

ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY



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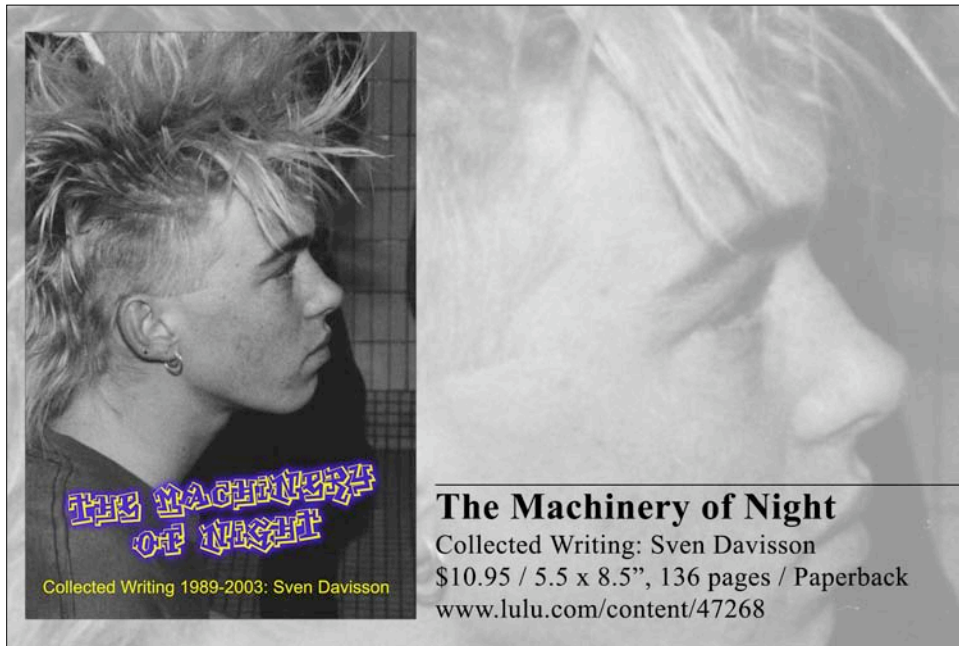
from the editor...

With this issue, Ashé Journal marks its second anniversary! Over the course of these eight issues, the journal has coalesced an eclectic group of gifted ‘friends’ behind the project. Like the Paris salons of the 19th century, these writers, artists, philosophers and priests combine to create something that is truly unique. I am able to say this with no false humility, as I feel I only play a minute roll in the overall project. Fittingly as represented in its name, Ashé has an energy of its own—an entity created from the deep reservoir of talent from which it draws. There may be no Oz, but pay no attention to that man behind the curtain regardless.

It is only appropriate that we take this opportunity to thank all those who support the Ashé project: first and foremost, our authors and artists, those individuals who have blessed us with the sharing of their work; old friends; new friends who have joined us in our game; and friends who are sadly no longer with us.

Love light laughter,

Sven



PS

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In Cuba

Gary Lawless

i

Eleggua opens the way
gives us a good road
a road of saints and spirits
a way into this green land
smoke and a prayer
rum and a flower
drum and a song
a road of saints and spirits
Eleggua opens the way

ii

Dry god of metal rusty
iron in a clay pot
sharp blade cuts
plant stem the stone
is in my right hand,
the seed is in my left.

iii

Someone said to love your enemy
Someone said thou shalt not kill
Someone said to love your neighbor as yourself
Someone said you can't go there but
Someone said to follow your heart
Someone said it isn't possible
Someone said yes it is,
yes it is

Gary Lawless is editor/publisher of Blackberry Books. He has recently taken part in poetry festivals and readings in Italy, Slovenia, Latvia and Lithuania. His books include *Caribouddhism*, *In Ruins* and *Nanao or Never*.



The Naked Apocalypse of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*

Polina Mackay

The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man. (William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p. 7)

In 1980, William S. Burroughs delivered a speech at the Planet Earth Conference at the Institute of Ecotechnics in Aix-en-Provence titled 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'.¹ In this speech, Burroughs, following religious tradition, says that the four horsemen of the apocalypse are Famine, Plague, War, and Death and moves on to prophesise a more contemporaneous apocalypse. In Burroughs' apocalypse, War and Plague, for example, have become allies; this alliance, Burroughs announces, 'was cemented with the first germ experiments' (Burroughs, 1984, p. 12). The danger of these experiments lies in their ability to not only create new viruses but to also turn them into biological weapons. But for Burroughs there is a significant similarity between a twentieth-century-specific apocalypse, with its radiation and contaminants, and the religious apocalypse of the four horsemen. For Burroughs, both types of apocalypse 'have no meaning outside of human context, they are in fact human inventions' (p. 17). More specifically, they are the essential flaws in what Burroughs calls the 'human artifact' (p. 17) and in our evolution as a species. For Burroughs, the only way out is to first understand that our biological destiny 'is in Space, and that our failure to achieve this is the basic flaw in the human artifact' (p. 24). This speech constitutes Burroughs' first appearance in the scene as an apocalypticist. Previous to this, he was best known as one of the fundamental members of the Beat Generation movement, as the exponent of disorder and drug abuse, or, along with Brion Gysin, as one of the first practitioners of 'cut-ups' in literature. But he was never considered to be an apocalypticist before this speech. As I shall argue in this paper, in *Naked Lunch* (1959), Burroughs serves us a naked apocalypse that is not simply cataclysmic and frightening but eternal, parodic, and comic.

¹ The speech was published in a book with the same title in 1984.

WB

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In 1988, Burroughs was asked to write the introduction to a Keith Haring exhibition catalogue, *Apocalypse*.² In it, Burroughs is more specific about his conception of the apocalypse:

Consider an apocalyptic statement: ‘Nothing is true, everything is permitted’ – Hassan i Sabbath. Not to be interpreted as an invitation to all manner of unrestrained and destructive behavior; that would be a minor episode, which would run its course. Everything is permitted because nothing is true. It is all make-believe, illusion, dream... ART. When art leaves the frame and the written world leaves the page – not merely the physical frame and page, but the frames and pages of assigned categories – a basic disruption of reality occurs: the literal realization of art... Success will write APOCALYPSE across the sky. (Burroughs and Haring, p. 1)

If nothing is true then there can be no prohibition and no law and everything is permitted, and permitted in the form of creative art because only that can disrupt reality. The effect of Burroughs’ experiments with writing is to demystify literature as an institution and to make it available for creative work. ‘Anybody can make cut-ups’, he says in *The Third Mind*, his collaborative work with Brion Gysin, ‘it is experimental in the sense of being *something* to do’ (Burroughs and Gysin, 1979, p. 31). But the disruption of reality that Burroughs demands is, as Timothy S. Murphy points out, ‘neither the modern disruption of traditional structures of value, nor the postmodern disruption of modernist mythologizing; rather, it is the “literal realization of art”, a realization which simultaneously requires the destruction of art as a separate category, as a mirror to nature and life’ (Murphy, p. 6). When art frees itself from the model of truth the myth of apocalypse will be re-written to fit the new ‘dis-order’.

It might seem from Burroughs’ introduction to the Keith Haring catalogue that he does not envision a conventional apocalypse, with its Satans, Antichrists, or disasters. But the kind of apocalypse that Burroughs describes in *Naked Lunch* is preceded by catastrophe; like any other apocalypticist Burroughs sees the future breaking into the present, and this world being replaced by a new order. In addition to this, Burroughs envisions a post-apocalyptic world in which socio-political systems are totalitarian and

² A similar text, with not much variation, is read in Burroughs’ first compact disc, *Dead City Radio* (Island Records, 1990)



infect people with viruses, abandoning them to deteriorate. This post-apocalyptic world is very similar to Burroughs' representation of the present in *Naked Lunch*. It is not clear whether Burroughs describes an exaggerated 1950's and 1960s present or whether he prophesies such an apocalypse in order to somehow prevent it. This is the degree to which the vision of the future blends in with the present in the book

Keith Haring, graffiti artist of the 1980s, provides an image that helps us illustrate Burroughs' conception of the apocalypse in *Naked Lunch*. Haring's 'Untitled, June 3, 1984', depicts a human figure crucified upside down. For me this image signifies the final condemnation of the body: the body is, like Christ, in the end crucified – that is, betrayed, humiliated, and punished. The possibility of resurrection is crushed for what Haring and Burroughs are most interested in is showing the conditions of crucifixion – that is, the systems of discipline and punishment that make crucifixion possible. In Haring's image and in *Naked Lunch*, these conditions are laid bare in simple, naked mouthfuls.

Examining Burroughs' and Haring's personal relations and looking at the group of artists and writers they circulated with, helps us to contextualise their work. Haring was a member of the East Village art scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This scene was an anarchic movement of New York writers, artists and musicians. At the height of the cold war, the East Village artists such as the 'wall-posters' Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, the graffiti artists Kenny Scharf and Jean-Michel Basquiat, or the performance artist Ann Magnuson, produced the kind of work that seemed to summarise, as Peter von Ziegesar puts it, 'the apocalyptic visions and vivid anarchic political beliefs of a desperate, dead-end culture' (Ziegesar, p. 285). Haring's figure, to use the same example, signifies the direct attack on the sense of selfhood, and the inevitable exhaustion of past mythologies (e.g. crucifixion) brought about by a culture that is conceived as cul-de-sac.

Burroughs was the true patron saint of the East Village. This scene was a continuation of the junk-punk scene in the 1970s, a scene that saw Burroughs as a totemic figure, an example to follow. As Ted Morgan notes, for the punks 'here was this recognized author of venerable years and conservative mien, and he was a junky, too, man. Burroughs seemed to validate the taking of hard drugs. It was like Daddy giving you permission' (Morgan, p. 539). Burroughs' relation to the East Village and Punk scene has already been well documented in Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (1996). Putting aside the biographical connections between Burroughs and artists such as Haring and the Punks (e.g. Patti Smith, Tom Verlaine, or Richard Hell), one can argue that the East Village scene seems to have come straight out of *Naked Lunch*. The two 'discourses' share the following: obsessions with all kinds of viruses, extraterrestrials, government conspiracies, and



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addiction to everything and anything; the artistic experimentation; the paranoid search for ways out; the dismantlement of the so-called American dream; the homosexuality; the trancelike parties. The dead-end culture of the punk scene can be summarised in a sentence from *Naked Lunch*: '[P]recise, prosaic impact of objects... washstand... door...toilet... bars... there they are... this is it... all lines cut... nothing beyond... Dead End... And the Dead End in every face...' (Burroughs, 1993, p. 22). Many of these artists and writers admitted that their major influence was the work of Burroughs. Haring for example wrote in his journals:

The major influence, although it is not the sole influence, has been the work of William S. Burroughs. His profound realizations, which I encountered in radio broadcasts of the Nova Convention, and in the book *The Third Mind* by Burroughs and Brion Gysin, which I have just begun to read, are beginning to tie up a lot of loose ends in my own work and thinking. (Haring, p. 31)

Naked Lunch, then, became the manifesto of the East Village scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s; its antiestablishment message, spilled over its pages over twenty years earlier, became the words behind the posters or the graffiti images of the scene. However, the scene is different from the protest, antiwar art of the 1960s. As Peter von Ziegesar notes, 'the most notable difference is that the contemporary artist often takes an ironic stance of acceptance toward nuclear and other potential holocausts, feigning to embrace them because they will spell the end of a boring and pointless bourgeois world' (Ziegesar, p. 284). *Naked Lunch* takes a similar ironic stance toward prospective catastrophes, structuring not a cataclysmic end but an end that brings about an alternative universe in which a few basic things, such as the human body, are unalterably mutated. To this end, Burroughs' book is not about antiwar revolution. For these artists, he is not the exponent of a meaningless random order as Frank Kermode took him to be in the 1960s (Kermode, p. 117). Rather, *Naked Lunch* constitutes a genuine response to the climate of progress, American capitalism, and social conformity of the 1950s and 1960s.

Burroughs, as a source of inspiration, is like an angel of history, taking the censors by storm, constructing an apocalyptic vision by dissecting the past. Walter Benjamin brought the term 'angel of history' to the centre of twentieth century culture and criticism. Benjamin's angel of history, like Burroughs, is hurled in horror by the storm of progress:



A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, p. 249)

Burroughs, the writer of the doomed future, the prophesier of alien attacks, and the Messiah of the apocalyptic end, creates a storm, with his fiction, and constructs its apocalyptic vision by scrutinising the past. His face is turned toward the past and, in realising his paradise lost, he can only keep his wings open to spill the naked truth - the bare realisation that there is no way out of history and the ideology of progress. Benjamin bequeaths to postmodern culture its most apocalyptic representation. Benjamin's storm is both cataclysmic and also implies that something precious is eternally being lost. But Burroughs shares something more with Benjamin's vision of the end: his work is not marked by apocalyptic illusions that are linked to literary form, though it indulges in a glorification of substance abuse, as Kermode points out about Burroughs and the rest of what he calls 'avant-garde' (Kermode, pp 117-8). His work therefore performs an apocalyptic quest that, like Benjamin and the angel's sense of an ending, is visible in the apocalyptic tones of the spectacle not in the end product itself.

Burroughs links the myth of apocalypse with institutions. His aim is to expose the apocalyptic claims of institutions in order to unveil their illusionary nature. For Burroughs, institutions make these claims to seduce people into thinking in certain ways, into believing that, in the light of the apocalypse to come, they have to obey. Burroughs' sense of apocalypse is a direct consequence of institutionalised power and progress, and this is why, in *Naked Lunch*, the passages that describe this apocalypse refer to it as being defined in relation to these institutions. The following is one example of many:



Scientists will say: 'Sending is like atomic power.... If properly harnessed'. At his point an anal technician mixes a bicarbonate of soda and pulls the switch that reduces the earth to cosmic dust. ('Belch... They'll hear this fart on Jupiter')... Artists will confuse sending with creation. They will camp around screeching 'A new medium' until their rating drops off.... Philosophers will bat around the ends and means hassle not knowing that sending can never be a means to anything but more sending, like Junk. Try using junk as a means to something else.... Some citizens with 'Coca Cola and aspirin' control habits will be talking about the evil glamor of sending. But no one will talk about anything very long. The Sender, he don't like talking. (Burroughs, 1993, p. 136)

In *Naked Lunch*, the Senders are one of what Burroughs calls the 'Interzone parties'. The Senders control others by monitoring the others' transmission of messages. Moreover the Senders are agents of what Burroughs calls the 'human virus', a virus that was originally brought to earth by the Venusians and attacks and mutates the human race. Gradually the virus has been incorporated by humans and has gone to become the 'other half' of the human body and the 'word virus' - that is, language. The Senders behave like the virus in that, in controlling the transmission of messages, they penetrate and mutate those on the receiving end. In this sense, similar to Derrida's account of the apocalyptic tone, the Senders affect not only the meaning of the message but also their senders and receivers. In Burroughs' hands, the receiver is mutated to the highest degree to become, like the sender, a viral organism conditioned to pass on the infectious virus.

In the extract above, Burroughs envisions an apocalypse caused and orchestrated by the institutions of science, art, philosophy, and production. Burroughs' version of the apocalypse at this point is triggered off by the scientists' use of atomic power. The use of what might be best called language of progress, 'sending is like atomic power... If properly harnessed', functions to unveil an apocalyptic world that is horrific, critical, and comic. Burroughs' post-apocalyptic world would consist of artists endlessly talking about the new medium of art, philosophers mumbling forever about ends and means of the world, and citizens addicted to Coca Cola or aspirin. But, most importantly, these social groups operate according to the codes of sending; sending for the scientists is like atomic power; artists confuse sending with creation; philosophers are convinced that sending can lead to more than just sending; and consumers only talk about the glamour of sending. In other words, in this post-apocalyptic world the message is not only changed to fit the



needs of the various participants but also mutates the sender as well as the receiver to create a new form of subjectivity. This new form is parodic and satirical; as I take it, it demonstrates Burroughs' mocking of the supposedly tolerant United States of the 1950s and the sense of American social conformity, and reveals his long-standing hostility towards institutionalized power. This new form of subjectivity dramatizes his sense that any subjectivity is somehow split and alien in that subjectivity, and like institutions, is a fragile illusion conditioned to endlessly change.

Burroughs' sense of apocalypse functions to create not only a new form of subjectivity but also a fiction of historical order, in that he creates a comprehensive literature to narrate history as a narrative of apocalypse. He envisions a complex history that, as in much of apocalyptic literature, is fundamentally concerned with our human relation to the changing forms of temporal reality, not with static simplifications. The myth of apocalypse is the principal narrative force within this history and lends its structural patterns to create a model of an apocalyptic vision that, as Klee's 'Angelus Novus', turns away from progress, which is imaged as a catastrophic storm.

This horrific apocalypse is not the only kind of apocalypse that one finds in *Naked Lunch*. The book also envisions a comic apocalypse. In his introduction, J. G. Ballard rightly describes this paradoxical effect: 'From its opening words we are aware that a unique world – comic, paranoid, visionary, delirious – is being revealed to us. Bizarre and nightmarish scenes flash by, like glimpses of some exotic and decadent city' (Burroughs, 1993, p. 1). One of these comic apocalyptic moments is found in the episode of the carnival man's tale. A man teaches his anus to talk and eventually the anus takes over from the mouth, reducing the man to a blob of flesh. The apocalyptic tone is located in this moment.

Then [the anus] developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk, too, and have crying jags nobody loved it and it wanted to be kissed same as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with his fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him: 'It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any more. I can talk and eat and shit'.



After that he began waking up in the morning with a transparent jelly like a tadpole's tail all over his mouth... He would tear it off his mouth and the pieces would stick to his hands like burning gasoline jelly and grow there, grow anywhere on him a glob of it fell. So finally his mouth sealed over, and the whole head would have amputated spontaneous... except for the eyes you dig. That's one thing the asshole couldn't do was see. It needed the eyes. But nerve connections were blocked and infiltrated and atrophied so the brain couldn't give orders any more. It was trapped in the skull, sealed off. For a while you could see the silent, helpless suffering of the brain behind the eyes, then finally the brain must have died, because the eyes went out, and there was no more feeling in them than a crab's eye on the end of a stalk. (pp. 110-111)

Dr Benway, the controversial physician, is one of the most frequently used characters in the book. His tale of the carnival man, in turn, is one of the most quoted episodes in critical analysis of Burroughs' work. For example, Robin Lydenberg begins her critique of the book by quoting the tale in arguing that the story is part of a history of a battle for domination, the digestive (anus) versus the linguistic (mouth) function (Lydenberg, pp. 22-23). Wayne Pounds adopts the same technique in arguing that the tale parodies such battles for domination (Pounds, pp. 611-629). Alvin Seltzer provides a more conventional interpretation of the tale, interpreting it as 'an allegorical equivalent of bureaucracies that feed off their host, creating their own needs which finally render the host helpless and unhappy' (Seltzer, p. 346).

Benway's tale of the carnival man is simultaneously humorous and sad. Apart from the obvious humorous resonances in the idea of 'ass-talk', one has to come to terms with the tragicomic implications of underestimating the anus. Talking and defecating are brought to the same level, reducing talking to mere blabbing and giving defecating the ability to produce meaning. The sound of the 'ass-talk' is a sound you can smell, which is emphasised by Burroughs in italics, to make the association between 'ass-talk' and farting noticeable. The anus's demands for 'equal rights' and its desire to be kissed like any other mouth are extremely funny parodies of the contemporary revolutionary demands for equal rights by oppressed groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, in America. The tale is about control, about the struggle between the oral and the anal: 'It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here any



more. I can talk and eat and shit'. This is a struggle that ends up in apparent victory for the anus: it can talk, eat, and shit; the mouth is no longer needed. But the anus's victory is momentary because it cannot see.

At this point, the narrator elevates seeing to the status of the most important sense. This is typical of Burroughs' fiction; the act of seeing is often associated with vision and delirium, two of the most significant concepts in his early work, such as *Junky* (1959), *Nova Express* (1964), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and, of course *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs wrote these works under the influence of drugs and claims that he has no precise memory of writing *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs, 1993, p. 7). These works thus record the visions and deliriums under the influence of hard drugs. In *Naked Lunch*, the apocalyptic moments are often located in or produced by visionary deliriums caused by drug abuse. Equally, most revelations happen in the same fashion. As Derrida suggests, 'we know that every apocalyptic eschatology is promised in the name of light, of seeing and vision, and of a light of light, of a light brighter than all the lights it makes possible' (Derrida, p. 22). Seeing and vision play a crucial role in the carnival man's story. As the story develops and, as the carnival man's body deteriorates into a jelly-like substance, 'Undifferentiated Tissue', his eyes 'go out' and there is no more feeling in them. It is at this instant that the apocalyptic moment is subverted: instead of a revelation the carnival man experiences a covering; the world is covered for the man not to see. In this sense, the apocalypse creates a dark world in which the subjects literally cannot see the past, the present, or what is to come. Yet, the image of the carnival man does not lose its comic edge as he is, in the end, reduced to a blind blob of flesh because of too much 'ass-talk', because of paying too much attention to his arse.

The carnival man's tale is an example of *Naked Lunch*'s many comic apocalyptic moments. Burroughs suggests that these moments, and the whole of the book for that matter, are not supposed to be taken seriously. In the last few pages of the novel, the narrator claims that the narrative records nothing but 'prophetic mutterings':

This book spill off the page in all directions, kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises, farts and riot yipes and the slamming steel shutters of commerce, screams of pain and pathos and screams plain pathic, copulating cats and outraged squawk of the displaced bull head, prophetic mutterings of brujo in nutmeg trances, snapping necks and screaming mandrakes, sigh of orgasm, heroin silent as dawn in the thirsty cells, Radio Cairo screaming like a berserk tobacco auction, and flutes of Ramadan fanning the sick junky like a



gentle lush worker in the grey subway dawn feeling with delicate fingers for the green folding crackle. (Burroughs. 1993, p. 180)

Indeed, *Naked Lunch* cataclysmically spills off the page in all directions to talk about promiscuous sex, drug abuse, trances, and death. This cataclysm of at the time censored narratives helps to define the book as, in the words of Burroughs, ‘signal flares of orgasm burst over the world’ (p. 165), a near orgasmic experience of the subject on the edge, that is, the moment when the subject is in pain, on drugs, screaming. The second half of the extract clearly states how the book actually consists of prophetic mutterings of nutmeg and heroin trances, confessions of a sick junky that happily exists outside the supposed norm. The paragraph that follows this extract finally reveals what the above extract actually describes and ultimately, as I take it, what *Naked Lunch* is about: ‘This is Revelation and Prophecy of what I can pick up without FM on my 1920 crystal set with antennae of jissom’ (p. 180). So, the book both prophesies as well as reveals an apocalyptic world. This world and prophecy are not universal but very specific; they are what the narrator can pick up on his own 1920 radio – that is, his own experience – using as antennae his own jissom – that is, his sexual experiences and sexuality. In Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, revelation and prophecy are related to sexual activity but only to a degree – they have more to do with our knowledge of the conditions under which they are constructed as narratives. However, this knowledge seems to be an impossibility because the subject – that is, the writer or reader – is absent from the narratives of the apocalypse: ‘[Y]ou were not there for The Beginning. You will not be there for The End... Your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative’ (pp. 173-4). The absence of the subject for the beginning and for the apocalyptic moment is vital because suddenly the apocalypse loses its cataclysmic edge. The subject is not there to either be saved or condemned by God. If the subject is absent from this moment, what is there to suddenly destroy? The word virus – that is, language – and Burroughs’ fiction imprison the subject in body, time, and excrement. This is why it is the body that has to offer resistance: ‘Gentle Reader, we see God through our assholes in the flash bulb of orgasm.... Through these orifices transmute your body.... The way OUT is the IN...’ (p. 180). In the end, the body, like the subject, falls. The gradual fall of the body becomes a central narrative in Burroughs’ fiction, especially in his later fiction in which the corpse replaces the living body. At the same time, the absence of the subject at the crucial moments of beginning and end is part of the stripping off of the conventional elements of the apocalypse. Burroughs’ apocalypse does not make room for the screaming subjects, the catatonic faces, in general, the people running amok. This apocalypse is different.



