

ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

Incarnation 8.2



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Uncounted Cost of Samaya

Joseph M. Gant

blood on the dorje,
tears in the bell.

loneliness invades my space
with questions I should not
need to answer, and so I
stand with cramped knees
and rearrange the wrathful puja—
new beginnings, same old endings
 . . . why'd it have to go that way . . .

incense fills my eyes—the smoke,
I stand too close then walk away
in circles clockwise counter
revolution of the wheel of time,
but won't rewind the scene—
I remember every stitch of it.
 . . . why'd it have to happen . . .

for sanctity more than refuge,
standing yet again before the
multicolored rainbowsque
display of wisdom's power—
I kiss the tail and face of time
and sit beside my piety

... why'd these prayers fail your pleas ...

i strike the drum for new beginnings,
touch my skull to ground and so
begin repentance turning but there's

blood on the dorje,
tears in the bell.

Abnegation

John Givens

Speaking of things chills the lips: the autumn wind.¹

The rogue samurai Hasegawa Torakage was still searching for the path he wanted when he chanced upon a collapsed gate still fitted to its framework and lying in the weeds, the whole spavined assembly splintered apart like some kind of primitive winnowing device discarded in a repudiation of husbandry. He pushed through a forest of giant bamboo, each towering gray-green trunk as thick as a man's leg, and came to a one-room shanty, the roof so thickened with moss and summer ferns and cloud-ears that its original shape could no longer be determined.

Mugen sat half-naked on the veranda, a scrawny and filthy apparition, his tattered black monk's robe pushed down into a bundle wrapped around his waist. He slapped a mosquito then wiped the blood smear off his arm. Another new Buddha. He wiped his palm on the wad of his robe.

The walls of the Unreal Hermitage were plastered in places with mud patches crudely sheathed with strips of split bamboo, and neat pyramids of clay pellets lay beneath these renovations, as if in demonstration of the better order that could be achieved by insects gifted with enterprise and enthusiasm.

Hasegawa lifted his main sword from his obi sash and leaned it against the side of the hermitage. You're hard to find, he said.

We all are.

They watched as the day seeped down out of the sky, and the last of the

¹ "Speaking of things chills the lips: the autumn wind." My translations of Matsuo Bashō's *Mono ieba / kuchibiru samushi / aki no kaze*. (Autumn, 1684)

end-of-summer fireflies began wandering through the weeds of the derelict garden, a few tiny, tentative lamps that flared and faded then flared again.

‘In the morning, damp rises up through holes in the floor,’ Hasegawa recited; ‘and in the evening, drizzle leaks down through gaps in the roof.’

Mugen snorted derisively. Just the kind of thing to impress an ignorant old mountain monk.

Hasegawa laughed. Probably I should give it up.

Probably you’d be better off without it.

Probably I would be.

The evening’s darkness settled more deeply around them. If I had any rice wine, I’d ask if you wanted some, said the bonze. And if you asked if I wanted some, I’d ask if you had any. But it wouldn’t get us any closer to drinking.

No. Hasegawa watched the fireflies bobbing in the garden, weaving their patterns of meaningless meanings, the designs they carved beyond any possibility of improvement. What I have is what I was born with. A cutter’s expectations. The requirements of candor. Swords given to me by my father. His swords when he died. Swords taken off other dead men and –

Fierce poetry! Mugen cackled, and he seized both earlobes like a man with burnt fingers then began rocking from side to side, a holy-mad Daruma roller frowning at the comedy of it. But so then tell me, O honorable killer, where’s the wine after you drink it? An owl flapped out across the open space at the far side of the garden, a shifting portion of that night’s shadows differing only in intensity from the other shadows surrounding it, and the bonze released his earlobes as if in response to a reprimand.

Hasegawa waited until he was looking at him again then said, Where’s the ‘you’ after the drinking?

Too easy! cried the bonze. I can see why you’re still mystified. He scratched himself then grimaced like a bogey. Can you?

I guess not. Hasegawa returned his attention to the darkening bamboo forest. My life would be lonely if it weren’t for the solitude?

Those are just words.

I know it. But where are your words without you saying them?

You read that somewhere. You have a bookish stink on you.

Hasegawa smiled. It's where I get most things I trust.

Off dead men.

Men of the past. Yes.

Nothing but mumbling! Mugen glared at the rogue samurai. You can't see how it is with the world of words? All tangled and strangled and knotted and bound! I'd rather be a shit-scraper hanging on a peg in a public latrine.

I guess that's true enough, said Hasegawa mildly, what you said, I mean. He grinned at him. The clever way you expressed it.

Still too easy, the recluse bonze said although he sounded less sure of it. Words wobble. Fall over. Lie there looking up at you. He scratched at a mosquito bite on his arm, making it bleed, touched his tongue to the blood. Non-words do too, he said then shouted: You piss it out!

Hasegawa smiled, gazing into the end-of-summer night. I used to want things. Then I thought I didn't. Now I don't know. He told the bonze how he had been wandering for over a hundred days, following along the lower slopes of the barrier mountains and seeking rigors for the body as mechanisms for measuring the resilience of the soul. Grass pillows and sky quilts. People said bears still live up there in the back country but I never saw one. Nor had he met any person who had encountered such a beast. I went all the way around to the Western Coast Road, walking through the heat of the day and bivouacking wherever evening stopped me. Some nights I sang to the moon. Some I yelled crimes at it. Finally got to a place where I could smell the sea and turned around and came back the way I'd gone. One direction as good as any other. So I got that far. But then I thought that if I –

Bear shit?

Bear shit?

See any?

He hadn't.

Know it if you see it?

No. Probably not.

The recluse bonze nodded to himself and plucked at the unraveling hem of his black robe. Where I learned to sit was at the Great Virtue Monastery. Big old buildings filled with shave-pates all pushing as hard as they can. Backs straight. Feet tucked in. Faces so still and solemn it would make a cat laugh just to look at us. Nobody could match me there.

I don't doubt it.

Ask about me. They'll tell you. Here's an iron-ass bonze who will not move!

They remained silent for a long moment, the myriad world outside lowering itself into a darkness that became one with the darkened interior of the ramshackle hermitage.

I thought I'd write about things as I saw them, said Hasegawa. Mountains and rivers, birds and flowers. But all I saw was what they meant. Not what they are.

More greed.

I guess that's so. Hasegawa pulled up his water gourd by its braided cord and took a drink. There were certain ways of behaving that samurai always accepted. But now that's no longer needed. The shogunate's a bureaucracy full of cushion-chooser. Brazier-lovers. Fashion-seekers. And men who used to define themselves with their blades now make entries in account books and are judged by the quality of their calligraphy.

So you miss the old happy days of slaughter and rapine?

Hasegawa laughed. He said that ever since he was a boy, he had found himself among the hacked ruins of men that he hadn't known were his enemies. He'd watched their blood-flow draining away into summer grasses or pooling on the frozen earth of a winter's night, the dead and dying men like him, men whose companionship he might otherwise have shared, and he had trusted what was happening to them and not sought to follow back out along the chain of unavoidable consequences and determine the one true source of their undoing.

Perhaps there was none.

I would prefer not to have to believe that. Hasegawa told him that his

father had been a sword-fighter who accepted the inevitability of the fact of convergence, and that he had tried to do so too. But he'd cut down men who were afraid. He had seen their terror and recognized how it made them vulnerable. And he had used their fear to kill them. He told him he had concluded that such behavior meant he was irretrievable. A wrathful type. But then he too had picked up a writing brush and begun jotting down things in journals. He too went back over what he'd done and tried to devise ways of making it better. Yet it still seemed to him that this was more of the same. Like draping cloths over the things of the world so that although the shapes were retained, their actuality became obscured.

All right. Mugen gazed around then said, You go knock on the gate of the Great Virtue just northwest of Old Miyako. They'll tell you about a wonder-bonze whose Zen roared like a blazing fire. He scratched violently in his armpit then examined what he had rooted out. Of course back then you'd also find this old fraud climbing over the monastery walls at night. Talk about greed!

You being him.

Me being stupid.

All right.

The topic being greed.

Hasegawa smiled. Meaning mine?

Meaning yours.

All right. He nodded at it. I still try to make things out of words, but they never seem true. So I try the words different ways. If I can't fix it, I throw it away. But I can't throw away what it should have been. So I keep that.

Try spitting straight up. Maybe you'll learn something.

All right. Hasegawa observed the drifting lamps of fireflies, the way they transformed the grasses and bushes of the overgrown garden into webs of transience, each tiny light disappearing then reappearing a certain distance from where it had extinguished itself, lovely in its shifting. No walls for the ego's self to climb out here, he said.

Ask about the marvelous bonze they lost. See what they say. They'll tell

you he could sit zazen all day and drink rice wine all night. Local whores called for him by name. You can still hear faint echos of them shouting for joy: Hey, good girls! Come upstairs! Crazy old Mugen's riding his little pink pony tonight!

Years and years and years, and your pride's still with you?

The recluse laughed. You can't keep what you write if you don't like the words?

Hasegawa watched the fireflies then said, You can describe the world as being simpler than it is, and a reader will take comfort in your easy answers. Good is rewarded, evil punished, and lost children are restored to their mothers. Or you can declare how it's impossible to say anything really true about the world, and your reader will think you're a profound fellow with deep thoughts. Or you can say no. Here it is. This is it. And press at what you find and press and press at it until you push through to the original beauty of things, and those readers who can manage it will follow you into the mysterious depths of the true essence of being.

Well! The recluse bonze leaned to the side, lifted one scrawny buttock, and released a long slow sonorous fart of remarkable resonance and duration.

Hasegawa laughed. I guess you don't agree. He stroked the weather-worn boards of the veranda, scraping together seeds that had blown up there, feeling a pile take shape under his fingertips. I showed some of what I'd written to Old Master Bashō. He made a few corrections, said he thought it wasn't entirely hopeless.

All right. So then that's what you have. Red marks on sheets black with ink.

Hasegawa neatened his seed pile then started another.

So here's mine. One hot summer day some good few years ago, the much admired Zen-hammer Mugen left the Old Imperial City. Birds wept to see him go, and the eyes of fish filled with tears. A golden nimbus shone around the noble bonze as he hiked without wavering into the forest, left foot right foot, left foot right foot, straight as a shot arrow. Went right on through blocking bushes and tangling vines, streams and rocks and trees no obstacle.

Where he had been became where he wasn't. Finally he reached a place where no person came or would come.

Hasegawa nodded but said nothing.

So you probably want to know why he never went back to the Great Virtue. He might tell you he got tired of city dust, but that's not true. He liked the dust, liked to stir it, stick his man-stick in. And you might think they wouldn't have him with all his hopping fleas and crawling lice. But that's not it either. They wanted him back for his big loud Zen. So finally a delegation of delegates came out but the wonder-bonze wouldn't listen. Left some things out there in the garden. Robes and sandals and books and begging bowls and cooking pots and knives and ladles and sieves. Once summer passes and autumn passes and the weeds die back, you'll see bits of it sticking up.

I don't understand.

It's a story.

A story.

And yours is too.

The moon rose out of the blackness behind them, silvering the tops of the giant bamboos so that they glittered like the surface of the sea as seen from below. Hasegawa said, So then I guess you don't think you're free from the chain of unavoidable consequences....

The recluse bonze scratched himself. You don't listen very well, do you.

No. I don't know. I guess not.

Tree frogs had begun proposing an agenda for that night, the single voice starting it soon joined by others, braiding in various opinions and refinements until the possibilities that had accumulated formed a tapestry so rich in its implications that a moment's silence was required for the songweavers to ponder the marvel of their design.

Women and words and reputations, said the bonze mockingly. Can I learn not to want the encumbrances of this world? I can learn it!

Hasegawa laughed. But it's harder not to want the not-wanting, Hasegawa said, his face again turned towards the bobbing lamps of fireflies, their numbers beginning to decline as their brief evening ended. Walking.

Remembering. Writing. Walking....

And you think that's good enough?

Hasegawa sat on the edge of the veranda, the moon's radiance leaking down into the darkening ligature of the bamboo forest, silvering the blank mountains beyond, all the world everywhere holding itself in its tranquility much the way fingers might be cupped on the hands of someone cradling new-born kittens. I guess even a needle-thief can dream of spears.

*Along this road goes no one: autumn twilight.*²

Mugen's method was a series of abrupt adjustments, with each choice yielding the easier route. They pushed through the giant bamboo then began climbing up into the cedar forest of the higher slopes. At about the hour of the horse, with the day getting hot, they reached an island of exposed granite that was thrust out over the void like a giant fist. They drank from their water gourds then lay on their backs on the sun-flooded rock and watched a hawk tilting directly above them, gripping the air with an easy grace.

The recluse bonze sat up and unstopped his water gourd again. You ever hear the story about how old Nansen taught the truth of the dharma?

No.

Well, then. This old-time abbot Nansen, he –

No.

No?

No.

He looked at him. You decided now you don't like stories?

Hasegawa said there were times when a person didn't want to hear explanations, teachings, anecdotes, and that for him this was one of those times, or was about to become so.

Seems to me one time is the same as any other, said the bonze, and he drank then tapped the stopper back in place.

They continued hiking uphill through the middle part of the day then

² "Along this road goes no one: autumn twilight." My translation of Matsuo Bashō's *Kono michi ya / yuku hito nashi ni / aki no kure*. (Autumn, 1694)

came to an elongated alpine dell that ended against a backdrop of abrupt limestone cliffs. Jade green mountain ferns filled the dell, and Mugen waded in then flopped over backwards, rolling in the ferns with his elbows flapping, carving a space for himself like some form of subterranean mud-monkey flushed up into the open air. It's at the other end. You go all the way back. Mugen's eyes were closed and he breathed in deeply, filling himself with the scent and sensation of the crushed ferns. See that jumble of rocks? There's a path there.

The sheer upright expanse of gray limestone was fractured into irregular pinnacles and palisades, and overgrown with creepers and dangling vines. Seepage darkened the surface of the stone. At the base lay a tumble of mossy boulders that had once been part of the cliff face. Hasegawa climbed up to the entrance of the limestone grotto. Hewn blocks of cliff-rock formed the front walls and entryway portal, the surfaces smoothed from centuries of wind and rain, as if the upright pilaster-supports and massive stone forming the lintel were being reabsorbed into the mountain itself.

The stone floor of the cavern was slippery and slanted downward. He could see nothing of the depths of the interior, and he moved to the side wall and felt his way along the wet stone surface as his eyes adjusted to the gloom. The air was damp and cool and smelled of dust and decay. He went deeper then left the side wall and crept forward, peering into the blackness. A broad shelf of raw stone ran along the back wall of the grotto, carved directly out of the flanks of the mountain and serving as a crude altar. No candlesticks or incense burners were to be found there, no stacked sutras or bowls of crystal fruit or vases of porcelain lotus blossoms. Only the array of seated images showed that this was a place meant for worship. Hasegawa went from one to the next. Gaunt human figures spaced apart on the shelf sat rigidly upright and frozen in full lotus position, implacable in their insistence and awful to behold. Some would have been there for hundreds of years, others were more recent. But each of the Followers of the Way of Perfected Abnegation had achieved a state of unwavering self-mortification that transcended the stench of the flesh of the world, their faces dried to skin-covered skulls, their

leathery bellies sunken to hollows beneath out-bowed rib cages, their dry arms and legs little more than sinewy sticks so that every bone and ligature seemed bound within the preservative of death's own sheathing.

Hasegawa studied the face of the avatar located at the deepest end of the shelf, trying to detect some glimmer of meaning in the two blind patches of dried shadow that obscured what had once been eyes, the nose crumpled like a withered walnut, the pale wedges of a few remaining teeth. The rogue samurai held up the down feather he had brought, moving it closer and closer to the grimacing lips until he could confirm a slight fibrillation.

He placed one hand on the knee of the desiccated creature and held it there, asking nothing and giving nothing and only confirming what he had always known.

Then he turned away and went back out to the light of the sky framed by the trees of the forest, and the bonze still wallowing in his nest of crushed ferns.

He sat down beside him and said nothing.

The bonze waited long enough to be sure it was intentional then said, Maybe you didn't look hard enough to see anything.

Maybe not.

They hiked back downhill, not mentioning the grotto of the perfected mountain ascetics nor discussing any other such topics of mutual interest until they were seated on the ramshackle veranda of the Unreal Hermitage, once again watching as gathering dusk began filling the dense bamboo grove with shadows.

Probably you could say, Why should I search for what I haven't lost? And then I would say, How can you know whether you've lost it if you don't know what it is?

Hasegawa said nothing then he said, It seems wrong.

So maybe you were just curious? Is that the way it is with you? Wondering what it's like?

Hasegawa studied the bright surfaces of the bamboo trunks still holding the last gleam of twilight within the darkness, unsure what to propose and

unhappy with whatever options occurred to him.

You taper off, the bonze said. Rice gruel and pickles. Then just tree ears and fern shoots. Nuts and berries and certain mountain plants. For years and years. Then no plants, then no berries. As you get closer, you shift to certain barks. The tannin helps preserve the skin. Then just pine needles. Then just the tips of pine needles. Then just the points of the tips. Then just the prick of them.

All right.

Then just the memory of it. The recluse slapped at his bare shoulder then smeared the blood spot off his palm. Another Buddha. Born of my hand. He smirked like an offer-maker burdened with an obtuse audience then said, I guess just because it doesn't mean much, which side of the line you're on. Other than that there's a line.

That sounds like something made out of words, Hasegawa said. But he wasn't satisfied with it and didn't know why.

'Rats occupy the four corners,' Mugen intoned. 'A wasp nest hangs under the roof beam. And spiders and beetles and centipedes circulate throughout the room, and do whatever they desire....'

Hasegawa nodded, recognizing the quote. So then you too try?

I try not to try.

Just point at it?

Finding the traces before seeing the ox.

It's still the same. Anecdotes. Stories. Lessons. Everything's made out of words. Hasegawa stared out at the darkness then added, I guess what I don't understand is why I don't feel any better about knowing that.

Maybe because you don't know it yet.

Maybe not.

Whatever they are, and whatever you think about them and their yearning for perfection, what they did is not made out of words!

No. I know that. He sat gazing into the autumn twilight. But it's also just becoming dead as slowly as possible. Like trying to watch it happen. A kind of greed.

Mugen scowled then grinned and shook himself like a water-spaniel back on dry land. So then what in your honor's opinion did you encounter in there?

Dead men dying in a hole. With no reason for it, Hasegawa said harshly.

The bonze laughed. And so we confirm thereby that your samurai values still hold you.

I've cut men and I'm sorry about it. But there are also some I'm not sorry about. And I don't know what else to say.

I guess that's all right then.

But it was mockery and Hasegawa thought he deserved it. No, he said. It isn't.

The bonze observed him. You ever tell the truth?

Hasegawa looked back at him blankly.

I mean, to yourself?

I knew what you meant, Hasegawa said.

So then what will you say to the man who kills you?

You mean if I'm not him?

All right.

Hasegawa returned his attention to the settling night, the beauty of the way shadows flowed out from dark pockets into lighter planes filling them. I don't know, he said. I don't see how that's the kind of thing you can know.

But you'd kill another man. If there was a reason for it.

I guess I would.

They sat together silently for a long moment, then the bonze said, I didn't offer to teach you anything. I offered to point out something you might learn on your own. But you didn't see it. And the following morning, bright and early, the recluse bonze guided the rogue samurai out through the bamboo forest as far as a path that led around the edge of a swampy meadow and would join up with the main road. Morning sunlight bathed the reeds and water grasses growing there, and small white butterflies filled the air, fluttering around each other like bits of torn paper dancing. Hasegawa continued alone out into the open wash of sunlight, his feet sinking into the

swampy earth, releasing the fragrance of it. He stopped then came back. I guess you forgot to give me your lesson. Probably the fault is mine.

Probably.

So?

So anyway, a long time ago, there was this old abbot in China named Nansen and he knew a lot. Could answer your question before you even asked it. Had a stick to hit you with when the lesson required. So anyway, one day one of his lip-flapping monks got a little too close and the stick-whack dropped him to his knees. If there's a dharma truth no one has professed yet? old Nansen shouted out. Is that what you're wondering? Well, yes, there is one! The lip flapper rubbed his sore head and said nothing. Old Nansen told him he wanted to know about it. The lip flapper moved back to where it was safer then admitted that he did. And old Nansen spoke up with a voice that shook like thunder and said, This is not the mind. This is not the Buddha nature. This is not a distinction between being and non-being.

Mugen's mouth gaped open and he leaned forward, staring intently into the face of the rogue samurai. Don't you want to know what the 'this' is?

You forget to bring your stick?

I need one I'll borrow yours.

Hasegawa smiled. He gazed around at the swampy moorland, the unfolding scent of living mud heating under the morning sun. It's our nature to wish to praise it, he said, the world as it is. And he told him he acknowledged the truths of the transmitted doctrines and revered them. He said he knew he was at fault; and Mugen watched him depart then turned away himself and scampered back into the bamboo forest, an absurd and filthy apparition slapping at the upright trunks of giant bamboo for the joy of the sound it made and the feel of the hollow smack against his palm.

