

ISSN 1558-4690

# ASHÉ!

JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

WINTER/SPRING 2006



SERDA CON  
MIMESIS

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Cover Design: Sven Davisson

Photographs: "The Bouncer" Jamie Evans, "Graffiti E" Charles Krausz.

**mimesis** | mə'mēsis; mī- | *n*

representation or imitation of the real world in art and literature.

(Oxford American Dictionary)

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JOURNAL OF  
EXPERIMENTAL SPIRITUALITY  
Winter/Spring 2006, Volume V, Number 1  
ISSN 1558-4690 (print)  
ISSN 1558-4704 (digital)

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## Grafting Plato's Shadow Play: a spray can version of metaleptic mimesis

Sritantra

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**Abstract:** The feel of this text on paper, this page—this “pageantry” is borne on the *mythos* of a logic applied in mute grisaille tones: a lateral drift of shadowy inscription emblematic of the Peripatetic pigeonhole impulse to which it dares chum up, indeed, and retain the asperity resultant from the battles required to keep from being deposed (Fisher 2003). For ‘if darkness implies a lack of visibility, a shadow is surely not something dark. A shadow is what we see without noticing, a trope that operates beneath our attention—a light too long ignored’ (Lock 1998). And yet as the present discussion begins to loom, and as we find ourselves embroiled in scathing disputations long sautéed in rich cultural chauvinisms, let us here anticipate the imminent appearance of the poet of man: that self-churning server of his own soul’s relinquished partings and who covets no concern for anyone’s posterity. And although this agent-of-the-new-generation’s *tack* may be likened to the insurgent graffitist’s, let it here be known that his truest aspiration is the isolation and insinuation of himself *corporeally* within the dampened pigments of this tactile fresco.

## 1. THE SKIAGRAPHIC PALINODE

Shadow is crucial here in the steamy tropics, these sun-drenched amphiscian climes; especially from the ambler's point of view from which portable shade is readily availed in the guise of dark eyewear and broad UV-resistant parasol. The umbrella though serves an important multi-function, mounting its sombre screen rain or shine, and.... And yet in or out of the Torrid Zone, shadow is received as a given datum, but from who knows where? That's the point. And yet still as a 'datum,' as an abstract entirety, shade emphatically bears disposition, bears chiaroscuro binding of qualia to character in quest of resolution through firm appeal.

## 2. MAN-MADE DREAMS AS SHADOWS

Is Plato the conflation of *mimêsis* and *mythos*? Do we see his 'man-made dreams' as shadows? Do we see them as shadows whose 'ubiquitous presence and coexistence in the august tradition of Hellenic philosophy have as their point of departure and reflection the allegorical cave?' (Lock 1998).

Shadows shift. The causes are three: the movement of the light-source, the eclipsing substance, and the retina upon which the shadow enjambs.

The earliest conceptions of an authorial voice construe the writer, or storyteller as a copyist of reality 'constrained either within a literary tradition or by the limits of divine inspiration' (Burke 1995, 5). But starting with the late classical period when the tragedian Sophocles added a third actor to the stage (Aristotle *Poetics*, 1449a), the notion of *mimêsis*—routinely rendered "imitation"—took onboard the important dramaturgical nuance of "impersonation" with particular regard to psychosomatic behavioural traits. Yet also at this time the notion of *mimêsis* was adapted to the field of rhetoric too, where it came to

represent an assorted arsenal of tropico-schematic methods and skills for mimicking language and its delivery systems.

### 3. EDWARD SAID ON ELOQUENCE

Very late in his prolific career Edward Said (2004) offered some appealing notes belles-lettres on the notion of rhetoric as “eloquence in language.” What he had in mind was to adumbrate the sense that eloquence “once conveyed”—that being ‘a distinguished, mainly spoken practice and skill—perhaps due in part to an innate gift—but which still required schooling and development in ways that marked its holder an eloquent person.’ Rhetorical skill, or *rhêtorikê technê* in classical Greek, largely comprised the imitation or *mimêsis* by a public speaker or pleader (*rhêtôr*) of stylistic features and discursive devices known within the canon of style as tropes and schemes. These tricks of the trade had the task or function (Gk. *ergon*) of persuading and bringing ones audience over—and certainly not putting them off. In the later Latin tradition of rhetoric this “eloquence” was defined as a straight up “art,” as *ars oratoria*, “oratorical art”—‘the art of eloquent public speaking,’ and which included elocution, or the ‘refinement of voice and manner of expression.’

But as a truly well-ordered and disciplined practice—as the art that epitomizes eloquence itself—rhetoric remained quite well and alive as late as the eighteenth century in Europe. The Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico regarded eloquence and rhetoric as identical. And writing from his chair as professor of Latin Eloquence at the University of Naples, Vico described eloquence as a ‘faculty of speaking appropriate to persuasion whereby the orator bends the spirit through his speech’ (1711-1741). But when Vico with his orotund, Latinate manner is read today he tends to come across as a relic of antiquity who—perhaps having failed to heed his own good advice—continues to expose himself to new generations of harsh reproof for the hubris and the haughtiness that his misread brand of autotelic pomposity and frivolity regrettably

convey. So let us take pause to quickly sum up. Are there lessons to be learned from any of this? Tentatively three: (i) awing ones audience with virtuoso verbal skill and unexcelled mastery of rhetorical technique is not quite the same as bona fide eloquence and (ii) may well be interpreted as imbecilic drivel; but in any case, (iii) every aspiration for eloquence in language implies a certain likelihood of missing the mark and ‘achieving little more than a baroque verbal performance’ (Said).

#### 4. INVENTIVE CONTINUATION

To the extent that we have all become accustomed to accept and expect of the philosophical project the production of cultural artefacts or “texts” of varied sorts (Gk. *mimēmata*), such goods or fetishes will need comply subaltern to the inevitable dominance of *mythos*. And with the assuaging pats of the scholarly fingertips, let there be the likelihood that all falls in line with a range of stencilled and formulaic templates educive of clear-cut specifications; for example, that the ‘sparseness of these sampled grains’ alone ‘compose our lust for a tropological unity’ (Vico; Fisher; Duncan 1957), and further convey in semblance of press—as a memorandum prefiguring quarrel—the gallivant tradition’s waivers of claim that entice transposures of what Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s dialect similarly elicits as “determinate negation”—though rearticulated by McCumber (2004) as “demarcation,” and which still to a certain irreducible degree, exacts, extracts and foreshadows the extension and/or prolongation of any discourse as naturally reliant on discussants thereof either growing tedious of what they’re presently chomping on about and empirically advancing to the next menu item.

But in the case of “tradition” it is a bit more interesting. And displacing if I may McCumber’s ‘demarcation’ with my own preferred “continuation,” I shall tersely exhibit its two instantiations, and thereby—drawing on a stark though expedient polarity—disclose how “tradition” in the specific sense of ‘something that assures a seamless discipular genealogy’ (Joyce 1939, 1.5.112) transfigures its gestures of

“continuation” by means of either kissing the teacher’s ass or kicking the teacher’s ass.

It was Aristotle’s response to his teacher’s aporia on the rise of literacy in sixth century Athens and ‘the need to rethink its functions and consequences’ (Harris 2000) that established the orthodox Western assumptions on the momentous nature and role of *mimēmata* or “mimetic goods” in the arenas of art and rhetoric. And this reign would last for a lengthy two millennia until Alexander Baumgarten (*Metaphysica* 1773) finally dared to critique and stare down the logic that had come to sustain the near archetypical view of *mimēsis*—a perspective that hinged on two critical points: (i) the cheapening of sense and (ii) the dichotomous partitioning of art from genuine things.

Yet between these two our mammoth culture-heroic duo, the notion of *mimēsis* as “imitative theory” accorded little scope to “authorial inventiveness” (Burke, 6). And one really wonders ‘why’ when for tens-of-thousands of years already the human species had exercised its near neurological need to traffic and trade in dramatic narrative text—this folk re-threading of the mundane yarns of peoples lives into compact frames (Mckee 2000) eliciting heroes, villains and fools—and bicycle riders and their bloodied victims—all shuttled and pressed to the rhythmic beat of the passions loomed in pursuits and their reprisals.

So why would a storyteller still be regarded as a ‘copyist of reality constrained within a literary tradition’—or otherwise simply ‘beside himself’—a “maniac” in Plato’s text (*Phaedrus*, 244a-5b)? For are these not two (or three) clearly incongruous proposals here? If ‘tradition’ requires that a writer give form to the repetitive fragments of everyday life ‘in a way that has a clear-cut beginning, middle and ending—well, this is plainly at odds with reality and truth already’ (le Carré 1996) that is, the ‘so-called’ reality, the ‘so-called’ truth, to which ‘tradition’ feebly construes it constrains one.



## 5. PERIPATETIC LOGOS, MYTHOS

Peripatetic *logos*, or let us just say logic, is an explicative and/or descriptive gesture or phraseology that applies to all genres of art (Gk. *technê*). Its avowed objective, its “superobjectivity”—which is the knowledge (*epistêmê*) of truth/reality/actuality (*alêtheia*) as a ‘work in progress’ (*entelecheia*)—claims to be a demonstrative, transparent “account,” as subtly nuanced from ‘narrative.’ *Logos* alleges to be a fully rational procedure that is furthermore and crucially always open to debate. The truth of *logos* is therefore a protocol in a state of interminable negotiations, a deal that is never sealed.

With *mythos* however, or let us just say myth, veracity is never a bastion concern, but—together with such universal abstracts as *ontos*, *aisthêtikos*, the good, and the just—a ‘conscripted’ protagonist’s superobjective impinging unbeknownst by tragedian peel—an instantiation of suspended disbelief. Here we have truth as just another “myth” repotted or respun as the dramaturge’s ploy, and with verification and refutation her chief determinate antagonists as she plots us on by dip and turn to each the troika’s deemed resolution: *tres persona in una substantia*. Thus in a single tragic episode logic is seen to encapsulate, indeed, be the product of its own ongoing and reincubating “narrative,” as subtly nuanced from ‘account.’

But how to pick apart between *logos* and *mythos* as each correspond to the fashioning of this story, as each in its own individual sense exfoliates, re-self-generates, extends and disperses its neurological imprint, only stripped to a more archaic plane where the *mythos* of *logos* is conspicuously mythological.

And what do *logos* and *mythos* actually do? *Mythos* aims (i) to produce and effect an overall impression and/or (ii) to convey a message through the cogent composition or artistic arrangement of its given data-set, and further, (iii) to arrive us to a packaged product or experience—be that in the form of tragedy, epic, poetry, painting, sculpture, installation, musical score, film sequence, text on screen, you name it.

*Logos*, again, aspires for transparency, and therefore neutrality. *Logos* thereby constrains itself to factual statements, to ‘affairs of the present tense’—i.e. ‘to evidence, argument or testimony that is producible here and now’ (McCumber, 22, 9). And this is why the *epistémê*-driven myths of history and science plot as their superobjective tasks the knowing of real or factual things.

*Mythos*, by contrast, as both embodying and being an analogue to fiction—be it tragedy, comedy, poetry, novel, and the rest—waives such pretensions of “non-fictional ontology” and grants free reign to authorial voice—even though this voice be unidentifiable (McLeish 1998, 47). But in factual practice, vis-à-vis Aristotle’s *Poetics*, say—a manual devoted to presenting theories for the production of ‘performance texts’ (Gupt 1994)—the unified action or praxis of the tragedy (romance, dramatic tale, what have you) is transparently indifferent to the conventions of truth. Instead, the *mythos* of tragedy entrusts itself to the workings of *mimêsis* (L. *imitatio*), to the graphic art of ‘representation, depiction, replication, simulation, translation,’ etc., while faithful to the knowledge that its retail goods are emphatically fictive and essentially lies. ‘The transparency of *mythos*, then—indifferent to the truth of science—shadows instead the cinematographic *technê*, or expertise, in its comprehensive strategy to portray human dealings in embellished idiom and stylised beat’ (*Poetics*, 4).

## 6. FABULATIONS OF LOGOS

Now despite and in spite of a bold disregard for empirical reality on the part of *mythos*, it is nevertheless *mythos*-driven “tragedy” that writes resolution into the template of its entelecheian quest. And again this is not the truth of *logos*-driven “science,” but the baffling truths of the fey equations that persistently elude understanding. For it is *mythos*—not *logos*—that insists that the crimes of your own *energeia* be unravelled and revealed, and that the facts that these foreshadow be confronted. Now the father of the *Peripatetics* was himself abundantly aware of this

systematic oddity, and in his account (Poetics 9) he crafted the claim that ‘poetry—though clearly a fictive genre—is more philosophical and a higher art than scientific writing, as it tends to express the universal, while factual writing the contingent (after Butcher, cited in McLeish, 40).

Now, given the august weight of this standard we should not like some succumb to the somewhat rash perplexity of McCumber (20), say, vis-à-vis the likes of Michel Foucault when the Frenchman rather unabashedly remarked, “I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. [And f]or all that, I would not want to say that they were outside the truth. It seems plausible to me to make fictions work within truth, to introduce truth-effects within a fictional discourse, and in some way to make discourse arouse, ‘fabricate’, something which does not yet exist, thus to fiction something” (Foucault 1979, 75).

Pursuant of a truth that is essentially *mythos*, either in its abstract or contingent form, the project of philosophy—if borne on the fabulations of *logos*—becomes, and indeed inescapably IS—in this very moment—an instantiation of that tragic property or peculiarity (idiom) that goes by the name of “suspended disbelief.”

## 7. IS PHILOSOPHY AN INVENTIVE ENDEAVOUR?

According to the Aristotelian songbook or ‘canon’ (from L. *cantare*) the medium of tragedy is storytelling, i.e. the telling of a story midst the setting of the scene (Gk. *skene* ‘tent,’ cognate of *skia* ‘shadow, shade’). Thus tragedy “shows” while history “exacts.” Drama reveals while science alights on. Or in other words, physics is given to factuality, poetics to artefactuality. Permitting this dictum, the following question nearly asks itself: What is the medium of philosophy?

Now another crucial question appears in our midst. This question furthermore insists on an answer. Science thus has no stock in it. Let the appearance of this fundamental query mark a flourishing ‘twist’ in

this present set of knickers; our protagonistic point of no return. Is philosophy an inventive endeavour or not?

Should we democratise the project and employ Robert's Rules? Shall we table the motion and take a vote? How about a little campaign analysis? Fine. As a yes vote victory risks upsetting certain segments that would fain consign such pretence and hubris to the school of dainty arts, a shadow so cast would additionally risk subjecting oneself to the insensitive charge that one is doing 'travel writing' rather than 'philosophy' (Critchley 2001, 60); or perhaps even worse, trying to turn philosophy into a sumptuous aesthetics. But why should the yes voter even care? The present authorial voice doesn't care. In fact, it greets such bracing charges with affection and—firmly ensconced in the yes vote camp—is moved to tears to determinately negate, demarcate and continue philosophy as an inventive *techné* and *ars* put together.

Thus philosophy is, or rather “represents”—vis-à-vis our growing concern, which is *mimêsis* (‘inventiveness’)—its own self-reflexive basis or “property,” which entails self-grilling and auto-critiquing tendencies. This indicates further intensive testing through deep exploratory ponderation vividly alert to an instrumentation that always stands in need of replacement, adopting its consoles, lamps and tropes as a tactical set of surface marker buoys and other equipment plunged beneath the sea—*avec un penchant fétichiste pour le creux de ton oreille...un murmure...renvoie toute chose à son étrangeté*—as it tracks the pursuit of keeping up with data with a hermeneutics of resilience and inkling, floating through the layers of bubbly veils to impasto sands and the sound of breakers booming on the shoreline: salt-foam splashing at her knees and thighs, footprints left near the half-buried boat as to de-self-centre once and for all her intentions, her believers, her vatic voice in the abyssal whirr of an ear shell's venting, adequating all in its strangeness.

## 8. OUR TROGLODYTIC HERITAGE

Laterally prefigured, this tacit source is the default question of a shadow misperceived—a man-made dream, a lucid particle, a singular datum frail in resolve—threadbare and tentative in a textual promiscuity as ubiquitous as the shadows of the opening focus of our troglodytic heritage. So as far as those obsessive leaps of virtuoso intellectual-bravado go, they should rather be read as the symptomatics of a shrewdly sampled critical mass expressly aimed at deflecting notice away from certain core-deviations. Or to come to the point: it's a guy thing. And that the tragedy, rather than dampen ones zeal, is but an intravenous petrol drip for stoking the adamant cerebral fire. It is therefore imperative to assess the given set in its full array of hypersensitivities, devastating manias, marked disinclinations to accommodate any form of insolence—to adroitly make no sense, etc., as this brusque “sweeping stuff under the rug” routine has by now become particularly worrying; reappearing as it were to the choral accompaniment of well-waxed and well-honed meta-verbal signatories vigorously expounding the sound of one hand clapping.

And so again, what distinguishes—what picks apart—the movement of logic from myth? Is it the *logos* of philosophy, of philosophy qua philosophy? Or is it the *technê* of *epistêmê*—that “special art” that amounts to an “understanding,” a “buoying,” a subliminal levity that doffs all follow-ons in sceptical disownment of the very feasibility of ever bringing this arraignment to conclusion. Is it this that ‘sifts,’ that ‘conspicuates’ itself for an immanent and everlasting truth—but in tandem with pathetic bootleg reproduction limbering—in tandem—itinerant tracks as waivers incised over mustard fields of discourse ‘somehow parallel to each other’ (Correia 2001), the lighter ‘left’ penumbrally opening the way for the dim-witted, half-witted and nitwitted ‘right’—as *ontos* absolving *epistêmê*’s tragic bind?

Her faith in the boy is truly unshakable, despite his numerous delimiting factors: his cultural derangement, his terpsichorean lameness, his faulty choice of media—his *austérité-fixe*.

‘But for the hand to be able to clap alone, Being is undoubtedly the one that counts. Might it thus be at all possible to ontologise these in order to adequate additional things’ (Correia) from the knicker-twisting ground of nescient being? I don’t think so. For the absents of being surely ‘adequates’ already; and in any case, adding ‘things’ will never reach it any way. —Fine. But if fundamentally ‘there is no being’ then adding things to what will never reach what?’ —Correct, and which is also ‘why the final word on philosophy, ontology, epistemology and apophatic discourse has got to go further than words can go’ (Srinivasan 2000b, a). Such is the levity of sensitive intellect lingering at the crossroads of paradox and sublimity.

## 9. THE SUGGESTION!

It is mere presupposition that truth is sought, and that its seeking is truthful and based on truth. Or ‘that the left hand knoweth not the’—Who, say ‘what?’—because scholarship simply hasn’t anywhere to go with that. You’ll just get harangued for staking out a privileged position, lighting incense, promulgating a cult mentality, or being womanish. The suggestion! As if truth were bereft of those pretty shades that lurk in the alleyways of apophatic discourse. Who exactly curates the current installation?

## 10. TRACKING PHILOSOPHY’S ESSENTIAL MYTH

Tracking philosophy’s essential myth is the natural task of its auto-plot discernment console. Here the protagonist/questioner/inquisitor begins self-seeding her personal conclusion through responding to a registry of obvious questions; though knowing the inquisitors will never be content and that she’s fated to a barren, unrelenting search that only comes to closure with the hushing of authorial voice. Here we have the concept of self-liquidity: preconscious freedom without direction—though not to be mistaken for a psychic dimension, neither a wily deduction of thought.

Why? Wholly unconfined and devoid of direction...this is just the reason why it's not a happening, neither a result. It is the unreasoned aftermath of personal liquidation without any trace, and whose function as a cryptic dramaturgical figure is concealed in its own inner private sub-philosophy. This naturally includes a rule-ensemble that we trust metaleptically yields all essentials averred through the Vedic conception of *mandala* ('seed receptacle'). And in this way the play/act/object of the tragedy prompts the whole bazaar—indeed 'calls' the entire permeated public space 'to prayer,' to diaphanous regions of aesthetic sensibility where, bathed in the thus-pierced-springs of exfoliation, one resigns to the hand of a force far beyond—one dances to a score that is normally not perceived by the standard apparatus of cartilage, flesh and minuscule bone. Here prospects of returns get thoroughly impeached, as does the very notion of taking leave. All that remains is the naked utensil reduced to its unadorned simplicity and beauty—a living *mythos* retrieved from the sun, let us say.

Shadow is to light as echo is to sound. Tone is both visible and audible shade.

## 11. PLATO'S SUPERBIA

So with *mythos* there will always be hyperthetich reach towards resolution's unknown zone, as the cinematic project's superobjective robustly demands a teleological winding up. Here we have suspended disbelief twice over as the inquirer resists and inadvertently forfeits any basic sense of reflexive perspicacity. However this is not acquiescence to the myth of truth alone, but to the 'jealously hidden fraudulence' (Vogel 1974) of her own reflexive pronoun, as well; that is, to the myth of personal egoity—to her own private agency as wilful chooser in pursuance of the myth of truth, and which effectively amounts to the scoring a hat trick of suspended disbeliefs, the third cede going to the myth of choice. But on the other hand, the "myth of choice" in itself bears consequence only to the "myth of *logos*," and patently not to the "myth of truth." For in the

myth(os) of tragedy, according to Aristotle, the protagonist's predicament is not to be caused by personal mistake or wrongful choosing—neither by 'vice or depravity'; but rather, it is caused by a 'flaw of tragic judgment' (*Poetics* 13). Therefore its function sharply diverges from any set notion of 'decisive will.' *Poetics* explains this as an 'error brought about by external and/or internal forces,' by influences 'destined, preordained.' Here we have the lynch pin—the pin of this grenade called "the truth of *mythos*" bit by the smirking teeth of insurgency plying state design with havoc. I allude to the vision of Greek *hamartia*, the antagonist's 'extra-volitional flaw,' which evokes a sense of dramaturgical "action" as that of an 'impersonal causal agency where characters themselves are devoid [hence relieved] of causal role' (Husain 2002, 59, 62, cited in Halliwell 2002). This defining key philosophical principle is elicited twice in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, a work to which *Poetics* alludes ten times. Indeed, Aristotle found in Oedipus 'the man' the best disposition for the finest tragedy—'for hearing such a story causes men to be horrified' (14).