This apocalypse is naked. The spectacle of the apocalypse, Burroughs claims, is so unique that it ‘buggers description’:

Gentle reader, the ugliness of that spectacle buggers description. Who can be a cringing pissing coward, yet vicious as a purple-assed mandril, alternating these deplorable conditions like vaudeville skits? Who can shit on a fallen adversary who, dying, eats the shit and screams joy? Who can hang a weak passive and catch his sperm in mouth like a vicious dog? Gentle reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner. Oh Christ what a scene is this! Can tongue or pen accommodate these scandals? (p. 44)

Burroughs’ pen dares to accommodate these scandals because, unlike Blake’s proverb, the roaring lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword (quoted in epigram) are already here, not just out in the world, but served in *Naked Lunch*. But it is something that had to be done. Burroughs’ pen, unlike Blake’s in the proverb, and similar to the Ancient Mariner’s will not spare the reader from this. Not just because Burroughs is trying to impress with his shock tactics, but also because he seems to believe in the resurrection of the viral, fallen, decaying subject.

The naked apocalypse is a narrative strand in the novel that is part of Burroughs’ strategy that aims to show that ‘as always the lunch is naked’ (p. 12). The relationship between the apocalypse and the world is not allegorical but logical, literal, and mathematical. The literalness is a step towards a naked awareness of the imprisonment of the subject by systems of control, of the fake visions presented to them by socio-political institutions, and of the literal madness that it is to be part of such systems. This is what the title, *Naked Lunch*, signifies. Ginsberg was the first to suggest at the trial of the book that the title relates to the ‘nakedness of seeing, to be able to see clearly without any confusing disguises, to see through the disguise’. As Burroughs himself announces in the introduction to the book, naked lunch is ‘a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork’ (p. 7). To quote Eric Mottram, it is ‘the moment a man realizes his cannibalism, his predatory condition, and his necessary parasitism and addictive nature’ (Mottram, p. 15). A naked apocalypse, then, reveals that this is precisely Burroughs’ intention – ‘to offer us a naked lunch, a revelation of what is really going on and not an allegorical evasion’ (Lydenberg, p. 9). The message, then, is literal, simple, and clear. This is why *Naked Lunch* is a ‘How-To’ book. It is a book that exposes a naked mouthful



that tells the reader how to call for socio-political change, how to see behind capitalist and government conspiracies, and how to challenge capital punishment, to name a few of Burroughs' aims.

Cavorting in the brink of apocalypse, the novel invades every inch of the reader. In every page, we see Burroughs orchestrating an orgy of cannibals, viruses, and cadavers, repeatedly asking the reader to become a knight, to swallow the naked truth. But the four horsemen of this apocalypse lead the way to eternal loss and disintegration. And this is Burroughs' ultimate aim: to describe the ugliness of the spectacle as forcefully as he can. The repeated requests for resistance, especially from the reader, are, as the rest of the novel, nothing but 'mutterings' of a junkie shivering in the sick morning.

We can conclude, then, that Burroughs' prose aspires to a direct naked seeing – and what it sees is no comforting vision of transcendence, resurrections, or calmness after the horrific apocalypse but a comical yet ugly mixture of violence and boredom, viruses feeding off bodies, humans feeding off humans, life falling to final death. There will remain in Burroughs' vision of the future the prospect of reviving what has been lost, the body, the subject, and language in a new form – that is, as they might exist outside time, institutional power, and monolithic subjectivity. This hope for a possibility of the future is, however, left for his later 'cut-up' novels: at the end of *Naked Lunch* all we have is the grim humour of a naked author who describes even the Last Judgement as 'the last erection' (Burroughs, 1993, p. 83).

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Asesu

S.B. Wilson

frail, forgetful old
granny obsessed
with counting
chicken bones,
bottle shards,
and soft down
from passing geese
where sewage
coats river rocks
thick, slippery brown.
an ancient debutante
who dons heirloom
opals & pearls to
scrape clean plates
of sloughed skin,
clipped nails,
and refuse
entertains her
death-stricken
dinner guests
with a slow
deliberate
dance.
Asesu brings
the ocean
to the faucet
gushing forth.

Asesu is a road (avatar) of Yemaya, a motherly spirit of Yoruba origin who is manifest in the ocean waves, the Ogun River in Nigeria, and in various other bodies of water. Her younger sister is Oshun, spirit of sweetness, laughter, love, wealth, and all rivers, streams, and waterfalls.



Aruanda*S.B. Wilson*

Bring me to the land of Aruanda
 Where no bird is caged
 Where no dog is chained
 Where grown men play
 ‘Cowboys & Indians’ again.
 All are half-tame
 As eyes meet eyes –
 No need for names
 We wear buckskin & leopard spots,
 warpaint & mushroom tops –
 Arrowheads pierce half-hearts.
 We know our blood flows
 Behind the waterfall, beneath palmetto leaf
 In tree-hollow, or citadel of reeds –
 Are we not men
 Down on all fours?
 There are no wives here,
 no nations or tribes
 The forest is our sweatlodge
 And we hunt with glances
 Stiff & upright we return
 As Aruanda fades away.

Inspired by *The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomblé* by Jim Wafer, but dedicated to Ochosi (Oxosse), orisha of hunting, freedom, accuracy, and justice. Aruanda is a mythical forest realm where the caboclos exist. It is a strange otherworld where hunters mix freely with male orishas and nature spirits, without societal constraints.

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**Renewing the Balance:
Gender, Culture, and Cosmos**

Dirk Dunbar, Ph.D.

I believe . . . we need to encourage a shift, which will not be a small one or an easy one, toward sustainability and toward deeply meaningful religion that does not separate itself from Nature, from our bodies and from women. (Charlene Spretnak 1993, 71)

“Everything alive has feelings.” That is one of the oldest convictions of my eleven-year old daughter, Annabelle. She cries when she sees a dead animal or a wildlife area being clear-cut. She communicates with our cats and parakeets, plays with frogs and ladybugs, and cherishes the sight of a dolphin and the company of a squirrel. A vegetarian for over three years, Belle senses that even plants feel pain and has bemoaned, for instance, receiving a cut flower or eating a salad. I hope she is able to retain her reverent connection to nature, one that many aboriginal cultures have sustained for millennia. Most of us in the industrialized, technocratic world have lost touch with the sacred in the natural. I know I have, physically as well as spiritually.

I suffer from arteriosclerosis and am familiar with literature about heart disease as a major killer in urban-industrial societies. If reports are right, stress and heart attacks are natural reactions to the overcrowding of space and schedules, to too few trees and too much steel and concrete, and to the overuse of TVs, cars, and computers. Those of us influenced by if not dependent upon gross national products tend to confuse what we do with who we are. In the process, we often forget how to breathe mindfully deep, how to respect the intrinsic value of flora and fauna, and how to enjoy food in terms of quality rather than quantity. While our society caters to addictions, as is testified by the daily bombardment of advertisement warfare, most of us sense a need for change, whether that awareness is conscious or subliminal—we suffer from plant and animal extinction, air and water pollution, and the disempowering sense of what to do about it. I believe that the first steps must be taken with our own bodies, minds, and spirits and that, in the face of epidemic rates of war and crime, consumerism and obesity, depression and drug addiction, and sexual and technofilic obsessions, those steps *are* being taken; that we are rediscovering in a tumultuous but healing manner the sacred balance that characterizes the wisdom of ancient Eastern and aboriginal cultures. By offering chronological



snapshots of cross-cultural expressions of nature's polarities, I hope to convey their balance in Earth wisdom, their antagonism in the West's reason-as-virtue paradigm, and current attempts to renew the balance.

Earth Wisdom

Awareness of Earth's sanctity is deep-rooted in human consciousness and culture. First sculpted over thirty thousand years ago, the Venus or pregnant female figurines are our oldest cultural artifacts and attest to the Paleolithic reverence for the life-giving powers of women and Earth. The worship of the Mother Goddess, which reflected a way of life for many Neolithic cultures, reveals the intimate relationship that primal people had and have with nature.¹ Many archaic as well as present-day aborigines have created and continue to sustain a multi-millennarian communication with nature that constitutes Earth wisdom. Mostly foreign to Western civilization, that communication binds devotees to a cosmic sense of family and encourages a reciprocal relationship with the land, plants, and other animals. Earth wisdom does not belong to any one culture nor are its myths, rites, and practices uniform, however, certain concepts and principles are clear. Earth wisdom dictates that human beings belong to the earth's body; that our species is merely a strand in life's web; and that what we do to the environment, we do to ourselves.

Free from distinctions such as fact and value, natural and supernatural, and animate and inanimate, the language of Earth wisdom centers on balance, cycles, and connectedness. Symbolized in the world's oldest-known myths, the sacred marriage and creation stories of the World Parents, Father Sky and Mother Earth endlessly interchange energies in cycles such as day and night, the seasons, and growth and decay. Those polar yet harmonious powers teach as well as impel balance. Earth wisdom comprises a compendium of lessons. Amidst a mosaic of relevant traditions, those of Taoist, Native American, and Greek and Indian heritage offer some of the clearest expressions of the forces that emanate nature's balance.

Taoism represents the oldest and most obvious tradition in which light and dark, sky and earth, and male and female are equally valued. Much of the uniformity of Chinese philosophy owes to its focus on the way that Tao, or nature, balances her bipolar forces yin and yang. First expressed in World Parents myths and divination rites of the *I Ching*, yin represents the dark, receptive, earthly, feminine force that interacts with the light, aggressive, heavenly, masculine, yang principle. As Chinese wisdom has decreed for millennia, the interplay of yin and yang—united in the mysterious Tao—not only



guide nature's patterns, they serve as principles that, if allowed, balance human thought and action. Following the Tao is, necessarily, an individual affair, which is one reason why Taoist texts avoid dogma and emphasize experience. Filled with aphorisms and meaningful paradoxes, the *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tzu* describe the compassion, selflessness, and contentment one achieves by following the Tao. Beyond good and bad, sacred and profane, fact and value, and thing and event, the follower's state of mind is often described as feminine, tranquil, and flexible—able to allow "everything to fall in place." By "holding to the center" one conciliates extremes by allowing insight, receptivity, and spontaneity to guide reason, aggression, and order in healthy, non-dominating ways.² The consequences of not recognizing and enacting that balance can be catastrophic. As the *Tao Te Ching* prophetically announces:

In harmony with the Tao,
The sky is clear and spacious,
the earth is solid and full,
All creatures flourish together,
Content with the way they are,
Endlessly repeating themselves,
Endlessly renewed.

When man interferes with the Tao,
The sky becomes filthy,
The earth becomes depleted,
The equilibrium crumbles,
Creatures become extinct. (1991, 39)

There are literally hundreds of Native-American prophecies regarding environmental ruin at the hands of men who disregard nature's lessons.³ Although acute differences exist between nations, Indians have always regarded the planet as Mother Earth and their way of life decrees communion and communication with her endless manifestations. They are also testaments to the fact that earth wisdom is learned and that nature's lessons can be harsh. North American Indians completely decimated indigenous horse populations and may have been responsible for hunting other species such as deer and beaver to near extinction.⁴ But they learned. Native Americans created a bond with the natural world that centered their religious rites and mythology—including an array of World Parents and Grandparents myths. Indians recognized the land as sacred, as that from which all



life forms spring and to which they belong and return. They learned to revere and utilize the “sacred power” of plants, to speak with animals, to pray to and for the ones they kill, and to use in honor and respect as much of the dead creatures as possible. Animals serve as spirit guides, as names of tribes and individuals, and as foci of totems and rituals. Practices involving sacred places, song and dance, rites of passage, vision quests, and prophecy are all part of the perception of nature as teacher. The primary lesson is: all things work in terms of a circle and to act in accordance with that knowledge is to keep the ecosystems of local habitats in balance. Indians see nature as always changing form and consider their participation in the circle of being as their purpose for being alive.

As do hundreds of earth and sky gods from various cultures, Shiva and Vishnu of India and the Greek gods Dionysus and Apollo express nature’s balance. Archetypal expressions of the masculine ego and civilizing forces such as control, order, and progress, Vishnu and Apollo accompanied the rise of urban culture and the secularization of earth wisdom rites and practices. By promoting male-dominated hierarchies, being patrons of the aristocracy, and establishing laws regarding human behavior and propitiation, the sky gods evolved into protectors of culture. Shiva and Dionysus, on the other hand, were originally Mother Goddess consorts of Neolithic planting cultures. Both earth gods served the Great Mother by inhabiting the woods and mountains, by liberating the feminine unconscious, and by sharing their divinity with their worshippers. Male gods but depicted often with feminine traits, they were admitted into the realm of warrior-sky-god pantheons only after invading hunting societies (such as the Kurgans and Aryans) vanquished nearly all signs of the Mother Goddess. Unlike the solemn rites, hymns, and propitiation rendered to Vishnu and Apollo, Shiva and Dionysus were worshipped in wild dances, fertility rites, and drama.

Internal forces as well as social principles, Vishnu and Apollo establish boundaries and Shiva and Dionysus question them. While the sky gods guard the distance between themselves and their followers, the earth gods revel in uniting with their devotees.

By observing the dictates of reason and citizenship, by following goals and ideals, we emulate the virtues of Vishnu and Apollo. By obeying our bodies and instincts, we affirm our connection to nature and pay homage to the ecstatic and spontaneous realms of being. By balancing the forces of each, we honor human worth and our place in the cosmos. The World Parents, yin and yang, Shiva and Vishnu, and Dionysus and Apollo are unique expressions of nature’s balance. As universal principles, yin and yang—much like Mother Earth and Father Sky archetypes—have always belonged together. Vishnu and Shiva as well as Apollo and Dionysus derived from separate social systems and are depicted with bodies, wills, and emotions that tend to make them more antagonistic.



However, each polarity necessitates balance and, hence, transcends categories such as good and evil, sacred and profane, and spirit and nature.

The West's Reason-as-Virtue Paradigm

By instituting the good/sacred/spirit and evil/profane/nature as absolutely separate realms, Western civilization, from Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian theology to modern science, has misplaced the balance that distinguishes earth wisdom. The West has traditionally projected nature's polarities as interacting in constant and necessary conflict: light, God, reason, order, the ego, and masculine principles battle darkness, the Devil, mystery, chaos, the unconscious, and feminine impulses. By valuing one over the other, the West has historically defiled nature and instinct and eulogized the laws and hierarchies of culture. Although momentous in terms of the evolution of culture and consciousness, that eulogy has promoted and elevated human abilities and endeavors over and against the non-human world. Greek philosophers, church fathers, and/or scientists have encouraged us for centuries to fortify the ego and super-ego, oppress the powers of the id and the unconscious, honor our spirit over our body, separate our mind from our heart, and divide human nature from nature at large.

The consistency of the West's dominantly masculine, rational value system is epitomized in the notion of logos, which means "cosmic mind" and "human reason" in Greek philosophy, reflects the "divine word" of Roman stoicism and Christianity, and translates into the "logic" of science. Greek philosophers such as Heraclitus and Parmenides regarded logos as the cosmic mind which, manifest in humans as reason, makes us the apex of creation—hence, the Protagorian edict, "Man is the measure of all things." Plato described ultimate reality in terms of the Forms that, glimpsed only through reason, are captured in the physical world as mere "copies" or "appearances"—the imperfect manifestations of perfect mind and spirit. Not only did he regard the soul as being chained to the body, he insisted that a man could, if he led a life in logos, be reborn as a star, or, if he failed, could be reborn as a woman (*Timaeus* 42b-d and 90e-91a, in Hamilton 1987, 1171). He argued that the appetites or the realm of Dionysus, women, wine, ecstasy, and "unholy" song and dance needed to be oppressed for the sake of the spirit and the State.

The Early Stoas such as Chryssipus and Cleanthes agreed that the divine mysteries of pagans defiled the spirit and, consequently, added a judging principle to logos that enabled it to chasten the wicked.⁵ No longer the mere measure of the "the good life,"



logos became the divining force of reward and punishment, a theme picked up by Philo, a Greek Jew living in Alexandria.⁶ A devotee of “the most holy Plato” and a contemporary of Paul, Philo amalgamated logos in Greek and Hebrew terms and clearly inspired the author of John, who Christianized it as the “Word,” ordaining Christ and the Bible as God incarnate. Advancing the word of Paul and the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, respectively, theologians from Augustine to Aquinas and beyond affirmed logos as the metaphysical force behind the spiritual, moral realm that transcends the mundane, bodily existence in which humans are temporally trapped. Hence, for over two millennia, the mainstream core of Western theology has adjudicated existence on the physical plane as profane, corruptible, and an obstacle to pure mind and spirit. The result, as Carl Jung contended, has promoted religious dogma that, once invaluable, now stifles the evolution of spiritual experience:

Far too little attention has been paid to the fact that, for all our irreligiousness, the distinguishing mark of the Christian epoch, its highest achievement, has become the congenital vice of our age: the supremacy of the word, of the Logos, which stands for the central figure of our Christian faith. The word has literally become our god and so it has remained . . . this worship of the word, which was necessary at a certain phase of man's mental development, has a perilous shadow side. That is to say, the moment the word, as a result of centuries of education, attains universal validity, it severs its original connection with the divine Person. (1983, 385)

The success of logos as a defining force of Western theology abetted the demonization of Dionysus, eros the cosmic force, and Eros the god. Before Plato denigrated the powers of the nature god, Euripides’ depicted Dionysus as the horned beast in *The Bacchae*—a clear forerunner of Christianity’s Devil. Along with Dionysus, eros belongs to the pre-polis, Mother Goddess worshipping culture that was subsumed by the Olympian system and assimilated by the political and philosophical values of Athens, Delphi, and other cradles of Western civilization. The primeval, mysterious eros is the force that was—in ancient myths—“brought forth from a cosmic egg” with the purpose of causing “all things to mingle.” Hesiod depicts eros as the intangible force of love that emerged along with Chaos and Gaia at the beginning of the world. The more anthropomorphic Eros appears in several forms, from an all-powerful god to a consort of Aphrodite, to the Cupid of Apuleius, Ovid, and Renaissance painter. As Eros was turned from a god who created all other gods into a mischievous cherub, eros the cosmic force was transmuted into a human desire that is merely sexual or “erotic.” That transmutation signals a maligned relationship with the natural world. As Sam Keen asserts, “When we limit ‘erotic’ to its sexual meaning, we betray our alienation from the rest of nature. We



confess that we are not motivated by anything like the mysterious force that moves birds to migrate or dandelions to spring” (1983, 5).

Affecting modernity, scientists started differentiating between the analytic and spiritual aspects of logos. For instance, in his famous letter to the Duchess Christina, which he wrote in hopes of getting out of prison, Galileo described science as teaching “how the heavens go” and scripture as “how one goes to heaven” (in Drake 1989, 186). Descartes and Newton reinforced the notion of logos as the force behind natural law that governs the mechanistic universe. Descartes, who crowned Plato’s split of spirit and matter, maintained that the soul was connected to the body via the pineal gland and that the mind is separate from and better than the body. Francis Bacon, who called “holy scripture” the “mistress” of all disciplines, amplified the worldview’s degradation of nature and the feminine. He insisted that it is the duty of the scientists to steal “the secrets still locked in nature’s bosom . . . to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations” (1964, 93-99). Despite attempts to separate the realms as “Nonoverlapping Magisteria,” the confrontation between science and religion was inevitable. The Copernican revolution, Darwin’s theory of evolution, and Freud’s view of a psychic “survival of the fittest” not only defied our place “above” nature, but also ordained nature as foreign and hostile. The success of modern scientific methodology helped turn logos into logic and eventually precluded the spiritual realm from rational inquiry altogether. However, the pursuit of fact and proof has remained astoundingly consistent with traditional Western values: the good, or truth, is proven in the light of day and eventually overcomes the darkness of ignorance, the “nonsensical” and irrational, including all forms of animism. Armed with technological progress, scientific thinking has become sacramental in the contemporary world. As Rupert Sheldrake explains:

We are all influenced by mechanistic habits of thought that shape our lives, usually unconsciously. If we are to hold these assumptions up to scrutiny, we need to look at their cultural origins and trace their development . . . Through the successes of technology, the mechanistic theory of nature is now triumphant on a global scale; it is built into the official orthodoxy of economic progress. It has become a kind of religion. And it has led us to our present crisis. (1994, 5)

The results of the West’s reason-as-virtue paradigm have been monumentally beneficial and auspiciously catastrophic. The Greek establishment of democracy, theater, and philosophy, the Abrahamic practices of justice, brotherhood, and social service, and the wonders of science and technology all testify to the West’s prodigious role in the evolution of human consciousness. That role, however, is at an impasse because the relentless search for the ideal good, the provable fact, and the perfectly mechanistic worldview has subjugated the mysterious, ecstatic, and spontaneous dimensions of being



human. The West's reliance on aggression, competition, and progress has been the source of vast achievements, but is distinguished also by colonial racism, capitalistic forms of oppression, and the industrial urge to conquer nature. Patriarchal consciousness has been an integral to human development, yet, as Western civilization's ultimate internalized voice of authority, it has advanced an unbalanced vision of human potential, promoted the illusion of unlimited material progress, and encouraged the moral devaluation of nature and women.

The Ecocentric Revolution

A variety of movements in the latter half of the twentieth century started re-visioning the West's reason-as-virtue paradigm, beginning with the African-American revolt against the history of their oppression in the United States. Blacks not only instigated the riots in Watts and Detroit, but also organized university students to aid their cause and incited Native Americans and other minorities to join in the revolt. The results included the stands at Alcatraz and Wounded Knee, the demonstrations at Berkeley and Kent State, and innumerable activities aimed at the immense, invisible, and impersonal "system." Women joined in the cause and feminism has proven to be one of the counterculture's most provocative voices. The bra burning and the ban-the-bomb protests as well as the be-ins, sit-ins, and love-ins mark the rebellious refusal of patriarchal consciousness. That refusal connects the disparate forms of spirituality behind the Summer of Love, the Age of Aquarius, and the New Age. What started with the questioning of authority in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and religion has led to a counterculture comprised of sons and daughters of corporate America.

The youthful counterculture rediscovered in uniquely provocative ways the archaic reverence for magic, mystery, and ecstasy. The wild and vibrant fashion, the loud and primitive music, and the celebration of nature and freedom merged naturally with the interest in various rites, myths, and practices of Earth wisdom traditions. Besides the Vietnam War, Woodstock, and Watergate, two of the crucial events that helped spur countercultural sensibilities were the Cuban missile crisis and the First Lunar Orbiter's pictures of Earth floating in space. The crisis made species extinction an imminent fear and survival a revolutionary cause. The photos helped distinguish the planet as a living entity as well as our home and provided the revolution with a spiritual symbol, an intrinsically justifiable reason to embrace peace and love. The emergence of the birth-control pill and psychedelic drugs radically encouraged the nontraditional aspects of



that embrace, aspects which hippies designated as “free” and “universal” kinds of love. Many Sixties experiments were naïve, utopian, and even perverse, but behind the forms of the revolt resided the principles of a revolution. Those principles are being articulated in terms of ecocentrism, an alternative, value-laden philosophy that integrates contemporary interpretations of Earth wisdom, disciplines such as ecofeminism, deep ecology, and ecopsychology, theories of cosmic and planetary connectedness based on relativity, superstrings, and Gaia, alternative ideologies involving Green politics, ecotheology, and holistic health, and aesthetic movements linking Beat literature, rock and roll, and dissenting-voice films.

Ecofeminists, deep ecologists, and ecopsychologists all seek ways to re-identify humans with the more-than-human world, ways that draw distinctly from the sensibilities of Asian, aboriginal, and/or Mother Goddess traditions. Certain that pollution, human overpopulation, and the decimation of natural resources necessitate a call for earth-centered spirituality, sustainable lifestyles, appropriate technology, and cultural and biological diversity, ecocentric advocates often proclaim the inherent need of living organisms to commune with the whole of nature, contest dysfunctional environmental relations that sanction the planet’s plight, and promote a reverence for the mysterious force that mothered all life into existence. In such a context, sanity becomes a matter of acting in harmony with the life-sustaining forces that connect the self “in-here” with the environment “out there.”

