religious enthusiasms, hysteria, and barbarism in the form of persecution that left its mark on nearly everyone. For safety, the "enlightened" eighteenth century turned God to a watchmaker, whose World-Clock ticked perfectly. It no longer required winding by Him, or by his chosen representatives on earth. After the French Revolution, the antique conception of sovereignty, with all its mixed capacity for evil and for beauty, was effectively broken in the western world.

\*

To trust in something, be sure, secure... Sovereign lingers on in language, distillation of S, sun — the source, its worldly message muffled, hubris, history, and halting, in the liquid suggestiveness of 'reign'. English pronunciation slides the silent *g* swan-like, across *n* to a vanishing point back of the throat. American—Emily Dickinson cut the treble-syllabled word in two. "And now We roam in Sovreign Woods—". Five dissonantal *o*'s in one short line, accent the beauty of the final term.

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;

Shakespeare, Sonnet 33

Janus-faced, *Sovereign*, signifying liberty and submission, is infinitely beguiling.

\*

Browning's Childe Roland and Dickinson's Gun stand at the last limit, isolated at the borders of the present. Driven by longing and enormous intellectual ambition into the vicinity of the mutilated message of all poetry, they fear the failure of their own energy. Their language must be terse, tense, sometimes violent. England's Elizabethan Laureat lures them with his chivalric questors from earlier fictions. Graceful knights, reclusive hermits, chaste maidens fleeing, doubling, disappearing, or wounding and pursuing. Words hurled through allegorical woods seen backwards through Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Milton.

\*

Gun hovers in subjective space, symbol of her own sway. Gun is only a weapon. Without her Master to grip, aim, and pull her trigger, she has no use. Women of Dickinson's class and century, existed in a legal and financial state of dependence on their husbands, brothers, or fathers, that psychologically mutilated them. Excluded from economic competition (hunting), they were forced to settle for passive consumerism. For a puritan nature, happiness is based on the sacredness of the work ethic. Desire is the process of acquisition. Desire is energy and it is illusory. Time's dominion embraces each poem. Time is Spenser's Blatant Beast, predatory history and unzoned necessity. In the hollow of Merlin's looking glasse, before and after Trojan Aeneas wandered west... Sovereignty insists on succession.

Spenser's Blatant Beast is also the Great Beast of Plato. The Great Beast is the social Beast. The crowd or Collective makes wrong seem right because I submit out of false obedience to forced order. The Great Beast may be everything that is remembered by history, and all that is most applauded in poetry. What flew away from the crowd and the poet – the meaning she didn't mean, the illusiveness of such allusion alone is truly sovereign.

\*

Meaning has a carnal layering. "My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—" is concentrated on the lust for power. Two separated souls are leashed together. Day soon turns to night, conversion to cunning, union to sexual aggression. A great poet, carrying the antique imagination of her fathers, requires each reader to leap from a place of certain signification, to a new situation, undiscovered and sovereign. She carries intelligence of the past into future of our thought by reverence and revolt.

*To recipient unknown*

*about 1861*

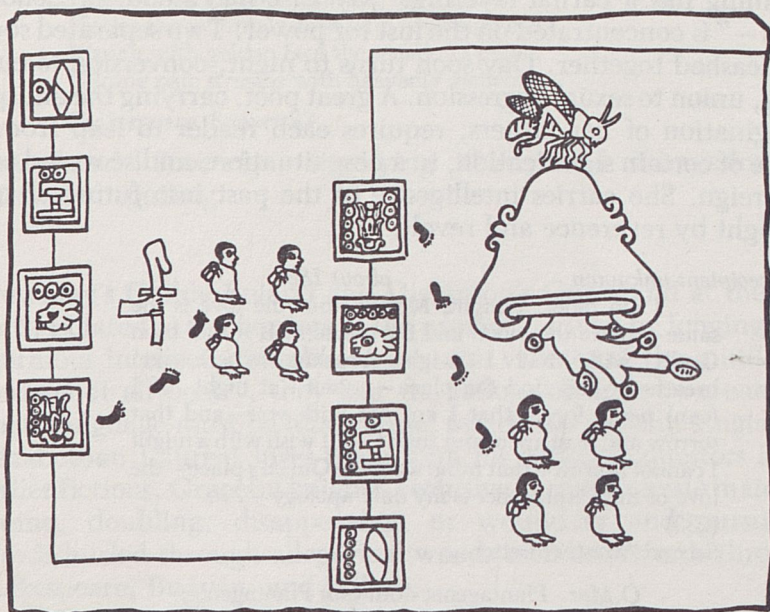
. . . I am older, tonight, Master—but the love is the same—so are the moon and the crescent. If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed—and find the place—myself—at night—If I (can) never forget that I am not with you—and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I—if I wish with a might I cannot repress—that mine were the Queen's place—the love of the Plantagenet is my only apology—. . .  
(233)

Second "Master" Letter

*Q.Mar.* Plantagenet doth quit Plantagenet;  
Edward for Edward pays a dying debt.

Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, IV, iv

\*  
\*  
\*



BRIEF READING:

from		Then they moved on to Chapultepec,
Year 1-Flint		Grasshopper Mountain,
to		the mountain that issued
		fresh water into the salty lake.
Year 2-House		Year 8-Reed
to		to
Year 3-Rabbit		Year 7-Rabbit
to	They went on to	to
	Atlacuihuayan,	Year 6-House
Year 4-Reed	"Place of the	to
they remained	Spear Thrower."	Year 5-Flint
in Techcatitlan		there from
[where they'd moved		They stayed
on the previous page.]		↑

Karl Young

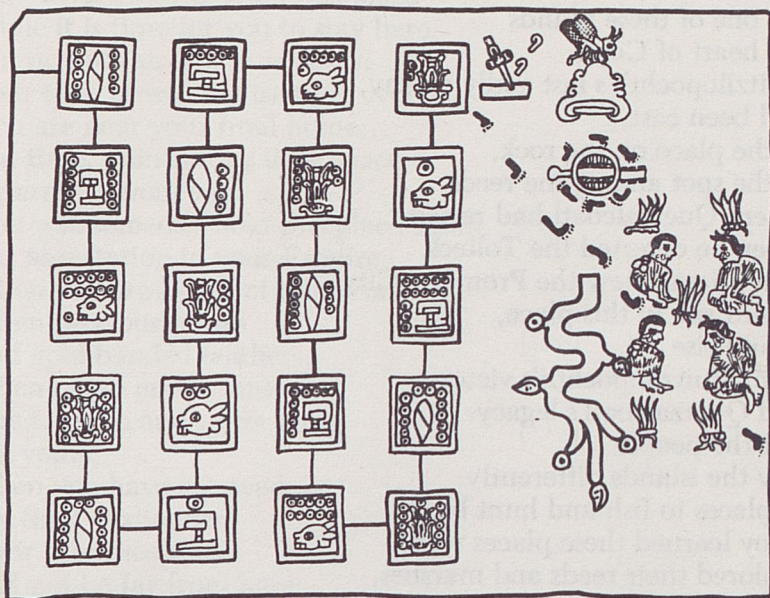
from *The Codex Boturini*

Page 18 – *Extended Reading*

From Year 1-Flint to Year 4-Reed  
they stayed in Techcatitlan.  
In year 5-Flint they moved  
to Atlacuihuayan,  
The Place of the Spear Thrower,  
where the atlatl was given to man,  
an old Toltec colony,  
where the last Emperor of Tula  
had strangled himself  
after his city perished.  
Here some descendants  
of Toltec knights  
joined their company,  
gave them counsel,  
and became a part of the Mexica people.  
In a dream,  
Huitzilopochtli,  
The Blue Hummingbird of the South,  
the patron god of the Mexica,  
told their four priests:

take what you can from this place  
while it is time for you to stay here,  
but do not think of it as yours:  
your time of waiting isn't yet over.  
You are near your final home,  
but time, pain, and a little space  
separate it from you.  
You will someday hold this place again,  
but as a station in your Empire  
when you are Lords of this World,  
when precious stones  
and gold banded feathers,  
when cacao and incense,  
fine tobacco and sweet fruits  
are yours,  
when you have received  
my final Ordinance.  
Your promised City  
will not be far from here  
though you can't see it now."  
They Left Atlacuihuayan  
in Year 8-Reed.  
In Year 9-Flint  
they settled in Chapultepec,  
Grasshopper Mountain,  
the rock that looks like an insect,  
the mountain that issues  
fresh water into the salty lake,  
the rock on which future Emperors  
would have their faces carved.  
The people could see the whole lake  
from this place,  
could see canoes and caravans  
pass from one city to another,  
could see the shining temples  
of all the gods,  
could see the colored palaces  
of militant kings,  
could see the cities' fires  
ring the lake at night,  
could see the tiny islands

out in the water.  
On one of these islands  
the heart of Copil,  
Huitzilopochtli's last godly enemy,  
had been cast,  
in the place on the rock,  
in the spot among the reeds  
where Quetzalcoatl had rested  
when he deserted the Toltecs.  
The priests knew the Promised City  
would rise in this place,  
would rise  
from Huitzilopochtli's victory,  
and Quetzalcoatl's legacy.  
But the people  
saw the islands differently:  
as places to fish and hunt birds.  
They learned these places well,  
explored their reeds and marshes,  
studied their inlets and currents:  
they did not know  
that what they learned  
would soon be put  
to other uses.



BRIEF READING:

These were the years they lived in Chapultepec:

Year	Year	Year	Year
9-	5-	6-	2-
Flint	House	Rabbit	Reed

In Year 2-Reed they celebrated New Fire.

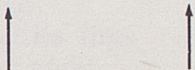
Year	Year	Year	Year
10-	4-	7-	1-
House	Flint	Reed	Rabbit

The people around Chapultepec made war on them.

Year	Year	Year	Year
11-	3-	8-	13-
Rabbit	Reed	Flint	House

They were defeated and sought refuge on Acolco Island, "Place of Twisted Water." Dressed in grass and weeds, they wept among the reeds.

Year	Year	Year	Year
12-	2-	9-	12-
Reed	Rabbit	House	Flint
Year	Year	Year	Year
13-	1-	10-	11-
Flint	House	Rabbit	Reed



For twenty years the Mexica  
lived in Chapultepec.  
From Year 9-Flint to Year 2-Reed  
they stayed in Chapultepec.  
Here, too, descendants  
of Toltec knights  
joined their company,  
gave them counsel  
and strengthened their lineage.  
Here they elected their first ruler,  
Huehue Huitzilihuitl,  
Hummingbird Feather the Elder,  
and codified their laws.  
In Year 2-Reed  
they tied up the counts of time,  
the bundle of the fiftytwo years  
just ended;  
in Year 2-Reed  
they celebrated New Fire,  
the rebirth of the World,  
the beginning of a new era,  
a new cycle of time—  
it would be the cycle  
of their foundation,  
the era in which their Empire  
would begin,  
the time when  
The Blue Hummingbird's Mandate  
would be fully given to them.  
But the cities around the lake  
hated the Mexica:  
they grew jealous of their prosperity,  
they envied their courage in war,  
they feared the strength of their arms,  
the power of their hearts,  
the metal of their faces.  
The lords of Colhuacan,  
of Azcapotzalco and Xaltocan  
impatiently waited

for the time to destroy the Mexica.  
They formed a league together  
and attacked Chapultepec.  
After desperate fighting  
against impossible odds,  
some of the Mexica  
escaped to Acolco Island,  
The Place of Twisted Water,  
and hid in the whispering reeds,  
the restless cane.  
Misery covered their faces.  
They dressed themselves  
in grass and weeds.  
Even if they found  
something dry to burn  
they dared not light a fire.  
They ate the insects  
off the reeds,  
they ate scum  
from the water's surface,  
they tried to catch birds  
with their bare hands,  
they hunted for eggs  
among the rushes,  
they grabbed at fish  
between the currents,  
they tried to suck moisture  
from the reeds  
that grew in the salty water,  
they searched the muck below them  
for anything that could be eaten.  
The sky weighed heavy above them;  
the lake grabbed at their feet.  
In despair  
they twisted reeds into nets  
and slept in wet grass.  
They kept their God's bundle dry  
and prayed before it in anguish.  
At last they surrendered  
to the Tepanecs;  
they accepted the status of slaves.  
The Mexica will never forget this.

## Translator's Notes On the Last Pages of Codex Boturini

The story of the conquest of Mexico by a small band of European soldiers of fortune is certainly one of the most engaging tales in human history, and, at least in its outlines, one of the best known to contemporary audiences. But the story of the rulers who were conquered by Cortez, the Mexica Aztecs, a tribe of nomads who had come from the northern deserts and within a few generations conquered nearly all the world known to them, is equally gripping, if not as famous. It is a tale of pilgrimage and omens, of lightning raids and ritual skirmishes, of stoic perseverance and uncanny luck, of defeat and near annihilation, of divine mandates and individual whims, of sudden reverses and desperate gambles against impossible odds, of shifting alliances and awesome spectacles, of palace intrigues and judicious marriages, of delicate compromise and stone-faced brinkmanship, of draconian protocol and whimsical chivalry, of carefully adjusted social organization and the forging of the largest and most flamboyant empire meso-America had seen. It is this story that the author of *Codex Boturini* set out to tell. How fully he could tell it we cannot know, because the manuscript ends in a rip in the middle of the twenty second page. We cannot even know whether he continued from this point or stopped his painting here. The empty space at the lower right of page 21 and the bottom of the surviving portion of page 22 suggest that some circumstance forced him to stop at this point, but it is also possible that he had his reasons for leaving these spaces blank and that more of the story was told on a portion of the manuscript that is now lost. In its present state, the manuscript tells of the origins of the Mexica on Aztlan island, their wanderings through central Mexico, and their defeat and humiliation by King Coxcoxtli. At the beginning of page 22, we see two Mexica, freed from their Colhuacan captivity, with knives in their hands and nasty expressions on their faces, looking for revenge, perhaps with a sense of their destiny as future lords of their recent masters. The middle of the twenty second page is a poignant place for the manuscript to break off.

As it now remains, the book is a strip of amatl (fig bark) paper approximately 19 cm tall and 549 cm long, folded accordion fashion into pages averaging about 24 cm across. The figures are drawn in black ink. Except for a reddish ink connecting dates, no color is used. The quality of line is similar to that of other Mexican manuscripts: it is fluid but shows no purposeful variation in breadth. Dates are rendered in a neat and regular manner. Humans, place signs, and other symbols are drawn in a sort of simplified shorthand that would seem awkward if the figures were taken out of the overall design of the manuscript. Composition in most indigenous books is dense and crowded, suggesting the patterns of oriental rugs to some commentators. This is not the case in *Codex Boturini*. The scribe, as Donald Robertson has pointed out, leaves generous areas of open space, at times suggesting a spaceless landscape, an open field in which persons, dates, and place names can interact in freedom and solitude. Most of the pages of the book contain columns of dates, like those on pages 18, 19, and 20. The curved and rectangular shapes balance and play against each other in a wide range of designs, providing pleasing variety as well as carefully modulated rhythmic development. The scribe tends to present human figures in groups of four, primarily for symbolic reasons; but he works well within this limitation, showing as much versatility in handling these clusters of four as in overall composition. The course of the Mexica is indicated by a path of footprints moving along with the narrative. This may seem childish or cute,

but their significance goes deeper than it may seem at first glance. The footprints help unify the design of the manuscript. In many Mexican books, and even in ceremonies and in architecture, footprints indicate the presence of an unseen god. These footprints, then, probably do not represent the impressions left by the feet of the passing Mexica, but the path of their primary god, Huitzilopochtli: we may read them as the fate the Mexica must follow, or, to put it in terms of other cultures, their Tao or their Wierd. The style of *Codex Boturini* is deceptively simple: though it shows none of the soul-wrenching force of *Codex Borgia*, or the serene mastery of *Codex Vienna*, or the colorful grandeur of *Codex Borbonicus*, its artist was a master who deserves our respect.

The provenience of the manuscript has provoked little debate. On the grounds of style and content, we can feel sure that it was produced in or near Mexico City—Tenochtitlan. A number of scholars have assigned it a preconquest date, but cogent arguments have been advanced for an early colonial (c.1521 - c.1540) date of composition. Perhaps the best evidence for this is a tree on the third page which shows definite European influence, though such contamination apparently does not occur elsewhere in the codex.

Few preconquest books have survived, though we know that large numbers of them were produced before the coming of the Spaniards. The Mexican people continued to make them for more than a century after the conquest, picking up more and more European techniques as time went by. Types of pre-Columbian manuscripts include religious books, histories, geneologies, books for determining suitable marriage partners and interpreting dreams, books used in divination and the practice of law, and a wide variety of bureaucratic documents including tribute list, demographic surveys, and political dossiers. The system of writing was iconographic: it represented ideas by highly stylized pictures. Though some manuscripts occasionally employ forms of rebus writing, the iconographic system did not dictate a fixed sequence of sounds or words, as does our Roman alphabet, but rather a set of concepts that could be verbally formulated in a number of different ways. In fact, a book of this sort could be read by people who could not speak the language of the original scribe. An interesting feature of these books is that they could be given what I call a brief or an extended reading. In a brief reading, the reader would simply identify the figures in the book and recognize their functions. In an extended reading, the reader would elaborate on this, filling in myths, legends, historical data, etc. associated with the figures but not specified in the book itself. Despite the strong visual character of the codices, writing was an adjunct to speech in preconquest Mexico and books were essentially tools for oral performance.

