

# Dew in April

*Therese Schroeder-Sheker*

EXCERPTED from the forthcoming  
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*“Reason is the enumeration of qualities already known; imagination is the perception of the values of those qualities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.”*

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

*“In order to expand, one must first contract. In order to contract, one must first expand.”*

LAO-TZU

*“The analytical mode first reduces abstractions to a defined image, followed by a proliferation of disconnected facts. The analogical mode, on the other hand, first expands from the image into far-reaching associations, then inwardly unifies.”*

R. A. SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ

*“Heartbeat takes me forward; stories take me back.”*

KIM STAFFORD

*“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.”*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

*“We must be still and still moving into another intensity for a further union, a deeper communion.”*

T. S. ELIOT

## The Tree of Life



AM STILL MOVING IN ANOTHER INTENSITY AND RISK SAYING SOMETHING from the perspective that only time can provide: **Scholarly non-fiction is to meditative essay as mill is to orchard.** Perhaps there is a better simile than that of mill to orchard, as the first pulverizes and the second allows, but in entering the theme of Christ-Orpheus for this third issue of the journal, I sought to allow both analytical and analogical modalities to speak together, as if marriage partners, and distanced from any obligatory patterns of cultural hegemony.

The story of Orpheus has been told and re-told by many, for approximately two-thousand four hundred years, and each retelling departs from the one before or after it. The ancients spoke of the Thracian bard in poetry and prose, and the moderns have augmented the manuscript tradition in visuals of great import and beauty—film and painting—and these and other forms have even created allegories of allegories. Though I love Plato, my own approach to Orpheus was most deeply formed by drinking in the images and details relayed by Ovid and Virgil, though these early masters differ from one another, too. May I say that at no time during the last twenty-five years have I ever returned to Ovid (or Virgil) without having been astonished at some new detail of the myth I had previously overlooked or for which I had found myself, at the time, with insufficient life experience to register the significance of the content being conveyed. That being said, at no time have I ever sought these waters only to receive sand.

For a short article, I chose to limit myself to as few of the interconnected and over-arching themes as possible: Faithfulness and fine-tuning; voluntary disarmament; sacrificial dismemberment; metamorphosis, resurrection, and redemption. By extension, these themes included several primary symbols, each of them reverberating inwardly as powerful quickening agents. For me, they are spear or lance, cross, tree, chalice and bridge.

### *Meditative Writing*

To return to themes and symbols by virtue of immersive depth (not publishing deadlines) is risk-oriented; it is a kind of engagement that is ultimately alchemical. If the depth process is authentic, it takes time, years, and the spirituality of the writer's vocation burns and pulverizes both writer and reader to ash. This stands in contrast to the technical writing that demonstrates skillful professionalism but requires no personal transformation of either author or reader. One way of writing gathers together everything which has already been done and known about a given subject, and recirculates those details in new packaging; this speaks to knowledge *about*. The other risks entering the wholly unknown and attempts to describe a new geography. This speaks to understanding *of*.

Something precious happens when analytical and analogical modes appear together in alignment minus the history of cultural hegemony. In seeking the beauty and substance of *different ways of knowing*, together, unified, we walk an agapeic wisdom path of coherence that bridges vast divisions. This is the harmonizing moment of a new kind of fluency. When the organizing currents of speech and song or reading and writing ripple and sound in new and living ways, we cross over the great divide to one another. We traffic worlds. We establish, repair and maintain a sacred kind of Bridge Work because we have at long last begun to know by being what we love, rather than advance by collating what we dissect. Both ways of knowing—analytical and analogical—can and do bear precious fruit. When honoring both ways of knowing, unified, I see a single tree of life bearing two kinds of fruit on its manifold branches: *golden apples of the Sun, silver apples of the Moon*.

### *The Context of Harmony*

The Greek word *Harmonia* was used as a wood-working term long before it was found in the musical-philosophical treatises of antiquity. Harmony referred to a woodworking *joinery technique*, and described the skill an individual demonstrated when able to join together separate pieces of wood without the use of adhesives. The separate pieces of wood featured grains running in opposite or opposing directions, and the two separate and contrasting pieces were fastened together without the compulsion of a material glue—without an unrelated physical element. The intentionality and skilled artistry of the woodworker were manifested in the *act of bridging or joining together* disparate bits of the physical material world in order to create something strong, beautiful and/or useful. The wood of the tree could be seen and touched, and the olfactory, gustatory and tactile senses would amplify the qualities of the material used. The etymology of the word *harmony* never suggested or implied a conflict-free zone, a musical pleasurable, a background music of nothing but easy consonance, but the opposite: the serious work of coming together in new ways that results in Beauty. The harmony implied could be cultivated inwardly, in humans and groups, in their ideas and intentions, or exteriorly, with literal music, vocal or instrumental. Later, the *moral imagination* of the *harmony of the spheres* described separate reverberating cosmic intelligences, the sounding of the movements of planets in orbit through celestial space. This harmony happened at a different and higher octave than that in which the wood of the forest grew in the physical, material world. In this same context, in antiquity, the word *passion* referred to the currents that act upon one from without, that leave one unfree, rather than the meaning it has today, and for this reason the liberal arts curriculum once had its inspiration in the movement towards freedom.