The notion of connectedness has been a major focus of a growing group of new physics’ interpreters and Gaia theorists.⁷ The dialogue begins with the premise that theories of relativity, quantum, chaos, and superstrings have made it obvious that in order to transform the worldview that has dominated the West from the Greek logos to Newtonian mechanics, the belief in notions such as particles and building blocks, an objective observer and experimental certainty need to be modified by notions of patterns and networks, a subjective participant, and probabilities, tendencies, and meaningful paradoxes. Those changes precipitate a worldview in which the whole cannot be split into constituent parts, in which the organic replaces the mechanistic, in which the immutable laws of nature that were once discoverable by investigating cause-and-effect relationships are supplemented with the concept of spontaneous creativity—or, mind-in-nature. From subatomic “particles” to galaxies, the cosmos presents itself as a connected, interpenetrating phenomenon that is not an object of analyzable absolutes, but a process of dependent relationships that express mindfulness.

Gaia theory also posits connectedness, but focuses on biochemical and planetary terms. Convinced that the Earth is a living, self-regulating organism that seeks homeostasis, balance, and sustainability, Gaia theorists are seeking to relocate mind and planetary evolution in a single source. According to one of the theory’s founders, James



Lovelock (1990), “Gaia, as a total planetary being, has properties that are not necessarily discernible by just knowing individual species or populations of organisms living together . . . Life and its environment are so closely coupled that evolution concerns Gaia, not the organisms or the environment taken separately” (9). Many of the principles at work in Gaia theory correlate with holistic health. As planetary ecosystems work in concert with one another to sustain equilibrium of the parts to the whole, by regarding health as a process that includes spirit, body, and environment, holistic health offers alternative approaches to the biomedical model that isolates parts of the body in order to treat illness. Holistic health practitioners not only focus on preventative care, they view the various systems of the body as so inherently balanced that when an ailment intrudes the entire body resists as an integrated whole. The goal of holistic health is to activate that connected process. That does not mean holistic health should depose mainstream health care, but merely provide alternative approaches to drugs and surgery, which is why the merger of the two fields has been called complementary medicine.

Earth-centered spirituality also drives the efforts to assimilate a feminine, ecological impulse in Christian myth, practices, and liturgy. The professed “greening” of Christianity—often called ecotheology—has been championed by a vitalization of the feminine impulse and women’s roles in churches, by a renewed emphasis on stewardship, and by the concept of the “Cosmic Christ” and Creation Spirituality. Processes of re-mythologizing Christianity have been advanced by rising numbers of ecotheologians, who claim that the transcendent masculine “Father-in-heaven” needs to be balanced by qualities associated with an immanent feminine one. Convinced that “Earth is part of God’s body,” those scholars reconsider Jesus’ incarnation as symbolizing God’s manifestation in nature, the crucifixion as the abuse and suffering that God-as-nature is experiencing now, and the resurrection as a potential communal awakening to the sacred kingdoms of plants, animals, and the cosmos as a whole.⁸

In concert with the growing forms of ecospirituality, Green politics (with help from hundreds of environmental organizations) has spread ecocentric values and issues worldwide. Through grassroots democracy, long-term thinking, nonviolent activism, decentralized governance, community-based economics, and bioregional practices, activists seek ways to create sustainable relations with the natural world with the intent of leaving future generations a biotic community that is diverse, healthy, and revered.

A defining feature of popular culture, the ecocentric revolution has also found voice in literature, music, and movies. Bookstores today are filled with self-help treatises that promote healthy living, spiritual growth, and sustainable environmental relations; but the original revolutionary literature that captured the Sixties’ *Zeitgeist* belongs to the Beats. Aptly called Neo-Romantics, the Beats produced a prolific body of work in the



1940s and 50s that united spontaneous writing and back-to-nature ideology with Eastern philosophy. Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg were particularly adept at integrating Eastern concepts and mystical forays into their poems and novels, consistently chastising consumerism, conformity, and nature-denying spirituality. They were well aware of what they were trying to do—as Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder) proclaims in Kerouac’s *Dharma Bums*: “Think what a great world revolution will take place when East meets West finally, and it’ll be guys like us that can start the thing” (1958, 202-203).

The evolution of messages in rock and roll, diversity and disparity included, also offers unique insights into the emerging ecocentric paradigm. The contagious affirmation of the gift of life that began with Rock’s primal beat became a revolt against and a questioning of authority’s values and, ultimately, has led to a quest for new forms of identity and spirituality. Between the “shake, rattle, and roll” of Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley to the lyrics of Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and Tori Amos, words became more important, messages began to move the medium, and the forms of revolt became principles of revolution. That is, from the cultic forms of old-time rock and roll, the countercultural messages of folk and classic Rock, to the ecofeminism of contemporary singer-songwriters, Rock music has increasingly promoted civil rights, religious ecumenism, political egalitarianism, and environmental harmony.⁹

So have dissenting-voice films. From the 1950s to the present, American mainstream film has advanced a barrage of countercultural heroes that bears witness to the shattering of traditional cultural assumptions and to the emergence of new values that help define popular culture. The countercultural journey traverses a variety of genres while breaking stereotypes, casting new archetypes, and re-identifying the Hollywood hero. Perhaps the biggest change is the move away from the macho, conquering hero who defeats the evil enemy and captures the treasure (the girl, the riches, or both) to the centroverted hero whose victory is one over the ego-self wherein the obstacles of sexism, racism, and speciesism are overcome. Employing compassion and nonviolence to assuage bigotry and hatred, those kinds of characters—from ET and Powder, Pocahontas and Erin Brockovich, Gandhi and Bulworth, to Rain Man and Forrest Gump—mirror the cinematic quest to define the new hero in terms of growing perspectives regarding race, gender, sanity, spirituality, and environmental relations.¹⁰



Conclusion

I believe that the feminine, ecological impulse that was revered in ancient earth wisdom traditions is being integrated into the West's dominantly masculine, reason-informed ethos. I am aware of mass media's commercialization of that conviction. Behind the rhetoric, however, are principles that have historical and philosophical significance and revolutionary potential. According to Earth wisdom traditions, nature teaches and heals. Her lessons are laden in our cells and the seasons, our veins and ocean currents, and our unconscious and Earth. To understand those lessons, one must learn to listen to and communicate with the more-than-human world, a task that is increasingly difficult for us in technocratic societies. Although popular culture's embrace of aboriginal and Asian thought, holistic health, and environmental spirituality is mired in commercialization, it is also driven by a simple, but demanding realization—we need to change. Ecocentrism is a call for change, a plea for balance, an attempt to reconsider the philosophy behind the West's commitment to dominion.

From the birth of the polis to the Age of Information, our culture has learned to ignore ways to communicate with the planet and her nonhuman inhabitants. Our incessant attempt to control, manipulate, and "better" the environment is sanctioning the desecration of our and many other species' home. By assuming dominion—religiously and scientifically—we have suppressed spiritual connections to nature and sacrificed instinct, spontaneity, and quality in favor of facts, control, and quantification. In the process, we have become unwitting heirs of earth wisdom traditions that have guided most of the human enterprise. The humility and reverence toward the natural world and the reciprocity practiced in those ancient traditions is, by virtue of growing awareness, changing our anthropocentric worldview. Enacted in ways that range from meditation and recycling to complimentary medicine and sustainable agriculture to bioregionalism and global responsibility, ecocentrism equals a practical and revelatory philosophy that activates anew the feminine, ecological impulse by promoting the powers of cooperation, sensitivity, intuition, and global consciousness. That philosophy could help ignite the kinds of changes needed for a sustainable future.



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NOTES:

¹ The archaeological and mythological interpretations of Merlin Stone (1976), Marija Gimbutas (1982), and Riane Eisler (1988) suggest that Neolithic cultures engaged in city planning, did not build fortifications, and used stone and metals primarily for ornamentation and agriculture—not for warfare. Although their conclusions have been criticized (particularly their reconstruction of “an ancient egalitarian age”), Mother Goddess worship clearly permeated many ancient cultures.

² Disciples of Daisetz Suzuki and Thomas Merton, Carl Jung (1968) and Mircea Eliade (1974) professed the relevance of yin and yang while Alan Watts (1970) and Fritjof Capra (1982) outlined and helped popularize that relevance. Deep ecologists such as Arne Naess (1993) and ecofeminists such as Charlene Spretnak (1993) have also utilized the Tao as a model to rebalance Western ways of thinking and doing. For further discussion see Dunbar (1994).

³ See Peterson (1999) for a variety of such environmentally oriented prophecies.

⁴ For a discussion of the harmful impact that Native American practices had on their environment, see Krech (1999).

⁵ For further discussion, see Long (1986).

⁶ For further discussion, see Winston (1985).

⁷ For a few of the many discussions regarding the spiritual implications of the findings of the new physics, see Watts (1970), Capra (1991), Roszak (1993), and Dunbar (2000).

⁸ For discussions regarding a remythologized Jesus, see Ruether (1992), McFague (1987), Fox (1988), and Dunbar (2003).

⁹ For further discussion see Dunbar (2001).

¹⁰ For further discussion, see Dunbar (2004).



Dreams: Our Psychological Immune System Against Bad Ideas

John D. Goldhammer, Ph.D.

Dreams have a poetic integrity and truth. . . . These whimsical pictures, in as much as they originate from us, may well have an analogy with our whole life and fate.

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

What if the dreams we have every night were actually a vital, natural part of a psychological immune system to protect us from bad ideas and pressures to conform?

When I move my hand too close to a fire, my nervous system immediately launches its warning system, sending a powerful pain signal to my brain. I know I am about to injure myself and I quickly remove my hand. It makes sense that part of our survival in this world would also include protection and immunity from self-destructive influences and attitudes that we could look at as mental viruses, or ideological infections. Hence a particular belief, a negative comment from a parent or a friend, something we were taught in school, gets into our system, into our head, contaminating our thinking and reasoning. Over time, these silent trespassers change our behavior, our self-image, and sometimes even our basic sense of who we are.

After twenty-plus years of researching dreaming and dream interpretation, I realized that dreams not only defend our psyches from self-destructive influences, they focus, with laser-like precision, on freeing us from anything and everything that is self-negating and self-defeating. Dreams are like a master sculptor removing everything from the block of marble that is not “elephant.” The profound result of this *natural* process is to gradually bring into clear definition one’s *Authentic Self* and particular genius.

This particular aspect of dreaming has tremendous implications: it means we each have an inner, psychological defense system designed to not only insure the survival of life as we know it but also to facilitate the continuing, creative evolution of consciousness.

Consider this example of how a dream reacts to a controlling, *group dynamic* and its repercussions for the dreamer. Elaine, a fifty-something, impeccably dressed artist, was searching for a spiritual philosophy. She brought this dream to one of our therapy sessions:

I was with my spiritual study group and the minister, the one who led the group, fiddled with my hair, putting my falling-out-of-place hair back in place so that it looked right.



For Elaine, her hair had a lot to do with how she looked, her appearance to others, and it also represented her ideas and thoughts—things that “grow” out of her head. In her dream, the “minister,” an authority figure, rearranges her appearance. This “resonated” for Elaine and she realized her dream was warning her that the group’s ideas were causing her to “rearrange” her thinking so that she would *look*, appear “right,” please the minister, and fit into the group. It is precisely Elaine’s “out-of-place” hair, her singular uniqueness, how she thinks for herself, her *difference* and authenticity that does not want to fit into the group mind set.

Elaine’s dream “minister” now becomes a paradoxical figure representing an internalized *outside* authority, a way that she inflicts conformity on herself. Hence the “minister” represents a self-defeating influence that has gotten *into* her head, not unlike a virus. When I asked how her “out-of-place” hair felt, she replied, “Angry! It feels like I’m disappearing, like I can’t be seen, I’m being like all the other hair that looks right.”

Elaine’s dream did something quite astonishing: It exposed a self-destructive influence that did *not belong to Elaine at all*. The “minister” in her dream, contrary to most popular methods of dream interpretation, was NOT a part of Elaine’s psyche, NOT a “masculine” side of her persona, NOT a “negative father experience,” or an “animus figure,” as Jungians might say. This minister figure was, in fact, a dangerous alien influence that her dream wanted out of her head; her dream was calling for a *debugging* operation.

This dream helped Elaine to extricate herself from a life-long pattern of self-negating social conformity, like suddenly discovering she had been eating poisoned food for many years. Moreover, she now understood the source for much of her irritableness and anger—that “angry” out of place hair that’s forced to be “like all the other hair that looks right.” Elaine’s dream makes a powerful point: it explains that one of the consequences of not being ourselves, of living inauthentic lives, of conformity, is *anger* in all its many shapes: displaced, misplaced, and inappropriate—anger that often seems to bubble up out of nowhere over the smallest triviality. And anger unexplored and locked away in the basement soon turns into a beast many people know all too well—depression.

Tragically, most contemporary dream interpretation treats dreaming like a video game, a toy designed for our entertainment, or something to manipulate and direct, as in lucid dreaming, to make us feel powerful. Much of so called “spiritual” dreamwork, is in reality a sad drama of addictive escapism, attempts to withdraw from life and one’s own potential. Even in the supposed serious dreamwork taking place in modern psychotherapy—whether in individual therapy or in a group setting—dreams are “shrink”-wrapped in some theory. Freudians will tell patients that most images are simply disguised, repressed symbols of sexuality. Jungians will tell you that person in your



dream is a “shadow” figure, or your dream is about a certain mythological drama. More enlightened “archetypal” psychologists will corrupt your dreams with a complex structure of exotic, aesthetic images, archetypal patterns and lofty sounding ideas saturated with “soulful,” feel-good, exalted meanings. These dreamworkers also will quickly shred your dream with their expertise. You will have to attend unending, expensive seminars so that you can be parented by their expertise in order to even begin to understand what they are talking about. Tibetan dreamworkers will tell you that all life, waking and sleeping is “but a dream,” from which we must awaken. New Age or metaphysical practitioners will tell you certain images are from your “past lives” or that you are meeting angels or inner guides in your dreams. Dream dictionaries will also tell you what each image in your dream means, which completely eliminates any possibility of remotely understanding what a dream really means. In other words, some “expert” or “ideologue” labels, and thus interprets *your* dream images according to some theory of dream interpretation—another way to *avoid* the real meaning of dreams. You are the expert with your dreams. No one can tell you what your dream means.

All this hocus pocus passing for dreamwork, all these infantile wading exercises in shallow, stagnant pools of ideological conformity, have given dreamwork a very bad image. Mention dreams to the average person and the eyeballs roll with an “oh sure,” look of quiet ridicule. For many people, dream interpretation equates to metaphysical mumbo-jumbo—New Age, twinkle-toe exercises in fantasy land with no connection to the real world we live in. This situation is a genuine tragedy, for dreaming is perhaps one of the most potent natural resources we have to help us live a creative, authentic, and meaningful life.

Dreams address not only our relationship with our own inner nature but equally important, they address *how we influence and are influenced by the world around us*. Our dreams are *social activists*. They intend to derail the status quo, to dynamite the careening train of a routine life.

Prior to my thirty-fourth year, the occasional dreams I remembered appeared to be either unintelligible nonsense or endless dramas about frustrating work scenarios. I would wake up panicked, relieved it was just a dream. But one December night everything changed. I dreamt that I was looking through a large door to see what was in a mysterious room. I saw a huge single eye looking back at me intently. Someone had opened the floodgates and a torrent of dreams spilled over the banks of my well-planned and quite ordinary life. Some dreams were life-transforming, others catastrophic, euphoric, nightmarish. Some were shocking. Bottom line: I was hooked, fascinated, drawn into the house of dreams, a world that demanded exploration and attention. That winter night I



began a remarkable journey that forever changed my life, an adventure that continues to this day.

As I began to explore the vast landscape of dreaming, I realized that dreams were far more than psychological curiosities, circus side shows we visit every so often for entertainment. I discovered that dreams have shaped and influenced the stream of history for thousands of years.

Dreams have inspired poets, scientists, heads of state, emperors, people from every walk of life. Dreams have saved countless lives from lethal illness, providing individuals with uncanny medical knowledge and healing remedies, often at the eleventh hour. Dreams have ignited wars and created peace. Innumerable lives have been forever changed, transformed, by a single dream. But, for the most part, our modern world does not take dreaming seriously. Instead most popular attitudes about dreams turn them into crib toys, or video games, or dismiss them as nonsense. Dreams and dreaming carry tremendous potential for social change and innovation.

Devil or Genius?

I'd like to tell you about a dream that happened over two centuries ago. Dream researcher and author, Stuart Holroyd, describes the experience of Giuseppi Tartini, a talented, 18th-century musician. Tartini dreamt that he made a compact with the Devil, who agreed to be his servant. In his dream, he gave his violin to the Devil to see what kind of musician he was, and the Devil played such an exquisite solo that it far surpassed anything Tartini had ever heard. The Devil's music so delighted and amazed him that he woke up and immediately tried to reproduce what he had heard in his dream. His best efforts produced a composition he called *The Devil's Trill*, which the public regarded as his finest work. But Tartini felt it was so inferior to the Devil's music in his dream that he said he would have broken his violin and abandoned music if he could have found any other way to support himself.³

In Tartini's time, the *Devil* personified the spirit of evil, a demon, the ruler of Hell, and the chief adversary of God. So what or who is this "Devil" and how can *he* create such beautiful music? An important question that evokes an answer that threatens to topple some massive ideological structures. Might Tartini's dream be saying that it is his *devilish*, non-conformist, rebellion against the accepted musical authorities—the musical gods of his age—that carries the treasure of his unique genius, his authentic, original music. In fact, his dream suggests that his true creative nature *depends* upon characteristics the establishment has rejected and cast out.

³ Stuart Holroyd, *The Supernatural Dream Worlds* (London: The Danbury Press, 1976), p. 72.



Hence, *the missing piece in modern dreamwork*: The vital necessity that we understand those dream images and symbols, like Tartini's "Devil," that represent either conformity to bad ideas and outside influences that would smother our essential nature, or, on the other hand, represent our own hidden genius and creativity that wants *into* our life; those priceless qualities that define who we really are and empower each of us to live an authentic life, to become a true *original*, a masterpiece. Our dreams want to draw us *out*, save us, pull us outside the narrow passageways and cloned subdivisions that have been *put upon* the land; our dreams want to collapse the gray, concrete garages where we mechanically park our lives each day. Our dreams want our lives to *make a difference*.

Our dreams relentlessly identify those essential, extraordinary qualities that make us unique and *authentic* individuals. At the same time, dreams are ruthless and often shocking in exposing influences from others, from society, from family, from groups, from ideologies, that threaten our ability to live our own lives. Any technique of dream interpretation that ignores this powerful dream dynamic is like a child playing in the shallow end of the pool—safe and secure but missing something *tremendous*, a priceless tool for helping us to avoid living a puppet-like life of dull conformity, a life without passion and creativity, a life of *depressed* potential, a life of little or no value to the world we live in.

An *Authentic Life* is the expression of our essential nature, the original blueprint, the soul struggling, playing, creating, and recreating life. It is breaking the mold, living outside the boxes of life that want to define, contain, and imprison us. It's the distinct, eccentric, unconventional *you*, your unique sense of who you are in the core of your being. Our dreams carry the awesome potential to help us to see clearly *who we really are*, our natural, inborn potential and unique character without anything "put on" us.

A few weeks before I began working on the manuscript for a book about dreams, I dreamt that I was looking down on the countryside from high up in the atmosphere at night. I was on my way to some high object, looking for a place to strike—I suddenly realized in the dream that *I was a lightning bolt* and I saw everything from inside the lightning, from the lightning's perspective; I was the *eye* of the lightning. In that same instant I connected to a tall pole on the ground, and then I felt myself spreading out like an electric mandala rippling with brilliant, translucent colors: blues, light magentas and violets. I felt dangerous, powerful, natural, completely real—elemental. I experienced what it was like to be pure energy, but energy *with consciousness*.

For me, this dream has several layers of meaning. It foretold my actual experience when the idea and realization of *Radical Dreaming* struck me—electrifying, astonishing, beautiful, energizing, and also frightening. Would I be able to articulate what I had gleaned from two-and-a-half decades of dream research and study? What would be the



reaction to ideas that don't fit the established, contemporary dream interpretation techniques?

The lightning dream also helped me better understand myself and my love of ideas, words, and images that “shock.” And it further convinced me of the awesome power of our *dreams*, their natural autonomy, their unpredictability, how a dream strikes our life from the heavens, rippling through our world, leaving trails of fire and scattering rose petals, changing everything. Suddenly we see ourselves and our environment from a completely new perspective.

My fascination with dreams actually began nearly two-and-a-half decades ago when, seemingly out of nowhere, that torrent of unusual dreams roared into my life. It was as though somewhere in my psyche, someone had opened an inner floodgate. Even though I was unable to interpret this inner, symbolic language⁴ at first, my intuition told me that these dreams were far more than just my brain purging residues from the day. They contained thematic images, symbols, and dramas that moved through my life, leaving strange tracks, exotic fragrances, tearing down old buildings, setting fires. I was captivated. I committed myself to understanding their real meaning and gradually filled five dream journals with thousands of dreams, all the while voraciously reading everything I could find on dreams, symbols, the imagination, and theories and techniques of dream interpretation.

In the late seventies, I began working with others' dreams and with numerous dream study groups, filling several filing cabinets with fascinating examples of individuals' dreams. I realized early-on that dreams held many valuable keys to understanding life and the choices we make that inevitably chart our future course. Working with my own dreams had proven to be so valuable and enriching for me, that I knew I had to write a practical book about how dreams relate to a person's life circumstances.

But the real epiphany for me came *after* I began working on the manuscript for *Radical Dreaming*. I was well into the first chapter and still in the process of organizing my dream records and research materials, intending to organize the book around types of dreams: relationships, death, sex, warnings, etc., when that lightning bolt in my dream struck! In the process of rereading and selecting dreams from my files, twenty-five years

⁴ By *symbolic*, I refer to its meaning from the Greek root, *symballein*, “to throw together.” Thus an unfamiliar face in a dream is symbolic in the sense of a *composite*, a combination of images, a carefully crafted mosaic intended to impart information. An important additional aspect would be looking at the dream as a symbolic whole, like an artist throws together all the elements of a painting on a canvas; Jung (“Definitions,” CW 6, par. 817) explained it as, “The best possible expression for something unknown.”



of dreamwork came together. It felt like discovering the long-lost, missing pieces of a beautiful mosaic: Dreams were indeed about our *real* life circumstances, but even more significantly, they were about an *inner revolution*, a *radical* approach to living life. Dreams consistently drag us, usually kicking and screaming, from normality and conformity, into our own life.

I realized that a major category of dreams focused on defining and extracting our *Authentic Self*⁵ from the miasma of collective, outer-world influences and authority that divert all of us at one time or another from living our own creative life. Moreover, I found that dreams were relentlessly purposive in seeking to move us into living our own authentic life, releasing dormant, inner potentials so that individuals can add unique values and characteristics to society and to our outer world; then we, in Buddha's words, enter into "joyful participation" in the world.

Dreams want the individual life to become a creative *intervention* in the social order; they intend to change not only the dreamer's life, they mean to accelerate the evolution of the human spirit and change the world we live in. Our dreams say that social change begins within each of us.

For example, Jasper Johns was working as a window dresser in New York City when he had a dream about painting an American flag. He followed his dream's prompting and went on to play a leading role in mid-20th-century American art, breaking free of the prevailing abstract expressionism movement. Johns' dreams gave him the confidence to step outside convention, to "enter the forest where there was no path," to become a "radical."

President Lyndon Johnson had a recurring nightmare that began as a child and continued while he was vice-president and then as the President of the United States. His nightmare worsened after the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam. Shortly after a final dream, which bluntly portrayed the impossible predicament he found himself in regarding the Vietnam war, he decided not to seek reelection. His successor quickly ended the war and withdrew U.S. troops.⁶

When we are faced with life-changing choices, you can rest assured that our dreams are showing us the consequences of the approaching event. A friend told me about this fascinating example of a young woman about to be married: While in the midst

⁵ I use the term, *Authentic Self*, not in the sense of any personality theory, but rather to describe that constellation of qualities that define our *essential nature*—who we really are, including our fate, our destiny, and our purpose—all the characteristics that combine to make us unique individuals. Instead of a final goal to be attained, the *Authentic Self* is a creative work-in process, like the seed becoming a unique tree.

