

Escape from Eden

Dennis Cove, 1976

“What is a rebel? A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself.”

—Albert Camus

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1

night dispelled
the receding moon
planets wandering homeward

the horizon is dripping with blood
saffron rain spills down from heaven
white heat melts the frozen water

from the womb of night
the sun
bursts forth

I stretch out my arms
but cannot touch it

2

the labyrinth of streets & alleys
the silent towers looming large
silhouetted on an imperceptible skyline

grass between a crack
in the concrete pavement
struggling to seed

I see much I can't forget
but nothing worth remembering

the wilderness without /
the wilderness within

3

the red cathedral doors are closed
I pull at the handles with all my might
not knowing they open towards the altar

I pound my fist on the wood
I cry at the stones to yield

only when I
 have made myself
 invisible

can I float like a ghost
 through these walls
 & enter the dark inner sanctum

4

the plagues of the city are behind us now

torrid sand
 wizened waves of dunes
 complaining brains inside our toes

what!
 —only a mirage?
paradise lost,
 there is no oasis!

nothing can grow in the hot desert sun

5

do not hesitate!

cry for a vision if you must
offer your pipe to the four directions

be attentive!

you must become smaller
than the tiniest
ant...

then break the seal on your pipe
& follow the smoke wherever it leads you

6

we travel an unknown path
no maps will help us here

wherever there are
partings of the ways
let us choose which road
we each will follow

we will walk until we can't walk anymore

7

suddenly we stumble upon the ruins

isolation is impossible
anywhere you go

for protection
—from what?
for seclusion
—from whom?
for security
—what kind of happiness is that?

the walls have all collapsed

all that remains is the gate
the rusting iron gate

8

at the waterfall
diamonds spill
over the rocks

in their sparkle but a moment

icons flow &
dissolve into swirls

the stream knows where to go unaided
fallen leaves are carried along
without effort

one ripple yields another

9

you were never cast out of the garden
 you left of your own free will

as you toiled you learned
 how to transform landscapes

you returned to bulldoze paradise away

now the boundaries are lost
 men of faith can move mountains

seeds beneath the soil
 must be allowed to grow again

“not as a beggar
 you eat from my hand
 not as a beggar
 I drink from your cup”

10

exiled we wander
 our cumbersome clothes
 whipped by the wind

we take them off and run naked

now your hair falls on my shoulders
 we tumble on blankets of silky grass

then up again
 up again—
 up!

pursued
 we flee
 to the hills

11

bleached bones were scattered all around

I was surprised when they got
up to dance for us

first—ballet
then a minuet
& last a frenzied tango

we waited until they finished
then clapped each other's hands

12

my father has brought me here & left
I'm certain he's not coming back

I sit alone by the fire

its warmth is the same warmth
within me

the birds
bring me messages

my shadow dances with the flames

13

once in the woods
I met a young maiden

she took me to her shelter
when the rain began to fall

radiant skin
radiant hair
radiant eyes

like a fakir charming snakes
the old skin stripped away

I fell beneath her spell
& rose to the sound of her music

14

someone needed to blow the pipe
also a stick to beat the drum

sway

twist

turn

lift your arms into the air
move to the earth's pulsing rhythms

dance till you fall from exhaustion

15

I dreamed I was climbing
the nose
of a sphinx

—steep ascent

thorn branches whipped my skin to the bone

at the top I saw other sphinxes
& other people climbing

16

when opposites are resolved
when sky-father & earth-mother
get back together again

who would dare take sides?

much better to plant our seeds early
& and leisurely watch them grow

17

what I see becomes peripheral

resolved:

no more will I while away
vicarious hours

the horizon encircles me

somehow the open air makes me think
my eyes are getting larger

18

such simple stone pews
the spires of tees
the vestments of tattered denim

the rustling weeds whisper quite incredible prayers

I let my scarf dangle
like a pallium

but wait until everyone's gone
before I preach my sermon

19

water
so perfectly clear
fluid and crystalline

the world inside of me
drowns

the pool is disturbed by a single drop of rain

then showers become a deluge
torrents turn into floods

I try in vain to escape

20

we sang & sang & sang

since no one was there
nobody heard us

our voices echoed
from one canyon wall to another

when our songs had ceased
& all fell silent

the stones themselves began to sing

21

just sitting
is a very laborious task
with

nothing

to think about

nothing

to do

my eyes cannot focus

I breathe in
the wind
through my nostrils

22

here is fire
stolen from a lightning bolt

the smoke diffuses like incense
the flames rise into one everlasting

warm
consuming
inner animation

clearing the ground for new things to happen

23

I seem to commemorate
getting up to eat

the lamb was rare
the bread soft and spongy

I reach

& sop the blood first
before all the others

24

envisioning myself before the court
the prosecutors claim I am “innocent”
their arguments fail to convince me

twelve jurors in all

a fire-eyed
snowy-haired
judge in the middle

I the unlucky thirteenth
seated on the opposite side of the table
also in the center