Corrosive Juices

Joseph M. Gant

A bleak and drained end-time
Recollection came over me in a
Past life flash, and I saw the
World, my death, in atomic collisions
Of time against space and me
Suspended between and wept.
For now I walk and wrack my
Mind against my brain and watch as
Consciousness is squeezed like juice from the
Pomegranate fruits rolling at my feet. I
Walk past carts of citrus and sub-tropical
Fruits that tell apocalyptic tales in their
Patterns of color fragmented by sound.
I cross the pavement, and pomegranates
Surround my feet and so my thoughts.
Nerves wired hard into the bright machinery of
Oblivion, senses plugged into the transformer of
Brain's switchboard-daycrawl chemical
Reaction. I am a laboratory of glass
Apparatus and I smash the pomegranates
On the empty street. Seeds eject themselves
In holy light, and I recoil with
Boots of distain and want for more.

I continue down the black paved hill.
Visions again paint themselves on the
Windows of the mind, obscuring my vision through,
And I have no choice but to sit and
Succumb to my death replayed - a fistfuck
Cinema, torturous yet captivating. I am
Reborn and the pomegranates have rolled
Down the street behind me. I pick
One from the ground and bite into the
Soft and soothing flesh full of
Nectar. The visions remain like ghost
Images on a powerless television and I
Weep again - not for any torment of the
Mind's eye, but because these streets are
Empty and have been since before the notion of
Time escaped me in a chemical jailbreak. But
Now returning I sit on the streetside and
Eat. Everyone's gone. The fruit is good.

Does Real Buddhism Exist in the West?

Brad Warner

Enlightenment is not a cool experience you have, which you then file away with all your other cool experiences. It's not like that acid trip you took at Burning Man five years ago or that really wicked bike ride down an active volcano in Hawaii when you were in college. It's certainly not something you can buy for less than it costs you to hire a hooker,* then clean up and go get lunch. It's also not something that someone who's gotten can now give you.

In Dogen's lineage we talk about two kinds of enlightenment. Dogen famously said that zazen is enlightenment itself. Sitting on your cushion and doing zazen is the actual enlightened activity of Buddha. So enlightenment for Dogen was not some experience you had. It was an activity you did.

The practice of zazen is unassailable. It doesn't matter what you think. It doesn't matter what you feel. It doesn't matter if you hate it or love it. It doesn't matter if you think you're doing it wrong and wasting your time or if you're all jazzed up about how cool and "Zen" you are. The practice itself transcends all attempts to box it in.

There's a story in which a Zen master hears about a wandering monk who says, "If a clear mind comes, let it come. If a cloudy mind comes, let it come." The Zen master grabs him and yells, "What if neither a clear mind nor a cloudy mind comes?" The monk says, "I hear they're having a big sale on underwear at JC Penney"*** and wanders off. The master says approvingly, "I thought this was no ordinary monk!"

There's also another kind of enlightenment. When you've done the practice of zazen for years and years you begin to accumulate little bits of

understanding. At some point these little bits and pieces begin to come together. Gradually a kind of deeper intuitive knowledge starts to form. At some point this process reaches a kind of threshold and there may be a single moment in which everything seems to change. Or maybe several of those moments. Or maybe none at all, just a sense that something has changed.

That doesn't mean that everything gets fixed forever. You still have to live, with all the hassles you had before. You just have a better idea about what it is you're living and how to deal with it. That doesn't mean you'll always do what you should, though. Enlightenment has to be practiced.

The first kind of enlightenment happens instantaneously, as soon as you sit on your cushion. You can put this book down and go have it right this second.*

As for the second type, there is no way to get it without years of practice. That's just the way it is. And nothing will ever change that. No miracle drug. No miracle process. Nothing. Imagining you could get enlightenment quickly would be like imagining you could do fifteen minutes of sit-ups and get a bod like one of the chicks from America's Next Top Model, or thinking you could take a single guitar lesson and emerge playing Eddie Van Halen's "Eruption," or believing you could take one yoga class and be able to bend your leg around the back of your head afterward. It just doesn't happen that way. Never can. Never will.

But since there's no real understanding among the general public of what this enlightenment stuff is, anyone can claim that just about anything is enlightenment and a lot of people will believe it.

What that waste of space who invented the wicked-cool enlightenment-in-an-hour process has stumbled on is nothing more than a way to hypnotize folks and give them a really tripped-out cool experience. He then tells them this experience is enlightenment, and since he's supposed to be a Zen master they believe him. He walks away with a few thousand bucks, and all the suckers leave feeling pretty good about themselves. No harm done, right?

Well, actually, no. In fact, this kind of thing can cause a whole lot of damage.

To show you why, let me ask you something. What do you imagine happens to a guy who gets a wild tripped-out dissociative experience in an afternoon and has some other person who's supposed to be a "spiritual master" interpret that experience for him as enlightenment just like Buddha's? How does the guy feel about the master who he thinks gave him this great gift? Does he owe the master something now? And will the guy do pretty much anything the master asks him to just so the master will keep on confirming the guy's enlightenment? What if the guy does something the master doesn't like and the master starts telling everyone the guy isn't enlightened anymore? Does the guy's enlightenment even exist without the master's confirmation? That's a key question. And, for bonus points: Having just parted with a hundred and fifty smackers, is the guy

a) more or b) less likely to admit he's been ripped off? Answers on a postcard, please.

People love to be told they can get a big payoff with no real investment. But when was the last time you got something for nothing?

Here's another way the fast track to enlightenment stuff causes real damage. A Zen teacher friend told me the story of a woman who went to Japan to study in a Zen temple that emphasized having enlightenment experiences as quickly as possible. This was a far more traditional setting than one of those instant-enlightenment seminars. Which means they wanted you to get enlightened in a couple of weeks instead of in an hour.

This woman happened to be going through some pretty heavy shit in her life at the time she went to the temple — something like a divorce or a lingering illness in the family, that kind of thing. Add to that the culture shock of just coming to Japan and the triple culture shock of living in a Zen temple and the quadruple culture shock of being a white woman in an all-male Japanese Zen temple, and you have a surefire recipe for a nervous breakdown.

And that's exactly what happened. The poor woman started cracking up under the stress. Only her teachers told her that this was a sign that she was about to experience enlightenment, if only she pushed a little harder. So she

pushed harder for her big breakthrough. And boy, did she get it. She went completely wacko and finally had to be forcibly ejected from the temple. It took her years to get over it. God only knows what kind of things some of the victims of those instant-enlightenment seminars are going through now.

There's a truckload of extremely good reasons why you don't want to rip open the doors of your subconscious too quickly. If you're not fully prepared for what's behind those doors, they're better left shut tight until such time that you are. It's a dangerous game to fuck with people's heads.

In the furious-paced, get-it-done-yesterday world we live in, the idea of In-N-Out Enlightenment sounds pretty appealing. But do you really think someone who weasels you in with an appeal to your hunger for big experiences right away so you can move on to the next thing has anything of value to offer? It is this very hunger for big experiences that real Buddhist practice is intended to root out.

Buddhist practice is difficult and takes a lot of time, effort, and energy. I know no one likes hearing that. But tough titty if you don't. There are no shortcuts. There are no easy ways to circumvent the pain and difficulty of practice any more than there are ways to develop a hot bod without working out for years. But you know what? It's not really that painful or difficult. You just sit on a cushion and stay still for a little while every day. If you can't handle that much effort, I feel pretty bad for you.

As Buddhism becomes more widely accepted, guys trying to make a fast buck on people's misconceptions about it are going to keep crawling out of the manure. It's really a buyer-beware situation. If you think enlightenment is something someone can give you in a big hurry for \$150, you deserve what you get. But if you're ready to face reality, the real practice is there, and the real teachers are more plentiful than you can imagine.

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She had never been one for gambling. Not one lotto ticket or casino night with girlfriends. Never scratched to win \$\$\$, peeled a sticker promising free fries, dug inside her bottle cap for a chance at a free Coke. Would not stuff her name in a "Free Groceries for a Year" box, give a dollar to a quilt raffle, play the stock market, check the weather forecast beyond the seventy-two hour window of reliability. Luck was for those who could afford loss. Hard work, rule playing, and cheeriness were safer bets. When they failed—as they did, with comforting predictability—the disappointment cost less than the aftermath of chanced freedoms—unforeseen taxes, hidden obligations, reawakened consciousness of vulnerability. Searching dozens of Web horoscopes every morning didn't count. The shifting pattern of stars was no safety net of fate over which she masterfully balanced her choices. For her the calculation was more basic: needing to seize upon words—"soon," "opportunity," "better," "support"—that lifted—for an instant—the weight of her dread so she could fling herself into the void of the day. Marriage no longer counted, having evolved to a manageable risk. She had managed it twice. Now she preferred casting herself with the newly tipped balance of the 51.5 percent living without reward or benefit of a husband. Death, too, could be adjusted for, with or without the Grief Management business. To hazard children—biological, adopted, blended, inherited—was still possible, but she had successfully avoided that liability. Not for her, lugging around relics of love who answered good faith with guile, praise with derision, devotion with indifference. Children were the worst kind of speculation: effortless, like breathing, and deceptively reassuring. Under a guise of familiarity, they leaped into the unknown and dragged you with them, more apt to give you the finger than thanks for your trouble. It had been trouble enough to fashion a recognizable self out of the slam of her life.

There would be one moment of freedom. Swamis, sheikhs, saints, lamas, ammas, rebbes, senseis—all the masters she had consulted bore witness to it. Every path followed to its end led to this moment: wriggling out of oneself into emptiness. To stop breathing self self to be breathed by . . . what to her, on this side, howled Terror, but to those holy fools on the other side spoke Wonder, Welcome, Love. Gamble on the One? The Alive? That alchemical Nothingness where—so the light-bearing messengers reported—risk becomes reward and reward turns to gratitude? The inexhaustible Womb of Joy into which one slipped and had to keep slipping, weightless yet lifted, placeless yet home? And if she couldn't? As so many could not, choking on their comforting sureties? Or if poverty of self were a con the Haves played against the Have-nots, outsmarting born losers guaranteed to amuse?

There would be one moment of freedom. She would have to slip into it. Not like a snake, by law of God or nature, shedding one skin for another. Not like a magician, banking on the safety of illusion. Like this: a woman trapped in a drowning car who must open a window to be saved.

**G
A E
W R**

The Occult William S. Burroughs: The Road to the Western Lands as Magical Text and Occult Allegory

Mitch Shenassa

William Seward Hall ... he was a corridor, a hall, leading to many doors. He remembered the long fugitive years after the fall of Waghdas, the knowledge inside him like a sickness. The migrations, the danger, the constant alertness ... the furtive encounters with others who had some piece of the knowledge, the vast picture puzzle slowly falling into place.

Time to be up and gone. You are not paid off to be quiet about what you know; you are paid not to find it out. And in his case it was too late. If he lived long enough he couldn't help finding it out, because that was the purpose of his life ... a guardian of knowledge and of those who could use it. And a guardian must be ruthless in defense of what he guards.

And he developed new ways of imparting the knowledge to others. The old method of handing it down by word of mouth, from master to initiate, is now much too slow and too precarious (Death reduces the College¹). So he

1 The "College" (capitalized) is not a term frequently employed by Burroughs. It is likely a

concealed and revealed the knowledge in fictional form. Only those for whom the knowledge is intended will find it.

The Place of Dead Roads, page 115

INTRODUCTION

In 1956, William S. Burroughs moved into 9 rue Git-le-Coeur—the “Beat Hotel”—in Paris. Already residing there was surrealist painter, poet, and occultist Brion Gysin, with whom Burroughs quickly struck up a close friendship. The two came to experiment in a variety of ways with techniques for modifying and expanding consciousness. Of the well-known experiments were the cut-up technique (using which they collaborated on *The Third Mind* in 1978, and which Burroughs subsequently employed in the composition of *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *The Nova Express*), and the phenomenon of “flicker” which, through collaboration with mathematician and computer programmer Ian Sommerville, led to the creation of the dreamachine. Less well-known, but still amply documented experiments included what Burroughs referred to as *tape recorder magic*, as described at length in *The Electronic Revolution* and in interviews; magical curses, and experiments with photographic magical techniques.

In addition to these experiments with Gysin, Burroughs studied a variety of schools of Western Occultism, from the traditional texts, such as the writings of Aleister Crowley to the more avant garde magical writings of the Temple Ov Psychik Youth (whose founder, Genesis P-Orridge was initiated into the occult by Burroughs and Gysin). In addition to these direct studies of occult magical principles, Burroughs has spoken in interviews to a lifelong belief in magic, perhaps offering insight into his study of anthropology

reference to the notion of “The Invisible College”—the intangible state or realm of learning in which occultists reside and collude, originally derived from the writings of the Rosicrucian Order in the 17th century

and particular interest in ritual, and beliefs regarding reincarnation and spiritually-based powers among civilizations such as the Maya and Yaqui, and has often referenced books on occult subjects in recorded lectures and classes.

In the final trilogy that Burroughs penned in his lifetime, the *Road to the Western Lands*, Burroughs explores the full spectrum of occult themes, with particular attention to system of occultism attributed to the ancient Egyptians, who are generally regarded as the source for the majority of modern Western occultisms, from the lessons of Paul Foster Case to the rituals of modern Freemasonry and the magical practices of the Golden Dawn. Throughout the three books of the trilogy, *The Cities of the Red Night*, *The Place of Dead Roads*, and *The Western Lands*, Burroughs offers hints to the underlying occult significance of his works in the manner traditional to the Esoteric tradition, practiced particularly during times of persecution. Woven into the texts alongside these hints are three distinct occult strands.

Firstly, the texts function as magical primers, enumerating magical principles and techniques through the narration and actions and words of the characters. These include instances of traditional ritual magic alongside Burroughs's form of sexual and masturbatory magic—as explored in *The Book of Breething*—as well as curses, auric bodies, astral travel, extra sensory perception (ESP), reincarnation, spiritual possession and exorcism, and references to the magical systems laid out in Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan books, and the Ancient Egyptian funerary texts. Secondly, the books *are* magical spells, as Burroughs envisioned, taught and practiced magic: the theme of writing as magical power is explored repeatedly in the plots of the novels and, when viewed in the context of an overarching belief system, reveal the books to be very definite concentrations of Burroughs's will and intentions. Finally, the books outline the path of occult initiation through the parable of the Road to the Western Lands. Within the occult tradition, this path is seen as a microcosmic preparation for the immortal journey of the soul (as understood from the Egyptian funerary texts); this concept is reflected in the trilogy's theme of reclaiming the Western Lands (i.e., the spiritual state that can be reached after death) from the elites who have

monopolized it.

In this paper, I will illuminate these profound concepts and principles hidden in the text, identify their proper contexts within Burroughs's study of the occult, and extrapolate from these hints a complete, ancillary plot line, interwoven through esoteric symbols in Burroughs's sometimes lurid, often dreamlike prose.

THE OCCULT BURROUGHS

Burroughs's belief in, practice of, and thought about the occult—particularly in its operative form as magic and curses—can be traced back in his letters and interviews at least to the 1950s. In a 1952 letter to Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs writes, “Of course I am attempting black magic. Black magic is always an attempt to force human love, resorted to when there is no other way to score. (Even curse is last attempt at contact with loved one. I do not contemplate any curse, that is absolutely end of wrong line... The curse is last attempt to regain attention.)” (Letters 128). By 1954, while living in Tangier, Burroughs wrote Ginsberg saying, “Paul Bowles is here, but kept in seclusion by an Arab boy who is insanely jealous, and given to the practice of black magic” (Letters 197). Shortly thereafter, Ginsberg confided in mutual friend Neal Cassady regarding Burroughs's use of magic in personal situations, “in this case not really dangerous since Bill [Burroughs] is ultimately sane somehow & anyway I do not believe in black magic.” Later that year, Burroughs wrote to Ginsberg of protecting a painter friend from magical attacks: “The young man I protected with counter magic against a vile attempt by a rival” (Letters 245).

It is clear from his open inclusion of his magical beliefs in correspondence with his close friends that Burroughs believed in magic as a matter of fact, not merely an intriguing device to wield in his fiction. The ardent interest spanned the majority of his life. In an interview with the *LA Weekly* given in 1996—a year before he died—Burroughs said, “Certainly I'm interested

in the golden dawn [sic], Aleister Crowley, all the astrological aspects. I'm interested in all that whole level of metaphysics and occultism, magic..." (Conversations 223-4).

In *The Book of Lies*, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge writes, "My very first question to [Burroughs], a living, breathing, Beatnik legend in the flesh was... 'Tell me about magick? [sic]'" (105). Burroughs's response was, "Well... Reality is not really all it's cracked up to be, you know" (105); he then went on to explain the fundamentals of his magical outlook:

What Bill explained to me then was pivotal to the unfolding of my life and art: *Everything is recorded*. If it is recorded, then it can be *edited*. If it can be edited then the order, sense, meaning and direction are as arbitrary and personal as the agenda and/or person editing. This is magick [sic]. For if we have the ability and/or choice of how things unfold—regardless of the original order and/or intention that they are recorded in—then we have control over the eventual unfolding. If reality consists of a series of parallel recordings that usually go unchallenged, then reality only remains stable and predictable until it is challenged and/or the recordings are altered, or their order changed. These concepts lead us to the release of cut-ups as a magical process (106).

Burroughs was certainly aware that language had broader power than communication. In *Electronic Revolution*, he writes regarding the power of the word, "Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, says that certain words and word combinations can produces [sic] serious illnesses and mental disturbances. I can claim some skill in the scrivener's trade..." (38). Regarding this dangerous negative capability inherent in language, Burroughs writes in *The Adding Machine*, "There is a definite technology for the negative use of words to cause confusion, to create and aggravate conflicts, and to discredit

opponents. This is the opposite of what a writer does” (34).

In search of new means of manifesting the “opposite” of “the negative use of words,” Gysin turned to the cut-up technique of the Dadaists, which Burroughs took to eagerly and made famous. Gysin had “spent more than a third of [his] life in Morocco where magic is or was a matter of daily occurrence, ranging from simple poisoning to mystical experience... Magic calls itself the Other Method ... practiced more assiduously than hygiene in Morocco, though [magical practice] is, there, a form of psychic hygiene” (Vale 39-40). When Burroughs encountered Gysin and his cut-up technique, he was “only too willing to listen to Gysin’s ideas on the magical-technology approach to writing and to try out the methods discovered by Gysin which, as Burroughs immediately recognized, were specifically intended as ways *out*—out of identity habit, perhaps out of the human form itself” (40). Thus, they determined that “Events could be written and the message hidden in any piece of writing divined by the use of scissors”.

To Burroughs, cut-up was a technique for textual divination and magical actualization; events could be caused to occur by writing them—and these linguistic magical triggers could be revealed through the disassembly and rearrangement of language. As P-Orridge put it, “Gysin and Burroughs saw these new writings [cut-ups] as magical spells” (Lies 94). In *The Job*, Burroughs writes,

cut-up techniques will lead to more precise verbal experiments closing this gap [between writing’s necessity for abstraction and painting’s ability to mold its medium] and giving a whole new dimension to writing. These techniques can show the writer what words are and put him in tactile communication with his medium. This in turn could lead to a precise science of words and show how certain word combinations produce certain effects on the human nervous system. (27-8)

This ability to rearrange and refashion reality—one of the primary aims of occult training and study—is clearly at the core of Burroughs’s work, developing particular definition and refinement in his later works, and reaching its apex in the *Road to the Western Lands* trilogy. In his continued experimentation with Gysin, Burroughs came to develop this approach to record and rewrite reality in real time, through the use of tape recorders. By making recordings of a number of facets of an event he wished to make manifest (such as a recording of the location, a recording of an event desired at that location, and a recording of the outcome desired as a result of that event) and playing them back interspersed and cut-up, Burroughs was able to project his will into reality. A series of these anecdotes is collected in *Feedback from Watergate to the Garden of Eden*, which appears in *Electronic Revolution* and *The Job*. An oft-repeated anecdote is Burroughs’s curse against a restaurant—the Moka Bar in London—achieved by means of tape-recorder magic.

Here is a sample operation carried out against The Moka Bar at 29 Frith Street London W1 beginning on August 3, 1972 ... Reverse Thursday ... Reason for operation was outrageous and unprovoked discourtesy and poisoned cheese cake...

Now to close in on The Moka Bar. Record. Take pictures. Stand around outside. Let them see me. They are seething around in there...

Playback was carried out a number of times with more pictures. Their business fell off. They kept shorter and shorter hours. October 30, 1972 The Moka Bar closed. The location was taken over by The Queens Snack Bar.