### *Parallel Structures and Narrative Movements*

I am unable to overlook the profundity of voluntary and redemptive sacrifice, wherever, whenever and however it happens, in the Greek mysteries or in the development of the Christian sacraments. This brings me to the presence of narrative structures and parallel movements. There are several structural affinities that both classicists and Christians will recognize and cherish if they come to the texts in an unbiased manner. In naming the parallels and affinities, I am not suggesting anything like a syncretic conflation of Orpheus and Christ, as if one is the outcome of the other, or as if the two figures are the same, but, instead, I think of them in terms of prophecy and *pleroma*, anticipation and fulfillment. As such, I seek to approach them in their exquisite and unique differences and similarities in order to be able to continue to grow and learn from them. From whence do we come? And where shall we go? And whom do we serve? And why and how? The Greek mythic and Biblical legacies work with these questions differently. If I approached the texts in the spirit or attitude of *lectio divina*, (transformationally rather than informationally) I never stopped learning and growing.

### *Archetypal Aspiration*

Over years, I learned that through sound, with strings and voice, Orpheus presents not only an archetype, but a dual archetype: musician/artist and physician or healer. The myth tells us how he harmonized and freed himself, other creatures, and Nature from that which is destructively wild and instinctually frenzied and by extension imprisoning. Thus, the healing nature of his musicianship (or becoming truly musical) is intrinsically coherent with the deepest meaning of freedom. This purification process of fine tuning is what prepared him to first appear in the myth as a grown man, and as one who was approaching the wedding altar as a consummate musical artist. That artistry seemed to be his wedding garment.

### *Incarnational Manifestation*

In both figures, Orpheus and Christ, I found myself recognizing something like the movement from anticipation to fulfillment, or perhaps that of crossing a bridge, moving from prophecy to *pleroma*. Much about Christ reflects paradox. Although spiritually the Sun of Suns, and the brightest possible radiance, He did not enter our consciousness as if the divine intelligence emanating from a far-distant star or as a planet moving through the skies. Nor was He a beautiful idea or a metaphysical possibility. He Incarnated. A holy woman carried a divine child in her womb for nine full months of pregnancy. She gave birth to an infant while the world was being taxed. Jesus the Christ walked the earth as an historical reality. We meet His humanity and His divinity. He lived and died in real chronological time, yet His timeless actions live outside of time in eternity. He descended into the Earth. Following death, He came again in a new form. As Jesus Christ, He is a spiritual being inhabiting an ensouled physical body; He is the anointed one, the Being of Light and Love, the Word made flesh, the Messiah walking amongst every one: women, children, men, rich, poor, lepers, kings. Christ *is* the Logos, whose Word *is* more vital than bread. The Son of God *is* not only divine sound Incarnate, but is divinely sounding. Like sound, His very being organizes and re-organizes. “*In the beginning was the Word...*” and this Word is the Way, the Truth and the Life. In the Resurrection Body, He comes again in the clouds of other dimensions and in intelligence of the human heart. As such, He is always present in a condition far exceeding the boundaries of any institutional identity.

### *Orpheus in Ovid*

The Thracian bard is man and god, divine and human, and first appears in the myth on his wedding day. Orpheus is walking in solitude in Nature, not performing on a stage in the acropolis. The myth describes a singing voice that is as beautiful and startling as his instrumental playing. He sings and plays the lyre, a plucked stringed instrument held close to the heart. This particular lyre constellates a chorus of voices singing together from several hierarchies: mineral, plant, and animal. These three are joined to receive and transmit the inspiration of the stars, angels and gods, coming through a harmonized human-divine.

Orpheus is thus an archetype in whom all the hierarchies *reside in accord*, and the chorus of offerings have been brought together in special proportion and with specific intention. This harmonization creates a mystical chorus never before heard. The intimacy is so palpable that trees, stones, beasts, and birds bow, and even the rivers re-route their courses to follow him. He is unarmed in the ways of men, and his finely tuned responsivity indicates the integration of the interior feminine dimension. The wisdom of the animal instincts is embodied and intact, yet finely tuned, and serves the world rather than tyrannize the Bard. He enters the stage of the drama as an archetypally free person, harmonized, liberated from the tyranny of the passions. This is the precise moment when he is capable of marriage, of union. For this reason, the stage is set in Nature, as if an altar. Only here as the wedding begins do Bride and Groom both come into view.

### *The Mystery of an Instrument*

Through the lens of contemplative musicianship, we enter the imagination of the nature and significance of the Greek lyre, one of the oldest instrument morphologies in the world. The ancient lyre is held on the left side of the body, as an extension of the heart, and as such, is open, facing the listeners. The body of the instrument is in part formed of the fallen, sacrificial turtle, an air-breathing creature at home on land and in water, at ease in both earthy and fluid elements. The strings come from the fallen, sacrificial oxen, such strong, patient mammalian animals with four stomachs, devoted to digestion. Their spines carry heavy burdens. The oxen are living out a double sacrifice, having been bodily castrated. Their creative generative energy is re-routed for a specific new purpose at a different level and form. The soulful ability to generate life resounds in the reverberating strings, and a faint oxen overtone is called back into existence each time the sound of the lyre moves through open air.