In my interpretation of the final pages of this manuscript, I have tried to approximate both a brief and an extended reading. In the brief reading, appearing in the boxes under the facsimilies, I have identified the icons and indicated their functions in blocks of type, the placement of each block corresponding in position on the page to the figure being interpreted. The extended readings appear on facing pages. In these I have taken relevant material from chronicals, transcriptions of oral poems, and modern histories and filled out the information given in the manuscript with it. Although, in places, like the lament affixed to page 20, I have closely based my working on the language of the indigenous sources, we cannot know how close a reading of this sort comes to the extended readings of the people who originally used this sort of book. We can assume that they included much of

the same information I have filled in, but how they used it is a matter of pure conjecture. I offer my reading simply as a suggestion and an illustration of how historical information known to the reader might have been added to what is explicitly stated in the text. The facsimilie is my own redrawing of the manuscript pages, rather than a photographic reproduction. In reading these pages, bear in mind that the facsimilie shown here is reduced considerably from the original size. Of course, any reading of a manuscript of this sort must be hypothetical, but in this case we have a good deal of collateral information from other sources, and the disagreement between the interpretations of the various students of the work are minor in comparison to the various readings of books like *Codex Vienna* or *Codex Borgia*.

It is impossible at the present time to determine exactly how *Codex Boturini* was originally used, but I will make several conjectures, based in part on the style of the manuscript and on my study of Mexican book painting in general. One possibility is that this is a sketch history, essentially meant to place events in a chronological framework. Books of this sort could be used for quick reference or they could be collated and used as primary sources for more elaborate and detailed works such as *Codex Nuttall* or *Codex Vienna*. Then again, *Codex Boturini* could have been used as a text book for students who had some knowledge of iconographic writing, but not enough to read the denser, more complex books. The teacher could adjust the details of his lesson to the capacity of his students, while making sure they committed the basic narrative to memory. It is also possible that the book was used by a Singer of Tales, not unlike the Yugoslavian bards studied by Lord and Parry or the west African poets brought to popular attention in this country by *Roots*. In this case, the book would not be so much a score for the singer as a visual correlative for his audience. We can imagine the bard sitting in the middle of a semi-circle of listeners, unfolding the book before them as he sang. The large and simple figures would be easy for an audience of a dozen or more people to see. Finally, the book could have been produced for the Spanish conquerors as an explanation of Mexican history and a proof of the indigenous people's legitimate claim to their land. If this were so, the author would want to state his case as simply and directly as possible, using large designs in the hope of making his message sink into the foreigner's mind. A problem with this possibility, however, is the artist's mastery of such large and open designs: it would seem probable that he had had considerable practice in this style and didn't develop it spontaneously in a moment of crisis.

We will never know how diverse were the styles and methods of preconquest book painting. A comparison of this manuscript with, say, *Codex Borgia*, *Codex Laud*, *Codex Vienna*, the *Matriculo de Tributos*, and the *Selden Roll* suggests that the resources of the native artist were broad and flexible, and that bookmaking was a mature art at the time of the conquest.

NOTE. Pages 1-4 of the *Codex Boturini* appear, in Karl Young's translation, in the revised edition of Jerome Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred*.

Marc de Civrieux

*Meda'tia*

A Makiritare Shaman's Tale

*Translated with an introduction by David M. Guss*

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Makiritare (also known in ethnographic literature as the Ye'cuana) are a Cariban-speaking tribe living in thirty independent villages along the Caura, Paragua, Erevato, Ventuari, and Cunucunuma Rivers in the Guyana Highlands of southern Venezuela. This present demography represents a period of expansion from the initial center of Makiritare concentration in the uppermost tributaries of these rivers. The Makiritare refer to this original homeland, which they still occupy, as Ihuruña, "Headwater Land," and tell the story of a migration which occurred hundreds of years ago in a cycle of tales called "The Wai'tie," for it was the Wai'tie who were the Makiritare's first great chiefs and leaders. But this cycle begins before the Wai'tie, for it also tells of an original dynasty of six shamans who preceded even them. These were the Meda'tia and Wa'saha shamans. There were three of each, first the Meda'tia and then the Wa'saha. Before them there was nothing.

The Watunna, the sacred oral tradition which unites the dispersed Makiritare settlements, describes this period preceding the Meda'tia and Wa'saha as one of chaos and suffering, set off by the departure of Wanadi, the culture hero, from the Earth. It describes a people no longer able to make contact with the invisible realms of the universe, the realms where the *akato* or souls travel, and the masters of animals and disease dwell. With the loss of Wanadi, the people, or *so'to* as they call themselves, had no one to intercede for them in this suddenly impenetrable

“other world” where the critical decisions of life and death are made. Shut out from it as they were, their lives became vulnerable and desperate. They had no ability to control disease or the growth of plants. There was no way to return the spirits of their dead or to recover the lost ones of their living. They were helpless in a world defined as an illusion, a world in which success depended on the ability to manipulate the reality it was said to reflect. To do so required the power to enter this reality, the power to turn oneself into a spirit equal to those who control it, the power to become a shaman.

The first Makiritare to have such power was Meda'tia. He was the first to “turn himself into an *huhai*” and re-establish contact with the invisible worlds of Motadewa and Koiohiña. He was the one who set the example for all future shamans; the one who opened the way by visiting all of Heaven's seven houses and retrieving the critical shamanic skills from each of them. It was Meda'tia too who brought back *kaahi* and *aiuku* and planted them on Earth so future shamans would have them, and then went off to rescue all the people who had been imprisoned in the houses of the spirits and animals since the time of Wanadi's departure.

The following is the story of Meda'tia and this first journey into Motadewa and its seven houses. It is both a map of this invisible landscape and an origin tale. As a map, it is a rare document, for although we have chartings for such journeys among other peoples (especially for those peoples of the Siberian area), there is almost no comparable narrative material for the indigenous peoples of South America. It is important, therefore, to note the way in which this tale functions as an atlas of the entire Makiritare universe, from the dark caves of Odo'sha and his Odoshankomo to the underwater world of Hui'io and her mawadi and up through the complex, multi-levelled world of Heaven. It is important because only when one has fully comprehended the landscape of this invisible world, can they begin to comprehend that everyday, visible one of the Makiritare which is said to be a mere reflection of the other.

As an origin tale, “Meda'tia” describes the birth of the first shaman among the humans and thereby the subsequent race of *huhai*. I say “race” here because it is the important emphasis of this tale that Meda'tia and the later *huhai* were (and are) not just *so'to* with special powers, but rather a completely separate species of beings, whose family is to be found in all the houses of the universe. The instrument of origin here, of course, is the shamanic initiation which Meda'tia imposed upon himself and which subsequent shamans underwent through the agency of their predecessors. It is through this initiation that the *so'to* dies and the *huhai* is born with the power to pass freely between both worlds. One can clearly see in this elaborate initiation not only the process of rebirth, but also the responsibilities implicit in it.

At each stage of the initiation, the shaman is given new skills, new powers with which to serve the *so'to* as arbiter and psychopomp between

the two worlds. For again, the principal difference between *huhai* and *so'to* is not that the former alone can move between the visible and invisible universe, but that he can do so of his own conscious will with an effectiveness in both. As Meda'tia himself discovered:

The *so'to* don't just live in the house of the *so'to* out in the open, on the Earth. The *so'to* are spread out in all the houses, both hidden and seen. They live with all sorts of people like sons-in-law and servants. They lose their memory and language. They don't know how to get back to their own house, to the *so'to* again.

It was up to Meda'tia and his heirs, the future *huhai*, to show these *so'to* the way, and thereby perform their primary function as guides between this world and the other.

## *Meda'tia*

### THE SINGER'S TALE

An *aichuriaha* said: I'm going to tell about *huhai* and men now; about people and shamans and how it is. I know the wisdom of the old people. I'm not an *huhai*. I'm an *aichuriaha*, a singer of *Watunna*. That's why I know something. Because of that I can tell you something about the *huhai* and the *so'to*, we people who live on the Earth today.

There are all sorts of spirits that can harm us. So we have wise people in our own house. These are the *huhai*, the shamans. They help us against our invisible enemies. They give us good harvests and game so we don't go hungry. We depend on the *huhai* for our well being. Without them, we'd have nothing. We'd all be living with Odo'sha and his people, the bad spirits, the masters of the other houses.

We don't know how to see the other houses. We're blind outside our own houses. They're all invisible to us. We can't hear their voices either. We're like deaf people in the other houses. When we go into them, we don't even know it. When we look in the sky, we don't see anything. It seems empty. We can't see their houses. We don't see the grandfathers of those other people, the animals and the plants. They're the Sky People. They live up in the Sky. We don't know about them. Only our *huhai* know them. They know everything.

The masters of those other people, the grandfathers of the animals, they know we don't know. They catch us and make us fall in love with their daughters. That's how they make us their sons-in-law. That's why we need our *huhai*. If we didn't have *huhai*, we'd all be prisoners in those other people's houses.

The *huhai* has real wisdom. He sees all the spirits and speaks to them. He can understand. He speaks to their masters. He can see and hear any type of person. He travels up to Heaven and all around the Earth, along the animals' paths. He knows them all. He sees them as they really are. He sees in the dark. He listens to everything. He knows how to change his eyes, his ears, his words. He drinks the *kaahi* juice and breathes *aiuku* powder into his nose. They're the medicine plants that show him how to see and hear. The body gets drunk and falls down. The *huhai's* body dies but he gets up and goes right to Heaven. It gives him power, courage. That's how he goes to Heaven.

Kahu is what we ordinary people, the *so'to*, call Heaven. But Motadewa is Heaven's real name. That's what the *huhai* call it in their own language. We don't know that language from Heaven, the spirit language. But the *huhai*, they are spirits. Motadewa, that's it, the name of Heaven in Heaven.

We can't understand the *huhai's* language. When they call, they sing like birds, like frogs in the rain. They never stop listening. They never sleep, night or day. They see everything. We don't hear them, the masters of those other people. But they hear them. Those spirits are all one family. They're all *huhai*. Spirits and *huhai*, it's the same thing. Each in his own house. We can't see them. We don't know their true forms, their real language. But when our *huhai* calls those *huhai* from the other houses in their own language, those masters answer him. They come up tame and dancing, as if they were his brothers-in-law, his friends. As if they were his own children.

One time when I was young, I fasted. I drank the *kaahi* juice. I learned how to see and hear. And so I travelled. I wanted to become an *huhai*, a spirit. The old *huhai* said to me: "I'll make you an *huhai*. When I die, it'll be you." That's what he told me.

I did what he showed me. I went to Motadewa, to Heaven. I went to a land called Iadinakuwa. It was filled with foods and treasures of every kind. I saw all types of people there; people who on Earth we call tapir, peccary, deer. They were people. They didn't have animal bodies. I saw them as they really are in Heaven. They're just people there. I saw their houses and all the roads leading to their houses. They were the houses of the masters of each species, the grandfathers of all the different types of animals. I became frightened.

There were lots of people all around me. They were looking at me very strangely. "Who are you?" they asked. "Are you a *so'to*?"

Are you an *huhai*?" Everyone was talking at the same time, each of them in his own language. Some of them were mad. They were saying: "What are you doing here? Why did you come and bother us? What's your name?"

I didn't dare tell them who I was. I was too frightened to speak. There were lots of them and they were big too. They had arrows and they were pointing them at me, getting ready to shoot. I just stood there and didn't move. More and more kept arriving. They were like a herd of peccary. I lost my courage. I was going crazy.

Then my friend said: "I'm with you, brother. I'll watch you. Stay calm. I'm your master's *akato*, his heavenly double. I control all those people. Those arrows you see are mine. I know how to take care of them. Don't worry, I'm here. I'm your brother."

I looked at him. He didn't have any bow or arrows. But the others did. I thought he was lying. He wasn't moving to defend me. He was just speaking to me, not to them. I didn't believe him. I was afraid.

I said to him: "I don't recognize you. If you're my brother, then defend me. Show me your arrows. Speak to them. Tell them who I am. Tell them to go away."

He didn't say anything. He just stood there. I had never seen anybody who looked like him before. Now I looked at the masters again. "Why'd you come?" they said. "What do you want here?"

Now they turned into animals—jaguars, eagles, peccary, tapir... They were scaring me. I closed my eyes. I closed my ears. I saw an onslaught of enemies. The *kaahi* juice was driving me crazy. I screamed and started to run. I ran down toward the Earth. I got away.

The old man was waiting for me below. He had shown me how to fly to Heaven. He was furious.

"Coward!" he screamed at me. "I was with you. You didn't know me. You didn't listen to what I said. You didn't have any eyes or ears, just fear. I had arrows. They were yours, for you. It was me. That was my *akato* up there with you. You just shut your eyes and ears. You're not an *huhai*. You're a *so'to*. Why didn't you answer any of the masters' questions? What did you go up there for? You haven't understood anything. Okay, now you'll stay here on Earth. This is where *so'to* belong. When you want to get drunk, you can drink *iarake*. That's the drink for *so'to*. The *kaahi* juice isn't for them. It makes them crazy. It's just for us *huhai*, to give us courage. It only makes the *so'to* afraid.

"Now you'll be a hunter on the Earth. You'll call the animals dur-

ing the festivals, dancing and singing with the other *so'to*. You'll just call them to hunt them. You'll only be able to see their Earth forms. You'll just kill them to eat. You won't be able to control the masters or find the way to their houses. If they catch you, they'll make you their prisoner. They'll take you with them. That's the punishment for your fear."

And so that's why I'm not an *huhai*. I'm just a *so'to*, a hunter.

Now I'm old. I'm an *aichuriaha*. That's why I know something of the *Watunna*, a little bit of the wisdom. The old man helped me. He took pity on me. But that was later on.

One day I was out hunting in the forest. I was calling the animals in their Earth language to shoot them. I came across a herd of peccary. I had no wisdom. I didn't know the grandfather. I didn't know their real language. The peccary caught me. I couldn't control them. They turned me into a peccary and gave me a peccary woman. She took me to their house in the sky. That peccary master made me his son-in-law, a child in his house. He blew charms on me to make me forget. I didn't remember I was a *so'to*. I thought I was a peccary. I forgot my own house, my mother, my children, my real wife. And so I couldn't get away. I didn't even want to. Those peccary had me trapped. They made me crazy.

The old man took pity on me. It was that same *huhai*, the one who had showed me how to fly to Heaven. He saw me when no one else could. He saw that that peccary woman had me. The old man could see the peccary house. He saw me going in there. One night he sent me a dream. He made my *akato* travel. My *akato* got away from that other house. My body went on sleeping in its hammock, but my *akato* went travelling around. It spoke with my mother, my children, my real wife. By morning it was back in the peccary house. It came back to my body and I woke up in my hammock. When I got up, I remembered my house again. My *akato* told me about its trip. I felt sad. I wanted to go home too, with my own body. I didn't know how to get away. The old peccary man had my body prisoner.

The next night I dreamed again. It was the old *huhai* calling my *akato* again. The *akato* went to the old man's house.

"You're here," said the old man. "That peccary *huhai* has your body. You're here because I control you. But your friend's still asleep in the peccary house. He doesn't know how to get away. Now I'm going to fight with that peccary *huhai*. I'm going to take his control away. Now go back to the peccary house. Get into your friend's body and wake him up again. Tell him: 'Tonight I went to

the old man's house. He wants to help you. He says the peccary have gotten hold of you. Wake up. Remember. You're a *so'to*. You're not a peccary. Your house is on the Earth. Ask for permission to return. The old man controls the grandfather of the peccary. He'll give you permission if you ask him.' ”

The old man did what he said. He broke into the peccary house and fought with the grandfather. I was sleeping. That's how he saved me. Then, right away, my *akato* came back to the house. He woke me up and told me about the trip (*adekato*, dream). And so I escaped from the peccary house. I went back to my own house. The old man was waiting for me with my mother and my children and my real wife. My memory came back. I knew where I was.

Later on, the old man said to me: “Now I'm going to tell you the story of Meda'tia's incredible journey. You can't be an *huhai* because you were afraid up in Heaven. But you had the courage to escape from that other house; so you'll be an *aichuriaha* now, a keeper of the *Watunna*.

And that's how I came to hear the story of Meda'tia, the first man to travel up to the invisible houses. That's why I'm going to tell it to you now.

#### MEDA'TIA

When Wanadi went away, the Earth was abandoned. We call that *Wanadi Nistama*, “Wanadi's farewell.” The yuca dried up in the *conucos*. We all became sick. No one had the wisdom any more. Odo'sha became master of the Earth. There was no one to fight against him any more. Wanadi had gone. The wise ones were all living in Heaven. There wasn't any sickness there; just wisdom, good harvests and happiness. Wanadi had gone back to Heaven. Odo'sha couldn't chase him there. He didn't have the power to go there. He stayed with the people. He became our master. That's why we got sick and suffered so much hunger and sadness. We didn't know any more. We didn't know anything about Heaven.

Meda'tia was a man who turned himself into an *huhai* through his own courage, by his own knowledge. No one showed him how to; because after Wanadi, he was the first one. He just sat down on his magic bench and went to look for Wanadi. He went right through the roof of his house and up into Heaven on that bench. He went to Heaven just like Wanadi. But Wanadi didn't come back. Meda'tia did. He learned all the languages and then came back here in the open. He stayed on Earth to cure us, to help us.

After Meda'tia, there were lots of other *huhai* on the Earth. They did the same thing he did. They went up to Heaven to find their own maraca, their *wiriki*, their power. Now they're with us. They see and sing and cure. Med'tia showed them all the way.

In the beginning, no one knew how to go up and get in the grandfathers' houses. At first they did it like Med'tia showed them. They went up with their *akato* and their bodies. Then they forgot something. They couldn't go to Heaven with their bodies any more. They just sent their *akato* there. That's why the *huhai* today know less than the old ones did. They leave their bodies asleep on the Earth. Then their *akato* come back down and wake them up.