It was thus as a kind of 'pre-emptive effort to demolish the threat of insurgency's exclusive and totalising control over the social, civil and political situation' (Naddaff 2002, 6, cited in Krajewski 2004) that certain kinds of dramaturgical forms and theories were to face the countervailing threat of expurgation, whilst their authors and their theorists (their fan bases too?) irrevocable expulsion from Plato's Superbia (*Republic* X). Though important here to note that such celebrated artists were not to be 'expelled from this city-state island just because they fashioned unpleasant poetry—explicitly not. For as Socrates' dialogist has him declare: 'the more superlative the artist, the more seditious his art' (3.387b, adapted from Grube). And yet all the same in this utopian vision, such poets of matchless impersonating brilliance would need not harbour any fear of coercion or mistreatment by the state: 'for we shall do him every reverence as before someone wondrous and sweet' (declares the text), 'we shall anoint his head with myrrh, crown him with



wreaths, and send him away to another city’ (3.398a; trans. Grube, 409, emphasis added). (Though wonders what would happen were no other city willing to receive the banished bard.) Here censorship of content together with its conduit is brought to the point of seething ebullience, as it overflows with the tragic force to scald the very verve of the literary outlook. Here ‘recognition’ (*anagnôrisis*) and ‘turn of events’ (*peripeteia*) conjoin to chart that crucial point from where a happy ending becomes impossible. Like Hamlet when he kills Polonius by mistake. Now he’s a murderer too, just like uncle Claudius. Here we have the crucial “point of no return” where *mimêsis* morphs to imbue wary character and spawn Plato’s added sense of “masquerade.” Though in doing so, Plato, knowingly or not, effectively invents his own chief antagonist, his own darkest *nemêsis*—his own most beautifully painted screen (*skiagraphêin*) or “shadow picture.”

## 12. SUFISTIC FORMULATION

When we carefully examine the Peripatetic corpus we discover that *mimêsis* poetically-aesthetically designates something more at “representation” (depiction, replication). This ‘representation’ is not just of life, not just of nature, but more specifically ‘of the tragic view of life itself’ (*Poetics*), and of eloquent persuasion (vis-à-vis Rhetoric). For Aristotle *mimêsis* specifically applies to the active arena of “human dealing” (‘activity, work, goals, drives’; cf. Sanskrit *karma*), called in classical Greek *ergon*. To be precise, *mimêsis* functions as the ‘imitation of the essential spirit, passion and nature of human life in such a way that its products (*mimêmata*) are made to seem real in themselves’ (Kennedy 1980, 116-17).

To elaborate further what was touched on earlier; as applies to *ars rhetorica*, the ‘art of persuasion,’ *mimêsis* connotes a range of senses from the uncomplicated aping of verbal idiosyncrasies, to the studied emulation of linguistic patterns and the assimilation of discursive models and techniques (Corbett 1971, 243-50). In the general Platonic/Neo-

Platonic sense, however, *mimêsis* contrastingly adopts a metaphysical frame. This draws on three to five—depending how you parse them—points: (i) an apparent noumenal-phenomenal dichotomy between (a) the contingent world of sense perception and (b) a centreless, far-flung sphere of perfection; (ii) the human faculty of apperceiving this ultimate, unchanging reality or being, (b) above; and (iii) the added capacity for ‘sharing’ these apperceived sublimities with fellow inhabitants of the mundane world (Kennedy, 117). In fact, Plato’s idea of a realm of being that is crystalline in character and infinitely centreless would later contribute to the Sufistic—i.e. Central Asian / Silk Route—formulation of the Persian arabesque, i.e. as an enigmatic instrument of extension, infiltration and absorption—a disaggrative frond-like link and line to the very fore structures of that far-flung sphere.

Beyond this, however, the Platonic corpus exudes equivocation with regard to the notion of *mimêsis*. For while clearly on the one hand preserving the ancient view that the poet’s work is that of nature’s copyist (Burke, 5), Plato’s new classicism problematically characterized nature-in-itself as a ‘phantom,’ indeed, a ‘shadow’ displaced from the realm of reality. And as mentioned before, it would take two millennia before this view was properly critiqued, and its hypothesized dichotomy between mimeticistic artefacts and genuine things rejected out of hand as wholly insufficient to the needs of getting real. It was thus that the likes of Alexander Baumgarten and others of the early German aesthetic tradition choreographed their radical departure and established “aesthetics” as a separate discipline whose focus was the sensitive investigation of “mimetic goods” as typifies the modern academic sense of Fine Arts (Sörbom, 20). Yet Baumgarten’s denotation of aesthetics is still something far beyond a mere philosophical scrutiny of the meaning beauty and art. It is ‘a theory,’ writes Hammermeister (2002), ‘that substantiates the epistemological relevance of sensual perception based on a gnoseological faculty, and which in turn produces a distinct type of knowledge.’ Yet furthermore ‘unwilling to regard sense data as merely the stimuli for higher and more advanced cognitive processes, he

founded a science of sensual cognition independent from cognition itself (Sörbom, 4, 8). And in doing so, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten strikingly stands as the first critical thinker in the conventional history of Western philosophy to present a vigorous and sustained defence of the up-till-then dispossessed vision of the poet-artist. Through depreciation of the goads of logic in favour of the refined calibration of the senses rinsed of reason's vague ambitions, these daring exponents of a tantalizing science disclosed, dismayed and rejected out of hand the pooled presumptions and historical affixations of Europe's two principal cultural progenitors, between whom had furnished more than all put together the essential setting, pace and décor of Western philosophical rumination.

### 13. PLATO'S QUALMS

Thus Plato's qualms, his "fits of sickness," stem in large from the article of faith that 'acquaintanceship with the higher, non-sensible Forms is attainable only through disinterested, rational inquiry (*logos*)' and that 'complete, true knowledge can only come to light when the soul (Gk. *psyche*, viz. 'the mind'), or perhaps more naturally "the self" (Gk. *autos*), is "*autê kath' hautên*," 'completely denuded of all but itself' (*Phaedo*, 65a-d). However added quandary is seen to arise from Plato's insistence that this elevated praxis be the sole proprietary pursuit of philosophers and wholly unbefitting the rhapsodic bard. And with an air of disquietude he sternly counterindicates any possibility of the poet accessing such lofty realms, dismissing them rather as 'those who are incapable of apprehending the eternal, but lose themselves and wander (dis-course) in the region of the many and the variable' (*Republic*, 6.484b). And it is here Plato grabs for the tissue of fable and launches an assiduous battle to install his high born lot of truth-seeking theorists as the 'futuristic city's elite corps of guardians' (Naddaff, 12) otherwise known as "philosopher-kings," and whose superobjective—whose philosophic *technê*—is deemed that ultimate knowledge or *epistêmê*

resultant from the reasoned and single-minded tracking of ‘ideal Forms, the only true realities,’ the most important Form of which is the Form of the Good. Now helpful to observe that ‘ideal forms,’ in being above all else “ideals,” are plainly things ‘other’ more-or-less than “real.” For ideals as derived from classical Greek *eidólon*—and similarly related to our notion of “idols”—are clearly figures of an insubstantial nature and, in so being, “non-empirical.”

Now a certain reading of Republic—say, Naddaff—accentuates the grave trepidation and distrust on the part of its own authorial tradition with explicit regard to mimetic genius. Such power in the hands of inventive poets who could ‘cause men to apprehend dreams when awake’ (Plato *Sophist*, 266c) dangerously intensified the poignant sway their impromptu pastiches and tropic manoeuvrings could wield in the recombined processes of social formation and manipulation. ‘We become like what we imitate,’ would tersely sum up Plato’s stance on how misleading depictions submissively believed ‘become as our nature and settles into habits of gesture, speech and thought’ (*Republic*, 3.395d1-3). In other words, we identify with and configure our lives on vicariously experienced man-made dreams—an emotive-laden staple fare consumed throughout our lives, and which sets and sustains the derivative impressions not only of our heroes, but of our very own sampled sense of who we are, as *mimêsis* secretes metonymies of fraud.

#### 14. LUSH PERMUTATIONS OF A SMUGGLED METALEPSIS

Perhaps the most overlooked rhetorical figure ever marked is metonymy. From Greek *metónymia* to Latin *metonymia*, “The Law” is the commonplace example of this trope in its switching of “the cops and the courts combined” for the fascist sense of “state decreed rectitude” adapted in the passé neo-realistic style. Now its being ‘most overlooked’ is due in large to a dreadful poverty in academic valour, and to the gross

insufficiency and out-and-out blandness that reduces this figure to a filled in form.

“It works by contiguity,” it is tirelessly repeated, even though ‘contingent proximity’ has managed to nudge in more than metaphor’s vapid simulacra. And so metonymy really just denotes ‘transference’—not of ‘qualities’ per se, but obliqued more exactly through associative properties, or “props” if you will, and which are probably non-core to the theorematized object patiently obliging unnoticed contemplation. Now the immanent force of this unassuming trope is most delectably toned when its substitutions or consubstantiations are both transumptive and indexically smidged together—“*immutationes nusquam crebriores*” (Cicero *De Oratore*, 3.54.207.94)—that is to say, through the lush permutations of smuggled metalepsis arraigned as “nature’s master trope” (Wilson 1997) recanting all anterior linguistic pacts as tamped down sundry re-illumed tinges, erasures, abrasions and grafted slips into cracks overlaid with raked abhorrence and topped with the grace of incendiary acid: these skilfully measured elliptical placements of players and things up near to that which the artist wants either to link or affect. Indeed, and through the intimations and insinuations that abide in these objects sent to the pitch to extend and reshape the emotive schema that distinguishes exquisite tragic text, ‘the psychotropic nature of the mind is incited—*metaballomen ... tén psuchên*—throughout the course of listening to this recital’ (*Politics*, 8.5, 1340a); and all in a manner that accordingly cedes no intrinsic/extrinsic or authorial/auditorial dichotomy (vis-à-vis Halliwell 2002), but scores to insight participatory responsiveness. No wonder the domain of ancient theatre was under the protection of Dionysus, god of change (McLeish, 11).

By grafting mythic metaphor to allegory’s prolonged fabulation, Plato twigged how ‘man-made dreams could be used in so many different ways, for different reasons, and in vastly different contexts: religious, educational, political, commercial, purely diversional and naturally pornographic; and with each and every application based once again on

the Academic notion that ‘within the field of human senses there resides a certain mimetic capability to see and hear remarkable things when no such things are actually at hand’ (Sörbom, 26). ‘Thus, all the more reason why Plato’s fair-metropolis must even ‘forbid the truthful portrayals of wicked actions and malevolent personae upon the amphitheatric stage’ (Grube, 497-8).

## 15. DISINTERESTED RATIONAL INQUIRY (LOGOS)

Further corpus fusion, confusion and conflation, emerges with the *Ion* where the poet’s cousin, the rhapsodic bard, is conferred—though likely ironically—a semi-divine eminence and described as a passive yet ecstatic agent of a splendidly gifted data. Indeed, Ion “is beside himself” in Socrates’ words, and in the metaphoric “god inspired” enthusiasm of the moment imagines he is actually present at the scene of the Homeric episode he presently recites (Plato 535b7-c3). Two defining points emerge from this reading. Here we have a poet (a *rhapsode* or bard) who is acknowledged to have (i) gained ‘acquaintanceship’ with the Higher non-sensible Forms,’ and (ii) employed a methodology that is independent of ‘disinterested rational inquiry (*logos*).’

But what about the subsequent segment of this promise—specifically, that ‘complete, true knowledge only comes to light when the soul becomes most truly itself (*autê kath’ hautên*)? Transculturally assessed, this Platonic approach, as tersely dialogued in *Phaedo* (65a-66a), is analogous to that of the Sceptic’s *ataraxia*, i.e. a psychosomatic state of composure achieved through ‘resolving the anomaly of *phainomenon* and *nooumenon* (Sextus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.29) and where participation in the world of the senses—particularly cognitive participation—becomes as it were quiescently suspended and appears to have stopped altogether. This naturally alludes to the Platonic state of the philosopher’s soul (or self) when it or he ventures to ‘employ pure, absolute reason in the hunt for the pure and absolute essence of things, by withdrawing himself, in so far as that is possible, from his senses and their objects.’ Or in brief,

by withdrawing himself from ‘his entire body’ as he feels ‘the affixation to the corporal frame disturbs the soul and hampers it’s acquaintanceship with truth and wisdom’ (*Phaedo*, 66a).

This furthermore finds companionability to the “perfect aloof-ness” of the Sāmkhya school and its provision of *kaivālya* as the exalted state of “self-isolation” of the *purusha* (Sanskrit ‘person’) from material and metempsychotic existences, conclusively. Beginning with the strategy of *prāṇāyāma* (‘breath regulation’) this strikingly hiero-philosophical praxis, first attested in Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* (ca. turn of the 1st cen. CE), entails the subsequent fixing of the mind on an object of sense, to be followed in turn by ‘the abstract withdrawal and eventual freeing of the senses themselves from the domination of external sense objects’ (*pratyābhāra*). In Patañjali the unqualified state is itself termed in Sanskrit *kaivālya-mukti* and may best be rendered as “supreme self-sufficiency.” But while *kaivālya-mukti* here is tersely presented as an analogue to Plato’s far-flung sphere (and thereby the ethical goal that is sought), still the actual praxis—the hiero-ascetico approach itself—is the way of *pratyābhāra* or ‘sense withdrawal,’ as readily corresponds to what the Sceptics describe as ‘resolving the anomaly of *phenomenon* and *noumenon*’ and what Plato explains as ‘disinterested rational inquiry (*logos*).’

## 16. AFTER DEATH

But does Plato ever offer any clear indication that this goal is attainable by any caste of man?—or indeed, of even more crucial importance, attainable by any man at all? If ‘sensible’ things are never to be known—in fact cannot be known by man (*Phaedo*, 65a-d), then how on earth are the higher, ‘non’-sensible things ever to be known? Plato never offers an account of the “how” with regard to reaching his far-flung sphere, only cryptically remarks through the mask of Socrates that the “actual realities” will “probably” be known “after death ... rest assured ... I have great hopes” (63b-c). “Such aspiring thoughts among men who love...wisdom need always be reiterated” (67b).

## 17. A PASSIVE RECEPTOR OF FREELY GIVEN DATA

If the essence of the acquaintanceship of the higher non-sensibles is rooted in the fact that the soul is somehow “nobly akin” or “of connate substance” (*sungenês*) to the higher Forms (McCumber, 15-16), then two revealing points naturally follow: (i) every soul irrespective of caste, creed, occupation or gender has at least got a shot at getting acquainted with higher non-sensible Forms, and (ii) the trademark “wait-and-see” logocentric strategy together with its endless rounds of negotiations denies ipso facto any eventuality, any “process in time”—any shadow of a chance—that logic-driven science can ever arrive to any conclusive claim whatsoever. In other words, it is the nature of *logos* (in contrast to *mythos*) to sceptically interdict confirmation or closure ON or OF anyone’s account, as its tactical protocol effectively precludes all conclusive claims to anything whatsoever. Succinctly, it is the incontrovertibly sceptical basis of the scientific method’s aspiration for precision and lucidity that properly constrains its *loci classici* to the given indications of the bare here and now, to the looming grain of shadow and shade.

*Logos*-driven science then, in and of itself, sceptically denies any ultimate account of “the tenebration in which we are cast” (Lock 2000); or more lucidly expressed, refutes that any sensible discourse on ultimate objects or things “beyond time” can even poke up when embedded so deeply in the succulence of its own Ionian roots. By re-describing man as ‘essentially choiceless’ and redefining datum as ‘a given component,’ both the Platonic and the Peripatetic protocols apparently regard the poet-artist as a passive receptor of freely given data, the provenance of which is a separate reality perfect in form and function.

And yet, until we can derive from Plato’s fabulations an account of the sense of ‘disinterested rational inquiry (*logos*)’ and where in high heaven that’s supposed to lead us, we will never understand what the Platonic plot is on about. And so the phantom author has got to tell us plainly, “Is the body a hindrance or not?” (*Phaedo* 65a).



## 18. 'THOSE STARK CALABRIAN VILLAGES'

*Questo ombromanie*—"this play of shadow"—is an elusive idea for those oppressed by the theses of contemporary science, which explicate the nature of light as something thrown on a canvas of insipid texture, and which furthermore accord it the attribute of speed—even clocking it at 700 million miles per second. But in the absents of shadow there could be no vision of a surface far brighter than any could stand, and the emotive apple cart gets upturned; hence the shadow plays dimming the unbearable harshness of this Requiem with gypsy kids filching the spill.

A shadow is the tracing of the motion of the sun. A shadow is a trope here cast as data upon the dial of the page as a pageantry in tropic delight of lengthening shadows adumbrating splendour in the dimming glow as the earth turns back to the shadows of night... There is no true light and dark in nature, but variegated shrouds of dimmed concealment: dream-like chiaroscuro veils of enchantment brushing mute across phosphorescent sands.

And though shadow be the opening focus of philosophy, *logos* works best in the torrid light of noon, in the midday amphiscian sun with its shadowless light that always reflects the facts of the matter. Or does it?... Then *logos* is a cloud-sized aquiline vantage, the shadow of the wingspan circling high above the cordoned-off crime scene. It's time to bag the body. The decomposed body in the shadows of Mount Etna exhumed near the lava flows of Santa Maria di Licodia.

*Mythos*, then, demands a more diaphanous light, a 'light suffused through a glass of Chianti, a light that is robed in the shadows of Ravenna—the light that paints those stark Calabrian villages' (Witmer 1990). On the outskirts of the town he sketched old men sitting on porches near amber-hued street-lamps swarming with insects; scabby dogs in the garish shadows sniffing round uncollected garbage-heaps. The winding road eventually narrowed and slowed considerably as they geared down, ascending toward the lip of the volcano...

## 19. THE SHADOW PLAY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Ploy rose first the following morning: a beam of light through a chink in the shutter... Is it light or substance that casts the shadow? Or neither? What is the sense of ‘cast’ here? Has it metaphoric meaning of ‘shift’ or ‘transpose’? Or faintly the trope of metalepsis—the shadow of a net to entrap perceptions of the veritable mannequins, the animated ghosts, the profound amnesiacs lost in the shadow play of a consciousness entombed in a brain in a body. And yet nothing, surely, nothing substantial is caused to actually alter its position in this. The object before the shadow isn’t moved: neither the light as projected upon it. Unless, that is, we presume it has speed and that it’s constantly trying to get somewhere. But the more primmediate frame refutes this, asserting its pre-eminence stable. Her clean silhouette as projected at the sink by the sun through the morning kitchen window. Her sultry voice disjoined from its shadow as cast upon the fridge through the bidi smoke. Have we dwelt too long in the shadows of existence? ‘Is man [indeed] but the shadow of a dream (*skias onar*)?’ (Pindar *Odes*, 8.95). Then how are we to plot this *mythos* of *skia*—*il mito de schermo*—when diffused as filtered light through screen as scenic blind on the canopied stage at the threshold of this theorematic spectacle. *Che ombromanie*.

## 20. LA SCRIPTA PUELLA

Now *rere regardant* (Joyce 1922, [Proteus] 2430) the silent nature of our hesitant subject [looming on the screen] as specifically regards poetic arts, though other mimetic genres too: throughout the long history that dramatics has enjoyed there have always been those who felt uneasy with the fact that narrative accounts and recounts invariably involve deception (McKee 2000). And Plato, as we’re seeing, represents a very early tendency in this highly sceptical regard, having harboured great suspicions in the fictive machinations upon which art and poetry depend. ‘For ‘tis the queer disposition of mimetic activity to mirror vague

impressions of reality and truth (Gk *alêtheia*) whilst remaining far removed from its ideal province, that makes the poet's replicas—his forgeries and thefts—only seem to be what he claims them to be' (*Republic*, 10.598c). And the venerable founder of the Academy adjudged such trickery perturbing, indeed perverse and a peril to the state, this curious mismatch of imminent plots, this deceptively 'elastic scattering of attention' across the procedure-divulging field (Fisher). And it's here we see *mimêsis* as filmy phantom, impalpable form—the attempt to reconstitute that which formerly shone in the mind as appearances, idols, 'those silent images (*eidôla ta aphôna*) that lead the heathen astray' (I *Corinthians* 12:1). This is hushed reproduction—*simulacra muta*—in view of our use of skiagraphic scraps and the fact that a shadow is a shadow of a shadow of a strewn about chiaroscuro mass of equivalence settled like twigs in chance arrangement of her sun bleached hair over gold flecked brow as to shade or to camouflage love induced pause: as she blinks sitting up in the morning light refracted through a pane over crumpled linen, dust motes casting round her kiss bruised face. This is *mimêsis* as screened metaleptic figure—typos of "mature mark fracture" (Fisher) foreshadowing metaphor's extenuated fresco of which she proclaims herself director of tropology, and also why we always see her fingering the frieze making wet notations with sticks and things, "oozing and spilling from trope to trope" (Lock 2000) in total disregard for the paying audience: *la scripta puella, la filosofia bella*.

Then comes the actual dimensioning of the film: its theorematic movement of thrown filtered light with recumbent, virgin-like rococo tags that brazenly expose her own aesthetic affairs. And though the painter's choice of mediae—and their ardent applications—may be likened to those of the inner-city vandal, one should never misinterpret these forceful gestures as a meagre fondness for defacing public space: these cursive swipes that trash fiasco. And we actually do find it rather Twombly-esque this spray can version of chalk on Roman distemper (Hughes 1994) as our self-absorbed audience finds itself remodelled on

the curtly drafted skiagraphic palinode—screened from attention by the broad umbrella—this folio notation on the out of touch getting unceremoniously touched over.

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# The Pineal Auras of J.D. Salinger & James Joyce: A Study in Neo-Classic Ribaldry by P.G. Hoeven

Farrell R. Davisson

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Good morning, class. Are we all here? Miss Hornung, would you close the door, please? The dean wears sneakers. Sorry—that's an earlier generation joke. Now let's see. Oh yes. We're going to put aside for this period our discussion of the *Roxburghe Ballads* as an example of the lusty longevity of pre-Victorian folk humor. Instead, we're going to digress, and not entirely irrelevantly, I trust you'll see. That's why I've asked you to bring to class copies of



Rebecca Ellis

*Franny and Zooey*, written by Mr. J. D. Salinger. An author, my graduate assistant informs me, who enjoys a considerable following among the college population. My assistant also tells me that this installment of the longrunning Glass family serial first appeared in a periodical renowned for its impeccable taste, and that the young writer has been memorialized

in a collection of critical studies, and has been given the stamp of respectability by what I believe is known as the cover treatment in *Time* magazine. All of which strengthens my doubts that Mr. Salinger's audience has fully comprehended and properly appreciated the pithy nature, the pungent bite of his art.

These two volumes on the desk? No, this little pea-green book isn't Franny Glass's *Way of a Pilgrim*. It's the Compass edition of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The large red volume, literally a modern giant, is, of course, Joyce's *Ulysses*. We'll have occasion to refer to them both this morning as we delve beneath Mr. Salinger's highly glossed veneer in an attempt to unearth at least a portion of what he's really saying.