I enter a plea of “guilty”
reach a verdict
convict myself
& hand down the sentence

looking at myself in a broken mirror
a daimon laughs back at me

25

gravediggers find it Sisyphean
to disinter sand from a hole
—using sticks for shovels no less!

the sand keeps falling back in

speeches planned...unspoken
anticipated feelings...unfelt

unceremoniously
the cross is lowered

26

it should only happen in legends
imagine—a tree growing up
some several decades later

grimacing branches
bug-eaten leaves
roots above ground

a scarab spinning twisted yarns
—a choker for your neck

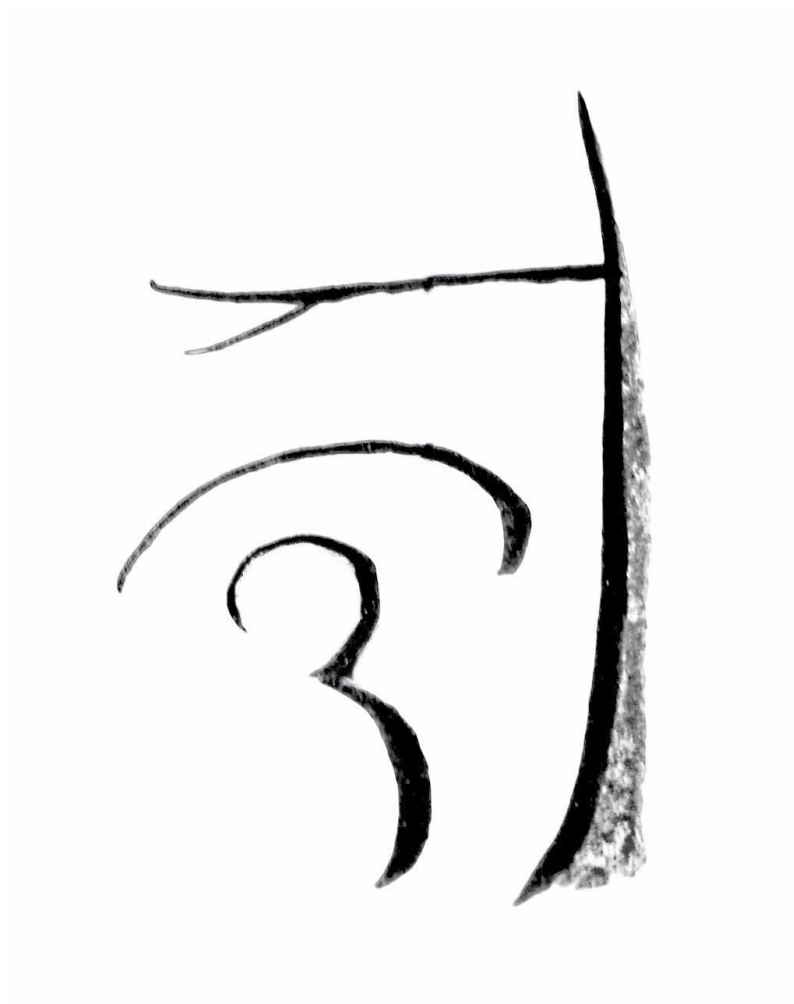
your head is haloed by the dying sun

27

why not?
besides, the day has ended

twilight inscribes
a nimbus round the earth

after all, it's kind of holy



Annotations

The epigraph is from Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971 [1951]), p. 19. The gender-specific language of the original quote has been retained. The illustration is by Richard Evanoff. Poem #17 was previously published in *Soul-Lit*. <<http://www.soul-lit.com/poems/V32/Evanoff/index.html>>. Fall/Winter 2022. The annotations below pretty much record what's going on in my mind as I write this stuff.

#1: The spell of Night is broken. One proceeds from Mystery into Light. Diana, imprinted on the moon, inspires the hunt, encourages manly courage, yet receding, softens her aloofness to the possibility of Eros-tic love. The planets, too—those tireless “wanderers” to the ancient Greek astronomers—eternally make their way back into Night, back into Mystery; it is towards these perhaps that all wanderings, all hunts, and all intense searches lead. Cat Stevens: “It’s only ‘cause you’re not at home that you feel so out of place.” Matsuo Basho: “Each day is a journey and the journey itself home” (日々旅にして旅を栖とす, *bibi tabi ni shite tabi wo sumika to su*).

Mystery—the Unattainable. We see less than a zillionth of what is, and even what we do in fact see often remains beyond our grasp. It is only what we’re tuned into—the radio station we set our dial to. Why, therefore, this intellectual presumptuousness? A recognition of the great vastness of existence can only inspire humility. “What is Man that thou are mindful of Him?” Yet, by extending our arms outward, away from ourselves, we learn to appreciate the tremendous diversity of what there is (irreducible to “facts” or “formulas”); it shatters even our noblest conceptions of it. Life looms larger than thoughts about life. Sensuous Sappho: “I could not hope / to touch the sky / with my two arms.”