⁶ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).



of her wedding plans, she had a startling dream that kept her from making a very bad choice and altered the course of her life:

I'm ascending the Pyramid of the Moon outside Mexico City, which I had actually once visited. I am being escorted up the steps in my wedding dress. My feet feel like lead. There is a sense I'm about to be sacrificed. I am filled with dread, panic, and helplessness. I wake up feeling an incredible sense of relief that this is only a dream.

Marriage panic? Maybe—maybe not. But she called off the wedding. Her dream impressed upon her a new resolve to live *her* life: "I've got things to do with my life. And it's not about being a wife, settling down, and having children. ... from that point onward, I was on my own journey. That's been my driving force." She added, "The dream was so absolutely *real*, the feeling of impending doom so terrifying, the relief so huge that I had not been sacrificed. ...Something informed me, and I just followed it in an uninformed way!"

Her dream has an ominous image of outside influences in the *Pyramid of the Moon*, a place where individuals were sacrificed for the "good" of society—a pretty transparent message about society's pressure to conform, *outside* pressure to shrink wrap our lives into socially acceptable roles.

Dreams are the ingredients creating the healing elixir; Dreams are the gateways into the Royal City, our passport into the Special World—and our passport into a meaningful life that makes a difference.

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Children Of Magdalene*Emanuel Xavier*

Dedicated to Reverend Phelps

There are so many dead pretending to live amongst us now
 who belong to a church hidden behind the harvest of hate
 which takes us in and blinks us out with ignorant eyes
 and condemn us for lying together in the tombs of our beds
 while their savior hangs from nails displayed on hollow walls
 and our sacrifices are left to hang on fences
 bleeding rivers of glory
 to wash away the sins of their world

This prejudice is the pain that clouds my eyes and knots my spine
 the scars on the back of my head
 engraved by those who reach out open arms
 bloodied with hypocrisy, lost dreams, and intangible mantras
 those who haunt our daily prayers
 with the sounds of oppression
 to silence our shepherds with death
 because death equals dreams never to be heard of again
 and our prophets get no maps to salvation

But the wind will not inherit the echoes of our souls
 we will not leave our canvas with unfinished colors
 or remain the uninvited children of a lesser God
 we will ground our bare feet with toes in soil
 listen for the wind chimes in the insanity of life
 light candles for our brothers and sisters
 from the West Side Highway piers of New York City
 to the farm lands of Laramie, Wyoming
 to the Castro Streets of San Francisco
 and feel the closest we can to heaven
 because true love has no boundaries
 and our angels have wings too



AL PIE DE OYA

Emanuel Xavier

I shared a drink with Miguel Algarin,
founder of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe,
the place that sanctified me from the streets with poetry

& I found myself thinking about Mikey,
not the Mikey X I had contrived as an alias in my writings,
but the Miguel Pero that had been this man's best friend

Miguel (Algarin) stared back at me as if to compare
& I remembered one of his poems which read
"Instructions for ceremony should be written as a poem"
When I die, I want to be burned with my books
flesh and words melting into one (*echame candela*)
ashes unleashed over the West Side Highway piers
gently dispersed by the winds of Oya
carrying my soul to the secret verses and hidden places
where the children will always find me
where my lovers will always find me
where I had found me watching the bright lights of New York City
hoping one day I would shine as bright as the stars
inspiring hope in the hearts of hustlers to come

However, with many nights spent stretched out on her graves
tombstones casting shadows on faded wings
the Queen of Cemeteries will want to embrace me
If buried, black is sanctioned
color of my children and eyes and revolutions
garnish me with poetry and rosaries to set the spirit on fire
haunting dreams with words and deliverance

And so maybe I proved prostitutes can become poets
shamelessly rising above and beyond homelessness
Sitting there like a novelist posing in lush, spacious apartments



while French journalists covered me with cigarette mist
asking questions like, “What does ‘munchin’ trade’ mean?”

I came a long way only to find that it wasn’t enough
that the mistakes of the past limit the future
even though when it rains, we all get wet-
the prostitute, the poet, the prophet
Each breath brings me closer to the end of this journey
until dead is dead is dead

In the end, it doesn’t matter how I lived, how I died, or what becomes of what is left
Listen for me in the flicker of candles
Inspiration often comes from silence

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Taken from the poetry collection, *Americano*.
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Faceless in the Dark

Nathan Horowitz

"I am he, as you are he, as you are me, and we are all together."

—Lennon and McCartney

All day I've been fasting from food and drink; at three o'clock in the afternoon, the headache sets in from caffeine withdrawal. I'm lying face down, stretched out in the best hammock. This large hut has no walls, just a palm-thatched roof and a floor that's up on posts, three and a half feet off the ground. Most of the family is away. Somewhere upriver, Joaquin Tarahuila's friend and fellow shaman Huhú Seseneno is brewing yug out of vines and leaves. Around me, the sounds of the jungle. After urging my teacher for some time to make time for another ceremony, the day has arrived and I'm apprehensive, dreading the awful taste in the mouth and the vomiting. I complain to Joaquin's twelve-year-old grandson Luis: "Poor me." "Why?" "I'm going to drink yug tonight." He laughs.

Luis has never tried yug and has no plans to. In the past, boys sampled it at about nine years of age, just a little at first. It wasn't as essential for girls. After Joaquin was orphaned, he learned to drink it under the guidance of his mother's parents, who were both shamans, and he began healing when he was about fifteen. After Protestant missionaries from the United States entered the area forty years ago, shamanism and the yug ceremony went underground and nearly disappeared altogether. Joaquin's wife Maribel, having begun her training as a shaman, was abandoned by her helping spirits when she accepted Christ, but she retained the ability to heal by laying on hands. Today's youth, for better or worse, seem to care more about learning to read and write, and to deal with the outside world, than about old customs. This helps explain the fact that Joaquin's few apprentices are all outsiders.

Luis wanders off to play soccer with his brother and sister. I close my eyes. Nearby, in the trees by the Tajino River, black and yellow oropendula birds are singing a sad, liquid tune.

It's dark when Joaquin and Huhú arrive, and I'm confused by sleep. The two men bear flashlights, speak in their alien tongue, laugh. In my dreams, I was far away. Now I'm in a laughing darkness, unsure of the order in which things will happen. I sit up in the hammock, collect my thoughts, wait a while. The family is bedding down for the night in the enclosed room at the other end of the hut; the native schoolteacher and his son, who are visiting, are already asleep under mosquito netting in the dining area.



Faceless in the dark, don Joaquin bustles over and hands me a flashlight; a tin-framed, rectangular mirror; and a seedpod of uculi to be used as a pigment. “You can paint your face now,” he says. I crack open the soft, spiky pod, work a finger into the moist, red juice around the seeds, and apply a standard, basic yug drinker’s design: a spot on each cheek, and one spot each on the chin, tip of the nose, and forehead.

Huhú builds a small fire of palm wood on a wide metal plate that rests on three squat ceramic pillars on the floor. I wrap myself in a blanket and recline in a hammock; Joaquin and Huhú are side by side in the one I was sleeping in before, facing opposite directions, Huhú closer to the fire. This is the first time I’ve seen him. He seems to be in his late fifties, a decade younger than Joaquin, with a strong jaw and small eyes. Unlike Joaquin, he doesn’t speak much; he seems uncommunicative, and he makes me nervous.

In front of Huhú are two plastic jugs, one filled with yug, the other with water; and two plastic cups, one for yug, and one for water to rinse out the mouth. It’s no problem to spit or even vomit on the floor: it’s easily washed off in the morning.

I close my eyes and listen. Huhú unscrews the cap from the jug of yug. The sound of the cap being placed on a floorboard. The sound of liquid pouring into a plastic cup. I watch Huhú as he holds the green cup in his hands. Praying, he sings; singing, he chants. It’s very intense and serious and goes on for about five minutes. He’s a priest consecrating a sacrament. Then there’s a pause, and he drains the cup. He rinses his mouth with water from the other cup, leans over and spits the water into a crack between floorboards. He pours yug and prays over it for Joaquin, and lastly does the same for me. I thank the creator of the earth and sky for the day, for this moment, and for the yug, and I drink it.

The taste is even worse than I remember, instantly nauseating. It’s hard to get to the bottom of the cup. He brewed it very thick and strong. I rinse my mouth, lie back and try to move as little as possible. I rest for an hour, calm, bored, praying for good visions, unable to sleep, listening to the night sounds and the sporadic conversation of the shamans, wishing I could speak their language.

I look for alterations in my vision or thought and find none. Huhú sings, and his voice makes me uncomfortable. It’s somehow less human than Joaquin’s, less mammalian, even: it contains some of the pitches and rhythms of insect songs.

Huhú finishes his wordless song, chats with Joaquin, and prays over and drinks another cup; offers me another, which I accept. Another uneventful hour passes and I drink a third. I feel the yug building up like water behind a dam, and eventually I have a fourth cup. Now I’m shivering, waiting for the dam to break. Feeling cold and electrified, I shake violently, rock forward and backward in the hammock.



At last a vision begins: a complex, light blue arabesque arising from the song of nearby cicadas. I relax as I focus on it. It occurs to me that each part of this visualized song, each element within its pattern, contains a different piece of information. The cicadas seem to be describing the environmental conditions of the area.

Huhú chants like a cricket, very fast. In the near-complete darkness now that the fire has died down, his face blurs, half cricket, half visual song, blue green sound patterns like fan corals shifting in the air. Joaquin prays now too, as if he were an old scat singer, improvising riffs on ancient melodies. He's been singing when he drinks yug for nearly sixty years, and he sings the sacred syllables with a fluent beauty. From time to time one or another of the shamans breaks off singing to mimic a howler monkey or a jaguar, a sudden *HUH! HUH! HUH!* or *HRRR!* in the common language of the mammal tribe. Now Joaquin picks up a *shesh*, a ritual fan made of leaves, and shakes it as he sings, for rhythm and to move energies. It sounds like the wind rustling leaves, fast, over and over.

A rumble in my belly leads to pain, which I visualize as a huge serpent, glowing blue, writhing in my belly. The pain makes me cry out, gliding from agony when I scream like a hurt child, to triumph when I'm at the top of a hill of pain and feel tremendously strong and alive, and back down again. The pain becomes awesome—I've never felt this much pain before. It's as if I've been poisoned and I'm dying. The pain makes me writhe in my hammock, like a fish dying in the air, or like a butterfly trying to shake off its chrysalis.

Keep the yug in as long as possible as it extracts its price, the tax on transformation. Its price is pain, and I'm willing to pay. This is where some of the healing comes in. It's what I imagine being Rolfed must feel like, only from the inside: I'm stretching out my back in wondrous ways. As I scream in pain, Joaquin and Huhú build a brilliant wall of song nearby from their shamanic spaceship hammock, a song that says to me very clearly, "You're doing fine. We've been there too."

*A crescendo of pain,
gripping, whirling, killing,
infinite pain, insane,
breaks me at last
and explodes out my mouth;
my cries turn to roars
of ecstatic, magic victory.*

*!...It's like smashing into a magic mirror
or passing through a lens that turns everything upside-down:*



*the pleasure that follows the breaking point
is exactly as strong as the pain that preceded it...!
(!...Death (must (be) like) that...!)*

I have nothing to fear, now or ever. My body roars with the strongest joy imaginable. With the piney smelling vomit pooled on the floorboards inches from my face, I scream, my body facing the floor, swaying, just my head out of the hammock, looking at the upside-down world in darkness. Now's the time to growl, no human language needed, now's the time to howl, to pound on the floor, imagining enemies.

Now I lie back in the hammock, my body humming like a well-tuned machine, now's the time to sing *Aumm... omm... home... heyyy!... ommm... hey, hey hey hey hey...* With simple sounds I sing of the growth of plants, the birth of stars, the alliances between rainforest peoples and outsiders.

Be silent now, and listen to Huhú and Joaquin singing different songs at the same time. Complex patterns of sound waves and vibrations mix with the songs of cicadas, crickets, tree frogs peeping in the woods.

Listen to the silence of the shamans, and to the peaceful song of the forest night.

The two men sit up in their hammock, their legs in opposite directions, and converse. Huhú pours, chants a magic spell, drinks another cup of the potion. To me he says, "You want another?" "Yes," I reply. I watch while he pours, prays, passes it to me. Horrible glittering holy yug, welcome to my body, even as I shudder as I drink.

Since I'm sitting up, I feed the fire, blow on it, get it going again. Smoke blows back in my face. I lie down in the hammock, swaying a little. Along my jaw, my fingers explore razor stubble, 2 A.M. shadow from shaving yesterday morning in the river. Thoughts lead to thoughts and I wonder how the U.S. military mission in Haiti is going. A newspaper article I read in town a week ago said the death toll on our side was up in the twenties. Now I see the dead ones marching, thirty yards southwest of the hut, lost among planes of darkness in the roadless jungle of the night. They've found out what we wonder all our lives, what it is to die. I sing to them,

*Now you know,
now you know,
now you know.
Honor the fallen soldiers,
we wish you well,
we wish you well.*



Immediately they have taken refuge in my stomach, and I know I'm going to throw up.

I sing to the dead soldiers of the pride America has, and the love their families have, for them. Later on in my life I'll die too.

*We all die,
we all die,
we all die.*

A peaceful, deathlike calm floats over and around my body. I lie without moving, practicing to be dead, rocking gently back and forth in the hammock like a corpse moved by the wind. My thoughts drift away like smoke.

Someone clears his throat loudly.

There is silence, there are crickets. In a dream once, a dead friend told me that for a week after he died, he didn't know he was dead, and he ate cabbage and the tops of the waves on the whitewater river where he drowned.

The cicadas start up again. I hum, wondering about the birth and death of the universe. I fall silent, agnostic. What are the shamans seeing?

Joaquin coughs and begins a song, tentatively at first, then stronger. He's told me it's his work as a shaman to protect his people with his song, his magic, his prayer. Demons—a metaphor for what?—can't stand the sound of it and flee back to hell-realms below. Invisible to me, but not to the shamans, the sky people descend, radiant. After a while my stomach churns and I know it's only a matter of time.

The waves of nausea come closer together now, and stronger. I'm singing hard, trying to persuade my body to keep the yug down. Then the waves of pain break over me and I cry out, then I'm singing again, knowing I'm going to feel a lot worse before I feel better. Nine people are more or less asleep within earshot, and while it's acceptable to roar, howl, scream or yell as necessary, it feels important to sound good while doing so. I think about them thinking about me and reassure them with my song that I'm all right.

No, I'm losing it, a horrible groan is wrenched from my lips, and in a moment I'm puking again, as inevitable as death. It's strong, my whole body bucks, I think my eyes must be squirting tears. Cleaner inside to start with, I'm not roaring as much, but I feel like I'm staring right through the earth into outer space. The fingers of one hand grip the webbing of the hammock, the other hand braces against the floor as I spit out the last of it—*Ptah!* Empty, but racked by dry heaves, I shout *Dau! Huh huh huh HUH! Hrr!* Cough and spit again and then lie back feeling lighter, sing *Haaa* to signal that I'm at peace, and that rage is a gift that must be used only for good. Sing *Hey...* the defense of peaceful



communities. *Hmmm...* healing and the color green. *Heyy...* the sound of sunlight. *Hai*, the blue sky. *Ha, ha, ha...* the pleasure of being alive. I mix a surreal song from shining fragments of words and sounds that come out in all colors; I sing real nice, then falter; try to regain the magic, fail, and subside. I remember something funny that happened in ninth grade, and laugh and laugh. Then there's silence again.

Huhú sings his funny insect song, Joaquin is serious and I laugh, Joaquin sings, shaking the leaf fan, and I hum along, wishing I could sing like him. I'm grateful to him and his ancestors for their songs of freedom and redemption. Later, Huhú gives me more yug, and later still I throw it up again, the vision machine humming around me, painting intricate colored patterns in the black air. Even later, we all sing together, and it's like flying through clouds.

A distant roar of howler monkeys in the jungle to the south at 4:30 A.M. sounds like a storm on the ocean.

Huhú stands up and begins to march up and down in the deep blue pre-dawn light—marching forward, stepping backward, all the while shaking his leaf fan, *sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh*. I lie there eyeing him, thinking, *This is weird. Truly, deeply, embarrassingly weird.* But the following evening, Joaquin would ask me, *Did you see how beautifully he danced? And did you see the sky people dancing alongside him? So many of them, like leaves! And so beautiful!*

Soon the roosters begin to crow, and then the light creeps into my companions' bright tunics, one orange, one yellow, and into my green tunic as well. Doubled over with dry heaves, gagging, gut-wrenched, and utterly thirsty, I feel a sudden nostalgia for the café where I work back in the States; I wish I had a raspberry Italian soda.

In the early morning light, Joaquin and Huhú joke with me, broad smiles and laughter all around. Joaquin is relaxed, bemused, red spots of uculi on his cheeks, his legs crossed at the ankles. He usually reminds me of a Tibetan lama, but his smile now is pure René Magritte. Huhú takes a long swig of yug directly from the jug... just watching him do this nauseates me, and I belch and throw up a bit on the floor. I stay where I am, perfectly comfortable, and watch the pool of vomit—pure yug—as some of it begins to slip slowly down between the floorboards. I study the chainsaw pattern of the floorboards, and the tiny, white saliva bubbles on top of the thick brown liquid.

I hear the sleepers rising in the other part of the hut. Joaquin, who's drunk less than Huhú or I, converses with them. I shift my head and watch, for a long time, the upside-down jungle, and the way that the breeze picks out certain leaves to caress while leaving others unmoved. Huge, upstanding leaves of banana plants, transfixed bright green by the morning sun, rock back and forth. I study the clean clothes hanging on the



line outside, and the flight paths of small birds as they zoom by, little more than blurs. An immense black beetle buzzes through the hut.

I lie back in the hammock, chatting with Joaquin and Huhú. My whole body feels good. From the dining area where he was sleeping, the schoolteacher regards me intently. His son is wary of me, remembering my wild roars. Two of Joaquin's grandchildren smile at me, proud of my fortitude. And Joaquin's wife Maribel beams her gorgeous grin and sits down with a knife to pare her nails.

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Adam and Steve

Toby Johnson, Ph.D.

One might say homosexual orientation—and modern day gay and queer, consciousness—derive from an Edenic state before “original sin.” In the metaphoric language of myth, you might ask: “Where were the homosexuals in the Garden of Eden?”

Well, we frequently hear Christian preachers deride gay people’s struggle for equality and fairness by joking that God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

Well, maybe they’re wrong. Maybe He did.

The Book of Genesis begins with the story of how the gods, referred to in the plural as the *elohim*, created the cosmos in six days, creating human beings on the sixth day and then resting on the seventh. The story then goes on to tell how a particular God, referred to in the singular by the unpronounceable Hebrew name YHWH, who seemed in charge of sending rain, wanted a gardener for his Garden on the east side of Fertile Crescent called Mesopotamia.

This God YHWH formed a man out of the dust to be His gardener. YHWH was a strict and demanding God and set a rule for this gardener He’d made that he could eat any of the fruit in the Garden except the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And He instructed him to give names to everything in the Garden. As we know, the gardener named the Garden Eden.

What isn’t mentioned in the second chapter of Genesis is that there were other men in Mesopotamia. In fact just down the road from Eden, our creative myth tells us, there lived a cute young fellow. Let’s call him Clay. Clay was born from the dust of the Earth, just like YHWH’s gardener. But he wasn’t created by YHWH. He was created by the *elohim*. Since the *elohim* were plural, among them were masculine and feminine gods, that is powers and spirits of creativity and intellectual acuity and also powers and spirits of receptivity and feeling sensitivity.

As it says in the first chapter of Genesis, the *elohim* created man in their own image, that is, both masculine and feminine. The text in Chapter 1, line 27 says in the image of God He created him, male and female He created him. The writers of ancient Hebrew weren’t sophisticated enough to understand the distinction between gender and sex, so when they wanted to say the first man was masculine and feminine, they said he was male and female.

This was Clay, the cute young fellow who lived down the road from Eden, who was both masculine and feminine.



Modern day Scripture scholars now explain that the two different creation narratives in the first and second chapters of Genesis, first by the elohim and second by YHWH, are actually two separate traditions in the development of Hebrew Scripture. The Northern Kingdom of Israel called its God by the more abstract, philosophical plural term, while the Southern Kingdom of Juda called God by the more personal and homey YHWH. The elohim create by word and thought. YHWH, the more personal in spite of His difficult name, created by shaping dust and breathing into it; He walks in the Garden with his creation, a kindly fellow though also a strict and demanding employer.

The creation story occurs twice, the scholars tell us, not because there were two creations, but because there were two myths that got woven into one when members of the priestly clan organized the nomadic Hebrews into a single tribe with a written tradition. It's their stringing the two narratives in sequence that results in the two stories.

But those Fundamentalists—the ones who grouse about Adam and Steve—generally don't have any truck with modern scripture scholars. They dismiss all that book learning and research as unnecessary at best and the work of the Devil at worst. They don't need scholars explaining the different stories. They say you can take the Bible word for word, exactly the way God wrote it.

So it's according to that kind of literal belief in the words that we can weave our myth about the androgynous fellow who lived down the road.

We're calling him Clay. He wasn't assigned any particular job by his creators like that gardener YHWH created. (Those scripture scholars tell us that name would have been pronounced Yahweh, if anybody had dared say it aloud. Yahweh was a friendly personal fellow, but obviously a little neurotic. He didn't like anybody getting chummy enough with him to call him by his personal name.)

So Clay hung around the beautiful spot of land the elohim had given him. He played with the animals and birds and enjoyed life. He especially enjoyed having the beautiful body the elohim had given him.

He loved to look in the water and see his own reflection. The sight of his lithe body reflected in the water excited him and pleased him. It made him feel such love and wonder for the gods who created him so marvelously. And he loved to caress himself and wrap his arms around himself and squeeze and squeeze in boyish bliss. And also boy-like, he loved to excite his body. He discovered the wonderful wand the gods had given him and he loved to stimulate himself and come to orgasm, so that he felt at one with all the beautiful nature in the garden world he been given for a home. Sometimes



the gods would come to watch. They would laugh and applaud when Clay came because they were pleased they could enjoy Clay's embodiment with him.

Clay was perfectly content living down the road from the Garden of Eden.

When they were both young and fresh from their creators' hands, Clay and the gardener (whom we all know is going to get named Adam a little later) used to play together. Clay showed Adam how he could get his body to respond to touch and friction. Clay taught Adam how to kiss. And how to see his own reflection in the water. They had wonderful times together, though Adam would sometimes get very nervous and worry that Yahweh would see what they were doing and not like it. Adam enjoyed his job and especially liked walking with Yahweh in the cool of the evening, but he was always on edge cause Yahweh seemed so easily ticked off.

Well, of course, the story goes on to tell that Yahweh thought Adam should have a helper. So he cast Adam into sleep and took a bone from his side and fashioned a woman to be Adam's helper and mate. This was Eve.

Once Eve came around, Adam took to visiting Clay less often. And since he was having an adult sexual relationship with Eve, Adam didn't want to play the boyish games with Clay Clay had taught him.

Clay sometimes got lonely when Adam didn't come around. Not that he needed anybody; as an androgynous being perfectly balanced between masculinity and femininity, he never really had a bad mood. But he did miss the camaraderie.

He'd go down and visit Adam and Eve. Indeed he got to be better friends with Eve than Adam. Adam had gotten so bossy and patriarchal. He wanted his own way all the time. Eve was much easier to get along with. Clay and Eve loved to sip tea together in the morning and talk about the problems they were having with Adam.

One day while Clay was down at his own little grove, enjoying the beauty of the morning, he heard an enormous commotion over at Eden. There were lightning bolts flying and booms of thunder rolling across the countryside. Clay went running to find out what was happening to his friends.

He arrived to discover that Yahweh was standing out by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil having a hissy-fit, and stomping at a big snake curled around the foot of the Tree, while Adam was alternating begging God to calm down and whacking Eve on the side of the head, shouting, "This is all your fault!"