I must confess...a measure, I'm sure of the density of the ivory in my tower walls...that I hadn't encountered any of Mr. Salinger's works until a few days ago. Last Thursday, in fact, when at the end of my Chaucer seminar a perceptive young woman came up and drew this well-thumbed copy of *Franny and Zooey* from her handbag. She said she'd be interested to know how I thought it compared with *Ulysses*. Frankly, I was at a loss. But thanks to an impish twinkle in her eye, it dawned on me almost at once that she was referring to the Celtic adaptation of the great pilgrimage, not the Hellenic version. Some days before I'd told my Chaucer group that to refresh my cloyed vision I make it a practice to reread Joyce's masterpiece at least once a year, usually during the Christmas holiday. It's an avocation I heartily recommend. Be that as it may, the young lady's suggestion seemed so farfetched that I was intrigued. So I took Mr. Salinger's book home with me to dip into over the weekend.

Aggenbite of inwit! I couldn't put the curio down; I read it in one sitting. Despite the skimpiness of its canvas, it's a tour de force, make no mistake about that, a delightful spoof of consummate artistry. It's been a long time since I've had the pleasure of savoring such an exquisite play on polygonal words, the reverberating nuances, the palpitating

undercurrents, the adroit circumventions, the thinly veiled asides which make up the musculature and the ganglia of Mr. Salinger's stories.

One is tempted to say he's pulled off a literary prank in the grand tradition that goes back to Aristophanes, that he's craftily finessed those who take him seriously for the wrong reasons. I would like to believe that more of his fans, like the bright-eyed young woman in my Chaucer class, got at least a glimpse of his unsentimentalized vision of reality. But I fear that the extent to which he has succeeded in hoodwinking the myopic reader is the most telling comment he could make about the aseptic hypocrisy, the neo-Puritanism of that segment of American society he set out to describe—and to titillate.

Now as we proceed, I'll be drawing a good many parallels with Joyce. But you mustn't think I'm implying that Mr. Salinger has intentionally cribbed from the Dublin genius. I mean only to bring out the similarity of their approaches to the truth—past 'the corporate watchman's sentry box' and 'through a prism of language, many-coloured and storied.' Like Joyce, Mr. Salinger has an irrepressible sense of the lighter, the antic side that saves human nature from absurdity. Yet he never lets us forget the dark dank bogwaters immediately below where the eels lash and writhe. And he possesses with his Irish forbear that nobler insight that refuses to see the eels as evil merely because they are unpretty. Most importantly, he seems endowed with a Joycean compassion, a generosity, if you will, toward humanity and its foibles that rescues satire from caricature, parody from scorn and ridicule.

Professorial dignity demands that I make one further point before we attempt to unpeel the several layers of significance in these tales as intimate as the dermis of a scallion. You're all upperclassmen and/or honors students, supposedly mature. I trust that now we're this far into the semester in our survey of Medieval Literature, you're aware that such mean-spirited, lip-pursing latter-day labels as lewd, obscene and scatological have no place in my critical lexicon. Are we understood? Excellent.

I have to admit it took me some little while to appreciate Mr. Salinger's candor in telling us that this is a 'compound, or multiple love story, pure and complicated' and in saying the characters use a 'kind of esoteric, family language, a sort of semantic geometry.' On first reading of Miss Franny Glass's celebrated trip to the ladies' room of the college community restaurant, all that occurred to me was that the writer seemed to be straining for effect in providing such an off-beat setting for the climactic scene. The writing takes on a certain diuretic urgency during this interlude which has the highstrung girl communing with her soul, so to speak, but I assumed only that she was stricken with some sort of an emotional indigestion. A psychic upset that seemed somewhat strident and out of proportion to the rather banal conversation with her weekend escort that preceded it. I likewise failed to detect the allegorical import of her reviving after he faint in the manager's office. We'll go into that a bit deeper in a moment.

When did I begin to wonder if Mr. Salinger, to use Stephen Dedalus's expression, was as innocent as he sounds. Or, to borrow a bit of doggerel Joyce from W.S. Gilbert, tha the might be writing 'on a cloth untrue/ with a twisted cue/ and elliptical billiard balls.' Open the text to Page 88. Mr. Cunningham would you be so kind as to share yours with Miss Treadwell? Fine. We again find one of the characters—Mother Glass—ensconced on the toilet stool. This is more than coincidental poetic license—it begins to smack of burlesque. It was at this juncture that I began to feel my leg being mischievously pulled. The pull, in my case, anyway, led me back to that wonderfully feeling passage in *Ulysses* here on Page 68 where Leopold (Poldy) Bloom makes himself comfortable 'asquat on the cuckstool' of his backyard privy. A tenuous connection with the spic and span fixtures of the Glass chapel where so much of the plot unfolds? Much depends on one's empathy. There are those, I'm told, who consider Mr. Salinger a religious writer. I'm reminded of a germanely sardonic biblical paraphrasing of Joyce's: 'It is meet to be here. Let us build an altar to Jehovah...It is meet to be here. Let us construct a watercloset.'

Moreover, Mr. Salinger appears to be deliberately encouraging a comparison with the master as he describes Mrs. Glass's enthroned mannerisms: 'Distinctly, her way of holding it tended to blow to some literary hell one's first, strong (and still perfectly tenable) impression that an invisible Dubliner's shawl covered her shoulders.' I did a double-take and asked myself: What is Mrs. Glass, a decidedly down to earth creature, really doing? To put it as genteelly as possible, if a shade facetiously: Is the lid actually up? It is my conviction as a scholarly 'word-squeezer' that it may well be. It is my further conviction that to overlook the sub rosa events of this passage is to miss the whole point—the Rabelaisian mockery—of Mr. Salinger's genius. I'll go so far as to say that if this *intime* domestic vignette isn't an artfully masked lampoon of the hard-dying cultural prissiness, the last stand of the modern blue nose, that holds as indecent and an improper literary concern something as vital to life as an everyday bodily function, I'll turn in my key to the Heuristic Society. Speaking of that, I found most amusing Franny's line later on when she cautions Zooey during their exceedingly personal heart to heart talk not to bang the keys too hard.

Since a proper understanding of what our text for the day is all about may be said to hinge on how one assays the 'embedded ore' of this compact section, let's examine it bit by bit. It seems to me we find here in capsule three of the 'illusionist's' favorite ingredients of his dissembling technique. Mrs. Glass orders Zooey, her twenty-five-year-old son seated waist deep in the nearby tub, to 'Just be quiet a minute, young man, I'm thinking.' A perfectly innocuous declaration at first glance. At first glance—before one has caught onto the author's flair for the suggestive, the vibrantly assonant word. I've jotted down a few scattered through the book: Fat old druid, the role of 'Rick' heavily underlined in the TV script with a soft-lead pencil, the aforementioned word-squeezers, the dean named Sheeters, Sickler's, sunny old Athens, Mr. LeSage, the wicker chair in which Franny had her strange vision of the Fat Lady with thick veiny legs. You may wish to gather your own store of nuggets to amuse your friends.

An interval of silence follows Mrs. Glass's admonition, broken only by the 'faint swush of *it*.' The italics are mine. The 'it' supposedly refers back to Zooey's dutiful application of the washcloth in the preceding sentence. Perhaps it does. I call attention to the dangling pronoun only to alert those of you who may want to reread the book in its *entirety* to the writer's frequent use of ambiguous antecedents. A device also favored by Joyce that permits the necessary inferences to be drawn by the adept. My research assistant showed me a poetically tender...the phrase is sincere...instance of the device in this pivotal paragraph in Mr. Salinger's widely read *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*: 'The young man (Seymour Glass) suddenly picked up one of Sybil's wet feet, which were drooping over the end of the float, and kissed the arch.'

To continue with Mother Glass's thoughtful labors: Nearly a whole page is devoted to her way of holding a cigarette, and to her comely limbs. But note the permeating flavor of the double-duty adjectives: 'extraordinary length and shapeliness,' 'elegant tremor,' her calves were 'still firm and evidently never had been knotty.' As I read the oblique passage a second time I keep expecting to hear Leopold Bloom murmuring in the background: 'Pwee! Little wind piped wee.' Sure enough. 'A much deeper sigh than customary—almost, it seemed, a part of the life force itself—suddenly came from Mrs. Glass.' My assistant, a droll chap himself, suggests that's undoubtedly the first time anybody had the temerity to break wind in the fastidious pages of *The New Yorker*.

Mrs. Glass gets up, drops her stub, her cigarette stub, that is, into the wastebasket and sits down again. 'The spell of introspection she had cast on herself and unbroken, as if she hadn't moved from her seat at all.' Now really, I ask you. But you'll notice if you turn to Page 112 that Mr. Salinger reserves the last laugh for himself as he has Zooey inform his mother with a great guffaw that he doesn't 'want any party poops around here.'

Are you still skeptical, class? Hear me out, please. Obviously I'm not basing my deciphering of Mr. Salinger's message on this one circumlocutory scene rather cavalierly wrenched out of context. Let us



go back to Sickler's and rejoin Franny and her weekend date busy with his snails. Why snails? In passing permit me to read what Dedalus, speaking about *his* mother, has to say about snails: 'But for her the race of the world would have trampled him under foot, a squashed boneless snail.' You profligate young gentlemen might ponder that aphorism when next you flog the elusive muse.

But anyway, we'll start here on Page 15. Franny and Mr. Coutell are rambling on about Literature and Live and Everything. Read attentively and you'll pick up the deft, economical clues with which we're prepared for Franny's mystical tryst in the toilet. She's staring with special intensity at the blotch of sunshine on the table linen as if she were considering lying down on it. Next, she's staring beyond her young man at some abstraction across the room. They're talking all the while about *real* poets, beautiful poems and 'terribly fascinating, syntaxy *droppings*—excuse the expression.'

Beneath the coyness we hear Franny's plaintive, almost fervent inflections and begin to suspect she is taking refuge in euphemisms—a not uncommon guise in social intercourse. We get the feeling that her college undertakings...I don't think *I* need to underscore the word for you people...have not been all she has been led to expect. It takes now great reach of perspicacity to gather that in Franny's situation sex...that chilly, unvoluptuous three-letter word that can't possibly convey the infinite aspects of love...has taken on the trappings of a religion with all the misguided piety that entails. And though she has evidently done with normal amount of casual shopping around, she has yet to meet up with her Grand Passion. If I were asked to make a curbstone diagnosis of her Problem, I'd say she is suffering from the lack of soul-satisfying...fudging a bit myself, I'll say consummation.

Franny says as much on Page 20 where we're about to find out just how exalted her requirements are, and the extent of her confusion. '...I'm sick of just liking people. I wish to God I could meet somebody I could respect.' With that, she suddenly excuses herself and heads for the ladies' room. When she reaches the seclusion of the *apparently*

unoccupied quarters, her brow is beaded with perspiration, her mouth is slackly open. She is very pale. She locks herself in a stall and assumes a tense ‘almost fetal’ position. She holds the pose for a ‘suspensory’ moment then breaks down in a good old fashioned cry. This clause—‘a partly closed epiglottis’—is a gem. Here’s a portion of Joyce’s description of a similar mind versus matter, spirit versus marrow crisis Stephen Dedalus experiences at about the same age: ‘And the cry that he had strangled for so long in his throat issued from his lips. It broke from him like a wail of despair from a hell of suffers and died in a wail of furious entreaty, a cry for an iniquitous abandonment, a cry which was but the echo of an obscene scrawl which he had read on the oozing wall of a urinal.’

When Franny’s ‘violent outburst-inburst’ stops, it is as though ‘some momentous change of polarity had taken place inside her mind, one that had an immediate, pacifying effect on her body.’ Young Stephen went through much the same phenomenon: ‘He was in another world; he had awakened from the slumber of centuries.’ Having seen the light, he proceeds to a Dublin brothel where he sheds his physical virginity. But sweet Franny, having already been initiated when a sophomore one guesses, has only her spiritual chastity to offer as she keeps her rendezvous with the Holy Ghost. Or whomever it is—no doubt a composite of all the mystical heroes picky, romantically inclined young women dream up these days to partner with in a nice clean, sweatless immaculate conception. A sterile, unabrasive union she must sense as a well-schooled child of the scientific century will bring no lasting joy and bear no fruit. Perhaps she’s also read, along with Dedalus, Meredith’s definition of a sentimentalist as one who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done. It’s now wonder she goes into a decline for the rest of the book.

We might inject a word here about the Jesus Prayer in the little pea-green book Franny’s latched onto and which looms so large in her travails. A more elaborate explanation of the prayer is found on Page 112 where Zooey attempts to describe it to an unimpressed Mrs. Glass

who says she knows what's at the root of Franny's troubles: "The subject doesn't really come up in either of the books, but, in Eastern terms, there are seven subtle centers in the body, call *chakras*, and the one most closely connected with the heart is called *anabata*, which is supposed to be sensitive and powerful as hell, and when it's activated, it, in turn, activates another of these centers, between the eyebrows, called *ajna*—it's the pineal gland, really, or rather, an aura around the pineal gland—and then, bingo, there's an opening of what mystics call the "third eye." It's nothing new, for God's sake."

Hardly. Listen to the sport Joyce has with the subject: "Yogibogeybox in Dawson chambers. *Isis Unveiled*. Their Pali-book we tried to pawn. Crosslegged under an umbrel umbershoot he thrones an Aztec logos, functioning on astral levels, their oversoul, mahamahatma. The faithful hermetists await the light, ripe for chelaship, ringroundabout him. Louis H. Victory T. Caulfield [sic] Irwin. Lotus ladies tend them I' the eyes, their pineal glands aglow...*In quintessential triviality/For years in this fleshcase a shesoul dwelt.*" If nothing else, class, I hope our discussion this morning arouses your curiosity about James Joyce, certainly one of, if not *the*, most influential, seminal poets of the modern era.

Incidentally, I understand many readers imagined the queasy Miss Glass to be pregnant, goodness gracious. Her young man seems to have grumpily assumed quite the contrary. But you'll see if you read between the lines when he's comforting Franny after her faint that she has hopes the Big Weekend he's been saving up for won't come entirely to naught.

That brings us to Franny's famous collapse. You'll remember the stress put on the fact that there was no room for her in the local inn. She comes to in the manager's office. Drop the second 'a' from manager and what do you have? Franny's face and that of her host suspended above her have a remarkable pallor, we're told. Mr. Coutell says they've just run out of ammonia. Ammonia? Don't you detect more than a faint whiff of the Bethlehem stables? And aren't you beginning to admire the fecundity of the bewildered young lady's imagination? Less than two martinis and she fantasizes a spiritual seduction complete with the

Nativity Scene. And it takes a writer with a marvelous sense of the bizarre to have his heroine a few days later being metaphorically delivered of a flea-ridden ‘altered’ tomcat who answers to the name of Bloomberg, of all names.

I submit that from one angle, Franny’s hallucinations can be translated as a cunningly contrived parody rigged for the Serious reader by a Serious author about a Serious heroine who takes life far too seriously. I also offer for your consideration the possibility that it is with this very parody that Mr. Salinger reveals his understanding of the genuine pathos of Franny’s plight and that of the superficially erudite generation she personifies. That desperate search—which one surmises has much to do with the popularity of these outwardly intellectual adventures—for the tidy explanation, the trustworthy definition of love, the oven-ready formula for living. A vicarious, unriskey search for enlightenment and wisdom requiring no more physical exertion than that needed to turn a page. A quest we may assume from Franny’s syncretic background that has led her through the Great Books: The biblical Old and New Testaments, as well as Joyce’s Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Freud, Reich, Krafft-Ebing, Heidegger, Proust, Zen, the Puranas, with especial emphasis on the blood rites of Kali, the malevolent mother goddess. The list is endless, thanks to the paperbacks. And plainly baffling in Franny’s case.

It’s only a fifty-minute hour so we must skip along over the high spots, leaving the perplexed youngster gazing up at the ceiling, lips moving. A supine position in which she spends an unconscionable amount of time, I might add. Let’s pause again with Zooey and his mother and their marathon *tete a tete* in the Glass bathroom. Here on Page 79 I’ve marked a touching exchange that captures, it seems to me, the intensity, the inescapable nostalgia of the classical mother and son romance. An affair that dates back to the reverential, tactile intimacy of infancy. The sensuous delights of the bathinette, diaper rash freshly powdered, the soothing croon of Rockabye Baby, terrible hungers in the night assuaged palatable flesh to ravenous lip—need I go on? Keep in

mind the author's warning that this is a 'complicated love story.' Holding a clean washrag in her hand, Mrs. Glass patiently repeats: 'Do you or don't you want it?' Zooey answers from behind the showercurtain: 'Oh, my God! Yes. Yes. Yes.' The triple assent throbs from the very depths of his cleft being. As does Molly Bloom's unforgettable 'yes, I said yes, I will Yes' which ends Joyce's masterwork and one of the most truly wholehearted acceptance speeches in all literature. To frown distastefully, Miss McCarty, is to miss the artistic integrity. Who's to decide, be he doctor, cleric or merely voyeur, where the filial bond ends and incest begins?

While we're on that, we might briefly examine Zooey's particular bent, his Achilles heel that has him playing 'Martha to somebody else's Mary.' The allusions are so overt that I wondered if perchance Mr. Salinger wasn't baiting a trap with a redherring. There are the young man's emphatic puffin and blowing on a panatela, a stock lingum; his celibate rabbits; Dick Hess's monogrammed attaché case; the powertools and vises in Mr. Le Sage's basement—shades of the Marquis. But then I realized that Zooey *had* to be a hail-fellow-well-met disciple of the Athenian school or these two lines would be robbed of their essence: Speaking about his television (a suspect usage) confers, he says, 'Nothing's final—nothing's ever final with these guys.' Think about that for a moment. What's that but a succinct summation of the intrinsic futility of such grimly gay male pursuits set in the *mis-en-scene* of 1950's America. The other line is let's see...here is on Page 173: 'A Philadelphia highboy had been moved out into the hall, and, together with Mrs. Glass's person, it blocked Zooey's passage.' Infectiously tongue in cheek, isn't it?

I can't resist calling your attention to the intentional coupling of the volumes in the Glass family library listed on Page 119, particularly *Nancy Drew and the Hidden Staircase* which lay atop *Fear and Trembling*. You may also wish to scan more closely the quotations, starting on Page 176, which Zooey's older brothers penned on their bedroom door. Ring Lardner's is my favorite. And if you're looking for the Primal Scene,

apparently a must for any conscientious novel these days, I suggest you reexamine the paragraphs, originally written in blue-lead pencil, at the bottom of Page 180.

Professional circumspection inhibits me from dredging too deeply into the submarine substance of Franny's off little aquatic dream she tells Zooey about on Page 126. Have you found it? A whole bunch of people, it says, keeps making her dive for a can of coffee at the bottom of a swimming pool. 'Every time I'd come up, they'd make me go down again.' Franny says it's hideous—testimony to her innate good taste, one may guess. As the priest told Dedalus during *their* discussion of esthetics: 'Many go down into the depths and never come up. Only the trained diver can go down into those depths and explore them and come to the surface again.' Especially, as in Franny's dilemma, if there's a brace of dormitory mates ready to clout her with a big oar every time she breaks waters.

You can almost hear the master chuckling approvingly at the graphic sketch on Page 128, further setting the stage for the heated brother and sister dialog to follow. 'Under the stimulus of Zooey's investigating finger, Bloomberg abruptly stretched, then began to tunnel slowly up toward the open country of Franny's lap. The instant his unprepossessing head emerged into daylight, sunlight, Franny took him under the shoulders and lifted him into intimate greeting distance.' Joyce's observation about a Dublin midwife seems more than a little apropos: '...he is reported as having stated that once a woman has get the cat into the bag (an esthetic allusion, presumably?...I'm still quoting...'to one of the most complicated and marvelous of all nature's processes, the act of sexual congress) she must let it out again or give it life...to save her own.'

That brings us down to the nub of the matter, as it were---Panditji Zooey's longwinded lecture to his befuddled little sister that makes up the revealing last part of the book. An exhortation that she cease her bootless pining for the Ideal, the Perfect One, and, to put it quickly and colloquially, that she Wake Up and Live. 'One life is all. One body. Do.

But do,' Poldly Bloom exclaims paraphrasing Hamlet paraphrasing Ecclesiastes paraphrasing Yahweh only knows. You may recall in this connection Franny pointing out that the 'mercy' in the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me' is really an enormous word that doesn't have to mean just *mercy*. And as Zooey declares: 'Everybody in this family gets his goddam religion in a different package.'

It should be apparent by now that Franny and Zooey's facile glibness, their incessant verbalizing, their supposedly cerebral orientation, their forlorn sublimations, may be construed as a wry indictment of the folkways of the milieu Mr. Salinger is holding up to the light. And once again he erects signposts warning the reader not to be dazzled by the prismatic rhetoric. I refer to the drollery of having Zooey fiddling with a glass paperweight filled with snowflakes when he launches into his harangue. Is the slang expression 'snow job' still extant? I prefer Joyce's: 'To make the blind see, I throw dust in their eyes.'

To grasp fully this penultimate scene, pitting brother against sister, you must pay close heed to the convoluted drams, the subliminal total recall of things past, that is taking place in the wings. We've reached extremely sensitive ground here on which we must tread delicately lest we corrupt with our tribal attitudes this reenactment of the time honored, perfectly natural explorations of childhood. Those pioneering, exhibiting excursions with next of kin down the exciting bypaths of physical attraction that probably commenced when inquisitive tykes first began romping and jostling together in the sunlight at the mouth of the cave. It's a matter of faith, but I trust you young people will recognize that this implicit reengagement, *jus sanguinis*, is handled with the loving tolerance of the authentic poet.

I sense from your restiveness that you're eager to do the rest of the digging on your own—beyond, in Joyce's words, 'the portals of discovery opened to let in the quaker librarian, softcreekfooted, bald, eared and assiduous.' If any doubts remain as to the subjective intimacy of the history the close-knit pair is reliving, scrutinize closely the culminating paragraphs on Page 171 where Zooey breaks off and stares at Franny's

prostrate, for once face-down position on the couch, her back to the fray, to borrow Ovid's terminology.

I devoutly hope, as I believe Mr. Salinger does, that any atavistic chords the tableau may strike in your memories ring not with guilt and remorse and an assumption of sin, but with the sounder, more basis knowledge that the call of nature, the lure of adjoining flesh, is felt by all of us early in life before we quite know how to respond and can only experiment with those nearest to hand. With that understood, we can only sympathize with the Glass offspring for their needless scars, their imaginary snake bites—above all, the topical...I believe the fashionable word is *angst*...of their ex post facto apprehensions that what was done in primeval innocence was done in wickedness.

Maybe that's neither here nor there, but it's worth thinking about, surely. The scene shifts. For the peroration of his sermon on the mount, Zooey gets in touch again with his sister via the telephone which in the Glass ménage, as in many another, apparently serves as an electronic umbilicus. Franny takes the call in her parents' bedroom. The handpiece (of the phone) lies detached from its catch on Father Glass's pillow where Mother Glass left it with symbology aforethought. 'To get to it, to redeem it,' Franny has to shuffle through a quantity of newspapers and sidestep an empty paint bucket. Emptied of whitewash? Perhaps. Perhaps some of you will be reminded of King Lear saying: 'Nay, and you get it, you shall redeem it by running,' and the Gentleman observes, 'Thou hast one daughter who redeems nature from the general curse which twain have brought her.'