And then the strenuous labor. Nothing comes easy. The glorious Sun of Light warms the day, born out of earlier struggles between opposites—male and female he created them. The ice melts in resurrected Spring; the Frigid is awakened to sensual endeavors again.

Dawn bursts blood-red on the horizon, as in a Native American mandala. Associations with the blood of birth, the fertility of the unbroken virgin, the hope of Myth-raic resurrection as the culmination of Quest-ing. As simply as the Act of Dawn, another Day is born.

#2: Now we are in the city, Blake’s charter’d streets of London. Man as the measure of all things. Vultures perched on the walls of Zoroastrian towers of silence swoop down to pick the bones of the Already-Dead. Skyscrapers soar like Towers of Babel, edifices of Unholy Pride grasping at the sublime with false assurances of exposing naked Mystery. Imperceptible skyline: no one will humbly search for the life which looms larger than thoughts about life when All is already thought to be reckoned. Now Death, the Towers again, are all that “loom large.”

Such attitudes nurture the Philosophy of Domination. At first there was only the instinct to survive; only later did domination become an attempt to satisfy this instinct. But here is another side, another formulation, of that same Unholy Pride: “God made man a little lower than the Angels.” Why so much talk of “man’s superiority,” of “what distinguishes man from the animals”? The antediluvian moral heresy: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Man in the image of God: the Great Arbiter of Life and its Subduction. Under this sign shall ye conquer. And in the end, the Industrializers, the Commercializers, the Greatedificebuilders transform the instinct to live into something quite different. In the quest for life “enrichment”—the *better* life—life itself is lost. The Simplicity of Primitivism (Gauguin,) is the watchword for the CounterMovement. Others, preferring the bland gray of (the) “concrete,” untempered by *Geist*, inhibit the fruition of regenerative possibilities. A respect for Eros-tic love without platonic delusions. The grass surrounding the earth’s vulva, barred by a chastity belt of cement—nothing can seed. In the absence of renewal, there is nothing but the *struggle* to seed, the *possibility* of redemptive meaning, the *hope* that the situation is not impossible.

Modern life leaves an indelible impression on the Primitive’s mind which he wishes was not there.

#3: In the city is a cathedral, a grander version of Van Gogh’s *Church at Auvers*. For Van Gogh, as for many others, its doors are closed. No heretics or seekers are permitted to enter, only True Believers. The perversion of Humility: lofty arches, uplifting music, echoes beyond the Babylonian spires, the presumptuous Savoir of those whom it labels the Elect. Yet something having grown up with, something still having the power to inspire. For Van Gogh, as for me, something is there which continues to haunt him, something that evokes his natural sense of Mystery, something that seeks to *draw him in*. But the doors to the sanctuary are closed. Christ’s Last Feast can only be shared among those who are Holy. Doubters who might disturb the solemnity with their questions are not invited.

“Let me in!” I cry. But my words are drowned out by swells of the organ, the antiphony of choir and congregation. Perhaps I should give up my tugging and *push* at the doors instead. With apologies to Cat Stevens: “Life is like a maze of doors and they all open from other side. Keep on pulling hard, boy, try as you may, you’re going to wind up where you started from.” Futility. The same absurdity as in a Zen koan: You can’t understand because you’ve got everything backwards. You try too hard. You take things too seriously. You refuse to stop scraping before Lord Rationality. Perhaps you really do wish to make a connection: the doors swing towards the Altar. It is you who stands aloof. You who does not want to go in. You who are attracted by the Goddess’s beauty, but not willing to make a commitment. If you were sincere, a gentle nudge is all it takes.

Footnote: Freudianism lurks behind every religious metaphor: swells of the organ and all that.

#4: And now, like Theseus leaving Crete, like Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, the Spirit takes us out of the puzzling labyrinth of the city. It is cursed by ten plagues which the city dwellers have brought upon themselves. Motivated by the Philosophy of Domination, they built a fool's paradise to live in, not seeing how the plans they had so meticulously laid would backfire and end in an apocalypse. There are, of course, no other magical powers.

Passionate sand: not the placid sand of hourglasses, the glass itself made out of sand, or the depravity of those whose lives are constantly pursued by the thought of Time. Yet we still grow old like ancient Magi, traveling Yeats-like through the rising and falling dunes: "appearing and disappearing in the blue depths of the sky." Time Marches On. We are Wise Men precisely because we never give up searching. And yet, like the children of Israel lost in the wilderness, we complain as they complained: "Where is God now?" If God were put on trial, his only defender would be Satan. The ultimate spiritual depravity: that things should be otherwise. "Whatever is, is right" can be understood in two completely opposite ways. Even if we were mistaken in our Saturnalian beliefs (the Elysian fields, the promised land, paradise on earth, thy kingdom come, *De Civitate Dei*, blessed nirvana, etc., etc., *ad infinitum*), the dilemma occurs because we reject the reality of such myths, yet still cling to the hope which they offer. The false imperative: Life *must* have hope! The reason why we have no hope is because we expect it to be indelibly written into the scheme of things. Whoever believes this is predestined to become an existentialist.