Suddenly another big explosion and an angel with a flaming sword came swooping down out of the sky and forced Adam and Eve to go fleeing out of the garden.

Clay ran up to his friend Eve and asked what had happened. She hurriedly told him how the snake had tricked her into tasting the fruit of the tree and it was so tasty she



got Adam to try it also. Then God had shown up and all hell broke loose. “Now he’s fired us and put a curse on us,” she said. Then added, “Look, Clay, he doesn’t have any control over you. And I know he likes you. Won’t you go back in the garden and see if you can talk Him into changing his mind.”

So Clay slipped back into Eden. When the cherubim with the flaming sword demanded to know his business, Clay reminded him he was the androgynous first creation of the elohim and the Cherubim let him pass. “For you, the two sides of the sword have no power; they are male and female; you are beyond their power to cleave for you comprise both sides in yourself.”

Clay arrived just in time to find Yahweh satisfied the snake was gone. He was still huffing and puffing, but his anger had cooled down.

When Yahweh saw Clay, he sighed loudly and exclaimed, “What’s a father to do? I gave them everything they asked for. But they couldn’t obey one simple little instruction. You tell me, Clay, what’s a father to do?”

Clay smiled, a little sheepishly and a little patronizingly, “You could forgive them.”

“Well, I am sure I will,” Yahweh answered. “But not yet. Let them stew in their own juices for a while.”

“Now, don’t be cruel,” Clay said.

“Cruel? It’s for their own good,” Yahweh retorted. “Look, Clay, if I had given all this to you and the only thing I’d asked is that you not eat the one apple, what would you have done? Yeah, tell me. What would you have done?”

“Well, Lord God,” Clay answered carefully, “you’re right. I wouldn’t have eaten the apple. There’s so much abundance here in Mesopotamia, there’s no reason to eat something marked dangerous. But, still, you’ve got to be merciful with them. They have such a hard time making up their minds because their feminine side is in Eve and their masculine side is in Adam and they have such difficulty ever figuring anything out between them.”

“You’re damn right about that,” Yahweh said, with a thunderclap to punctuate his point.

Not seeing what more he could do for his friends by imploring God, Clay left God in the Garden and went out to help the Adamses carry their stuff to town where, maybe, they could find a cheap apartment. They were unemployed now and finding housing wasn’t going to be easy. Clay offered to help with the first and last month down.

A couple of days later, Clay was back in his own grove sitting by the water side, relishing the feelings and sensuality in his body—and occasionally feeling sorry for



Adam and Eve, but also understanding it was their own fault. Though Clay liked Eve a lot, he certainly saw that the marriage had changed Adam. It was that cocksure thing that Adam did around Eve that made him distrust Yahweh's rule.

Just as Clay was getting into his morning sex ritual, the elohim arrived at his door. They tittered a little, but said they were hoping to get a look at his play. He reminded them that they were always welcome. And then they said, "Well, we have a surprise for you."

"We were talking with Yahweh and learned he'd fired his gardener and Eden is down there without anybody to tend it or keep it beautiful. We think you should take the job."

"It's a lot of work. Adam had to get Eve's help to keep up," Clay replied. "But thank you very much for the offer."

"We'll give you help too," the elohim replied with a snicker of knowing in their voice.

"Clay," they said, "look in the water. See your reflection. See how you encompass all the masculine and all the feminine traits in yourself. See how beautiful you are. Gaze upon the beauty of your reflection in the pool of time."

Clay experienced the voices of the elohim drawing him into a profound mystical experience. He sensed how, as their creation, he was a manifestation of their divinity in the stream of time. He saw his own beauty—and God's beauty—reflected back at him.

And then to his great surprise, Clay saw his reflection seem to take on flesh and to rise up out of the water.

Yahweh appeared next to him at that moment. "As a reward for your willingness not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, I pass on to you the land I'd created for my servant Adam. And I create for you a partner, an equal, a reflection of yourself, a lover beyond the duality of male and female."

So when Clay's reflection came up out of the water, he embraced himself with great love and affection, and he felt wonderful sensations of sexual pleasure rise up in his body. What a wonderful thing this is, Clay thought.

"Thank you, so much, Lord God Yahweh," Clay explained. "I wasn't expecting a reward for obedience. I just thought you must have had a good assessment about the edibility of that fruit."

And Yahweh said, "You shall always have your reflection as a helpmate. Your attraction to one like yourself is my gift to you in acknowledgement of your virtue."

Another thunderclap and Yahweh was off.

The elohim gathered around Clay and his beautiful new boyfriend. "Clay," they whispered, "what are you going to name him?"



Clay thought about a name. He'd liked Eve a lot. She was a great partner for Adam, even if Adam didn't always see it and appreciate her. Clay thought he'd name his partner for Eve. But since Eve was a woman with a woman's name, Clay chose a more manly sounding version. He called his partner Steve.

So, see, there was a Steve in the Garden of Eden. There still is.

Well, Clay and Steve moved into the garden and took very good care of it. They decorated and designed and beautified til there was just nothing more to do.

The Adams family was still living in town and Adam and Eve used to bring the children out to Eden occasionally to visit. Their teenage boys were terrors, always getting into fights with each other. Everybody in town knew they were going to come to no good.

But Adam and Eve had other children and they all came around. Sometimes Clay and Steve discovered they could see reflections of themselves in some of the kids. They weren't going to be parents themselves. They understood Yahweh's gift of living in the garden and not having to cope with the problems of original sin the way the Adamses did meant they wouldn't have their own children. But always among the children who came to visit, there were those like them. Clay and Steve always invited the cute gay boys and the sissies and the tomboy girls to come back without their parents so they could be instructed in the secrets of cultivating the Garden.

The Secret of the Garden is that we've never really left. This world, as it is, is the perfection of the Garden, the Kingdom of God on Earth. This is why the "children" of Adam and Steve can bless and forgive all the others.

That's why we're here.

Toby Johnson, Ph.D. is author of eight books: three non-fiction books that apply the wisdom of Joseph Campbell, his teacher and "wise old man," to modern-day social and religious problems, three gay genre novels that dramatize spiritual issues at the heart of gay identity, and two books on gay men's spiritualities and the mystical experience of homosexuality. In addition to his novels, Johnson is author of *In Search Of God In The Sexual Underworld*, *The Myth Of The Great Secret (Revised edition): An Appreciation Of Joseph Campbell*, *Gay Spirituality: The Role of Gay Identity in the Transformation of Human Consciousness* and *Gay Perspective: Things Our Homosexuality Tells Us about the Nature of God and the Universe* (reviewed in this issue).



Gay Perspective by Toby Johnson

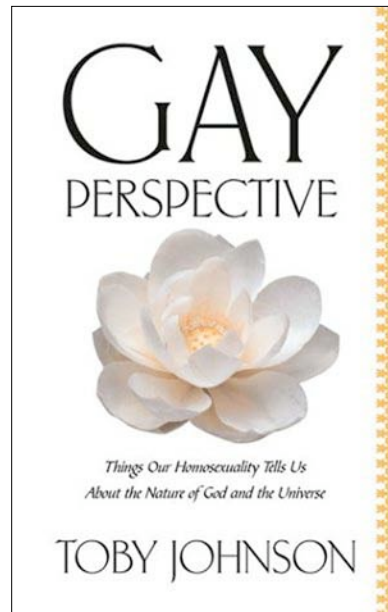
Review by Peter J. Plessas, Ph.D.

Gay Perspective: Things Our Homosexuality Tells Us About the Nature of God and the Universe, by Toby Johnson (Alyson Publications, 2003, \$14.95), is a provocative revisioning of gay spirituality for the new millennium. *Gay Perspective* honors our sacred sexuality and spirituality, while continuing a cultural critique on heterosexuality and the rigid dogma of monotheistic religions.

Johnson begins by reminding the reader that our diversity is reflected in nature, which offers a unique perspective that adds to the evolution of the species. One possible reason for homosexuality, suggests Johnson, is the “Earth wants fewer people.” Other than population control, Johnson believes that due to our unique sexual perspective we challenge heterosexual norms such as, the assumption that sex can only be for procreation. Rather Johnson positions gay men in particular, as translators and definers of sexuality and gender roles. Because we are defined by our sexuality it becomes our vision and perspective. Johnson believes our purpose in our orgasms is an expression of “expending excess”—we do it for the evolution of the species. *Gay Perspective* also reminds us that our sexuality has spiritual roots; sex as prayer—a communion with self and with God.

Gay Perspective's strong point is its ability to reframe our perceptions, by weaving together many current issues raging from HIV/AIDS, pedophilia, organized religion, to inspired spirituality. HIV/AIDS, according to *Gay Perspective*, is a “call for compassion in the world” and illustrates how HIV has sparked a medical revolution, placing homosexuals at the forefront of this change. More importantly, Johnson honors our role as leaders in the process of death and dying. Johnson also reclaims pedophilia from its heterosexual fear-based projections. The public eye has been focused on the shame of being molested in male-male relations, which is evidence of latent homophobia. In response, Johnson recalls the ancient practice of *Paidierastia*; the practice of an older man taking a younger man as lover/pupil. Johnson even speculates that the current

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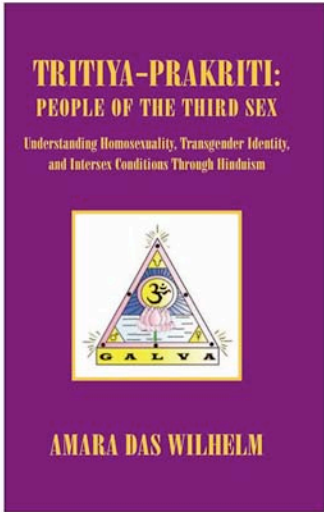


pedophile priests could be—as they were in the past—initiators of young people into the realm of sexuality.

What *Gay Perspective* does best is reconnects oneself with a higher power. Johnson’s metaphysical vision reunites us with God, through the term “spirituality” which best captures our sense of God as consciousness. Influenced by mythologist, Joseph Campbell, Johnson reveals how God is a projection of our deepest sense of self, which therefore requires a personal responsibility. Johnson encourages us to find God inside our own lives. In this discovery Johnson believes that we create our own heaven and hell; how we understand these places crafts our success or failure in life. Johnson explains that people are literalizing religion rather than metaphorically imagining their transcendent meanings. Many people are caught in the search of finding the actual “Garden of Eden” and the real “Adam and Eve” taking biblical texts as unshakable truths, rather than seeing it as composite of metaphors inspired by one vision of God. Because of this, organized religions have, “lost ability to move people through the power of its metaphors and its spiritual teachings.” As gay people we readily see through the world as metaphors, because much of the world does not speak for us as literal truths. Many of the monotheistic religions did not create room for us in their own mythology.

Johnson offers other mythological figures and stories that transcend antiquated

“In India there is a system where such people (the third sex) have their own society, and whenever there is some good occasion like marriage or childbirth, they go there and pray to God that this child may be very long living.”
 – A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founding Acharya ISKCON



Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex

Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity and Intersex Conditions Through Hinduism

By Amara Das Wilhelm

ISBN: 1-4134-3534-3 / 263 pages – \$18.69

RELIGION / Hinduism
 SOCIAL SCIENCE / Gay Studies

“Gay and lesbian people have always been a part of society from Vedic times to our postmodern times.”
 – B.V. Tripurari Swami



dualisms that monotheistic religions ascribe to. Instead Johnson offers two characters that homosexuals can readily identify with: the teachings of the Historical Jesus and from the Buddhist tradition, the myth of Bodhistva Avalokiteshvara, a deity who transcends both male/female and time/eternity. Johnson excellently presents a new mythological story on gay spirituality one that weds our perspective with ancient history and different traditions. He infuses our gay story with power and reverence instead of sin and disgust reflected in many monotheistic traditions.

The reader may find some parts of *Gay Perspective* challenging. For example, Johnson teases the reader with small sections topics that could have been more in depth. There were many times in which Johnson's writings seemed like proclamations with overarching assessments about gay life. I find myself disagreeing on several of these. But in this disagreement the reader finds him/herself in a reflective quandary with one's own perspectives which, I imagine, is the purpose of his book: to craft one's own gay perspective. From this provocative vision, his proclamations are another example of the multiplicity of the gay experience. Overall *Gay Perspective* is an impressive book that awakens—or re-awakens—the gay sense of self and offers a transcendent doorway to spirit for anyone who is searching for higher understanding of their sexuality and the spiritual power it holds.

Peter J. Plessas, Ph.D. is a recent graduate of Pacifica Graduate Institute where he obtained a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies with an Emphasis in Depth Psychology. His dissertation, *Devotees of Dionysus*, focused on the Greek God and archetype, Dionysus in relation to queer men's lives. Mr. Plessas currently lives in San Francisco and is beginning a private practice in Archetypal Psychology, working with gay/queer men.



Left in the Dance

Bryan Dini

1

This boy, here, with lips pursed
and a brow drawn by lines
of too much thinking--
a harsh shadow over a broad nose
and drowsy eyelids, with a neck
that cranes habitually to the left
and a handshake that retreats
too soon and stutters--

I left him in the dance.

This boy, here, who thought
solitude was fashionable, and who
would stretch dirty lawn chairs
over clean-cut grasses and wonder,
alone, how the people who live
assembly-line lives in Euclidean houses
could be happy when the faraway birds
migrating northbound to some unknown
primitive wilderness were calling them out
of their vicarious digital travelogues--

I left him, too, in the dance.

This boy, here, who sucked a tit
that left him cold, and who was
otherwise fascinated by the throbbing
cyclopean stare that drooled
lovely pearls when lit by
thrashing tongues, fevered lips--
who got bent and spread-eagled
because male receptivity was sexually subversive
and proved he could take it like a man

when really all he wanted was to feel like
 the shudders had been lifted
 before a single human gaze
 for one transparent moment--
 I left him, too, in the dance.

This boy, here, who thought
 he was a Democrat, but then realized
 their proposed socialist safety net
 would increase his taxes--
 and who was too tender to flirt with the Republicans
 because they didn't give a shit in the first place--
 and who found himself somewhere in the middle
 disillusioned with media spectacles
 slightly Green but technicolored
 looking for something more real,
 more mystical than politics--
 I left him, too, in the dance.

This boy, here, who thought
 God was first a man got through a virgin
 whose tears were rosary beads to be cried
 and counted before bed every night in prayer--
 and who started looking for divinity elsewhere--
 in equations--in the stars--
 in the ghosts of galaxies
 their spectral light reaching
 from their burnt-out graves
 on the periphery of time
 like the last retreating gasp
 of a dying legion
 looking back over their lives
 before the last nuclear blast--
 and still later looked for it
 in the drugged but lucid eyes
 of someone to whom he just made love
 and the expectantly vacant moment

PS

when
any possibility of discerning
where his body began
and the other ended
was nil--
I left him, too, in the dance.

This boy, here, who distrusted
his senses because he could not feel
with his world-weary heart
the bittersweet prick of all those Things
that tickle our nerve-endings
and make life worth living--
and who was converted to
touch, smell, sight, sound, taste
by the inexplicable grace of
a crushed-velvet space
of substances too coarse for addiction
and too fine to be given up--
all burnt in an offering,
a tempered ring of spicy clove-smoke
blown drunk with tangy red wine
across eager wet lips ready to kiss
and an Air on a G-string
that was played so sweetly
it fell off and revealed
a glistening white buttock
ready to fuck--
all he needed to make him happy--
I left him, too, in the dance.

2

Lover! Lover! See him there!
There is a poison in his brain!

A poison that makes the fireworks



between his temples shoot
like pitchforked thunder
from his static-charged fingertips--

A poison that makes the slowly erotic jazz
spinning

 spinning
through the night
vibrate with cymatic symmetries
he tries to grasp and weave together
with his chi-dripping hands
until he realizes these Things
must not be held
 but let go—



PS

A poison that makes visible
those synergetic spiderwebs
plucked symphonically inside him
capturing the epileptic neon lights
 all around
in their crystal orbs
 broadcasting beauty
 on a higher frequency--

A poison that lifts him up
and dumps him out
 and makes a space
for Things to name
 as their nesting place.

3

You admire him, Lover, don't you?
Like an act, but without an actor.

There is just a body cleaved
with invisible magnetic needles
that reach out from every corner
pulling
 tugging
 gently coercing
in every direction
like a man with elastic limbs
quartered by horse-drawn ropes
on a flower-laden rack.

A body that would rock and fly
as if in maternal lullaby--

or a ship sailing black, uncharted waves
that is sea-sawed by curious winds
from far-off places where



foreign words and fragrances drift by
like lost sprites from another world
looking for the compass
that would lead them home--

a choreography like the sad but graceful
sillhouette of a dying swan
in a glassy pond ballet
with children watching naively
in a nearby playground
and asking their mothers
what it means

to cease to be
entirely.

4

You smile, Lover, at this
peaceful nihilist

because the shadow has been lifted
from his haloed brow--

because the lines have been
sandpapered smooth--

because his contemplative chin
is no longer cleft in fistful repose--

his cheeks ovular, porcelain
his eyes no longer secretive
his expression as happily vacuous
as a newborn calf.

You smile, Lover, and continue to do so
even as this plastic marionette
cuts his strings



and backslides
 down
 a
 column
until he lies almost prostrate
an open lotus
like a tipsy Buddha
who collapses
 dishevelled
beneath his Bo Tree
 not quite off the Wheel
 and feeling the inward centrifugal force
 fling his bones and sinews ever wider
 like his soul is much too big
 and bursts out at the seams.

5

You wonder how it is possible
that small narrative miracles like this
still occur in a world where people
march daily into anonymous money factories
with rank and file tagged squarely
on their cattleswine backs.

You sigh for a moment
as the space around your Lover
 stills....
quietly waiting
 for some
 impending crescendo
a slightly more subtle burning bush
to remind everyone
that their childhood fairytales
still exist--

less biblical, perhaps,



but no less magical.

But you are his eyes, Lover,
and you describe inwardly
this very thing before him
he can no longer see.

6

*This fur you clutch beneath your hand, you say,
Belongs to some unknown, unowned creature,
A dog or wolf, none can say,
That wandered in with a tuft of gray
To lick the night from your face
And pillow your fetal frame
Like a stillborn babe carried back to heaven
On sweetly sorrowing angel's wings.*

*This heat you feel on your face, you say,
Belongs to that same shaft of dawning light
That turned Saul into Paul on the road to Damascus
And cuts now through thick cartwheeling dust motes
To bleed honeydew on your sugared crescent eyelids
And pull a luminous blanket over those tender parts
Still chilled by the whispering cadence
Of the snow-melt river crying to herself
Because she is overwhelmed with beauty outside.*

*This voice you hear, you say, not with a single ear
But with every open pore that drinks in sound and light
Belongs to him, your Lover, who will sing you now to sleep
And blow reassuring kisses into the void
Like rose-petals wafting on an obsidian pool dotted with stars
So that you do not make peace too soon with nothingness
So that you heed the welcoming siren-song of an existence
That still needs us, because we make palpable
And we articulate nature's half-spoken, half-realized utterances*



With our interwoven fingers and inextricable breath.

7

I open my eyes--
and this boy, here, who thought
he was the selfsame consciousness
that impels the unfurling chrysalis toward the sun
the infant toward it's mother's breast
the patient to make his last request
which stares out of all things
and sees you seeing me--
I left him, now, in the dance.

And here I am presently
existing in the pregnant space
between two lovers
always ready to birth
greater wholes--

Because all love and poetry begin
when we put ourselves in another's place--
Because poetry is philosophy
experienced through the body--
Because the body is God's way
of seeing Its own thoughts--
And my last thought is:
YOU.

Bryan Dini currently lives in California where he is a philosophy student. He promises to be a brilliant philosopher in the vein of the mystic Osho. He is a “so-postmodern-you-cant-even-see-me-yet Zen motherfucker.”



Ochetura

Eric K. Lerner

There is nothing the head cannot make of a man:



If he is the reflection of a man
 Does he see in the other man
 his own reflection
 Or does the other man become his mother
 giving birth to him
 And he become the reflection of a woman to
 the other man?

The question was asked of young Ochetura days after he passed through the sacred grove. He asked it himself, his eyes inflamed like peaches, ghosts brandishing branches and beating one another raw in his mind, as the diviner, We Sell Honor to Wear Coral Beads, put on trousers and made cloth of palm oil. The words he spoke: you will marry your own initiator. Recoil and cough. “What do you mean?” Diviner We Sell Honor to Wear Coral Beads whisked his hand cupping sixteen cowries counterclockwise over the mat and punctuated the electric whir in the air by pounding his fists against the straw mat to release five elders to speak: You must marry your own initiator Five elders have spoken.” Ochetura searched the Diviner’s eyes, he studied the slightly downward curve of his liver colored lips nestled in straggly salt and pepper hairs to betray a joke, a deceit designed to test the mettle of the young initiate. But there was no sign.

“You should offer 10,000 cowries on the right side;
 You should offer 10,000 cowries on the left side;
 You should offer five white hens;
 You should offer five bowls of honey;
 You should offer five strands of brass beads.



This is what my mother, Owner of the Brass Mirror, was told by Orisha to sacrifice to have a husband, a fecund womb, and she made the sacrifice, and sang Orisha's praises, and her husband was strong, fair, and provided well and her children many. Orisha say it will be so for you that your husband will be fair and provide well and you may bless him with children. The sacrifice you must offer to have."

Ochetura no longer knew his sacred charge from a game where you see how far you can probe a wriggling wasp with your finger without being stung. Gorgeous river cast off her luxurious golden coat to reveal glistening black oil skin as the sun melted into distant horizon. He pulled back skin and pumped the raw neck in his hand to squeeze vivid drops of the hen's life essence into sweet water. Hazy memories of the river picked across his mind like wispy legged birds patrol shallows for fish. Hidden, he watched women innocent of his eyes, freshen themselves. Fragmented perspectives of breast sparkling, shadowy plumed crests nestled between thighs like distant caves momentarily divided by the edge of a palm to flash reddish pulp. Nipples like leopard spots, nipples like kola nuts collided hazily in his mind, sucking his essence, a subterranean recollection of sucking his own life-sustaining essence, until milky drops sprayed across his bald thighs and stomach. He fingered is flaccid penis, emptied, then as it was now, contemplating his fate.

"What is a woman?" he asked is initiator-padrino. Padrino's square hand fixed his solid jaw in a heaven-tilt repose. "A woman is sumptuous dress, melodious speech and laughter, the gentle flutter of a peacock-feather fan beneath dark luminous eyes. Modest at all times, yet she is a bottomless pot of oni. She is water lettuce odor that tweaks hairs inside your nostrils. She coagulates in your mind and then loins as a bunch of warm slimy leaves to be divided, penetrated and sung about. I thank my mother for this inspiration. You're a strong young man, be sure to marry at least one with broad hips so that you will have strong boys." He prayed to the river. He stood naked at four cross-roads a the mirror hour of noon. The jungle cast shadows into giant weevils and men with waxbill heads on all paths before him. Broken panes of light. A hard moon. His petition. To marry his own initiator — that's what he's doing here. Crabs with melon humps, women with paddles for limbs wander dark roads ahead. Lily pads form a skin on his mental eye as he walks home until he hears them crunch. Off the road, in the bush, he detects ripping and sucking noises. He must look. Hard moonlight. A dead man. A vulture pecking out his privates. "My priestess is chief priestess of the vulture. A vulture did a kindness and grew bald. Oshun Ibu-Kolé take your child's prayer to heaven. I see my flesh is a veneer that changes with your caress. Chief priestess of the vulture. Thank you, my odu is clear." As he watched, the vulture was joined by another. The dead man became two distinct halves of a man.



A bite-full gagged him as he prepared to face Padrino. With water lettuce, with honey and fresh water, he inspired his body. With saffron-colored cloth he wrapped it. Brass beads and cowries fashion his crown. The river's melodious rhythm flowed through the pitch and phrasing of his speech. A fluttering peacock fan idled in his hand obscuring his mouth brightened by camwood paste. He eyes rolled askance, making Padrino seem further removed. Ochetura spoke, river murmuring over rocks and shards: "My father — He Does Not Know What He Has Until He Loses It — believes marriage between us will result in profit. But I must work his land for six months of the year because my hands and arms are strong and he has no son. Half the harvest will be yours. So I will tend to your bed, kitchen and market for six months. My father gives you the thatch to build my hut on your compound and pots for a most excellent kitchen. However, nudity is my red parrot feather. Please do not harm me, my husband, by looking upon it. I bring you five kegs of guinea corn beer to seal this bargain."