Zooey in an anticlimactic burst of vehemence by remote control tells Franny who the Fat Lady really is besides Momma and Papa Glass and Professor Tupper, et al. Their name is legion. After that democratic appeal to love thy neighbors, the pure with the dross, awful neckties and all, Franny slips into the bed to 'lay quiet, smiling at the ceiling.' You may rest assured our *petite chou* isn't thinking about tangerines.

It's nearly time for the bell. I'll just say in closing that it takes a brave story teller in this analytical age to challenge the snickers of the



capital-A Amateur Freudians by dropping the final curtain on his heroine peacefully snuggled down in her dad's bed, balancing the familial equation. One if left with the melancholy premonition that Franny, like Cordelia before her, is not to arise from her deep, dreamless sleep.

To end on a less somber note. My assistant tells me this Zen koan figures prominently in connection with Mr. Salinger's works: 'We know the sound of two hands clapping. But what is the sound of one hand clapping.' One doggedly earthbound reply suggest itself: The marveling cadences of Leopold Bloom's applause as he admired a stone's throw away the preening adolescent Gerty MacDowell that eventide on the Sandymount strand.

Happy word squeezing, class. I do hope our little exercise in exegetics this morning has whetted your appetites for chapters of the Glass family saga still to come.

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# Sea, Swallow Me

Craig Laurance Gidney

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The island hated him.

Jed could feel it as he walked down the empty street. A ghost town spread out before him. Houses with rickety, water-eaten planks and warped shingles, with broken glass or torn plastic where windows were. The street was covered with sand, jeweled with glass. The metal of a derelict car glinted as the heat vacuumed. Was there electricity in these houses? Running water?

A Doberman lunged against an unstable fence, the barks of rage as sudden and relentless as machine gun fire. Jed jumped back, startled. He saw the tan and lewd underside of the dog, and its dangling genitalia. He laughed, out of fear or embarrassment.

The guidebooks had specifically warned tourists to avoid this section of town of La Mer Vert, unofficially called La Merde. It was a shantytown, with houses in ill repair, patched with corrugated tin. He could feel sullen eyes on him. They hid in the shade of the silent houses. Jed shivered, in spite of the heat. Was the search for local color worth



Barbara Kandler

this feeling? This morning, he'd woken up in his hotel room. A gentle zephyr stirred the filmy curtains. The walls of the room were nautilus pink and touched with painterly strokes of morning sunlight. The generic painting above his bed showed a riotous marketplace scene. He heard gulls, children, and steel drums. It was horrible. The resort feel was starting to grate on him. Jed liked his vacation with a little bit of bite. One more fruit-filled, alcoholic drink, and he'd puke. But now that he was here, he was having second thoughts. If he were killed here, who would find him? The killers would probably just throw him in the sea, to be nibbled by fish and covered by algae.

The street ended abruptly, quashing his morbid thoughts. There was a cul de sac, and then, the beach. The scene took his breath away. Hidden behind this raggedy, dangerous street was one of the most beautiful beaches he'd ever seen. The sand was white and soft as powdered sugar. Off to the left, dunes undulated, with thin fingers of grass poking out of them. The ocean water was like a liquid geode. Smashed sapphire was shot through with veins of emerald and milky opal. The horizon was empty, no cirrus, no birds, just endless blue. Jed kicked off his sandals, and stepped onto the sand, entranced. The glimmering water beckoned. Salt air tickled his nose. Why does it glow like that? He thought. It was as if there was a sun *under* the water. When he reached the wet lip of land where the tide kissed it, he looked down. The water was clear, and all those colors simultaneously. Something burned under his breastbone. It was joy, bright as the phantom sun under the water. He'd made the right decision, coming here.

Jed stepped in the water, which was mercifully warm. He waded out, until the tide licked his knees. He saw shells and sand dollars in the silt floor. The wet sand oozed between his toes, holding him there. He closed his eyes. I am the only imperfect thing here, he thought. But that didn't matter. He forgot about the raised continent of the keloid on his face, and his ashy skin and too-thin body. If he could only be like this forever.

He stood there for a while, and lost track of time. So he wasn't really sure when he heard the singing begin. It seemed to evolve out of the breeze and the sighing surf. Voices, soft and vaporous as sea mist, rose near him, and moved away. He turned away from the horizon, blue upon green-blue, and faced the shore. White and blue and black moved further away from him, a singing congregation of men and women. They wore linen suits and dresses, all of them blindingly white. The women had headscarves of navy blue. They looked clean, their brown skins gleaming. The crowd moved in nimble, ghost-light steps down the beach. They ignored him; he was utterly irrelevant. He might have been a rock in the sea, or a discarded buoy. Dark children wove in and out of the group of sixty, with orderly, mannered chaos. Some of the men at the back dragged wagons behind them. The wagons were filled with all sorts of things: white flowers, bottles with sheets of paper stuffed inside, perfect shells, and food. The chorus was steady, with the men's voices keening, and the women's voices reedy. Jed couldn't understand the language they were singing in. St. Sebastian had a notoriously difficult pidgin, old English mixed with colonial French and seasoned with an accent that had no precedent. He followed their subdued yet joyful progress down the white beach.

Back home in D.C., he'd witnessed an Easter parade held by the Ethiopian congregation that worshipped in the church behind his basement apartment. They marched down the alley like this group, led by priests that looked like life-sized black chess pieces. He recalled the decorated umbrellas, palm leaves and vibrant clothing—it was very much like this current group. But there was different feeling, here. The Ethiopians had shared a communal happiness; it was very much a celebration. These people in blue and white were becalmed, as if they were under a spell. They marched and sang toward the inevitable, rather than towards salvation and reward. It was eerie.

Maybe I'm reading too much into this, he thought. He moved out of the water, and followed them, at a discreet distance. Curiosity got the better of him. No one looked around; they all faced forward, even the

children. The one baby, facing backwards and resting on his mother's shoulder, was sound asleep. They walked adjacent to the shoreline, and scarcely seemed to notice it. Every now and then, Jed would look to the Atlantic, and notice a change. Silver water became blue, then brown then green. Once, he saw the grey-silver flash of a pod of porpoises, arcing in the water. Another time, a bird of prey hovered over a spot. Every time he paused to look seaward, he found that the group had moved further ahead than he thought possible. Oddly enough, he could hear their voices all the same—their sound did not diminish. The fourth time he was distracted by the activity on the water, he resolved to follow them, and ignore the periphery.

Jed settled into their gait. He focused on their linen-covered backs, and their dark necks. The women's hips swiveled and bopped. They were rounded, and breasts were full. They were totemic, living sculptures, Black Madonnas. The men were mostly slender. A few of them were shirtless, with firmly muscled backs and buttocks that slid underneath pants with ease and grace. Stomp, sway, sing—Jed found that he was singing their song, even if he didn't understand the words. The melody just got into his blood, like an infection.

Finally, they stopped. Jed stopped as well, wishing that there was a dune or something that he could hide behind. They seemed intent on what they were doing; maybe they wouldn't notice him blatantly looking at them. Still, he felt like he was invading their privacy. Even so, he felt no strong urge to move. Presently, the group formed a semi-circle, a crescent of blue, white and brown at the lip of the ocean. Their voices rose, and were accompanied by percussive instruments and handclaps. Then, one by one, they walked to the laden wagon to their left, and dropped the trinkets into the water. Bottles, beads, feathers, coins, and other things were laid out on the shoreline, and devoured by the incoming breakers. From where he stood, it looked like the offerings disappeared. He saw a wreath of flowers drift on the wrinkled surface of the water. They gleamed against the kaleidoscopic water as they floated slowly towards the horizon. Jed imagined one of the porpoises

leaping through the hoop of white blossoms. When the last offering went to the water, the music stopped abruptly.

He heard the distant screech of seagulls. Then silence.

A figure in a long robe of blue stepped out of the crescent of gathered people, and stood facing them, its back to the water. The being was long limbed with hair cut close to its skull. It was male, but so old that the maleness of the features had eroded like stone. The priest was beyond gender. He glanced over his flock, and saw Jed lurking. The ageless gaze captured him, held him momentarily, and released him. Jed's keloid itched and burned. Perhaps the salt air irritated it.

The priest spoke to his congregation. The words flowed out like the tide. Its voice was musical and slightly feminine. The patois of St. Sebastian rippled over his ears. Jed supposed it was a sermon of some kind. But who were these people worshipping? There were vague rumors of cults in the island, where people followed African rituals—the guidebook had mentioned obeah and Voudun. But the worship was swathed in mystery. The priest, however, did not seem to be bothered by his presence. He raised his arms and stretched them out. In response, the audience began to chant and sing. They stood still—even the formerly restless children—and sang a simple song that increased in tempo and velocity slowly. Jed couldn't make out the whether it was in French or Spanish—or some older, pre-colonial tongue. The priest conducted them, as if they were instruments in an orchestra. One word was repeated, over and over. It rose and separated from the flow of voices: Olo Kun.

There was a magic about all words that began with the letter O. It was something that Jed had felt as a child when he was first learning to read. It was a silly thing, but the feeling never left him. Owl and opal and Orion were beautiful words. O was the letter that was an endless circle, that surrounded a hole. It was geometric and mysterious, mystical and mathematical, the cousin to 0, the number that signified nothing. He found himself saying the word with the group of worshipers.

The voices and their rhythms had insinuated themselves into him, into his blood:

*Syllable, sibilance, Olokun...*

*Beat, beat, Olokun...*

*Sigh, bird's cry, Olokun...*

*Serpent words, serpent sun, Olokun...*

Olokun...Olokun...Olokun...

The space between the magic word got smaller and smaller. Soon there was no word, but Olokun. A word that meant everything. A word that meant sea and sky and sand. A word that was also a name, a name that meant endless and terrifying blue...

The name came faster and faster, darker and darker, cresting waves of human voices. The voices of the congregation, the bizarre priest(ess), and, indeed, his voice mimicked the tug and pull of the surf and the darker currents. They stood on the lip of the ocean, calling for the he, or she, or it.

And It, or She, or He came.

O, or Zero is magic, because it holds emptiness. It defines space, and captures it. What lives in the center of Zero, or O?

A woman broke free of the crescent of people (half of O). She was an explosion, given human form. She screamed, and her eyes rolled back into head. She staggered in paroxysm for a few steps, before she fell to the ground. She could have been something spit up by the sea. The semicircle dispersed.

It was second nature, really, him running down to where she had fallen. Last summer's stint as an EMT had prepared him for all sudden medical episodes. It was essential that he act, and soon. The first few moments of an accident were crucial. The audience had parted and let him through. He dropped to his knees, and reached for her slack arm that poked out of her robes' sleeve.

"Non," said a strange, high-pitched voice. Jed looked up, into the eyes of the priest. He towered over him. His gaze was stern, and hawk-like. Jed was reminded of a vulture. The priest's neck was impossibly

long, and Jed noticed the long, yellow nails on his ancient, veiny hands. For a moment Jed thought of the strange, feminine bird creatures in the movie *The Dark Crystal*.

"I am an EMT—a doctor," he said, even though it wasn't quite true. He wasn't a doctor *yet*. Med school started in the fall. "I can help."

The priest shook his head. "Non. You mustn't touch her. She not sick."

The woman's mouth was open. A pool of drool had formed in the corner of her lip. Her eyelids fluttered.

Jed repeated himself: "I can help her," and took her thin, brittle wrist in his hand.

He was burned. His keloid flared and throbbed—an island of pain on the side of his face. He saw endless blue, cut through with emerald, the bottom of a boat, shoals of fish. He jumped back, as if he had been shocked. The inert woman jerked back to life. 10,000 volts thrummed through her invisibly. Her jaws quivered, and her eyes flew open. Jed was on the sand, rubbing his keloid. He saw for the briefest moment the woman's eyes.

They were blue, a rich, impossible color. She had no whites in her eyes—they were just twin ovals of blue. He saw movement in them—tiny daggers of sunlight. Or fish?

Before he could look further, she stood up. But *stood* implied a control of her body, the obeying of anatomy and physical reality. No, she did not stand up. She sprung up with such exuberant fluidity, it was as if her bones were malleable as clay. She was a short woman, perhaps 5'4, and yet she loomed over him. And it wasn't just that he was on the ground. Maybe the rest of the world shrank, in response to her.

The first spasm of her body had Jed scrambling off his ass. He moved back to join the circle that had formed around the woman. She began to shudder, as if she had just caught a sudden chill. And then, she started dancing, if such chaotic movement could be called dancing. It was simultaneously robotic and graceful.



The throng started chanting the name of the god again and again: Olokun! Olokun! Olokun! As before, he joined in with them. He felt the massed sound in his body, in his blood. The woman's wild dance sped up. Jed remembered seeing some program or another about *krumping*, a spastic, high-energy dance that was in the ghetto underground back home. Young men and women would hurl themselves into hiphop rhythms with abandon. Muscle and bone became water. It was similar to what he saw now. It was terrifying. She would hurt herself, if she didn't stop—

The vulture-priest emerged from the circle with slow, steady steps. The krumping dervish ignored him, entranced by the chanting crowd and her own hummingbird beats. The priest stood in front of her, and was spattered by her profuse sweat and droplets of spit.

He raised his hand. A sapphire ring glittered on one of his fingers. The hand swooped down like a diving bird of prey. He smacked her in the center of her forehead.

She stopped moving at once.

The crowd stopped chanting.

The sigh of the sea filled in the sonic void.

"Speak!" commanded the priest.

The sea just sighed. And the woman began to reek. A smell came off her, of salt and stagnation, fish and cunt, seaweed and chemicals. She was a statue in white and blue. She suddenly moved. It was a lurch into motion. She jerked slowly, as if she were flotsam and the sand was the sea. She shook her head vigorously, and beads of sweat flowed of her body. Her blue scarf came undone and undulated to the ground. A grove of black coral—her braided hair—fell around her shoulders. She opened her eyes:

Blue, fringed with the shawl of foam, no whites in the corners. She fixed her gaze on Jed. She advanced as slowly as a zombie. The surrounding crowd spread out away from him and her.

"You," she said, pointing a finger at him. Her voice was deep, thick and husky.

Jed's keloid tingled. It had risen from a cut he'd gotten when he was riding his bike to work a year ago. The ugly scar grew from the sea of his black skin. It was an island of deformity. For the past few months, he'd been able to ignore it. Now, it telegraphed every uncomfortable feeling he had. It was sensitive in the way arthritic bones were. Fear was the emotion that he felt. This woman was clearly deranged, and doubtlessly held some power over the gathered crowd. He felt completely the interloper, the American black who might as well have been white. The eyeshaped portals to the sea captured his reflection. They mesmerized.

Jed broke eye contact, before he sank into them. He saw the priest at the periphery, where the white sand turned brown. He caught his eye: Help. The priest shrugged. It was beyond his power. He was in her hands now.

She repeated, "You," and her overwhelming smell hit him. She stepped right up to him, and got in his face. He felt small, even though he towered over her. She could crush him, if she wanted to. She did not. "You, you are mine," she said.

Her voice was deep and male. Deeper than Nina Simone's tones. A basso profundo that creaked and cracked like hurricane-warped wood. She stank, and Jed thought of fishscales, wavering fronds, fishshit and oil. She smelled like leviathan whales, and the strange fish that dwell at the bottom of the ocean that have bioluminescence. "Mine..."

The sun at the bottom of the sea glowed. Dark blue into sapphire water.

All over island, there were images of the patron saint. In churches, towel, t-shirt and grottoes. The fey youth pierced by arrows. Sebastian lent his name to hotels and clubs on the island. The Arrow bed and breakfast. Saint's Peak. The island's lone gay club was called The Catamite. Those languorous eyes with luscious lashes, the slender youthful body, and the tortured poise were everywhere. You couldn't avoid it. Everywhere you turned, the murdered homosexual saint appeared, like Mary does in sandwiches and cloud formations.

The possessed woman's eyes of liquid pierced him with arrows tipped with toxins. The jolt of the eel and the sting of the ray were in that gaze.

"Mine..."

Echoes in underwater grottoes.

She took his hand, and Jed rose. He followed, wanting to hear the echoes. She pulled him to the water's edge, then into the water itself. They walked out into the water, which was as warm as mother's milk, knee high, then waist high. On the shore, the gathering had reformed their half O shape. The woman—who was something more than a woman—led him on. Jed felt the silky carpet of the ocean floor. A smooth pebble or stone would graze his feet. Waves crested and they went underneath them for thrillingly brief seconds. He saw faces in algae, and fish made of sunlight. Before long, even that didn't matter. He was floating, massaged by water streams. They stopped at some point, and just bobbed like buoys.

A current of cold water broke the spell, or whatever it was. The safety of the woman's grip ended. Jed felt the cold fingers of the current run through his legs. The cold bit him. They were frozen, and he began shivering immediately.

"What the hell..."

His guide was shocked awake with him. The sea spilled out of her eyes, into the surrounding water. She closed her eyes, and abruptly snapped awake, with prosaic brown eyes and panic in them. She shrieked.

"Calm down," Jed told her, through his chattering teeth. "We'll make it back to the shore together." There would be time later to figure out what had happened. The people on the shore were not quite dots. And the cold current wasn't that strong. He felt its insistent touch, as if he were being tickled by feathers of ice. His companion, completely freaked out by now, began to babble in her patios. She battled the waves, and began to swim, clumsily, toward the shore. Jed began to follow suit, and found that he couldn't feel his limbs. A lesson on

hypothermia came back to him as he tried to control his cryogenic body. He felt he no longer had blood in his veins; it had turned to liquid nitrogen.

He watched as the woman made her slow progress to the shore, to the group of people who waited for her and loved her. He was frozen in the sea, a sacrifice to some unknown god. Jed strained his muscles, felt nothing. His body was no longer his own. Soon, his body would go into shock, and the gravity of the sea would pull him under. Surely, the people on the shore would realize what had happened to him, and would go for help? Unless, this was his punishment for witnessing their secret service. Jed felt the stirrings of rage. Death was too big of a penalty for seeing what was conducted in public. Those stupid savages... But, he remembered that they were kind, and had let him join in. He remembered clapping, and singing along with them. Of course, they would go for help, as soon as they realized what had happened to him. It would be too late to save him, though.

Almost as an afterthought, Jed called out. What started out as “help” turning in a long, anguished howl that was carried away by the wind, the sea, and various ambient noises. He tired his voice out. Still, he drifted away, carried by a riptide. Rising hillocks of sapphire and emerald separated him from the shore.

“You are mine,” said the woman with the voice of the sea, and she was right. He was now of the water. Soon, he would be one with salt, and fish. Images and emotions of his past life flashed before his eyes in random and senseless order. Candy from a favorite aunt. Watching Prague emerge from the window of a train. The first time he had sex. He was giving all his memories—all of his essence—to the water. The sea had a name. It was Olokun.

Something within him, something dark and instinctual, reacted to the bubble of thought. The name meant something. Just thinking it made him less cold. (Of course, he was going mad). But, if he were going mad, what did it hurt, to say the name aloud?

“Olokun,” he said aloud, as he sunk beneath a surge of saltwater. His lungs filled as he was submerged beneath the murk. He popped back up like a buoy, and said the name again. He felt his fingers tingle, and the balls of his feet. He could feel his body again. He did not dare to hope what the third pronunciation might bring. Would he be free of the riptide? It was foolish, magical thinking, like the believers. And yet, Jed had never really been a committed agnostic. The supernatural was a nice idea; logic was overrated, as far as he was concerned. He said “Olokun” a third and final time.

The sea froze. Everything froze. No waves. No birds. No current. No sound. Jed might have been alone in the world. He saw each molecule of water. Beneath the water he saw a jellyfish, a translucent silver balloon with pastel organs, caught in the knot of time, as if trapped in blue Lucite. A spot of golden sunlight stained the surface of the sea. He could see the striations of wrinkles. The golden spot was an island of light on the face of the sea. The whole world held its breath. The arrow was knocked. Who did the world wait for?

Motion. It happened all it once. The crest of a wave, the shiver of jellyfish, a gulp of water in his lungs. The current came back, stronger than before, and it tugged him underneath the waves. He could no longer fight it. The sea swallowed him. He was pulled down, into the deep. Bubbles of air escaped him, little silver jellyfish heading for the surface that he would never see again. Cold water rushed to fill his lungs and nostrils, to crush them. He let out a gasp, to hurry the business of drowning. No bubble of air escaped.

Jed blinked. He took another breath, and found that his lungs were satisfied. The invisible current that he was trapped within was not cold, either. It was a warm as the zephyrs that played across St. Sebastian. He blinked, and found that he could breathe, even as the curtain-like drapes of sunlight slowly receded.

I am dead, he thought. Some chemical had dumped into his brain, and filled it with peaceful hallucinations to lead him to death, that was

the only reasonable explanation. I might as well enjoy this elevator ride to Death.

He settled into the unseen cushion that bore him down in the yawning depths. The current lead him through a shoal of grouper, with bright yellow fins and spotted like giraffes. They wove and danced around him, aquatic sunlight given form. Other, finer fish, in colors of green and electric blue appeared now and then, and ignored him. Jed flew past a coral bed, pink and treacherous. Once, a shark lunged at him, but something—the current?—kept it at bay.

Down and down and down he went. A light disappeared; he found he could still see perfectly, as if he had dark-adapted eyes. He saw blue in the darkest tones, possibility beyond the human spectrum. He made up names for the colors that he saw: Strata Blue. Stygian Cerulean. Chthonian Indigo. He sped by valleys and chasms where who knew what lived. Giant squid, whales and other leviathans of the deep hid in the topography.

Just as Jed relaxed in the current, he noticed that the speed of his travel slowed down. The speed lessened, the deeper he got into the water. He looked behind him, since he was “seated” backwards, to see what new sights were ahead.

At first, he thought it was a cliff, a misshapen underwater mountain. Then he saw the “mountain” had familiar shapes in it. Car parts, pipes, coral, and shells. It was a mountain of junk. Engines and abandoned fans nested among coral reefs and various skeletons of long dead sea creatures. At various intervals were circular openings to the mountain; some of these were filled with the portal windows of ships. Fish darted out of the open ones, vanishing into the hollow center of the mountain, like tourists into a cathedral... With that thought, it occurred to him that this structure was, in fact, some kind of building. It was too *arranged* for it not to be. The current nudged him further on, to the bottom of building of shells and sea wrecks. He stopped and hovered in the chthonian indigo, in front of a large door. It yawned. Its frame was formed by the ribs of some huge whale, and fringed with hundreds,

thousands of glimmering coins—the long lost treasure of pirates. Irregular circles of golden, the embossing faded and verdigrised. Jed waited. The whole ocean floor waited.