The pitch of the strings is dependent upon the capacity for maintaining a tension of opposites at all times; without the tension on the strings, the lyre is mute. The highest sounding note is closest to the heart, and the deepest or lowest is farthest away. These strings must be tuned and re-tuned, over and over, and fluctuate with the dampness and heat of the day, not to mention the residual touch of the musician's fingertip. Fine-tuning is always a metaphor for the inner world of the bodily life. Pitch shows us whether we are pushing or withholding, whether we are sharp or flat, and the strings stretching emphasize all that is vertical in an earth-sky axis. The inspiration of the blue dome of heaven is irradiating the body and soul of the musician who is open, ready, waiting, and listening.

The vibrating membrane of the lyre is created from the skin of the great ox. Skin had absorbed the previous dual work of holding and protecting internal organs for the ox. Now, in the fashioning of the musical instrument of the lyre, this same skin is stretched across the carapace of the tortoise. In this way, we encounter an unexpected pairing: reptile and mammal co-exist in Beauty. The cold-blooded herbivorous tortoise resting in cooperation with the warm-blooded ruminant ox results in extraordinary generosity. We often say that the lyre, harp, and psaltery are particularly generous instruments, because, even after

a single tutorial, the sound one can make tends more toward the beautiful than the rough, unlike a bowed stringed instrument, where one might practice for years before finding the ability to liberate a first beautiful sound.

### *The Genealogies, the Dove, the Inheritance*

Both Greek and Christian traditions structure that which is sacred with the use of genealogies and dove symbolism. Both sons receive a spiritual inheritance, and each inheritance reflects blessing and agony. Apollo, the Sun god, is the god of healing and music. Apollo marries the Olympian Calliope (“beautiful-voiced”), and she is the muse of epic poetry. The god of music and healing, whom some call Spirit, chooses artistic story, not abstract information. Apollo is regenerated in the world of soulful, artistic story; and if we read the image just as it is, a great mystery regarding the nature and practice of healing is indicated. A father god gives the seven-stringed lyre to his son, Orpheus; the spiritual inheritance and earthly practice are the same. Music and healing interpenetrate.

Of the childhood, education and formation of Orpheus, not a word is included. Like the destiny of many heroes in Greek mythology, we have no details about the presence of his father in the formative years, only the details of the inheritance. Orpheus appears on the scene as a fully grown man, already about his destiny, already about his father’s business; thus, a Greek son-of-god narrative starts to be woven that reverberates later in history when we first encounter Jesus of Nazareth. However, a distant echo of the presence of the dove hovers in the background. The Orphic relationship with the dove is not the same as the descent of the dove at the Baptism in the River Jordan, but there is an echo or resonance nonetheless, and it is beautiful to pause to receive it.

Orpheus’ grandmother Maia is a Holy Spirit. What do I mean? As a star in the heavens, she is a divine intelligence, one of seven sisters clustered together, the cluster known as the Pleiades, each of whom had been turned into a dove by Venus—the goddess of love and beauty. Why the transformation? In order to protect them from the harm of a marauding influence. In the Greek, the gentle and winged dove quality is a picture of a special degree of chastity. Unlike other stars, cool or distant, Tennyson describes the weeping stars, and the beauty of these dove tears: *“like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid.”*

In the Christian Scriptures, we read of the prophecies, the genealogy of forty-two stages, the divine conception announced to Mary by the archangel, and the birth of the Son of God. The Christian narrative introduces the symbol of the dove at the baptism in the River Jordan. In the progressive movement of Jesus to Christ, Luke says: “The Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven: ‘Thou art my beloved Son’” (3:22). Then, full of the Holy Spirit, He prayed and fasted in the wilderness for forty days and nights, encountering the great temptations, becoming stronger each day. Something progressive and increasingly intense is clearly infusing the life of Jesus Christ.

There are traditionally seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, each of which can emerge or sound individually. Whether one considers the image of Maia or that of Jesus

as He steps into His Father's increasingly intensified work as Christ, we have the dove, the tears, and the outpouring of the Spirit. The dove symbolism is not only chaste, pure, but also one in which strength and vulnerability are equally expressed, unified, in a single light bearing figure.

Finally, Orpheus is handed a literal musical instrument as part of his father's gift, yet Christ *is* both instrument and music, the Incarnation of harmony, melody and rhythm.