In the beginning, no one knew the road to Motadewa. Meda'tia discovered it. First he came to a house called Huecheti demadi. The winds lived there. They're Odo'sha's children. They tried to blow him down. Meda'tia just held onto his bench and went on flying. Then he came to another house, called Sakihaña. That's where the Scissor People live. They just hang from the roof of their house, opening and closing, trying to cut people's heads off.

"Be quiet!" Meda'tia screamed at them, and the Scissor People stopped. He went on flying.

Now he came to Medenawa's house. That's a beautiful woman who makes love to everyone that passes. If you fall in her trap, she carries you off. She turns into a jaguar and devours you. She's an evil spirit who just looks like a woman. Meda'tia wasn't fooled by Medenawa. He got away from the jaguar's curved claws. She couldn't catch him.

Then he came to another house. Nuna, the moon, lives there. He spends all his time crouched down by a trap, waiting for his prey. He waits for the spirit travellers who go up and down between Heaven and Earth. The ones that aren't careful, fall into his trap. Nuna carries them off and devours them. Meda'tia didn't fall in the trap. He pushed Nuna over and got away. Then he came to the bank of the river. He crossed it. Right away, he came to a crossroads. That's where the travellers choose their path. One of the paths is black. It leads to Koiohña, the Land Without Dawn. The houses are all caves there. That's where the Odoshankomo live. The other path is white. It goes to Motadewa, the Land Without Night. That's where the wise ones live.

Meda'tia stopped to decide. Now he took the white path. He passed the trials. Now he was in Heaven. Right away he came to Iahuakuda hana, Heaven's first house. The Attitudi hana live there. These people are very wise. They blow and sing and cure

people. They're the masters of *ahenomadi* (breath) and *adeu* (language) and *wedinakana* (shaking). The people in the other houses all listen to them. They sing in strange, foreign languages. They never sleep or eat. They taught Meda'tia all the languages of the different houses on Earth and in Heaven. They told him: "Change your hearing." At first Meda'tia didn't understand. Then they sang again. He changed his hearing. Now he understood them.

"Now you can go into all the houses," said the Attitiudi hana. "You'll be able to understand everyone's songs, the songs of all the birds who are Wanadi's family. You can call them with their own songs. They'll come to serve you."

Meda'tia changed his throat too, so he could sing like the birds. Now all the birds started coming down from their house. They came up dancing, charmed by his singing. They thought another bird was calling them. "Here we are," they said. "You called us. We'll help you. We're your brothers."

Meda'tia sang like the frogs, the peccary, the deer, the mawadi who live under the water. He called each of them in their own language. They answered his call. They offered to help him. They said they were his brothers.

Now they began talking to Meda'tia. Meda'tia understood their words but what they said seemed crazy. Those people had everything confused. They didn't call anything by its right name. They didn't understand the way Meda'tia did.

The Mawadi came. They said: "Here we are. We brought you some presents. Here's some dogs and some yuca." What they brought weren't dogs but jaguars. It wasn't yuca either, but fish.

Then the Teditumadi, the Lightning People came. "Here we are," they said. "Here are some hammocks." They were spiders' webs. They weren't hammocks.

Now the Thunder People rushed up, afraid. "Protect us," they said to Meda'tia. "This falcon wants to eat us." But what they were running away from wasn't a falcon. It was just a mosquito.

Now the grandfather of the armadillos came up. "I'm here," he said to Meda'tia. "I'll help you kill those deer." But the deer he showed him were rats.

The Stars came up next. "Look at our fallen tears," they said. But they weren't tears. They were just drops of dew.

Then Meda'tia sang to the grandmother of the bees. Right away, she came up dancing. She was tame. When she arrived, she said: "Here I am. I'm thirsty. Give me that gourd full of *iukuta*." But that wasn't a gourd full of *iukuta*. It was a tortoise shell filled with

flour.

Meda'tia was sad. He couldn't understand these people. He told the language masters: "I don't know what's happening. They're all coming up here, talking like madmen. I don't know who's crazy, them or me."

The masters said to him: "Those are the spirit languages. You've changed your hearing and your throat. That's why you can understand their words and speak to them. Now you have to change your eyes. Change them and you'll understand what they're saying. You'll see things as they really are."

Then the Attitudi hana blew over Meda'tia. They blew the *ahenomadi* breath which cures all sickness and gives understanding.

Now Meda'tia said goodbye to the Attitudi hana. The blowing took him to the next house called Iadekuna hana. Another family of wise people called Setawa Kaliaana live there. They gave Meda'tia something to wash his eyes with. It was ginger and pepper juice and very hot. Right away they said: "You'll change your eyes with that. You'll be able to see in the dark. You'll understand everything. You'll change them in every house. Each people have their own eyes. When you speak with the parrots, you'll see just like they do. When you come to the snakes, you'll become like them. You'll be able to talk with anyone. You'll go into their houses as if they were your own."

Those Setawa Kaliaana are the *huhai's* masters, both on Earth and in Heaven. They don't eat. They don't sleep. They don't speak. They don't work. They just sit there; their hands over their heads, their elbows on their knees. They see everything. That's all.

Now Meda'tia found out why men have enemies in all the other houses. The wise ones told him: "The masters of the other houses aren't evil. They get mad when people who don't know hurt them. That's why they hurt people too. That's all. They understand the people but the people don't understand them because they lack wisdom. When they fish in the lakes and rivers, they don't think they're doing anyone any harm. But actually what they're doing is robbing yuca from the mawadi's *conucos*."

Then they said: "The mawadi really get angry with you. Why is it that people see something and think it's fish when it's really the mawadi's harvest? That's why they get so mad and come out on land to hurt you. They're just avenging themselves. That's all. The people can't understand the mawadi because they have different eyes. The mawadi, when they're hungry, go out on land and hunt

people. That's because men are peccary to them. They think they're peccary and so they're not doing anything wrong."

Those are the words the wise ones told Meda'tia up in Heaven. They changed his eyes. They teach the *huhai* who go up from Earth. Meda'tia was the first *huhai*, the first to go to Heaven and hear their words.

Right away, he wanted to try out what he'd learned. He sang. He called the masters from the other houses. Some saw him as a deer when they came. Others thought he was a spider. Meda'tia began to wonder himself. "Maybe I'm not a man," he said.

"Don't worry," the Setawa Kaliana told him. "You're both right. You're a man as well as a deer and a spider. You're everything the way they see it. You're not a *so'to*. You're an *huhai*. You can change into anything you want to. You're whatever the people's eyes see you as, on Earth and in Heaven."

Then Med'tia began to understand the masters. Their words didn't seem crazy anymore. They were all his brothers, his family. He could see and speak like the mawadi. He saw their dogs as dogs, not as jaguars. And he saw the mawadi as they really are in their own house, not as anaconda but as people. He could finally see their house too. He went inside it. He knew he wasn't underneath the water but in Heaven, in the house of people, in the house of *huhai*.

And that's the way he became an *huhai*. He went down every path and met his family from each of the houses. He spoke to all the *huhai*, the grandfathers and masters of all the animals and plants that live on the Earth.

Then Meda'tia went into another house in Heaven called Mahekuna hana. That's where he asked for his maraca. The maraca masters, the Dedewashi iamo, live there. These are the Bat People who spend all their time just holding their maraca. They never shake them. Their maraca don't have any *wiriki*. They're empty. They sing by themselves without moving. The masters just have to hold them, they have so much power. They attract the evil spirits. They capture them and make them their servants. That's how they cure. They take all the evil and illness away.

Those Dedewashi iamo gave Meda'tia an empty maraca. He tried to make it sing. He couldn't. Only the masters can. They told him: "Our maraca are empty. You have to find your *wiriki* in another house. Then you'll be able to shake it. That'll give you power. The *wiriki* are power spirits. They sing inside the maraca."

Meda'tia sat down on his bench and flew off to look for the

*wiriki*. He went to find other houses. The trip was hard. It took away all his strength. He thought he was dying. He kept on going. Then, completely worn out, he came to the most beautiful land in Heaven, Iadinakuwa. This is where all the wise ones come to meet with the people's *akato*, their guardian spirits, the ones who know everything and never die. This land is filled with light. There's no night. No evil spirit ever comes there. The wise ones live there in peace. No one bothers them. They never get sick.

A great blue lake named *Aku'ena* glows at the center of Iadinakuwa. *Mahewa*, the great morpho butterfly, with his heavenly blue wings, is the master of that lake. He's the master of Heaven's water. He shines as he flies. His servants are *Mu'na*, the manatee, the master of milk and life and health, and *Dinushi*, the electric fish which is called an eel. On the shores of Lake *Aku'ena* lives the *kaahi* plant which teaches how to see. It gives understanding. Its roots drink the *akene*, the water from the lake.

*Meda'tia* was exhausted. He asked if he could bathe in the *akene*. This is a blue, blue water that glows like *Mahewa* when he flies. It has its own light. The *huhai* from all the houses come there and toss the bodies of their dead in. They come back to life right away. They bring the bodies of the wounded too, to heal them, and the bones of the animals they have eaten so their flesh will grow back on them.

*Meda'tia* went into the *akene*. *Mahewa*, the butterfly, flew toward him. He had a small blue gourd filled with blue water. That gourd was the *Kura'meiru* egg, the tinamou's. It had *kaahi* juice in it. It was the *akene* itself, the water of life.

"Drink!" said *Mahewa*. And *Meda'tia* drank.

Right away, his strength returned. He was healthy again. Then *Dinushi* touched his body and let out a bolt of lightning. "Neumai," he said. "He's dead."

Now *Meda'tia*'s body floated on the *akene*, but his *akato* was still alive and could see everything. Then suddenly, *Meda'tia* felt crazy. His *akato* went flying through all the houses. All at once he saw light and dark. He saw the people in Heaven and the *Odoshankomo* in their black caves. He saw his dead parents. He saw the spirits, the animals, the plants. He saw the sickness and magic that kill people. And it was all there together in front of him, spinning and turning and flying around in the *Aku'ena* water, in the *kaahi* juice.

Then *Meda'tia*'s *akato* came to the *Ennemadi* house where the keepers of the *wiriki* live. These *wiriki* are light stones, little pieces of crystal. *Meda'tia* got them and put them in his maraca. He be-

came their master. His maraca sang with those *wiriki*'s voice.

He went to Matawahuña, to the house of the three birds where Wanadi's relatives, Müdo, Hohottu, and Tawadi live. With the help of the *kaahi* he threw up all the poisons out of his body. His body was still far away, floating on top of Aku'ena. Now Meda'tia's *akato* went back to its own body. He woke it and made it get up. It wasn't dead. It was still alive. It hadn't gone anywhere. No one had moved it from Aku'ena. Now Meda'tia had the power to cure the living and bring the dead back to life.

He went to Shiriche Kumenadi now, the Stars' house. The grandfather of those people is Hadewa, the fish. He said to Meda'tia: "You've come. No one needs you here. We have our own wisdom. We don't need you. Wanadi is our *huhai*. He protects us. Odo'sha can't come in here. We don't have any sickness. No death. No darkness. But the people on Earth are waiting for your maraca, your *chakara*, your *wiriki*. Go back to Earth. Plant your *kaahi* and *aiuku* seeds so that other *huhai* will learn how to see. Let the people hear your maraca so they can be cured. Go! This is the Stars' house! You have everything now."

Meda'tia became sad. He didn't want to leave the Stars' house. Then he thought: "I'll do what Hadewa says."

If Meda'tia had stayed in that house, we wouldn't have any *huhai*. He was our *huhai*'s first teacher. If he hadn't come back, we would have died. We would have gone hungry and gotten sick. We wouldn't have had any *conucos* or game. Everything would hurt us. We'd all be living as servants in the animals' houses. The whole Earth would still belong to Odo'sha and his Odoshankomo.

Now Meda'tia took hold of the handle of his maraca and went back down to Earth, letting his *wiriki* sing. He went to the dark house, to Koiohina where Kahushawa lives. They also call him Odo'sha. He lives in caves and has lots of people. Odoshankomo is what they call them. They're evil spirits who send all types of sicknesses.

Meda'tia went inside the caves and saw all the Odoshankomo's prisoners and servants there. Odo'sha had taken them from the Earth and turned them into Odoshankomo. They couldn't remember that they were people. They'd forgotten everything. They could just speak Odoshankomo.

Meda'tia shook his maraca in the cracks, in the caves, in the dens of the evil spirits. He went deep into all the caves and drove out the demons. They flew out hissing like tornadoes, like whirlwinds. Then he spoke to the prisoners. He told them: "Remember, you're

men. You're not Odoshankomo." He gave them their memories back and freed them from the darkness. They dreamed about their own houses on the Earth. They remembered the way and went back to their own people.

Then Meda'tia went into the waters and rapids and came to Hui'io, the great snake's house where she lives with her mawadi people. We see Hui'io and the mawadi as anaconda. Sometimes we see Hui'io as the rainbow. She brings us rain and harvests. She also brings our children sickness. Meda'tia saw Hui'io's mawadi as they really are—huge, powerful people who hunt and fish and make *conucos* under the water.

They had lots of women there. Meda'tia asked them: "Who are you?"

"We're the women," they answered. "The mawadi's mothers and daughters."

That was true, but they were women the mawadi had stolen from the Earth. They had forgotten everything. They didn't know who they were. But Meda'tia knew. He understood. He had his *wiriki*. He could see inside.

"No," said Meda'tia. "You don't belong to these people. You weren't born in this house. The mawadi stole you is what happened. They came out of their rapids at night like anaconda and tipped over your canoes. They caught your children and your husbands. They spit the juice of a plant in your face. That's how they took away your memory. That's the way they cast spells when they steal women from the Earth. You forgot everything. You gave yourselves to them. That's how they dragged you under the water. Then they brought you to this house. You've forgotten your own house out there. You've lost your memory. You're living in the dark here."

The women listened to Meda'tia's words and cried. Then they went to sleep and dreamed. Dreaming, they went back to their real houses on the Earth.

When they got up, they told Meda'tia: "We woke up. Now we remember it all. We've got our memory back. We dreamed we went to our own houses. It's all come back to us now."

One woman said: "I was just a girl is what happened. We were out getting water. The mawadi came out of the rapids and dragged themselves up on the shore. They slid into our bellies. They made us pregnant. They killed all the men. Then they turned into winds, like hurricanes. They took our house and our *conucos*. There was nothing left."

Then another woman said: "We were gathering water in gourds by the edge of the river. I was very young. Suddenly blood started coming out. It was my first blood. The mawadi smelled it down there in their house in the water. When the blood fell in the river, they went crazy with desire. They came up from below in droves. They flooded the banks and our house. They took us down in the water."

That's why now, the men shut their women up away from the rivers and the houses when they menstruate. That's so the mawadi don't find them; so they don't take them away or flood the houses.

Now Meda'tia told the women: "That's good. You remember now. Now you can get away from here and go back to your houses."

Then Meda'tia saw the dogs the mawadi use as servants. They're not really dogs, but children the mawadi steal from the Earth along with the women. The mawadi send them back to Earth at night to look for other children. Men don't see them as dogs when they come back to Earth, but as packs of jaguars.

Meda'tia shook his maraca to call Hui'io, the mistress of the mawadi house. Hui'io came right away. Meda'tia told her: "Tell the dogs to all go out on the riverbank and bring back some peccary for dinner."

They're not really peccary that the dogs hunt when they go out on land, but people.

Then Meda'tia got out of the water. He hid on the shore to wait for the dogs. Hui'io did what he said. A mawadi came out of the river like an anaconda. He danced. He sang. He called the dogs out of the river. They all came up, dancing and howling. When they got to the bank, they weren't like dogs at all, but jaguars.

Meda'tia was waiting there. He shot the jaguars with his arrows. But he didn't kill them. He turned them into children. He gave them back their old forms again through the power of his arrows. The mawadi became afraid. He dragged himself up. He was like an anaconda there by the river. Then he got in the water and turned into a person again. He went back to his people's house and told them what happened, about Meda'tia and the dogs.

Now Meda'tia understood everything. Now he knew that *so'to* don't just live in the house of the *so'to* out in the open, on the Earth. The *so'to* are spread out in all the houses, both hidden and seen. They live with all sorts of people like sons-in-law and servants. They lose their memory and language. They didn't know how to get back to their own house, to the *so'to* again.

Meda'tia understood. He went to the houses of all the animals, one by one. He went to the rats' house and the armadillos' house and the owls' house. In every house, it was the same: men turned into rats, armadillos, owls, taken by the animals while hunting them on the Earth. Their families don't know what happened to them. They were lost.

Meda'tia spoke to them all. He freed them from their spells.

"Now we remember everything," they said. "The armadillo women seduced us. We were out hunting armadillo. Their women spit magic leaves in our faces. We just forgot we were men out hunting armadillo. Those leaves they spit in our faces made us crazy. That's how they caught us and changed our eyes. We didn't see them like armadillo any more, but like beautiful women. We fell in love and they took us home with them to speak to their father, the armadillo master. So we became that man's sons-in-law. We forgot our own women. 'I want to be your son-in-law,' we told the father. 'Okay. That's fine,' he answered, 'my daughter's agreed. You're my son-in-law now.' And so we forgot everything."

Then Meda'tia told them: "I've come to the animals' houses to rescue you. I'm the people's *huhai*. I can make the masters of all those houses send you back to the Earth with my maraca. Now you'll leave these houses. You'll find your way back, dreaming. You'll go home and see your mothers, your children, your wives again."

Right away, the men saw their house in dreams and wanted to return. They said to their father-in-law, the master of the other house: "I dreamed about my mother. Let me go visit my mother. Then I'll come back."

"Okay, son-in-law," he said. "You can go."

He said that because Meda'tia, the *so'to's huhai*, was controlling that other house with his maraca.

Now the man is really happy. "Good," he says. "I'm going straight back by the path I saw in my dream."