For what?

For *whom*?

The answer was obvious. It vibrated in his heart, his head, and his soul. The excitement was inseparable from the fear. It thrummed through him, like electricity. He felt himself harden with anticipation.

In the hollow of dark contained by the steeped door, Jed saw movement—filmy, diaphanous swirls of movement. Cobalt dark changed to electric blue as the form resolved itself. The first thing Jed saw was the eyes. They burned, lambent and green like cat's eyes. But there was no oval slit to interrupt the green. It became clear that these glowing almond-shapes were eyes, when whatever light under the sea described a face. The skin was like lava, turned into fabric. The high cheekbones and high forehead, the wide nose, the whole architecture of the face had this marvelous black stuff stretched across it. It looked as hard as rock, and as soft as silk. Nappy, knotted hair adhered to the top of the head—black coral. As the figure emerged from the door, Jed saw the giant man's magnificent torso. Lava skin, firm pectorals, and the large dinner plate sized nipples, plummy in color. His waist tapered downward. Jed throbbed in anticipation—both his keloid and his groin. His eyes traveled down the molten skin, where surely perfectly shaped, large genitalia were...

Below the giant's waist was a finely woven garment of blue scales that shimmered with glints of green and gold. It was skirt of peacock feathers. Jed looked for garment's end, to see legs ropy and thick with muscle. He found that the garment didn't end. It continued, covering his feet, and ended with a filmy, flowing fin. Jed laughed—he could imagine the Icelandic singer Bjork wearing such an outfit. Then it hit him, the realization, with the force of a tidal wave. The giant was not wearing a skirt. That was his tail. He was—Olokun. The one who dragged him a thousand miles beneath the sea's surface. The one who he

was sacrificed to... The betrayal of the people on the beach was withering. It overwhelmed the wonder of the merman and the palace of shells and junk. The creature (or god) must have perceived Jed's final recognition, for a slight smirk played at the corner of his (His?) lips of plum. The pupilless eyes of his captured Jed. He was a fly caught in absinthe. The eyes raked him, burned away his clothes, until he stood naked before the god. He was so weak; Olokun's presence was like Kryptonite to him. Jed had to do something soon, before he was devoured. What would it be like, to be crushed by the giant pearls of his teeth? He'd be devoured, his negritude nourishing the substance of myth. The useless bits, the gristle of Europe and the West, would be shat out, spread across the sea...

"Please," said Jed. Or he thought it. This far down, bubbles flattened and elongated. "Spare me."

The fishman, still contained by the borders of the door, shook with silent and majestic laughter. A couple of glowing fish swam on either side of his head, illuminating his face. Cowrie shells were nesting in his hair. Barnacles in psychedelic colors grasped his chin, buried in thickets of hair.

*Spare you*, he replied in the voice of gods, *why should I spare you when you have been looking for me ever since you came here?*

"What are you talking about?"

Images were placed in his mind, like precious jewels in a velvet-lined box:

The incense-soaked, shadow shrouded cathedrals and churches he visited on the island. The self-conscious prayers to the Black Madonnas, the multiracial and androgynous Christs. The visits to the grotto of Saint Sebastian, and the fountain where he leaned languorously, in an ecstasy of arrows. The half formed prayers before he entered into bars where male beauty was of paramount importance. All of his clandestine prayers the same: to remove the raised blemish on his face.

The merman God chuckled. Bubbles of power escaped from sculpted lips.



He said, *Those prayers did not work. Those gods did not listen. I listen.*

Jed's heart leapt. "You—can help me?" His keloid burned icily.

A barely perceptible nod of the massive head.

His voice-force boomed in Jed's skull: *Why you want to remove that proud flesh from your face? You are marked. You have a map of Guinea on your face. You should be happy.*

"Please," said Jed.

*You must give me something.*

What could he possibly give this being of lava and scales, of iridescence and shells? Could he give him soul—a kind of Faustian bargain? As Jed considered what the god might want, he was interrupted.

*I will take this thing,* Olokun's voice broadcast across his brain with satellite precision.

"What--? Wait..."

But a wave engulfed his thoughts. They were swallowed in a sea of obsidian and lapis lazuli water, ground down by molars of coral, turned into particles of silt. They drifted down to the belly of the man leviathan. Images hissed away, in ghost of steam. Blond-haired Adonises, with muscles of alabaster, neither regions of coral. Blue eyes burned in the liquid furnace of Olokun's belly, as did aquiline noses and thin lips. Brown haired Jesus, tonsured men of the one God and the whores and virgins went down the ethereal intestines, to become more mulch for bottom of the oceans. Jed was seared in flames of cold ice. He bounced in the phantom belly, and was rejected himself, of the anus of Olokun, along with the silt—

Yellow sands, and the bare feet of black people—his people—were the first things he saw. He heard the screech of seabirds, the sigh of waves, and the low singing of a chorus of people. He rolled over on his back, and found the crystal blue sky encircled by a ring of singing, concerned faces. He was back on the beach. He was sort of cold—he coughed, and seawater was expelled from his lungs, further soaking his already sodden clothes. Absurdly, the group of people began to laugh

and clap. Jed thought unkind thoughts as he crashed back down into sleep.

His second awakening was gentler. Someone had stripped the clothing from his body, and placed a blanket over him. A pillow was underneath his head. But he was still on the beach. He saw the sky streaked with cirrus. He was warm and relaxed. Jed stretched, and instinctively touched the side of his face, to check his keloid. He felt nothing.

He felt again, expecting the ugly, knotted network of raised skin. He felt smooth, uninterrupted flesh, soft as silk. He rubbed again. It was wondrous, tender, but it did not tingle. Jed pulled his covering away, and cautiously stood up. He was nude, but he didn't care. The serpent sun under the sea was in his heart. He was whole again.

And the island loved him.

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# The Erotic Mikva

Jay Michaelson

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According to the second-century Alphabet of Ben Sira, the mystic who gives the text its name was conceived when the prophet Jeremiah's daughter bathed in a *mikva* in which her father had ejaculated earlier that day. Ben Sira was thus a child of virgin birth; the son and grandson of Jeremiah, the prophet of Israel's doom; and the product of an unintentional incestuous union between father and daughter.

Often, when I step into the mikva, I am reminded of this tale, particularly when, as is often the case, the cleansing waters of the ritual bath are themselves filthy with bits of floating human hair and flesh. The mikva's purifying powers are not unlike the health-giving powers of kosher food: they exist in a way so conventionally false, so distant from physical reality, as to only be cognizable as 'spiritual' in nature. Materially, the "living waters" of the mikva are often stagnant, unchlorinated pools -- just as "healthy" kosher foods are often poor cuts



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of tough, greasy meat. Although the tale of Ben Sira seems fantastic, it is entirely reasonable to me that I may be ingesting the bodily fluids of a previous visitor to the mikva, as I immerse my naked body in its warmed waters seven times every Friday. Since the water, by law, must be untreated, I do not doubt that, like Ben Sira's sister-mother, I am engaging in unintentional intercourse with dozens of men I do not know.

I moved to Jerusalem two years ago, and have missed only two weekly visits to the mikva in that time. One time was on a weekend holiday in Paris, where I arrived too late on Friday to begin the complicated process of finding a ritual bath for men. And another was when my shopping was postponed by a terrorist attack at the *shuk*. The attack did not come close to my usual stores, but it thoroughly disrupted both the market and my own personal shopping routine, as well as (I suppose) my heart. By the time I had made all the purchases I needed to make, the sun was almost setting, *shabbat* had nearly arrived, and the mikva had closed.

At first, I went to the mikva to cleanse myself of the sin of homosexuality which God had seen fit to bestow upon me. Strictly speaking, the mikva only removes certain kinds of *tum'a* (impurity) and the authorities are divided as to whether the *tum'a* from wrongly-spilled seed is among them. Still, there is no alternative, until such time as the Temple is rebuilt and the sacrifices are restored. For my sin, the consequences of my nature, it is the mikva, or nothing.

It was during my first full year in Israel, a year of *yeshiva* study before college, that I both became aware of my sin and began my regime of effacing it. I had grown up in an Orthodox home, even though, privately, many of the so-called 'lesser' *mitzvos* were disregarded or treated lightly by my parents. Outwardly, we conformed entirely to the modern Orthodox mainstream, but when no one else was looking, corners were cut. It was not until I became an adolescent that I learned that our secret transgressions—not *toveling* our new dishes, being lax when it came to gossip and other forms of *lashon hara*—were part of that mainstream as well; that they were not, as my parents had said, peripheral *mitzvos*

attended to only by the ‘crazies.’ Over time, I came to develop a disdain for my parents’ casual commitment, their inability to see their transgressions as what they were, their abundant desire both to explain away their own shortcomings, and ascribe pejorative labels to those who did not share them. Better to reject one’s Judaism outright, I felt, than to pretend that one is a practitioner while in fact violating its essence. I eventually grew to be mystified by my parents’ occasional levity in the face of God’s command; it simply made no sense to me. Fleeing their home for the monastic, meticulous life of my yeshiva in Israel was a flight into the opportunity to be the more reverent Jew I wanted to be.

At that time, I had no real understanding of my own sexuality, and how it would come to interfere with the life I desired. Growing up, all sexual desire was effectively forbidden, so the fantasies I entertained about my classmates were repressed, I imagined, with no more or less effort than the fantasies they held about models or actresses, women whose bodies I always found repulsively rounded and curved. My and their desires were equally constrained; and all were equally forbidden. Of course, I was troubled. I consulted certain trusted sources for instruction as to wet dreams, and learned of Rabbi Nachman’s *tikkun klali*, a set of psalms to recite in penance after such a dream came. Yet at the time, I did not see myself as special. In the showers at the gym or in the bunks at my summer camp, I observed myself to be no more inquisitive as to the naked bodies of my friends than they were as to each other’s, or mine.

It was only at yeshiva—now over ten years ago—that I began to see myself as abnormal, different, and in need of repair. I was living in a dorm room with three other boys, all from around New York, like me; all going to college afterwards, like me; and all, like me, sincerely thankful, it seemed, for the chance to learn with some of the great rabbis at our yeshiva. Often, we would confide in one another that, if not for our parents, we would stay a second year, or maybe even stay forever—make *aliyah* and live here permanently. The secular world of modern Israel held little appeal for us. It was the Torah learning, the sincerity, the *piety*

that we saw, every day, in the faces of our teachers—these enticed us. We clung to the yeshiva, as if it were a tiny life preserver in a sea of ignorance and superficiality. Many of us only left its walls when we really had to do so.

At the same time, the yeshiva was like a hormonally-charged locker room. In high school, my bodily interactions with other boys had been bounded by the walls of the gym and the bells of fourth period. Now, physicality was omnipresent. The place was redolent with the smells of late adolescence. The sexual tension could be felt in the air, in the *beis medresh*, in the dorms, even in the room where we ate our meals. Moreover, I learned from my roommates that my high-school illusions of universal celibacy were false; in fact, they had all been “hooking up” with certain of the girls, and if not, then “jerking off” themselves. These terms were more foreign to me than the Aramaic of the *gemara*, but I quickly came to understand their meanings. Only I, it seemed, had scrupulously avoided encouraging my evil inclinations; during my entire adolescence, only once, in a moment of weakness, had I pleased myself, in the shower, and even then it seemed to happen half by accident, and was followed by weeks of *tehillim*. But, I learned, this was not the norm even among the *frum* boys whose piety I had admired. They had all been carrying on in ways I had never imagined.

Yet now, in the yeshiva, the outlets for sexual energy were denied to my classmates; neither hooking up nor jerking off were so easily accomplished. As for meeting girls, there was little opportunity to socialize with them in an unsupervised setting, and hardly any free time at night; even getting to a place where there *were* any women (apart from the wives and young children of the rabbis) was a serious undertaking. And as for oneself, there was hardly any privacy in the yeshiva. All the dorms were four-to-a-room, and the showers were open, army-style. The only places one could be assured of privacy were in the stalls of the bathroom, and I soon learned that an array of euphemisms for the excretory acts had been passed down in the yeshiva as code-words for masturbation.

Frequently, however, the sexually charged atmosphere proved too volatile to be contained in the toilets. Boys masturbated in their beds, even with their roommates present; they did it in the showers, even if other people were there; they did it as a contest, as a game, with targets and prizes and rules. And I participated—of course, I participated. At first I was reluctant, knowing these games to be an incitement to the *yetzer hara*, anxious about my own lack of expertise, but I felt that if I didn't join in, my secret—that I wanted not only to pleasure myself, but to touch and kiss the other boys as well—would somehow be discovered. As if the queerness of not participating in these sexual games would naturally be associated with the deeper queerness I truly—as I only fully understood that year in yeshiva—possessed.

Confronted with the eroticism of the yeshiva, it had become impossible for me to deny my own sexual orientation any longer. When all desire had been repressed, not even discussed, it was easy to see myself as the same as everyone else. But now, with constant talk about breasts and vaginas and the other disgusting viscera of the female body on the one hand, and with, on the other, the naked bodies of beautiful boys constantly around me, constantly available, and constantly engaged in open sexual acts, it was clear what I wanted—and how that set me apart from the others.

I told no one, convinced that I might in some way be able to master this inclination. But I knew. I also knew that none of the guys was entirely innocent. Notwithstanding the macho talk—or, perhaps, as a quite unsurprising complement to it—my classmates' sexual play was undeniably homoerotic; their sarcastic remarks about each others' "hot bods" and "big cocks" contained a grain of honesty, no matter how much they might deny it if confronted. No one was as straight as they seemed. Yet, for all that, I also knew that I was different. These guys were playing with each other as part of a phase; their homosexuality was part of who they were, but only part. Most of the time, I believed, they really were fantasizing about girls, as they said they were, and I had no doubt that (as they later did) they would all go on to be happily married

to women. Not me. I lied about which models I found attractive, which girls back in school I desired; lied about it all, inventing a series of false fantasies, when in fact the objects of my erotic attention were right in front of me.

I first went to the mikva before Yom Kippur, with all of the yeshiva. Most of us had already spent the whole summer together, so being naked in front of each other was hardly novel. I even felt the stirrings of an erection as we stripped, habituated as I was to the frequent group sessions that took place in the showers. But this was supposed to be different. We had learned about the mikva before we went to it, learned of the waters' purifying power and holiness. We learned—I especially—for which sins the mikva was especially efficacious, although we had to deduce them from the rabbi's nineteenth-century talk of “self-pollution” and “seed.” And of course we learned of the many *halachot* of the mikva: its minimum size, its use, the requirement for waters untouched by human or mechanical agency.

Although I did not understand it at the time, I have since come to understand the warm, amniotic waters of the mikva as allowing a sort of new birth. The plunge into the waters is like a re-entry into the womb, where all is undifferentiated, and I emerge from them a new man every time. That first Yom Kippur, I knew more than ever before what stains clung to me, stuck to me like barnacles on the side of a ship. And in those first immersions in the mikva, I wanted nothing more than to cleanse them from my body. I imagined the mikva as filled with acid, or cleanser—anything to scrub away my defects. Yom Kippur itself is centered around this notion of catharsis; *kapparah*, usually translated as ‘atonement,’ more literally means ‘cleaning.’ It is what must be done to any place that has become impure: scouring, uncovering hidden stains, confronting them, and, through hard effort, expunging them.

Afterwards, I felt refreshed in a way I could not explain. I was prepared to focus my mind when entering the mikva, and had learned how important the mikva had been to the Israelites in the desert, and indeed to Jews throughout the centuries. I knew that the first building a



Jewish community would build, even before the synagogue, would be the mikva. And I was taught that while immersion was only commanded of women, it was practiced by men, regularly, across hundreds of generations. But nothing had prepared me for the *feeling* of it, the real feeling that I experienced, donning my white clothes, symbolic of death, for Yom Kippur: a sensation, and also a deep, profound knowledge, of having died and been reborn. I felt as though the mikva had annihilated my sexual longings along with the residue of my sexual sin. Yom Kippur is known as the “day of death,” the day on which Jews, who normally eschew asceticism of any kind, deny themselves all of life’s pleasures. And I felt as if the mikva was a portal to this special death which contained within it the seeds of life. It had done what, alone, I had failed to do: kill my inclination.

And so, I went again, before Sukkot. And again, before every shabbos. It became a part of my life. I would review, before each visit, how well or poorly I had fared in the preceding week’s efforts to control my *yetzer*. I would consciously focus on annihilating this inclination within me, and feel myself dying as I entered the liminal space of purifying water, only to be reborn, with a clean slate and fresh chance, as I exited them.

Though both the yeshiva’s showers and the mikva entailed bathing with other naked men, and though I was often conscious of this or that beautiful boy among them, I imagined these twin aspects of the mikva—the erasure of desire and the locus of it—to be polar opposites, one side an aspect sin and desire, the other a place of purity and equanimity. To minimize the chances of encountering anyone I knew, I found a different mikva, further from the yeshiva. The last thing I wanted, as I effaced myself and obliterated my desire, was some chitchat with a guy from one of my classes.

That was all many years ago, and everything about my life has changed. I am no longer in touch with any of my friends from yeshiva. All of them have wives, and most, by now, have children. In college, and for the first few years afterwards, bachelorhood was a shared condition,

and we would spend time together, have *shabbat* together. But gradually, as they settled into relationships, they stopped calling me, stopped needing to call me, as their new lives supplanted the old ones. I grew increasingly removed from the community, increasingly worried that my abnormality was readily apparent, if only from my lack of a wedding band. But by the time someone would be expected to say something, there was no one left to say it.

For a while, I contemplated marriage myself, and dated several women, in the non-sexual way that many Torah Jews date. It was not difficult, really. A few meetings in hotels and parks, honest discussions about everything except for *that*, and the celibate march toward marriage could proceed. But, in the end, I was unwilling to live this life. Primarily, I was anxious about completing the sexual act; I was unsure I could do it, repulsed by the very idea, and racked with nervousness. I thought I probably could do it; after all, if I can fantasize by myself, I should be able to do it with a woman. But it was more than mere sex. I was unsure if I could manage the deception as a whole, unwilling to enter into vows that I could not be sure I would keep. I preferred to remain alone, and have everyone know but not say, or say but only in a hushed tone, rather than this—rather than put a woman through the hell of marriage to man who could not love her. I could not force another person to live the life into which God had forced me.

Yet I knew that the ‘gay lifestyle’ was not for me either. I experimented now and then, venturing out into their seedy bars and mindless, pulsating dance clubs. But no matter how I tried to convince myself otherwise, I saw the sin, the darkness, everywhere I went. It would be enough of a burden if it were merely the sexuality, only the act itself that alienated these people from God. That burden, I thought, might be overcome, with sincerity and monogamy and, if possible, love. But everywhere I went in the ‘gay world,’ I saw the glorification of surface, sensuality, and the kind of ‘freedom’ that exists only in the hearts of men who do not truly understand the meaning of the word. The few times I did meet men for sex were limited to semi-anonymous

encounters in parks or, once, at a club. There, in those contexts, it was at least clear that we were servicing a biological need, like going to the bathroom; there was no glorification of it, no illusions. The sex was quick, and at once mechanical and animalistic. I never knew the men's names, never wanted to hear them speak. Where this sort of indulgence was celebrated, I was disgusted as much as by women.

As a consequence of this double alienation—from the Jewish community on the one hand and from the gay community on the other—I became virtually celibate, and quite alone. I am not so strong or so righteous as to say that my piety was stronger than my libido. My lifestyle was due to my inability to ignore the resilient conscience that guides my life as a Jew in every aspect of its existence. I know what some would say—that this voice of conscience was not a spark of God but was instead a residue of guilt; that the voice was to be suppressed, not heeded. But each time I heard it, whether in a bar or in bed or catching someone's eyes in the park, I recognized its timbre as precisely that tone which accompanies the exhortation to do good. I knew it well; I knew it from parts of my life that have nothing to do with my sexuality. To deny this identity—the identity, that is, of the Voice—was as false as to deny my own.

One of the reasons I came to live in Jerusalem was that here, being a single, *frum* man in one's thirties is not as much an aberration as in America. Everyone in the Anglo-Israeli community here seems a little damaged, a little... off, in their awkward sandals and plaid shirts. They've come here for different reasons, some for ideology, others for love, but all *olim* have at least one radical idiosyncrasy in common: we've all rejected the more comfortable living of our home countries for a place riven by war and inflation and a thousand inconveniences. In other words, everyone here has made a highly Un-American choice: to value a commitment above convenience. In such an environment, where everyone is a bit of a misfit, my own difference seemed somehow to matter less.

Of course, in Israel, machismo is a principle of the secular religion. But beneath that surface, and almost universally among boys about to enter the army, there is a kind of bisexuality inherent in many Israeli men: you can almost read the impressions of their overbearing mothers on them, see how it has made their sexuality just that marginal amount more open and tentative—and thus accessible. In America, the boys I knew lost their effeminate vocal cadences and pretty-boy features by age sixteen or seventeen at the latest. Here, somehow, I find myself surrounded by instances of the same ambiguity and sensitive fragility even in men whose ages approach my own. There is, as a consequence, a sort of ambient anti-masculinity in the air, feeding and resisting all the posing and militarism of the culture, an atmosphere that sets me at a curious kind of ease.

And, there are many *frum* Jews like me. We do not march in the parades. We don't look like the gays, or act like them. But we are here, in the parks and the personal ads. And so I hold out hope that, one day, I might even find a man with whom I can share my life, someone who has refused all the same compromises as I have, and with whom I can share our uneasy contradictions.

I continue to go to the mikva with complete faithfulness. It was harder in America, where I worked on Wall Street for a while, to keep to my practice as regularly as I do here. There are fewer mikvas there, less time, more of a sense of strangeness and even freakishness to the ritual. One feels almost ashamed, buzzing the un-labeled doorbell on an anonymous Manhattan brownstone, skulking up the stairs. Here, however, everyone goes: families, students, Ashkenazim, Sephardim. I almost imagine that I am normal.

The mikva has grown into the simultaneous expression and abnegation of my sexuality. I still feel its waters cleanse me of whatever sins I have accumulated; its all-encompassing warmth and silence return me to a state of innocence and purity, if only temporarily. And—I do not want to say “but”—and, the mikva is also a place of confrontation, an erotic zone of permissible shared nudity, like the showers at the

yeshiva those years ago. Unlike in my yeshiva days, going to the mikva is now one of the few—the only—times during the week that I see other men, and boys as well, naked. Stripping off our clothes together in the changing room is usually the most sexually liberating act I perform all week. This is where we are naked with each other, old and young, straight and gay; this is where we simultaneously stimulate and annihilate our appetites for one another. I have long since eroded the Chinese wall I tried to construct between the eroticism of the mikva and its power to efface and abnegate desire; it is in the union of those contradictory impulses that the power of the ritual bath lies.