*"Voices that make free are not tranquilizing, reassuring voices. They aren't content with inviting us to wait for the future as one waits for a train. The future is something that must be overcome. We don't endure the future: we make it."*

GEORGES BERNANOS

### *Two Mysterious Figures*

What do the texts tell us? With bowing trees, re-routed rivers, singing stones, tamed beasts, multiplication of fish, walking on water, quieting of storms, earthquake irruption and solar eclipse, we see that each mastered the elements in particular ways, yet *each* knew modesty from the inside and demonstrated it widely, generously. *Each* roamed hillsides to pray and reflect in solitude, yet returned to serve the many. *Each* was larger than life, yet could make himself invisible. *Each* faced initiation by descent, only to rise into the firmament and shine in different qualities of glory. *Each* was a peacemaker, yet paradoxically, *each* rattled and unsettled every hypocritical layer in the human soul. Ultimately, neither of them provided their receivers with easy or conflict-free models. *Each* moved, inspired and nurtured in ways that were transformational. "*Bloodless spirits wept*" the poet Ovid writes about the beauty of Orpheus' singing and playing. After all, he was no less than Apollo's bard. When Jesus taught, preached or healed, he was going about His Father's business. Matthew was a sturdy tax collector rather than a poet; he observes that "*the multitudes were astonished... the multitude marveled... they were filled with awe... the multitudes were amazed.*" But Scriptures also tell us that others resented and scorned Him for his truthfulness and for his ability to inhabit strength and tenderness equally rather than leverage power. This is a new kind of chastity. It is safe to say that people either loved or hated him; Christ did not generate neutrality. Amongst the Greek Maenads, Ovid describes how Orpheus was resented from afar rather than revered for faithfulness or for his service to Beauty. "See, see the man who scorns us!" So, too, especially after Jesus called out the merchants and bankers hawking in the temple, an inner circle gazed at him from a distance and plotted revenge.

### *Initiation by Deception*

Both Orpheus and Christ suffered the initiatory experience of scapegoating, that is to say: psychological projection. They received the hatred expressed by a collective incapable of reckoning with their own shadow material or shortcomings. In projection, imperfection is transferred from a group or an individual onto the purity of another, almost always an innocent authentically living on the margins

and edges. Not only is the poisoned maw off the mark; it knows no charity. It resents and blames. Though different, Orpheus and Christ both suffered the ravages of deception generated by group frenzy born of jealousy and fear. Each suffered a gruesome death in a noble manner and yet rose again from lifelessness and did so in radically different ways, to different degrees.

### *Orphic Disarmament Encounters Rabid Passion*

Orpheus was unarmed and disarmed. He walked *toward* the armed and raving Maenads and approached them tranquilly, with open hands, in the gesture of supplication. The mob literally speared him to death, ripped him apart and then beheaded him. Though animality in animals is in itself pure, it was as if the Maenads were possessed of an animality-gone-rabid. Why? How had instinct turned to poison? Orpheus chose faithfulness, rather than accept the advance of Maenad lovers, and then and now, my sense of things is that nothing unleashes the ugliness of destructive frenzy or fury more than the loss of cherished illusions. Much later in Ovid we learn that each of the Maenads metamorphosed into trees. Oak trees.

### *Christian Disarmament Encounters Betrayal*

In the ancient olive grove known as Gethsemane, Christ anticipated what was just about to come. He prayed so intensely that He sweat blood. When the adversarial multitude came, He turned in purity, remained unarmed, and suffered betrayal by way of a kiss. When Peter reacted in fear, he drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, servant of the High Priest. Christ remained disarmed, responsive, and compassionate. He healed Malchus. Later that evening and again the following morning, Jesus stood before his inquisitors in complete disarmament, though within an exceedingly incarnated "I AM." He declined to offer verbal self-defense against the untruth hurled by cunning detractors. Christ offered pregnant silence; he was not mute. "*If the world hates you, remember that they hated me first.*"

### *The Greek Signature of Three*

In the myth, we meet Orpheus and Eurydice on their wedding day. Whether one reads the framing of the narrative as a social reality or as an alchemical symbol of *coniunctio*, and whether one reads the death of Eurydice as a loss of the beloved or as a loss of soul or as a loss of the feminine dimension, the number three is a strong signature permeating the mythic dimension of the drama.

For three mysterious years, Orpheus grieved. He chose to remain true to his (finely-tuned and attuned) innermost being and thus also remained true to his divine musical commitments as Apollo's bard. As he became more and more capable of musical beauty, which is to say acute listening and exquisite responding, entering a condition of re-marriage with an unsuitable partner was simply untenable and impossible. In symbolic terms, attunement is key. A swan cannot marry a shoe or a shovel. A swan marries a swan and mates for life. Thus he grieved for three years prior to the time when the Maenads dismembered him.



***The Christian Signature of Three***

After three full years of healing ministry and radical teaching, Jesus was swiftly coming towards the fulfillment of His destiny, or stated differently, in His terms, the terms presented in the Scriptures, the culmination of His commitment to His father's work. Three full ministering years of healing, teaching, preaching, forgiving and loving were required to prepare the Master to meet the agony of the Cross and the Glory of the Resurrection.

***Orphic Metamorphosis/Christian Resurrection***

After being dismembered and beheaded, the myth tells us that Orpheus, still singing, was raised to the constellation Lyra, visible in the Northern sky, audible in the heavens. This seems to me to rely upon something I can only call transcendence. After scourging, crucifixion, and the harrowing of hell, Christ rose from the dead in a way that had never before been expressed in history, and has not been duplicated since. This seems to me to speak to restoration. Ultimately, whether in transcendence or restoration, neither Christ nor Orpheus could be or has been silenced. They speak and sound differently, but the tide of indescribable violence did not eradicate the myth about the bard nor the resounding gifts of the historical Messiah.