The oasis called Eden that we are always trying to get back to—like Nicodemus asking if we must re-enter the womb—is nothing but an illusion, a mirage in the desert. Nonetheless, life is more often than not guided by fictions rather than realities (*also sprach* Nietzsche, as well as Hans Vaihinger). Illusions impact life, which is why they partake in Being. Those who try to rebuild Eden can only create a science fiction monstrosity in which everything is perfect. But life cannot breathe indefinitely with an iron lung. At some point "The Machine Stops." Furthermore, too much is lost trying to get there. Striving for perfection cultivates demonic imperfections. The Rapture is a castle in the air, the Millennium a pipe dream. The desert—our desolate piety—is barren. Utopian answers have No Place to take root. Idealism stands in a perfect 1:1 ratio with disillusionment.

#5: Native Americans went to the wilderness to cry for a vision. Taoist sages fled to the mountains to escape the cultured life of the cities (Confusionism). Moses ascended the mountain to see God's backside. Jesus retreated to the desert to be tempted by the Devil. The sealed pipe is offered to the Four Winds. The rituals are different but the mandala is the same. May the gods (in this pluralistic universe of ours) grant us the vision.

We are not attentive to most things we encounter. We miss so much because it does not look "important." (Consider the Chinese landscapist who entitles his painting *Geese*, yet the geese appear only insignificantly in the upper right-hand corner of the panel; the rest is a huge blank space of whiteness. The reason why painters see more is because they must fill their canvases.

The Oglala Lakota directive of Humility, as given by Black Elk: You must see yourself as "lower than even the smallest ant." As descendants of bacteria, we are below them. There is no room here for Unholy Pride. Only then may the seal be broken. Because then, too, Life is unsealed for you. There is *more* because you have made yourself smaller. We pass through the gateless gate by becoming infinitesimally small. There is no need to strive. We follow the Smoke of Life wherever it leads us.

#6: Who can deny that we still follow paths, bivouacking here and there like nomads in the desert on trails we ourselves have made to places no one has ever been to before, not knowing in advance where they will take us? We pursue Rimbaud's Unknown.

Unlike the charter'd streets of Blake (see #2 above), there are no maps of uncharter'd territories. Words—those cloaks of Rationality and Explanation that conceal rather than reveal—are of no use to us either. Wittgenstein was wrong: it is impossible to "say things clearly." We are as silent as Zen.

We make up our meanings as we go. And we are forever confronted with choices, even when it results in separation. If our ways part, if we don't agree on which path to follow, let us depart from each other. Yet as friends. Chances are that we will meet again somewhere down the line.

We walk for the sake of walking. A thin line divides going without purpose from going without purpose. Kerouac: "We gotta go and never stop going till we get there." "Where are we going, man?" "I don't know, but we gotta go." Robert Pirsig: "The ego-climber is like an instrument that's out of adjustment."

We walk until we die. We do not let others carry us.

#7: While wandering in uncharter'd regions, we come across the ruins. Why is it that fortresses are built when there is no threat of attack? Much of our fear is imagined. There is No Place (utopia) we can go to get away from the threat that overshadows us. More universally: Solitude itself is impossible.

We are, as always, held captive by the ideal of Security. We stand in fear-like awe (like fear and awe of God) before the wonders of creation. But because this makes our position in the universe indefensible, we are open like unsuspecting children to all kinds of abuse. We seek to withdraw to Some Place secure, constructed by the Industrializers, the Commercializers, the Gatedificebuilders, and the Militarizers. Profit vs. prophet. In whatever endeavor we undertake, we are bound by the same fears. *A Canticle for Lebowitz* (rough précis): "We sought to make

ourselves secure and did not realize that the very attempt to do this brought about quite the opposite—everything now was insecure.” Did not the *Tao Te Ching* admonish us: “When gold and jade fill your hall, you will not be able to keep them safe?”

Another perfectly balanced ratio: Fortification : Insecurity. Where fortification is defined as the *desire* to make oneself secure. The man who lives simply, simply has nothing to defend. Ergo: he is a warless man. Disarmament can never come as long as we think that we have something precious to protect. Precious possessions are attachments (Buddha’s Third Noble Truth). The whole idea of property (John Locke: “that which we have mixed our labor with”) stems from the erroneous notion, nurtured by Unholy Pride, that everything we have is owned not borrowed. Everything the earth possesses is possessable by us, with or without her permission. We need only make it our own.

The Primitive apologizes before taking anything from Nature, saying, “I am sorry I must kill you, Deer, but my family is hungry” instead of butchering behind the closed doors of slaughterhouses. Modern man is unapologetic, held fast by the Philosophy of Domination. Should not the whole idea of *possession* be abolished? Cat Stevens again: “Don’t stop that sun to shine. It’s not yours or mine.” And again: “*Nune concipitur mali hominis crimen*” (“Now does blame for disaster fall upon men”). The Apocalypse is hastened entirely by human forces. There is nothing supernatural in this.