The bargain was most agreeable to Padrino. Their first night. Fumbling hands like overturned crabs made their way across Padrino's melon firm stomach to grab his thick stubby penis. Burnt cloth odor wafted from his balls. Ochetura began self impalation. He sucked in a deep breath. A burning coin press against his anus. He massaged the opening with palm oil as he worked the slippery black grape shaped head into him. Boisterous stars shone from Padrino's mouth as Ochetura exhaled permeated in gut pain. From above, Padrino became a satiated meerkat squirming on his back and glutting itself with beetles, as Ochetura ground his hips and pelvis to fulfill him. And then stillness. Smugness fattened Padrino's face. He raised glistening fingers to the light emitted by a palm oil lamp and brought them to his lips. Tasting Ochetura's blood, he boasted what a good deal he had found in a virgin bride.

Seeing Padrino through a bride's eyes, cockeyed parrot stare, changed Padrino's irrevocably. Cruelty did not characterize him. Ochetura learned that by nibbling along Padrino's shaft like it was roasted yam and then gulping the whole apparatus like it was the starfruit's pulp eliminated the most strenuous part of wifely obligation. But where was the wisdom that once shone across that square nut colored brow? All he wished to speak of was daily market profit and tempting odors bubbling over from iron pots.

As he carried his daily wares to market along the riverside Ochetura's own reflection danced in ripples indistinguishable from a nubile girl's. He'd cup his breast and push them together to make little brown mounds and that reflected imaged surged his penis to life. Bluey-white veil of morning mist and beginnings. Sometimes he's empty his own essence into sweet waters. He balanced basket on head imitating market women. A sweet pair of white swathed buttocks swayed several steps ahead. Arch of her back. Synchronicity of leg and buttock in rhythm with the current Women multiply like bees on



the spear of a sticky lurid flower on dewy riverbank mornings. He fell into their step. Smiles raised the corners of their lips, like furtive smiles he revealed to Padrino briefly over the whisper of a peacock feather fan when he felt like being coy.

Women's gossip changed them irrevocably as Padrino's little hurumph when he ejaculated changed him. "Etolona," smiled fat Bi-Moremi, flat withered carcass of lizard brandished in her hand. "I can give you a rest. Grind this into a powder. Mix it with camwood powder and lemongrass juice and rub it allover the lips of your pussy before he takes you. His little soldier will not be able to stand again for three changes of the moon."

"Little soldier," raised Ajalere with frozen eye, "I want a big warrior chief."

"Now listen my sister, take juice of one watermelon, water buffalo curd, a cicada, five times five raw peanuts, and licorice root. Boil them together until they are a mush," spoke fat Bi-Moremi. "Strain the mush through yellow cloth. Take what's left and the next time you make love, rub it on the little soldier when he get excited. Your man will cry out it swell up so big. Rub it then with river water to cool the pain. When the pain stops, your man will stay big like a water buffalo."

Ochetura blushed all this time. Modest parrot hiding her red feather, voice like brass bells chime across water, wild lettuce leaf's opacity, coral beaded yellow horsetail scepter, lightness of step, cheek without tribal marks: her inspiration.

Six months passed. Muscles grew firmer in Ochetura's arms — the walks to the market. She greeted each day with water. He picked at each day like a vulture. Pecking for a juicy liver. Bile and truth. The river swarmed with little milky streams that wove their own contorted lacey shapes. Desires streamed endlessly through him. The shapes desire took become various and convoluted as the little milky streams it projected.

Ochetura resolved to conclude six months of nights with Padrino like the first. His hands moved like hungry crabs across Padrino's melon firm stomach to a dead fish, his thick stubby penis. His balls were full like peaches. Ochetura wrested the shaft in one hand. He sucked in a deep breath. Padrino reached up his hands to caress Ochetura's breasts. He massaged the opening with palm oil as he worked the slippery black grape shaped head into him. Boisterous stars shone from Padrino's mouth as Ochetura exhaled sliding his Padrino's life essence inside. From above, Padrino's face was wet making his skin seem smooth. Ochetura's heart beat fiercely. Strength surged through him. He grabbed Padrino's wrists. He strength met his. Stars crackled in Ochetura's mouth. Waterfall of breath crashed through his lungs. Padrino's arms shook violently then yielded as sinuous branches to the young man's ballast. His hands pinned, terror sparked in Padrino's eyes, amidst dark fluttering lashes, then eased into milky gobs. Ochetura was all boy. Boy sparks clobbered every chord and key of his nervous system. He shot a milky lace allover Padrino's stomach. For an instant he leaned into to plug Padrino's



gaping mouth with his tongue, but his senses now intuited each vibration and repercussion. Padrino's mighty little penis was sputtering in his asshole. He pulled out so that Padrino's semen would join his own. Stunned by explosion fattened Padrino's face. His arms lay splayed out. Ochetura raised glittering fingers to the light emitted by a palm oil lamp and brought them to his lips. Tasting his and Padrino's cum, he was silent to the core.

A bird crashes into the river. Broken reflections. Clear Spray. The river pours its sorrows into a white plate. Diviner We Sell Honor to Wear Coral Beads whisked his hand cupping sixteen cowries counterclockwise over the mat and punctuated electric whirl in the air by pounding his fist against the straw mat to release five elders to speak. "You must marry your own initiator." Ebo of three months becomes the trial of six. Then twelve. Ochetura: anything is possible. Lord Eshu of the crossroads. Mirror hour of noon. Iya Oshun Ibu-Kolé take my prayer to heaven. Fly past where hawks and sparrows immolate. I will be a man, half the year. I will be a woman, half the year. To marry my own initiator. There is nothing the head cannot make of a man.

What does Ochetura think at Padrino's feet? Again his boy apprentice. Summoning truth in a handful of cowries, goat's knuckle, piece of soap, onyx marble, mussel shell, and doll's head. He casts shells and counts. Six. Obara. The king does not lie. Padrino dresses himself in camwood and weaves blankets across the sky. Tenderly, he touches Ochetura's shoulder. Ochetura gazes upon his face and is vexed by a haggard curve cut in Padrino's lips. The young man parts his full pale lips as if to speak, but catches himself before he reaches to touch Padrino's face. "You do not hear them speak," says Padrino. "Memory without expression is nothing."

Amidst renegade leaves of water lettuce, Ochetura slept. He greeted the day with water. Water returned his nod. And before him turned a woman with fluttering parrot feather fan in one hand, a brass ago in the other. In turn she becomes two women, plump with youth and camwood stained lips. Darkest honey drips from their lashes. Their necks nod. Unmarked cheeks touch. One woman touches the other's belly which caress swells like a melon. But there is only one woman. Nude. Black velvet skin sparkling with sweet water. Her back and buttocks arch like a pre-pubescent boy's. To her stomach she holds a huge canary melon. Ochetura runs his finger down a crease in the fruit. Quiver and hurrumph. The crease becomes lips of a pussy, delicate crease between two perfectly balanced testes. Penetration. With penis. With castrating knife. Yielding exquisite clear yellowish pulp. His mouth waters. He hasn't taken a step. He realizes it is not a melon she clings to her womb, but his own head. His mind implodes in lacy milk streams. His features expunged. His head a white melon. White calabash. There is nothing a man's head cannot make of him.



He sees his odu revealed like white meat of obi. Lord Eshu, make everything possible fore me, and I will make myself all. A drunkard who smelled like burnt cloth handed him an onion before he entered the sacred grove. Many years passed before Ochetura peeled back each white fibrous layer crying like a girl. His lips, eyes, nipples, genitals plump. He is suffused with warmth. Five kola nuts paid for his shift. Diviners become cowards, become drunkards staggering through the grove. Tree barks become diaphanous cloths. His lips, eyes, nipples, genitals wove together into a sweet sticky web he tremulously traversed. He was splayed out like a sacrifice. Greetings to the sacrifice! Man whose sacrifice is taken by his own head is well honored. Lord Eshu at the crossroads. Iya Oshun Ibu-Kolé's shadow accentuate the sun's brilliance. They and found hundred and one powers of the right handed path circle around white calabash. Boisterous stars. White light ring. Ochetura kneeling by Padrino — sweet, again boy apprentice, again wife. No middle ground. But the weight of one's head on neck. To make the world good, sweet water flows in our directions at once. "My father crowned me so that I could crown myself."

Eric K. Lerner (Associate Editor) combines outstanding credentials in the areas of writing, spiritual ministry, divination, and art. He has served for the past five years as a priest of the Yoruba arch-divinity Obatala. He teaches tarot divination, Yoruba religion, and other spiritual topics. He is the author of two books *AIDS Crisis in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clio, 1998) and with Baba Raul Canizares, *Babalu Aye Santeria and the Lord of Pestilence*. Mr. Lerner's website is <http://www.voiceofthoth.com> For those of you who are interested I will be opening a website devoted largely to Cosmobiology study early next year. If you have material you think should be included, please contact me at eklerner@ashejournal.com



Omar's Tears

Baba Raul Canizares

Omar grew two tears where his green
Eyes had wept
Tears of ink, painted in, sad like his face,
So young yet so had
Who would've thought this man child of
The streets
Would end up in the wrong side of a
Faggot's dick.

Omar grew two tears and his green eyes
Wept
For him, for his people, for P.R. his
birthplace.
In the black and white ceiling
Of his tiny gallery
An artist paints Eleggua crying Omar's
Tears.

A predator's evil infects Omar's blood
A sentence of death
That snuck in the back door

Yes, Omar grew those tears thinking
They made him tough
Green tears that somehow managed to show
How disposable Omar's youth had become.

Omar had grew two tears next to non-
Reading eyes
That have seen lots of prisons and other
Backsides.

He must have had promise, or why would his eyes,



weeping eternal from the
Gallery's high, decorate the Elegua
From the Lower East Side?

There can never be justice in a world that
Allows
Young lives to be wasted, and raped, and
Thrown out.

Omar's tears of ink will fade with his
Promise
As he rots away, His pearly white smile
Filling up with decay

And the worst of it all is that He doesn't Know
How his life has been wasted,
How his eyes have been shut
To the fact that nobody really gives a
Fuck.

Except perhaps
For the guy who looked up
At his ceiling and saw
The potential divinity in Omar's soul

Omar grew two tears where his green
Eyes had wept
Tears of ink, tears etched in, sad like his
Face. So young, yet so had.

Baba Raul Canizares (1955-2002) is the founding Oba of the Orisha Consciousness Movement (<http://www.orishareligion.com>). He was also a respected author, scholar and gifted artist.



Transfutation of the Soul

Frater Desti-N'aton

The body: flesh, bone and sinew.

Mysterious matrices of nerves, organic wiring and tubular plexuses, sacked up neat and tidy in a bag of skin, shaped out by the bone. Travelling homes, eat sleep and shit through them in-between conducting routine affairs.

For roughly two-thousand years a conspiracy has been perpetuated urging us to escape from this flexible bone-sack, from which we daily locate our time and space. And what better way to confuse and detach us from reality? Emerging from the Judeo-Christian tradition to take a bite of the apple, an initial expectation was to somehow become less physical - all this talk of transcendence, whispers of unbeknownst power, presented the startling possibility that one may walk through walls. So didn't stop to ponder the very first stirrings of gnosis had by Eve and Adam: consciousness of the body!

So the Garden of Eden is a paradise only because supposedly ignorance is bliss, so gnosis must be a pain in the arse - anyone following gnostic paths will probably agree, simultaneously acknowledging that once you have the Urge, once you've had a taste of that apple, the path of return falls away so all that remains is an abyss of pain and suffering, all the more painful because you know the alternative.

So transcendence of the body comes through knowledge of the body, an increase in body consciousness and body functionality. Ignorant of this fact initially, after some months of regular practice of rituals, exercises with energy and such, was walking down the street and realised I was in my body, in every inch of it, felt every inch of it, WAS THERE in a profound way, and my mind was clear; not an irrelevant thought, not a stream of endless analysis and association: totally clear, so what else could I be but exceptionally conscious of my body and all that it was experiencing; the mega-bursts of data interpreted through its five little senses. A joyous discovery and a seminal experience. Later found I could stop hiccups as soon as they occurred, hold in piss for as long as I wanted and cum when I wanted therefore fuck for an extraordinary amount of time (poor girl at the centre of that discovery needed a nurse to fix her up; I got off lightly with a bruised cock). Exciting stuff at the time. But how much further can we go?

Common assumptions about what divide eastern and western mysteries often concern the eastern doctrines of the body and the west's apparent lack of it. What to do with it, practices to train it like Taoist Alchemy and Tantric Yoga, esoteric anatomy etc. seemed the exclusive possession of the East once those doctrines had penetrated western



consciousness, and once western consciousness opened themselves to them. Most western theory about the body seemed to belong to the mysteries of death and resurrection.

But the western esoteric tradition isn't limited to the intellectual and analytical, but has an equally strong tradition of techniques involving and training the body; speculation extending, with plausible and probable cause, that Tantra originated in Egypt.

What constitutes the Western Esoteric Tradition, at least throughout the 20th Century, has been what may more accurately be described as the Colonial Esoteric Tradition; that embodied in the institutions of Empire, within its friends and allies, delegating all otherness Oriental or Hell. In a post-colonial world, The West and the East has become merely a symbol. In terms of esoteric traditions, there may be more value in dividing between South and North, hot and cold climates requiring different approaches. When Buddhism hit Tibet it became fused with Shamanism. All that dancing and shaking about keeps you warm, and when you're possessed by a spirit you can't feel the cold...

[Just overheard a conversation worth repeating:

"Jesus isn't dead any more."

"No."

"He died on friday didn't he, then came back on Sunday?"

"The Christians believed he rose again."

That past tense made me think perhaps we should speak not only of a a post-colonial but a post-christian world too. How the two are linked bears deep analysis]

But within the body of 'western traditons', typically embracing cabalistic and platonic traditions, is left out the other stuff. Tribal beliefs of the Africas and Americas, Indigenous Runic traditions of the Northern hemisphere, which are surely as much a part of Western Heritage as any other. How eastern traditions, particularly India, managed to maintain themselves better than the west is a mystery; perhaps they had better techniques of fire-control, unlike those poor bastards at Alexandria, and Londoners in 1666. Probably had less chance of execution for heresy, too.

Body mysteries tread the lines between sex and death. Pleasure and pain, the fusion of the two and the indelible transmutation of one into the other. Changes in body-consciousness prefigure mutation. When Adam and Eve became conscious of their bodies, it were as if they had suddenly grown it, mutated from a state of bodiless-consciousness into a physical actuality.

Magick has this capacity. Mutation can be induced through physical means, and actual rituals, but symbolic mutation, a mutation of consciousness and a change of body-image, is a more common form. Astral cloaks of beast-shapes, lycanthrope gnosis, the



manifestation of ancient atavisms in the here and now, recalling genetic memory of four-legged and fish-tailed lives in strange climates. Perhaps mono-cellular cultures.

Futation demands the imagining of new life-forms, or the psychic decoding of DNA programmes, to actualise the potential audacity of the next step, and house the infinite possibilities of our consciousness. Some modern authors imagine an insectoid future and why not? Surviving radiation and experiencing the consciousness of the hive. But is this a step back or a step forwards? Perhaps its time we discarded ideas of either, share consciousness of each others pain and work towards a common purpose, stripped of the illusion of separation, towards an über-goal as arachnean centipods. Modernism's social dialectic of progress and disintegration has no place in a future where the dusty polarities of Aristotelian logic can be discarded in favour of systems which accommodate multiple and infinite possibilities. Two legs good and four legs bad? What about eight legs and serpent tails? Oh, Big Brother, thy logic system doth not accommodate for the wilder reaches of our imaginings, please advise... or fuck off.

Yes, death to control.

Under a dark sky megalithic buildings touch the stars, long-limbed and luminous silver spiders crawling over their obsidian surfaces, and the eye goes down, down, to the floor of this city, towards a triangular door, eye of horus emblazoned in gold upon its apex. Within, through the door, is a black shrine, with a bound book, alien symbols embossed upon its thick black cover. A figure, draped in a black cloak, waits patiently for the reader of this book, the reader of future histories and star-wrapped oracles.

Such secrets as our bodies will know, accessed through the imagination, secreted by Will. Unbound by taboo we can tap into our latent bestial sexuality, explore the sensuality of the octopus and the sterling prowess of the horse; reach into our bodies, know their breadth and depth through attention, the dis and re-ordering of cells, in and out again through an orgiastic wilderness of no-mind, where we all share the atom, and the atom shares us.

Mass-transfutation begins with detailed knowledge of current life-forms, and their subsequent and suitable alteration to accommodate our infinite probable futures, whose destinies conjoin in the belly of the stars, in the depths of oceanic space., symbolic or otherwise.

Reach into your body, remembering that in its completeness it is a perfect mirror of the universe. Reach into your toes, feel your fingers, the exquisite gelatinous beauty of your genitalia, your eyes move over these words...wouldn't it be useful to have another couple, to see 360°? Imagine the startling possible pleasures of mutli-genital sex. Let's not stop there; lets discard cars and transport ourselves over phenomenal distances with a



thought, as we know certain others can. Lets love our bodies for all they are, and push them towards all they can be.

Survival depends upon adaptation.

Don't let nature steal all the fun! Second guess Her, with due respect, and futate into your favourite imaganimal!

See you at the End-Time Cafe, at the dimensional cross-roads, wearing suitable erotic underwear that accommodates our genetic appendages; we'll have a holistic massage from spider-women; can pop over to the brothel afterwards and gain carnal knowledge of giant androgenous beetle-people, then visit the beach, swim out to the deep ocean, breathing the water with our gills, fuck octopi and communicate truths beyond language spoken by a throat and tongue.

More constructive future imaginings manifesting now through your own chthonic pipelines. Watch this or that, his her and mine own outer-spaces. Jam the network, experience the overflow of a sci-fi bestiary and birth new worlds.

Tristram Burden (Frater Desti-N'aton) is a writer, researcher and low priest in the areas of the self-transformation and magickal praxis. His work has been published in *Prediction Magazine*, *Suspect Thoughts: A Journal of Subversive Writing* and edits *Hem Neter*, a newsletter for the Oxford Golden Dawn Occult Society. Current projects include working on a novel and a couple of non-fiction titles, while finishing his degree in Religions and Creative Writing.



The School of Five-Weapons

Ko Imani, Shirt of Flame excerpt

Individually and as a queer community, the time has come to make a bold and decisive commitment to the most congruent and effective means to create change that we can muster given our current knowledge. We have two options, but we must choose wisely, for only one alternative nourishes life. Our enemies have already made their choice—the sword of Fear, falsity and dissolution. We must choose growth, wholeness, transcendence, truth, revelation, cultivation and Love!

However, we must remember that Love is not a hoe, not a hammer. Love is not a pen, saw, mask, nor ship to sail across our conflict in repose. Love is not even a weapon. Love may not be wielded and then yielded when the war is won. This love is the “thunderbolt within,” a

power which cannot be displaced nor lulled back to sleep once awakened. To choose the instrument of Love is to don “the intolerable shirt of flame.” to put on the garment, a second and shimmering skin, the very being, of Love. Each of us must become Love, in chosen, earthy, and real Incarnation, by choosing to respond to every situation with it.

To become an Incarnation is not to lose self. These processes and ethics do no harm to individuality or free will. This articulation of 21st Century queer activism does not require that we all think in exactly the same way, agree what our most important issues are, or undertake exactly the same projects to transform culture and society. We will not dissolve into a homogeneous movement but unite into an unbreakable web of snowflakes and sunlight, distinct and glorious.

At the same time, to weave that web we must determine the strongest connectors between us, including a Love-centered moral basis for action upon which we can all agree. We cannot continuously choose the weapon of Love if our activism is undertaken because we feel threatened, maligned and discriminated against.



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For most of human history, morality has been defined by large groups of people engaged in one or another religion. However, in the 21st Century we blink and breathe in an age of pluralism. Most people acknowledge that their personal freedom to choose their spiritual journey is threatened when other people are denied the pursuit of other religions, and yet there are so many different religions, with so many moralities, that our society lacks a comprehensive moral rudder. As in life, we can determine which way to go by where our obstacles lie. In this case, “there are too many opinions to be able to set a standard” points to the answer: we must find a morality outside of the divisions.

This diverse new millennium requires a morality as powerful as it is comprehensive, fresh and compassionate. We require an ethic not rooted in any church’s doctrine or tradition but that still allows for our incredible array of traditions and belief systems. This Universal Ethical Standard (UES) must also set reasonable limits on what is permissible in a modern and diverse society based on what seems to be the most basic right of living beings: the right of every individual to take action in the pursuit of their genuine happiness or to avoid suffering. So, the Universal Ethical Standard defines an acceptable (ethical) act as “any action taken in the pursuit of happiness or the avoidance of suffering which does not infringe upon the happiness of another.” Significantly, the UES is based on our sameness as living beings, not on our differences. Unlike old models, the UES involves a bringing together instead of a dividing.

With the UES, we claim the freedom imagined by our ancestors: a global society in which all people—regardless of religion, race, gender identity and expression, creed, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and every other separating label between people—are welcomed with equal opportunity for joy in living and peace in dying. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called this vision the “Beloved Community.” The King Center explains:

“Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.”

One may (and some probably will) argue that to impress an ethical template like the Universal Ethical Standard on our entire society might bring us to the edge of chaos, or turn the capital to salt, as society’s prejudicial, patriarchal, heterosexist traditions are gradually transformed by our compassionate fulfillment of a dream of freedom. The point



is, of course, that in this case there is a distinct choice: either we choose to engage and fulfill our vision of justice, respect and freedom, or we choose to put the lie to innumerable years of inspired and eloquent evolution. Not coincidentally, the choice our nation faces is also the choice for us as LGBT people: do we claim our lives and loves or relinquish the entire possibility of our true being? Do we do what we know is best for us or continue to wallow, struggle and self-destruct?

Although occasionally a government will jump ahead of its citizenry—ending racial segregation, for example—governments usually change as a result of popular transformation. If a critical mass of citizens changes their thinking, their representative government will necessarily reflect that change.

If there is one baseline assumption upon which *Shirt of Flame* is based, it's that the means are inherent in the end. Hate has never displaced hate, and violence cannot end violence. One cannot separate the result from the process of achieving it. Because the true freedom of a Beloved Community is the end we desire—a mass paradigm shift toward refined love and deep nonviolence is required to transform our government and make the nation culturally sustainable. Refined love and deep nonviolence, must dictate the process of change because the end we desire is loving, decent, affirming and fraternal. As citizens change one by one, nations change collectively. A 13-year study by Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson estimates that 50 million such “Cultural Creatives” are already active in the United States alone!

Once we really get it, that the means are inherent in the end, we begin to understand the potential violence inherent in the “us-versus-them” thinking upon which conflict is usually based, and we shift our thinking toward an “us-and-them” model. Like an arm or leg, queers cannot be actually separated from the body of society, however much we may be denied or despised; however great our bitterness toward the rest of the body. “An eye for an eye just leaves the whole world blind,” as the saying goes.

We LGBT people are both inseparably part of and at the same time held at a distance from society, but our very peripheral-ness may be our greatest asset! Those of us who have been marginalized by a patriarchal, ageist, racist and heterosexist society, who already feel separated from its culture of Fear, have an advantage because of our isolation. Just like peacocks making brilliant feathers by eating thorns, we can use the principles in *Shirt of Flame* to transform the darkness and the distance we are given.

The *Shirt of Flame* path to victory comes easier to those who already feel different and outside the affection of society because for us, the fundamental fear of being perceived as “different” has already been faced! We know, on a deep and personal level, that we have been marginalized because we are different in some ways: because of whom and how we love; because we look different or have not lived as long or have lived



longer; because our gender identification or behavior is perceived as deviant and/or unnatural; or simply because we fundamentally disagree with various socially-acceptable paradigms and policies.

