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Orthodox Theology and
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Symposium

**Theology and Literature:
The Deification of Imagination and
Its Cathartic Function
in Spiritual Growth**

*The Fifteenth Ecumenical Theological
Symposium*

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**The Romanian Institute of
Orthodox Theology and
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The opening prayer



George Alexe

His Eminence Ioan Casian of Vicina
between the organizers, George Alexe
(left) and Theodor Damian



Theology, Literature, and Imagination, a Topic of Special Relevance and Significance

Introductory Remarks

Thinking of the 15th Ecumenical Theological and Interdisciplinary Symposium, I have considered that the best way to understand this cultural and spiritual event consists of briefly emphasizing from the very beginning the actuality and the significance of its selected topic.

That supposes to make clear not only the distinctive relevance, but also the specific challenge of the general theme for our Symposium as it will be evident in the scholarly contributions of our distinguished speakers who will debate and approach critically some of the very interesting aspects of the fields indicated by the Symposium's topic.

In this sense, for theological reasons and in order to better express the specific cultural and spiritual meaning of today's event, it has been necessary to find a common denominator between Theology and Literature on the one hand, but also, and in particular, between Theology and Literature taken together and "The Deification of Imagination and Its Cathartic Function in Spiritual Growth" on the other hand. It is indeed this second part of the title that validates and gives the necessary importance to the special relationship between Theology and Literature.

George Alexe is a Senior theologian of the Romanian Orthodox Church, member of the Union of Romanian Writers, director and founder of *Romanian Communion*; Chairman of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality

Therefore all the papers to be presented in this afternoon will analyze and interpret different aspects of Imagination, the variety and originality of its revelatory dimensions and their implications in our daily life, certainly, taking into account the Good and Evil of the Imagination as well.

Certainly, without imagination man would be a perfect robot. Imagination is one of the essential elements that produced human culture and civilization. If we need an example we can think of the contemporary movement of globalization which is based on and at the same time produces that imagination whose relevance, actuality, and implications are increasing daily, hopefully in a positive way. It is good to mention here that in Romania, the homeland of many of us, a few years ago (2002), in Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania, a center for the intellectual research of the imaginary, called “Phantasma” was established. This is a real conclave made up by Romanian intellectuals, who are particularly actualizing in their studies the relationship between imagination, language and thinking (see: Sorin Lavric, “Despre imaginatie,” *Romania Literara*, Nr. 44, Nov. 9, 2007).

Now I would like to briefly indicate the papers that will entertain us this afternoon, following these preliminaries. The names of our distinguished speakers and their academic achievements will be properly presented by our gracious and talented moderator, Professor Victoria Malczanek.

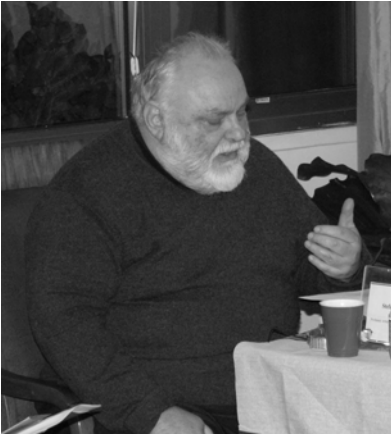
The titles of the presentations are as follows: *Image and Imagination as Components of Learning*; *Imagination & Science Fiction*, *A Poet of the Transcendent: Mihail Crama*, “*The Realm of Dusk*,” *Understanding Your Spiritual Nature*, *The Mythical Dream Voyage in “The Cobbler of Hydra”*; *Imagination’s Quasi-Religious Nature in Later Modernity*.

I take this opportunity to mention that our 15th Symposium must be considered as a special celebration and I want to express here my gratitude to Dr. Theodor Damian for his efforts and consistency in organizing every year such an important event.

Finally, I would like to close my remarks by asking the blessing of our most honorable Archbishop Dr. Nicolae Condrea, and by wishing all of you in advance Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