#8: It is better to be like a waterfall, so esteemed by Chinese painters and poets. We float along with the currents. We do not need to be shown the Way. We know where to go *in spite of* ourselves.

What perceptions does such a life yield? A Heraclitean flow of events. Experience is not divisible into discrete segments (neither is Zeno’s line). Nietzsche: “A ‘thing’ is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept, an image” (i.e., “things,” as such, do not exist). We ride, like Plato’s charioteer, around the arena, catching only glimpses of what we pass by. And even if we stop, the arena itself would continue spinning around us. Memo to Joshua: no one can make the sun stand still.

So, when Husserl “brackets,” there are no essences to be found, only eternal motion. We live in a moment that itself does not exist. And like all good iconoclasts, we refuse to accept not just the images of things but the things-in-themselves. We refuse to make a symbol of any-*thing*. God himself is no-*thing*. When Pseudo-Dionysius met Maimonides, the two had nothing to talk about.

The flow is effortless. To be sure, there are rocks that obstruct our course, but these can be circumnavigated. Perspectivism: “What we perceive we half-create.” Each ripple of Vision yields another.

#9: What brought about the Fall of Man? Why was Milton’s Paradise Lost? By way of explanation, let us make up a story: It starts with community, Adam and Eve in communion with each other and in communion with God, all living together happily together in the Garden. God had entrusted Eden to Adam’s care. And it wasn’t too tough to take care of. Adam lived in God-given ease. But one grows fat in idleness. Want begets want and want begets the Philosophy of Domination. The monastic cycle: (1) devotion to poverty, hard work; (2) hard work bring wealth; (3) wealth bring laziness; (4) laziness brings poverty; (5) poverty plus power brings domination. Wealth is “invested” in the labor of others.

Stripping the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of all their fruit until there was neither life nor knowledge left, the Garden became a Desert. “I loved you,” sings Cat Stevens. “Now they’ve come to cut you down.” Once the trees have all been razed there are no longer any boundaries. Nature has been raped, its hymen broken, its virginity surrendered, its innocence lost. There can be no going back. The Angel’s sword becomes a chastity belt, protecting that which can never be repaired. The triadic community (God-Adam-Eve) is dissolved by a fourth (the Serpent). Each becomes estranged from the other so they go their own ways: Adam to the thorny fields, Eve to painful childbirth, God to prepare for the Flood, the Serpent to eternal hellfire. That is the meaning of the Expulsion. Pride is the source of all alienation. Seeds can be replanted, but they grow again on their own, with no interference from us.

An alternative ethic of sharing: a system of equality in which no one is regarded as a beggar, in which people can live together-separately and draw inspiration from each other, filling each other’s cups and bellies.

#10: Dante exiled from Florence. Petrarch escapes from the city to climb Mont Ventoux. The flight of St. Francis away from his father. There have been so many exiles in the course of history that “exiled we wander” should be considered a universal archetype. Exiled as well from the now-transformed Eden, we seek a return to Nature-ism. The clothing of culture and civilization impede us. Better to take them off and run free. Kahlil Gibran: “And when the unclean shall be no more, what were modesty but a fetter and a fouling of the mind?”

The first stirrings of a martyrdom complex: whipped masochistically by the wind. The *pneuma* within: conscience, guilt, perdition, then redemption. But now we are free of all that, having broken through the fetters of religion, ethics, customs, and norms. All that remains is the closeness of companionship: hair on each other’s shoulders, mine on yours, yours on mine. The earth welcoming us as lovers and friends. Yet we cannot remain in the Cave. We must break our chains and emerge into sunlight. Freedom is a constant struggle; exile means unending flight. David fleeing Saul, with Jonathan not far behind. Pursued by *pneuma*, we retreat to the wilderness to seek a Vision.

#11: Ezekiel's Vision: "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, though knowest.' Again he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'"

A flight into surrealism: the decadence of the dance. The ascent of man: from Classicism through Romanticism to Primitivism. The sound of one hand clapping against another person's hand is the sound of two hands clapping.

#12: A Paleolithic Rite of Initiation: once the Father departs, the Son must seek his own vision and discover his own Individuation apart from parental upbringing and cultural indoctrination. This can only be done in solitude. The possibility exists that no reconciliation may occur once the ritual has been performed.

Line from a Vedic poem: "...the power of Warmth (*tapas*) produced the sole One." Mystical identification of the heat of fire with the heat of one's own body. Warmth is associated with Life and Creativity. All things must be respected, though in fact nothing is respected: oneself, others, nature, *et al.* To injure Life in any form (even inanimate objects have Life) is to injure Oneself, since All is by definition interrelated with All. *Ahimsa*, an ideal of mutual respect, is a consequence of the metaphysical doctrine of Brahman. Exit that boastful bifurcation of man from Nature; of man as the manipulator of Nature, of man as superior to "lower" forms of Life. Pantheism has always been the religion of nonviolent, respectful persons. Monotheism, to the contrary, has always been the religion of aggression.