"Okay. That's fine," answers the father-in-law. "But be very careful. Don't go talking in the house of the humans. That's the condition. Keep quiet. Don't answer their questions. They don't know anything about us. They just hunt us to eat our meat, that's all. You've seen our house. You know our ways. Keep our secret. My daughter will go with you. She's your wife. She'll take care of you."

Now many of the human prisoners in the other houses are freed and can return to their own house, because Meda'tia taught other

men and made them *huhai*. They control the other houses and help the people who've been caught to get away. That's why sometimes a man will come wandering back to the house of the humans. He'd been lost a long time ago. His family was in mourning. They thought he was dead. Now, because the *huhai* went to get him in the other house, he comes back.

Whenever a lost man comes back to his own house, his family rejoices. "You're here! So you weren't dead after all. Where have you been? Tell us what happened."

That's what they all say to him, his mother, his children, his wife.

But he doesn't answer. He doesn't say anything for fear of his father-in-law's revenge. Then he says: "I was hunting. Here's your daughter, mother. I brought her with me. This is my wife. But be careful. Don't go looking at her during the night or you'll die."

"Okay, son," says the mother.

Then at night, the mother starts to get curious. "Where's my son been all this time?" she wonders. "Why doesn't he want to tell me where he was? Who is that woman? Why'd he tell me not to look at her at night? I want to know. It's dark now. Everyone's asleep. I'm going to get a torch and see."

Now the mother goes up to the strange woman's hammock with a light. But she's not a woman any more. She's an armadillo. The mother becomes frightened and starts to scream. She wakes up the whole house.

"Have you gone crazy, boy! That's not a woman you brought. It's an armadillo! Where've you been? Did the armadillos get you? And she picks up a stick and starts to hit the armadillo. The armadillo woman gets out of the hammock and runs out of the house. She heads straight for the hidden path back to her own house.

The son runs after her, half-mad, screaming. He tries to follow her. He doesn't want to lose her.

"Mother, you've scared off my woman!" That's what he screams in his rage.

"That's not my daughter-in-law, son. That's not your woman. That's an armadillo. She's bewitched you. She's made you crazy."

The boy follows the armadillo's tracks. Then he loses them. He can't see that invisible path to the armadillo's house any more. He's lost that memory of the other house, that knowledge of the armadillos. That's what madness is for humans. Now he's happy.

He's free from the spell. He sees like other people. He talks like a human. He lives in the house of the *so'to*. He's not a prisoner any more.

## GLOSSARY

**ADEKATO** The *akato*'s journey, which is recounted to its body in the form of dreams. The *adekato* is considered a dangerous journey, for whenever it leaves the body, the *akato* is in constant peril of being captured by Odo'sha. On the other hand, it can also be manipulated by a shaman, as seen in "Meda'tia", to send messages to a lost body.

**AICHURIAHA** Literally the "*aichuri*" or "song man," this term refers to the keeper of the *Watunna*. Neither a hereditary or paid position, there are nevertheless in every village a small group of elders who guard and perpetuate the tradition. Although *aichuri* itself refers to the shorter, more ritually oriented songs, the *aichuriaha* is both the keeper of these and the more publicly appreciated *Watunna*.

**AIUKU** An hallucinogenic snuff in wide use throughout the South American rain forest, *aiuku* is variously known among other tribes as ñopo, yopo, and vilca. Made from the seeds of a large, leguminous tree (*Anadenanthera peregrina*) which is commonly found in savannah areas, the Makiritare say that it also grows along the shores of Lake Aku'ena and restrict its use to shamans.

**AKATO** The body's companion spirit or double which descends from Heaven to occupy it upon birth. All *akato* are eternal and upon the body's death, the *akato* returns to live in Heaven once again. A principal cause of death is the loss of one's *akato* which enjoys travelling at night and therefore runs the risk of being captured by Odo'sha.

**AKENE** The deep blue water of Lake Aku'ena which has the power of immortality and can restore not only the dead but also the meat of eaten animals from their bones. Akene is mixed with the *kaahi* plant's juices which grow along its shores.

**CHAKARA** The shaman's medicine pouch in which he stores a variety of magic herbs and plants, tobacco and power stones. No larger than 6 in. by 12 in., it is made from either jaguar or monkey skin and has a strap attached so its owner can carry it across his shoulder.

**CONUCO** The large slash and burn gardens found throughout the greater Amazonian basin area. *Conuco* is the common Spanish term although its wide usage has actually been adopted by many Indians. Among the Makiritare, the *conucos* are cleared by the men and planted and maintained by the women. The main crop is the bitter yuca plant, but sweet yuca, bananas, pineapple, sugar cane, chili peppers, squash, sweet potato, tobacco and gourd are also to be found.

**ENNEMADI** The fifth house of Heaven where the masters of the *wiriki* crystals dwell. Although this version does not name the inhabitants of this house, Daniel de Barandiaran claims they are called the Weweyena people, who do nothing but play their maracas all day long.

**HADAWA** The master of the seventh house of Heaven which is occupied by the Star people who are the Earth's past shamans. Hadewa, who is always identified as a fish, is very likely the father-in-law of Wanadi, the culture hero who married the daughter of the master of fish. De Barandiaran identifies Hadewa as Phadeewa, claiming he is the small *cupaneca guayanes* fish which the shamans of this seventh house consider to be their greatest delicacy and spend all their time feasting on it.

**HÖHÖTTU** *Glaucidium brasilianum phalaenoides*. The ferruginous pygmy owl, who lives in the sixth Heaven with Müdo and Tawadi and forms along with them, the great trinity of shaman's helpers.

**HUHAI** (pronounced fhufhai) Shaman.

**HUI'IO** A supernatural anaconda many times larger than any visible one, Hui'io is the mistress of all water and the mother of everything living in it. Quite literally the "Plumed Serpent," she wears the feathered rainbow and lives under the rapids with her mawadi people.

**IARAKE** The most important alcoholic beverage of the Makiritare, made with fermented bitter yuca and the leaves of a certain tree.

**IUKUTA** (also *sukutaka*) The principal Makiritare beverage made from cassava and water and drunk in great quantities at every meal.

**KAHI** An hallucinogenic made from a malpighiaceae vine of the genus *Banisteriopsis* (there are various species), which is prepared and taken in liquid form. As with *aiuku* and *akuhua* (virola), the use of *kaahi* among the Makiritare is restricted to the *huhai* who uses it to travel to Heaven and make contact with the invisible world. Closely related to the word for Heaven, *Kahu*, *kaahi* is its equivalent, growing at its center beside Lake Aku'ena and mixing with its waters. One of the most widely spread hallucinogens among the native peoples of South America, it is also known as caapi, yage, and in Ecuador, as ayahuasca, the "dead man's vine."

**KOIOHIÑA** The dark, cave-like region of the universe where Odosha and his demonic Odoshankomo dwell.

**MAGIC BENCH** (*Mude*) One of the huhai's most important objects is his magic bench, a low, wooden seat carved in either the form of a jaguar or a monkey. It is with this bench that the *huhai* is transported to Heaven.

**MARACA** The shaman's gourd rattle whose great magical properties are attributed to the *wiriki* crystals inside of it. The maraca, the first of which was created by Wanadi, is used in virtually all shamanic activities.

**MAWADI** Enormous, supernatural anaconda who live under the rapids with their mistress, Hui'io. They are extremely feared for their habit of kidnapping women and turning over canoes, as well as for their ability to cause floods, thus one of the reasons given for the taboo on killing anaconda.

**MOTADEWA** The shamanic or secret name for Heaven, which is known as Kahu or Kahuña among the non-initiated Makiritare. De Barandiaran claims that Motadewa refers to an impenetrable and supreme eighth house of Heaven which is the special dwelling place of Wanadi.

**MÜDO** *Nyctibius grandis*. The great potoo who is Wanadi's brother and one of the three great bird spirits living in the sixth Heaven, Matawahuña. Despite his position as one of the most powerful shaman helpers, Müdo is often made fun of because of his extreme ugliness.

**NUNA** The moon, who is an evil cannibal spirit that spends all its time trying to catch *akato* and *huhai* travelling between Earth and Heaven. It is said that when the moon has a ring around it, Nuna is about to eat someone and a shaman must go up to rescue them.

**ODO'SHA** Also known as Kahu (pronounced differently from the Kahu used for Sky) and Kahushawa, Odo'sha is the master of evil and the incarnation of all negative forces in the universe. Born from the placenta of Wanadi, Odo'sha lives with his people, the Odoshankomo, in dark caves in a land called Koiohiña and is involved in a constant struggle to dominate the Earth.

**SETAWA KALIANA** Referred to as the "huhai's masters," who dwell in Iadekuna hana, the second house of Heaven, these spirits are said to be related to the Kaliana or Sape Indians who are a small, linguistically independent group living in the headwaters of the Paragua River. They are greatly respected by the Makiritare for their shamanistic skills, and it is the image of the Setawa Kaliana shamans seated back to back in deep meditation which is carved at the top of every *huhai's* maraca.

**SHIRICHE** The stars, being both the stars we see in our own sky and the invisible ones who dwell in Shiriche Kumenadi at the top of Heaven. These invisible stars are deceased shamans, and a shooting star is therefore said to be a shaman who has just died returning to Heaven. "Star" is also the term used to denote a year's time.

SO'TO A human being or person, defined as being a member of the Makiritare tribe or speaking their language. *So'to* is also the word for "twenty" just as *Pemon* and *Kari'ña* are in the respective languages of those tribes.

TAWADI *Podager nacunda*. The *nacunda* nighthawk who dwells with Müdo and Höhöttu in the sixth Heaven and acts as one of the most powerful of all shaman's helpers.

WANADI God, culture hero and proto-shaman all in one, Wanadi is the unknowable, unseen force ("light") in Heaven, who since his farewell to the Earth has taken no part in the affairs of the humans. Created by Shi, the sun, it was Wanadi (through his *damodedes*) who established order as it is known today amongst the *so'to*.

WATUNNA The complete, sacred narrative tradition of the Makiritare people.

WIRIKI Small quartz crystals known as the "shaman's power stones" with which Wanadi himself was created by Shi, the sun. Every shaman, upon initiation, must travel to Heaven to receive his own *wiriki* which he then puts in his maraca along with the roots of the shaman's drugs, *aiuku* and *kaahi*. When a shaman dies, his maraca remains on the Earth, but his *wiriki* return to Heaven with him. Makiritare say that a long time ago, all people were created from *wiriki*.

end

civrieux

Bruce McClelland

*The Prince Who Learned What Counts*

Once there lived in a simple forest a complex Prince whose father, the King, was neither sick nor dying. Not only that, but in all his years as King, he had shown not the slightest sign of wishing to pass on, leaving his considerably large kingdom, the entire forest with all of its inhabitants and their lives, to his son.

The complex Prince had in turn grown accustomed to this immutable condition, and had learned to content himself with princely, rather than kingly duties. He spent his days walking about the boundary of the forest, pretending to be noticing the condition of the walls and the sympathies of the subjects who lived at the edge, because he knew that every now and then a wall might need some repair, or the inhabitants would allow foreign words into their way of talking. But what he was really doing, as everyone knew, even those who lived across the border, was counting the steps it took to walk all the way around the kingdom.

This never changed, and every time he went to walk around the forest, whenever he got back to where he had started from, the number of steps he had taken was always the same. So happy was he that the kingdom was not getting any smaller that he never noticed that it wasn't getting any bigger. And since most of his time was spent in the princely activity of inspecting the perimeter of the forest, he hardly ever saw his father, who spent *his* time ruling the

subjects of the village in the center of the kingdom.

One day, on his journey around the forest, he came upon a place where the wall had been broken, and because it was the first time the Prince had noticed anything at all different along his path, he stopped to inspect the damage.

While he stopped he was approached by a hag who lived outside the forest. She looked at him inspecting the stones, and asked him in a rather abrupt manner: "Don't you have better things to do? I see you every day, walking around your forest. Are you not the son of the King? Can't you ask your subjects to inspect the borders for you?"

The Prince was alarmed by the hag and her many questions, for now there was another change he had not expected. But he tried to compose himself, and answered her. "There is no better thing to do that I know," he said. "My father the King has taken care of all the more important things, and I am sure that will be so for a very long time. And if the subjects were more qualified than I for this important task, I am sure he would have them do it. But then I can't imagine what he would reserve for me."

"But you will be the King someday yourself," replied the hag, "and then you will know nothing of the job. Would it not be best for you to help him in what he does?"

The Prince immediately answered, "I am helping him with what he does by what I do. Besides, I am certain that I am not allowed to leave my walk, for my father is not dying, and nothing is changing. To leave here and return to the village to ask my father if I may learn his job I am sure would make him very angry at me for leaving the stones uninspected."

"Since you are a King's son, I cannot make you a prince." said the hag. "And since the King is yet very powerful, I cannot make you King. What I can do for you is grant you leave from this post, to seek his advice. But you must do something in return."

The Prince, who had just learned things could change, was eager to see whether things might soon be different between him and his father, and so quickly agreed to do whatever the old lady asked.

"Say to your father when you at last see him, 'Father, it has been many years since we have really spoken to each other. I would like that to change. But first I must tell you I have asked the hag who lives outside the forest to be my bride.'"

The Prince objected, saying that such words spoken to the King would more likely keep the situation from changing, for he imagined his father had always thought it was important that no one

from the kingdom should ever marry anyone from outside it, much less the Prince should marry such an ancient hag. But the hag warned him: "If you do not say this, I will know it, and I will deny that I have kept watch for you. And then it is more likely that your father will have as little time for you as you have for him."

Believing that he could fool the old lady, he finally agreed, and set off for the center of the forest. Before long it grew dark, and the Prince, who had been counting his steps into town, decided he should stop for the night. As he was carving the number of steps he had taken, so he could recall it into a tree when he awoke, a large owl with eyes as big as moons swept down and landed on a nearby branch. Before the Prince had fallen asleep, the owl began to speak. "Do not try to fool the hag by deceit. Instead, when you reach your father's throne, you must say exactly what she told you. But if you wish to avoid your father's wrath, you will have to offer him proof of your devotion to your princely tasks by bringing him a stone from the wall and a word you cannot understand." With that, the great owl flew into the night, leaving the Prince tired and uncertain. For he surely wished not to cause his father displeasure, but he did not want to go all the way back to where he had met the old lady, because he could not decide whether to add all the extra steps to his count or not.

He fell asleep pondering the issue, and was visited in his dream by a beautiful princess who told him that if he knew, when he awoke, how far he had already come, he should continue directly to his father, but if he did not know, he should forget the counting and do as the owl had instructed.

The Prince woke with the sunrise and the first chirpings of the birds, feeling very confident in the new day. He went over to the tree where he had notched the number of the steps he had walked to where he was, and found that the markings were no longer there. As he had relied upon the writing to serve in place of memory, he found he had no idea how far he'd come.

He didn't particularly care, for he *did* remember the words of the princess, and knew that he must go back to the wall, to retrieve a brick and a foreign word. The brick, he thought on such a fine day, will be no problem. The strange word, on the other hand, might be more difficult to obtain, for how can you ask someone to give you a word you don't understand in a language they don't understand?

Anyway, back he went, so glad that he did not have to count, that sometimes along the way he even walked backwards. But

when he arrived at the place where he believed the wall had been broken, he discovered there was no wall to be found. Nor was there anyone about, not even the old witch, whom he could perhaps have asked to give him a word to say to his father which he did not understand.

The sunny day on which he had woken so confident now seemed grey and overcast. Thinking there was little now to do, with no count, no wall, and no word with which he might please his father, the Prince deemed it best to just go to his father straightaway, and upon his arrival explain all of his derelictions. So the Prince walked very briskly from where he was, directly into the castle, all in the day that was remaining and without counting a single step.

When he arrived, it was just evening, and he met his father upon this throne right before supper. Recalling his obligation to the hag, he decided he ought to say her words before explaining about the wall. So he recited the words she had given him: "Father, it has been many years since we have really spoken. I would like that to change. But first I must tell you I have asked the hag who lives outside the forest to become my bride." And then, before his father could express his unhappiness, the Prince continued: "And, father, I am afraid I shall make you even more displeased when I tell you that I did not count my steps, that there seems to be no more wall, and that I could not find a word which I did not understand."

"My son," said the King, "I am afraid I do not know what you are saying to me. Why, indeed, should you count your steps? And if there is no more wall, why should that displease me, for it has always served to keep my kingdom from growing, and has kept us from knowing our neighbors. That you have not yet found the word which you do not understand does not displease me as much as you should think, for you will learn that word from her who will be your queen. And since you did not learn this from the hag, I cannot believe she is the one you will marry. Now if you have nothing else on your mind, and since there is no more wall for you to be concerned about, if you ever wish to learn my job, you would be wise to go and find a word you do not understand."

The Prince, though hungry and wishing to be invited for supper, which he could smell coming from the kitchen, thanked his father for being so kind and understanding, and returned to the forest.

It rapidly grew dark, and the Prince found himself tired, confused, and ravenous, in the middle of the wood, and he began to be angry with himself for having left his father's residence quite so soon. Although his hunger kept him from sleep deep enough for

dreams, he finally gave up for the night, and decided he would know more clearly what to do in the morning.

When he first awoke, his hunger seemed no longer with him, and the Prince was relieved to not have to find food first thing in the morning. He set immediately upon his task of finding this elusive word by choosing as his direction the one which seemed to him least familiar, though in truth, he had never in his whole life seen the place where he found himself.

He had not gone but a few steps along his path, when he happened upon an oak tree with notches carved in its bark. Since the notches looked as if they had been put there on purpose, the Prince took the trouble to count them, and found that 32 gashes had been cut into the tree. Now since his only real relation to number, besides his age, which was just past 32, was footsteps, he decided to see what would happen if he took 32 steps in the direction he was headed when he found the tree.