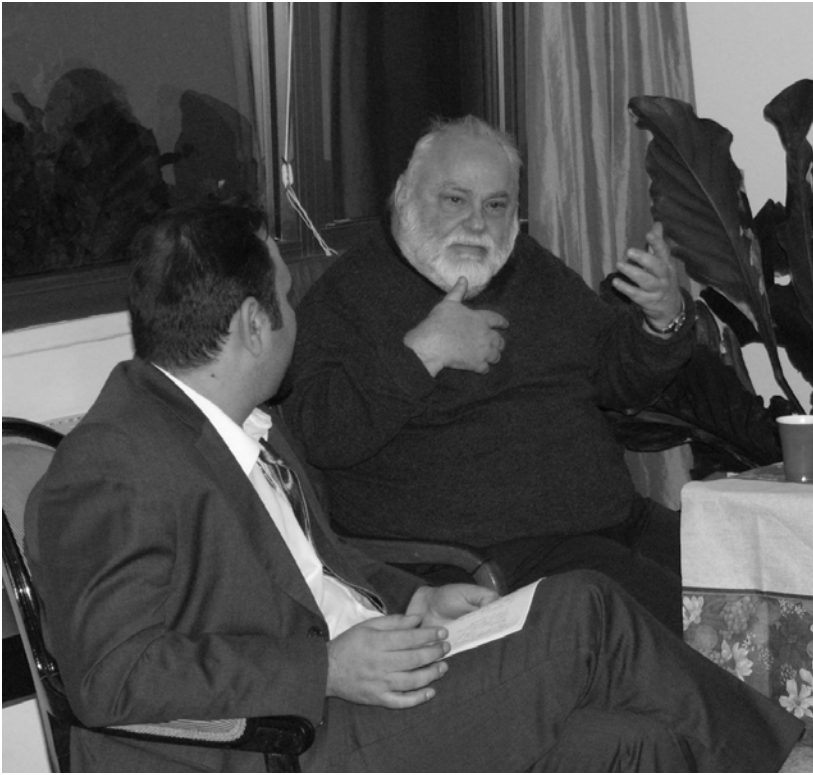


George Alexe



Prof. Stefan Stoenescu, presenting his paper *Imagination's Quasi-Religious Nature in Later Modernity*.

Daniel Damian (left) and Prof. Stefan Stoenescu



Anca Chelariu



George Alexe and Stefan
Stoenescu



Richard
Grallo
(left) and
George
Alexe



Richard Grallo

Image and Imagination as Components of Learning

There are three basic aims to this paper: (1) to describe and define *imagination* and some of its associated products and processes; (2) to place these phenomena in an explanatory context of other cognitive processes associated with both *learning* and *mis-learning*; (3) to briefly discuss some applications in the areas of education, counseling and self-regulation.

Examples, Definitions and a Description

If we were to examine a room, we might pick out some object of interest for us, for example a lamp. If we were to look at the lamp and then close our eyes, in some sense we can still “see” it. This phenomenon of still “seeing it” is a visual image, and it is something that we can carry with us even after we leave the room. Later we can close our eyes again, and in some sense that lamp is again present to us in the visual image.

The study of painters and what they went through to create their visual products can be illustrative here. Particularly fascinating are painters who are almost blind, for example Monet with his cataracts. With normal eyesight one has a realist representation of the visual field in great detail. In contrast, vision through a cataract presents a visual field that is impressionist. Hence a whole movement in painting can find at least partial roots in the development of cataracts (Gugliotta, 2007).

As another example, consider auditory imagination. Imagine a favorite song or symphony. If we were to tape record what is going on in the room while you imagine, we would only pick up the background noise of the room. We would not hear what you are “hearing” in your imagination. The study of the lives of composers raises some interesting questions about imagination: What are composers doing when they are composing? Are they “hearing” something that no one else hears? What is happening when deaf composers like Beethoven compose? What conditions allowed him to compose?

Relevant to these points, Chaplin (1985, p. 221) defines *imagination* as “the process of creating objects or events without the benefit of sensory data.” He also defines *image* as “a conscious experience similar to sensory experience but less vivid and recognized as arising from memory.” This last point is reminiscent of David Hume’s remarks on what is vivid and less vivid in conscious experience (1971/1748).

We can be subjected to a parade of images, as often occurs in dreams; or we can manipulate them in consciousness as the poet, painter or composer does. We can store these images and take them with us. We can adjust them at will and create something new. These considerations are true for all kinds of imagination: visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory.

Bernard Lonergan, in his work on human understanding (1958), described imagination as a playground of desires and fears. He went on to describe how this playground becomes the fertile soil for both questions and insights that are so central to authentic learning. In so doing he reaffirms Aristotle’s basic claim in *De Anima* that “mind grasps form in images” (1964, III, 7).

Image and Imagination in an Explanatory Context

Placing *images* and *imagination* in an explanatory context means indicating how they function and then relating them to other events in consciousness. The other events in consciousness may cumulate to *learning* or to *mis-learning*.

First, one could argue that there are two main functions for images: (1) as integrator (pulling things together) and (2) as operator (or cause of further events) (Doran, 1994).

As *integrator*, images can consolidate and economically re-present main features of any experience. For example, suppose you look at a lamp in a room and then imagine it two hours later. The latter image will likely not include every detail associated with actually seeing the lamp. Some features will be included and others left out. You have abstracted some features and left others behind. What you have done is to economically abstract, consolidate and re-present a (conscious memory of a) “lamp” to your own consciousness.