Now to apply the 3 tape recorder analogy to this simple operation. Tape recorder 2 is the Moka Bar itself in its pristine condition. Tape recorder 2 is *my recordings* of the Moka Bar vicinity... Tape recording 3 is *playback*... By

playing back my recordings to the Moka Bar when I want and with any changes I wish to make in the recordings, I become God for this local [sic]. (Electronic Revolution 15-16).

Burroughs's magical theory and practice found its most thorough exposition in an obscure 1975 text entitled *The Book of Breething*. The text, to a large extent, functions as a sort of magical notebook for Burroughs: explanations of techniques and principals accompany a chart of hieroglyphic elements that are deployed for magical purposes in textual and illustrated form to comprise the body of the work. Describing the mechanism of magic, he writes, "A curse is activated by hate. Mixture of sexual and hostile elements is the basic death formula" (55). He goes on to lay out the fundamentals of magical control:

To control any situation it is simply necessary to place yourself and keep yourself in Third Terminal Position with respect to other participants in the situation. T.T.P is no-effect position. Hassan i Sabbah took and held Alamout, a Third Terminal from which he could reach and affect his enemies and where they could not reach or affect him. This is a classic 3T² in Alamout. (55)

THE ROAD TO THE WESTERN LANDS TRILOGY AS OCCULT PRIMER

2 "3T" no doubt refers to "Third Terminal" in acronym form (a practice which Burroughs seems to have adopted from his time in Scientology); nonetheless, as occultists are trained to recognize multiple equally valid layers of symbolism, it is worth noting that on the seventh Tarot card, the Chariot (which is representative of conquest, willpower, and self-reliance—all principles of utmost important to Burroughs), the rider's breastplate bears an emblem constructed of three Ts. According to prominent 20th century occultist Paul Foster Case, these Ts represent the Hebrew letter 𐤛, which signifies the energetic principle at the center of the three-dimensional universe

Given Burroughs's deep and abiding relationship with magic and the occult, it is unsurprising that his final fictional written testament to the world (in the form of the Western Lands trilogy) is rife with practical examples of magic, occultism, and a broad range of associated phenomena. A preliminary index of occult themes in the trilogy yields hundreds of overt references; none of the three texts proceeds for more than twenty-three pages without one of these instances.

Occurring throughout the series is a persistent emphasis on reincarnation, or “transmigration,” beginning roughly mid-way through *Cities of the Red Night* with the transmigration of John Everson's soul to a new host's body (149-50). Shortly thereafter, Burroughs introduces the system of reincarnation that predominates in the culture of the cities. “To show the system in operation: Here is an old Transmigrant on his deathbed. He has selected his future Receptacle parents, who are summoned to the death chamber. The parents then copulate, achieving orgasm just as the old Transmigrant dies so that his spirit enters the womb to be reborn” (154). Just before the character Audrey dons Mercury sandals and a helmet with the wings of a whooping crane,³ it is revealed that “Audrey knows [the proprietor of a shop] from Mexico City where Audrey was a private eye in another incarnation” (271), likely referring to the private eye character of Clem Snide who appears along a different plot-line earlier in the novel. As the novel draws to a close, Burroughs writes, “The pilgrimage may take many lifetimes. In many rooms, on many levels, the ancient whispering stage...”

This clue—referring to lifetimes, or incarnations, as “rooms” is a hint toward the manifestation of the reincarnation theme in the second novel of the series, *The Place of Dead Roads*. In *Dead Roads*, Burroughs muses, “perhaps the human artifact had a creator. Perhaps a stranded space traveler needed the human vessel to continue his journey, and he made it for a purpose?” (11). According to Egyptologist and occultist John Anthony West, the winged

³ The whooping crane, or Ibis, is the animal form of the Egyptian god of magic, writing, and wisdom, Thoth, who was known by Greek adepts as Hermes. In the parallel Roman pantheon, Hermes is named Mercury.

solar disc, representing the soul, graced every doorway in ancient Egypt in order to serve as a reminder that, as the adept enters a room to serve a specific temporary purpose, so the soul enters an incarnation for only a small fraction of its total existence (Magical Egypt). Throughout *Dead Roads*, the theme of leaving the physical body for space travel is emphasized. It is significant that “The themes central to the art and architecture of Egypt are reincarnation, resurrection and the journey of the soul in the underworld” (West 82), as the motif of Egypt and these themes animate the *Western Lands* Trilogy. According to West, Egypt is the source of the mysteries—the occult system of initiation that gave rise to the mysteries of Pythagoras and Plato, which in turn evolved into the modern occult schools. Given Burroughs’s occult studies and practice, the symbolism of leaving the physical body for space must have been known to him as the Egyptian conception of the journey of the non-material energetic aspect (the soul) to the celestial realms, often pictured in funerary murals as the winged spirit of the dead ascending to the stars (Magical Egypt).

The Egyptian reincarnation theme is made overt in *The Western Lands*, wherein Neferti must pass through the Duad, the energetic route, depicted as a river, that souls take to the afterlife. Upon crossing it, Neferti reincarnates: “Neferti is dropping his Ego, his Me, his face to meet the faces that he meets. There is nothing to protect himself from. He can feel the old defenses falling... Khaibit, my shadow, my memory, is shredding away in the wind” (*Western Lands* 158). This represents the process of the dissolution of the individual or the “return to the source” that precedes reincarnation.

Beyond reincarnation, Burroughs weaves ample examples of ritual magic throughout the series. In *Cities of the Red Night*, magical rituals abound, beginning with Clem Snide and his assistant Jim, “The altar is set up for an Egyptian rite timed for sunset...” (76). The Clem Snide storyline continues with the discovery of Jerry Green’s murder as, “the Egyptian sunset rite dedicated to Set. A sacrifice involving sex and death is the most potent projection of magical intention” (85). Afterwards, magical rituals are necessitated in order to exorcise the head of the ritually murdered Jerry

Green, and then to exorcise the spirit of Jerry Green from Snide's assistant Jim (117, 122).

The trend of ritual magic permeates the other storylines (incarnations) within *Cities*: Audrey buys “winged-Mercury sandals and a helmet with wings from a whooping crane” from a shop keeper he recalls from a prior incarnation, then “extends his arm and the wand tingles straight for the power plant of Yass-Waddah. ... All the lights in Yass-Waddah go out” (271). In the final battle of the novel, wherein the iconoclastic rebels lead their “sorcerers revolution,” Dmitri and General Darg, “evoke every aid they can summon through magical rituals” (111, 302).

In *The Place of Dead Roads*, Kim, who “never doubted the possibility of an afterlife or the existence of gods,” and “intends to become a god,” performs a variety of rituals to further his cause (42). He “rears backward, making hooves with his hands and pawing the air. Then he pretends to gallop as the boy fucks him with a riding motion, jogging Kim's shoulders with his hands,” over a map of the local terrain, magically remote guiding his horse which “streaks ahead of the distant posse” (78). Kim repeatedly employs an invisibility technique whereby he renders “himself invisible by giving no one any reason to look at him,” described by Burroughs in an essay in *The Adding Machine* as a trick he learned from a Cleveland mob boss. There are multiple mentions of an incident where Kim and his “Fox Boy made sex magic against old Judge Farris,” drawing upon the principles Burroughs lays out in *The Book of Breething* regarding combining sexual and hostile elements (89). Shortly thereafter, Kim meets Chris Cullpepper who “is into magic and has studied with Aleister Crowley and the Golden Dawn,” after which they perform a “preliminary evocation of Humwawa, Lord of Abominations, to assess the strength and disposition of enemy forces...” (91).

The enemy being assessed by the evocation of Humwawa, and reappearing throughout the trilogy, are “Venusians.” The curious selection of Venus as the home planet for the alien invaders is of occult significance. “The Divine Mother is Isis, the Ceres of the Mysteries of Eleusis, the Celestial Venus; she who in the beginning of the world originated the attraction of

the sexes and propagated with human generations with eternal fecundity” (Weor 62). Burroughs’s worldview maintains that “women are trouble. It is another organism with interests perhaps basically irreconcilable with the male interests—which has installed itself as indispensable” (Hibbard 69). As such, it is logical that in his magical text chronicling the battle against the influence of Venus, homosexual sex magic and death/suicide should abound, as embodiments of principles contrary to those attributed to Venus in the occult systems. In *The Place of Dead Roads*, Burroughs observes, “Sex forms the matrix of a dualistic and therefore solid and real universe. It is possible to resolve the dualistic conflict in a sex act [through sex between males], where dualism need not exist” (172).

Clearly, the European occult traditions (and the ancient Egyptian mysteries from which they were adapted) were a significant influence on Burroughs, and his own investigations and explorations formed a large part of his magical outlook, however other sources were clearly known to him. He refers throughout the trilogy to Carlos Castaneda’s Don Juan books in many ways. In *Cities of the Red Night*, Clem Snide reflects, “Don Juan says anyone who always looks like the same person isn’t a person” (41). Towards the end of the novel, the lizard youth whom Audrey has encountered uses the “sorcerer’s gait,” a technique which Don Juan teaches Carlos for navigating dark canyon floors (291). The references to the Don Juan books subtly continue in *The Place of Dead Roads*, Kim tells an old man named Don Linares, “I bring greetings from Don Bernabe Jurado” (14). While this is not a direct reference to any personages who appear in the Castaneda series, this method of introduction, particularly using the antiquated Spanish title “Don” is reminiscent of the plethora of meetings Castaneda describes with Yaqui sorcerers. In *The Western Lands*, Burroughs observes (through the character of Neferti), “My universe is less stable than Don Juan’s, sometimes I am an impeccable warrior and at other times I act like a timid suburbanite in a New Yorker cartoon” (139).

While drawing on external sources as disparate as the Western Mystery Traditions and the Yaqui sorcerers, Burroughs employs his texts

as opportunities to display many of the details of the magical system and techniques that he developed with Gysin. In *Cities of the Red Night*, private eye Clem Snide proceeds through his investigations by means of a “very special recorder designed by [his] assistant, Jim, and what it won’t pick up isn’t there. It is also specially designed for cut-ins and overlays, and you can switch from Record to Playback without stopping the machine” (43). In essence, Snide is armed with the ideal tool for the tape recorder magic designed and practiced by Burroughs. Even more significant (as it transcends the boundaries of the text and frames the intent of the Trilogy) is the sort of textual magic that Burroughs envisioned being a function of the written word. “Changes, Mr. Snide,” explains the Iguana sister, “can only be effected by alterations in the *original*. The only thing not prerecorded in a prerecorded universe are the prerecordings themselves. The copies can only repeat themselves word for word. A *virus* is a copy. You can pretty it up, cut it up, scramble it—it will reassemble in the same form,” (166). When Snide is captured by CIA agent Pierson, Pierson insists that Snide write a scenario, as he has “written enough already to get the ball rolling,” (203).

This reflects Burroughs’ magical view on writing: “the immortality of a writer is to be taken literally. Whenever anyone reads his words the writer is there,” namely that writing something is the first step to its manifestation (*Dead Roads* 42). At the same time, it represents an example of his view of writing as discovery. In *The Western Lands*, the District Supervisor tells Kim (who is passing through the afterlife), “Writers don’t write, they read and transcribe something already written. So you read orders, which are then conveyed through your spokesman...” (74). The “orders” mentioned by the Supervisor are equivalent to the prerecordings the Iguana sister explains to Clem Snide in *Cities of the Red Night*—an original source of knowledge that manifests itself in words and deeds which are removed by orders of magnitude (i.e., the separation between the original text and the spokesman; the separation between the prerecordings and the viral copies).

THE ROAD TO THE WESTERN LANDS TRILOGY AS MAGICAL SPELL

Given Burroughs's belief in the magical power of writing—in its ability to fashion a concept and pass it through the world, from mind to mind, like a virus—it is noteworthy that aspects of the seemingly patchwork texts of the Trilogy stand out as clear examples of magical intention. In *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs describes techniques for “unarmed psychic combat. The techniques mostly run on a signal switch—I love you/I hate you—at rapid intervals” (224). This technique is employed within the body of the text itself to affect a psychic assault on those with “weak points” who attempt to pry the occult secrets from the Trilogy (recall Burroughs's self-identification as a “guardian of knowledge and of those who could use it,” taken from page 115 of the *Place of Dead Roads*, taken as the epigraph of this paper).

An example of this I love you/I hate you technique employed not *in* the narrative, but *as* the narrative, can be found in *The Place of Dead Roads* as Burroughs is describing the smell weapons that Kim finds in the market. His evocation of strong smells throughout the text (e.g., Joe the Dead's smell of “burnt plastic and rotten oranges” on page 128, the “whiff of brimstone and decay” on page 182, “the smell of unwashed flesh, exhaust fumes, and kief” on page 209, etc.) stimulates the reader's imagination to draw strongly upon the smell memory. After this neurological pathway is established and repeatedly accessed “safely,” Burroughs guides the reader to the market. “Many smell weapons work on the ‘sweet cover’ principle, luring one into a good deep breath like rotten blood, a heavy sweet odor so you wonder what flower could smell that sweet and suck in a lungful, doubles you over like a kick to the crotch,” (230). In many instances throughout the trilogy, Burroughs finds it sufficient to describe the principles of action that support a phenomenon, yet here, he continues with an assault of the actual smells: “gardenia and carrion ... roses and baby shit... sea air and gangrene” (230).

In *The Western Lands*, Burroughs applies a similar principal of magic *as* text. Burroughs first describes some principles of black magic, which

operates most effectively in preconscious, marginal areas. Casual curses are the most effective. If someone has reason to expect a psychic attack, an excellent move is to make oneself as visible as possible to the person or persons from whom the attack is anticipated, since *conscious* attacks on a target that engages one's attention are rarely effective and frequently backfire. (46)

Here Burroughs reveals a motivation to his lurid style: he is making himself "as visible as possible", essentially jamming any potential psychic attacks his texts may inspire. He goes on to explain that

Writing prejudicial, off-putting reviews is a precise exercise in applied black magic. The reviewer can draw free-floating, disagreeable associations to a book by implying that the book is completely unimportant without saying exactly why, and carefully avoiding any clear images that could capture the reader's full attention...

There are other tricks: the use of generalities like "the man in the street" and the editorial "we" to establish a rapport of disapproval with the reader and at the same time to create a mental lacuna under cover of an insubstantial and unspecified "we". And the technique of the misunderstood word: pack a review with obscure words that send the reader to the dictionary. Soon the reader will feel a vague, slightly queasy revulsion for whatever is under discussion. (47)

After describing the black magic employed by biased literary reviews, Burroughs employs the text to invoke his own curse against a maligned reviewer. Real-life literary critics such as Anatole Broyard delighted in harsh reviews of Burroughs work, thus Burroughs defines the target of his curse as a

“book reviewer for a prestigious New York daily, [who] knows all the tricks. He has chosen for his professional rancor the so-called Beat Movement, and perfected the art of antiwriting. Writers use words to evoke images. He uses words to obscure and destroy images.” Recall Burroughs’ remarks on the negative capability of language in the *Adding Machine*—the use of “words to obscure and destroy” is anathema to him.

As such, he proceeds to curse the ill-minded reviewer, employing the same logic as his tape recorder magic. First, he describes the standard situation, before the interference of his will and magical intent:

This afternoon he has delivered his latest review to the office and made an appointment with the editor for three o’clock. Reading over a copy of the review, he feels a comfortable cool-blue glow [this indicates a spiritual aura of calm and happiness]. A perfect job of demolition, and he knows it. And the editor will know it too. Two columns and not one image ... word, pure word. The effect is depressing and disquieting, gathering to itself a muttering chorus of negation and antagonism. (47-8)

Having established the pre-curse state of the subject, Burroughs includes a quote from the black magic review—connecting directly to the targeted critic by inviting the critic to manifest within the context of the curse.

The critic thus invoked, Burroughs launches into the next phase of his spell, defining the alterations he wishes to affect on the previously defined “standard situation.” This passage serves the function of the second tape in Burroughs 3-tape- recorder system of magic, described in *Electronic Revolution*.

A sudden silence that can happen in big cities ... traffic sounds cut off, a pause, a hiatus, and at the same moment the feeling that someone is at the door. This should not

happen unannounced—that is what he is paying \$3,500 a month for.

He steps to the peephole. The hall is empty down to the elevator. He slides the deadbolt and opens the door. A small black dog slithers in without a sound, its brush against his leg light as wind. He snatches a heavy cane he keeps by the door.

“Get out of here!”

But the dog is nowhere to be seen. (48)

Here Burroughs has given his curse the form of the dog, a symbol of death to the Ancient Egyptians (as the jackal-headed god, Anubis, presided over entrance to the underworld). The dog proceeds to follow the critic, always just behind him, drawing the criticism of doormen and colleagues. At this point, Burroughs has interwoven his intention into the standard situation. To return to the parallel with tape recorder magic, this is tantamount to playing back the “street recordings” at the target.

Finally, he describes the desired outcome of his curse, the “playback” tape, where he leads events to unfold along the desired parameters. The critic arrives at his meeting to find that his friend Karl, the editor who has encouraged his black magic reviews, has suffered a nervous breakdown, having imagined he was being followed by a black dog. The editor’s replacement then takes the critic to task for his review of the text.

“Mr. Chandler ... this review of W.S. Hall’s [Burroughs’s initials, with his last name changed from Burroughs to Hall] latest book ... you say categorically that it is a poor novel but you don’t say why.”

“But ...” My God, didn’t this punk know *anything*?

“But?” The young man raised a pencil-thin eyebrow inquiringly.

“Well ... I *understood* ...” Why, his orders had been

crystal clear: trash it all the way.

“You understood?”

“I understood that an unfavorable review was indicated.”

“*Indicated?* We are trying to maintain standards of impartial appraisal. After all, this is what criticism is all about. I suggest that you submit a rewrite for *consideration*.”

(50)

Burroughs’ structure of curse is complete: the outcome has been defined and inserted into the sequence, restoring balance to the imbalance he has built into the energy of the situation.

The final passage of *The Book of Breething*, written a decade before the Trilogy, refers to precisely this technique: “Possession of the Books puts The Old Man in T.T.P. [the Third Terminal Position described above] He hashis [sic] opponents in his books. They do not have the information access or skill to compile such books on him. The Old Man must have been a very great artist.” Precisely because Burroughs can write about the critic in images, while the critic is bound to use words only to “obscure and destroy images,” he has put the critic into the Third Terminal Position.

THE ROAD TO THE WESTERN LANDS TRILOGY AS OCCULT PARABLE

Understanding Burroughs’s familiarity with occult symbolism and principles, and his clear intent to employ this familiarity and seed this symbolism and these principles throughout the Trilogy in active and passive forms; and understanding his assertion from *The Place of Dead Roads* which functions as the epigraph of this paper; it becomes worthwhile to analyze the predominant themes, ideas, and symbols evoked in the Trilogy in order to discover the “knowledge” that “he concealed and revealed... in fictional form” (115).

This investigation properly begins in the Invocation placed prior to the text of *Cities of the Red Night*. In it, Burroughs dedicates the book to a pantheon of twenty-seven deities from across world wisdom traditions, culminating the list with “Hassan I Sabbah, Master of the Assassins,” ending the section with the quote he and Gysin attributed to Sabbah on his death bed: “NOTHING IS TRUE. EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED” (xviii). Sabbah is the only human or historical personage on the list, and the only one to be referenced twice.

Beyond the Invocation, mention of Hassan i Sabbah appears throughout the Trilogy. In *Cities of the Red Night*, the text skews into a sudden aside, introduced by Sabbah’s infamous dying quotation, describing the cities as manifestations of permutations of the phrase.

Tamaghis: ... Here everything is as true as you think it is and everything you can get away with is permitted.

Ba’dan: ... Everything is true and everything is permitted.

Yass-Waddah: ... Here everything is true and nothing is permitted except to the permitters.

Waghdas: ... Complete permission derives from complete understanding.

Naufana and Ghadis are the cities of illusion where nothing is true and *therefore* everything is permitted.

The traveler must start in Tamaghis and make his way through the other cities in the order named. This pilgrimage may take many lifetimes. (158-9)

Sabbah persists in the text, referenced in one of Noah Blake’s dreams on page 216, before reappearing in *The Place of Dead Roads*.

The first reference to the “Old Man of the Mountain,” as Sabbah is called, in *The Place of Dead Roads* occurs in a parenthetical anecdote: “(An old gardener who has worked in the General’s garden for ten years killed

him with a scythe. The General was planning a campaign against the Old Man's fortress at Alamut.)" (26). It is significant to note that this scene is one of a handful illustrated in the *Book of Breathing*, Burroughs's quintessential magical text, which is also anchored on the personage of Hassan i Sabbah.

Following the gardener assassin anecdote, Denton Brady's uncle Kes recognizes Kim Carsons (another of Burroughs's alter-ego characters) as "an assassin," though the phrase seems odd as it does not appear to refer to Kim as an assassin in the sense of a hired killer, and is therefore best understood as a reference to Hassan i Sabbah's followers, the *Hashishin* or "assassins" (53).