When he had counted his 32 steps, he looked up from the path he had been following, and saw riding by on a very large horse a beautiful lady dressed in a shining blue gown like no other he had ever seen. So enchanted was he by the sight that he once again forgot everything he had tried to remember, including the number of steps he had just taken, and just stared at the beautiful girl.

She noticed him staring, so she turned her horse and trotted over to where he stood. "Why do you stare at me so?" asked the damsel. "Is there something I should know about my appearance?" But the Prince said nothing. So the girl continued, "Then perhaps there is something I can do for you, that you look at me so strangely?"

When the Prince heard that, he remembered his father's words, and the necessity remaining of finding a word which he did not know, or was it understand? If he could get such a word from this beautiful lady, would he not then be obliged, according to his father, who was after all the King of the Forest, to marry her instead of the hag? So he nervously said, "Yes, actually. You see, I am on an errand, and am having difficulty locating what I was sent to retrieve. Since you are a stranger, it is possible for you to grant me what I request. I am on my way to find a word which I do not understand."

The princess replied, "It is very easy for me to tell you a word you will not understand. But first I must ask for something in return, for such a word should not come cheaply for the Prince I take you to be."

Embarrassed by her recognition of his status, yet eager to solve

this riddle once and for all, and to get this lovely vision as his wife in the bargain, he of course agreed to do what she asked him.

“When next you see your father,” said the lady, “say to him, ‘Father, I have met the Lady of the Forest, and she gave me a word, but I cannot marry her, for I have given my word to the hag. I must keep my earlier promise. But here is the word I do not understand, please tell me what it means: *duty*.’ If you do not say these words to your father, I do not know if you will ever see me again.” She turned her steed again, and rode away.

The Prince for the first time knew exactly where he was, even though he was disappointed in himself, that he had promised to marry the hag before he had known he was going to meet the lovely lady on the horse. So back he went to see his father. He arrived just in time to find dinner being served to no one but his father at a very large table in the banquet hall. At the other end, a place was set, but the Prince, who hardly knew his father, once again dared not ask to sit.

“Sit down,” the King commanded. “It has been many years since we have spoken, and I would like to change all that.” The remark struck the Prince as familiar, something he would have liked to have said first, but he was glad the King had spoken first, because it gave him an opening to fulfill his obligation to the beautiful damsel of the forest.

“Yes, father, you are right. As a matter of fact, here is something we can talk about. I have recently met the Lady of the Forest, who told me a word, which I do not understand. The word is ‘*duty*.’ May I ask you what it means?”

“You may,” replied the King, “but I may not give you the answer, until you already know what it means; which is to say you cannot learn from me, except that you learn for yourself what I can only teach you by not teaching you.”

The Prince, who had managed to hold on to the feeling of knowing where he was, saw that being a King must be very difficult indeed, if one had to speak so. He also realized why probably he had not spoken with his father in so long. So he remained quiet for a very long time and concentrated upon devouring the many courses that now were placed in front of him, one after the other. When he at last finished all the meats and desserts, the Prince broke the silence.

“Father, you do not know how grateful I am to sit even this far away from you, moreso to eat the wonderful game and sweets your servants have placed before me, for I certainly was hungry. But I am still confused; I have come with a word from the Lady of the

Forest, which I thought would gain me marriage, but instead, you have replied in a way which makes little sense."

"My son," said the King, "I think you know: the hag and the Lady are one. By not betraying the first, you have secured the second for your bride. And as you have told me you do not understand my words, no longer should you wander around, but henceforth you shall dwell within the castle; and every evening until I die, we shall dine almost together, separated always only by the length of this table, filled with what you want."

With that, the King excused himself, and went upstairs, to read.



Giordano Bruno

from *On the Composition of Images, Signs and Ideas*  
translated by Charles Doria and Dick Higgins

*Book I, Chapter 1*  
**On Light, Radius and Mirror**

Being is perceived and distinguished under three headings, universally called metaphysical, physical and logical, as these are the three principles of everything: God, nature and art; and three effects [proceed from this], divine, natural and artificial.

Every agent should be constituted for a specific purpose, and not out of any such necessity [as] the appearance of effective matter, so that it has a preconceived [aspect].<sup>1</sup> Plainly, this appearance in advance of the world of natural things is called "idea," in the world of natural things [it is called] form or the vestige of ideas; in the world of postnatural things [the world of art] [it is called] reason or intention, and is [further] distinguished into primary and secondary, [this last of] which we usually call the shadow of the ideas.

These ideas are the cause of things before the things [exist], the vestiges of the idea are the things themselves or what [vestiges] are in things; the shadows of the ideas are from the things themselves, or [exist] after the things which are said to exist with so much less reason than those things which proceed out of the lap of nature, just as in the same way the things themselves are less than mind, while idea and principle [are] effective, supernatural, substance-

generating and transphysical.

Thus, beings are distinguished into those which are things, and into those things which are their sign or indication; this distinction is just about the same [as the one given above], and which the uninformed public proclaims [as the division] into substance and accident.

We are deliberately proposing a method which by no means concerns things [but] which treats, rather, the significance of things, [a method] in which may be easily ascertained that there exists beyond a doubt a productive power of all things, by those who will [but] contemplate the world and characters of Nature, who will call calmly to us from all sides and describe the species of things; since matter, less than idea and form, seems to contribute to the specification<sup>2</sup> of producing all things. For in this principle all things come together and are one; and truly in this and through this all things are distributed into the genus, the species and their numbers. But, from this it is apparent that generally the same nutriment becomes, in a dog, the dog's substance and seed, in a man a man's [substance and seed], in an ape an ape's [substance and seed] because of the idea [which is] present [in dog, man and ape], which we discover is not separated from things but most things joined to themselves. Thus, we specify that all things have a ratio of matter of either the prime, middle or the proximate degree, in the action of the inventive or memorative faculty according to the condition of assumed significance of anything; and we invent and accomodate in such a way that everything may be elicited from everything, and all things signified by all, and all things contemplated in all. And, to say it in one word, let everything be considered by application.

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<sup>1</sup>Right off, here, we are into one of Bruno's principle ideas in this work, that the preconception of a thing is part of its essence and contributes to its validity. This concept, developed also in *De Umbris Idearum* ("On the Shadows of Ideas"), is, so far as we can determine, unique to Bruno in the Neo-Platonic tradition.

<sup>2</sup>One must not forget that this work was written in a very compressed, almost shorthand form. This passage, like many, is extraordinarily compacted, with poor grammar and with many parallel constructions which only hint at the subject and object of the sentences.

Here also we come to an idiosyncratic term of Bruno's, the species, that is, the varieties and classes of ideas, things and illusions. When Bruno says "specification," he does not mean the making of something specific, but the making or determination of species.

*Book I, Chapter 4*

**Every sign should be referred to the atrium of sense  
and the tribunal of sight**

In this art all things can be used under the name of image: marks, signs or indications very easily may be properly named in another manner, because to those who very diligently consider a thing [by] itself, it will not seem to lack its proper ratio. For all things, in whatever way they signify and represent, are referred to and reduced to species comprehensibly by sense, and the general terms (the genera) of all perceptible species are finally limited to the visible, that is assuredly to the liveliest and most effectual species, since sight is the most spiritual of the senses. This will quickly become apparent when we shall examine the steps by which they (the genera and the species) are inferred or transported back to their proper objects. For touch, in the internal as well as external organs, conceives those things which both cleave and penetrate, taste [conceives] only those things that cleave, smell [only] the exhalations given off by the body of those things which are conspicuously placed, hearing [conceives] those things which lie rather far away, but sight comprehends very swiftly those things which are the most remote; and, for this reason, we recall rather quickly to mind those things apprehended by that sense, and retain them more effectively than by the other [senses], and through the objects of this sense we signify the objects of [all] the other senses, as well as the objects of all the appetites and the cognitive faculties, in the same way that we describe and reveal all things by means of visible letters.

*Book I, Chapter 5*

**On the physical, mathematical [and] logical moment of  
images, according to the general reception [or acceptance]  
of these modes.**

Images confer signs and characters for doing, perceiving and signifying physically, mathematically and logically all at the same time, since, to nature, it is agreeable to bring forth definite species from indefinite material by an actual or a non-physical idea or form. An indefinite material, I say, [is] not first in intention but second, as it is a common nutriment that is converted into the substance and seed of a particular species. Then mathematically the

simulacrum, image and character lead to producing and preparing many things, since it may be observed, the cosmos is threefold: archetypal or original, physical and umbral; thus, from the first (the archetypal) a descent through the middle (the physical) is available to the third (the umbral), and from the third through the middle an ascent [is available] to the first, in the same way that we descend from the sun to the aspect of the moon's light, [which is] imparted by the stars and the air, or as in a mirror, notwithstanding the fact that the light can be sent directly into the mirror from the sun, and that from the mirror [light can be] turned back toward the sun on a direct and immediate track. Thus our mind-and-sense<sup>1</sup> procures, prepares and receives for itself certain favors directly from the supernal cosmos, but these [favors come] through the medium of nature and sensible things. We do not prepare and understand all these things, whether they be in one mode or another, save by sure sign, archetype, gestures and, as they say, sacraments.

Thus, forms, simulacra and signacules<sup>2</sup> are vehicles and, as it were, some sort of chains by which the favors<sup>3</sup> of lofty things emanate, proceed and are dispatched upon the lower [orders of] things at the same time as these are conceived, retained and preserved. Concerning them I omit too close a review, lest I seem to wander more than is proper from [my original] purpose.

One thing I do wish, nonetheless, to recall to memory — that the planets seem to seek out similar faces [to their own] in subjective and informing things according to the counsel and practice of the Magi.<sup>4</sup> This same fact that the teachings of the Caballists and the example of Moses confirm, Moses, who at one time, compeled as it were by some necessity, erected a golden calf to gain the favor of Ceres and Jove, likewise offered for worship a bronze serpent to assuage the violence of Mars and Saturn;<sup>5</sup> there are many other things [like these] to see, which they say lie hidden and veiled in both his acts and words.

There is a similar rationale (*ratio*) in those stories which are retold about Prometheus who is said, when he was about to steal [fire] from Jove, to have brought the light and fire down to earth from heaven in a lump of mud, that is science and the arts, as a boon for human life;<sup>6</sup> when they perceive someone in some way stealing and purloining a simulacrum's virtue, the favor and in addition the privilege of the gods, for the sake of some (I don't know what) personal, expert and secret analogy of higher forms with lower material, from hence then, as if allured, they descend and

communicate themselves by images and by likenesses.

Consider, moreover, that just as every species is separated from every other species by an image and a figure, so too does the species run into, fit into and become dispatched towards and mingled in the same species. In all these [species], however, arrangement and constitution fitted out with its own configuration is preferred, just as the cylinder's species receives the form of the rainbow stone [the prism] and projects colors on the wall opposite [it], [while] a concave surface gathering, as it were, the light rays of the sun and moon into one central point, participates more effectively in the virtue of these same entities (sun and moon); and an opening formed by a cone shapes in the shadows these species of those things which are made and moved about in a circular fashion. Of such importance is figure.

The most potent effects of the celestial bodies are to be added [here] for consideration, effects which are thought to conceive virtue, principle and perfection upon the hinges of morning, evening and noon. From this [come] all these things which astrologers and diviners of every sort diligently recommend concerning solstices, equinoxes, the points of noon and midnight, when larger orbits intersect each other. From all this [come] those crosses, those charms and incantations [that we see] at [road] intersections, likewise those seasons during which the sun or moon or a particular planet stations itself in the assembly of the adjoining corners [of the universe].

In this way are [all things] protected by figure, to defend themselves from adversaries, [to] repel contraries and to gather for themselves the favors of [both] helpful and lofty things, and [of] other things as well.

This is what we see taking place physically, nor [do we see it] condemned divinely; thus, just as we indicated a little earlier, they (figures, etc.) seem to provide a rationale for the formation, ultimately, of mind, intellect, reason and sense; because Aristotle, compelled by the truth if not by sure knowledge and obvious reason, says: for one wishes to know [something], it is proper to speculate on phantasm, likewise to endeavor to find out that something is either a phantasm or something to fantasize about.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, not without particular form or figures, which are conceived by the external senses from sensible objects, and [which] are located and digested in the inner [senses] do we know we can achieve some operations suitable to our nature.

There are many things which we could adduce for the elucidation

tion of subsequent differences from those things [which we shall] speak of next, concluding as it were inductively and applying by case (topice), unless we were to fear the censure of certain supercilious people along with their deadly ignorance.

Nonetheless, we wish this to be signified only to the more adept minds — that manifold is the force in the light of preordained principles as well as in the grain of living salt.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, too, [it is] in those things which we seem to conclude and infer easily and soberly, and not, as it were, according to their breadth, from principles of this sort, since we descend from a universal [which is] broader than is proper to the particular, as the law of dialectic forbids, which ordains [that we] assume a particular knowledge and a [particular] definition from its proper (its nearby) object, from the next genus, and not from the remote and primal [genus].

But a little is sufficient for one who understands. As for what remains, it is necessary to treat next those matters which [have to do] with the purpose of specifiable signs and images that will seem to pertain not only to all the operations of the cognitive ability [and which] confer not just some modicum of benefit, but also to those which we in no less way term operations as well, since a very clever mind may attain [them] by application, intention and easy conception.

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<sup>1</sup>Bruno uses a hendiadys to indicate the complex “mind-and-sense.”

<sup>2</sup>The term Bruno uses, “*signaculae*,” is the diminutive of “sign” and is lacking in English; thus our neologism seems necessary to indicate Bruno’s exact meaning.

<sup>3</sup>This concept of “favours,” here and above, which accompany the passage of something from one plain to another, seems to be an avoidance of the concept of “Grace,” which would have too Christian a context for Bruno’s purposes.

<sup>4</sup>By “magi” Bruno does not mean Zoroastrians, necessarily, but the plural of “magus,” adepts at occult knowledge. This concept of synpathy or sympathetic resonance is common to many forms of arcane knowledge or practice, such as herbal medicine, astrology and other forms of divination.

<sup>5</sup>In *Exodus* 32, 1-20, it is Aaron who built the calf and Moses, who, outraged, destroyed it. Bruno’s inversion of this familiar bible story is very curious, as is the allusion to the serpent. Evidently Bruno is referring to some occult text.

<sup>6</sup>See Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, lines 461ff.

<sup>7</sup>We have not been able to identify from this passage any corresponding passage in Aristotle; furthermore, it sounds quite un-Aristotelian. Bruno is evidently quoting from memory, and blending in his own ideas in the process.

<sup>8</sup>As part of the pantheistic tendency, Bruno typically attributes life to things which we normally think of as inanimate. His argument would probably be that, if salt is a prerequisite of life, it partakes of it.

*Book I, Chapter 6*  
**Separating image and sign<sup>1</sup>**

Some images and signs are of sensible things, others of intelligible [ones]; some of substance, some of accident, some of size, some of virtue, some of number, action, passion, act, cognition, appetite, habit or relation, of giving or receiving, possessing, of time, place, opposition, continuity, intention and speech, and of those things which are reduced to these [categories]. In regard to principles, means, instruments, differences, harmony and comparison consider: greater, smaller, equal, superior, inferior and sharing.

Some images, on the other hand, like signs, are in things, others in intention, others in words, others in graphic delineation; others, I say, [to reduce these to two headings] are [parts] of things, others of words or of clear-speaking voices.<sup>2</sup>

ON THE MODES BY WHICH VARIOUS FIGURES AND INTENTIONS ARE MADE

Therefore we provide a figure for something and describe it to the external as well as the internal eye:

I. From that which is singular (unique), in itself also creates its own distinguishing marks, as for example when (we describe a snake) because of its spiral track or the twisting of its outline (on the ground), a ram by reason of its shape with horns curved in, twins because they are equals bound up in two swaddling cloths, a lion by his famous mane, a crab by his shell. In this way astrologers reserve the heavenly signs' characters, as first drawn up by the Egyptians.

II. From ratio (comes) gesture, just as (we describe) love from two figures embracing one another either in characters or strokes, and not by the opposite, by figures turned away, separated and disconnected. These and similar things enchanters and witches, as well as doctors customarily honor (ie, use respectfully, observe almost religiously), and in no small way do they (the figures) contribute to the effectiveness of things, as for example some purgative simples, if taken high up by mouth, with stems and leaves removed, conceive the power of expelling through the upper passage (vomiting), but if taken down below expell through the lower passages, as we know by experience.

III. From a simple custom (like this) let us plunge into the significant intention of the visible as well as the invisible species. To this

are referred genealogical tables, insignia (heraldic devices?) and the established seals of gods and people. These descend not from sort of reason, etymology or nature, but from a simple decree of the institution (in question), (that is, these figures are created arbitrarily by fiat by those who require them.)

IV. From constitution, which we understand as something different from institution, from it certainly (comes) that which pursues some sort of business or account. For example we signify peace with an olive tree, not because the power or significance of peace is in the olive tree *per se*, but (because) from it (the olive tree) we recall to mind that story wherein Neptune (the god) gave the horse as a gift to the Athenians to use in war, (the horse) which sprang out of the earth when his trident struck it, and Athena presented them with the olive tree after her spear had shaken the ground. It (olive) evolved into an archetype of peace, at least on the grounds that it was separate (distinct in purpose) from the sign of war (the horse).