Birds are regarded by some as couriers of prophecy (*cf.* the Native American belief that any form of Life may bring significant messages if an individual is but attentive to them). Life through Life directs itself with no need for an intermediary. Brahman = the fire of Heraclitus. The Stoic Trinity: God is Nature (*κόσμος, kosmos*), the cosmos is ordered by his son (*λόγος, logos*), and created by his spirit (*πνεῦμα, pneuma*). Emanation attuned to emanation.

#13: An Eros-tic fantasy in a medieval setting: Dante catches a glimpse of Beatrice in the Dark Wood of Error and what happened after that. Bob Dylan: "Come in she said I'll give you shelter from the storm." Rain is a symbol of both destruction and renewal. A beatific Vision may be dark like Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* or Munch's *Madonna*, or radiant like Botticelli's *Venus*, a femme fatale or a nymph, a vampire or a cherub. In any case, the maiden is a charmer of snakes, just as Eve was charmed by a snake and Adam fell for Eve both literally and symbolically. Ensnared by temptations, there is both a falling and a rising, death and resurrection, flaccidity and erection.

#14: A charmer pipes the flute. A drumstick pounds the skin of the drum. The lovers begin to dance utilizing various maneuvers and positions. (Need the Freudian symbolism be explained?) We continue to reach for the sky while moving to the cadences of the earth, rhythming (a verb) to the very pulse of life itself, the consummate consummation of regenerative powers.

And finally an answer to Yeats' question: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" We can't. A dancer (subject) dances (verb) a dance (object). They are all one and the same event, distinguishable not by what they are but by how we describe them. It took even Wittgenstein a while to come up with the line, "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language."

Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* depicts a primitive pagan ritual in which the sacrificial victim dances herself to death.

#15: A dream. The dream of an ascetic climbing the Mountain of Solitude (or a philosopher's tower perhaps?). Life is a riddle, as the sphinx put it to Oedipus. And if you fail to come up with the right answer you will be devoured alive. The ascent is steep. Perhaps the mountain we are climbing is not Mount Carmel but Golgotha. As we ascend through the thickets we are pricked by thorns, flogged by branches, pierced by spears and nails. And what awaits us at the top? The Form of the Good? The One? God? Or Nothing at all? St. John of the Cross: "To arrive at being all / desire to be nothing." We think that the peak we are climbing is the only one that exists. But once we reached the summit, we discover that there are in fact other peaks and other people climbing them. Our Way is not the only Way. Nor is our Mountain the only Mountain. Nor are we the only persons climbing. There can be no coherent eclecticism. We are *not* all getting at the Same One Thing.

#16: In most post-matriarchal mythologies, including that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the male god of the sky takes dominance over the original goddess of the earth. In Egyptian mythology, however, the order is reversed: the sky is represented by a female goddess, Nut, and the earth by a male god, Geb. In Chinese cosmology, *yin* (the female principle) and *yang* (the male principle) are not seen as contrary but as complementary to each other. "The two shall be as one." The tension between Love and Strife (Empedocles). The harmony of a string pulled taut on a bow or lyre (Heraclitus). A dialectical reconciliation of opposites. What is the point of taking sides? The string will break if pulled too tightly from either end. The person who can make the most distinctions (differentiation, analysis) and yet bring them together into a unified whole (integration, synthesis) has the most insight. The antithesis of Aristotle's Golden Mean, which is nothing more than a wishy-washy point at the center.

A Wise Man visited a village and left it a seed. Quibbles immediately arose among the villagers as to what should be done with it. Some said that the seed should be placed on a pedestal and given the highest reverence. Others said that the seed had no value in itself and was useful only as a symbol. No one thought to simply impregnate the soil by...planting it. Only when two become one is growth possible.

#17: Peripheral Vision: a Way of Seeing in which our attention is diverted from the “ordinary” to the “non-ordinary,” from looking at things directly to noticing what surrounds them, from common sense (Thomas Reid, G. E. Moore vs. Stuart Chase: “Common sense is what tells us the earth is flat”) to senses we previously didn’t know we have. This has nothing to do with the supernatural but rather with seeing the natural in a different mode. Empiricism is an impoverished philosophy if it limits itself to what is directly observed. Rationalism is an impoverished philosophy if it substitutes the ideas we have about things for the things-themselves. Peripheral experience shatters the very structure of thought built up by the mind. We cannot see clearly through a cloud of concepts; Lord Rationality must be dethroned before Vision can be liberated. Reality is bigger than Science can explain. Horror movies are good at making this point. The ordinary Way of Seeing is an attempt to prevent us from confronting the World, to vicariously experience Life while holding it at arm’s length, like reading a book about what we are going to do on any particular day instead of actually doing it. It is time to put our books away, time to plunge ourselves unvicariously into what actually is, with us as part of it. Like Faust, we do not need philosophy or theology.