It soon becomes obvious that Kim intends to organize his army of Johnsons as Sabbah did his *Hashishin*: Kim first surveys Fort Johnson, his eventual base of operations, declaring, "This could be my Alamut," (87). This is made certain shortly thereafter when the narrator muses, "who would move against him, or even know about the Alamuts he was establishing throughout America and Northern Mexico" (95). Kim later reflects, as a conflict with the elites his Johnsons are combating becomes inevitable, "I didn't ask for this fight... or maybe I did. Just like Hassan i Sabbah asked for the expeditions sent out against him just because he wanted to occupy a mountain and train a few adepts" (117).

Sabbah, who haunts the text almost parenthetically throughout, appears as the primary focus for a set of revelatory passages in the middle of *The Place of Dead Roads*. "Kim studies the scant sources on... the Old Man of the Mountain. This man is the only spiritual leader who has anything to say to the Johnsons who is not a sold-out P.R. man for the Slave Gods" (169-70). Burroughs recounts, briefly, the legend of Hassan i Sabbah:

Hassan i Sabbah was a member of the Ishmaelite cult, who were viciously persecuted by the orthodox Moslems...

Hassan incurred the displeasure of a potentate and fled for his life. It was during this flight that he received the vision of the Imam and took over the Ishmaelite sect with all its underground networks. He spent several

years in Egypt. Once again he was a fugitive. He escaped by boat and is said to have calmed a storm. He gathered a few followers and, after years of perilous wanderings, established himself and his followers in the fortress of Alamut in what is now northern Iran ... (the fortress is still there⁴). Here he maintained himself for thirty years and trained his assassins, who spread terror through the Moselm world. (170)

Here Burroughs comes to what may be considered a clearly-defined key to unlocking the occult nature of the Trilogy:

During his exile in Egypt [Hassan] learned some basic secret by means of which his future power was realized... What Hassan i Sabbah learned in Egypt was that *paradise actually exists and that it can be reached*. The Egyptians called it the Western Lands. This is the Garden that the Old Man *showed* his assassins....*It cannot be faked any more than contact with the Imam can be faked*. This is no vague eternal heaven for the righteous. This is *an actual place* at the end of a very dangerous road. (171)

This passage is obscure and mysterious, particularly when considered along with the claim, two pages later, that “The Old Man showed his assassins freedom from rebirth and death. He created actual beings, designed for space travel” (173).

The Western Lands returns to Sabbah as an object of contemplation for Joe the Dead, who has killed Kim. “He knew there was only one man who could effect [sic] the basic changes dictated by the human impasse: Hassan

⁴ The fortress at Alamut was visited by Brion Gysin, who wrote an essay about the trip, ultimately fueling a great deal of speculation by Burroughs in the final portion of *The Book of Breething* as to what appear to be discrepancies between the “scant sources” and Gysin’s observations.

i Sabbah: HIS. "The Old Man of the Mountain" (29). Reflections of the Old Man continue to appear: "At the end of the human line, everything is permitted," a clear corollary to Sabbah's last words appears as an explanation for a rampant hybridity that could be actualized across species (34). Later in the text, Joe the Dead meets with Sabbah, the Old Man's first manifestation as an actual character in the Trilogy, and has an opportunity for dialogue.

Questions raised: How did the Egyptian Gods and Demons set up and activate an elaborate bureaucracy governing and controlling immortality and assigning it, on arbitrary grounds, to a chosen few? The fact that few could qualify is evidence that there was something to qualify for.

Limited and precarious immortality actually existed. For this reason no one challenged the system. They wanted to become Gods themselves, under existing conditions....

Immortality is purpose and function. Obviously few can qualify... (70)

Sabbah appears a few times tangentially for the next few chapters, to return in conjunction with this metaphysical quandary, "Is there a technique for confronting death without immediate physical danger? Can one reach the Western Lands without physical death? These are the questions that Hassan i Sabbah asked" (191). Burroughs discusses the process by which Sabbah trained his initiates to kill their own death, in order to "train individuals for space conditions" (192).

Hassan i Sabbah makes his final set of appearances as an actual protagonist of the text. Breaking the fourth wall, Burroughs writes,

The most severe visitation of writer's block has fallen as my narrative comes to Hassan i Sabbah in Egypt, where he presumably learned the secret of secrets that enabled him to attract followers, establish himself at Alamout [sic] and

control his assassins from a distance.....

The persistence of this mystery in the Trilogy clearly underscores its import. A last clue is given as the Old Man prepares for his final appearance in the Trilogy:

Consider this scenario: HIS and Neph make the pilgrimage and reach the Western Lands. The knowledge they bring back could destroy the existing order founded by the Venusian Controllers, which manifests itself through all authoritarian governments and organizations: the Church, the Communist Party, in fact *all* governments currently operating....

... Alamout [sic] was never intended to be permanent. It was intended to gain time to train a few operatives for the future struggle, which is right here, right now, in front of all of you. The lines are being drawn.

“God’s word says that the Occult is the enemy.”

Some reborn son of a bitch is listening to his Master’s Voice like a good human dog.

“Magic is the enemy. Creation is the enemy.”

Burroughs’s curious linkage of magic and the Occult to Sabbah’s operation may seem at first a wishful fictionalization of history, however it is necessary to consider the repeated emphasis Burroughs places on Sabbah’s time in Egypt and what he learned there.

The relationship between Burroughs, Gysin, and Hassan i Sabbah is briefly explored in the documentary film, *FLicKeR*. In this segment, it is stated that Brion Gysin envisioned himself as the reincarnation of Hassan i Sabbah, and studied the old man assiduously. Given Gysin’s particular Occult leanings, and that all three books of the Road to the Western Lands Trilogy are dedicated to Gysin, it is worth exploring what Occult connections Gysin

may have discovered in his copious research regarding the figure of Sabbah that made his interest so vibrant.

Unquestionably, the connection to Egypt is essential. Burroughs's emphasis on what Sabbah learned there implies that he knew some specific learning was taking place, despite the fact that none of the handful of 10th century Persian texts, nor most of the 20th century texts discussing the Old Man explicitly state that he did anything in Egypt other than serve in a royal retinue. In *The Third Mind*, Burroughs and Gysin posit, "Maybe it wasn't just hash Hassan-i-Sabbah [sic] picked up on in Egypt. What about glyphs talking over distances in silence?" (184). This is, however, as obscure as Burroughs's theories about space travel.

The key can be deciphered by means of Arkon Daraul's⁵ *A History of Secret Societies*, originally published in 1961, a book analyzing an array of secret societies, beginning with Hassan i Sabbah and the *Hashishin*. Daraul writes:

One of the most successful secret societies which the Shiahhs founded was centered around the Abode of Learning in Cairo, which was the training-ground for fanatics who were conditioned by the most cunning methods to believe in a special divine mission....

Members were enrolled, on the understanding that they were to receive hidden power and timeless wisdom which would enable them to become as important in life as some of the teachers....

Students had to pass through nine degrees of initiation. In the first, the teachers threw their pupils into a state of doubt about all conventional ideas, religious and

⁵ Though "Daraul" is known to be a pseudonym and the genuine author has never been identified with absolute certainty, it is thought that noted Sufi mystic and author Indries Shah is the scholar responsible for the text. This is particularly curious, given Gysin's affiliation in Morocco with Sufi mystics.

political.... This 'confusion technique' was carried out until the student reached the stage where he was prepared to swear a vow of blind allegiance to one or other of his teachers.

This oath, together with certain secret signs, was administered in due course, and the candidate was awarded the first degree of initiation.

The second degree took the form of initiation into the fact that the Imams... were the true and only sources of secret knowledge and power... In the third degree, the esoteric names of the Seven Imams were revealed, and the secret words by which they could be conjured and by which the powers inherent in the very repetition of their names could be liberated and used for the individual...

In the fourth degree, the succession of Seven Mystical Law-givers and magical personalities was given to the learner...

The fifth degree named twelve apostles under the seven prophets, whose names and functions and magical powers were described. In this degree the power to influence others by means of personal concentration was supposed to be taught.

To obtain the sixth degree involved instruction in the methods of analytical and destructive argument, in which the postulant had to pass a stiff examination. The seventh degree brought revelation of the Great Secret: that all humanity and all creation were one and every single thing was a part of the whole, which included the creative and destructive power...

To qualify for the eight degree, the aspirant had to believe that all religion, philosophy and the like were fraudulent... The ninth and last degree brought the

revelation of the secret that there was no such thing as belief: all that mattered was action.

This is what Hassan i Sabbah learned in Egypt. He was initiated into an Occult secret society with demonstrable links to ancient and modern occultism (according to scholar of secret societies and the Occult, William Cooper, these are the nine degrees of initiation maintained in modern York Rite Freemasonry).

Reviewing these nine degrees of initiation, and comparing them to Burroughs' descriptions of the permutations of "Nothing is true; everything is permitted," that define the aspects of the Cities that comprise the journey described by the Trilogy, the link between Sabbah's discovery in Egypt and the Western Lands becomes clear: the road to the Western Lands functions as a metaphor describing the successive states of mind and personal development that result from Occult initiation and progression through the degrees of an esoteric school or doctrine.

In this light, even Burroughs's remarks regarding Hassan i Sabbah preparing his followers for space travel, the notion that the journey to the Western Lands could take many life times, and the concept of achieving immortality by reaching the Western Lands appear logical. As John Anthony West explains in *Magical Egypt*, the Osirian Mysteries of ancient Egypt (which gave birth to all subsequent occult traditions) emphasized Occult initiation in the physical incarnation in order to prepare the soul or eternal energetic essence for its journey towards immortality in the heavens following bodily death.

CONCLUSION

Given William S. Burroughs's definite familiarity with Occult principles, techniques, and philosophies; his affiliation and collaboration with Occultist Brion Gysin; his interest in the Occult initiate and master, Hassan i Sabbah; and his inclusion of all these themes and concepts, alongside suggestions of a hidden message, in his Road to the Western Lands Trilogy, it can be surmised that these three books represent Burroughs's passing on of his accreted Occult understandings "in fictional form" as his death loomed closer and his priorities shifted to the eternal principles he had discovered in his lifetime of experimentation and exploration. Further, though his interest in, and practice of the occult can be clearly identified as early as the Ginsberg correspondence of the 1950s, the subject (and its symbolic referents) did not appear in his work until the cut up trilogy (*The Soft Machine*, *Nova Express*, *The Ticket that Exploded*) that he composed after his artistic collaboration with Brion Gysin. This trend accelerates into Burroughs's final trilogy, *The Western Lands*, in which the occult is the fundamental preoccupation of the plot, content, and construction, establishing Burroughs as a master composer of magical allegory on par with the ancient mystics who have handed down veiled metaphysical doctrine through the millennia.

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Wat Pho

George Moore

That the Buddha should need to rest
lying down, or that his calling was sleep,
seems to be a first mistake, the second

is in thinking this a religion, for he was
already liberated and at his ease reclining,
staring into empty space above our heads,

glazed with perfection. But we are not.
We are hot and sticky, our cotton shirts
turned to river rags, our hair like jungle vines

wet with the monsoons. For us the moment
is less an awakening than a melting, emerging
out of city traffic, tuk-tuk choked streets,

pushing in and stealing our air. The Buddha
in all his gold flake and mother-of-pearl
does not seem to mind. He rests on an elbow,

the same for three hundred years, since
before the city was a city, before the world
watched its space collapse, the silence broken

by gas fumes, the temples clogged with
sightseers, like us, the fallen Christians from
across the sea, the new colonialists. But then

the Buddha does not care, he reclines, and
stares out at what the world was and what it is,
or just might be, if we take off our shoes and sit

within this stillness, without moving.

The Lines in the Palm of Your Hand

George Moore

Like the mountain you are disfigured by time,
but here, in the reverse, for the lines in your hand

map out the weather before rain clouds build,
and anticipate mud slides, alluvial fans, years

prior to the dry ravines of the future. You seek
predictions, I see, the palmistic axis of disposition

and desire. It will finally unsettle you. You think
this lifeline somehow geologic, the granite structures

of the body's sediments slowly condensing to stone,
where time charted along these rough monastic edges,

and the fleshy, subcutaneous parts mark coastal ranges
of your present life. But nothing changes so drastically

as the earth's features buried in your hand, the volcanic
dispensation, the atmosphere around you screaming

into another plume, the pressure building into desire,
and once released, the ball of your thumb ridged against

the mountains of Venus, where the goddess in you
lives, looking across the hand at the mountains of the Moon.

The pool of love and libertinage, disrupted by the moon's
temper or its reflection, trace the line of the heart.

You survive the climb although it's mostly mechanical,
one handhold after another into the lower stratosphere,

where you will see your whole body carved in patterns
of weather, living like a clock. The last mountain

you'll discover below the middle finger, the mountain
of Saturn, a site of paradox and interpretation, no temple

or rune, but thick with natural flora, and a wisdom
or improvidence, that burns like incense at the finger's altar.

This is the chiromancy of chance, crosses and triangles,
in a matrix of terrains that let you dream beyond now.

Yet hidden in your landscape, I cannot tell, there are rivers,
more roads, and seasons of planetary evolution, all rooted

in the primal elements, where a single stone was loosened
and still falls through the silence of your future.

The Way Things Are

George Moore

From where do all these worlds come? They come from space. All beings arise from space, and into space they return.

— Chandogya Upanishad

Night of unusual stars
when the Milky Way
makes a disc of the universe.
I stare for a moment transfixed
by a sudden awareness of place.
There, for an instant, the darkness
between my body's hollow
and the furthest, simpering light
becomes a clear image--no,
more a bodily part,
a physical sense of how far
that burning body is from mine.
Like watching a woman
walk a strip of coast
miles off to the north
and moving away, watching her
from a spot on the cliffs,
and knowing her, knowing
somehow the whole space

between as something imaginable
in the flesh—somatic
as the air you move through
to reach whoever you are with her.
It is the years then
I cannot imagine,
the light dying at its source
but alive in an emptiness
through which it must travel
to simply reflect,
a moment's missed chance perhaps,
never warming again.

But how could it be otherwise?
Suddenly, the whole sky
and its minions,
the mathematical impossibility
of being alone—but unknown,
unreachable, for the moment.
Or forever? The universe
a great experiment in single lives,
and how would we act otherwise?
If we knew others were out there,
perhaps thousands of generations away,
would it change us? Isn't it
the not knowing,
the space between,
that marks us and makes who we are?
Light and its barriers surely
are not of the body
and it's matter, but this
does not deny light's being,

right there, where its otherness
somehow limits our sight.
Perhaps this distance that is
both part and not of who we are
is so that we are,
so that we are not like stone
full of its own center.

From that night
death arises too, that final space
cured of time. But what
could be beyond it, or of it?
What could this matter
in all its particulars do to move
to light, or to be as powerful
as light's absence?
My second father,
gone five months,
rushes at the world from inside me,
swarms the night.
And what would be different?
To know? How inhuman
would we be then?
The other side of death
would always look inviting,
a field in future space,
a choice, a logic, the next
sure step. And to know
would rupture life, drain it
of its simple logic,
sever it from its final
vital part.

As to reach that star
might somehow flatten its light,
and alter the dream of earth
that constantly recurs
from that difficult moment
of birth. His nearly ninety years.
The sense that here is a sun
so far away it is only a small pulse,
consecrates the darkness
and marks the night as something
we can cross, but only
on the rough circle of an earth,
a span that makes this
being human, a moment
of complete unknowing.

Even before the Exodus

C.N. Bean

It doesn't make sense what they say
that beliefs in an afterlife
arose quite late in tradition.

According to their own writings
the Hebrew people, later Jews
early on spent years in Egypt.

Am I to conclude none rubbed off
those ancient Egyptian beliefs
whose center was life after death?

After all ancient Egyptians
embalmed their deceased royalty
and buried them with their treasures.

If belief in life after death
arose late in Judaism
why does the Torah make bold claims?

While living in ancient Egypt
Joseph had his father embalmed
Jacob, also known as Israel.

The ancient Egyptians embalmed
both the father of twelve nations
and the son who brought Israel there.

Panther Meadows

Terry Sanville

After standing four hours in the August heat, the hitchhikers hardly spoke. The conical mass of Mount Shasta filled their eastern horizon. The roar of semi trucks on Interstate 5 assaulted their ears.

Aaron lowered his thumb and turned on Joel. "I need to get away from this," he shouted over the noise.

"What da ya mean get away?" Joel yelled back.

Aaron pointed across the freeway to the town of Shasta, tucked into a pine-covered hillside.

"Yeah, let's find some shade," Joel hollered.

Picking up their bedrolls they moved across the bridge. A half-loaded produce truck passed them going the opposite direction and turned down the onramp.

"That guy woulda given us a ride, I'm sure of it," Joel complained.

Aaron kept shuffling forward, his head down. They were both numb from the onslaught of traffic. Joel bent at the waist, the hunger tearing at his guts. At the southern edge of town they slumped against the shaded side of a Texaco station.

"I've had nothin' ta eat for two days," Joel said. "We gotta get somewhere, soon."

Aaron tucked strands of dirty blond hair under his baseball cap. A slow smile spread across his stubbled face. "It's not so bad for me – the pain went away yesterday. It almost feels like I'm strung out on Ex."

"I'm happy for ya, man. I really am – but no phony drug high is going

to overcome this pain.”

“That’s why I must find Panther Meadows,” Aaron said, reverently.

Joel scowled. “Jeez, not that again. I thought we were through with the mystical bullshit?”

“It’s not bullshit. The Wintu Indians believe that the Meadows are sacred. And drinking from the spring...”

“I know, I know, drives away fear and brings peace to the soul.”

“Yes, that is correct. Some people spend days there, under the trees, fasting and meditating in the high thin air.”

“But I thought you were into the Krishna thing?”

“There are many Swamis that I could learn from. But there is more than just the Hindu way.”

“Well, I’m lookin’ for a way to scrounge some food. Got any ideas?”

Aaron didn’t answer, just breathed in deep and slow. A sheriff’s cruiser leisurely motored past. The two hitchhikers compressed their bodies against the wall, trying to be inconspicuous. The patrol car kept moving, the cop eyeballing them in his mirrors. The midday heat had scared most everybody off the street. Only a lone café surrounded by Peterbilts and Kenworths showed signs of life.

“Maybe we could scare up some grub at that place,” Joel pointed.

“The truck drivers would eat you alive,” Aaron said, blinking once then shutting his eyes.

“I meant begging leftovers from the cook, stupid.”

“It doesn’t matter. We’re in the great north woods here – you know, ‘God’s Country.’”

“And you’re tellin’ me it’s all different at Panther Meadows?” Joel glared at Aaron. “Come on, man. You’re the big guy – the ham heads won’t try anything with you.”

“I’m not the one that’s hungry. Come to the Meadows and you won’t be either.”

“With my luck the panthers would eat me for lunch,” Joel cracked.

“Not much of a meal, there,” Aaron laughed for the first time in days, a

low chuckle that went on too long. Neither of them moved. Joel studied the pine-covered slopes leading up to Mt. Shasta and the southern flanks of the Cascade Range. A few cars swept past, tires squealing in the heat. Afternoon shadows grew longer and the scent of Ponderosa and high chaparral filled the valley.

Finally, Joel pushed himself up, groaning. “I gotta head south. You do what ya want.”

Aaron opened his eyes. “Yes, I must get moving too. It’s a day’s uphill hike to the Meadows.”

“So how long are you gonna stay there?”

“Maybe two or three days. George told me that’s how long it took him before the visions came.”

“Why don’t ya just drop some acid? The visions will find you a lot quicker and you won’t have to starve yourself.”

“Get serious, Joel,” Aaron said. “There are no shortcuts to finding peace.”

Since the end of spring term, Joel and Aaron had been traveling cross country, moving back and forth between coasts. Their plan was to look for temp jobs and visit major league ballparks along the way; they were both baseball fanatics. They’d started out driving Joel’s rusted camper truck. It had stopped running in Winslow on their first pass across, forcing them to hitchhike. Their latest trip to Washington State had promised jobs picking apples. They were months too early. In Seattle, Aaron signed them on to crew the sightseeing ferries that sailed the San Juan Islands. But even on flat summer seas Joel got sick. So they’d headed south, broke, and still weeks away from the start of fall term. Joel had been surprised by the emergence of Aaron’s spirituality, suspecting that it had grown out of weeks of drifting – sort of Aaron’s own forty days of wandering in the desert, with no shortage of devils to tempt him.

Aaron slipped the bedroll over a shoulder and fingered his harmonica. “Are you going back to San Diego?”

“Yeah, might as well. My parents will put me up until I can find an

apartment.”

“Don’t let them talk you into anything stupid. I’ll check in on you later.” Aaron moved off, winding his way uphill into the trees.