## The Retrospective Gaze: From Whence Do We Come?

***Restored Life is Mediated through Past and Future***

The members of the earliest Christian communities who met to pray and remember Christ did so as Jews and Gentiles, Romans and Greeks. Their identities and cultures had known of one another, and had influenced one another to greater or lesser degrees. These earliest circles gathered together in the catacombs to share the sacred meal. Though Romans shuddered at the thought of contagion, Roman law decreed burial grounds sacred. The new activity these early Christians performed was one of great intimacy, reverence and devotion. The early Christians could gather together in this way because the experience of the Master was still alive in them, still reverberating in personal memory. Individuals *remembered* His eyes and voice, words and face, hands and feet, tunic and sandals, nostrils and lips, gaze and pregnant silence, the miracles and the parables. Above all, many recounted the sermons, the cenacle, the agony of Golgotha, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, and more. The intensity of direct contact coupled with the authenticity of powerful witnessing. Together these permeated the fluidity of the earliest Christian liturgies and hymns, and infused the earliest memorial meals which came to be known as the Eucharist. It was not till generations later when individual memory and or supersensible perception began to fade altogether that prayers, texts, liturgies, definitions, and beliefs began to be codified and systematized. This "fixing" process may have begun prayerfully at

first, out of concern that their greatest treasures might otherwise become lost, but the “fixing” occurred by way of appointed figures established by and ranked within an increasingly formalized and institutional church.

That precipitation process is the point at which the Roman element with its tendency toward legalism began to take precedence over what many theologians refer to as a Sophianic and agapeic Christian encounter and memory. The institutional tendency toward legalism tends and tended to arm itself strongly and to dismiss or eliminate the Sophianic dimension as something merely gnostic. Be that as it may, I am unable to identify any Sophianic Christian impulse that sought or seeks to eliminate or exclude the Apostolic or the Traditional. In that regard, a truly Sophianic agapeic dimension is simultaneously Christian and Orphic in that it remains disarmed through harmonization procedures. Here, especially in light of the contemporary recognition of the role that a patriarchal interpretive voice has played in the exclusive structure of an institutional church, I differentiate between the tendency to want to transcend something and instead, recall (and cherish) the possibility of restoration. I want to repair, maintain and restore that early catacomb inclusivity which allows all to breathe, know, feel, and sense ourselves as parts of the Mystical Body of Christ, if we so choose.

In that context, in the first hundred or hundred and fifty years after the historical Crucifixion and Resurrection, the term “pagan” meant country dweller and referred to locality rather than religious outlook. The earliest Christian communities who met in cenacles and catacombs incorporated the Greek influence and Orphic culture into this new and living Judeo-Christian consciousness. They did so in the same way that Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, and Greek were learned tongues of the several cultures at that time. Because of this multi-cultural ferment, and because Christian content had not yet been codified into a systematic theology, I had no difficulty in understanding that mural images of Orpheus and of the Orphic musical archetype were naturally to be found in the Christian catacombs.

### *The Catacomb Testament*

Seated on a throne, lyre over heart, of course an image of Orpheus would be considered normal to any ancient sacred space commemorating the departed. The images of the departed included Moses, Jonah, Noah, the Three Magi, the Good Shepherd, Lazarus, the paralytic, the symbols of bread, fish, olives, plants, sheep, the four seasons, the signs and miracles of Christ, along with Eros and Psyche, even Hercules and Helios in Chariot! Heidenreich’s monograph on the catacombs reminds us that not a single one of the thousands of witnesses who left wall inscriptions did so with the word “Farewell” which was customary in Roman culture. In both Christian experience and Orphic myth, bodily death did not signal an end, but rather, the *dies natalis*, a sanctified birth and transition into the renewal of life, and life in a new form. Bodily death bridged Heaven and Earth, and recognized both to be heavily populated by different qualities of being.

“Alexander is not dead, but lives above the stars, and his body rests in this tomb.”  
from an inscription in the catacombs of ST. DOMATILLA

“There is a reason why whatever hardened into dogma or led to mere evanescent legend had somehow to come to a full stop.”

EMIL BOCK

“To be aware of what is going on, one must feel the presence of the past, the presence of the present, and the presence of the future... Pay attention to all of it.”

NADIA BOULANGER

“Voices that make free are not tranquilizing, reassuring voices. They aren’t content with inviting us to wait for the future as one waits for a train. The future is something that must be overcome. We don’t endure the future: we make it.”