V. (Figures also arise) from similarity of fortune or life. Because of this, the prophets examine by their particular methods as it were, and for the most part divine the fate of a later republic or empire which has been similarly constituted a particular empire, priesthood or republic which flourished in other ages. But among them, moreover, the destiny of one embraces the images of many destinies; for example Rome's destiny subsumes not only the condition of the Babylonian, Persian and Greek realms, but outdoes them. In the same way in large measure it surpasses the regimes and pomps of republics and high priests (popes, probably) (of the present time?). Truly for all things the constitution of human life is a most general and appropriate image, because all things enjoy helpless infancy, a growing period (teenage), maturity and death. But some things have been constituted such that, as soon as they are born or (are) in their very adolescence, they die and dissipate themselves. Some things fill the spaces of their whole lifetime; some things in the likeness of certain species complete all parts of their lifetime in a short space of years, while other things (do so) over a longer (span of years). Dogs for example age more quickly than horses, horses more quickly than people, people more quickly than stags.

VI. By analogy (it has been) reasoned that from the motion of lower things as well as from the effects of higher and invisible things, and from the motion of higher things as well as from the

causes of lower things we receive the impulse to signify (I'm calling *significatum* a supine here, because no other possibility seems to fit.) From sensible substances, I say, the intelligible, that which can be understood, (arises).

VII. From the concrete (comes) the abstract, just as *qualis* (such) for example comes from *qualitas* (suchness), as *albus* (white) from *albedo* (whiteness), and the reverse, the concrete from the abstract, for example just as we conceive *albus* from *albedo*.

VIII. From the relative the correlative, just as for example we conclude from the adjacent master the existence of a servant (ie, masters imply slaves). We can depict a giant on a small pebble by virtue of relation and comparison, while a man is likened? associated (proportioned) to the size of a single fly, and many people standing together to a swarm of many ants.

IX. From the same or similar effects we have the ratio of the same or similar causes.

X. From the antecedents, (we divine the cause) as for example from clouds rising up in the south and hens rolling in the dust we pressage rain.

XI. From concomitants, (we divine the cause) as for example when (we see) fire kindled from flame.

XII. From consequences, (we divine the cause) as for example (we understand that) rain (has occurred), when the ground is damp.

XIII. From adjacencies, (we divine the cause) as for example we perceive needle reed pen and fly on tailor, writer and corpse, as well as an arrow on an archer, when we set a better sense in motion.

XIV. From something composed sensibly (arises) a division (*divisum*) not sensible (ie, invisible), just as for example from *animalis* (alive) (comes) anima (soul, life force).

XV. From a clear division (comes) something composed (that is) not clear, as for example when we prepare *oxymel* (honey-vinegar), with one part honey, another part vinegar.

XVI. From the conjunct (arises) the adjunct, as for example when we recognize the sick person by the bed where he will lie down, while the doctor assists him in his illness.

XVII. From this season (arises) the seasonal, as for example when the grape and ripe fruit (we perceive) autumn, from hog-slaughter winter or (the cold?) month. Likewise:

XVIII. From the tool the skill, as for example (we recognize) the astrologer by the astrolabe or sphere in his hand, the farmer by his hoe, his plow.

XIX. By the badge of office (*insignia*) (we recognize) the office holder (*insignitus*) as for example (we recognize) Janus by his key, Saturn by his sickle, Mars by his sword.

XX. The agent (*agens*) (is recognized) by his mode of action (*actio*) or the one in pain (*patiens*) by reason of his suffering (*passio*). Really the opposition here is between *active* and *passive*, the one doing is known by his deed, the other, the one done to, by his passivity or suffering.). For example a corpse dragged by the wheels behind a particular leader's chariot leads us to recall Hector, and someone slicing through a complicated knot with a sword (reminds us) of Alexander who thus swiftly loosed the Gordian Knot.

XXI. From the person located there (we recognize) the place, as for example from Roman Rome, from Italian Italy, and the reverse: from the place the person located there, as for example from treasure chest treasure, from wine jar wine, since it does not exist by itself.

XXII. Likewise from sensible activity (we understand) insensible (ie, invisible, imperceptible) effect, as for example from adulterer with adultery (we understand) adultery, from somebody murdering someone murder.

XXIII. From the part the whole, as or example from the wheel the chariot, from four or five persons together (we understand) people.

XXIV. From the whole the part, as for example from a blind man (we understand) weakness of the eyes.

XXV. From the proportional the jointly proportional, as for example from a potter who diligently handles and spins his wheel (we understand) divine judgement and predestination; the governance of affairs by a particular prince (is) marked/signed/designated by the *paterfamilias* (head of household).

XXVI. Through something's subject or its susceptible property we

pursue the thing itself or its property. For example with someone, whom we have recognized as a just man who judges justly, we have an approach (insight) into his way of thinking: a just man shall judge the people (Biblical? source?). From a simple person who fears nothing and (is) worry free we have a way into his thinking which is: he who goes about simply goes about confidently.

XXVII. From one able to speak (well), we seek to learn his mode of thought just as from someone who habitually drinks we seek and encounter with his sort of thinking: let he who thirst come to me and drink.

XXVIII. From the denominator (the namer), the denominated (the named) and the reverse, as for example from *fortis* strong man *fortitudo* (strength), from a woman musician the science of music.

XXIX. Likewise from a hieroglyph its denotation (ie, what a word denotes, designates or indicates). With instances of this, the whole book is littered, for example from the balance scales (we intuit) justice, from the fox cunning, from an ass head ignorance.

XXX. From the effect (we intimate) the cause, and from the cause the effect, for example from something skillfully made (we understand) skill, from an architect architecture and the reverse.

XXXI. Likewise from a certain allusion (we intuit) that to which allusion is made, for example from a little old woman (standing, positioned) between two very young and pretty girls (we comprehend) eclipse, earth's position between sun and moon.

XXXII. From contrary (we discover) contrary, for example when ironically calling to mind a stupid person, both useless and worthless, whom for the occasion we wish to consider wise, clever and generous, we are moved toward remembering or contemplating opposites, so too does nature excite contraries better from contraries, and very frequently works by theme-antitheme [probably a rhetorical, not a musical term, but otherwise unknown to me, the word in question is *antiperistasis*.]

There are other ratios (means) by which certain things are figured and signed by other things, these ratios obviously refer back to these first chapters for example, or in a smaller number (of cases) to some specific one. To those who conceive their forms (ie, of the things themselves), either singly or collectively, that is either by virtue of one or more or two modes, to their lot it will fall to discover

the infinite diversity of images and likenesses.

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<sup>1</sup>This is the first of several chapters which are presented only in outline, as lists, like notes for a lecture.

<sup>2</sup>The noun-epithet "clear-speaking voices" appears frequently in *Homer*, in both the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*. It suggests prophesy.

*Book I, Chapter 9*

**Some Ways of fashioning images  
for deduction are contained in what  
the Chaldean writing holds in our  
Mnemosyne's temple.**

Aegyptus, you bore the secret signs of gods and people  
celebrated once in song and story,  
thanks to them, with nature as guide, thoughts can be  
religiously expressed and better than by our varied sense  
and ordering.

In these signs the ancient mysteries remain manifest,  
as when nature in her numbers expresses herself,  
with them gods' oracles came straight into men's eyes.  
Therefore, when a thing stands signified by its own figure,  
A chariot is admitted for a chariot, a fire for a fire,  
but when an image not invisible in itself is signed,  
let a better sense, better skill step forth.

II. Now you will sign a dissimilar thing by a work sounding like  
the sensible thing, for *vitis* (vine)/recalls to mind  
*vita* (life), *equus* (horse) *aequum* (equal),.

III. Different (words) are whole in part  
at least the first (syllable). They inform (us) that the whole  
(word)

bind them as one, just as when *Presbyter* (priest) is signed *Dans*  
(giving),

*Preaedans* (greedy) signifies (him), let *Asinus* (ass) likewise  
betray *Asilus* (gadfly).

*Aser* (donkey) is here likened to Asia's head graspable  
by a similar tail. IV. Now the whole word is partly signed (.)  
Plainly to me *Capitolia* [Mt. Capitoline in Rome, so named from

a man's skull found there] reveals her marble *caput* (head).  
V. *Accola* (dweller) gives *Patria* (fatherland), because when  
because when *angelus* (angel) gave *Anglus* [Angle, member  
of old Germanic tribe which settled and named Britain],  
then the looked-at Brittannus himself signs his whole fatherland  
(Brittania)

Their limbs' movements, their outfits, robe and hood  
designate Turk, Jew, monk and Arab.

It follows also that *proprium* (*property*) gives *adpropriatum*  
(appropriation)

*Blasphemum* (blasphemy)(comes from) *abscissa* (torn out) because  
a (blasphemous) tongue needs to be signed.

Sometimes things that happened previously disclose signs of the  
future,

*sensile* (sensitive)(revealed) as if it were *facinus damnandum*,  
*socium* (*damnable crime*) (*comrade*)

(derives) from *sensibile* (sensible) which accompanies (it), and  
*saltus* (leap)

(comes) from *saltans* (leaper), because of the way  
the act is done.

Specific insignia have been assigned specific things,  
so that we may bind Janus by his key and Mars by his sword.

then the proper season will bring back its encompassing gifts,  
April (arrives) with flowers, Autumn trickling with grapes,  
Winter weighs in with snow, summer is armored in ears of

wheat,

*habens* (one who has) gives *habitus* (outfit), king kingdom (*rex*  
*regnum*) *dives* (rich man) *opum vim* (power of riches),

*Invidus* (envious) *invidia* (envy), *legista* (lawmaker)

*lex* (law) . And genus

is tied to species, just as *brutus* (animal)(is) nonetheless  
[tied] to *bos* (bull)/.

The agent grants the sign, which the mode of action (agency)  
will of itself not provide;

*Invidus* [grants] *invidia*, *adulter* (adulterer), made famous by his  
act, (*stuprum*).

Formerly the Greeks' cleverness with words taught  
that images of things should be ascribed to figures that fit,  
so that then the gifted man be not restrained from acting;  
Them (the Greeks) we see certain Latins (Italians) so very  
foolishly agreeing with  
that they totally lack reason about things.

Simply standing still changes the given nouns/names about me,  
A concept figure will make each and every thing once  
assembled:  
person, verb, case, number and gender.

*Book I, Chapter 10*

## **On the images of the words or of utterance and expressions**

But as to what pertains to the images of words and vócales, it surely escapes no one's notice that just as words and vocables receive no figures, so too neither are they explained in and of themselves, for example by the appropriate indicatory forms of sensible things which properly are contained not in the genus of the images, but of the signs. Yet we nonetheless bring up the ratio (explanation?) of the name itself, because plainly in this case the images do not receive their names from the condition of those things they signify, but rather from the condition of those things that do the signifying. For we are not able to explain Scriptural passages and their very expressions by signs like those we delineate on papyrus, unless we think of the forms of sensible things as very much alive, since they are images of those things which come into existence in nature assuredly by art and are projected onto our eyes. In the same way images are attached not to what they intentionally signify, when brought together (with them). For how can that be, since it is right there exist forever species like these, preconceived and predetermined, as can so be their (ie, of the real, or sensible or the perceptible things) signs, that they come into existence, either simply (ie, uncompounded, or unmixed with any other sign or image) or by composition (ie, being compounded or made up of other signs or images), as the simulacra of those things (which they have) assumed.

Some, for the enhancement of Scripture, have mentioned certain tools and instruments, or certain species of things, sometimes natural, which seem to resemble very closely the shapes of the letters. For example, a sphere signified the letter O, a scale or ladder A, a column I, M by someone slung between two yokes or on a tripod. Those who, by specific relationships and arrangements (of the letters), made (a word) one syllable or two by this method when other (syllables) were added on, delineated for themselves the art of speaking according to part or whole with better luck than they were able to before.

To these (grammatical operations) are added, after the sign (ie, the root, as in *terra* = *terr* plus the grammatical ending *a*) of the simple word, the diversities of cases, genders and numbers by analogy with the touch, movement or signing of the (human body's) members. For example, the nominative case is indicated by the head, the oblique cases (all the others) by the remaining members: the dative (*dativus*) by the right (*dexter*) hand (ie, the giving hand), the genitive by the genitals, vocative by the mouth, the ablative (the 'taking away' case, from *aufero*, to take away, remove) by the left hand (the hand that takes away), feminine gender by a woman, the plural by doubled agents or means (grammatical terms). Cases, moods, tenses and other things of this sort are indicated by posture, leaning, bowing, sitting, by turning this way and that, by an animal here or there standing up straight, by a fall, (*casus*# case, as in grammatical case), a fracture, an inflammation, an eruption.

Thus it fell to me in prior years to search after this art of ever more particular distinguishing signs (or marks), to imagine a work not revealed (to me) by the principles of the ancients which were enlarged upon (ie, I improved them) by a similarity of (a word's) head or tail, by the form of one word acquainted with a second word's form (ie, they both are spelled and sound about the same). For example, by likeness of its head (ie, front half) and ass (*asinus*) led to the figure of asylum (*asylum*), *generans* (he who generates) to (the figure of) Genesis, *parturiens* [(she who gives birth) to (the figure of) the Paralipomena (Biblical, = Books of Chronicles, containing "particulars that were left out", Greek). By the likeness of (a word's) tail (ie, ending, termination, as in grammatical), temple] (*templum*) (led) to *contemplatio* (*contemplatio*); by the likeness of the body (ie, the whole word), mirror (*speculum*) (led) to speculation (*speculatio*). By the composing (*compositio*, ie, the blending, the mixing) of various ingredients flesh (ie, sex, lusts of the flesh), snow (bad weather), sewage (shit, etc) created a diction of sorts (four-letter words, people started cursing and swearing,) in a criminal way. For example for someone grain (*granum*), vine (*vitis*), pear (*pirum*) signified great blame (*grande vituperium*, if you can believe it). Other matters pertain in this regard which, because they are of little use to us, we wish omitted, for example what is transmitted by (here follows a list of various rhetorical figures): metalepsis (transumption, an assuming of one thing for another) division, contraction (ellipsis?), etymology (ie, *figura etymologica*, using a word to explain its history), interpretation (an explanation of one expression by another).

Of course, these things have been useful and most sufficient for most people (in the past). Nevertheless, they seem, with greater effort, to require (from me, Bruno) a work not yet ready, than what we now deem worthy of proposing.

More completely, however, fully and carefully, we shall undertake for most people's use a further explanation which will be contained in subsequent chapters. To these later chapters we judge it would be impossible that at any time another explanation could be offered similar or better in any way, since with too few images the work (is) very confused and indistinct, but with many (images) the toil and effort is still more in vain. With other (images) unsuitable for anything intelligence and sense should proceed. And thanks to them many arts/skills? (which we have (already) explained in our book *On the Thirty Seals*) will be effectively comprehended.

But before we come to an explication of each and every image, their explanation, what shapes them, makes them come to life, contains and conveys them, let me offer some words (ie, the poem that follows).

*Book I, Chapter 11<sup>1</sup>*

**Conditions under which the images adhere  
better to subject and object in the Temple,  
as we express it, of Mnemosyne.**

Let skill plant her crop in rows in the cultivated field;  
Let the internal sense survey it also in its proper order,  
With just measure let them beat [pulsent] upon the eyes' line of  
sight;

For sight extended in a body that is overly large destroys  
[itself];

Moreover, the contractions of places by comprehension's power  
Are accessible to your desire as if embraced in your arms.

Little people embrace a giant's limbs,  
A winnowing fan the wind, a shield a fly as well as a corpse.  
A different doorkeeper makes these things come alive in the  
vestibule,

And that robust species of things which have no color<sup>2</sup>  
Should be rejected; let it not be present in your work.

Nor conceived as if [coming] from afar, but cleaving close,  
So that you won't conceive a hodgepodge, overly heaped up and  
confused,

In the very seat of the species, at which time  
You would be wretchedly cheated of your heart's reward,  
No matter how eager you might be.

Of all species, the human is best; of course it  
Seizes upon each and every instrument, is born for  
everything,

Whether doable, seizable or bearable.  
For what's alive gives much to what is not,  
And I live simply, endowed with an impulse for all life.

Therefore, beware of writing too much, lest while you trust  
writing,

A species vanish in the meantime, cast off into the void;  
Let it be entrusted to art, as if to nature.  
Let the members be placed, I say, beside the members of their  
contracted place;

Let a head be by the doorpost, a hand touch the column,  
And as a shining sword is waved around, so let yours  
Shine with glory on this side and that, but let mine decide.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever comes your way as useful and serviceable,  
Comprehend it eagerly and completely in your mind's eye,  
Lest you dismiss matters somehow adjacent to the margin of the  
field.

Let not the same thing that is present to the eyes remain  
motionless,  
But truly let it be effective, agitate, suffer and move.

Cautiously shun the many things with similar shapes,<sup>4</sup>  
They may have the outward appearances, expressions and  
gestures of others things.

But if the same figure comes exactly,  
It does not run in the same numbers or in one color;  
A place's structure, the situation of its junction varies;  
It's standing, ready to assist varied forms  
According to its multiple condition.

<sup>1</sup>Following the relatively closely-reasoned prose of the preceding chapter, Bruno here breaks into extremely rhapsodic, imagistic verse. One should not dwell so much on the logic of his images as on their cumulative impact, bearing in mind that Mnemosyne is the muse of memory, so that Bruno's subject is actually the things and events which occur in the Temple of Mnemosyne, a sampling of what might take place rather than an overt description of how it occurs.

<sup>2</sup>I.e., which are invisible.

<sup>3</sup>In this passage, Bruno's assumption is that the reader is considering making up a mnemonic system, such as a memory wheel, and that he will be the guide to the reader.

<sup>4</sup>I.e., "look-alike."