Joel took a long drink from his water bottle and trudged back to the freeway ramp. Aaron’s footprints were still visible in the dirt next to the guardrail. Joel dropped his sleeping bag and rolled up the sleeves of his work shirt to expose finely-veined white arms. He found a piece of cardboard, placed it on top of a stubby wooden post, and sat, his outstretched hitchhiking arm resting across one thigh. The heat shimmered off the asphalt and burned through the soles of his work boots. Joel lifted his gaze to glacier-covered Mt. Shasta. A cloudbank hid its summit, constantly changing shape but never moving off, as if somehow tethered to the mountaintop.

This is gonna be a long one, Joel thought. Almost like that time outside of Des Moines where we waited at that intersection next to the cornfield. It was hot there too, tropical hot, so damn hot that the crows were too lazy to fly. I felt like wandering in between the corn plants and lying down in their shade. But Aaron always wanted to make it to the next town, the next state.

I can see him now, pushing along a narrow path through shoulder-high manzanita, then into the trees. Shifting dark shadows under the Ponderosas don’t slow him down. He becomes one of them, moving through the thick afternoon heat into the dark soul of the forest. A velvet-coated panther mutters at him and follows through the underbrush. They reach the Meadows’ edge. She stops to rest on her haunches, tail flicking, eyes staring while Aaron moves forward. He lies flat on the needle grass and drinks from the sacred spring. She envies him this cool comfort.

Aaron sits cross-legged next to the stream that divides the Meadows. His eyes are shut, hands resting on knees, palms up and open, long hair blowing in the afternoon breeze, a beatific smile on his lips. White sunlight bleaches everything it touches. The hum of grasshoppers fills the air. The panther yawns and licks her paws, purring. Yellow-green eyes momentarily squeeze shut then open again.

The sky becomes a deeper shade of blue. The sun drops behind the

western ridgeline and the air turns cool. Aaron remains motionless. The panther creeps forward, moving silently through the grass. She laps water from the stream, then, in a single bound, crosses it and sits next to Aaron. A full moon rises over the trees, shining blue on her rumpled fur. Her eyes are black pools that stare into Aaron's face. He extends a hand and strokes her coat. She yawns. Their bodies touch. He feels the slow rise and fall of her ribcage and the low rumbling of peace and contentment. The moon arcs across a star-filled sky. The wind dies and the cold sets in. The two move closer, curling together like kittens.

Just before dawn the panther sits up, arching its back. The edges of her body dissolve to form a perfect copy of Aaron. The new Aaron stands and moves silently off toward the trees, glancing back at his old self on the ground, but continuing forward. The old Aaron dissolves into the Meadows. By first light not even the grass shows where they have lain.

"Jesus, I thought you'd be long gone by now," Aaron said.

Joel stared at him blankly, his body cramped by the cold. It was nighttime. Traffic on the Interstate had disappeared, the quiet only broken by the sound of hunting owls and their prey.

"What are you doing here? It's not dawn yet." Joel croaked, his lips cracked and dry.

"What are you talking about? I don't think I could have made it to dawn."

"So what happened at Panther Meadows? I mean, did you find what you were looking for?"

"Never got there. A few miles out of town my hunger came back with a vengeance. I couldn't think past it."

"But I thought the spirit of the Meadows would take care of that. You were supposed to come back a different person."

"Joel, you're not making any sense. What kind of trip have you been on?"

Joel stared at Aaron, an innocent smile creasing his face. "It doesn't matter. I just got you mixed up with somebody else."

“Here, eat some of these dinner rolls I got from that truck stop. The cook turned out to be a junior from UCLA. We ended up talking football.”

“Maybe later. I’m not hungry.” Joel arched his back and yawned, exposing pointed canine teeth.

They were half asleep when the pickup truck screeched to a stop and the driver motioned for them to climb up in back. They made three hundred miles that night and by morning were just north of Nepenthe.

Three Encounters with the Gods

Eric Scott

1

I did not know that place. Well, no, that's a lie: of course I knew that place. I had walked down that cracked and broken sidewalk every day of my life, had swung high on that swing set, had climbed the old metal ladder up to the treehouse. Of course I knew that place. It was my front yard. But I did not know it that night, when I was twelve.

The sun and the moon stood together in the treehouse, holding hands as they never had and never would in the waking world. In the shadows of that tree stood the rounded figure of the earth mother, her skin the color of mud, with one great breast draped over her oak brown robe. A few feet from the front porch, a graying man with a face that was somber even when he smiled wore grapes in his hair, and he talked to a man with a staff and a black cloak. In the light of the fire at their feet, the cloaked man had a ferryman's countenance.

On the other side of the massive evergreen tree, where earlier that summer the old horse-trough swimming pool stood until we got rid of it, were three women. One of them was young and thin and loud, her hair long and black, and one was older, with a sweet face and a cruel glint in her glances. And between them was the mother. She was my mother, yes. But she was also everybody's mother.

It was Samhain, the day when the veil between the worlds was thin. Halloween night, the first night of the witches' new year, the most holy day

of our calendar. My parents said they wanted to do something a little bit different that year, instead of a normal ritual. They had accomplished that; somehow they had changed our yard from a walkway surrounded by beds of dead peonies and toys I had abandoned to the wilds into something out of myth. They had changed it into a place where the gods were waiting for us.

We kids-- Sarah, myself, Joe, and Megan-- stood in the doorway of my parents' squat house. The gatekeeper called Sarah forward, onto the path through the stations. I watched her walk up to the treehouse, the long red flame of her hair spilling behind her. Her brother Joe looked over my shoulder at the yard.

"Hey... I see your mom, and I see my parents. But where's your dad?"

I looked around. He wasn't Dionysus; that was Web. And I was pretty sure the Sun and Moon were the Kreynests. Joe was right; he wasn't out there. "I don't know. Maybe he's up between the trees." I pointed towards the front of the yard. "Probably just doesn't have a light."

Sarah moved on from the treehouse and the gatekeeper called for me. I walked past the large brush pile that we kept near the house for the birds to hide in and came to the treehouse. I listened to the Sun and Moon, who were also Dan and Becky Kreynest wearing papier-mâché masks. I only half-comprehended what they had to say; I was busy being disturbed by the the earth goddess. I spent a long time there, and when I left, Sarah had already passed through the other half of the yard and made her way to the three women.

The yard seemed denser than it used to be; in the nighttime dark I stumbled across rocks I was sure were not there in the daylight, and pushed my way through branches that I was certain were supposed to be much higher. And when I got to the front gate, I started walking back down the other side of the yard, towards the maiden, mother and crone, as Sarah had done. I saw the small redness of embers glowing on the other side of the branches, and I pushed my way through, and I saw him.

He was smoking a cigar, a big brown one, in long and deliberate drags, and he let the smoke out through his nostrils and his mouth. He was shirtless,

and his belly was full and round and solid. His goat's legs were shaggy, tobacco-brown. And his beard was full and his eyes were bright. His feet were hidden by the grass I had forgotten to cut, and so I could not tell whether or not they were hooves, but atop his head were two tiny horns, shiny and black.

He looked an awful lot like my father, but he was not my father, not entirely, not then.

“Pan?” I asked, quietly.

“Live, love, and laugh while you may, for darkness comes at the end of the day,” he said, and smiled, and tapped the ash from his cigar into the grass. “The god and the goddess mark your way.”

I must have left him, then, though I do not recall how I came to be before the goddesses, who stood beneath the evergreen and the dogwood and whispered things I do not remember. It was not long before I came back to the circle where Sarah was waiting, and where Joe and Megan would soon join us. We did not talk about it, if for no other reason than because Dionysus was there and it seemed impolite to talk about other gods in front of him.

Later that night, while we were eating feast, Joe turned to me and grinned. “Your dad was really cool tonight. I think I liked his best.”

I swallowed my cut of roast beef and nodded, not willing to say that I wasn't even sure that had been my dad.

The next day, as I was mowing the grass, I found a pair of blue jeans on the lawn. They had fur sewn onto the front of them. But those pants were muddy, and ancient, and something I was sure no human being had ever worn.

2

The thing to know about this story is that it does not end well. In fact, as evidence of just how badly it ends up, keep this in mind: it ends in White Castle. Nothing that comes out of a White Castle ever ends up “good.” And the encounter in the White Castle happens on a Thanksgiving, which only

makes it worse. But the story itself begins a month before that. It was mid-October, my sophomore year of college. Two in the morning. And I was walking.

Where was I walking to? Out. Away. I didn't particularly care where I ended up. I just needed to get out of Centennial Hall. It didn't take long for all the lights on Franklin Street to run out, leaving me alone in the dark walking through the sleepy Kirksville. There were no lights on in any of the houses, except for the occasional flicker of a television. It was quiet, and I was alone, and I guessed that was what I wanted.

Stupid girl.

She had been sitting outside her dorm room, just across the hall from mine, next to the trash cans and recycling bins. Her roommate said she had been there for half an hour, alternately calling my name and stopping her from going to get me. Eventually her roommate gave up and knocked on the door anyway.

Her name was Annie. I guess she was my girlfriend, then. I knew that she was drunker than I had ever seen her, bleary and only half-conscious.

"I don't want you to see me this way," she said, looking up at me. Her brown hair was tied back with a red bandana, and her thick eyeglasses were smeared with something I couldn't identify.

"Come on," I said, and tried to pull her up. "Let's go to your room so you can sleep this off."

"I don't wanna move," she mumbled. "I don't wanna move, because you're ashamed of me."

That much was true, but I have still never really made out how that worked itself out as "that means you want me to keep sitting by this trash can."

I would say that we argued for half an hour or so, but she was doing all the arguing with herself. Sometimes her head would bob back and forth: she faced left and smiled, so happy I was with her. Faced right, wished I would go away so I wouldn't have to see her like this. I just sat and wished my girlfriend wasn't an alcoholic.

Eventually I said to hell with it and got my coat and walked out of Centennial Hall and into the dark. She gave me one weak, pitiful look, and then she slumped back into the garbage bags.

Franklin Street outside of Centennial Hall was a main road in Kirksville, one of the boundary markers of the town square and the college campus. It only took half an hour of walking for the road to trickle down to a line of small houses, and eventually, to an ignominious dead end in a patch of trees. There was a little clearing in front of the trees, and I stopped there. I thought about turning around to head back home, but then I thought about Annie still muttering in the trash bags. I decided to stargaze instead.

It was a clear and cold night, and once the streetlights ran out the stars opened up. There must have been thousands of them visible, more than I had ever been able to see growing up in Saint Louis. When I was a kid I was sure I was going to be an astronomer when I grew up; I won an award once for a speech about astronomy, when I was nine.

I was twenty then. I tried to look for constellations, but I barely managed to spot the Big Dipper.

Franklin Street ended atop a hill, and just to the right of the trees was an open space where I could look down onto Baltimore, the other main road. The strip malls and Pizza Huts and tire shops stretched out beneath me, and far off the distance I could make out the bright white letters of Wal-Mart. I felt the disenchantment a college kid is supposed to feel when looking at his small town, and got ready to turn away, but over that tacky tableau I spied something else in the sky I recognized.

The three stars of Orion's Belt hung in the sky, those winter landmarks that stood out even in the middle of a city. Back in my astronomy phase I wrote a report on the constellation Orion; I had read this book about it that claimed the pyramids were built to be a reflection of the constellation on the Earth, and they conceived of the constellation as their god Osiris.

And suddenly, looking up at the sky over Kirksville, I could understand why they might have felt that way. I don't know how to describe it, except that I knew that, hanging somewhere above Woody's Tire and Auto, was

Osiris. I don't want you to think that I saw a mummy or a pharaoh next to me; no, it was just stars... But I saw them differently than I had before and have since. In that moment I felt like I was standing before a wise king, and he was dispensing his wisdom, if only I would listen...

We lived by the Nile, he said, and we lived by its ebb and tide. The Nile would flood, and then it would recede; we would plant and we would eat, and that was how we lived for thousands of years of men. The river rises, and the river falls, and the river rises again; it all comes back around, it always all comes back around.

I got back to the dormitory at three in the morning, and was relieved to see that Annie had managed to get back to her room. We didn't talk much for the next few weeks. I pretended that I had a lot of papers to write; she pretended to care about school. Eventually we went home for Thanksgiving, and that was when I got the call.

"My mom doesn't have any room for me this year," she said. I heard the sounds of highway traffic in the background of the call. "My aunt lost her house and now she's staying with them and it's all a mess..."

"You know, you could always come eat Thanksgiving at my parents' house. I'd love it if you would..."

"No, you wouldn't," she said as a truck horn blared past her. "You left me drunk in a pile of trash bags, for Christ's sake. You want me to believe you want me to be with your family? Right. I'm sure there's a White Castle open."

She hung up before I could protest.

I thought Osiris had been talking about her and I, that our relationship would come back around: maybe some kind of river metaphor, love ebbing and flowing like the tide. It had hit a low point, but it would come back again, always coming back around.

I only spoke to Annie once after that: a hollow little "congratulations" at graduation. In retrospect, I think Osiris must have been talking about something else.

3.

I couldn't tell you why I decided to go to the midnight mass that Christmas Eve. Curiosity, I guess. The only church service I had ever been to before that was a nominally Baptist service in Kirksville, where the sermon was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation and the preacher played electric guitar.

Saint Francis de Sales, by contrast, was a tall Gothic style church a few blocks from my parents' house in Saint Louis. Saint Francis loomed over that south side neighborhood, built of brown bricks and green copper gutters and tall, ominous doors. On the central steeple there was an old brass clock face that was so ubiquitous to my childhood memories that I never bothered to see if it actually kept time, or if it was just a broken reminder of another era in the church's life.

I was wearing a shirt and tie, of course, but looking around the congregation I wished I had thought to wear a suit. I walked down the red carpet looking for a pew to sit in. I sat down not far from an elderly woman and her husband, who took no notice of me. A moment later two teenage boys came down the aisle and stopped to cross themselves before they entered their pew. One of them gave me a dirty look as he did so. I was supposed to kneel before I entered the pew? Why had I never heard of that before?

It's because you aren't Catholic, I thought to myself. Because you aren't Catholic and they know it.

Ahead of me was the massive altar, where a small army of altar boys and priests sat and sometimes got up to cross the room for no obvious reason. The front of the church was dominated by two things: one was the never-ending cascade of pipes to the organ, like a Jacob's Ladder unto itself. The other was a statue of a crucified Jesus, which at least in my memories was thirty feet tall. I do not remember being able to see Christ's face; it was shrouded in darkness, and no feeling radiated from that statue except for suffering too personal to be expressed.

I did what my Catholic friends had told me to do: I got up when other

people got up, I knelt when they knelt, I sat when they sat. The cushions in front of the pews were painful to kneel on, and at one point in the service it felt like we were asked to kneel for an incredible length of time, hours and hours. I'm sure it couldn't have been more than five or ten minutes at the most in reality. All the time I looked around, hoping nobody noticed me, hoping I didn't stick out.

I didn't recognize anyone in the crowd. This was the church for the neighborhood I'd lived in my whole life, and I didn't know anybody. How could that be?

I was frightened. Catholicism can be an intimidating religion-- there is so much ritual, so much ceremony, so much left unexplained. Plus, the service was primarily in Latin, since it was the Christmas Eve mass, something I thought was going to be interesting. It turned out to just be confusing and scary.

Calm down. It's just a church service. These people are just trying to talk to their god in their way. And your own religion would be confusing and intimidating too, to someone who knew nothing of it.

They were good thoughts, but they weren't helpful ones; I was still overwhelmed. The altar boys kept going back and forth, back and forth, until I couldn't keep track of anything that might have cued them to move. And now the priest was speaking in English, and I could barely understand his accent...

I felt beneath my tie for the small silver hammer I wore around my neck, and I focused on it, tried to remember to breathe. They are just talking to their god, no different then you talking to Thor...

That was when I felt the hand on my shoulder.

There had been an open seat between me and the elderly lady in the pew. It wasn't empty now. Or-- well, yes. It was still empty. But somebody was still sitting there anyway, a big man with a long, braided beard and tousled red hair. The man was wearing a shaggy blue tunic, the kind that the Germanic tribes used to wear ages and ages ago, and a fur cloak that might have been made of wolfskin. He had a hammer next to him on the pew. His hand was

on my shoulder.

He did not look at me. He watched the priest and the altar boys. He sat silent like a stone.

I blinked many times before I turned and did the same. I kept kneeling and standing and sitting with the rest; he did not. He watched with a look that called the ceremony neither wrong nor right, and kept his big, warm hand affixed to my shoulder.

I left just after the priest announced the time for communion. My Catholic friends had made it quite clear that, regardless of anything else, I was not supposed to participate in that. It was snowing gently when he and I left through the side door I had entered alone, and we walked together out to my car. I never stopped to look at whether there was only one set of footprints.

I talked for a while. I thanked him. I wondered aloud whether I was hallucinating. I asked him why they had won, how their confusing and terrifying religion had managed to wipe his kind out.

He didn't answer, not in words. Thor is a listener, not an advisor. And he answered the last question in the best and simplest way possible: he was there. If he was there, he could not be completely gone.

I exhaled, very quietly, very slowly, as we reached my car. I felt better, if no less perplexed. It was almost two in the morning and I was drained. I looked into his eyes, which were a clear and piercing blue, and I looked past him, through him, at the string of Catholics coming out of their church. They were both there at once, both, in their own ways, true.

I didn't offer him a ride. It wasn't as though he would have needed it. And in any case, I don't think the gods have as yet gotten used to cars.

Redemption

C.S. Fuqua

Mist shrouded the figure at the edge of the woods, finger coaxing. Baker told me Marty would have thought the figure was God, like the time Jesus appeared at her hospital bedside. Baker had held her hand and assumed the role with grace.

“You okay?”

The mist cleared, the dream receding. Baker nodded, squinting up at his wife. He drew a deep breath: lilacs and pine freshener.

“You were talking in your sleep,” she said softly. Her eyes whispered *again*.

Baker winced from the sudden pain twisting through his gut, saw it reflected in Marty’s gaze. “Just a dream,” he said.

Shrugging, he later told me that he had wanted to describe the dream to her, but had decided against it. She would have blown it out of proportion, would have called it some kind of *sign* and called in even more congregational reinforcements. “And where would that have gotten us?” he asked. “Wasting what time I have left on entertaining a bunch of frightened eyes and best wishes.” He laughed, but I don’t think Marty would have reacted as extremely as he’d said. It was just a dream, a human figure, ancient, naked, shriveled, beckoning him into woods that he knew as well as I, a wide thicket at the end of our street, opening on a bank of the Tennessee River.

Baker and I fished from that bank every chance we got. We usually did our best to snatch out anything that took the bait. But sometimes all I wanted was company. I’d drop in my line, the hook bare, while Baker laughed and

sang the chorus from “Lazy Bones.” I still got strikes, the glint of the hook attracting fish, but they were rare, and I had all the time I needed to talk. Or not to talk. Whatever suited me, us. Two years earlier, directly across from where we fished, Baker’s wife had trusted the arms of her preacher and sucked in God. Baker said that Marty had drunk too much of the river, that it must have turned to wine when it reached her stomach.

“They’ll be here shortly,” Marty said. Baker started up from bed, but the pressure of her hand against his shoulder gently held him down. “You rest till then. I’ll come get you.” Baker remained on the bed as instructed. He closed his eyes, felt the springs shift as Marty rose to leave. The lilacs faded under the suffocating false scent of pine.

The doorbell rang. He rose quietly, slipped on jeans, T-shirt, and sneakers, and eased out of the bedroom, down the hall to the kitchen. They had gathered in the living room around a coffee table set with powdered doughnuts and five cups of coffee, one of tea. Marty’s large coffee table Bible sat in easy reach of the women. Marty would’ve invited me, but she doesn’t believe that Unitarians, especially Unitarian men, have any pull in heaven.

Baker poured himself a cup of coffee, steaming and black, from the pot beside the range, and the level of conversation in the next room softened to an indecipherable murmur. He sniffed at the rising steam, then went out the back door into the sunshine.

“When I was in high school,” he said to me one day on the bank, “I’d get tiny pimples from time to time. Medicines didn’t work, so I’d go out in the sun until I was a little burned. The sun dried the zits right up. Just like that,” he said with a snap of the fingers. He had sighed heavily then and began buttoning his shirt closed. “Too bad the sun doesn’t work on the insides the same way.”

From the porch’s top step, he narrowed his eyes at the rustle of leaves, a skink skirting across the yard. Stuff like a skink, he once told me, it’s important—even the hum of a mosquito at your ear. He stepped off the porch, the skink’s tail vanishing into tangled grass. He sipped the coffee, set the cup on the porch banister. The back door opened.

“Honey?” He turned to Marty. She smiled, her pearl earrings dangling. Her hair stuck out in jagged tufts, expertly shaped by a stylist, but it was still too short and thin to hide the recent past. The left side of her heavy blouse sagged slightly as the weight of her clothes compressed the padding where a breast had once been.