GEORGES BERNANOS

### ***The Manuscript Tradition***

Christianity reveres the entire Biblical canon, solidified long ago, as well as many other writings generally referred to as Traditional or Ecclesiastical writings. The non-biblical category includes the testimonies of members of the earliest Christian communities; the Fathers, the Mothers, and countless ancient and contemporary theological, philosophical, and meditative commentaries emerging from both East and West. It also cherishes homiletic essays; letters and journal entries; martyrologies, legends, lyrics, and laments; exploratory, speculative, mystical, and hagiographical works. Countless literary works contain illuminations and illustrations. Scholars carefully distinguish Traditional writings from Apocryphal writings, all of which are widely available but not contained in the biblical canons. Even though we begin to approach any Christian reality by repeated and prayerful return to Scriptural readings, we frequently encounter additional profundity about *context* in the moral imagination of Traditional writings. One reads—one reads *all* of it—in the spirit of *lectio divina*, (deeply, attentively, quietly, slowly, prayerfully, transformationally, and in solitude). In this manner, the texts and images thus received deepen, ferment, amplify and purify the spiritual life.

### ***The Golgotha of Tradition***

Apocryphal and Traditional manuscripts tell us that the foot soldiers on Calvary functioned as rough killing machines. After the Crucifixion itself, several soldiers had been discharged by Pilate to perform crurifracture on all three, the two thieves *and* Jesus, to assure that the three were dead before Friday’s sundown, which is the start of the Jewish Sabbath. As penitent Dismas groaned and snarling Gestas roared, a team of soldiers set about methodically shattering their upper and lower arms, above and below the elbow, then moved to their thigh bones and finally the lower legs. As if bodily mutilation were not enough, the soldiers mercilessly clubbed Dismas and Gestas in the region of the face until their skulls cracked and shattered. A traditional manuscript adds that one of the soldiers clubbed Gestas three extra times in the region of the chest. It is impossible

for any sensitive engaged reader to not hear the bones breaking while reading these words. The content is meant to bring head, heart and hands together in unity, rather than enable abstract concepts about suffering. Remember, dear Friends, this is not the first manuscript tradition that details brutality.

### *Anticipating the Pauline Circumcision of the Heart*

Unlike the apocryphal tradition, the Evangelists practice containment. Without much detail, John 19:31–37 describes foot soldiers performing crurifracture on the two but sparring the Third, Jesus: “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water.” The one who does the piercing is unnamed in the Gospel of St. John. All we see is the action of an anonymous man. Matthew 27:54 describes the difference between the common soldier and the centurion. Before St. Paul has his life-changing Damascus experience, and begins preaching circumcision of the heart, Matthew demonstrates *that* a change of heart has taken place. How? The centurion proclaims: “Truly this was the Son of God!” Mark 15:39 describes both *how* and *when* the circumcision of the centurion’s heart took place by indicating the level of engagement required of this still unnamed man. The centurion inhabits bodily senses, soulful seeing, and attunement with Jesus’s very respiratory cycle: he feels and senses the agony of each respiratory cycle: inhalation and exhalation. When he saw the way Jesus had breathed His last and witnessed the veil of the temple being torn in two, Mark’s Gospel relates that the centurion says, in awe, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

Luke the Physician plumbs the nature of transformative healing further, by inclusion of the subtle layers of the Traditional elements, till the who, what, where, when, and why become evident. Luke shows the centurion in *metanoic* and *kenotic* transformation. “Revelation pre-supposes inner-emptiness,” an anonymous Christian hermeticist once said. Becoming an observer-participant rather than a distanced observer, the Roman centurion emptied himself of his original military perceptions as he watched Christ voluntarily complete the process of self-emptying. The centurion is the single Roman official at the foot of the Cross in whom discernment germinated and blossomed: He “began praising God, saying: Certainly this man was innocent.” Praise cannot emanate from a closed or hardened heart, and seeing into the true nature and significance of things, events, being, and reality cannot take place till the scales fall from our eyes.

### *The Sophianic-Agapeic Tradition*

*The Golden Legend* is an amalgam of scripture, apocrypha, legend, history and allegorical lives of the saints, or, as more precisely described by translators Ryan and Ripperger: the Legend is the folk-lore of the saints, the saints as archetypes and the saints as the heroes of the people. The legends were sacred stories carried in the memory of generations of anonymous, devoted and loving faithful. These were the *stories known and carried by heart*; stories circulated via oral transmission; stories relayed by the faithful before the era of the printing press. These stories were eventually compiled by a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Dominican spiritual guide named Jacobus de Voragine.

### *The Centurion*

Because the *Golden Legend* is a metaphysical work, it paints a picture that streams like an aurora in the soul rather than as something like intellectual information or conceptual ideas that lodge safely in the head without asking much of us. The *Legend* relates that there was a centurion who could no longer be deployed in battle because of some sort of eye problem, perhaps cataracts. How odd! His wound prevented career advancement, and he worked instead in Jerusalem on behalf of Pontius Pilate. There he was, on a brutal and dry Friday, some scholars calculate the fateful day as April 3<sup>rd</sup> in AD 33. With armor and steed, he was commissioned to monitor the foot soldiers accomplishing a routine state execution. But with each passing moment, he was becoming a witness rather than a mere actor on a stage. It is startling to see how prevention and expansion, wound and strength are mystically related for those in whom the opened heart has become a center of intelligence into which the spiritual world enters or from which human goodness emerges.