## *Book I, Chapter 12*

### **Of Light, the Vehicle of Images**

Light indeed, according to the opinion of those who contemplate [it] very deeply, is some sort of substance; in fact [it is] the prime substance, as Moses explained, of those things which are in nature, when he (Moses) called it the first-born, since by distinguishing the species of the creations (which are not taken from the realm of the accidental but from that of the essential), he understood that it was not only substance but also the prime substance, from whose being all other species of substance are conceived. For both in the first volume of Moses,<sup>1</sup> as well as in Mercury's *Poimander*, after that great dark [shadow of Chaos] had been laid down, the darkness of deprivation, God said, "Let there be light."

Thus, then, from the meeting of light and dark, form and substance proceed, according to the various levels and measures, as well as [in] the composition of various things coming into existence, including the myriad species, in some of whom there is more light present, and in some more shadow. Herein indeed there is present a light which is some sort of substance, invisible in itself, and diffused throughout the immense cosmos and seeded everywhere. With the mixing in of shadows and by specific association and composition it moves toward the sensible light. Certain people thoughtlessly do not distinguish between the first-born light and the sun (sensible light), between plain and simple substance and that [light which has been] composed, between the work, I say, of the first day [of creation] and that of the fourth. With that light which is some sort of spiritual substance, with no sun of fire providing light, no object from without instructing our sense's faculty, soul was given, not just ours, but a universal one spreading itself throughout the im-

mense cosmos.<sup>3</sup> This, I say, is the [light] which visibly pours forth [over] the species of absent [invisible] things, and [is that light] by which, while we sleep, we see and learn about the species and figures of sensible things, which even if, as the Peripatetics affirm,<sup>4</sup> they are forms reserved in the power of the interior sense, (mind, imagination), after they have been introduced [to the soul], there is no one at all who can deny that the visibility and presence itself [of the primal light] emanates from and exists in some sort of seeds of light, not only in those things which have received it from without, but, even more, in those things [in which it (light) is] innate and sown for the quickening spirit. For, when one stands still while the sun recedes, when every external [source of] light carries off with itself its rays and the power of these rays and, as it were, pulls back from the horizon and leaves behind the hemisphere of the world no such tracks, which, if they had been there, would remain very lightly impressed, and, because of its rather weightless and fluid condition, we experience it (the primal light) as if by the traces of heat. Furthermore, it is very obvious that when a desire strikes [someone] by an act of the external senses, as [for example] in dreams, the species of things offered [to the senses] start taking on light to such an extent that when someone sleeps, he does not at all consider that he has been asleep for a while, and he is informed more accurately, as it were, by some sort of inner light than by the external one.

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<sup>1</sup>Genesis.

<sup>2</sup>The *Poimander*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistos, is an Egyptian gnostic text which survives in a Greek translation of roughly the 1st Century AD. A representative passage from it in English will be found in Charles Doria and Harris Lenowitz' *Origins: Creation Texts from the Ancient Mediterranean* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976) pp. 28-36.

<sup>3</sup>This is a prime instance of Bruno's syncretism, attempting to reconcile the gnostic doctrine of the preeminence of Light, the Platonic or at least Neo-Platonic hierarchy of forms, and the Judeo-Christian story of the Creation.

<sup>4</sup>The Peripatetic philosophers, the Aristotelians. Bruno was highly critical of the orthodox Aristotelians of his day, attacking them violently in his Oxford discussions. In his earlier writings he tends to pay lip service to Aristotle, but then to go on and attack the Aristotelians. Needless to say, in Bruno's present discussion, none of this mystical speculation on light has anything whatever to do with what Aristotle or the Peripatetic philosophers (so-called for their habit of carrying on their discussions while strolling around) have to say on Light. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

0.01130

Nathaniel Mackey

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. VIII. 80

Dear Angel of Dust,

Please forgive the long silence. I've had every intention of writing sooner but an extended bout with inertia set in shortly after I received your letter. There seem to be times when I feel as if all expressive potential had been turned back emptyhanded. For the past few weeks I've done little more than a lot of sleeping, feeling brought down if not exactly done in by the contradictions (to loosely paraphrase Lambert) between the world one carries around in one's head and the world one carries one's head around in. I'm sorry to say my predicament hasn't been as abstract as that may sound, but you'll allow me to spare you the gossipy particulars I'm sure. Suffice it to say that the fog (or whatever it was) has at last lifted, however much it may simply be lying in wait, having set me up for a surprise attack.

You ask if we've had any further discussion of our "intriguing rehearsal." I appreciate your circumspection. We did throw around some talk on one or two occasions, only to end up sending Penguin to confer with his grandmother. She's rumored to be well-versed in rootwork, hoodoo and such, so we thought she might throw some light on what had taken place. According to Penguin, once he'd finished giving her all the details, telling her the story of

what happened that night, she simply sat there puffing on her pipe and leaning back in her rocker, staring at the TV as though he weren't there, not saying anything. He says this went on for some time and that what she finally said, turning to look at him, was "Play with a puppy he'll lick your mouth." She refused to elaborate, he says, but instead told him he'd best be going, that she'd said more than she should've already. You can make of it what you will but I sense an allusion to the incestuous Dogon jackal Marcel Griaule has written about. "The jackal," he says, "the deluded and deceitful son of God, desired to possess speech, and laid hands on the fibres in which language was embodied, that is to say, on his mother's skirt. The incestuous act was of great consequence. It endowed the jackal with the gift of speech so that ever afterwards he was able to reveal to diviners the designs of God." Penguin's grandmother's words I hear as a recipe and a warning: *Play around with prophetic music and you moisten your mouth with a jackal's kiss.*

Now as for your "reading" of Opposable Thumb, let me say that I have no trouble whatsoever with your understanding of him as a projection of proletarian unrest. I myself sense that he may well be that "third, unexpected hand" to which I referred in an earlier letter — an avatar, as it were, of on the one hand manual, on the other hand manipulated labor. I ask only that you take the word "labor" in its most (if I may say so) pregnant sense. I've long argued against strict adherences to one-dimensional meaning, so my hope is that such a figure as Opposable Thumb retains the power not only to point but to correspond—to unsettle, if you will, an otherwise flat referentiality. As I've already said, "Opposable Thumb at the Water's Edge" represents no more than a beginning. In future elaborations I intend to unearth or erect a layered, resurrectional scale, an oppositional "poetry" of synchronistic fact by which to body forth the *soul* of a long-resisted ascent. To this end I'm looking into the possibility of a collaboration with two local groups whose work I much admire, the Boneyard Brass Octet and the Crossroads Choir. You've heard of them perhaps. In any case, I'll keep you abreast of whatever develops along these lines.

Your other comments I'll have to deal with some other time. Penguin and Djamilaa have gotten it into their heads that we've been taking things "too seriously" lately. They've decided that what the band needs is recreation, so we're all heading down to Venice

this afternoon to rollerskate along the beach. They'll be here to pick me up in a few minutes, so I'll close for now. I hope to be writing you again soon. I especially want to speak to your remark about "letting go."

Sincerely,

N.

\_\_\_\_\_ 12.VIII.80

Dear of Angel of Dust,

The afternoon in Venice turned out to be not all that bad. I haven't seen so many bodies on display in one place in I can't remember how long. In fact, I'm not sure I've ever seen the likes of it before. I saw even more flesh than the last time I was there. It even got me thinking along lines which have put me to work on a new composition. For some time now I've noticed an increasingly widespread tendency, on the part of men and women alike, to wear shorts or cut-off jeans which are cut short enough to expose at least an inch of the rounded base of each buttock — a tendency to publicize, one might say, the liminal crease where the upper back of the leg meets or joins or turns into the lowest part of the hip. Still, I was nowhere near prepared for the quantum increase in public access to "private" parts. Some of the outfits people turned out to go skating in I found hard to believe. We saw one couple dressed in what appeared to be cellophane jumpsuits — bizarre, rose-tinted, blatantly transparent affairs which clung to their bodies like a sort of Saran Wrap. There it all was for everyone to see — body hair, balls, asses, breasts, labia, the whole works.

What stuck me about this couple, though, was that each of them wore headphones and cradled a large radio/cassette-player to which he or she listened while disco-skating down the walk. They both seemed to be utterly oblivious to every outside presence (one another's included), thoroughly and absolutely absorbed in their respective maneuvers. What more telling sign of our present predicament, I thought. So observable a contiguity of publicized private parts with privatized public space spoke to me deeply of a miscegenous exchange between the public and the private. I instinctively recognized the crossfire, so to speak, of a precipitous volley back and forth between two mutually disdainful, mutually

infiltrating domains. It both withheld and held forth on a war of which I knew we were all, in one way or another, casualties. My intuition was both confirmed and complicated by the outbreak of a quarrel soon after the couple skated by. A somewhat skinny teenager with scraggy hair and a broken front tooth fended off a group of three other youths, making them keep their distance by threatening them with a baseball bat. (He kept taunting them to come on and, as he put it, "take a bite of the wood.") There were whispers among the crowd that he might be on the drug there's been so much publicity about lately, a violence-inducing concoction known as PCP. This evidently wasn't the case, however, as no violence actually materialized. The excitement died down not all that long after it arose when the three would-be attackers turned around and walked away. The funny thing is that we saw all four of them about a half-hour later, carrying on like the best of friends, joking with one another, laughing and drinking beer.

I remarked at one point that the crowd, the bustle, the outfits and all made for what struck me as a Carnival air. Penguin "corrected" me right away, however, pointing out that the word "carnival" etymologically has to do with bidding the flesh farewell, a sense of the term which didn't seem to apply to what was going on around us. "What we have here," he held forth, "is no such taking leave of the flesh but an indulgent exhibition of it, an outright wallowing in it." I disagreed, making a point of the ambiguous, debatable character of the word's original meaning. Its root might equally, I pointed out, have had to do with accommodating or taking solace in the flesh. It was as I made this point that the ideas for the new composition began to crystallize. I recalled a piece called "No Tonic Prez" that Rahsaan wrote as a tribute to Lester Young, a tune whose "head" doesn't have a tonic or a definite key resolution. I sensed a connection between this piece's lack of a tonic and Carnival's refusal to resolve into a fixed, unequivocal meaning. As I gazed upon the various disclosures of pubic hair, haunches and cleavage we were surrounded by I saw what seemed to be the third term of a triangulated refusal to resolve. What I saw, as though for the first time in fact, was the body's dichotomous desire to both extinguish and extend its own mystique, to reveal itself without relinquishing its ruse. What I saw was that ruse's ability to survive exposure. "The body as open secret," I heard myself mutter.

What I have in mind is a composition which, like Rahsaan's,

would advance disclosure as a further phase of complication. I'd like to posit exposure as a questionless "answer" whose intended unravelings only work to ensnare. (The word "crotch," though of uncertain etymology, appears to go back to a French word meaning "hook.") How much the piece will have to do with "Opposable Thumb at the Water's Edge" I can't say for sure, but the skinny kid's grip on the baseball bat would certainly seem to fit in. "The Slave's Day Off" is the title I'm working with now. Two Carnival traditions out of the Caribbean, Trinidadian Canboulay and Jamaican John Canoe, should, if all goes well, serve to "season" the piece. I'm learning to play steel drums in order to allude to the former but the latter has an especially personal resonance for me. I remember, from back in the days when I was a kid in Florida, a rowdy, music-making time known as Junkanoo. There's a tune I can still hear as though it were only yesterday, a song called "Kunk Ain't Got No Bone." ("Kunk," in case you're wondering, was our way of pronouncing "conch.") I intend to quote from this tune throughout "The Slave's Day Off." Isn't it exactly what I've already said? *The body as open secret*. The obvious play one could make on Venus-in-a-shell I'll try to avoid. To say that one disrobes to unveil an anticlimactic mystery inverts the shell-as-outer-bone's concealment of nothing if not an esoteric absence of bone. The bearing this has on questions of form and resistance, it seems to me, has yet to be given adequate attention — an oversight "The Slave's Day Off" will hopefully help to correct.

As ever,  
N.

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28.VIII.80

Dear Angel of Dust,

Perhaps I can put it across this way: "Public" and "private" are now disjunctive, now convergent masks for the featureless cave or the evaporative curve of an elapsed interiority, a nonexistent self. They cohabit so as to woo, so to speak, an otherwise involuted, apparitional pigment, a profoundly suspect, deeply prepolitical "taint." Though I may not be saying this with all the elaboration it deserves, a timely enough illustration of it took place a few nights ago. The Art Ensemble of Chicago came to town for a concert over at UCLA. As you've probably heard they sometimes do, they came

onstage with their faces painted. To me it made perfect sense. I saw line, spotting effects and color taken on as though they were voluntary, self-contracted stigmata, emanations of the flesh as though it were a canvas or a cave-wall, gaudy with aboriginal paint. The band seemed to revel in the imposition of a public, admittedly masklike face, but only to ambush, it turned out, the public's nonchalance about its own deep investment in "smeared" paints, "painted" snares or self-wielding "strokes." (It was like a few weeks back when Oliver Lake, during his solo concert over at the Century City Playhouse, whipped out a camera at one point and, to everybody's surprise, took a picture of the photographer who was taking a picture of him.) The emphasis seemed to fall on identity not as entity so much as enmity, self not as substance but as auto-constitutive stress. To me it made perfect sense.

I wish I had more time to go into it now but I hope this at least begins to answer your question. We've got a gig tomorrow night up north in a place called Santa Cruz, a small town on the coast about an hour and a half south of San Francisco. We'll be playing at a club known as the Kuumbwa Jazz Center. In other words, we've got some running around to do this afternoon. Things like renting a trailer to carry our instruments in, getting a new trailer-hitch for Lambert's car (the old one had a hacksaw put to it by vandals in Pasadena), so on and so forth. We'll be leaving early tomorrow morning. I'll try to get a letter off to you from up there.

Yours,  
N.

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30.VIII.80

Dear Angel of Dust,

The events during our stay here in Santa Cruz have been such that I'll have to put off till some other time what I'd intended for this letter. My hope was to enlarge on the points I made in day-before-yesterday's letter, but the goings-on of the past couple days are at the moment much more on my mind. We got here yesterday afternoon after getting up early enough in the morning to take the longer, more scenic route up the coast. That in itself I could fill a letter with — all that blueness of both the ocean and the sky so much like a medicine after the exhaust fumes and tinsel glitter of L.A. But

I'll resist going into that, except to say that Santa Cruz itself entirely partakes of that blueness. This accounts for the cheeriness of the people who live here no doubt. I don't know if I've ever seen so many smiling faces before—and not just on the residual hippies there're so many more of here than any other place I've been. It's a little bit eerie in fact how friendly the people are. I even hear you can cash a check here without leaving your thumbprint or your mother's maiden name. While we were out for a walk yesterday I heard a barefoot girl in somewhat ragged jeans say to her boyfriend as they passed us, "I didn't let it bother me though. Whether she wanted it or not, I knew I was spreading love."

You can imagine what a recess this is from what we're used to down in L.A. I couldn't help having misgivings, however, as to what sort of reception our music would get. Even though I'd heard a lot about how appreciative Santa Cruz audiences are, I had a hard time repressing the thought that our solemnity might put people off. I kept hearing a remark I'd read in *Downbeat* by a member of a "fusion" group called Spyro Gyra, one of whose tunes we'd heard on the radio just as we pulled into town. "It's not intellectually intensive," this fellow had said of their music. "We dance around and smile. We feel good. We're not pensive black men who have suffered. We're happy white kids. We don't have a heavy cosmic message that we're trying to get across." I couldn't help thinking of them as probably more this town's cup of tea than what we're into is. As it turns out, I was evidently right. Only seven people showed up for our gig at Kuumbwa last night. (At first only three people came in, but then the manager of the club called up the local radio stations and had them announce that they were letting people in for half-price. Four more people drifted in after that.) We were pretty stoical about it though, going ahead with the music as though we had a standing-room-only crowd. And the audience, small as it was, was enthusiastic enough. They gave us a standing ovation and even wanted an encore. So that, along with our getting all the granola-raisin cookies, carrot cake, brownies and date bars the club hadn't sold at its snack bar, made the turnout not so hard to take.

The interesting part took place this afternoon, however. They've got a place here known as the Pacific Garden Mall which is more or less the town's main drag. It's one of those situations where they've taken four or five blocks of a street where there're a lot of businesses, made the traffic move one-way, widened the sidewalks, set up benches, planted shrubs and trees, put in crowd-control

saying, “can hardly be accused of elitism.” With that we went into our final number, a section from Lambert’s ongoing composition “Aggravated Assent.” It proved to be an oddly strenuous, oddly effortless piece, starting off with a plaintive sigh from Aunt Nancy’s tuba (as though she set out to find love in the least likely of places). The gossamer dew again wet the soles of our feet as we went around in a circle, making the play between *lifted* and *lofty* even more pronounced than in the first two numbers.

An even more insistent vertical moisture, that is, made for a helical escalator effect. To me it felt something like a throwback to a high school commencement ceremony, though decidedly more brash in its utopian understanding of the term “graduation.” The music, almost against our wills, had become an anthem, so that the Upper Room so often sung about in gospel music — understood by us as a musician’s loft — spoke less of some alienated genius’ garret than of a surprisingly elastic, ever-expanding auditorium (like a longshoremen’s hall, but infinitely more inclusive). Surrendering none of their earlier suggestion of clanking chains, the bells on our ankles felt like wings as the helical escalator kept us aloft. Had the crowd on the mall beaten us to the elastic longshoremen’s loft towards which we ascended? Would they be waiting to greet us once we arrived at the Upper Room? Or was it the other way around, us leading them? Did they lag behind on the helical escalator, proverbial kids behind the proverbial piper? These were the questions I couldn’t help asking myself even as I struggled with the E-flat pedal the piece required of the bass clarinet. But as I looked around in search of a possible answer I noticed two cops getting out of the patrol car they’d pulled up in. They walked towards where we were and pretty soon were saying we’d have to stop the music, that the storeowners were complaining we were making too much noise. We argued, of course, that we had as much right as anyone to play on the mall, but to no avail. We got some satisfaction, though, from the fact that the crowd of thirty or so people that had gathered around us loudly hissed and booed the cops. In a perfectly deadpan, gentlemanly tone of voice Penguin congratulated them both on their part in making the town, as he put it, “one of the most alarming mixes of flabby pseudo-sixties idealism and crass mercantile instincts we’ve ever played.” The cops showed no signs of having gotten his point, however. They simply accepted the handshakes he offered with two indulgent, openly patronizing smiles.