Baker followed his wife inside, leaving his cup on the banister. The women, six of them seated on the sectional, smiled at him, their makeup wrinkling with determined pity. The youngest one, the one with black hair and tattered jeans, set her cup on the table and rose, her T-shirt billowing off her breasts like a balloon. Mid-twenties, Baker guessed. The others, his own age or about, late thirties, early forties. Each with righteous knowledge and sacrament in her eyes. *Especially this young one.* He laughed when he told me about her. “Recruit them before they have time to develop too many opinions or questions of their own,” he’d said. “Too much curiosity undermines the true conversion. Do it like the Marines. Train them right, from the cradle if possible, and they’ll walk directly into fire for you.”

“Where do you hurt most?” the young one asked him.

Baker shrugged. “Back some. And around here,” he said, indicating his sides and a rough line across his belly.

She pushed the coffee table to one side, sloshing coffee from the cups, paying the seeping puddles no mind. She directed the others to gather around him, to place their fingertips at various points on his waist. He met his wife’s eyes briefly as her fingers touched above his belt buckle and the young woman’s palm rested against his forehead. A smile played on his lips, but he held back, not wanting to hurt Marty no matter how ridiculous he believed the situation. The young one closed her eyes, her lips beginning to move silently. He glanced at his wife again, then back to the younger woman as she cried, “Dear God, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior, and all that’s holy to cleanse this man, your servant.” Her eyes widened, and her mouth snarled. “In the name of Christ Jesus,” she screamed, “I command the demon in this body to be gone!” She shoved hard against his head and he felt fingers dig into his gut.

Baker looked hard to his wife, but she'd closed her eyes, tears bleeding down pale cheeks. Her arms quivered, fingers trembled. He twisted abruptly away, fighting the pain that threatened to double him, knocking hands away as he fled for the front door.

"Baker?" his wife called weakly, but he didn't stop, didn't look back. "Baker? Please..." He fled through the yard, down the street toward the woods. His lungs ached as he reached the edge. He tore at the buttons of his shirt as he entered the thicket, ripped it off, his skin glistening in the sun's dry heat. He dodged limbs, forearming saplings aside. He stumbled, fell, twisted up to yank off his shoes and socks. He ran deeper into the thicket toward the river. Even from where I sat fishing, I could hear his wife's voice calling faintly. Briars and branches tore at his feet and slacks. Blood trickled off his ankles. He broke through, doubling over, gasping on the riverbank a few feet above where I sat, my line dead in the water despite the wiggler on the hook.

"I thought..."

He raised a hand, his head shaking, his chest heaving. I started up to help him, then thought better of it. He would've shoved me away then.

"Where's your pole?" I asked. "More important, where's your clothes?"

Another shake of the head.

A barge floated past forty yards out. The tugboat's horn sounded. Baker forced himself straight, raised a hand toward the barge, and the fat, bearded man behind the wheel gave him a thumbs-up. Less than a month later, he could barely walk.

It's been four years now since I last carried Baker in my arms through the woods, his frail body lighter than a child's. That last time, he sat, propped against me on the bank. "I wish we'd brought the poles."

"Who'd clean our catch?" I asked.

He grinned and watched the passing boats until the wind and sun lulled him to sleep. I lifted him and carried him home for the last time.

A few moments ago, a skink skirted past my foot, swishing sand with its tail, leaving a trail as curved as a snake's. A fish tapped my line, but the hook didn't set when I snatched the pole. The fish got away with the worm. In the

main channel, a barge lumbers past, and I wish I had Baker's nerve. When the fat captain gave him the thumbs-up that day, Baker slipped off his pants and shorts and slid into the water like an eel. The captain began laughing as I stood and cheered. Baker caught the barge and scrambled up the side when the captain tossed over a rope. He ran to the front and raised his fists at the sky like a defiant god sailing into oblivion.

I have Baker's pole with me. I've baited and sunk his hook where mine now rests bare. The skink has returned to warm itself in the sun. Movement will frighten it away, but I've been here long enough, and it's time for me to go. I've talked with Marty at length over the past few months. She and the others should be waiting at her house now. The poles will be fine where they are.



My Spiritual Beliefs

(current revision-
subject to
future editions)

Matheau Moore

April 2, 2009
15:54 EST

I know it is self important and pompous to assume that anyone would want to read my theological and moral ramblings. It is fine if you should decide to skip this piece. If, for some odd reason you care what they are, then here-in you can find the latest thoughts of a theological no-body.

I have found myself at times to be both too heretical and too Orthodox. This is perhaps a good assessment since I probably stand somewhere inside that spectrum. Many of us do even if we might think ourselves to be in the right on all the various spiritual subjects we ponder, I would venture that most of us are indeed quite off on many topics. Why? Because our collective “beliefs” are so divergent to start with. I would venture that the chance any of us having a “right belief” in all things is almost as infinitesimally small as the proverbial monkeys typing up Shakespeare by chance at their little typewriters.

I still consider myself a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church and will do so until notified by an appropriate authority that I am not. The question came to me today when being interviewed for an upcoming medical procedure. A very benign one, but they must ask none the less: closest relative to contact, allergies, religious affiliation.

Religious affiliation...

First, the more boring reasons I am Orthodox: I lost interest in the personality driven churches of Protestantism where the Pastor is the Church. When I was born I was baptized Roman Catholic but, after my parents' move to the suburbs, I was raised in a somewhat fundamentalist Pentecostal Church—for a time. Until, that is, my mother would decide that something the pastor had said was not in line with her beliefs. Then we would be packed off to the next congregation and abide there until the pattern would repeat. Wash, rinse, repeat.

I also found it increasingly unlikely that “true Christianity” had died out after the second century A.D. and only returned to the world in force in the 1600's—or, in the case of Pentecostals, the early 1900's. One of the most firmly held doctrines of the Protestant churches is their belief in “Sola Scriptura”—meaning that they will only accept a practice or a belief if it can be found in scripture. I have however, yet to meet a sola-scripturist who can tell me in any amount of detail how and when the books that would be in the New Testament were decided. Upon learning that these books were only decided upon by a council of the, then united Roman/Greek/Etc church in the 300's and that this same church at the same council laid out a number of statements concerning Church practices, government, and beliefs that they would not recognize as valid, I am usually met with a blank-ish stare. Why is it that we trust that the Holy Spirit spoke to the assembled Bishops and Priests of the 300's (and yes, that is what they called themselves) in a manner that is to be trusted to the Nth degree on the matter of what is and is not in the Bible, but on the other hand all other utterances of theirs that are made at this same council, whose Holy Ghost inspired genius, was sufficient for us to accept the Bible in its current form, are to be disregarded as the mere “teachings of fallible men.” Unfortunately there is not a sufficient answer to this question from the Protestant point of view.

This, among a number of other questions, led me to one of the three directly historical and “apostolically” (each Bishop can trace a direct line back to one of the apostles) connected Churches that were present at the time of this council and who still exist today. They are the Roman Catholic Church,

the Eastern Orthodox Church, Anglican Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. I chose my church based on teachings as much as on worship—and this is true of the very word Orthodox, which means less “right teaching” than “right worship.” It was by living through a complete liturgical cycle of Lent through Easter (Pascha) in the Orthodox Church that I arrived at the realization that spiritually, and aesthetically, this was a home I had somehow known all along.

That is probably the more boring part of my ramblings as now we get to read about how I might be considered heretical by many within my own communion:

I can with a clear conscience say the entire Nicene Creed. I believe this makes me a member in good standing, as far as the most important doctrinal beliefs go, with the Orthodox Churches (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Albanian, Romanian, Georgian, Palestinian, Finnish, Ukrainian, Macedonian, Czech, Polish, Japanese, American, et cetera et cetera...)

Where my beliefs might disconnect from some other members of my body are perhaps numerous.

1: I accept that the scriptures are “true” and inspired in so much as it is a book about spiritual and moral subjects. I do not believe it is a text book for science or for history. I believe that Jesus (the same God who supposedly brought us the Old Testament) taught primarily in parables—meaning stories that are true in the sense that they illustrate a point about eternal truth but are not thought to be necessarily true in the sense of a work of non-fiction. Why should God change styles mid-way through his career? I believe that many of the stories in the Old Testament are parables, allegories, instructive stories, if we are able to get beyond the literal surface material presented and look at the subtle meaning waiting just below that surface. I do not say that the following are impossible since all things are possible, but I do believe they are highly unlikely to be literally true: The earth was created in 6 days 6000+ years ago nor that Moses was able to fit thousands or hundreds of thousands of every land and air dwelling species into a boat smaller than many mid-size cruise ships—including every species of insect, as well as both the flamingo

and the penguin, and keep them all alive despite their very different needs and environments for 40 days and 40 nights, and that they were then able to spread across all the continents and cross all the seas (think Hawaii) and find their perfect ecosystems and exist only in those ecosystems (think Galapagos) and nowhere else, nor that Jonah lived inside the stomach of a fish for 3 days like some sort of biblical Pinocchio and was then regurgitated, unharmed by both the digestive system of a fish as well as the complete lack of air. I believe these, and many other stories, are moral allegories and parables but not likely to be historically true in the sense that a history of the American Civil War might be considered true or untrue. There are several sites that examine apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the text of the Bible if taken literally—here are two:

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/donald_morgan/inconsistencies.html

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jim_meritt/bible-contradictions.html#contradictions

2: I believe that the law is gone. Completely gone. There is much back and forth in the scriptures concerning this subject, but I have found the simplest and most consistent position to be that it is indeed gone. That when Saint Peter had his dream about the forbidden, non-kosher foods being lowered down in a net, and God said, “Eat”, and he argued with God saying the scriptures forbid it, and God got frustrated after a bit and said to him simply, “How dare you call unclean that which I have called clean?” (Acts 10-11). God meant it for the dietary law, but I do not see why he did not mean it as well for the sabbatical law, the menstrual laws, et cetera, just as much as he meant it for all the rest of the law. Not as something we could pick and choose from (so as to feel good in our ability to render judgment upon those whose practices we disagree with and justify our own disregard for the rest of the Old Testament.) It is commonly accepted among nearly all Christians that we find the following old testament teachings to be distasteful, or overly restrictive, based upon our current cultural norms: eating shellfish, shrimp, pork, wearing any clothing made of more than one fabric, a menstruating

woman appearing outside of her house (Lev 12:2, 15:19-30), the loaning of money for interest, the stoning to death of adulterers or homosexuals, the taking of a hand for a hand or an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth and many more laws handed down to us by Moses from God Himself. These, among other things, are all called an “Abomination” in the book of Leviticus and are likewise declared as worthy of death as a man sleeping with a man, et cetera.

3: I have come to believe in something very close to Universal Salvation—meaning that Hell is more a state of mind and heart than anything else, that it results from our cutting ourselves off from the ultimate reality rather than the ultimate reality casting us into a literal, eternal lake of fire. (This has led me in the past to examine the position of some of the most respected early church fathers and also examine dealing with the same school of thought in modern American Protestantism.) I think that all will be resurrected and “every knee shall bow and every mouth proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord.” (PHILIPPIANS 2:11). And what else is that but to be “saved”? Is it possible for one to eternally reject being fully re-integrated to the great what if? Yes, but is it likely one would do so even after their death and resurrection? Even after all knees bow and all tongues confess? I do not know that answer.

4: I believe Saint Paul’s verse that “In Christ there is neither male nor female” and hence the entire current debate raging through the Churches of the world at this time concerning the role of gender and human sexuality in the Church is thereby rendered fairly mute. “In Christ there is neither male nor female, Greek nor Jew, Freeman nor slave but all are one.” Why should that be such a difficult teaching to accept?

Well, that’s enough to digest for the moment—perhaps I will append this with a second chapter—a revision, if you will.

To reiterate my current beliefs, I will say: I believe in a God. I believe that God is the ultimate reality, and that the ultimate reality—that which is—is all part of God, and that the sorrow one might experience in rejecting this ultimate reality is simply the pain that would result naturally from a refusal to accept what is—denial, delusion. I myself have experienced this God in

the form of the Christian God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and I do not see a need, necessarily, to reject this presentation of the ultimate reality. The Dalai Lama says it is better to stay in one's own tradition and find the truth contained therein than to repeatedly convert from one culture's teaching to another in search of "the truth." I have found that the most sensible, beautiful, and meaningful expression of worship, for me, is that which is found in the eastern traditions of Christianity, and I have been in communion with that Church and consider that to be the body of which I am a member. I do not accept the Bible as a literal work of history or science but as a book containing many parables that can each teach a truly everlasting moral lesson rather than a rendering of a series of human events that can (and often do) contradict themselves morally, historically and scientifically if viewed simply as a text to be taken at "face value". I do not believe that God is a respecter of persons nor do I see why I should not embrace the words "In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, Male nor Female, Freeman nor slave" fully and therefore be willing to apply those words to my own particular sexual orientation as well as general human relations. I believe that Jesus' Sacrifice was sufficient to fulfill the law, and that "all things are lawful, though not all are profitable," and that "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," and that there is not an arbitrary deadline for salvation that is tied to one's moment of physical death, nor am I willing to accept that everyone from the resurrection of Christ until sundry colonial forces were able to deliver the bible to them in their own tongue have all been condemned to everlasting fire, and likewise that even those of us who have heard the Gospel but have been unable to understand or integrate this or that part of its message into our lives will be condemned for being subject to the circumstances of our lives—that God himself granted each of us as a part of "His plan for our lives."

That is my confession of faith at this time.

I suspect objections based upon dualistic and/or legalistic arguments that worry about what happens when there is no law. How can there be morality without a written spiritual legal code? I respond with the words of Saint Augustine—"Love, and do what thou will."

I also await objections in the form of scripture quotes that contradict those I have listed above. I can presently think of several Examples: MT 5:17-19, LK 16:17. A discussion limited to this approach to religion has led to the proliferation of 1000 schisms, churches and cults. This is not a mathematical experiment in which scripture 1+ and scripture 1- negate each other. It is not an exercise in which two wizards hurl magical spells at one another until one succumbs to the sheer volume of spells the winning wizard has up his sleeve. 1+ added to 1- in this situation equals nothing more than 2 out of context scriptural snippets. I am looking for a cohesive overall spiritual philosophy that compliments the spirit of the words and actions of Jesus Christ and is able to reconcile the style, words and actions of the old testament God with those of the God of the new testament in a way that does not leave a million unanswered questions. That does not leave us all in perpetual bondage to the fear of fire and brimstone if we simply happen to not be clever enough, or have enough ascetic self control, to pass the ultimate multiple choice exam before we breathe our last.

I suspect objections based upon my acceptance of the dominant western cultural understanding of God as personified in Jesus Christ—this is my tradition and I have experienced God in this capacity many time since my childhood and feel no compulsion to abandon this model simply because others have misused it. I do not make any assumptions concerning other traditions because I accept the words “the Holy Spirit blows where she wants to” and to confine God to any earthly organization is to tread quite close to—if not enter into—the realm of blasphemy itself.

And not to destroy anyone’s faith in God, but, to demonstrate that there is an argument for the Bible as allegorical and not a historical or scientific record, here are a few of the biblical inconsistencies and contradictions that personally came to mind whilst writing this piece:

Who is the father of Joseph?

MAT 1:16: And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

LUK 3:23: And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age,

being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli.

Which first--beasts or man?

GEN 1:25: And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

GEN 2:18: And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

The number of beasts in the ark...

GEN 7:2: Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female.

GEN 7:8: Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth,

GEN 7:9: There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

“Flying things”—neither birds nor insects have four feet... right?

LEV 11:21: Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth;

LEV 11:22: Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind.

LEV 11:23: But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you.

The order of Creation...

The first order (Genesis 1), the Priestly tradition, goes:

Day 1: Sky, Earth, light (Light from where? See Day 4)

Day 2: Water, both in ocean basins and above the sky (Above?)

Day 3: Plants (Again, Day 4)

Day 4: Sun, Moon, stars (as calendrical and navigational aids—how were there “days” before the Sun was created?)

Day 5: Sea monsters (whales), fish, birds, land animals, creepy-crawlies (reptiles, insects, etc.)

Day 6: Humans (Assumably both sexes at the same time?)

Day 7: Nothing (The Gods took the first day off before anyone ever did...)

“The Gods,” you ask? The Deity is referred to as “Elohim,” which is a plural, thus the literal translation: “the Gods.” In this tale, the Gods seem satisfied with what they have done, saying after each step that “it was good.”

The second order (Genesis 2), the Yahwist tradition, goes:

1: Earth and heavens (misty)

2: Adam, the first man (on a desolate Earth)

3: Plants

4: Animals

5: Eve, the first woman (from Adam’s rib)

Jesus’ last words...

MAT 27:46,50: And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?” that is to say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” ...Jesus, when he cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

LUK 23:46: And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, “Father, unto thy hands I commend my spirit:” and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

JOH 19:30: When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished:” and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Judas died how?

MAT 27:5: And he cast down the pieces of silver into the temple and departed, and went out and hanged himself.

ACT 1:18: And falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all

of his bowels gushed out.

Whom did they see at the tomb?

MAT 28:2: And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

MAT 28:3: His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

MAT 28:4: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

MAT 28:5: And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

MAR 16:5: And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

LUK 24:4: And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

JOH 20:12: And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

...And a few more for the road:

MAT 2:13-16: Following the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt, (where they stay until after Herod's death) in order to avoid the murder of their firstborn by Herod. Herod slaughters all male infants two years old and under. (Note: John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, though under two is somehow spared without fleeing to Egypt.)

LUK 2:22-40: Following the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary remain in the area of Jerusalem for the Presentation (about forty days) and then return to Nazareth without ever going to Egypt. There is no slaughter of the infants.

MAT 4:1-11, MAR 1:12-13: Immediately following his Baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness resisting temptation by the Devil.

JOH 2:1-11: Three days after the Baptism, Jesus was at the wedding in Cana.

MAT 7:21: Not everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be

saved.

ACT 2:21, RO 10:13: Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

ACT 2:39: Those God calls to himself will be saved.

MAT 28:6-8: The women ran from the tomb “with great joy.”

JOH 20:1-2: Mary told Peter and the other disciple that the body had been stolen.

MAT 27:3-7: The chief priests bought the field.

ACT 1:16-19: Judas bought the field.

MAT 27:5: Judas threw down the pieces of silver, then departed.

ACT 1:18: He used the coins to buy the field.

MAT 27:5: Judas hanged himself.

ACT 1:18: He fell headlong, burst open, and his bowels gushed out.

MAT 28:1-2: The stone was still in place when they arrived. It was rolled away later.

MAR 16:4, LOK 24:2, JOH 20:1: The stone had already been rolled (or taken) away.

MAT 28:9: On his first appearance to them, Jesus lets Mary Magdalene and the other Mary hold him by his feet.

JOH 20:17: On his first appearance to Mary, Jesus forbids her to touch him since he has not yet ascended to the Father.

White Christmas Eve

Don Phillips

Within the gabled bedroom
a woolen blanket tent
drooped from the blinded window
to the distant reaches of the bed.

Without, the strong young night,
clutching his wriggling white load
lost, at the start, only those flakes
which, jostling, tumbled recklessly
down by the parcel plunderers
snuggling into flannelled toyhood sleep.

Then from that sky exploded
a maze of discs of white:
hugged pillows and squinting curtains
glowed from the window's vision
for one eternity.

On Trying

KH Solomon

—*I'll try to be there.*

—*What does try mean?*

1

eyes forward
focused but
fixed on nothing

diaphragm descends
her lungs fill
at measured pace
chest expands
—half-breath

in subtle shift
weight pools above
her right foot
which then
rocks forward
below a bending knee
and her left foot
lifts

slowly moves ahead
touches down—
the knee above it
bends
as hips
square to front
follow—
her body
glides above them
weight transfers
foot plants
—grounded
—half-step

meanwhile
her right wrist
and elbow flex
in deference
to their hand
as it gathers
before her chest
moves gently
in time
and balance
with her foot
down
out
rises slightly
—finished
—half-push

as
diaphragm relaxes
chest contracts
her lungs expel
at measured pace
—half-breath

fixed on nothing
but focused
eyes forward

2

directed
her consciousness
performs these motions
in repetition
till the pattern
is familiar
—*wei*
—half-learned

as slowly
 as her half-step
as gently
 as her half-push
repetition becomes
ritual—
freed
consciousness
and motions
flow
like rising tide

fills the Bay
—*wei wu wei*
—half-learned

3

some words
are not
what they seem

some things
are really
actions in disguise—
where does *fist* go
when you open
your hand?

some actions
are really
things in disguise—
where does *try* go
when *wei* becomes
wei wu wei?

Worshipping

J. J. Steinfeld

On a dark, overly overcast
afternoon, full of residual gloom
and sinister headlines
I wonder if more people
in the course of history
from first baffling dawn
to this current afternoon
have worshipped
the moon or the sun
I mean deeply worshipped
fearing for their lives
and hereafters
and awkwardly, their earthly properties,
hearing the voice
of the moon or the sun
telling them the world
is good and abundant
or the world
is sad and deficient
or not even understanding
the words of the moon
or the sun, which more
likely would be the case

the way people listen
when worshipping
the moon or the sun.