### *Witnessing*

The centurion had witnessed the entire crucifixion, the hatred of the mob, the coarse barbarism of the hecklers, the agony of the nails, the total disarmament of the One in the center, the anguish of His suffering, and had been deeply moved by the Nazarene. This centurion was not a disengaged soul, handling power excessively, going about his governmental bidding in an unconscious manner. In yet another manuscript tradition, the stigmatic Anne Catherine Emmerich describes that in the face of the crucifixure of the thieves, the centurion was seized by something supernatural. As if overshadowed, the one monitoring the execution of behalf of the state rose up in split-second timing and served the Luminous Wound that moves mountains.

### *The Spear*

Still mounted on horseback, the Centurion leaned back and thrust a spear on an upward angle, through the pericardium and to the heart by way of the intercostal space between the ribs. All present saw the water and the blood gush out. When removing the lance from the wound in our Lord's side, a copious stream of blood and water flowed, surely spraying his upraised face, "bedewing him," Sister Emmerich says, with grace and salvation.

### *The Alchemical Tradition*

The peculiar term "*dew*" is a precise and technical alchemical term, indicating far more than literal moisture. The "*dew in April*" is many things, and the Gospels are inexhaustible; but until I read the apocryphal and traditional literature which augment the Gospels, I had failed to appreciate that this particular dew was the result of a consummate act of compassionate protection. On the surface of things, where all is black and white, a soldier finishing off our Lord with a killing machine seems to be yet another brutal act of violence. But going more deeply, prayerfully, we are asked to sit and hold the image, and reflect upon the elements

that generally remain below the surface. Can I comprehend the courage it took to wield military or governmental power in that one moment in time? The courage and compassion it took to rise up and protect One who is the Incarnation of vulnerability? Of disarmament?

*“The very essence of the sinner is his refusal to engage in the full depth of his or her being and make it something vital; at base, the sinner is someone who lives at the surface of himself.”*

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR ON Georges Bernanos

### ***Remaining at the Surface***

As a Catholic, I have experienced the Pascal Triduum more than sixty consecutive times since making my own First Holy Communion in childhood, but until connecting the Gospel texts with the Traditional and Apocryphal literature, and until working to harmonize the tension of the two ways of knowing in myself (analytical and analogical), I had remained at a surface and missed an essential mystery. The soil of my own inner life had not been prepared enough to understand this spearing as an act of compassion, literally, and ultimately, a redemptive act that serves the Love that is stronger than Death. Some acts in time become timeless and eternal. A Judas who betrayed was as necessary in the economy of redemption as was Christ, and slowly, we discover in a prophetic centurion that appearances and reality really do differ.

### ***The Tradition of Healing***

The *Legend* tells us that this dew from the blood and water of Jesus’s speared heart sprayed the Centurion’s eyes, whereupon his sight was immediately restored. Why? We are told that he fell to the ground on his knees *in praise*. The synergy of the Crucified and the Centurion together created a third possibility: Healing.

Dew is the alchemical term used to describe the rain descending in the alembic; the dew is an ablution that cleanses and reanimates. From this moment forward, Tradition has called the centurion *Longinus*, from the Latin references to the adjective long. Whether it is the physical spear that was long; or the compassionate aim that reached so far and was so far-sighted; or the act that ensouled the long view, the view that transcends time and serves the ages; we cannot corral or make specific. Whether it is the inversion of all untested assumptions we could ever have about peace and war, or whether it is a story about the mystery of good and evil, (a la Hans Urs von Balthasar) we tread with humility, love and awe.

### ***Cultural Ferry: Myth to Scripture***

The spear thrust received by a sacrificial and mythical Orpheus undergoes metamorphosis and reversal. When the spear appears later in history it does so in a transformed condition and context. Hatred is transformed to courage and compassion. The ferryman has taken us across the waters, and now we find Longinus’s spear thrust to be the consolidation and concentration of compassion and

courage. The wound is something received by an historical Christ. The spear is therefore an essential element in the emerging Eucharistic mystery that this issue of *Jesus the Imagination* invites us to consider. The blood and water of the crucified one spilled directly into and onto the earth because of a spear thrust; both were caught in a chalice by those doing vigil and transformed the many. A weapon of war disappears in the light of love, and in its stead, we the followers are left holding something that gives any who approach access to *The Luminous Wound*.

## Postscript

*“I love a window. A bird whizzing by. Bumblebee. It’s always different. The whole of life already framed. Right there.”*

MAUD LEWIS

*“Solvitur ambulando” (It is solved by walking)*

ST. AUGUSTINE

*“When inner and outer first mingle, it is the bridal night of soul and body.”*

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“Go for a walk in the fresh air, and then come back and return to your writing.” That was simultaneously a thought, a feeling, and a mandate, and it rose to the surface early in the morning of a recent March 15<sup>th</sup>.

I began walking down my own lane, not unlike a fish swimming through water. I say that because water surrounds the finned creature so thoroughly that the wetness of the stream is almost unnoticeable to it. Not unlike the shimmering fish swimming, I was at first walking through an undifferentiated village din: a few cars moaning over a hill, crows cawing, tree branches rustling, a lawnmower a block or two away, a plane to the north, the barking of a neighbor’s dog, the indignation of squirrels, the abbey bells pealing.