The horizon (Urizen) encompasses us, which is precisely why we must continuously break through the fences we have created both to imprison ourselves and to keep out the Unknown. Geographers of the sum of total of existence have mapped only a miniscule part of it. We are like ants who think that because know a blade of grass we understand the whole continent. To see the diversity of the universe and what lies beyond it requires humility (we ain’t gonna figure it all out) and a certain amount of awe (Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*) before what remains unaccounted for. It takes larger eyes to see a larger world. Classical thought seeks certainties, modern thought probabilities, future thought possibilities—experiential possibilities, not speculative ones.

#18: The cathedral of the City vs. the cathedral of Nature: stone pews, trees as spires, vestments like those in Rimbaud: “I ran away, hands thrust in pockets that were all holes; my jacket as well looking holy.” The simple prayers of weeds compete with the prayers of good seed. “I piss as high and as far as I can into the empty sky” vs. “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” Unlike a good Bokomonist, I do not thumb my nose at God; I simply let him disappear. Wheat and tares both grow together.

I am Nature’s decadent priest. Unlike most ministers, though, I preach sermons only to myself, sort like going to one’s closet to pray or taking the log out of one’s own eye first. Evangelism presumes that you are Truth’s spokesperson and that Others are in Error. No one is on such intimate terms with the Truth.

Once we have been liberated from religion, from empirical science and metaphysical philosophy, there are no longer any constraints. At first there is only joy, freedom, and a holy sense of relief. Wordsworth: “There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream / The earth, and every common sight, / To me did seem / Appareled in celestial light.” Harkening back to an idyllic Eden, to innocence and naivety, the Dark Night still lies ahead: “It is not now as it hath been of yore;— / Turn wheresoe’er I may, / By night or day. / The things which I have seen I now can see no more.”

#19: The water of a waterfall, of purity, of baptism. The pool is ice-cold but we swim in it anyway. Ripples flow into a River of Change. The Flood is meaningless unless it sweeps away our own souls. The old is purged, the temple cleansed. The Apocalypse is not a future event, but something we that happens to us right now. Destruction is Self-destruction—not suicide, but a destruction of the Self.

The Deluge begins with a raindrop that disturbs the pool of Atman. It is possible to drown in a single drop of water. There is no place to flee. Even renewal is a vexation to the spirit since it assumes that persons should have something which they do not already possess. Satori will come only when the quest for satori is abandoned. Even child-like faith must be renounced.

#20: Matsuo Basho again: “Serenity— / penetrating the rocks / a cicada’s cry” (閑さや岩にしみ入る蟬の声, *shizukasa ya iwa ni shimiuru semi no koe*). Like Basho’s cicadas we sing and sing and sing, our voices piercing the stillness of the rocks. We sing not for others but for ourselves. It doesn’t matter if anyone hears us. Kafka: “‘I don’t know,’ I cried without being heard. ‘If nobody comes, then nobody comes.’” *Angst* at the silence of the universe. Yet even when we run out breath and can no longer sing, nothing can extinguish the voices. “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

#21: *Wu wei wu* (為無為): to sit without sitting, to thinking without thinking, to act without acting. What is there to focus upon? Spirit (*pneuma*) is received through the simple act of breathing. No additional labor is required.

#22: Heraclitus: κόσμον τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ’ ἦν ἀεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πᾶρ ἀεὶζῶον. (“The world is the same for all, made by neither the gods nor men, and always was, is now, and forever shall

be an everlasting Fire”). Fire is the bringer of change. Prometheus was punished for stealing fire from Zeus. Even the gods are not incorruptible, and hardly the same “yesterday, today, and forever.” “The heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire,” a lake of fire reserved for “the judgment and destruction of ungodly men,” not to mention ungodly gods. “*Video flagrara / Omnia res*” (“I see all things burning”).

Nietzsche: “If I say ‘lightning flashes,’ I have posited the flash once as an activity and a second time as a subject, and thus added to the event a being that is not one with the event but is rather fixed, *is*, and does not ‘become.’” Benjamin Lee Whorf commented on this same linguistic phenomenon in the Hopi language. The bifurcation of language, which results in a preference for Being over Becoming, needs to be replaced with a unity of events. The smoke of the fire rises like incense to the empty sky, the *mysterium tremendum*, which originates not with God but with us. We are not *apart from* but *a part of* Nature. Nature praises nature, as all good pantheists hold. After the Deluge the earth was cleansed. After the Apocalypse there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The old must be destroyed before the new can appear.

#23: In Da Vinci’s *Last Supper*, Judas is identified as the Betrayer when he reaches for the bread, as yet unconsecrated, at the same time as Jesus. Like the lamb in Blake’s engraving, the Lamb of God is “meek and mild.” Innocence before Experience. The lamb is rare, both unusual and bloody, the sacrament raw not cooked (*Le Cru et le Cuit*), Nature not Culture. Commemoration is a remembrance, but more than that a participation in an ongoing reality, not looking back to death or the past but forward to life and the future, sharing a meal among comrades yet knowing that the revolution will be constantly betrayed.