And more than that: the mikva itself is charged with eroticism. Most modern mikvas are heated, and one feels release, surrender, the warm intimacy of a pre-natal memory, of the maternal heartbeat and soothing heat. Other mikvas are cold, fed by streams or natural springs, and require a different kind of surrender. In those, it is all I can do to suppress the lustful, soprano-pitched sigh as the impossibly cool water takes me, possesses me. I have always been afraid of the cold, I suppose; normally, in a swimming pool, I might take five or even ten minutes to wade in, slowly, inch by inch. The legs, the thighs, the waist, the abdomen—that is the hardest—the chest, and then at last the total consummation. But there is never time for such idling in the mikva. The erasure is absolute, and instant. In the years that I have allowed myself to be penetrated by other men, no act of intercourse has ever amounted to the total subjugation of the cold water surrounding my naked body. I am its plaything.

Here, in the conspiracy of the changing room, all of the men are transfigured together. At the mikva, we are men in a place normally associated with women. In the showers, friends, fathers, sons are all naked together, dissolving boundaries that, in my recollection, strictly governed my adolescence. And in the bath's waters, we commingle with one another, an act most men would usually deny.

Yet I try to actually enter the mikva itself alone. Joining another man in the mikva is too much: it is an act of intimacy commensurate with

sexual union itself. The mikva is a womb; it is a place of non-self, of dissolving the illusory boundaries of what it means to be a self, distinct from the world, and a place of return to the primordial pre-individuation of the amniotic sac. And to be in the womb with another person is a consummation: more than any pathetic imitation of heterosexual sex, it is the mikva that allows two men to unite with each other. Were such an intimacy desired, it surely would be the place for it. But as a casual encounter with someone who happens, obviously, to slip into the mikva with me, it is too much; it is sex with a stranger.

The eroticism of the mikva, of course, is concealed. Sometimes men chatter in the showers, before and after they bathe, as if nothing is different, as if they are naked with each other all the time, as if the mysticism of the forty *se'ah* of living water is as commonplace as a traffic light. Only the younger boys look overtly at the other penises in the room, their curiosity allowed by their youth and coupled with an innocent acceptance of our shared nudity. This casualness of intimacy is perhaps what arouses me the most. Many quiet nights, I have brought myself to ecstasy with the images of three or four naked students, fully exposed to one another, casually chatting in the shower, knowing yet not knowing the frontal intimacy that is shared in silence.

Actual physical contact, actual sexual consummation seems superfluous. The very possibility of it would compromise the delicate nest of illusions in which we all nakedly reside. And so across ten years of going to the mikva, I have never witnessed any overt expression of physical sexuality.

Except once.

It was a normal Friday afternoon—tidying up the house, buying challah and fruits and vegetables, the city rapidly preparing for its weekly slowing-down, everyone carrying shopping bags from one place to the next, the last buses making their rounds as the streets began to slowly empty. For some reason, I was running later than usual, and by the time I got to the mikva, the attendant had already left, as is frequently the case

when it is less than one hour before shabbos. I was fortunate that the mikva was open at all, this late in the afternoon.

When I entered, the place was virtually empty. Only one man was in the changing area, a round-bodied and hairless man in his fifties, and he was putting on his clothes. I felt a familiar blend of satisfaction and disappointment. My meditation would be easier, undistracted by naked bodies glimpsed in my peripheral vision. And yet, did I not also want those distractions? Had I not looked forward to them all through the lonely week? The consummation devoutly to be wished for; in the presence of it; surrounded by it?

I nodded perfunctorily to the man, and began to take off my clothes. As is my custom, I reviewed the week, my tasks at work, my plans for shabbos, my lapses in self-control. It had been an ordinary week; only two nights in front of the computer screen to be washed away in the water; and nothing particularly remarkable besides. I had lost some weight, I noticed. My skin was pale, but summer was coming; it would turn a healthier shade soon. Naked, I walked to the shower, where I washed off any bits of hair or dirt still clinging to my body, making sure that nothing interrupted the complete contact between myself and the living waters. Both of the two mikvas had been heavily used that day, and showed it, but I was in my own mind now, largely equanimous regarding the dirty water; I was preparing for the shabbos, shifting from the weekday to the holy. I immersed myself my customary seven times, spending a few moments under water each time, feeling the renewal and the peace and the quiet, making sure that none of my body protruded from the water, visualizing an inner *mem-yood-mem*, spelling the the Hebrew word for water, *mayim*. I heard its feminine, maternal sound, each *mem* the numerical equivalent of the forty se'ah of water needed to make a mikva valid, each forty a symbolic representation of completeness and rebirth, like the forty years in the desert and the forty days and nights on Mount Sinai. Each *mem* the Hebrew equivalent of *Om*, the universal mother, rebirthing us anew; the lone *yood* of my own sex suspended in between.

As I stood up from my seventh and final immersion, I saw a beautiful boy stepping into the mikva—my mikva, I thought immediately, even though the other one was empty. Why? Stunned, I couldn't help but watch him. He looked to be about sixteen, white skin, dark brown hair; a thin frame; delicate, feminine, quintessentially Jewish features. His chest was between a boy's and a man's; his body was smooth; his penis hung slightly to the right in a small nest of brown pubic hair, well-sized, slightly larger than mine. The way he carried himself, the kind of insouciant obliviousness to his own beauty and nakedness, made me certain of his heterosexuality, despite his choice of the occupied mikva over the unoccupied one. The boy seemed to have an unconscious, unpracticed straightness that I could not duplicate even with years of effort. It was only as my eyes watched his calves gently stepping into the mikva's waters that I realized I had been staring.

Immediately I ought to have averted my eyes, gotten up, moved past the boy, and returned to the shower room. The right thing to do was clear. I still cannot explain why I did not do this, why instead I moved my eyes up from his legs to his body to his face, to find that he was looking at me, expressionless. It was still safe to leave. His face was completely blank; he was neither offended nor interested nor anything at all. Just impassively, impenetrably blank. His dark hair was matted to his head; I tried to discern whether he had any *payes*, to see how religious he was, but couldn't tell.

"Hello," he said, in English, but with an Israeli accent.

"Hi," I said back, shocked that he had spoken to me, greeted me—and in English, as if he knew (as many Israelis seemed to know) of my foreign origins. It was surprising that he even acknowledged my presence as another person with him, otherwise alone, in this place; let alone in English; let alone as he seemed, too, to stare back at me. I tried to act as if I were one of those who talked in the mikva, that it was not unusual to say hello to another person coming in—and thus, not unusual to linger, either, enjoying the warm water and the relaxation before getting out. I thought of making small talk, to justify my presence, but



instead pushed off my feet as if to swim innocently for a moment in the mikva, which was about six feet square and four feet deep. This action unintentionally flashed my slightly-stirring penis above the water line. The boy, I noticed, looked over at it.

He looked away and did three immersions in the mikva, quickly, again seemingly without much expression or feeling. Then he stood up and, as I had done but more exaggerated and obvious, lifted up his feet and floated on his back, as if showing off.

“Are you looking at me?” he asked, almost in a whisper.

“Sorry,” I said, growing erect under the water. The boy moved closer.

“Do you want to touch it?”

I put my hand on him. I had never done this before, never in the mikva, never with someone so young, and apart from a few encounters, never at all. He grew rapidly in my hand.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. I stroked him gently, not masturbating him—caressing him. There was a silence in the room that I had never heard before. It was as if we were entirely underwater, instead of only partly; the air seemed to be made of wool.

“You won’t tell me your name?” I said.

“It’s not important.”

I continued touching him. I quickly wondered if we would be caught. Unlikely—shabbos was almost in. No one would be coming, except maybe the attendant to lock up. We would hear him. What was I supposed to do? I had never done this before. I maneuvered him so that he was in front of me, my hardness pressing up against his lower back, my hands caressing him. I was touching him lovingly, gently, instead of lustily; I wondered if he noticed this. I wondered if he preferred to be touched in this way or the other way, if he had done this before, or whether, as for me, this was one of the precious and silent times when the ordinary laws of the universe seem temporarily suspended—perhaps I had emerged from my immersions reborn not

into the ordinary world, but a world to come in which this was as natural as it felt.

He reached around his back and touched me. I sighed reflexively.

“What’s your name?” I asked again. He didn’t answer. I don’t know why I was asking; it seemed the only set of words that I could think of. But I wanted to know, I wanted to know *him*, wanted to know if he was like me—not like me simply in sexuality, but like me in some deeper way that I could not adequately express—with a shared *neshama*, as the Baal Shem Tov says, a soul with shared roots in the other world. *Like me*, like *me*. Maybe I asked because I wanted to know this for sure, to learn the essence of his being, which as the mystical books tell us is encoded in his name. At the same time, I did not offer my own name; I wanted to know his first; I wanted his reply to be honest, uncorrupted by what I would tell him. I felt he was not truly naked until he would tell me, not fully known, not fully capable of being loved. Even as I touched him. Even as he stood close in front of me and touched me in return. And it was not lust that I felt, now; it was a love that is *kadosh*, holy. I knew in one moment that I wanted what the other Jews had, as they consummate their love for their wives every Friday night, and in so doing effect a unity on high between the shechinah and the Holy One Blessed by He. I wanted no lines of separation. The sexual and the spiritual had always been separate for me; but now I wanted their union. I want the holy love that others take for granted, unifying the lusts of the body with the thirst of the spirit. This is my place, I thought, this place of nakedness and exposure, intimacy and purification. What is his *name*?

“Tell me your name,” I whispered into his ear. He only sighed. He was getting close, I could tell. As was I. Closer to unity; closer to what was always denied, deferred. His hand moved faster on me, his body had begun to tense. I remembered my roommates in the yeshiva, seeing who could shoot the farthest, ripping off their clothes to compete, naked, even though there—was no—reason they had to take off their shirts, and shoes, and socks, because they—wanted it; they wanted each other completely, just as God wants us completely, just as we must strip away

all of our clothes and all of our personalities, all our thoughts and sins and sense of self, just as we must cleave to God and stand naked in front of God, face to face as the Zohar says, and behind God, and we must know Him, and make love to Him, and unite with Her in her mikva bath, and become one with Her and with Him and conceive mercy that comes to us, raining down on us from the Foundation of God's sex, and in this bath in this moment, and—what is his *name*?

“Tell me your name,” I said urgently, on the brink of orgasm.

“Mendel,” he said, and he came in my hand, and I in his. And we shuddered together with the exhalation of a single *aleph*, a sigh that precedes the sigh, and his come flew over his chest and onto my neck, onto the small of my neck to the left of my adam's apple, as my head was arched back in release, and I said, “Mendel,” as I ejaculated again into the water, and he came again and again, and we both fell backwards slightly in the water, and I held him as we floated in the water.

The Alphabet of Ben Sira does not explain the circumstances of how Jeremiah's sperm came to be floating in the mikva where his daughter would later bathe. Some commentators assert that Jeremiah was accosted by a group of homosexuals, that they forced him to ejaculate into the bath, that his ecstasy was neither deliberate nor true. I, of course, prefer to think otherwise, and wonder who the prophet met that day in the mikva, or whether he was by himself, imagining a postponed consummation. I wonder why a book concerned with the arrangement of letters in creation, the codes that determine our natures and our desires, begins with this parodic virgin birth that originated in the ecstasy of the mikva—and whether through those letters, what is done may be undone, and what is broken be brought together.

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**Jay Michaelson** is a writer and teacher of spirituality, Kabbalah, and meditation. Jay is the director of Nehirim: A Spiritual Initiative for LGBT Jews. His books, articles, classes, retreats, and workshops focus on the integration of body, mind, heart, and spirit, of diverse contemplative, scientific, and cultural traditions. His piece “Daat” was recently included in the Alyson anthology *Mentsb: On Being Jewish and Queer*. His freelance writing has appeared in *The Jerusalem Post*, *Shma*, *Spin*, *Surface*, *White Crane* and *Legal Times*. Jay is chief editor of *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*, which appears online every month ([www.zeek.net](http://www.zeek.net)) and in print twice a year. Information on Jay's projects is online at [www.metatronics.net](http://www.metatronics.net). He lives near Garrison, New York.

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# Testify

Jason Hodges

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“Do you ever think of Him?” Jacob Mavers leaned against a wall and rubbed gray dirt from a window to see a gray world.

“Who?” Lenny Broock knelt at a battered chest that held folded ribbons and strips of aged cloth.

“Him. H. I. M. Him.” Jacob pressed his face against the window. “Do you ever really think about Him?”

Lenny quickly turned to Jacob. “This really isn’t the place to talk like that.”

“You don’t ever want to talk about Him. You just follow Lynn and Daniel like they know what they’re doing.”

“They’re all we got now.” Lenny pulled a faded ribbon out. “Some say He ain’t coming back.”

Jacob jerked his head from the window, his face and loose hair ash stained. He stepped toward Lenny and stopped. “That’s what They want you to believe. Don’t say that again. Not again.”

Jacob went back to the window. Outside, the sun leaned toward the level horizon. The sky, as usual, paled like all the colors had been bled away. The blocky, uniform buildings had only the color that concrete would give, sick, and dirty white. The buildings sat in bunches and long lines circling into the center of the city, which was like all cities these days. Only at the center would you find monuments, towering statues to Them that cast shadows on everything and stretched out to the rest of the town.

“Have you ever seen one?” Lenny had finished his search. He had a pair of dead-brown ribbons at his feet.

“Once.” Jacob lowered his head. “He was just as tall as men, and I was a kid. Everything seemed big them, but he wasn’t all that big. I saw him. He didn’t look at me, but I knew he saw me too.”

“His wings?”

Jacob felt his eyes water and drip. He hurriedly wiped at them. “They... were beautiful. I still dream of them.”

“Sorry.”

Lynn Madges gnawed at her fingernails, which weren’t much. She watched Daniel Teller paint Their symbols on the casket. She hated Their marks, loops and swirls that meant nothing in the beginning, but now people had given them value, mainly false hopes and forbidden promises.

“This is the best I can do.” Daniel stepped back. His hands trembled, and he didn’t know why. “How do they look?”

Lynn walked up to the casket which was glossy black and gold trimmed, something that had cost them all their meager savings to get and kept secret.

“It’ll do,” she said and wiped at her eyes.

“I don’t think we need, ‘It’ll do.’” Daniel threw a bottle of paint against the back wall. It bounced slinging white streaks all over the floor. “It has to pass Their eyes, not ours. Theirs.”

Lynn bit her words and nodded.

“Sorry.” Daniel slumped. “I just have the worst feeling about this. Who wouldn’t?”

“All we have is this bad feeling. And it’s all we’ll ever have....”

Daniel raised his hands to stop her.

“I’m not wanting to back out,” he said. “I’m just breaking down. That’s all.”

Lynn took his hands and held them until they stilled.

Jacob and Lenny came in silent. Lenny handed Lynn the ribbons and tried to say something but just mumbled.

"I need to do this alone." Lynn began to cry. Jacob, Lenny, and Daniel slowly left her.

"Here we are. But this isn't where we're going to stay." Michael Swan shook in his blanket. He had propped himself up in an old wooden chair that creaked constantly like it was tearing apart inside, much like Michael. Gathered around him were the few who still dared to come and listen.

"We will find our way again," Michael said, voice growing harsh. "And one day we will knock on every door."

Some candles blew out in the back of the room. Candles were used because it was believed They can't see in candle light. Daniel lit the candles, and Michael continued.

"The vision came again. I saw a man walking in a desert. He is alone and tired." He stopped, hacking coughs taking his words and breath. His round, pale face blushed deep as his coughs became thin.

Lynn wrapped another blanket around him and took his hand. Soon, he was able to breathe again.

"And that man had traveled far in the desert seeing many things that are to come. He wore two large rocks tied to his feet. When he walked, the sand rippled like water. The sky turned blue like the seas of yesteryears. A face appeared before the man. The face had no eyes and said one word. That would caused the mountains to rise out of the dessert. And the man let loose the waters upon the dessert for us to come and drink."

"Everything ready?" Daniel let his tears fall and took his place at the casket. Jacob and Lenny took their places as well.

"Yeah," Lynn answered and got behind Daniel. "Everything's ready."

Inside the casket lay Michael Swan. In his eyes were pennies pushed deep by Lynn's tender hands. The same hands had cut his tongue and placed a makeshift crucifix between the stiff halves. And on his bare

chest, she'd sown the brown ribbons into his flesh forming a crooked, sunken cross. The stitching was loose because his flesh gave so freely, but Lynn had made sure they would hold long enough.

"Everything's ready," she repeated and stopped her tears.

They stood at the doorway waiting. The sky darkened slowly, light lingering like their hopes of forgotten things. But finally the sun set, and the land gave to darkness.

Trumpets roared. Crowds cheered and wailed as Saturday's parades began. Those who were able began marching toward the glowing center of the labyrinthine city. And just as quickly as things began, the spiraling streets hollowed and emptied, like a bone giving up its marrow.

"Now," Daniel said. The four leaned forward and began carrying Michael Swan, who even with the casket, didn't weigh much, but at the same time, felt more than the world.

Cemeteries poked holes throughout the city and surrounding landscapes. Their ringed walls of stone rose with steeples fashioned with waning moons, drooping curves, and bent stars. There were many pillars slanted and spiraling inward. The tombs inside had letters carved above their doors. The letters' meanings were lost. When a person died, they were assigned letters that marked their sepulchers.

Michael, since he wasn't reported as deceased, had no letters. Daniels had selected one that read XXXVI.

Slowly, they circled inward to the tomb, dragging their feet and carrying the casket low.

"I can't do this," Lenny whispered. "They know. I know They know."

"Of course They know," Lynn said. "You can't back out now. They know. So you can't back out."

They hurried now. Lynn realized their path was simple and straight, but the cemetery had sought to slow them, curving in, raising, lowering, and casting shadows of its own. But finally, they reached near the center and found Michael's tomb.



“Here.” Daniel eased the copper-green door open to the greasy, sour odor of spoiled flesh.

“No.” Lenny gagged and let go of the casket. “No. This ain’t right. We can’t do this.”

The others gently put the casket down. The ground, usually solid, was moist and gave a little.

“Jacob, take him out of here. He’s done his part. Both of you have,” Lynn said.

“Be careful.” Jacob took Lenny by the hand. “Be safe.”

Lynn noticed Daniel. His lips were cracked and swollen. Her own mouth tasted of cotton. She turned around and didn’t see Jacob or Lenny.

“We have to hurry.” She tasted copper and spat.

Lynn and Daniel, whose whole body trembled now, pushed and pulled at Michael’s casket. Lynn had to step inside the tomb and pull. Her feet slipped on the mushy floor. She was thankful for the darkness that kept her from seeing what rested there.

They got the casket inside and closed the door, which sealed immediately. After its heavy click, they heard Jacob and Lenny cry out once. Then one of them managed a wet yelp.

Neither Lynn nor Daniel had to say anything. They ran hard.

They made it to an outer ring before the screaming began. But they didn’t belong to Jacob or Lenny. These screams filled the sky and shook at the stars.

Lynn and Daniel grabbed each other and threw themselves behind a pillar trying to hide. They watched the stars blur and fall as Angels wailed inside the cemetery.

Lynn reached down and scooped up some dirt. She tried to spit on it, but her mouth was empty.

The wailing came again and the ground shook as well as the stars. Lynn and Daniel lost their breath for a moment.

Lynn let go of the dirt and dropped to her knees searching for a rock. She found a jagged chunk of concrete. She climbed up Daniel and

grasped at his face. Without warning, she pressed the concrete at his forehead and pushed hard, piercing his flesh. She scraped down, gouging deep. Daniel moaned but didn't stop her. Next, she carved across his forehead completing a cross.

She did the same to herself, biting into her tongue as the pain bit at her. Her blood dripped down her face burning her skin.

Lynn Madges dropped the concrete and took hold of Daniel Teller.

The wailing came again from all around them. A white flicker grew as if fueled by fire, but white, not familiar orange. It lit everything and forced shadows to hide.

Amidst the great wailing, Lynn and Daniel could make out the sounds of mighty wings. And just before the light became too bright to keep their eyes open, they saw the faint outlines of Angels above them.

Now it was Lynn and Daniel's turn to cry out, but they didn't scream long when the Angels fell upon them.

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## De Profundis

Malcolm Dixon

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The elderly priest at the bedside appeared on the verge of tears, but this was really just a condition of his advanced age. The dank, draughty cold of the convent ward exacerbated his conjunctivitis and so lent him the outward appearance of one moved by an intense personal sympathy or profound inner sadness. Our Father of Perpetual Tears, his parishioners had ironically daubed him. In truth, he was by this point merely rather



Ken Chodnicki

bored and somewhat annoyed by the failure of his younger colleague on the bed to respond with the remotest enthusiasm at all to the great favour he had bestowed upon him by this visit. Turning away, he dabbed at his suffering eyes with the silk handkerchief usually folded immaculately into the breast-pocket of his best black baratheia jacket. As far as he could see, the electric clock at the far end of the ward seemed to have stopped. He hoped Sister Mary-Martha would return quickly with the two altar boys so he could leave. It was a mistake to have come,

dismal place that it was. Turning back to his colleague he blew his nose extravagantly, over-loudly, fit to wake the dead.

"I don't see, Michael, how you can stand it here. No, I really don't."

The younger priest lay with his head averted. "You may recall, Father," he began dispassionately, "that I was quite..." A pause. "...You may recall, Father, that I was more than quite perfectly happy where I was in the lay-hospital. I didn't ask to be brought here."

The elder priest inspected the contents of his handkerchief. "Nonsense," he said. "We have facilities more than adequate to take care of our own, and so we do it. Less burden on the tax-payer and what-not. ...You know, I spent some time here myself once..."

Then, he added quickly, "For an entirely different matter, of course."

"I just wish," the younger priest lowered his voice. "I just wish, Father, you hadn't brought those two boys with you. I don't want them seeing me like this."

"We honestly thought it would do you good, really. Cheer you up, you know, to see them. —We thought it would be 'therapeutic'..." He accompanied this last word with a roll of his pained eyes. "Especially as you get along so well. It's a feature of your service, your banter with the altar boys over football and the like. Today's congregations love that sort of thing. ...The light touch..."

"Yes, but this place, though, at their age... They probably imagine I'm in prison..." He laughed ironically. "—I shouldn't blame them, if they did..."

"Don't be so ridiculous, Father. —No, this is the best place for you. That doctor, I expect he meant well, but really... —I understand you're refusing the sacrament?"

The younger priest reacted sharply in surprise. "Yes, I am," he said at last.

"Is it a confessional matter?" His excessively moist eyes once more appeared on the brink of tears. "*Real* confession, I mean, now, Michael..."