Differences are, paradoxically, what human beings most value and most despise. Human beings virtually idolize those who, because of their deviation from social norms, inspire us to live our lives more fully—whether it’s Madonna or Mohandas K. Gandhi. At the same time, at certain levels of development, the prospect of being perceived as different can be very threatening. Every act of violence and war has the same origin: that someone or a group of “somebodies” is different and other, and must be possessed, dominated, altered or destroyed.

When we interact with oppressive society from our anger, fear or pain, we actually affirm to ourselves the social identification of us as “outside,” “different,” or “alienated.” Adopting a Shirt of Flame method means that we choose, instead, to affirm our constituent and responsible function as part of the body of society. After we have transformed the thorns society gives us into plumage, our outsider status can empower us. We then have the strength and agility to stand up in the boat to challenge group-think mentality, to boldly point in a new direction across the waters toward the island of a Beloved Community.

This is a challenging reversal of traditional “us-versus-them” activist thinking and an assertive affirmation of the society we wish to co-create. We become travelers of speed, at the outside edge of culture, great patriots of the ethical, inclusive and harmonious society to come instead of activists attempting to dominate society differently. Joseph Campbell insightfully said to Bill Moyers in *The Power of Myth* that “People have the notion of saving the world by shifting things around, changing the rules, and who’s on top, and so forth. No, no! Any world is a valid world if it’s alive. The thing to do is to bring life to it, and the only way to do that is to find in your own case where the life is and become alive yourself.”

Choosing the Shirt of Flame is a commitment to “finding where the life is and becoming fully alive yourself.” By exploring and defining yourself and your social contributions in new, wholly constructive ways, you will burn with your conscious and empowering difference from a society slumbering in fear.

Dr. King, for example, a black man in a predominantly white and certainly discriminating popular culture, led the African-American civil rights movement in the name of Love and nonviolence. He lived a life and inspired a movement grounded unconditionally in Love, although his life was hardly comfortable, filled with constant threats of scorn, death and failure. Because he woke himself and millions of others up



with the trumpet of justice, he became a target for all that was not Just. Love brings up everything unlike itself. Dr. King felt the fires of a Shirt of Flame.

Almost 40 years after his assassination, like Gandhi before him, King continues to be for us a pillar of fire sent into the darkness to light our way. We must carefully consider the past, in order to mindfully prepare for the future. Each of us must, in their own being, model the change she or he wishes to see in the world by including and transcending the lessons of history in struggle and in strategy.

At this point in the evolution of queer culture, we have the choice, as a People and as an LGBT community, to claim for ourselves freedom's promise of full, joyful and abundant life. No one else can do it for us, and no amount of parading and shouting will get us there. The only tool to end bigotry, to end hatred and violence, to end Fear—the only tool we can use to build the Beloved Community—is Love.

We must become the presence of that alternative.

The time has come for us to wake up from our narcoleptic lives.

It is time for us to choose.

Time to take up the weapon of Love.

Time to strip naked on the mountaintop and don the Shirt of Flame.

Ko Imani is a widely read writer, entrepreneur and agent of change. Ko's dozens of FIRE IN THE LAKE columns are already revolutionizing the way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people approach their personal relationships and their activism. Ko gives away his monthly FIRE IN THE LAKE columns to LGBT community centers, faith communities and PFLAG chapters for their newsletters and websites, through which Ko is touching the lives of almost ONE MILLION LGBT and Ally people. Ko and his husband, Michael, were married in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 25, 2000, and currently live near Ann Arbor, Michigan. <http://www.shirtofflame.com>



Creating Change In Our Lifetimes

A review by Sven Davisson

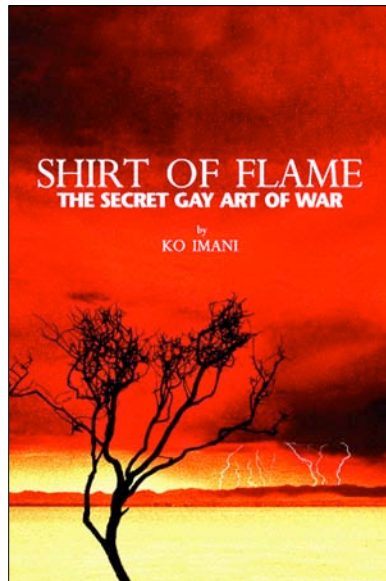
Shirt of Flame: The Secret Gay Art of War, Ko Imani
(Goko Media, 2003, 111pp, \$10.00)

In interviews granted near the end of his life, French philosopher Michel Foucault spoke of homosexuality as “an occasion to re-open effective and relational virtualities.” He spoke of an inherent potential to “introduce love where there’s supposed to be only law, rule or habit.” Foucault’s premises are core values I have carried with me for years. Now reading Ko Imani’s *Shirt of Flame: The Secret Gay Art of War*, I have found a manifesto that merges Foucault’s positivist vision of Queer placement and a Buddhist-derived concept of universal compassion, while throwing in a healthy dose of Sun Tzu.

Imani’s book is a rare find—a work that has the potential of turning the reader in a complete 180°. Imani writes with a passion and palpable immediacy: “We must create change now or not in our lifetimes.” Imani writes:

As LGBT individuals and as a queer community, the time has come to make a bold and decisive commitment to the most congruent and effective means to create change that we can muster given our current knowledge.

He opens the book with the mythic confrontation between a prince and an ogre. After using up all his weapons, the prince defeats the ogre by telling him he has thunderbolt in his belly that the ogre will not be able to digest. It is from this image that the book derives its name and emblematic symbol: the shirt of flame. The weapon of love that we carry with us.



Imani sees this “thunderbolt” as the only mechanism available to create truly instantaneous change. He theorizes that employing current weapons based solely on protest and confrontation will only prolong the fight for centuries to come.

The only means Imani sees for ‘true victory’ is “the cessation of hostility as well as the co-creation of new harmony and the transformation of the enemy into benevolent spirit.” During the course of the book, he systematically sets forth the goal, methodology and underlying theory. Imani uses Martin Luther King, Jr’s name the “Beloved Community” for his shining city upon a hill.

In the course of his book he undertakes a critical analysis of LGBT activism—its gains and shortcomings over the past 35 years. Imani asks where FIGHTING for LGBT rights has got the community and, the more uncomfortable question, what has it cost us. While acknowledging the hard-won gains, Imani also points out areas that to his eyes the activism has hurt the cause for overall acceptance into a peaceful community.

In addition to his insightful critique on activism, he embarks on an even more profound critique on the LGBT community (or communities). In my opinion, Imani correctly locates a failure in the community when it comes to support and nurturing or self-love and sanity. “Unable to understand or practice love in our own lives on a personal, micro-level,” Imani writes, “we are also unable to induce loving behavior and policies on a macro-level, societal scale.”

Imani’s book continues with a call for self-empowerment:

We do the oppressors' hardest work for them by allowing ourselves to be boxed in. We assume the worst and that keeps us from our best.

You, yes, YOU, deserve a full, joyful and abundant life filled with Truth, Beauty, Freedom and Love, but if you wait for someone else, somebody "over there," to give it to you on a platter—it ain't gonna happen. You have to claim it for yourself.

After his astute analysis, Imani sets out his vision of a positivist activism based on the fostering of love and harmony. He calls on each person to use their personal shirt of flame to create change—the universal through the immediate.

He makes an interesting point regarding civil disobedience. He identifies an impulse within the activist community that one has to martyr oneself through civil disobedience and arrest. He suggests that this is misguided and asks the thought-



provoking question: how can we be trusted to suggest laws, when we are breaking just laws ourselves in the name of justice?

Imani speaks from no one spiritual tradition, but his work draws deeply from a universal spiritual well. One can detect influences of Buddhism, Taoism and American Southern Baptist in his choice of phrase and terms he employs. Dalai Lama, Ghandi and King have prominent places in *Shirt of Flame*.

Imani writing style is erudite, clear and, at times, highly poetic. His vision is profound. Scratch the toaster, *Shirt of Flame* should be handed out with Queer membership cards.



Messiah Seeds*Story Waters***Truth as Personal and Evolving**

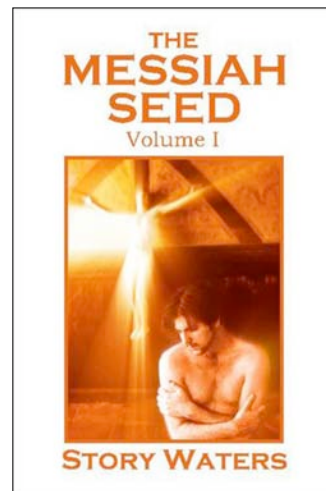
“I choose to continually evolve and transform
my personal concept of truth.”

Messiah, realize that as you change your beliefs, so you shift through realities. Realize that as you shift realities, so the expression of all truth shifts. Remain conscious that truth can only ever be personal and that it is constantly changing. To find the courage to face the reality, that truth is not constant, is the finding of the power to change your reality. It is to constantly break down and reinvent your own definition of *All That You Are*.

Hold no belief rigidly, and it will evolve with you and serve you well. Your allowance for your beliefs to evolve is the allowance of your own evolution. You evolve as your beliefs do, and it is *you* that evolves your beliefs. Through *openness of being*, lower your resistance to life and allow it to flow. Through rigidity you only fight your Self. Know that it is not wrong to battle your Self, if that is what you desire. *All* means of Self-discovery are valid.

Learn to speak your truth clearly, knowing that tomorrow you may speak a different truth. Realize that the truth you speak of today may contradict the truth you spoke of yesterday. Embrace such shifts and paradoxes. Do not allow your Self to be limited by a need for consistency. Know that if others reject you for changing your message, they were simply at a point of choosing to move on. To attempt to be consistent is to limit both change of your Self and the natural development of your personal truth.

Realize that changing your message is as inevitable as your own evolution. Know that evolution does not mean to become *better* than you *were*, but means to remember more of what you *already are*. When you change your message, *rejoice*. Demonstrate the evolution of your own truth. It is your path to contradict your Self: when you do, revel in it. Know your Self as change.



No Objective Truth

“I choose to release the idea that my truth is the truth.”

Messiah, remember that there is no such thing as truth beyond the understanding of truth as the idea of itself. Even those that have seen through the illusion of an objective world still tend to hold onto the idea of an ultimate truth; an objectified level of realization that transcends reality. You call yourselves *truth seekers* and indeed you are. It is, however, important to realize that the truth you seek is purely your own. You seek the *states of being* that totally resonate with your heart. Realize that this does not make these states ‘The Truth’. At most, they can be said to be *your truth in the moment*. Know that your personal truth is no more valid than any other person’s truth. Truth is not some Holy Grail that you seek. If you wish to think in such terms, then realize that the Holy Grail is *being All That You Are*.

To understand what this means is to see that truth is not a ‘state of ideas’; it is a ‘state of being’. Ideas are not *being*. Ideas do not free people; *being free* frees people. Ideas can be a huge catalyst for people to enter freer states of being, but the ideas in themselves do not make this happen. So share your ideas and truths, understanding that these do not free people, but that people can *use* them to *free themselves*. In the understanding of this distinction, a Messiah is freed from the search for an ultimate, mass objective truth. Such a truth cannot exist as it would invalidate *free* will. To cease to seek it is to find what you are really looking for; the understanding that truth is what you make it. ‘The Truth’ is a concept that at one time served you, but has now come to limit your idea of Self.

Remember an idea can be a tool for freedom - but it is not freedom in itself. You are more than your truth; you are a ‘state of being’. Do not worship truth. Do not objectify truth. Realize that, in any moment, truth is no more, or no less, than what you decide it to be. Love truth as you love your Self; as an ever changing, ever evolving, beautiful expression of *All That Is*.



To Love is to Free

“I choose to feel my being in the expression
of universal, unconditional love.”

Messiah, know that you cannot ‘fix’ or ‘save’ any other. To think you can is to attempt to separate your Self from a judgment, that is really about your Self, and to project it outwards onto another. You are not here to ‘be saved’ or to ‘save’ anyone else. If you wish to aid another, then know that the only way to fully do this is to love them unconditionally. It is in the experience of unconditional, universal love that *Self as God* is seen.

If your soul dream is to be a great spiritual master, then know that this is no more, and no less, than being one who loves all unconditionally, such that they may open themselves to the realization that they, too, are God. When such love is discovered, it is realized as the Self, for *you are love*. When you feel as one with all, then there is nothing but love for all. The spiritual master is one who purely realizes that they are love. There is no effort. There is no toil. There is no sacrifice. There is just love that radiates. Realize that there is no one great secret and, thereby, cease to search for that which, if known, would be the solution. There is no hidden solution. It is right in front of you in the art, literature, and many other diverse expressions of being, that have been recorded over the ages. You are love. *Be* love, and the reality that you seek will be yours.

Know what love is not. Realize that you are not loving another if your action limits or harms your own being. You are not loving someone if you sacrifice your own being for them. To make a sacrifice for another is to take away *their* power, *their* choice, and *their* right of creation. To sacrifice for another is to live someone else’s life rather than your own. No matter what the short term benefits may seem, to sacrifice is to simply delay the moment when you will *take back* that power, to retrieve whatever it is you have sacrificed. Know that there is no dream, or wish of your soul, that exists to be sacrificed.

Know what love is: what it is to truly love someone. It is to desire, and act, to make them more *their* Self and not more *your* Self. It is to fuel and empower them, but not direct them. You are love. You are free. Free your love. *To love is to free*.



Story Waters & The Messiah Seeds

Story Waters is a spiritual writer and digital artist who currently lives in San Francisco, California. He was born in 1972 in England. After studying Clinical Psychology for five years he left university one year short of obtaining his Doctorate, knowing that it was not his path. He started channeling his wider Self at the age of twenty and then in 1995 opened his first web site called Angel Web for people to share their poetry, spiritual philosophy, and artwork; thereby embracing the new freedom of expression provided by the birthing Internet.

Alienation.com then followed, housing his artwork, channeled spiritual philosophy, and creative writing. From 2001-2004 Waters founded and ran Open2love, a spiritual community for lightworkers to share of themselves and support each other in a positive safe environment.

The Seeds offered in volume one are drawn from over a decade of notebooks containing his channeling work. These he has reinterpreted through the prism of his current awareness. Waters still channels, “though he no longer sees it as a distinct state but rather as an integral sixth sense as important as seeing or hearing.”

Waters *Messiah Seeds* is a unique work and offers profound insights into living in this world as spiritual entities. Each seed is a philosophical postcard showing our capacity to live in love and truth.

Waters is currently working on further Messiah Seed volumes and a re-expression of the Taoist classic the ‘Tao Te Ching’ by Lao Tzu. For further information please visit his website: Limitlessness.com.



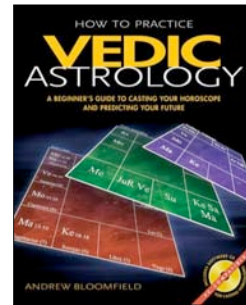
New Astrology Books

Eric K. Lerner

For thousands of years, Hindus have employed *Jyotish*, or Vedic Astrology, for insight into their lives. *Jyotish* means “the science of light.” It is meant to illuminate the map of someone’s life. It identifies specific conditions and life cycles through mapping the heavens, and recommends remedies to balance a client’s energies. During the twentieth century, this ancient astrological science has attracted the attention of Western astrologers. It has shaped thought about esoteric astrology, harmonic astrology, medical astrology and death astrology.

Today a Western astrologer is likely to encounter elements of *Jyotish* in his own studies. I know that I have. When I studied the late Richard Houck’s work on the timing of death in the horoscope, I found myself plunged headfirst in the world of Vedic Astrology with little preparation. That experience, and my readings on Harmonic astrology, made it essential for me to seek out a basic introduction to the science of light. Fortunately, the opportunity arose to review Destiny Books *How to Practice to Vedic Astrology* by Andrew Bloomfield (Destiny Books, 2003, 288pp, \$29.95). I was especially eager to read this title and was not disappointed.

Vedic Astrology differs from Western Sun Sign astrology. It employs a different zodiac. In a Hindu chart cast, each planet is placed 23-degree behinds where it appears in most Western charts. That is because Vedic astrology uses a sidereal zodiac. Western Astrology typically employs the tropical zodiac. A tropical zodiac is based on the point where the Sun is located during the spring equinox. This point is called 0 degrees Aries. Because this point gradually moves each year in a phenomenon known as the precessions of equinoxes, the tropical no longer corresponds to fixed constellations it represents in signs. However, the sidereal zodiac is based on the actual fixed placement of constellations. Bloomfield hypothesizes that this reflects a variation between Eastern and Western mentalities. “Being an Earth-based system, Western astrology encompasses Western sensibilities of imposing our will on our environment, through a certain amount of control, in order to succeed as an individuated, ego-based soul. The Vedic system is more concerned with how to work within a cosmology that incorporates every living being, so that we can bring into manifestation the full expression of our planets without causing any harm, or upsetting the natural universal flow....” Simply put, Vedic astrology



employs the zodiac as it exists today, while Western astrology uses one based on a 2,000-year-old model that is now largely symbolic.

It is beyond the scope of this review to argue the relative merits of each zodiac. Suffice it to say this difference sets up some likely divergences in chart interpretation between the two systems.

A Hindu chart is divided into 12 equal sign houses, with the ascendant contained in the first house. Most of the traditional Western house assignments apply, such as the first house representing self, the second economics, the third communication and siblings, etc. However, aspects are cast differently. Only the seven traditional planets and the Dragons head and tail are interpreted. (It follows that asteroids, Chiron, Uranian planets, etc. are also not evaluated.) There are unique rules of sympathy between planets and signs.

Another distinction of Vedic Astrology is the relative value it places on the sun's placement. Typically, in Western astrology a person's nativity is largely defined by his sun sign placement. Hence, you're Aries, a Pisces, etc. Vedic Astrology places more attention on the sign placement of the ascendant to define a personality. The sun is just another planet. In fact, much more importance is placed on the moon than the sun. This underscores the importance of synthesizing all planetary placements chart interpretation to understand a complete individual. (In my opinion, the over emphasis of the sun's placement is one of the chief shortcomings of most popular Western astrology.)

Bloomfield sets up a basic methodology for evaluating a Hindu chart. He begins with an overview of planetary sympathies. He introduces descriptions of friendship and enmity between planets and signs. He proceeds to analyze each house and its relationship to the planets and the total chart. Such an approach is simple and down to earth.

Also, he presents the *Navamsha* chart as a modifying factor in natal chart interpretation. A *Navamsha* chart is a ninth harmonic chart, which is used to fine tune judgment of a nativity. Differences in planetary placement may soften the negative placement of a planet in a natal chart, or weaken a positive placement. Vedic astrology uses a large number of harmonic charts to fine tune interpretation and timing. However, Bloomfield leaves these for further study by the student.

Both the strength and weakness of Bloomfield's approach is that it is designed for a beginner. Someone who has already been introduced to some of the greater subtleties of *Jyotish* may be disappointed that they are not included. However, Introduction to Hindu Astrology is not intended for someone who already has a working knowledge of Hindu Astrology. At times, I wanted to know more. However, it was very useful for me to have the essentials clearly spelled out once and for all.



There are a number of admirable factors in Bloomfield's book. He does analyze a number of celebrity charts throughout the book. Some of his interpretations seem to be beyond the scope of knowledge described in the text. However, it is very useful to see how a working Vedic astrologer pulls the elements of a chart together and makes distinctions.

Bloomfield also describes what steps he would recommend to ameliorate afflictions in a chart. One of the most seductive elements of *Jyotish* as a practice is that includes remedies for the troubles spots it identifies. An imbalance of planetary energy can be corrected through meditations, remedies and religious rites. This is something distinctly missing from most of Western astrology, which often makes it somewhat frustrating. For instance, a chart interpretation may reveal that someone has a susceptibility to violence due to an afflicted Mars. In Western astrology, an astrologer advises the client, but that is about all he can do. In Vedic astrology, the astrologer could recommend specific mantras, gemstones, and fire rites to balance the violent energies of Mars. Vedic Astrology is a science of healing as well as analysis. Indeed, it is an aspect of Hindu religion. The Vedic astrologer plays a priestly role.

Overall, I feel much more comfortable now in processing information about Vedic astrology. I believe that I could cast a Vedic chart for a client and extrapolate some useful information for him. That should strengthen my capability as a western astrologer as well. For instance, knowing another astrological approach enables any astrologer to get a second opinion in a challenging diagnosis. While you are not going to be able to cast a death chart or *muhurtha* (that is a precise form of electional astrology in *Jyotish*) you can gain a large amount of practical insight into a nativity through studying *How to Practice Vedic Astrology*. Furthermore, you may find yourself motivated to delve into this science more deeply.

In a sense, astrology is the application of universal archetypes represented by planets to an individual's life. The names of the planets come from Greco-Roman deities. It is easy to draw parallels between the planets and their namesakes. For instance, Mars brings force, vitality and courage. These are all qualities associated with Ares or Mars. The planet Mars provides a measurement of these qualities in a horoscope. Similarly, largesse, judgment and expansion are associated with Jupiter or Zeus. The planet bearing this lofty moniker amplifies the corresponding dimensions of life.

Ariel Guttman and Kenneth Johnson use mythic archetypes in their analysis of astrology. *Mythic Astrology Applied* (Llewellyn Publications, 2004, 360pp, \$24.95) is their second book on this theme. Their first book on the subject *Mythic Astrology*:



Archetypal Powers in the Horoscope, sought to increase the scope of astrological interpretation through illustrating ancient mythic associations. The sequel seeks to expand this work through including practical suggestions for harnessing mythic energies in one's life. In some ways the new title recapitulates ground covered in the first book. However, to be fair, I shall focus on *Mythic Astrology Applied* as though it were a lone title.

It is enjoyable read. I find the application of myth to modern life fascinating. It is how I make sense of the world, so when I see that methodology applied to the science of astrology it makes sense. Understanding astrology as myth helps empower the native. Long ago, Alan Leo wrote that a fool allows his astrology to run his life, while a genius controls his astrology. Understanding astrology in mythic terms helps us gain control. We tend to look at myth as life lessons told through stories. Looking at our nativities as stories encourages us to analyze them rather than bow down to them.

Mythic astrology can be empowering in the sense that it enables an individual to see himself in god-like terms. One of the great blessings of Yoruba religion and New Age practices that bring to life the Ancient Gods is that they encourage practitioners to see aspects of the godhead in themselves. Seeing one's self reflect qualities of an animate god is very exhilarating. Understanding one's astrology as being a description of one's god-like proclivities is a model for self-empowerment.

Each chapter in *Mythic Astrology Applied* is broken down into four parts: Astrology and Myth; Dreamwork and Imagination; Planetary Remedies and Awareness and Invocation. Each of these sections demonstrates how myth affects our daily lives. First, they analyze myths associated with each planet, portraying each planet's namesake as a protagonist in a drama. They describe how this archetype has developed throughout history and what are his defining characteristics. This leads to exploring how a planetary spirit may appear to us in dreams. For instance, according to Guttman and Johnson, the presence of a dog in a dream may stem for issues related to the planet Mars. A dog represents the best manifestation of martial intelligence, being both loyal and ferociously protective. Guttman and Johnson explain dream interpretation in a very specific context of Greco Roman mythology. Of course, these assignments may be the most debatable parts of the argument, given the wide variety of literature from different opinions that exist on dream interpretation. However, doing in making their identifications, Guttman and Johnson do stick to their guns and portray an integrated universe. They also include a list of remedies similar to those employed in Vedic astrology to correct energetic imbalances linked to the planets. To conclude each chapter, Guttman and Johnson demonstrate specific methods for raising awareness and invoking our own mythic



potentials. They illustrate appropriate situations in which to invoke certain planets and suggest visual symbols that may be used as trigger mechanisms.

Another important feature of *Mythic Astrology Applied* is its inclusion the asteroids, Chiron and Lilith as mythic archetypes. Only in the past few decades have astrologers begun to include these non-planets in their analyses. There is not a lot of source material available to the astrology student looking to include these in his interpretations. Guttman and Johnson supply good basic introductions to these. By explaining their mythology, they indicate how astrologers may include them in their chart analyses.