These matters, I find in the course of writing, have more to do

with the question of public and private than I suspected at first. Though I haven't the time to go into it now, I'm struck by the curious inversion implied by how we musicians use the terms "inside" and "outside" — the first applied to conventional respect for the changes and the latter to less traditional approaches. The thing worth noting is that the private or esoteric is referred to as "outside," the public or exoteric as "inside." It's as though music were the ground on which one guts every fixed assumption, chants it down (like the Rastafarians say) by turning its insides out. Yet what happened on the mall, I think, shows that simple inversion finds itself invested in the very assumptions it sets out to subvert. Were the cops in some occult way summoned by my own misgivings, my alarm at the concern I felt with who'd reach the Upper Room first? Unless revolution, as well as taking an upward turn, makes for a lateral displacement (a stepping aside from whatever one thought "upward" and "downward" meant), the road ahead doesn't seem to hold much in store beyond running in place. In other words, what Earl Zero says is true: "Where there's a wheel there's a turn." But until we get dizzy with it, dervishly and devilishly dizzy, we'll forever be stuck in the same old rut.

as ever,  
N.

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17.IX.80

Dear Angel of Dust,

Sorry to have taken so long to answer your letter. I've been meaning to write for some time now but one thing or another managed to get in the way. I've been hard at work, for one thing, finishing up "The Slave's Day Off," a tape of which I'm sending along. I also have to admit that I was surprised and a little put off that you took what I was saying in my last letter to have anything to do with being an "alienated artist" in some romantic sense. I would think you'd know better by now. One can, I think, speak of alienation without making a romance of it. In Kenya, when the English took land away from the Masai, the Kikuyu and the Kamba to give away to white "settlers" they referred to it, believe it or not, as *alienating* the land. Neither a confession nor a sadistic joke (and certainly not romantic), this use of the term turns out to

be perfectly correct. Alienation, I'm trying to say, is something people do. (And certain people have done it more than certain others.) I've said it before and I'll say it again: the last thing I want our group to become is a lonely hearts band.

I was also uncomfortable with your throwing so trendy a word as "history" around as you do. I hate to say it, but you sound like one of those critics who seem to fear that anything any of us do could somehow escape being "history." I keep wondering whose "history" it is you're talking about. I like your notion of "history as a manner of speaking," but when you accuse me of "trying to outshout or shut history up" I detect a sense of it not as a language but a lexicon, a fixed primer of permissible terms in which the tongue is either broken or embalmed by prohibitions. (A not very "historical" sense of the term, in other words.) In fact, I could go even farther and argue that what we're up to is hyperhistorical. Just the other day I heard a talk by Sun Ra in which he proposed a spelling of the term "word" which speaks, I think, to this point. He suggested "w-e-r-e-d" as a truer spelling, that "word," one might say, is the past tense of "were," an exponentially archival coefficient. Relatedly, I think of such things as scat, where the apparent mangling of articulate speech testifies to an "unspeakable" history such singers are both vanquishers and victims of. This carries back, of course, to what I said about the moan and the shout a few letters back, so I won't belabor it here. I will, however, add that one can hear the same sort of thing even in reggae, a scatlike gargling of "meaningless" sound in the singing of, among others, Burning Spear. Listen to "Jordan River" or, even better, the "live" version of "Man in the Hills," where you'll hear a kind of yodeling and even birdcalls about halfway thru.

This all bears more or less directly on "The Slave's Day Off." You'll notice, for example, the raspy, non-essentialist quality in Djamilaa's voice. This we got by having her sing with a piece of waxed paper about a fourth of an inch in front on her lips. Though the lyrics contained very few words in the usual sense, I wanted to guard even further against possible lapses into illustration, to give the thrust of her singing a dispersed, ventriloquistic edge. It's as though one answered the question "What was it really like?" by suggesting there's no "really" when it comes to "was" — as though the voice came out of a throat filled with bits of string.

Anyway, I hope you like the piece. My steel drum playing, I admit, has little more than a coloristic function, but my clarinet solo at the beginning of section three has to be one of the most

inspired I've ever played. The feeling I had was that I wasn't there, that the "I" which was was an "I" which wasn't my own. If it strikes you as overly dissonant please remember the old saying: "The more you hear it the more harmony it has."

Sincerely,  
N.



Christer Hennix

*Poetry as Philosophy, Poetry as Notation* \*

*(Plain Texts of unknown degree(s) of unsolvability)*

POETRY AS PHILOSOPHY

Poetry written at the edge of the end of a civilization must differ in its aims from the poetry written from within the assumptions of its own unquestioned center.

Poetry forces a beginning by systematically thematizing the end. The end of philosophy. The end of the word and of the discourse on Aristotelian categories.

Each poem is a projection of the Empty Word and the silence that follows it is its denotation.

The denotation is the Empty Sound, the inaudible sound from which all sounds follow, from which the world of sounds is fallen.

Each piece of writing represents a witness of a singularity, a map of a catastrophe suffered by its author.

Like gravity, sounds and writings (when we think of them as meaningful) warp the universe around us. The visible universe (the celestial geometry), when considered meaningful, is as warped or "curved" as the geometry of sound or the conceptual geometry of the philosopher. Contrary to the common assumption, the dialectical triangle obtaining between these geometrical

universes commutes only with considerable difficulty (the "warpings" are not sufficiently symmetrical.)

Semantics as a peculiar form of gravity, both pulls on and deforms an otherwise undivided and undisturbed whole. (Cf. Clifford's theory of gravitation.)

The beginning cannot take place before the end is completed. Needless to say, this completion lays wholly outside the scope of poetry. Hence, the *epoché* is only delivered as unspeakable hints operating exclusively in the space *between* the poems themselves. There can be no last poem of poetry but the (momentarily) last poem has *no successor*. It leaves the reader in a vortex of the world for which he (usually) lacks an adequate *notation*. Only the predecessor(s) of the last poem remain(s) as a reminder of what a notation for silence can look like. The poems are silent worlds which can only be recovered by the full cooperation of the human mind—they don't speak for themselves.

Only the logic of silence can explain the coherence of their intrinsic, i.e. *interior*, meaning. The meaning is only accidentally grafted on to the transient world; the poems function as *reminders* of wordless algorithms for recovering them.

Poetry as a notation for possible worlds, the material notation standing for the objectification of their possibility.

This is the method of philosophy in poetry.

Each poem presents a problem (which is not necessarily unique), the difficulty of the problem being its *degree of unsolvability*.

The poem is a code for a possible world which is stored up in the semantics of its terms. (The injection of meaning into a (syntactically) ordered set of terms must always be conceived of as an act of *sorcery* and *destabilization*. (Cf. René Thom's '(unsuccessful) attempt to create the semantics of poetry out of *catastrophe theory*<sup>1</sup>)).

As any instrument designed to probe the content of the universe, the description/code itself alters the world as soon as its possibility is created. Hence, the semantics of its terms also alters continuously, and, ultimately, decays, as the poem unfolds in time. Each word yields slowly into a projection of some properties attributable to a rising possible world. Its mental image becomes the meaning for which the poem is unique notation and, simultaneously, a code.

Poetry as philosophy. The theme is an old one, both its subject terms being antedated by their written inscriptions (as explained more fully in the surviving works of *Heraklitus* and *Parmenides*.)

#### PHILOSOPHY. THE PROBLEM.

##### FIRST APPROXIMATION.

My immediate reality is not authentically transmitted by the propositional content of a discourse. To try to bind the thought content of my mind to the format of discourse is, as it were, to try to draw from one perspective everything I see in a room on one and the same piece of paper; the closer an object is to me, the more distorted or left-out it becomes; the more inaccessible it becomes to being transmitted by the format of notation provided for by the technique of drawing.

The more immediate, the more "authentic" an encounter with reality becomes, the less can be anticipated by that encounter. To bring any system of beliefs to bear on the course of such an encounter would be the same as annihilating its entire potentiality. Its "freshness" depends on its incorruptability, on its immunity to beliefs about the course of the future, in fact, on its immunity to any form of organized knowledge, be it past, present or future.

#### POETRY. THE PROBLEM.

##### FIRST APPROXIMATION.

##### *Historical Remarks.*

The inseparability of poetry from philosophy. (Heraklitus, Parmenides, Brouwer, Wittgenstein.)

The inseparability of notation from philosophy, (Euclid, Leibniz, Frege, Cantor.)

*The inseparability of language from notation.*  
(End of historical remarks.)

A poem is an undivided whole—and so is its meaning. The poem is a *notation* for its meaning.

The meaning of a poem is a function of the meaning of its parts. After understanding the meaning of the parts, we understand that the meaning of the whole is more than all the possible meanings of its parts. — Functionality is always erratic. Meaning remains essentially multiple and complex. *Typical ambiguity* (Specker) is not a phenomenon of our times alone.

Thus, the poem remains a notation for its meaning. By con-

structuring a text out of notations for other meanings, a new notation is put together expressing a new meaning not yet revealed by the other meanings taken by themselves or in a different order. The new meaning is possible as a result of operating on an assemblage of meanings established in independence and anonymity by more fundamental notational operations originating with even stronger independence and anonymity. And so on, until, again, an undivided whole, an atomic unanalyzable act, becomes the meaning of an indecomposable sign or *parameter*.

There are no primitive notations reserved for poetry alone. Each poem constructs its meaning from a notation with an intractable semantic prehistory.

Hence, in order to rescue any possible (formal) meaning for poetry, it can only be conceived of as a conceptual notation for a *distinguished type* of expressions. Thus, a poem expresses, ultimately, a fragment of an uninterpreted calculus which is employed for the purpose of capturing the expressions of the distinguished type. (Cf. L.E.J. Brouwer.)

Poetry, like music, is an art of composed silence. Its distinguished type of expression is the *empty word*,  $\Lambda$ , a parameter to which corresponds an experience (denotation) of *epoché*, i.e. an experience of a presuppositionless world governed only by languageless "laws" or pure intuition. Only in this sense does a poem trigger a philosophical investigation or *teisho* which carries with it its own intrinsic difficulties or degrees of unsolvability.<sup>2)</sup>

The ultimate silence created by a poem's decaying afterimage makes a *boundary situation* of human existence, i.e. a situation in which the possibility of being guided by conventional meaning of cultural artifacts, including the anonymous powers of science, breaks down. The meaning of words ceases to be verifiable, only fragments of a private language remain in circulation.

GRAMMATICA SPECULATIVA. GRAMMATICA POETICA. .  
GRAMMATICA NONSENSIA.

“ ———— ”  
“ ———— ”  
“ ———— ”  
——— ———

*A Mental Problem; The Problem of Dying Civilizations.  
The Final Mix; Grammatica Abraxas.*

We have repeatedly noted that man compulsively organizes the meanings imposed on the events of his consciousness by means of some *notation.*, i.e., symbolic forms available to operate on according to directions originating in some mind(s).

For this purpose man has invented two (incompatible) cognitive kinds of symbolic forms, viz. (i) the symbolic forms of the *internal* notation considered present as *immaterial* symbolic forms, and (ii) the symbolic forms of the *external* notation considered present as *material* symbolic forms i.e. present as evidence of *public* cosmological principles and ostensibly *tangible* to the senses. The mythology layed down in the invention of these two forms extends to their embodying purported *existence proofs*. Thus, here is inevitably the point where the method of philosophy in poetry reenters. Everything must now be mixed together.

Before dealing with the end of philosophy, however, it pays to take a quick look at its beginning again. It must be understood that the possibility of the philosophical method depends on a re-examination of the possibility of poetry as a logical notation, as a *Begriffsschrift* (in the sense of *Frege.*)

*Ṛg Veda.* The first systematic conversion of poetry to philosophy. The sanskrit alphabet—the notation for all meaningful sounds—and all words formed from it—*all of it* reduces to the cosmological principle of the universal sound, *ॐ*, present even in the deepest of silence, out of which the *rag* is spun. The silence of *Soma.* *ॐ*.

The recollection of meanings of actions formed the flow of mental events. *Rta*, the Norm and Path for action—the singular act of recollection. *Satya*, the mind acting according to the Norm—the action of the Path.

The poets are those with an ear for the Norm and by expressing it (*satya*) maintain the world and create new ones. — R.V. 6.49.6.

The *Ṛg Veda* embodies the notion of *all possible worlds*, the philosopher's stone. But also the seed of the logical and set theoretical paradoxes which started to surface in the notation of the classic greek alphabet as soon as logic had divorced itself from sound as its notation. The conversion of logic from sound to *hexa-*

meter embodied and set free entirely new cosmological principles, the active ingredient having now been switched from *soma* to *barley* (served from the *kiste*.) The universal does not appear as a tangible sound anymore, but as an *immaterial concept*, the abstract concept of the unity *One*.

\*

*Parmenides* refined the philosophical method in poetry by considering the possibility of poetry (rooted in hexameter form) as a *notation for logical concepts and proofs*. Like *Montague* who recently treated the grammar of English similarly, *Parmenides* recognized the use of the Homeric language as a primitive *Begriffsschrift*. *Parmenides*' proem marks the beginning of viewing the expression of poetry as an *uninterpreted calculus*, a visual (but soundless) whole in which the values of logical operations replace the suggestibility of the human voice as a center of attention.

The all important point about the proem, its philosophical meaning, is *validity* in the most unrestricted sense. *Parmenides*' proem not only furnishes an answer to the question of Being, but in the course of delivering it, it brings about a *proof*, a formal demonstration, that *Being is One, ésti*, an undivided whole (thereby confirming the epistemical possibility conjectured by Hereklitus that everything is *One*. (But to what does the *One* return?))

The proem constitutes (a fragment of) an *ultimate reasoning*, a reasoning which has no successor, a last possible reasoning (which, in fact, also happens to be the first of its kind), the content of the whole being the inevitable *validity of the conclusion* — *independently* of what we may find the conclusion to be.

The conclusion being that anything *existing*, i.e. *truly perceived*, must (by the force of logic alone) be *One*, i.e. part and whole of everything. Hence, if *Parmenides*' proem and its meaning (i.e. conclusion) exists (see *Diels*,<sup>4</sup>), then also both the text and its meaning, both the external and internal notations, must be *One*, i.e. part and whole of an undivided world. Thus, the set theoretical paradoxes disappear since such a world has *no parts*, i.e. *no members*, and, so, as a collection or set is *empty*. To designate it uniformly by a parameter, the symbolic form for the *empty word*,  $\Lambda$ , is used.

This, of course, is not to say that the semantically empty world may not be beset by logical paradoxes of its own. In fact, if we try to assert the existence of an equivalence between *Parmenides*' fragments and  $\Lambda$ , all we assert is that there is *another text*

which states the equivalence i.e. functions as a *witness* to the result of a specific mental operation (an act of collation.) And if the latter text is valid (in the unrestricted sense alluded to above), then *it also* must be equivalent to  $\Lambda$ , and so on, ad infinitum.

*Conclusion*; no text (in the greek alphabet), except possibly  $\Lambda$ , can be a valid text – but there is no (finite) text which can (*validly*) express *that conclusion*, unless it is actually *false* (i.e. *invalid*.) This is the original (but neglected) version of the famous Gödel *Incompleteness Theorem*, i.e. the *Liar Paradox*.

Of course, *Parmenides* didn't quite end philosophy (and, contrary to popular opinion, neither did *Gödel*). Its last vestige of lies, however, the discourses on the *existence* rather than the mere possibility of  $\Lambda$ , still lingers on as a hangover from the switch from *barley* to *wine* and *sodomy* (as initiated by *Sokrates*, *Plato* and *Aristotle*). It is, however, only when, finally, the empty word itself is removed from philosophical discourse that the true end of philosophy becomes attainable. In the meantime, poetry continues to serve as an artful knavery for the last fragments of a (self-defeating) philosophy, encouraging, at best, the end of the printed word together with the worlds uncritically printed up with its aid. Indeed how can the philosophical task of ordering letters of our alphabet be but *kakotechnie*?

<sup>1</sup>R. Thom, *Topologie et Linguistique, Essays on Topology and related topics* (ded. G. de Rham), ed. A. Haefliger & R. Narasimhan). Springer, 1970, 226-248.

R. Thom, *Laugage et catastrophes : Eléments pour une Sémantique Topologique, Dynamical Systems, Proceedings of Symposium at Salvador, Brazil, 1971*, Ed. M.M. Peixoto, Academic Press, New York, 1973, 619-654.

R. Thom, "De l'icône au symbole; Esquisse d'une théorie du symbolisme," *Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme*, 22-23, 1973, 85-106.

R. Thom, "Sur la typologie des langues naturelle : essai d'interprétation psycholinguistique," *Formal Analysis of Natural languages*, ed. Moutin, 1973.

R. Thom, "La linguistique, discipline morphologique exemplaire," *Critique*, 322 (March 1974), 235-245.

<sup>2</sup>In this collection my poem are ordered according to their degress of unsolvability, beginning with degree 0. Unlike degrees used in metamathematics, the degrees in poetry are independent of any syntactical complexity measure. Hence, the empty word is assigned, eventually, infinitely many degrees  $\geq 0$ .

<sup>3</sup>K. Gödel, *Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia mathematica und verwandter Systeme I*, *Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik* 38 (1931), 173-18.

<sup>4</sup>H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Berlin, 1903.



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