Because if it is, we could sort it out—this whole thing, I suspect—right now.”

As if abashed, Father Michael turned towards the wall yet again. He began to draw his knees up to his chest but became self-conscious and stopped. Some moments passed. Then, decisively, he swung his legs down over the side of the bed and raised himself to an upright position. He kept his gaze fixed on the floor, however. “No, Father, not exactly confessional,” he said quietly, “or not any longer, in any case. If anything, in your terms, we’re talking apostasy. —Forgive me, I think it’s time now for my medication... Would you mind getting me some water?” Looking up, he held out a small glass.

The elderly priest blinked his troubled eyes, as if in disbelief.

“Michael, Michael,” he murmured, but otherwise remained rooted to his chair. “My son, Michael, surely you can’t mean?... —Think of what you’re saying, man, I urge you...”

“Father, if you would, the water?...”

There came no response. Indeed, the elderly priest seemed not to comprehend—or even have heard—the request. With an effort, Father Michael raised himself up and crossed the room towards the small sink. While he tried to fill the glass, the tremor in his hand became greatly exaggerated, almost to a point beyond his control. At the same time, he grew acutely conscious of the attentive if myopic gaze of his elderly colleague, who had continued to follow his progress. As a result, Father Michael turned his body to the sink, if only to conceal the fact that in order to steady his left hand he was forced to grip it firmly with his right. The elderly priest regarded him from across the ward, squinting to discern the cause of the delay.

“What is it, Father?” he called out after a moment. “What *are* you doing over there?”

But as no reply followed, or seemed likely, he soon resumed their earlier discussion. “Look,” he began, with an air of practised resignation, “...Michael, we accept, we have to accept, you are ill. There can be

absolutely no doubt about that at all, I can see that now. Your present state of mind strikes me as quite—”

However, the sudden loud clatter of the glass as it fell into the sink cut him short.

The younger priest did not turn around, at first. “You shouldn’t imagine, Father,” he said after the noise of the glass had ceased to resonate, “that my loss of faith is a symptom of my depression. I could argue the opposite but, in fact, what I now believe is that I never really had any faith to lose...”

“Father, really, this is ridiculous... How can you even say that?”

Father Michael steadied himself against the sink. “No, it’s true,” he replied quietly.

“But your record as parish priest—”

“I know... Believe me, Father, I understand better than anyone the effort that it cost me. Initially, I had hoped for...but, yes, I see now—I *know*—that was a self-delusion...”

As though weary or perhaps exasperated, the elderly priest lowered his head into his hands and held it there. For a time he sat in this way without speaking. Tiredly, Father Michael re-crossed the room and sat down once more on the edge of the bed. The elderly priest wiped his eyes and exhaled an audibly long, slow breath. “Father, these are serious matters...” he said, composing himself once more. “We must talk them through and make absolutely sure you are quite aware of the implications of what you’re saying.”

“Father O’Connell, I am quite aware, I can assure you...” He nodded his head several times over, as though emphasising the fact as much to himself as to his colleague. “It’s ironic, I know, but it is precisely my experiences as parish priest that have brought me to this... Even the most well-intentioned of my parishioners are at bottom only interested in their religion for what use it can be for them. They don’t care about the truth of it, so long as it works for them in some way...”

“But, Father, come now, the truth of it *is*, surely, so long as you’re producing effects in the real world, through prayer or whatever, you’re

doing God's work, you must agree? And the faults of your poor parishioners aside, you must have felt, on occasion, the spirit of God working through you in the sacraments? Even I—"

"I have felt nothing. Never."

The finality of this response momentarily stunned the elderly priest. "—But what I don't understand, man," he said with a heated voice, "is why on earth you would enter the priesthood in the first place, if you felt no vocation! For all your training, what possessed you?..."

His face betrayed his genuine bewilderment. The younger priest, while experiencing a sense of immense release, was moved by the look of anguish in his elderly colleague's eyes. He hesitated, lowering his gaze to the floor once again.

"Father," he began, taking a long breath, "I could explain myself, I think, if you'll bear with me... ...You may well indeed perhaps remember this yourself: there was an occasion some years ago—some commemorative event, I recall—when the great Ark Royal docked in Liverpool and was opened up to the public for the weekend?"

He raised his eyes. After a second, the faintest nod of assent came from the otherwise bemused-looking older priest. Father Michael moved closer to him, bowing his head.

"I suppose I was really no older than those two boys..." He paused for a moment as though to gather his thoughts. "We were all keen to go on-board ourselves, as you might imagine—boys like myself who had grown-up just after the war. Strangely, I can't now recall the details of the day very exactly... ...The point is, there was this young seaman—I expect as much to keep an eye on us as anything else, he offered to chaperone us all around. Now, I don't recall him or even the ship too clearly. He was probably not much more than a teenager himself. All I really recall is the feeling that I had in his company. I felt an excitement—do you begin to understand? Do you see? Certain feelings were aroused... Oh, Father, I understood very well... —I understood that my nature was depraved and only God's intervention could save me from myself... —Do you now see?"

Comprehension was dawning on the elderly priest's face. "But He has not intervened? —"

The question hung in the air unanswered. The two men regarded each other awkwardly, in a strained silence. Father Michael was disconcerted to note that a solitary tear had overwhelmed his lachrymose colleague's eyes and rolled unchecked down his aged, heavily-lined cheek, giving him indeed the very appearance of a man moved to weeping.

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**Malcolm Dixon** is originally from Liverpool. His fiction has appeared in the *Newport Review*, *Wind Magazine*, the *Briar Cliff Review*, *Literary Salt*, *The Gator Springs Gazette* and *Cranky*. In 2003 he was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He now lives north of Canterbury, on the Kent coast.



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# The Magick of Jack Parsons

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## Strange Angel: The Otherworldly life of Rocket Scientist John Whiteside Parsons, George Pendle

(Harvest Books, 2005, 368pp, \$25.00hc; \$15.00pb)

Reviewed by Mogg Morgan



I read in a recent review of the life of Austin Spare that becoming a cult figure is “a mixed blessing which threatens to overshadow his unique talents.” It is often the case that visionary individuals with unusual biography, are for a long time only remembered by fellow enthusiasts, who with unparalleled grace, are often happy to stand aside when the mainstream media finally gets up to speed.

Another example is the life of Jack Parsons, well known to occultists as one time head of a highly productive occult lodge in 1930s Hollywood—amongst whose luminaries were Wilfred Smith, Ron Hubbard, Jane Wolf and Marjorie Cameron, to name but a few. The story of how the house was brought tumbling down by the machinations of a geriatric Crowley are told in Martin Starr’s *Unknown God* (2005, see review below). George Pendle is of the opinion that for Jack Parsons, magick was only a sideline, his real passion the then infant science of rocketry. Difficult as it is to imagine, rocket science was once the

domain of science fiction buffs and amateurs, space flight itself being dismissed as physically impossible by leading academics of the day!

Pendle's biography of Parsons is therefore also a potted early history of rocketry and the American space programme. This is also another counter example to those intellectual historians who argue magick and science have not been bedfellows since the age of Isaac Newton. This is a highly entertaining book, that goes into just enough technological and management detail for the non scientist such as myself to make what might seem an unlikely tale of scientific progress really come to life. Parsons emerges as a complex character, whom despite being born with a silver spoon firmly in mouth, managed to avoid formal education and through empirical methods, to become one of the founders of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Unfortunately he was 'swindled' out of his shares by what would nowadays I'm sure be termed 'insider trading.' On the brink of a lucrative sale to a major industrialist, he was persuaded to sell up, 'as there was no future in this line of research!' The real reason being that the new owners wanted to purge the company of its maverick founders. It was long after Parson's death before his colleague and *eminence grise* Frank Malina, argued for some acknowledgement of Parsons' pivotal role in rocket research—hence the minor honour of the eponymous crater on the dark side of the moon.

The author manages to shine some new light on many of the well know incidents in Parsons' life that have taken on a folkloric gloss. He writes at length about his relationship with founder of Scientology L. Ron Hubbard and his entry into the bohemian community of Thelemites in Pasadena. Parsons' first wife Helen had already transferred her affections to the 'cult's' then head, Wilfred Smith. Parsons struck up an another 'open relationship with Helen's younger sister Betty, who was then to fell under the charismatic charms of Hubbard. Despite the presence of the 'green eyed monster', Parsons invested pretty much all his severance pay from JPL in a dodgy business venture with the Hubbards. It all ends in mutual recriminations and litigation.

The author falls into the view that Parsons' greatest interest in magick 'see-saws' with low points in his scientific career. At the time of his mysterious death he was reconciled with his third wife, the hypnotic Marjorie Cameron (Candy), the result, so he thought, of a magical invocation to gain himself a new 'scarlet woman' (magical partner to you or I). By then Parsons was engaged in a new commercial enterprise manufacturing explosive special effects for the movie industry. It was whilst completing a rush order before holidaying with 'Candy' that Parsons' cavalier attitude to explosives finally caught up with him. His body torn apart by the blast, he died a little while later, followed soon after by his mother's suicide.

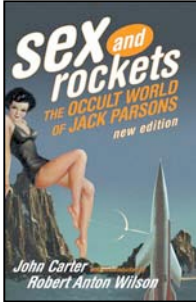
I found Pendle's science writing more convincing, and indeed entertaining, than the analysis of Parsons' magical work—which is perhaps not unexpected for a book coming from a mainstream academic press! There is little in here that is not better treated in other books on magical history, such as Martin Starr's masterful *Unknown God*. I quibble with the book's lack of a decent bibliography, making it quite tricky to really follow his sources or indeed see the influence of earlier books on the same topic. In my opinion it is extremely churlish of mainstream authors to cherry pick a story from the occult world but not even leave the fig leaf of a citation in the bibliography. The book has far fewer illustrations than others I have seen. Furthermore, I thought Pendle completely missed the significance of Parsons' resignation from the OTO and subsequent writings on witchcraft as the next new thing. Who could know that another fellow initiate of the OTO would meet Parsons and thereafter leave fallow his OTO charter, following the admonitions to start a witchcraft cult in UK. That was Gerald Gardner and the rest is history, although not one American writers are fond of acknowledging. But all in all this is a very informative and entertaining read. A good book, highly recommended.

**Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons,** John Carter.

Introduction by Robert Anton Wilson.

(Feral House, 2005 reissue, 239pp, \$16.95).

Reviewed by Charlotte



I've had this book on my 'to read' list for some years now, so being asked to review Feral House's new edition of *Sex and Rockets, The Occult World of Jack Parsons*, a book which seemingly contained all the elements that press my buttons, (Sex! Magick! Science Fiction! Occult gossip! AND Socio/Political Commentary of America!) was like Christmas and birthdays combined.

An initial superficial perusal of the book provided instant gratification.

Sci-fi cheesecake chick posing provocatively in front of a rocket, super-imposed over characters of the Enochian alphabet made for an ultra cool book cover.

The necessary appendices were there also, which in my personal checklist gives a near automatic degree of credibility and there was also a good-sized section of photographs which is always a good thing when one needs a break from reading text in order to ruminate over their contents.

There was, however, no biography given of the author and contact with the publishers revealed that 'John Carter' was a pseudonym of someone whose governmental job doesn't allow for out of office occult interests...thus the need for a degree of confidentiality. I found this an intriguing aside; especially in view of the fact that Carter's writing treads that fine line of intellectual and practical understanding of the Occult world without showing whether it was a spiritual path that was his own or just skilled researching abilities.

That said there was an occasional wry reference to Aleister Crowley, mention of Parsons perhaps using his Thelemic beliefs as a crutch in

times of personal stress and perceptions that didn't necessarily agree with mainstream occult orientated thinking that could be seen as giving a subtle indication of Carters personal predilections.

Robert Anton Wilson's introduction is fast, fun and near pop art subversive in style (a direct contrast to John Carter's more formal presentation). His writing moves rapidly from subject to subject covering what he considers relevant to understanding the life and times of Jack /John/ Marvel Parsons and giving a series of viewpoints that complement nicely with those of John Carters in the main body of the book (though not necessarily agreeing on some points admittedly, such as which is the chapter in 'The Book of Lies (Falsely so Called)' where Crowley purportedly revealed the secret of the 9th degree of the OTO seem to provoke some difference of opinion!).

The main body of the book looks at the separate personas of Jack Parsons that Robert Anton Wilson has already introduced to us; the man, the magician and the scientist and the aspects of these that one would expect to be covered in a reasonably comprehensive biography of Jack Parsons.

The scientific innovations, correspondence with Crowley, involvement with L. Ron Hubbard, and leadership of the Agape Lodge of the OTO are all examined as well as details of Parsons' Babalon workings. All these components are in many ways information anyone with an interest in this field would have come across prior to reading this book.

However there is more thorough and in depth analysis given and there are some details that I, personally, had never encountered before.

The chapters which focus on Parsons scientific discoveries with his invention of solid Rocket Fuel and innovations in the field of Jet Propulsion, as well as the section which gives an 'Introduction to Enochian Magic' whilst dealing with hugely different topics could perhaps be seen as being rather technical, however in my opinion this in depth analysis enhances the book and it remains accessible and highly

readable; which for someone as generally technically disinterested as myself is quite an impressive achievement.

The use of Parsons autobiographical essay 'Analysis of The Master of The Temple' provided fascinating personal insights that Carter weaves into the book skillfully, and the afterward of this edition gives an interesting take on the origins of the concept of Parsons' Black Pilgrimage.

Perhaps the greatest part of my enjoyment and appreciation of this book was derived from its looking closely at Jack Parsons' personal interpretation and application of Thelemic Principles and the changes this created within his life.

The mention of a bizarre black box being found after Parsons death, which contained films of Parsons, his mother and the mother's dog having sex, if true, casts an interesting and perhaps tragic light on the above.

On one hand you could applaud Parsons commitment to breaking the conditioning that bind and constrict, on the other (especially bearing in mind that Jack Parsons mother killed herself within hours of her son's death...and the dog was also killed on the same day) one could see his attempts at doing this as being literal to the point of instability and near fundamentalism.

There was no judgement conveyed in this book, and no over emphasis on the nature of Jack Parsons' death or over exploration of conspiracy theories beyond what was necessary in the name of thorough research.

There was, however, information given beyond the standard available, and a well-researched and unbiased insight into the multi faceted life of Jack/John/Marvel Parsons, which makes this, book a highly readable classic.

**The Unknown God: W.T. Smith and the Thelemites**, Martin P. Starr.  
(Teitan Press, 2004, 432pp, hardback, over 44 photographs and illustrations \$49.95) Reviewed by MMM



That's got to be one of the most interesting books on magical history I've read in a long while, perhaps ever. Martin Starr debut book is a documentary study of the North American followers of the English mystic Aleister Crowley told through the life of their defacto leader, Wilfred Talbot Smith (1885-1957). The author is fairly well known as one of the owners of Teitan Press, who for many years have produced fine, authoritative editions of the master's more obscure works: books like the beautiful facsimile of *Konx Om Pax*; the pornographic classic, *Snowdrops from a Curate's Garden* (of which I'm told there are many) and Crowley pastiche of Sufi sexual mysticism *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz*.

Starr tells the story of Wilfred Smith's and I suppose what one might call the second generation of Thelemites who set about to promulgate the Crowleyan teachings in 1930s Hollywood. Perhaps the following quotation from the books terminus ad quem, might give some idea of the ups and down of the Thelemic movement:

With Germer expired the last chance for Thelema to take root in the United States, and the prospects internationally were no more bright. Or so one might have thought. Germer had successfully accused Mellinger of being an FBI agent and kicked him out of the house, expelled Grant for blasphemy, dismissed McMurtry as a slave to his wife and ceased corresponding with Metzger over differences in the Crowley translations in German the latter had published. Motta had fled the United States for his

native Brazil after having been arrested in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in February 1961 on suspicion of drug trafficking; while in jail he confessed that the source of the drugs found in his compartment was none other than his OTO Brother, Louis T. Culling. In the following year Germer refrained from giving Motta a charter to open the OTO in Brazil, mindful of the fact that Motta, in his experience only ‘switched temporarily back into sanity.’ Yet on his deathbed what faith Germer had in a future for Thelema he chose to vest in Motta, telling Sasha to inform Frater Adjuvo that he was ‘The Follower.’ What this may have meant was the subject of speculation that was never satisfactorily resolved. The issue of Germer’s heir to the headship of the OTO remained an open question to the few who knew or cared about it. (Starr 2004: 343)

For those perhaps less familiar with some of the above names let me tell you that we’re talking about all the main players in the subsequent history of Thelema—here laid low by the mind games of Crowley and his successor Germer. And that’s not counting the ones that had already expired in scene two—i.e. Crowley’s co-superior in the OTO Frater Achad, Jack Parsons and the books hero Wilfred Smith. It reminded me of the first act of the *Mahabharata* when Vatsyanana tells the audience that the character who represents the ancestor of all humanity is at that point rendered permanently barren—what can possibly happen next??

Well that would take another book, but it seems to me that the modern stop go progress of Thelema is in part made more comprehensible by reading this fascinating history of its first days. In a way, it really is act two of the same play. When Crowley had trouble with his frater superior Theodor Reuss he upped and gave him the sack proclaiming himself head of the order (Starr 2004: 112.) It was a tradition he was to recommend to others with the words of John



Bunyan: “my sword to him that can take it.” And indeed, according to this book, if Crowley could have proved his right to the OTO crown he might also have succeeded in imposing his control over the Theosophical Society and AMORC—and then how differently the magical world of the 80’s might have looked. I could go on but hopefully that’s more than enough to wet your appetite for this highly recommended masterpiece.

Reviews courtesy of *Mandrake Speaks*  
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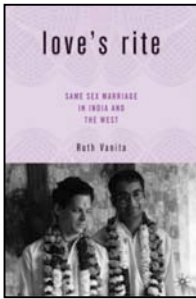
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## Love's Rite

Review by Amara dasa

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**Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West**, Ruth Vanita  
(Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 288pp, \$65.00)



While most Hindus remain opposed to same-sex unions and have not thought about the topic very deeply or on a personal level, this is changing. For instance, when a Shaiva priest from India was asked to perform a wedding for two women in 2002, he hesitated at first but then agreed. Vanita: “He told me that when the women requested him to officiate at their wedding he thought about it and, though he realized that other priests in his lineage might disagree with him, he concluded, on the basis of Hindu scriptures, that, ‘marriage is a union of spirits, and the spirit is not male or female.’” (p. 147)

Srinivasa Raghavachariar, a well known Sanskrit scholar and Hindu priest of the major Vaishnava temple in Srirangam, India, deliberated upon the same issue and came up with a similar response: “Same-sex lovers must have been cross-sex lovers in a former life. The sex may change but the soul remains the same in subsequent incarnations, hence the power of love impels these souls to seek one another.” (p. 147)

Swami Bodhananda Saraswati, a Vedanta master who took *sannyasa* initiation from Swami Chinmayananda and is the founder of the Sambodh Foundation with branches worldwide, had this to say on the

subject of same-sex marriage: “There is no official position in Hinduism. From a spiritual or even ethical standpoint, we don’t find anything wrong in it. We don’t look at the body or the memories; we always look at everyone as spirit...Different priests may or may not perform same-sex weddings—it is their individual choice because there is no one position or one head of Hinduism. I am not opposed to relationships or unions—people’s *karma* brings them together.” (p. 307)

Ruth Vanita also quotes Swami B.V. Tripurari, a sannyasi in the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition: “My opinion regarding gay and lesbian devotees is that they should be honored in terms of their devotion and spiritual progress. They should cultivate spiritual life from either a celibate status, or in something analogous to a heterosexual monogamous situation...Although my Guru Maharaja (Srila Prabhupada) frowned on homosexuality in general, he was also very practical, flexible, and compassionate. One of his earliest disciples was a gay man who once related how he had ultimately discussed his sexual orientation with Srila Prabhupada. He said that at that point Srila Prabhupada said, ‘Then just find a nice boy, stay with him and practice Krishna consciousness’...I believe that Hinduism originally held a much more broadminded view on sexuality than many of its expressions do today.” (pp. 308-309)

Of course, not all opinions are so favorable and open-minded. Swami Pragyanand of *Avahan Akhara*, for instance, had this to say for a reporter from the *Hinduism Today* newspaper: “Gay marriages do not fit with our culture and heritage. All those people who are raising demand for approving such marriages in India are doing so under the influence of the West...we do not even discuss it.” (p.308) The diverse nature of Hinduism allows adherents to agree or disagree on this controversial issue. Quite often, members of the same organization or temple will have varying opinions. This is an advantage for gay Hindus who can then “vote with their feet” by avoiding priests with negative attitudes, such as the one above, and seeking out those with more compassionate and inclusive viewpoints.

*Love's Rite* presents a refreshing array of new and encouraging material that will help this emerging debate along. It is well written and thorough, covering all areas of discussion, but at the same time quite easy to read. Divided into ten chapters, *Love's Rite* explores such interesting questions as—How is marriage defined, now and in the past? Who defines it? What are the differences between marriage in India and the Euro-American West? Is the spirit gendered? What are the differences between marriage and friendship? Who is qualified for child rearing? What happens to couples when they are forcibly separated or pressured into unwanted marriages? All of these questions are thoroughly addressed in Vanita's new book.