Guttman/Johnson's work helps to deepen awareness of astrology as a method for understanding mundane existence in light of divine archetypes. Their approach is direct and suitable for the reader who does not have an extensive knowledge of astrology. Indeed their work lays the basis for a consistent method of chart interpretation a beginning astrologer may wish to try. This would be particularly useful to the student who already had a good understand of myth. I know that when I first studied astrology, my teacher included correspondence to tarot and the tree of life, which made understanding astrology for me much simpler. Similarly, by using universal archetypes to explain the planets, Guttman and Johnson help make their approach to astrology accessible. They once more illustrate the famous maxim, as above, so below.

In this overview of astrology books, I have saved the best for last. If an astrology student can buy only two books, *Cosmobiology for the 21st Century* by Eleonora Kimmel (American Federation of Astrologers, 2000, 328pp, \$19.95) is one I recommend. It provides a solid introduction to a most effective discipline of astrological analysis.

Traditional Astrology has had an ambivalent love affair with Cosmobiology since Rheinhold Ebertin developed it from the work of Uranian astrologers in the early part of the 20th Century. Basically, virtually every serious working astrologer I know uses some aspects of Cosmobiology in his or her work. Some very famous astrologers, who shall remain nameless, recapitulate Ebertin's work virtually verbatim without due credit.

Kimmel has done something rare. She actually extends Ebertin's work! At the same time, she gives the master due credit.

I would like to take a moment to explain my introduction to Cosmobiology. A few years ago, I shared a chart I did for a client with my teacher. She said my analysis was decent, but that I failed to recognize that the client's mother would die on March 1st. I was a bit flabbergasted. Rule number 1 for an astrologer (or any diviner for that matter) who wishes to remain working is never predict a death, even if your oracle screams that



diagnosis in your face. I modified the report somewhat to indicate that there would be a period of emotional strain beginning around March 1st and left it at that. The mother was very ill at the time. However, by the 1st of the year, my client reported that her mother was doing much better, and I figured she had beaten the bullet. However, on February 26th, the old woman passed. At that point, I asked my teacher how did she come so close on the date. She nonchalantly explained that she used Ebertin's midpoints, and that if you ever needed to prognosticate anything accurately his system of Cosmobiology was what you employed. She even apologized for being a couple days off, explaining that she hadn't bothered to work up a graphic ephemeris to pinpoint the time. Now the question immediately came out of my mouth, why didn't you show me this system in the first place? She told me that Americans really aren't comfortable with it, because it desentimentalizes astrology.

From that point on, I made it a mission to study Ebertin's system. The book that I found the most useful, next to Ebertin's *Combination of Stellar Influences* (American Federation of Astrologers, 1972, 256pp, \$19.95), which is the basic reference work employed, was Kimmel *Cosmobiology for the 21st Century*.

Kimmel's book illuminates Cosmobiology and its techniques in a straightforward, elegant manner. She includes myriad examples to substantiate each technique she describes. She clarifies Ebertin's work and places it squarely as a definitive tool for precise analysis in Western Astrology.

Many astrologers are uncomfortable with Cosmobiology because it does away with House systems and soft aspects. Truthfully, I found house systems difficult to understand in Western Astrology. There are a number of different house systems in use. The only point of agreement shared is the placement of the Midheaven. Everything else changes. (In Vedic Astrology, the house system is based on a system in which each house contains a complete sign. The first house is determined by the ascendant. Vedic astrology also uses a sidereal zodiac that corresponds to how the constellations are actually placed in the sky. That house system makes sense to me in the context in which it is employed.) Soft aspects, such as trines and sextiles, are very flattering, but they strike me as being composed of fluff. I've never really seen a concrete example of a soft aspect acting a causative agent in real life. Furthermore, practically speaking, hard aspects don't that often indicate disasters. They indicate points of tension through which expression of energy occurs. In his investigation into a scientific basis for astrology, Phillip Seymour wrote in *Astrology: The Evidence of Science* that there was measurable phenomena which could account for effect of hard aspects. However, he could find no such substantiation for soft aspects. So perhaps, Cosmobiology with its exclusive use of hard aspects was just being ahead of its time.



That being said, many astrologers use midpoints, which are the bread and butter of Cosmobiology, in their analysis. Midpoints are the points exactly between two planets. They represent the sum of the planets' interaction and are sensitive to aspects, directions, progressions and transits. Truthfully, in private conversations with fellow astrologers, I have been told to use them by all means. Just don't tell my client that I'm getting the information from a midpoint analysis, just pretend it is from my psychic vision of their planetary placements! Of course, Kimmel presents her analyses with full midpoint elaboration. Additionally, she explains such useful tools and techniques as the graphic ephemeris, cosmograms and declination and her own linear diagram. (Truthfully, I'd be lost in my interpretations of current events without her linear diagram. It is the single most useful form I've ever encountered in astrology. You can see the complete context of someone's life, including natal chart, progressions, directions and transits in on very straightforward easy to read diagram. The blank form on page 88 alone is worth the cost of the book to any working astrologer!)

I know this sounds like propaganda. But I am appalled at how modern Western astrology relegates Cosmobiology as a closet tool. There is still much work to be done. For instance, what are the midpoint values of the asteroids and Chiron? Or how can Cosmobiology be applied to harmonic or locational charts? There are still vast untapped avenues of research and potential application this discipline. Kimmel has gone a long way to lay the groundwork for a continued future for Cosmobiology and its study. Unfortunately, the ball has been dropped. Hopefully, a new generation of astrologers will take advantage of Cosmobiology for the 21st Century and carry this important work further. Kimmel's book provides as strong argument for Cosmobiology's effectiveness. It also explains in a direct manner how to use it. Whether the reader is a veteran astrologer or a beginner, this book provides a solid groundwork for further investigation.

Eric K. Lerner (Associate Editor) combines outstanding credentials in the areas of writing, spiritual ministry, divination, and art. He has served for the past five years as a priest of the Yoruba arch-divinity Obatala. He teaches tarot divination, Yoruba religion, and other spiritual topics. He is the author of two books *AIDS Crisis in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clío, 1998) and with Baba Raul Canizares, *Babalu Aye Santeria and the Lord of Pestilence*. Mr. Lerner's website is <http://www.voiceofthoth.com> For those of you who are interested I will be opening a website devoted largely to Cosmobiology study early next year. If you have material you think should be included, please contact me at eklerner@ashejournal.com



Indo-world Beat Meets Traditional Bhajan

The Avatar Sessions, Sri
(Blueboy Music, CD, 2004)

Some may remember Sri Kesava as the talented lead singer of Baby Gopal or from her connections to the groundbreaking krishnacore band Shelter. Baby Gopal was a college radio favorite with their self-titled 1997 debut album on Get Go Records. Sri's 2000 album *Gravity Reminds Me* showcased her abilities as a solo artist. With the recent release of *The Avatar Sessions* Sri has broken new ground.



Avatar Sessions is a blend of traditional Indian devotional music, bhajans and kirtans, with contemporary progressive world-beat. Along with the standard instruments of Indian music, mrdanga, flute and tabla, are the rhythmic dance beats of western electronica. Sri's album epitomizes the best that this relatively new genre of world-fusion, or Indo-world beat, may produce. The two sounds, ancient and contemporary, intermix so seamlessly that the lines between the two are unheard. To spice the blend, samples and spoken word add an additional level of texture to several tracks.

More or less traditional renditions of classic Vaisnava (Krishna devotional) songs such as "Govinda Jaya Jaya" and "Radha Madhava" compliment the world-fusion tracks like "Gopinath Lord of the Gopis" and "In Praise of Goddess Durga." There is always a risk when combining sounds centuries removed from each other. Sri artfully avoids the pitfalls of techno-imperialism and over-production.

Sri hits the mark dead-on. *Avatar Sessions* is simply wonderful to listen to. The sounds are more organic than other electronica/world-fusion artists such as Cybertribe or her more techno-oriented counterparts like Mathuresh or Shri Hari. Even in those tracks with a dance back-beat, Sri preserves much of the original devotional sound.

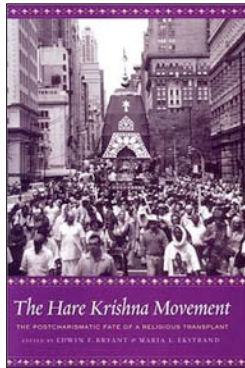
Also included on the CD is a music video of "Gopinath."

Artist Homepage: <http://www.srimusic.com>
CD available from: CD Baby (<http://www.cdbaby.com>)



Reviews

The Hare Krishna Movement, Edwin F. Bryant & Maria L. Ekstrand editors
(Columbia University Press, 2004, 448pp, \$49.50)



With *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, Bryant and Ekstrand have produced the first concise, thorough academic collection presenting material on the Hare Krishna movement in the West. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada arrived in the United States in the fall of 1965. This lone Indian renunciate brought with him a vibrant Indian devotional tradition known as Vaisnavism—centered on the fostering of devotional love of Krishna. In May of 1966, Prabhupada established the first Krishna temple in the United States at 26 Second Avenue in New York City. Prabhupada arrived at a period of upheaval unique in the 20th century. He soon attracted a collection of hippies, addicts and social dropouts into his fledgling temple. From this he established the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). By the time of Shрила Prabhupada’s passing in 1977, ISKCON had grown into an international organization with temples worldwide and thousands of followers.

As with many movements, founded by a charismatic leader, ISKCON suffers from succession dilemmas. Before his death Prabhupada appointed eleven devotees to serve as functional initiators, known by the Sanskrit term *ritvik*. After his death these eleven declared that Prabhupada had appointed them his spiritual successors. They divided the world up into geographical areas, each under the control of a particular *acharya*, ‘guru.’ This system has come to be known as the ‘zonal guru’ system. From the outset there has been a debate within ISKCON rather this spiritual succession was based on a correct interpretation of Prabhupada’s teachings and final instructions. By the late eighties, the movement was wracked by numerous financial and sexual scandals. Many of the eleven originally appointed by Prabhupada had succumb to scandal. In 1987 reformers successfully introduced changes to ISKCON’s guru system.

The Hare Krishna Movement primarily concentrates on ISKCON, which is only fitting as it still remains the largest and predominant Vaisnava presence in the West. This has changed some in the last decade with the introduction of other lines—most notably those of Prabhupada’s godbrothers Narayan Maharaja and Shridhara Maharaja.

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Bryant and Ekstrand's book presents a timely and broad-reaching selection of material. All articles are of the highest academic caliber. With many of the authors devotees themselves (both inside and outside ISKCON), the collection is an eloquent demonstration of the potency of participant observation.

The collection is broken into several sections roughly organized on a timeline. Part 1 places Krishna consciousness into the larger context of Hindu theology and Indian history. Part 2 places Bhaktivedanta Swami (Prabhupada) in the Vaisnava lineage with particular examination on the revolutionary nature of his own guru Bhaktivinoda Saraswati. Also included in part 2 is a superb paper by Paul H. Sherbow placing Bhaktivedanta Swami's teachings into context with Vaisnava tradition.

Part 3 focuses on the controversies that arose after the passing of ISKCON's founder. This section includes papers detailing the movement's current position on gurus, as well as the counter position championed by the ISKCON Revival Movement (IRM). The former is discussed above. The latter holds that Prabhupada intended himself to remain the guru of ISKCON with those he had named remaining *ritvik* functionaries as they had been while he was physically present. Also included in this section are two papers detailing ISKCON's treatment and rejection of two of Bhaktivedanta Swami's godbrothers. These two episodes are particularly telling illustrations of the insecurities that can afflict an organization reeling from the vacuum left by the departure of a charismatic founder.

Part 4 examines some of the heresies and doctrinal controversies currently extent within the movement. Part 5 examines the social placement of ISKCON plus the movement's position and internal debate on critical social issues such as women's rights and child abuse. Notably missing from this section is an article on the question of homosexuality and ISKCON. This omission stands out particularly due to numerous current debates stemming from the growth of the Gay And Lesbian Vaisnava Association (GALVA) and recent comments of outspoken teachers such as Bhakti Tirtha Swami and B.V. Tripurari Swami. Given ISKCON representatives' recent comments at the LA Ratha Yatra in opposition to gay marriage this inclusion would have been quite timely.

Part 6 presents reevaluations of the Krishna movement. This section presents personal stories both of people who have stayed and left ISKCON. In conclusion the editors provide a well thought out analysis of where ISKCON has come and where it might be going. This serves to tie the collection together and give it a cohesiveness that caps it off nicely.

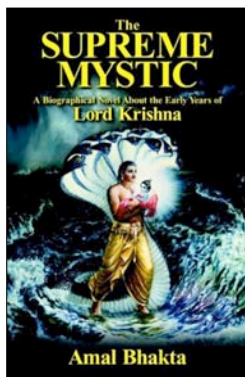
With his arrival in 1965, Bhaktivedanta Swami introduced a centuries old spiritual tradition to the West. During the 1970's and 80's his movement would become to many the epitome of what a cult was. When treated with serious academic attention, the



movement ironically has been approached as a new religious movement. This collection is one of the first academic examinations to attempt to place the movement within its historical context as a tradition while also navigating its uniqueness as a transplant to the Western world.

The Supreme Mystic, Amal Bhakta

(Krishna Productions, 2003, 342pp, \$17.95)



The Supreme Mystic is a biographical novel of the early life of Lord Krishna. In affect this book is a contemporary novelization of the tenth canto of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*—one of the great classic Indian spiritual works. The life and pastimes of Krishna represent the pinnacle of Vaisnava scripture. This work focuses on the early years of Krishna’s life from the imprisonment of his parents, his miraculous birth, his playful pastimes with the cowherd boys and gopis, through to his destruction of the demon king Kamsa. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, the founder of the Krishna Consciousness movement, devoted a tremendous amount of his time to create a multi-volume translation and commentary of the *Bhagavatam*. I suspect, some may criticize Amal Bhakta’s work for overstepping his teacher by producing a ‘popular’ edition relating Krishna’s pastimes. This charge would be unfounded and ill-informed. Prabhupada himself wrote a distillation of the tenth canto with his book *Krsna*—a book intended to appeal to a larger world audience. He also encouraged his disciples to write and publish their own works. There is an ethos, an undo privileging, accorded the printed word over the spoken. I doubt any would criticize a teacher for relating the stories of Krishna’s life to an attendant audience. *The Supreme Mystic* may not be the greatest of novels, but Amal Bhakta does an efficient and orderly job conveying his story in such a way that it is exciting and appealing to a wide audience. The story itself, of course, is tantamount and timeless. Bhakta’s book opens the tale of Krishna to a larger readership. As this was it’s avowed intent, the book is highly successful. Though the author admits to taking some ‘artistic license’ in crafting his story, the book is well researched and follows the sacred story as presented in Vedic scripture and Vaisnava literature. An appendix provides references, organized by chapter, to scripture and select works by Shрила Prabhupada. The inclusion of such references makes this work a great jumping point for further studies into the deeper philosophical points of the tale of Krishna’s childhood.

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When I See the Wild God: Encountering Urban Celtic Witchcraft, Ly De Angeles

(Llewellyn Publications, 2004, 288pp, \$12.95)

Reviewed by Keith Lerner



I looked forward to reading this book. Described as manifestation of ancient mysteries blended with urban folklore, the book promised a unique male perspective of the Celtic cycles. This is a difficult thing for a woman to do.

Occult knowledge is something to be experienced, by its very definition. In study of the cycles, many women authors have provided the tools necessary for a male to experience this knowledge. The most effective ones do not presume the male's perspective. Doreen Valiente, Margot Adler and even Margaret A. Murray all have provided the setup for this knowledge to be possessed. De Angeles, in modernizing the mythos and in describing the rituals presumed the male's perspective. In attempting this, she failed. I do not pretend to understand the female perspective of the ritual. I am a man. I understand that I need the ritual as a physical manifestation of my cycle. It is a manifestation of the God in me. A woman can experience this but not manifest it. Her contribution is paramount but different than the males. Together this makes ritual effective.

In the book *When I see the Wild God: Encountering Urban Celtic Witchcraft*, Ly de Angeles starts each section with a modern retelling of the Celtic mythos. She follows this with specific instruction on performing your own ritual throughout the witch's calendar. She follows this with some interpretation of their meaning. Most of the retellings involve what seems to be her coven throughout a Celtic year in her homeland (Australia). She attempts to provide the male perspective throughout her retellings and her interpretations.

The glory of ritual to me is partnership. The glory is union. Men and women are, of course, different. So are their roles in effective ritual. Many pagan writings do not address the God in ritual. As a man, I enjoy books that can provide me with this insight. Raymond Buckland, Nicholas R. Mann and Stewart Ferrar all are men that have provided this to me. They have contributed to my occult knowledge because, as men, they have experienced this. De Angeles defines her craft well. Her definitions were clear and expressive. Her expression of craft did not address the element she represents. This was an opportunity I wish she had taken.

I know a woman that was raised Jewish in New York. She has explored Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Paganism and Santeria. She found her path as a Santo. She has



no African or Philippine heritage. I do not think she has experienced this in a previous life. De Angeles presumed, early on that for her path to work, the genealogy needed to be there. This struck me as bullshit. Power is power and it is neutral. I am a Wiccan, my brother a Santo and my mother an Episcopalian. Each of us experiences the power of our faiths. Of this I have little doubt. The power is neutral and how it manifests itself is its own business. I have never considered practicing my ritual in Australia. The directions are different. It was considerate of de Angeles to address this. I do not understand how a Wiccan practicing in Australia on Aboriginal ground can tell me that I need to be Celtic in this life or a previous one to experience my faith. These separate ideas are conflicting and paradoxical. They lack balance. Neutrality and balance are key to my understanding of my faith.

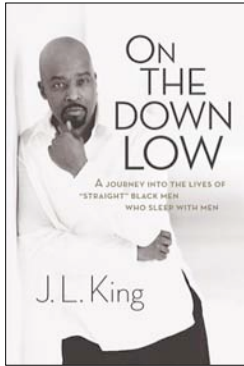
In closing, Ms. De Angeles did define the terms of her craft in good detail. I recommend this book to someone with experience in craft. I do not recommend this book to a novice. I feel the ideas might confuse them. I would have enjoyed this book much more thoroughly if the author had kept in mind the neutrality intrinsic to power. Magic itself does not depend upon such a mundane qualifier as ethnicity. This factor may shape the way in which magic manifests, however it is a mistake to believe they are the controlling forces of such power.

I would like to see the author explore the union of male and female energy in ritual. Ultimately I feel that her presumptions were her fault. Give the steps. I feel that the author is well qualified to do this. Let the presumption come from the act and the individual interpretation. The best books written in craft are guidelines for the experience. I would have enjoyed this book much more if the author provided her insights of the male in ritual. Instead, she attempted to provide the perspective of the male's manifestation of ritual. This should be explored and experienced by a man.



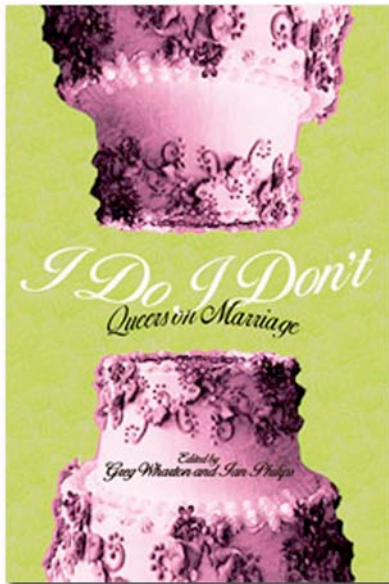
On the Down Low, J.L. King

(Broadway Books, 2004, 190pp, \$21.95)



In *On the Down Low*, J.L. King breaks a tacit commandment of silence by taking us on this ‘journey into the lives of “straight” black men who sleep with men.’ In doing so, he has caused no small amount of controversy. ‘Living on the down low’ is the slang used to describe black men who secretly have sex with other men. Over the past few years, only small glimpses of the secret lives have worked into the larger culture. I can think of an episode of *Law & Order: SVU*, where Ice Tea explains the ‘down low’ to his white fellow officers. With King’s book, his public speaking and education work all this has changed. It was

King’s strong faith in God that allowed him to develop a healthy attitude toward his sexuality (both physically and spiritually). He writes that he has “always had a clear understanding of [his] belief and love of God.” With God’s help, King has found the strength to break bonds of silence so strong that they prevent men on the down low from asking prospective partners about their sexual histories. His speaking out grows out of a need to help the black women who are all too often the one’s hurt by their lovers and



I Do/I Don't: Queers on Marriage
edited by Greg Wharton & Ian Philips

I Do/I Don't collects a diverse array of queer voices on the subject of marriage. Stars and ordinary Janes. Saints and sinners. Anarchists and poets. Journalists and dreamers. Personal essays, fiction, poetry, nonfiction, vows, rants, love letters, and sermons. Silly to serious. In favor and against. Yay and nay, in between, neither, and D) all of the above. All valid. All from inside the community.

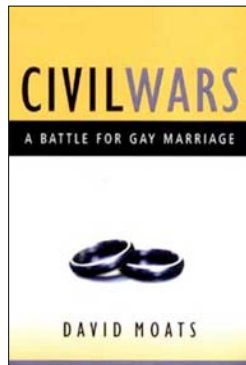
Suspect Thoughts Press
0-9746388-7-0, 384pp. \$16.95

www.suspectthoughts.com



husbands' infidelity. King takes the black church to task for not responding to HIV/AIDS crisis in their midst. He points out that women are counseled by their pastor to pray for their husbands when they suspect them of cheating. King notes that this waiting is akin to playing "Russian roulette" with infection and death. It is love of God and love for his community that draws King forth from the silence of living the down low life. Through his own personal crisis King's faith endures. He acknowledges, "God knows what [he is] going to do before [he does] it." He comes to a personal realization as to what it means to live in sin. "I question whether having sex with men and women is a sin," King writes. "I think that abusing people who give you their bodies, minds, and souls by not being honest and true is a sin."

Civil Wars: The Battle for Gay Marriage, David Moats
(Harcourt, 2004, 288, \$25.00)



David Moats won a Pulitzer for his editorial coverage of the battle for gay and lesbian marriage rights in Vermont. As editorial page editor for the *Rutland Herald* Moats wrote a powerful series of editorials in support of same-sex unions. His front seat view, coupled with his outstanding journalistic skills, have combined to produce the definitive chronicle of the Vermont battle. Following the December 20, 1999 Vermont Supreme Court ruling that disallowing same-sex unions was unconstitutional, the state became very divided over the issue. As the legislature struggled to craft a legislative solution, the country watched. Exacerbating the polarization of the state, the battle attracted outside fundamentalist agitators, such as Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry, who attempted to use the debate to further their own agenda. In *Civil Wars*, Moats artfully puts a human face on both sides of the debate. Through his own observations, he is able to show the power currents pulling at those tasked with coming up with a resolution to the dilemma created by the state Supreme Court's ruling. I have little doubt that as the debate over gay marriage will be remembered as one of the great modern civil rights fights, and Moats book will stand as one of the great works of literary journalism.



Zen: The Path of Paradox, Osho

(St. Martin's Press, 2003, 192pp, \$11.95)



Zen: The Path of Paradox are selected discourses chosen from a series of extemporaneous talks given over the course of several months in 1977. Each talk begins with a short Zen story or parable. Osho then expounds on the message presented in the story at length. He brings his unique vision of spirituality, the self and the state of no-mind to flower in each purport. Osho's superb sense of modern humanity is displayed throughout. Each talk is accented by Osho's trademark sense of humor—throwing contemporary jokes that accent rather than distract from the parable and his explanation. Many feel that Osho's greatest

teaching period was during the days of the first Puna ashram of the 1970's. These talks are gems chosen from the thousands of hours of talks given during that period. Though Osho talked on almost every great religion and mystical system, he often spoke of Zen as the ultimate spiritual expression. Within these pages, he explains why. It has been almost twenty years since the dissolution of the Oregon experiment. The resurgence of interest in his teachings, demonstrated by the ever-increasing number of books issued by major US publishers, shows that as times passes people are once again appreciating one of the most unique minds of 20th century.