Sisyphus Requests His Rock Returned

J.J. Steinfeld

I purchased Sisyphus's rock for what's left of my devotion
rolled it home through the encumbered traffic and gawkers
strained my shoulder and pulled a muscle
had a crisis of faith and a faithful crisis
all in all, the soul's exertion touching the eternal
not that the eternal weighs heavily on my thoughts
I almost understood what it felt like to displease
the creator of this cobbled together bewilderment
on my tongue I received the smallest taste of the possibility
of nothingness embraced and significance discarded.

Suddenly I hear a clapping of hands
not applause but a request
and I sing a half-hearted song
as if my life depended on imperfection:

I give up

I gave up

*I start to imagine beginning another time
and yet another time*

I hide

I hid

*I start to imagine reappearing another time
and yet another time...*

Sisyphus requests his rock returned
then makes a fist-clenched demand.
As for me, I'm getting used to the pushing
and what passes as singing.

Phenomenology of Maya

Manas Roy

ABSTRACT

'*Maya*' is a creative power until one realizes the truth of the sole reality of Brahman. One of the analogies favored by the Advaitin to clarify this is that of the magician and his trick; and here already a transition is made into an epistemological. When a magician makes one thing appear as something else or when he seemingly produces something from nothing, we are deluded by it; we mistake appearance for reality— but not the magician. For us the illusion is caused by the power of the magician and by our ignorance; for the magician there is no illusion at all. This article has tried to explore the '*phenomenology of maya*' in a simpler way so that one may easily understand the game of maya (*Lila*) as not magic.

INTRODUCTION:

Phenomenology, beginning with Edmund Husserl, urges that the world

of immediate or “lived” experience takes precedence over the objectified and abstract world of the “natural attitude” of natural science. Science as such, thus, is secondary to the world of concrete, lived experience. Phenomenology, therefore, engages in a process known as “bracketing” in which the “natural attitude” is placed aside such that the researcher may begin with “the things themselves,” as Husserl said — or, in other words, in the phenomena as they show themselves in experience. In Heidegger’s terminology, phenomenology involves letting things “show themselves from themselves in the very way in which they show themselves from themselves.” By definition, phenomenology never begins with a theory, but, instead, always begins anew with the phenomena under consideration. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s famous description of phenomenology is quite instructive; as he writes, the phenomenologist returns “to the world which precedes (scientific description), (the world) of which science always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific characterization is an abstract and derivative sign language, as is geography in relation to the countryside.” In Husserlian phenomenology, consciousness is understood as fundamentally intentional. In this sense, Husserl is, in part, indebted to Franz Brentano’s “Act psychology,” which held that all mental acts are characterized by “intentionality.” Consciousness as an act, that is, is always positing a world; in other words, it is always “of” or “about” something. Following Brentano, Husserl holds that consciousness is never directed toward itself, but, rather, is always directed toward phenomena in the world. It follows, therefore, that any abstraction is ultimately based on phenomena in the world, and, thus, are secondary to the primary lived experience of phenomena as they “show themselves.” Husserl brings to this understanding something unique, his phenomenological method, which is characterized by Husserl’s “epoché.” As mentioned previously, “epoché” is a “bracketing” of the “natural attitude” so that one can attend to a phenomenon as it shows itself. Once the “natural attitude” is “bracketed,” one can then attend to what, according to Husserl, are the two poles of experience, noema and noesis. Noesis is the act of perceiving, while noema is that which is perceived. Through this method, for

Husserl, one can perform an “eidetic reduction.” Noema can be reduced to their essential form or “essence” as “maya”.

ROLE OF RELIGION:

‘Religion’ is a human mean toward ultimate transformation. And ‘Phenomenology of Religion’ is a kind sympathetic study of religious phenomena, implying that one should not pass judgement only on the truth of a particular set of beliefs but also to do justice with all set of beliefs. It describes religious phenomena in terms consistent with the orientation of the worshippers, a method consistent with current hermeneutical trends in humanities. It looks at religion as being made up of different components within religions and looking at these across traditions that an understanding of them can be gained. Scientists are always seeking to find ways to tame chaotic reality and make it as simple terms and theories. The phenomenological approach towards the study of religion attempts to escape from this dilemma by not pinning religion down to a certain function or essence, but to look at religion as it appears to the mankind. The philosophical examination of religion ranges over a number of topics. Among these are questions of the truth or falsity of claims regarding the existence and nature of God, the existence and nature of other figures, events, and places which are to be found in different religious traditions and issues of the meaning and consistency of religious doctrines such as the apparent conflict between the goodness of God and the existence of evil. There is also the issue of the role and possible limits of reason in answering these questions and the corresponding role of faith. Some philosophers like Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) see religion as grounded on both reason and faith, whereas Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) holds that faith has the primary role. All of these topics involve a conception of religion as being or not being a part of the reality of what is. As such these questions belong to the branch of philosophy known as metaphysics or, more specifically, to the metaphysics of religion. “If we are to give an account of

the grandiose nature of religion, we must bear in mind what it undertakes to do for human beings. It gives them information about the origin and coming into existence of the universe, it assures them of its protection and of ultimate happiness in the ups and downs of life, and it directs their thoughts and actions by precepts which it lays down with its whole authority. Thus it fulfills three functions. With the first of them it satisfies the human thirst for knowledge; it does the same thing that science attempts to do with its means, and at that point enters into rivalry with it. It is to its second function that it no doubt owes the greatest part of its influence. Science can be no match for it when it soothes the fear that men feel of the dangers and vicissitudes of life, when it assures them of a happy ending and offers them comfort in unhappiness. It is true that science can teach us how to avoid certain dangers and that there are some sufferings which it can successfully combat; it would be most unjust to deny that it is a powerful helper to men; but there are many situations in which it must leave a man to his suffering and can only advise him to submit to it. In its third function, in which it issues precepts and lays down prohibitions and restrictions, religion is furthest away from science. For science is content to investigate and to establish facts, though it is true that from its applications rules and advice are derived on the conduct of life. In some circumstances these are the same as those offered by religion, but when this is so the reasons for them are different". The primary impersonal manifestation of Spirit to the interested devotee is exactly in the form of such an expanding sphere of (non-physical) light, with the point at the center of that (i.e., at the center of one's own) causal-level sphere of consciousness being the gateway between manifestation and unmanifested Spirit. Thus, corroborative mystical experiences such as the following should in no way be surprising or taken as paradoxical, since they are simply clear enunciations of the structural principles underlying the highest levels of human consciousness. Indeed, such concise descriptions only lose their original and obviously-intended meanings by being "interpreted" according to principles of general semantics or phenomenology—which, in their limited perspectives, can see in the point/infinity pairing only irreconcilable conceptual opposites as the

imagined basis of duality or maya, never literal causal structure.

ORIGIN OF MAYA:

Maya originates in human conceptualizations, where we abstract ‘distinct’ and ‘separate’ objects or measures from our ‘all-at-once’ sensory experience or gestalt, relating them to previously-formed memory-classes: ‘a chair,’ ‘a cloud,’ ‘inside,’ ‘outside,’ etc. That is, ‘duality’ or Maya refers only to the way in which the human ‘naming’ or conceptualizing of sensory experiences—this being inherently based in memory—‘creates’ seemingly-distinct objects from the ‘unfragmented’ sensory gestalt. Thus, all ‘things’ are ‘created’ by the words or concepts or names that we use to represent them, in speech and language. The transcendence of duality is thus attained to when we stop naming or conceptualizing our experiences—when we ‘release our finite concepts into Infinity.’ Conversely, scriptural paradoxes arise simply from the inherent inability of dualistic concepts to describe seamless reality.” Not surprisingly, Einstein’s special theory of relativity discloses some of the most precise instances of this reflection of the structures of consciousness in the behavior of physical-level matter, with higher velocities of matter mirroring the behaviors of higher states of consciousness. Thus, in both relativity and in human consciousness we find a subjective time dilation, where a great many subjective events can be experienced during a single objective period of time. Further, the measured mass of any object increases at higher relative velocities (becoming infinite at the velocity of light), just as we encompass a greater region of space in higher states of consciousness—so that our conscious “mass” increases in those higher states, becoming infinite in omnipresence, with our consciousness expanded to infinity. We likewise find a relativistic “space contraction” where, according to special relativity, an observer identified with an expanding sphere of physical light would experience a point (containing the entire universe) at the center of a sphere of light expanding to fill the universe.

MAYA IN KATHAMRITA:

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Ishwar' is present both in the form of 'Saakar' & 'Nirakar'; and this is 'Maya'. It is the self-realization of the 'Truth' that the presence of an idol does never implies the essence of its (Idol's) absence. It is the 'Absolute Truth'; and to realize that truth, man has to surrender all his/her ego (I) to 'Ishwar' (MAA – The Absolute Truth). Whenever the "I", "me," or "mine" is present, there Maya is also present. Maya is all experience that is constituted by, and follows from, the distinction between subject and object, between self and non-self. Whenever we transform the impersonal into the personal, that is, when we make Brahman something or someone who cares, we bring about an association of the impersonal with maya. Maya is the ontic-noetic state wherein limitations (upadhis) are imposed upon Reality. All attachments, aversions, fears, dreams, and semi dreams are touched with Maya. All memories, cognitions, percepts, and logics are grounded in maya. Maya is whenever we fail to realize the oneness of the Real. And maya is beginning less (anadi), for time arises only within it; it is unthinkable (acintya) for all thought is subject to it; it is indescribable (anirvacaniya), for all language results from it. The level of Appearance is thus maya.

MAYA IN ADVAITA VEDANTA:

Advaita Vedanta explicates the notion of maya from two perspectives; the metaphysical and the epistemological. Before we proceed with the explication, however, it is necessary that we call attention to the peculiar manner in which Advaitins often treat problems at once in metaphysical and epistemological terms and use these perspectives as correctives to each other. Not infrequently (and, according to its detractors, whenever the going gets rough), the Advaitin will raise a problem such as "creation" in essentially metaphysical terms and then, after proposing an answer to it which harmonizes with "scripture" (sruti), go on to treat it in epistemological terms—in terms essentially of a phenomenology of noetic-consciousness and

of multi-level epistemic standpoints. This turning to the epistemological as a “corrective” to the metaphysical is not, however, as far as the Advaitin is concerned, to turn “positivistic”; rather the turning is intended to bring one to a fuller awareness and understanding of reality itself. In other words, the epistemological analysis does not seek to destroy the metaphysical claim, but to support and complement it. And the primary claim that all Advaitic thought seeks to support is that of the sole reality of Brahman. This objective leads the Advaitin to analyze experience in terms of the various levels of being. From the standpoint of Brahman-experience itself, there is no question about, or problem of, creation, for in this experience or state of being there is no distinction between creator and created: creation is a question and problem only from the standpoint of rational-empirical consciousness, from the standpoint of Appearance within which philosophizing takes place. The shifting from one level to another in the treatment of a problem is characteristic of Advaitic Vedanta, and it fulfills the purpose of leading the mind from one level of experience (the Apparent) to another (the Real). In short, the primary intent of the Advaitic analysis of the relation that obtains between Brahman and the world is to lead the mind beyond the level of asking the question to the level of seeing the answer. Following the ancient Vedic usage of *maya* as a mysterious, deceptive power of the gods, the Advaitin, metaphysically conceives of *maya* as that power (*sakti*) of Brahman by which the world of multiplicity comes into existence. *Maya* is a creative power until one realizes the truth of the sole reality of Brahman. One of the analogies favored by the Advaitin to clarify this is that of the magician and his trick; and here already a transition is made into an epistemological. When a magician makes one thing appear as something else or when he seemingly produces something from nothing, we are deluded by it; we mistake appearance for reality—but not the magician. For us the illusion is caused by the power of the magician and by our ignorance; for the magician there is no illusion at all. And just as the magician creates illusions that are not binding upon him and that last as long as the experiencer is in ignorance, so Brahman conjures up a world show of phenomena that disappears upon the attainment of knowledge (*jñāna*,

vidya). Metaphysically, maya is that mysterious power of Brahman that deludes us into taking the empirical world as reality. Epistemologically, maya is ignorance (avidya). It has the power of concealing reality (avarana-sakti) and also of misrepresenting or distorting reality (viksepa-sakti). Not only do we fail to perceive Brahman, but we also substitute something else in its place, viz., the phenomenal world. Maya is thus not merely a negative designation, a privation of vision; it is positive so far as it produces an illusion (bhava rupam ajnanam). For Advaita Vedanta, then the phenomenal world is maya and it is produced by maya. But it is not on that account merely a figment of one's imagination. With the possible exception of Prakasananda, Advaitic thinkers hold that a subjective idealism is not the proper philosophical expression or consequence of a doctrine of maya. So far as a separate subject exists, so does the object that is experienced by it. Duality is transcended only in an experience that is different in kind from what takes place in the subject/object situation. Samkara writes:

There could be no non-existence (of external entities)
because external entities are actually perceived...

An external entity is invariably perceived in every cognition
such as pillar, wall, a pot or a piece of cloth. It can never be
that what is actually perceived is non-existent.

No one, in other words, perceives merely his own perception: existence must be attributed to external objects because they are cognized as such. The world, then, “appears to be real as long as the non-dual Brahman, which is the basis of all, is not known.” What is meant then by calling the world an illusion and at the same time ascribing existence to it? The answer is that for Advaita Vedanta the term “real” means that which is permanent, eternal, infinite, that which is trikalabadyam, never sublated at any time by another experience—and Brahman alone fits this meaning. The world then is not real, but it is not wholly unreal. The unreal or non-being, as we have seen, is

that which never appears as an objective datum of experience because of its self-contradictoriness.

MAYA IN BHAGAVAD-GITA:

In the words of the Bhagavad-Gita: “. . . of the non-real there is no coming to be; of the real there is no ceasing to be.” The world that is distinguished from true reality (*sat*) and from complete non-reality (*asat*) has then an apparent or practical reality, which is called *vyavaharika*. *Vyavaharika* is the level of *maya* that denotes the totality of errors caused by *avidya*. It is *sadasadvilaksana*, other than the real or the unreal; or *anirvacaniya*, indescribable in terms of being and non-being. Both in the writings of Samkara and in those of post-Advaitins, the terms “*maya*” and “*avidya*” come to be used interchangeably, with *avidya* actually taking precedence over *māyā* in the explanation of bondage and freedom. When asked, “What is the cause of our bondage, of our not realizing Brahman?” the answer most frequently given is *avidya*, ignorance. And in describing the process of *avidya*, Samkara introduces one of his most significant and interesting notions, that of *adhyasa* (also later termed *adhyaropa*), which means “superimposition.” In the Introduction to his commentary on the Brahma-sutras, Samkara defines superimposition as the “apparent presentation (*avabhāsa*) [to consciousness] by way of remembrance (*smrtirupah*) of something previously perceived (*purvadrsta*) in something else (*paratra*).” “It is,” he goes on to say, “the unreal assumption about the attributes of one thing as being the attributes of some other thing.” And again, *adhyasa* “is the notion of that in something which is not-that: just as it is, for example, when a person superimposes on his self attributes external to his own self. . . .” Superimposition takes place, then, when the qualities of one thing not immediately present to consciousness are, through memory, given to, or projected upon, another thing that is present to consciousness and are identified with it. In the stock example of the rope and the snake, the rope (the thing immediately present to consciousness) is taken as a snake

through the erroneous attribution of qualities remembered from previous perceptions (of snakes). The judgment that expresses this illusion i.e., the judgment, “this is a snake,” is the result of a positive identification between what is remembered and what is perceived. The main or primary application of *adhyāsa* is made with respect to the self. It is the superimposition on the Self (Atman, Brahman) of what does not properly belong to the Self (finitude, change) and the superimposition on the non-self of what does properly belong to the Self (infinite, eternity) that constitute *avidya*. “It is by adopting the reciprocal superimposition of the self and the non-self,” writes Samkara, that all world conduct and Vedic (ritualistic) actions . . . are promoted.” Vidyaranya in his *Pancadasi* asks: “What is the obstruction that prevents the recognition of the self?” And answers: “It is the superimposition of what does not really exist and is not self-evident on the Self . . .” And: “Those who do not see clearly attribute causation to Brahman, and assign the characteristics of Brahman, such as existence, to Ishvara, the creator of the universe.” With a simple metaphor Sri Ramakrishna says, “sky is blue, sea-water is also blue; but when we enter/sink into the sea, we donot find any colour- why? He answers it as, it is due to our ignorance that lies in our consciousness”; and this is ‘*Maya*’.

When transcendental Spirit manifests itself, it does so in stages or levels—the Great Hierarchy of Being. But Absolute Spirit or reality is not hierarchical. It is not qualifiable at all in mental terms (lower-holon terms)—it is *shunyata*, or *nirguna*, or *apophatic*—unqualifiable, without a trace of specific and limiting characteristics at all. But it manifests itself in steps, in layers, dimensions, sheaths, levels, or grades—whatever term one prefers—and that is *holarchy*. The whole point is that these are levels of the manifest world, of *maya*. When *maya* is not recognized as the play of the Divine, then it is nothing but illusion. Hierarchy is illusion. There are levels of illusion, not levels of reality. But according to the traditions, it is exactly (and only) by understanding the hierarchical nature of *samsara* that we can in fact climb out of it, a ladder discarded only after having served its extraordinary purpose. So “soul” is both the highest level of individual growth we can achieve, and

also the final barrier, the final knot, to complete enlightenment or supreme identity, simply because as transcendental witness it stands back from everything it witnesses. Once we push through the witness position, then the soul or witness itself dissolves and there is only the play of nondual awareness, awareness that does not look at objects but is completely one with all objects (Zen says “it is like tasting the sky”). The gap between subject and object collapses, the soul is transcended or dissolved and pure spiritual or nondual awareness—which is very simple, very obvious, very clear—arises. You realize that your intrinsic being is vast and open, empty and clear, and everything arising anywhere is arising within you, as intrinsic spirit, spontaneously. Sri Ramakrishna’s Maya:

Sri Ramakrishna in ‘Kathamrita’ usually explains our external world and all worldly creation, creatures as illusions (Maya); and we, the common people think those as real. He says, it happens due to our ignorance about the presence of the ‘Absolute Truth’ (MAA). Whenever all our ignorance about this illusory world diminishes or, ends, we find none for our survival except ‘MAA’, as he says. Ramakrishna also expresses about the Advaitic nature of ‘Brahman’. He says, ‘Brahman’ & ‘Shakti’ are unique and undivided characteristics of the Absolute Truth; and the Absolute Truth is ‘Ishwar’(MAA). Ramakrishna also says of ‘Krishna-Kali’ where Lord Krishna is Kali and at the same time Kali is Krishna. Both are Real; both are ‘presence-in-absence’ in nature; both are Truth but non-ignorance; both ‘Light is Truth’ as well as ‘dark is Truth’. Presence of one colour does never mean the absence of the other. Shyama-Shyam essence is also real. It is the ‘Presence-o-Absence’ essence of Shyama Maa; and this is ‘Maya’, as Ramakrishna says. Again Sri Ramakrishna says presence of soul (Atman) or, the determination of the presence of soul in a human body is like opening of skull of an onion. The more one open-up the skull, the more it opens and finally becomes NIL (‘I’ becomes one with ‘Brahman’). The Vaishesika’s concept of ‘Abhave’ or, ‘Non-Existence’ of a ‘jar’ in ‘clay’ means that the ‘jar’ is the ‘effect’ of ‘clay’ where ‘clay’ is the material cause. The presence of Soul in a *Life world* lies as a stream of cause-effect flux. And this cause-effect dynamism is ‘Maya’.

HUSSERL'S MAYA:

Husserl says - the presence of soul (Atman) in human body is present in the form of a 'Sedimented – History'. It is the 'Epoche of epoches', the 'History of histories'. It is the out come of 'genetic - constitution' of genes in a human body of a particular Life World. Now, to realize what actually 'Epoche' is? We have to first understand what a '*Phenomenological Reduction*' is? This may be answered as - 'Phenomenological Reduction' is a kind of analytical – synthesis of an external object upon human consciousness. The object under consideration while perceived by the subject (I), light from the said object falls on consciousness and an image upon human consciousness results. It is 'Noema', as Husserl says. Again, Human consciousness is naturally inactive & inefficient until & unless 'Mind' reflects on it (Noema). After reflection on 'Noema' by human mind, we get the second reduction of the said object as an 'Idea' or, 'Forms of Ideas'. This is 'Noesis', as Husserl says. In this stage, the active human consciousness tries to forget the root external object and make itself busy in analyzing the said 'Noesis'. Here, the total analysis of 'Noesis' becomes 'Intentional'. The more intensive-concentration 'Mind' will provide upon consciousness, the more 'Synthetic' will be the transcendence of the object under 'Epoche'. In this stage, 'Interiorisation of External Space' (object) happens. Here, the total external object becomes a kind-sensation/feeling of "space- time-causal relation"; and finally reduced to a pure, synthesized/humanized consciousness of the root object. And this is 'Epoche'. It is independent of 'Maya'.