But then the sound of my own footsteps rose to the surface, and this sound became stronger and clearer than the surrounding din. Soon, heartbeat and pulse were changing to synchronize with the tempo of the walking. As if the footsteps were conducting pilgrimage to a musical world, I turned to my right to gaze at a large oak tree that I have admired a thousand times before, on a thousand previous walks, only this time something about hearing and listening opened or expanded my heart. *Ovid!* Orpheus! Maenad hatred to sheltering oaks! Acorn to altar to bread. The oak of the Greek mysteries; the oracle of Dodona—with both oak and dove; the oak of Norse mythology; the oak of the world tree Yggdrasil; the oak from which Odin hung by the hair for nine long sacrificial days and nights, he too wounded by a spear; the oak of the Druids... the mistletoe growing on Druid’s oaks, mistletoe being not only the recent permission slip for a Christmas kiss, but the source of the famed cancer medicine *Iscador*. The oak in our backyard on Penrose was also my first memory of early childhood.

The air was filled with creaturely soundings of harmonized timbre, rhythm and pitch—a kind of *pleroma*.

First, the woodpecker on the trunk of the oak tree. Clear as a bell: 9 strikes, 9 strikes, 9 strikes. Three clusters of nine. Three times nine is twenty-seven. Even two plus seven is *still* 9. Every nine is three to the third. Trinities. Trinities everywhere. Then, the woodpecker poised itself in silence. But I remained across from the massive oak, listening and looking.

Next, antiphonally, mourning doves: “Who? *Who?*” “Who? *Who?*” Who? *Who?*

After a moment of pause, the woodpecker seemed to respond, although in a changed timbre. He began striking the tree trunk again, only this time in clusters of eights. *Octave! Octave! Octave!* Three clusters of eight, three octaves of mourning, three octaves of trinities, piercing the bright air, raising it, lifting it. Within the immediacy of the rhythmic pulsing movement and sounding, the analytical specificity and analogical connectivity functioned as a single way of knowing and generated an immediate internal realization.

I trembled in awe. Nature’s very own Morse Code!

Walking again in footfall *ostinato*, I heard a little metrical hymn rise to the surface. Each poetic foot was a fully formed, complete, one unto-itself tetrameter, emerging in a ratio of 1:4. Every line was carried by the cooperating rhythms of one full respiratory cycle to each foot.

Woodpecker’s: *Morse Code*—Mourning Dove’s: “*Who?*”  
 Sophianic symphony: Auditing by shoe.  
 Walking first in triple nines, then three octaves strong  
 Rebirthing in Trinities; spearing speech: Short-Long.

So it began, sheer reporting, but also phenomenological reporting. It came in sheets in the air as a wholly pure form of reception in which body, soul, and spirit are Trinitarian amanuensis. Analytical and analogical, inner and outer, soul and Nature, alembic and chalice, agapeic and noetic, previously known and wholly Unknown, tree and cross, movement and stillness, poison and gift, betrayal and medicine, failure and redemption. Everything one needs contained there unified in a single frame, even if the aperture remains open briefly. In Trinities and Octaves, Nature’s Morse Code arrives as if a sacramental telegram..... but..... from..... *whom?* Natura? Heartbeat? Earth? Or the countenance of something or someone even more? I held the question earnestly: “*Who is knocking?*” I asked and walked home enveloped in wonder and heat. It was a walking way of praying.

Later that very morning I shook to discover that *The Golden Legend* had reserved March 15<sup>th</sup> for the feast day of the centurion St. Longinus. And so it goes, if only we do not ignore or discard that which is due in April, or dew in April. A final word about the nature of affliction and destiny: Without his original burdened eyesight, the centurion would never have been “held back” from military advancement and battle. His cataracts *seemed* to create the context to position him to a demoted position. He was right where he needed to be on Good Friday. So it is that our illnesses and afflictions are so intimately married



to the inspired though hidden choices which can serve a higher octave of destiny.

A meditative essay draws from several scholarly disciplines simultaneously, and in multiple transformational operations, it burns the writer's vocation to white ash and offers something living to the reader who is always and essentially an Unknown Friend. Anticipation to fulfillment, prophecy to pleroma, Orpheus and Christ. These are our fluencies; these are ways of knowing. They are based on recollection, and situated in being recollected.

By virtue of this alchemy, where *nothing of the original material remains*, the resulting work is new or takes on a new form, a literary form that is betwixt and between. The inner Argonaut never arrives at the writerly destination originally imagined, but lands on a far shore, a musical shore. The new work is an amalgam of gold and silver, creating a new kind of map, etched in two light signatures, direct and reflected. Intentionally, upon the last word, the writer leaves the page on the table, in plain sight, and disappears into the night. Any passerby can freely partake of the bread if he or she chooses, yet no one is forced or coerced. The fecundity of the meditative essay is connected to the purity with which the Dear Unknown Reader's freedom is quickened.

THERESE SCHROEDER-SHEKER, *Chalice of Repose Project*, Lent 2019