The personal dimension of *Love's Rite* is enormously moving. In particular, Vanita examines the recent phenomena of joint suicides in India committed by (mostly) female couples encountering violent opposition to their relationships. In the following example, a poverty-stricken lesbian couple on the verge of suicide bequeaths their last few rupees to the local Krishna Deity: "Among the items Lalitha and Mallika left behind was a greeting card showing a man and a woman kissing in silhouette against a sunset. This card was not new; someone else had already used it. Mallika had pasted a piece of paper over the sender's name and written her own name on the paper. Inside was her message to Lalitha, giving her 'a thousand kisses in public.' Lalitha's note also stated, 'The Rs. 25 placed in the diary is to be given as offering to Guruvayoorappan.' Guruvayoorappan refers to the icon of Krishna in the temple at Guruvayoor, a famous temple town and pilgrimage site very close to the girls' hometown, Trichur." (p. 50)

Another incident occurred at a yoga center in Tamil Nadu: "Sumathi, 26, and Geetalakshmi, 27, had been living at a Yoga Centre in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, for three years. Since they were somewhat beyond the conventional age for marriage, and were living away from their parents, it appears that their religious way of life allowed them to remain respectably single. But the people at the Yoga Centre found out about their intimate relationship, and threw them out. They had to part

and return to their parental homes. Unable to bear separation, they decided to commit suicide. In a letter to their guru at the Centre, they wrote, “We did a mistake because of which you threw us out...We cannot survive in this society. That is why we arrived at this decision. Please forgive us.” (p. 135-136)

Not all of the relationships end so tragically, though, especially when they gain the support of their families and local villages. Vanita notes that in India, custom and community support far outweigh any legal validity—in fact, unlike the West, Indian law does not require marriage licenses, whether for the couple or officiating Hindu priest, and the majority of marriages conducted in India are not directly registered with the state. The importance of family and community support in India cannot be underestimated and is something that is slowly increasing: “More intriguing than parents who oppose same-sex marriage are those who come around to supporting it. Newspaper reports represent several parents participating in their daughter’s weddings. In some cases, the weddings appear to have been elaborate affairs, attended by many guests. In none of these cases was any gay rights movement or organization involved. The arguments that convinced these parents were not, then, those that might have been put forward by gay rights advocates. The family members quoted in the newspaper reports represent themselves as wanting to make their daughters happy, and becoming convinced that they would be happy only if they married one another.” (p. 146)

*Love’s Rite* offers several examples of same-sex Hindu marriages performed in both India and the West, along with heartwarming photos of the happy couples and their weddings. Some of the ceremonies are private while others are lavish celebrations attended by many relatives and friends. Most of the weddings make use of traditional Hindu rites such as invoking fire as a witness, exchanging garlands and vows, chanting sacred mantras, tying garments together, taking seven steps around the fire, and so on. In 2001, a Hindu priest of the Srivaishnava lineage conducted a commitment ceremony for a Hindu lesbian couple in

Sydney, Australia. He mentioned that in the *Ramayana*, a partnership ceremony between Lord Rama and Sugriva is described whereby Hanuman lights a fire and the two friends exchange vows, circle the fire together, etc.—very similar to a Vedic marriage ceremony. The priest was of the opinion that such a ceremony was appropriate for gay couples. Other Hindu priests model their same-sex weddings after more traditional Hindu *gandharva* or *vivaha* types.

The book contains many nice summaries of Hindu tradition and philosophy, especially in regard to ancient textbooks and their many gender-bending narrations involving Hindu deities. In Chapter Five, the reader is treated to not one but three renditions of the story of Maharaja Bhagiratha's miraculous conception by two females—a Bengali edition of the *Padma Purana* and two separate versions of the *Krittivasa Ramayana*. In Chapter Eight, there is an interesting examination of same-sex love between females as recorded in *Rekhti*, Indo-Muslim literature from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Using these and other textual references such as Kama Sutra and the *Puranas*, Vanita demonstrates how same-sex love and unions are by no means anything new to the Indian subcontinent.

In Chapter Seven, *Love's Rite* explores the modern-day marriage arrangements in India of gay men and lesbians to opposite-sex partners. Vanita writes: "It is well known that in India and other supposedly traditional societies, large numbers of people live as apparently traditional heterosexuals, while secretly engaging in homosexual liaisons or leading lives of quiet desperation. That the same is true in the West is less often acknowledged because many people assume that the openly gay community is synonymous with the entire gay population. In fact, this is very far from being the case." (pp. 218-219) My one critique of this section is that Vanita fails to provide any scriptural evidence supporting or contradicting this modern day practice. For instance, the Hindu concept of *svadharma*, or living according to one's own nature and duty (as mentioned in Bhagavad Gita), seems to disagree with it, and verses forbidding the marriage of homosexual men to women can be found in

Hindu texts such as *Narada-smṛiti*. The story of goddess Bahucara, who curses her husband for dishonestly marrying her (he refuses her love and goes to other men instead), also comes to mind. Nevertheless, Vanita recognizes the embedded tradition as highly questionable: “While demonstrating that same-sex desire has existed in the past and still does exist within traditional families, I do not mean to suggest it flourishes there. Among the gay Indians I know who have entered heterosexual marriage without telling their spouses, almost all have been plagued by fear, guilt, shame or regret...The few exceptions are those where both spouses are bisexual, or one is heterosexual and the other gay or bisexual, but they reach a mutual agreement not to be monogamous. I do not have the data to examine the relative happiness of MOCs [marriages of convenience].” (p. 243)

Undoubtedly, this book will greatly assist anyone wishing to better understand the difficult and complicated topic of same-sex marriage from a Hindu perspective. For most, the question will not be solved until one day, at some point in time, a dearly beloved friend or relative faces this issue in the most personal of ways. This is exemplified by a soul-searching swami in the book’s final chapter: “A couple of years ago, an eastern European devotee named Damodara hanged himself in a Vaishnava ashram in the US, after an Indian ashram had cancelled his trip to India when they found out he was gay. Gaudiya Vaishnava monk Bhakti Tirtha Swami, wrote a soul-searching letter: ‘Recently, I have been making so much more effort in trying to open up my heart to be more available in understanding and serving all Vaishnavas...After hearing of Damodara’s suicide...I must say that I have seen the light...’” (p. 306) Another swami, Bodhananda Saraswati, reveals a similar mood: “We have to face this issue now...I’m sure spiritual persons will have no objection when two people come together. But it is a social stigma...So what is required is a debate in society. I have not debated it enough. I have to do that. I have a lot of people confiding in me, ‘I am very worried. I am gay. What should I do now?’” (pp. 307-308)

In the beginning of her book, Ruth Vanita quotes San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom, who, while presiding over that city's civil disobedience against California's discriminatory marriage laws in 2004, said: "Put a human face on it. Let's not talk about it in theory. Give me a story. Give me lives." In this light, I offer many thanks and *pranams* to Ruth Vanita for doing just that—she addresses the important debate of same-sex marriage in her new book, *Love's Rite*, from a perspective that is not only scholarly but deeply personal.

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**Amara dasa** is the author of *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex* and is one of the founders of GALVA the Gay and Lesbian Vaisnava Association ([www.galva108.org](http://www.galva108.org)).



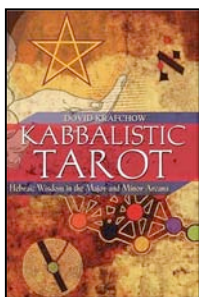
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## Reviews

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### **Kabbalistic Tarot**, David Krafchow

(Inner Traditions, 2005, 144pp, \$14.95)



I must admit that I approached reading *Kabbalistic Tarot* by David Krafchow with trepidation. A relationship between tarot and Qabalah is taken for granted by cognoscenti. Another book on the subject promised to do little to advance my understanding. Heck, I used to teach a course called “Tarot and the Tree of Life.” Since it is a slim volume, I figured I might as well be nice and give it a read through. I was

most pleasantly surprised. Krafchow has come up with an original approach to interpreting tarot in relationship to the Tree of Life. He focuses on the popular Waite/Colman-Smith deck. His book is the best practical manual on reading the Waite/Colman-Smith I have read.

Krafchow does not rely on the popular pre-existing models of applying Qabalah to tarot in his work. In short, there are three widely popular formulae in use. The paths between the Sephirah are designated Hebrew letters. The Hebrew letters are linked with the first 22 cards of the tarot, the Major Arcana. The most popular methods for doing so are:

- The French School, advocated by Papus, Levy, Wirth, and de Guaitia. The Major Arcana are interpolated in numerical

order to the Hebrew Alphabet, beginning with the Magician as Aleph and ending with the unnumbered Fool moved to the 21st position, Shin, and the World marked by the 22nd letter Tau.

- Thoth, developed by Aleister Crowley. In this approach, The Fool begins the alphabet. The alphabetic positions of the pairs Adjustment (Justice) and Lust (Strength) and the Emperor and Star are inverted which gives the progression through the alphabet the form of a mobius strip and foretells the evolution in consciousness of the New Aeon. (This is the model I have taught.)
- Frater Achad's Body of God. This is the formula most commonly applied to the Waite Colman-Smith Tarot. It applies the Jacob's Ladder or Serpent's Ascent progression up the Tree of Life, starting at Malkuth, the lowest Sephirah, in its correspondences between letters, paths and Major Arcana. Justice and Strength are inverted here, but the Emperor and Star or not. To me, this imbalances its structural integrity. Furthermore, on some level it tries to retain the starting order progression favored by the French and Crowley (which begin at the top of the Tree with the three supernals). It gets pretty confusing kind of like one of Waite's infamous four page sentences. For years, this model was a key factor in my distaste for the Waite/Colman-Smith deck.

Krafchow does not bother with any of these. Instead, he has developed an innovative approach that finds correlation between the Waite/Colman-Smith deck and Qabalah. It is based on his direct observation. He studied the deck and applied his own understanding of Qabalah to it. His insights come across as both fresh and incisive. For instance, he does not seek to correlate the Major Arcana to the paths. He writes:

“The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew language represent each of the male and female aspects of the Ten Sefirot plus the two essences, Will and Pleasure. The twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana represent the twenty-two letters and thus express the male and female sides of our nature. These twenty-two letters and the Sefira qualities they represent are embedded within each human soul. The Major Arcana are numbered from zero to twenty-one and these numbers reflect the duality of each of the Ten Sefirot, yielding an intricate portrait of the human experience.”

To someone who has not read innumerable treatises on tarot and Qabalah, this may simply come across as a sage observation. To one who has invested much time in these studies, Krafchow’s work represents a major shift in perspective. Any time an author does that he contributes to the body of wisdom in his field, and inspires new lines of thought.

Krafchow adds to the power of his unique insights by writing in a clear and elegant manner. He brings to his subject a voice of authority that illuminates rather than obfuscates divine truth. Consider how effortlessly he conveys some very sophisticated ideas in his pairing of the Hanged Man and the Tower, akin to Pleasure and Will. (Note that pairing of non-sequential arcana is an accepted part of tarot structural analysis. However, this is not a pair recognized by other scholars and adepts.)

“The Hanged Man card depicts a young man hung upside down by his foot. A yellow crown, representing pleasure, encircles his head. The crown, Keter, is the cabalistic symbol for pleasure, that source of all energy and reason for all action. The all-encompassing motivation of pleasure is seen in Cabala as being beyond logic, and is therefore sometimes also called chaos. In this card image we see that just beyond the intellect, pleasure—the fountain of life overflows in a fuming stage of unbridled energy.

“The Hanged Man’s heart is elevated above his head. In the human body the heart is beyond logic when the heart is elevated above the head, it is a sign that chaos rules. Cabalistically, chaos is what precedes logic and is considered one of the higher realms. The realm of logic is further

from the singularity of the Light Without End; it is the chaos of light and darkness, Pleasure and Will, that connects the infinite with the finite.

“The line-the essence of male-is represented in the tarot cards by The Tower, that most phallic of images. Here a bold of lightning strikes the tower and blows off its crown in a burst of fire as men jump from the window. Will is single-minded: Everything else can jump out the window. Nothing stands before Will.”

Simple, to the point, yet quite profound, the writing style employed here characterizes the *Kabbalistic Tarot*. It makes it a pleasure to read and reflect upon.

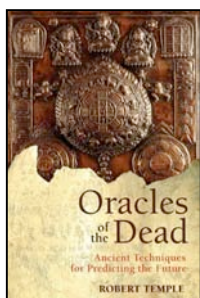
Krafchow's views are not entirely inconsistent with the body of convention that has developed around tarot. For instance, he makes the traditional elemental associations between the tarot suits and the four elements and his further interpolation of the suits to the four worlds is consistent with Crowley and Fortune. However, his reactions emanate from a focused mind that is clearly looking at the cards themselves. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are his interpretations of the Minor Arcana. Rather than rooting them in Waite's gobbledygook (even my writing style is more lucid than Waite's!) like many tarot writers do, he looks at Colman-Smith art and responds in his deceptively simple style. This strikes me as being a far more enlightened approach to the deck. (Indeed, I have always held Colman-Smith in high regard as a charismatic and engaging figure whose artistry is a far more enduring factor in the deck's appeal than Waite's rhetoric.) It is simply sweet to find a serious writer basing his understanding of the deck by reacting to Colman-Smith's work than deciphering Waite's writing.

There is much greater breath to the scope of *Kabbalistic Tarot* than I indicate here. Unlike many other metaphysical texts, this one manages to be highly accessible to a lay reader. It does not serve the book or the reader's understanding for me to waste a lot of paper or screen real estate explaining it. It is well worth reading. It can be readily grasped. The reading technique he advocates can be applied to both the Waite/Colman-Smith deck and others. I enthusiastically recommend

*Kabbalistic Tarot* as the primary reference book for anyone wishing to begin his study of the Waite/Colman-Smith deck. Krafchow has written a book that contributes to the understanding of tarot and Qabalah and lays groundwork for further exploration.

### **Oracles of the Dead, Robert Temple**

(Destiny Books, 2005, 480pp, \$19.95)



Robert Temple's *Oracles of the Dead* examines ancient techniques for predicting the future. In the first half of the book, Temple focuses on techniques of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The focus is on Oracles ("underworld" passages through which a seeker traveled to attend a séance with a medium/priestess) and divination through examining animal entrails. The second half explores the I Ching and its similarity to naturally occurring cell structures and physics theories. There is a wide range of ground to cover here, and in reading Temple's work, I was alternately stimulated and frustrated.

The opening section, in which the author himself explores the Oracle of the Dead at Baia, Italy, carries narrative force and intrigue. The author is part of a discovery team that uncovers one of the central oracles of the ancient world. Temple's combination of archeology, history, theory, first person experience and imagination work together well. He carries the reader along on his adventure. He succeeds in suggesting to the reader what the experience of oracular divination was like for the ancient querent.

Temple expands the scope of his study here to include other famous Oracles, such as the one at Delphi, and explores what the value of the oracle's riddle statements was. He also makes a foray into the significant role that courier birds may have played in accounting for the oracle's accuracy. Temple both debunks many of the so-called metaphysical powers of the ancient sages, while at the same time paying them respect.

Temple clearly understands that the value of a riddle is to motivate the client/querent to think outside the box about his situation and perhaps realize a new means of personal/community evolution. He is also aware of slight of hand techniques that many shamans continue to employ. His position as a scholar leads him to perhaps overly emphasize the magnitude of such tricks in their relationship to the total experience. Still his admiration for many of the underlying values expressed by oracular communication prevents him from disregarding its value.

Indeed, one of the most admirable qualities about Temple is that he is willing to get his clothes and hands wet. When he examines extispicy (the examination of animal entrails for divination), he jumps right in and examines a lamb's liver after slaughter. The insights he achieves in doing so go a long way to explaining the value that such divinatory practice had. It gives Temple credibility.

The first half of the book holds together very well. There are some excesses in the Temple's tendency to get sidetracked by providing too much information on a seemingly tangential subject. It does not detract substantially here. The author's asides and occasional proclamations establish him as being very personable. It makes the reader his companion on his investigation. His investigation of Greek and Roman ancient divinatory practices could well stand as a book in its own right.

Temple goes on to examine ancient Chinese practices. His work here does not parallel the structure of the first half, and there is not a lot of comparison and contrasts made between East and West. Temple examines the development of the I Ching and its similarity to cellular structures and ultimately the shape of events themselves. He provides an excellent introduction to the I Ching and its divinatory formula. His observations form what is both the most intriguing and unsatisfying dimension of *Oracles of the Dead*.

Temple rigorously describes how the I Ching developed from the technique of using oracle bones. Oracle bones revealed their subtle meaning through the angles at which cracks formed when the bones were heated. This leads to a lengthy discourse on how hexagonal lattice

constructs exist in cellular structures and thus underpin the foundation of physical reality itself. After all, is not physical matter an integral factor in the formation of events the affect it

Temple writes:

What I propose is that events which are in the process of changing drastically, of coming to fruition—of giving birth, as it were – manifest similar connect links with “event –cells” far distant as well as near, and that some geometrical or structural “crystallizations” occur when this happens. Such forces may possibly affect material object with the “event-fields” in which they are operating, leading to cracking or other phenomena of that kind. And I believe we cannot rule out that “event-fields” may influence physical processes or material objects such as the sorting of yarrow stalks [the traditional medium to cast the I-Ching] or the cracking of bones and shells by heat. In other words, there may well be a thoroughly respectable and scientific basis for even frequent accuracy of traditional Chinese divinatory techniques.

The “off” and “on” configuration of the cell gap junctions remind of the “off” and “on” results in Chinese divination.

Temple elaborates on the resemblance between the crack formations, cell patterns and event structures. He creates a branch-like model to illustrate the formation of real life events. Where he does not succeed is in integrating his model for higher event structures with the practical example of an I-Ching reading. This made me feel greatly short-changed.

On one hand, I’m reluctant to criticize any author who makes me want more. Temple makes progress in enhancing the understanding and

ultimate value of divination by relating a divinatory system to physical reality. (In a way that is something an experienced diviner grasps without elaborate scientific analysis.) On the other hand, I think that Temple has very worthwhile ideas here that deserve better representation.

Temple's tendency to digress gets in the way here. He goes to enormous lengths to describe the contribution of little known scientists to the study of cell structure. From a religious perspective, I realize that one must pay tribute to one's ancestors, especially at those moments in history when their names may be lost to future generations. However, Temple is working out a complicated line of reasoning. The subject matter is necessarily dense. As a writer, I have learned that the best tactic to employ when trying to explain something so daunting is to keep the writing as straight forward as possible with little if any interruption. I think Temple would have been better to include some of the historical background in the generous appendices at the back of the book.

Furthermore, the book really seemed to end mid sentence. Now this worked for D.H. Lawrence in a work of fiction, but I really expected Temple to pull it all together with a practical demonstration of how his theories would actually be reflected in an actual I-Ching reading (heck, even a fictitious I-Ching Reading.)

I formed the impression that Temple wrote at the same time that he formed his theory. The writing style occasionally incorporates some of his witty and salient asides that made him a welcome guide during the first half of the book. In small amounts, these give the reader pause before approaching more demanding sections of the text. Here, they get in the way and the course does not seem well planned out. The digressions cloud the argument, and I had the distinct feeling he stopped writing when he had reached a point of mental exhaustion.

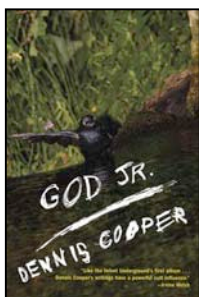
This in no way is meant to argue that *Oracles of the Dead* is not worth your time to read. I enjoyed coming back to it some months later to write this review. It is my sincere hope that in the future Temple will write a more clear study of the I Ching in relationship to his higher event



structure. His argument carries weight and deserves a more lucid expression.

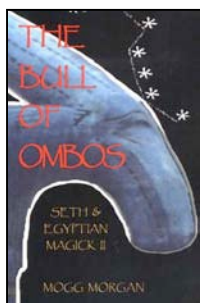
**God, Jr.** Dennis Cooper

(Black Cat, 2005, 163pp, \$12.00)



I find I am either captivated by a Dennis Cooper book or am left indifferent. *God, Jr.* is really a departure from Cooper's usual themes of lost drifting teens and serial sadists. The writing is, as one has come to expect from Cooper's novels, terse and impeccable. *God, Jr.* focuses on a father, Jim, grappling with the loss of his son in an automobile accident that leaves his father crippled. In an attempt to deal with his grief, Jim embarks on building a monument based on one of his son's drawings. He soon spirals down into the same marijuana-clouded space that had shrouded his son away from his parents. In an attempt to fathom the secret of his son and the mysterious meaning of his artwork, Jim begins playing his son's video games and quickly shuts withdraws from his wife and the rest of the world around him. This is a sort of "adult" book for Cooper, different from his other works. There is no overt abuse, no squaller, no degradation, no murder. This is a Cooper novel most surely and does take on themes of loss and de-evolution that run through his other works. But here Cooper turns himself toward a family and the impact the loss of a child has on it. The tearing apart of the husband and wife as they both wrestle with dealing with the devastation of their lives. This may be a small book, more of a novella, but it is not lacking in depth.

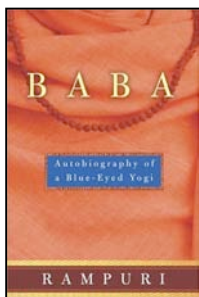
**The Bull of Ombos: Seth & Egyptian Magick II**, Mogg Morgan  
(Mandrake of Oxford, 2005, 356pp, £13.99)



The publication of a book devoted to the Egyptian deity Seth (aka Set) is a rare enough event even in the rarified halls of academia. The publication of a modern magickal text focusing on Seth is even rarer. Despite the important role Seth played in the history of magick—his frequent appearances in the magical papyri of the Hermetic period—few modern texts have taken a serious look at the enigmatic god. This is not all too surprising, given the short-shrift and a good dose of bad PR both in antiquity and also in the Victorian mis-interpretations of the early Egyptologists. Two other modern texts come immediately to mind: Don Webb's short treatise *Seven Faces of Darkness* and Mr. Morgan's earlier work *Tankhem*. Mr. Morgan is an amateur Egyptologist who has long maintained an interest in the maligned figure of Seth. *The Bull of Ombos* begins with the 19<sup>th</sup> century discovery of an ancient city near Naqada, Egypt. The city proved to be the capital of the earliest Egyptian state. The lost city was known to the Greeks as Ombos, the Citadel of Seth. Once ruled by the Hidden God the site had been left to be swallowed by the sands of the desert—the image of the god transformed through later layers of Egyptian power and politics. As Mr. Morgan notes that most of the knowledge discovered at Ombos was quickly reburied in academic libraries. *Bull of Ombos* delves into these forbidden areas. Mr. Morgan painstakingly puts together the intricacies of early Sethian worship and the role the god played in the Egyptians' daily lives. He does not shy away from analyzing the more disturbing suggestions of previous archeological conclusions—even hints of cannibalism. From the scant clues available, the author has produced a detailed and intricate portrait of Seth that is at the same time very applicable to the modern Sethian. Mr. Morgan also provides retellings of the key Seth-related stories as appendix material—a welcome supplement to the text.

**Baba: Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Yogi, Rampuri**

(Bell Tower, 2005, 243pp, \$23.00)



*Baba* tells the story of a sixties drop-out who journeys to India and is transformed into a Hindu renunciate. The young man sets out on a personal pilgrimage trying to find himself amidst his own myths of spiritual India. Early on he meets another western seeker (spiritual tourist). This fellow traveler points him in the direction of Hari Puri Baba, an English-speaking guru. Hari Puri was a yogi in the ancient tradition of the Renunciates of the Ten Names. The young traveler eventually takes initiation from Hari Puri and thus begins a complex adventure both within an ancient spiritual tradition and within himself. The youth became Rampuri and began his discipleship. Very quickly, he comes face to face with the harsh reality of being an outsider in a closed spiritual culture. Rampuri touchingly retells of the mysterious death of his guru. This singular event puts the traveler on a mission. By the 1980's Rampuri has founded his own ashram and begun to fulfill the course he began to walk when he left the West over a decade previous. The author does a fine job capturing and conveying hints of the smells and sights of India. His description of the *mela* is superb. Ultimately, this is still one person's journey and is not always easily universalized. There are moments where the reader is left wishing for more depth. All in all this is a fascinating story of the quest for spiritual India.