CONCLUSION:

The modern science today says that 'there are three different entities as-Space(X), Time(Y) and Causation (Z) that determines the presence of any creatures in this Universe. The scientists assume the World and the Universe as three dimensional reality(X, Y, Z). But, the philosophers say that, there is another reality that determines our very presence in this Universe; and that

is -Absolute (A); which is a dimensionless reality. Again, modern thinkers say that, only 'Absolute' cannot determine the presence of a certain entity unless Mind (M) desires so. They say that, *Mind* is the fifth entity that determines ones presence in this very world. In this light we may draw an example from 'Upanishad' that says: - "Brahman at first was One & Unique; then it desires to be *Many*; then the world & the universe results". Another example in 'Bible' it is said that, "Adam was the first living creature of the Universe; then he desires to eat the delicious fruit – fall under the action of 'Maya' - mixes with Eve (the second living female creature sent by God) and family results". From these examples we find that, human desire is also a factor that determines his/her position in everyday life and the Absolute's desire is the *Absolute*; without his desire one cannot move anywhere. We know *Time* as a metaphysical entity. Was there a beginning of 'Time'? Could 'Time' run backwards? Is the universe *Infinite* or, does it have boundaries? In his most famous No.1 best sellers Book, "A Brief History of Time", Stephen-Hawking has tried to find out the origin of the Universe. In doing so, he had succeeded to discover a *Singularity* (A point in Space), where Space-Time (the four dimensional space whose points are Events) curvature becomes *Infinite*. In searching for the presence of Infinity, Hawking became able to discover uncountable '*Black Holes*' in the Universe and finally synthesized the presence of *Infinity as Omnipresence* like *God*. The 'uncertainty principle' had profound implications for the way in which we view the world. Even after more than fifty years they have not been fully appreciated by many philosophers, and are still the subject of much controversy. The phenomenology of this '*uncertainty principle*' is '*Maya*'. The 'uncertainty principle' signaled an end to Laplace's dream of a theory of science, a model of the universe that would be completely deterministic; one certainly cannot predict future events exactly if one cannot even measure the present state of the universe precisely! We could still imagine that there is a set of laws that determines events completely for some super-natural being, who could observe the present state of the universe without disturbing it. However, such models of the universe are not of much interest to us like ordinary mortals whose thinkings are being governed by the 'Absolute',Brah

man,”God,”Allah,”Ishwar,”Isms’, what so ever we may call them as.

“While REASON ends, REALISATION starts”

—Sri Ramakrishna

&

“REALISATION’ is a process of ‘INTERIORISATION’ of external
space-Time-Causal-Relation” —Edmund Husserl

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Reviews

Impossible Princess, Kevin Killian

(City Lights, 2009, 164pp, \$15.95)

Reviewed by Peter Dubé



Among the many virtues that lend Kevin Killian's writing its unique dazzle one can't help but take a special delight in the way in which it offers a correction to our times—an era in which, all-too-often, we don't look at things closely enough, assume too much, and tell ourselves little fibs about how much we understand. Happily, none of that happens in Killian's textual world; in his pages, characters don't so much stumble into experience as embrace it, tear it apart, and ache for more and *different kinds* of it. His body of work, which includes (and hybridizes) fiction, poetry, the memoir and the essay, is marked by a playful rigor and an openness that takes nothing at face value. It wields an uncanny ability to be penetrating and generous at once. All these are qualities that have made him—deservedly—a cult figure among discerning readers everywhere.

The stories collected in *Impossible Princess*, his third volume of short fiction, are diverse in tone, richly textured and united by shared themes and concerns. They often play self-consciously with their status as writing or flirt with their intertextual relationships to other narratives. However, their main thrust lies in tracking the trajectories of desire in a world in which it is

increasingly virtualized and *détourned* while being nonetheless omnipresent.

“Zoo Story” announces a number of these themes up front and with considerable wit. In its very first line the piece declares a relationship to classic horror cinema by stating that if the reader has ever seen the film *Cat People* he or she already knows the first half of the story before sliding into an elegant and unsettling account of sexual obsession with big cats. With a skilful touch Killian manages, in the five short pages of this tale, to pack in more atmosphere and chills than the motion picture he’s referencing.

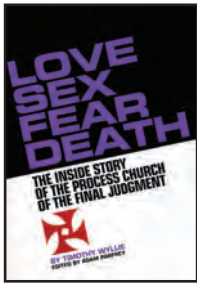
The story “Dietmar Lutz Mon Amour” anatomizes an obsessional love affair with laser-beam insight. Moreover, it infuses the account with both humanity and humor by having its characters conversationally riff about icons from film, the art world and other cultural arenas (among them Anton LaVey.) The technique takes on particular strength when it uses such references as emotional placeholders in the protagonists’ life and relationship, as in the exchange in which insecurities around body image are shared using the actor Forrest Tucker as a filter for the discussion. Rarely has the intimacy and awkwardness of a new relationship been so delicately portrayed.

A very different relationship forms the subject of “Greensleeves.” It tackles the dynamics of an s/m affair and builds up the emotional and social stakes with teeth-clenching deliberation before reaching its uncomfortable climax. The story’s manipulation of the power play between the characters is artful and one fine scene leverages a protagonist’s branding of the other’s butt on a hot stove ring against an almost equally powerful emotional cruelty to great effect. The moment is both precisely observed and given enough interpretive room to resonate.

And it would be easy to go on enumerating more remarkable instances from the seven other stories in the book. But in every case it is the author’s ability to create a deft tug-of-war between ambiguity and psychological precision, between the use layers of reference and quotation to imply the churning mass of a culture and the limning of a character who is inescapably individual, and his ability to be melancholy, terrifying and hilarious all at once that makes the stories so memorable and so vital. *Impossible Princess* is

filled with such strengths; it provides new delights for Killian’s fans, and an invaluable opportunity for readers who haven’t yet discovered his work to do so.

Love, Sex, Fear, Death: The Inside Story of The Process Church of the Final Judgment, Timothy Wyllie and edited by Adam Parfrey
(Feral House, 2009, 304pp, \$24.95)



Though now receding into the hazy memory of the twentieth century cultural landscape, The Process Church of the Final Judgment was one of the most fascinating (and notorious) new religious movements to come out of the 1960s. Often characterized as part of the darker side of the hippy era, little inside information has been available. That is, until Feral House’s new publication *Love, Sex, Fear, Death*. At its height, hundreds of devotees, conspicuous in their black cloaks and swastika-like silver mandalas, swept the streets of London, New York, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, and Toronto, selling magazines and books with titles like “Fear” and “Humanity is the Devil.”

Celebrities like Marianne Faithful, James Coburn, and Mick Jagger participated in Process publications, and Funkadelic, in its *Maggot Brain* album, reprinted Process’ “Fear Issue.” Process’ “Death Issue” interviewed the freshly-imprisoned Charles Manson leading conspiracy theorists such as Ed Sanders (*The Family*) and Maury Terry (*The Ultimate Evil*) to link The Process Church to the notorious murder sprees conducted in Manson’s name. The Church’s theology and publications influenced modern experimental music groups such as Skinny Puppy and Psychick TV/Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth.

Love, Sex, Fear, Death tells the previously untold secret inside story of The Process Church, which later became into Foundation Faith of the Millennium, and most recently as the Utah-based animal sanctuary, Best

Friends now featured in the reality TV show *Dogtown*.

The book was originally intended to be a collection of Process magazines collected and edited by Adam Parfrey and Genesis P-Orridge. As they began talking with former Process members the monograph project quickly became eclipsed by the fascinating inside story of the Church. The book includes a lengthy text by Timothy Wyllie, one of the earliest members of the Process and, later, Foundation Faith organizations; interviews with other former members; reproductions of Process magazines (many in color); never-before-seen photographs; and fascinating transcripts from holy books and legal actions. In addition to the Process materials, the book also includes a fascinating essay by Genesis P-Orridge and an introduction by Adam Parfrey.

I have long been intrigued by the imagery and mystery of the Process Church—their members’ appearance and their media aesthetic an irresistible contrast to the free-form psychedelia and proto-New Ageyness of the hippy era. This book is nothing less than a quantum leap in the availability of information on the Process Church. Wyllie, Parfrey and the folks at Feral House have produced a significant addition to the textual archive of 20th cult (and occult) history.

A Report from Winter, Wayne Courtois

(Lethe Press, 2009, 280pp, \$15.00)



Set in January 1998, when Maine is recovering from one of the worst ice storms in history. The author returns home to Portland into this unforgiving environment after a ten-year absence. His mother, Jennie, is dying of cancer and has lost the ability to communicate. Needing support, Wayne makes an SOS call to Ralph, his longtime partner. Ralph boards a plane from Kansas City for his first exposure to a Maine winter, and to Wayne’s family as well, including a feisty aunt and an emotionally distant brother.

In this moving memoir, the author's return home to be with his dying mother provokes a thoughtful reflection on his childhood. His memories contrast his dysfunctional family with the nurturing relationship with his partner Ralph. Mr. Courtois's writing is well crafted without being overly sentimental as he renders, often difficult, sketches of personal history.

A Report from Winter explores the universal questions of family at a critical nexus of past, present, and... future. As he watches his mother's life come to a close, Courtois is drawn back to memories of his childhood against a contemporary backdrop of a once familiar city and family. When Ralph arrives from Kansas City, he provides a stabilizing counterpoint to the destabilizing emotions of painful transition and the scars of memories.

The Heretic's Guide to Thelema, Gerald del Campo

(Megalithica Books, 2008, 444pp, \$22.99)



The Heretic's Guide combines two of del Campo's earlier books with a previously unpublished third, *Ethics of Thelema*. In *New Aeon Magick: Thelema Without Tears* del Campo presents an everypersons' introduction to the practice and philosophy of Thelema. Originally written as a text that he hoped one day would provide his children an explanation/introduction to their father's practice, the work was first published in 1994. The book is intended as a first exposure to Thelemic philosophy.

The second book included is *New Aeon English Qabalah Revealed*. This work on NAEQ was the real reason I was excited to see this anthology released. I had read the fascinating and (still) cutting edge text when Luxor released the first addition in 2001. The work outlines of a plausible Qabalistic (gematric) system drawn from and illuminating Thelema's core text Liber AL vel Legis. Del Campo's work on NAEQ should be in every Thelemite's library whether one agrees with his conclusions or not. They are that important.

The last piece, newly minted, is the author's thoughts and reflections on how his own ethics developed out of his practice and understanding of the philosophical groundings of Thelema. As the title implies, del Campo has been a controversial figure, especially following his departure from the "official" OTO. Ethics begins not as an answer to his critics but as a counterpoint presenting an alternative view. Pulling together his diverse ethical writings that originally appeared in the publication of The Order of the Thelemic Knights, the collection presents the author's thoughts on a diverse range of topics framing an ethics developed out of his personal experience with Thelema.

Initiation in the Aeon of the Child: The Inward Journey, J. Daniel Gunther (Ibis, 2009, 223pp, hardcover, \$40.00)



J. Daniel Gunther has spent more than thirty years in the A.:A.: Aleister Crowley's teaching order. This work is an interesting contrast to del Campo's reviewed above. Gunther presents a detailed introduction to Thelemic philosophy explicating its esoteric underpinnings. *Initiation* sits much more squarely in the tradition of occult treatises—all be it one written as an concise introductory text and not inscrutable grimoire. Drawing from Thelemic, Crowleyan and other sources, such as Jung and Masonry, Gunther presents a scholarly and insightful understanding of the Aeon inaugurated by Liber AL vel Legis. This is orthodox Thelema (with the capital T). And if anyone were to question it, the reader may turn to the backcover where a lengthy blurb from Hymaneus Beta (current Frater Superior of the OTO) gives the official stamp of approval on Gunther's work. I enjoyed both this work and the above reviewed one by del Campo and would not make a judgement call between their approaches or recommend one over the other. The esotericism with which *Initiation* is framed may turn off some, while being pure gold to others.

One thing is certain, Gunther knows his subject. His diverse references, sometimes arcane or technical, elucidate his subject, rather than obscuring it—a common pitfall that others in the field often fall victim to.

Gunther and del Campo's books are simultaneously aimed at the same audience and dramatically different camps. Perhaps the best recommendation is to read both works and land somewhere in between.

Zen Wrapped in Karma Dipped in Chocolate, Brad Warner

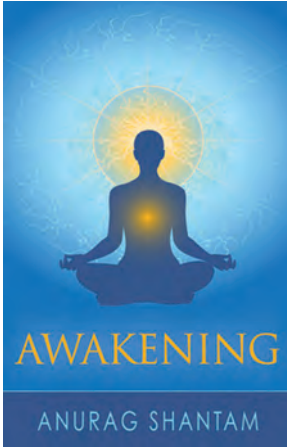
(New World Library, 2009, 225pp, \$14.95)



I have enjoyed Brad Warner work since first reviewing *Hardcore Zen* for this journal. His latest book is no exception. In *Zen Wrapped* (book excerpt elsewhere in this issue) Warner continues to present his own thoughtful and personal experience with Zen Buddhism.

While living in Japan in the late nineties, Warner was ordained a Buddhist monk by iconoclastic Zen teacher Gudo Wafu Nsihijima. In 2004, he returned to America and began teaching Buddhism. In this new book, he uses his personal suffering during a year in which his mother and grandmother died, he lost his dream job, and his marriage dissolved, to dismantle the myth of the spiritual master, while demonstrating how the philosophy and practice of Zen provides a rational and realistic way to deal with the challenges and struggles of life.

This work is much more of a personal memoir than Warner's two earlier titles. He spends much of the work discussing a particularly painful year in his life sprinkled with Zen anecdotes and references. This actually works well in presenting how Zen practice can intermingle and interpret life experience. As with his other books, Warner continues to do this with wit and no small amount of well placed self-deprecation.



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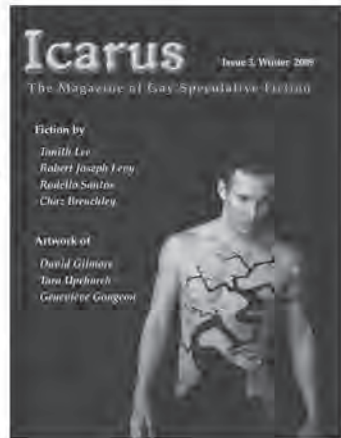


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Contributors

In addition to having published several novels, including *A Soul To Take*, **C.N. Bean** has published short stories, poetry and screenplays. His feature-film screenplay, *Santo De Cristos*, was a recent semifinalist in the prestigious Blue Cat Screenplay Competition and his screenplay, *The Beginning Of The End*, received an honorable mention at the 2009 Canada International Film Festival. He currently serves on the English faculty of Virginia Tech.

C.S. Fuqua's published books include *Big Daddy's Gadgets*, *The Swing: Poems of Fatherhood* (EPIC selection for Best Poetry Collection 2008), *Divorced Dads: Real Stories of Facing the Challenge*, *Notes to My Becca: A Father's Thoughts on Welcoming His Long-Awaited Child*, *Music Fell on Alabama*, and *Deadlines*, a four-novel audio series. His work has appeared in publications such as *Gothic.Net*, *Brutarian*, *Space And Time*, *Dark Regions*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Main Street Rag*, *Pearl*, *Cemetery Dance*, *Bogg*, *Year's Best Horror Stories Xix, Xx and Xxi*, *Amelia*, *Slipstream*, *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, *The Writer* and *Honolulu Magazine*.

Joseph M. Gant is a Scientific Glassblower by trade but a writer by passion. His poetry has appeared in *Mandala Magazine*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *The Stray Branch*, *Concise Delight*, and *Dark Gothic* among numerous e-zines. A long time student of traditional Tibetan culture and religion, he holds no degrees higher than a steady 98.6. He lives in the Philadelphia area with his family.

Mary Lane Potter (Ph.D., M.F.A.) is the author of *Strangers and Sojourners: Stories from the Lowcountry* and the novel *A Woman of Salt* (a selection in Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Program). Her nonfiction works include books and essays on John Calvin, liberation theology, and feminist theology. She has enjoyed residencies at MacDowell, Hedgebrook, and Caldera and in 2003 received a Washington State Arts Commission Artist Trust Fellowship. She has long been fascinated with concrete poetry, or what Guillaume Apollinaire calls calligrammes, poems in which the typographical arrangement of the words on the page conveys meaning. “Wager” is her first concrete story

George Moore’s poetry has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry*, *North American Review*, *Orion*, *Colorado Review*, *Nimrod*, *Meridian*, *Chelsea*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Chariton Review*, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize four times. He has also been a finalist for The National Poetry Series, The Brittingham Poetry Award, and the Anhinga Poetry Prize. His third collection is *Headhunting* (Edwin Mellen, 2002) a collection exploring the ritual practices of love and possession in certain ancient cultures. Moore also has two recent e-Books as well, *All Night Card Game in the Back Room of Time* (Pulpbits, 2007) and a CD, *Tree in the Wall*, (CDchapbooks.com, 2006).

Don Phillips was graduated from McMaster University with an MA in English in the late sixties. He worked variously in construction, journalism and for much of the past four decades in teaching. Most of the teaching was in Ontario high schools but he also taught adults at Lambton College and for one year at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Manas Roy is an administrative staff of Assam University, India. After Post-Graduation in ‘*Philosophy & Religion*’, he cleared the *National Eligibility Test* (N.E.T. for Lectureship) examination (December, 2003) in the subject(s)—‘*Buddhist, Jaina, Gandhian & Peace Studies*’ and was awarded by the *University*

Grants Commission, India. He has been engaged with a research work on the topic entitled 'Metaphysics of Presence' since 2004 and the present work is an outcome of that experience. His research interests include Metaphysics, Existential-Continental Phenomenology, Narrative Approaches to Religious Phenomenology and Peace Studies. Theoretical orientation in Phenomenology and Phenological interpretations with evaluative Anthropological transcendences. His four research papers have already been published in International Journals and had received a good repute. The most recent publication is on the topic—"Derrida's Philosophical Deconstruction" in *Transcendent Philosophy Journal* (Volume 9. December 2008, pp. 237-246). He also has a keen interest in Peace research. The last work on "Nonviolence & Peace" was internationally published in *The Gandhi Way Journal* (Issue 97); and had received a good audience from the readers. In addition to his administrative assignments in Assam University, he also serves as a Guest faculty of Philosophy, in an Evening Degree College, India.

Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California with his artist-poet wife (his in-house editor) and one fat cat (his in-house critic). He writes full time, producing short stories, essays, poems, an occasional play, and novels (that are hiding in his closet, awaiting editing). Since 2005, his short stories have been accepted by more than 80 literary and commercial journals, magazines, and anthologies (both print and online) including the *Houston Literary Review*, *Storyteller*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, and *Underground Voices*. Terry is a retired urban planner and an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist—who once played with a symphony orchestra backing up jazz legend George Shearing.

Eric Scott is a second generation neopagan writer. Born into the St. Louis, Missouri based Coven Pleiades, Eric is now pursuing a Masters degree in English and Creative Writing at the University of Missouri—Kansas City. In addition to writing, Eric is a member of the Heartland Spiritual Alliance and was a presenter at the 2009 Heartland Pagan Festival on the topic of second

generation neopaganism.

Mitch Shenassa is a writer of paranoid splatter-noir with a literary bent and a fanatical vendetta against tame prose. Originally from Dirty Jersey, now living in Boulder, Colorado, he has published two chapbooks of his acid-bubble short fiction and is currently hammering the final nails into the coffin of his long-conceived stoner-zombie-vooodoo-noir masterpiece

KH Solomon is a retired agricultural engineer, whose career specialized in water management. He began writing poetry to capture the sounds and smells of foreign markets, the colors and textures of new crops, and the remarkable characters that peopled his agricultural adventures. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *ZYZZYVA*, *English Journal*, *River Oak Review*, *Conclave*, *The Healing Muse*, *Two Review*, *Avocet*, and others. He resides in Moro Bay, California.

Canadian fiction writer, poet, and playwright **J. J. Steinfeld** lives on Prince Edward Island. He has published two novels, *Our Hero in the Cradle of Confederation* (Pottersfield Press) and *Word Burials* (Crossing Chaos Enigmatic Ink), nine short story collections, the previous three by Gaspereau Press—*Should the Word Hell Be Capitalized?*, *Anton Chekhov Was Never in Charlottetown*, and *Would You Hide Me?*—and a poetry collection, *An Affection for Precipices* (Serengeti Press) and *Misshapeness* (Ekstasis Editions). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals internationally, and over forty of his one-act and full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.

Brad Warner is the author of *Zen Wrapped in Karma Dipped in Chocolate*, *Sit Down & Shut Up*, & *Hardcore Zen: Punk Rock, Monster Movies, and the Truth About Reality*. A Zen priest, filmmaker, and blogger, he lives in Los Angeles.

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