#24: Putting oneself on trial, confessing one’s guilt while prosecutors find us innocent. Are we merely deluding ourselves with an assumed sense of guilt? Innocent or guilty, all remained unpersuaded: Socrates by Crito, Jesus by Pilate, K. by the priest, Mersault by the prison chaplain. The judge’s “head and hair were white as wool, white as snow, his eyes a flame of fire.”

In del Castagno’s *Last Supper*, Judas, the unlucky thirteenth, sits on the other side of the table from Jesus and his eleven apostles. Like Jesus, he is seated in the middle, wanting to be the center of attention. Like Lucifer he aims to make himself equal to the Most High. The Upper Room is a courtroom, not for Jesus but for Judas. The twelve jurors opposite Judas try in vain to persuade him to maintain his innocence. But Judas insists on being guilty, on committing the deed that will prove his culpability. He is not condemned by others but by himself. Defendant, jury, and judge are all one and the same person. And so, the same as Satan he is expelled from the chamber. There is no room for Jesus in Bethlehem, no room for Judas in a heavenly mansion.

Even if others do not condemn us, it doesn’t matter. We have already condemned ourselves. We *choose* to be martyrs. It is something we *want*. As soon as the verdict is rendered, we see ourselves in the mirror self-awareness and realize how we have deluded ourselves. We are more obsessed with watching ourselves cry than with what causes us to cry. Rationalizations mean more to us than admitting our own foolishness.

Self and Self-As-Seen-In-Mirror are a form of schizophrenia. But mirrors are made of glass that can easily be ground back down into sand. Why should we cultivate unhappiness as a matter of principle, thinking there is something righteous in this self-inflicted sadomasochism, the same self-disgust that motivated the Flagellants? Suffering is more than taking up one’s cross; it includes the pain of resurrection. Once the mirror is broken the duality of Self and Self-As-Seen-In-Mirror is overcome. The plague of consciousness/conscientiousness no longer afflicts us. We are healed. The Soul will only become whole again after it no longer exists. Is the daimon who told us this good or evil, an angel of light or a demon of darkness?

#25: Digging sand from a hole is hopeless. “Leave me just where I am!” the dirt screams. Why unearth that which should remain forever buried? A hole is only a hole once it has been hollowed out and nothing is left inside. Why must we do again that which has already been done?

Man as *Homo faber*. Our technology is far too primitive for us to control the world with it. Nor can we fool silence by speaking out against it, no matter how many times we repeat the refrain. It is impossible for us to feel about life the way we’re “supposed” to.

Without ceremony or ritual (the iconoclast has no need for such things), the cross is buried. Christ, forsaken by God, died and was buried. Religion is no more. We await the Messiah. There is no longer anything outside ourselves that can save us. It is we who must resurrect ourselves.

#26: Ego death is a traumatic experience for anyone who has lived through it. Some, of course, do not live through it. Since the soul ultimately does not exist, any image we form of it must ultimately be executed. This should not be confused with the eminently mistaken idea that it is Body rather than Ego that should be disposed of. Judas believed that he, too, would be a Messiah, that he would be misunderstood and crucified, that he would become an icon of metaphysical rebellion. When things didn’t work out the way he’d planned, he took the burden upon himself. Doesn’t this presume an awful lot—that people would actually give a damn about what you think of yourself? The need to suffer, to become a martyr, is not redemptive but masochistic. The supreme illusion of grandeur: to believe that you are important enough to suffer and to take on the suffering of others, that you can become the harbinger of a new

religion.

The scarab is a beetle, an amulet, the *hope* that living things can rise up again from the dead soil. Out of primeval mud, the world evolves all over again. We are choked by the rope, entangled in yarns of fantastic stories we heard once but can no longer believe in. The rebel hangs not from a cross but from a tree, a redemptive figure who defies the gods (Prometheus!), who urges us to become our own saviors and dies in atonement for our failure to revolt, his head haloed not by an otherworldly light but a very this-worldly sun.

The prophecy is fulfilled. Striving has ceased. The Judas-Ego, the twice-born Self, is dead. You are the resurrected Body of Christ. Now, only now, *can we begin to live*.

#27: To the question “Why?” the Philosopher answers “Because.” The Poet answers “Why not?” A full day has passed, from dawn to dusk. The sunset spreads itself across the horizon like a colorful tapestry. A nimbus surrounds the earth. The world has become holy again, no longer groaning in travail. We, too, must not, like Icarus, seek to fly into the Great Beyond. The Oversoul is already in all things. We can only be aware of the immediate—the here and now, not there and then. If the divine cannot be found in the Immanent, in what there is all around us, we will certainly never find it in the Transcendent, in what lies outside the cosmos. We have reached the end: the Hindu *neti-neti* (“not this, not that”), the Zen *mu* (無, “nothingness”), Pseudo-Dionysius’s God as “not-being” (μη ὄν, as in “*meon*-tological”), Fritz Mauthner’s *gottlose Mystik* (“godless mysticism”). Holiness does not exist outside what can be experienced but in the earth itself. And since we are part of the earth, the divine dwells in us as well.