In addition, sensory input and their imaginary re-creations often become associated with numerous meanings and take on the status of *symbols*. As integrators of experience, these images-as-symbols may be understood as oriented towards the past as in the work of Freud. As such, they become “archaeological symbols” (Doran, 1994). Hence the remembered “lamp” may be much more than just a lamp, but a tangled collection of meanings-for-us, intimately connected with our past.

As *operators*, images can introduce something new. In this capacity, images can suggest and stimulate further development and possibilities. In their association with multiple meanings such images can also become symbols; but these symbols are future oriented and teleological. Such a use of images and symbols is closely associated with the work of Carl Jung (Doran, 1994). In

this instance, the pertinent question is not: “Where did this dream (symbol) come from?” or “What does it say about my childhood?” but rather “What does this dream (symbol) say about my future?” and “What could it be in my future?” These last two questions, being more clearly related to an imagined future, are more easily related to the pursuit of a goal (*telos*).

Second, locating images and imagination in an explanatory context means relating them to other activities in the learning process.

As already noted, Lonergan (1958), in his treatment of various activities involved in the learning process, reaffirms Aristotle’s basic claim in *De Anima* that “mind grasps form in images” (1964, III, 7). Hence reference is made here to *images*, but also to *mind* (or consciousness). In addition mind is doing something. What is it doing? It is *grasping form*. This “grasping” is what Lonergan refers to as “insight.” What is being grasped? What is grasped is the *form* or essence of something, or the basic point.

It is possible to have an image without grasping anything, without having an insight, without getting the point. Such grasping and getting the point is an additional event in the overall learning process. In good mysteries one can perceive and remember the clues perfectly well without solving the mystery or getting the point. In English “insight” is related to “ap-prehension” and “com-prehension.” Piaget (1954) in his work on the development of the child’s concept of reality discusses the important role of “prehension” or a physical grasping in the sensori- motor stage. However, in later stages of cognitive development this physical grasping is augmented by a mental “grasping” (or comprehension).

The event of this mental grasping is often referred to as “insight”. *Insight* is defined by many experts as a transition in consciousness from a state of puzzlement or not knowing to a state of knowing an apparent solution to a problem (Davidson, 1995; Dominowski & Dallob, 1995; Lonergan, 1958). Since imagination is the representation of something not present, the event of insight is something quite different from images and imagination, yet they are potentially functionally interrelated.

Images can also be related to *questions*. Questions are a distinct cognitive event. As such, questions can be defined as the recognition of a gap in our understanding, or our knowledge, or our practice. It is a realization that something is missing. Often we must struggle even to formulate the question, and then put it in the right words. As an example of the relation of question to image one can cite the example of Watson and Crick who wished to know what the DNA molecule looked like (Watson, 1968). It was a question in search of an image. With the question hovering, the image of a double helix eventually presented itself, and with the image a train of related insights followed.

Third, locating images and imagination in an explanatory context also means relating them to interferences with the learning process associated with mis-learning.

One such interference is *bias*, which is defined as “the systematic exclusion of relevant further questions and insights” (Grallo, 2006; Lonergan, 1958). To qualify as a bias, an interference must be systematic, i.e. practiced over a period of time. It also must exclude questions and insights that are relevant to further progress in learning: i.e. questions and insights that would change our mind, or make us do things differently.

In addition, some have identified a *dramatic bias*, which is not a blocking of question or insight, but rather a blocking of

images (Doran, 1994; Lonergan, 1958). For example, sometimes specific images are too painful to be brought to consciousness for consideration. This is often experienced in viewing family photo albums that raise painful images from an “unresolved past.” It is often experienced in hearing once again a melody associated with a previous (now missing) love. This general blocking of images plays a prominent and unconscious role in the accounts of dreams offered by both Freud (1964) and Jung (1961). For them, one function of dreams was to allow for the management of anxiety by masking and disguising feared contents. Another function of dreams was for the dream images to assist in the resolution of outstanding problems, and for Jung they could serve as a fruitful source for creative thinking oriented towards the future.

Some Applications

Given these considerations about *images* and *imagination* and the ways in which they can be related to both *learning* and *mis-learning*, it might be useful to formulate some guidelines on how to use images and imagination to promote learning and growth and to reverse mis-learning and decline.

1 *Carefully examine the content of recurrent or dramatic images, whatever their source.*

For many poets and thinkers it is as if certain images keep chasing them, not the other way around. That may be the source of the ancient Greek idea of the Muses. This rule advises that we attend to those images that delight or disturb us. We can begin this kind of exploration by writing about the relevant images and pursuing further relevant questions related to them.

2 *Identify and address patterns of blocking recurrent or dramatic images.*

By following this rule an attempt is being made to reverse the dramatic bias. Such activity, if successful, will open up remarkable new areas of learning and growth. However, sometimes we are unable to do this without help that may be available in counseling and psychotherapy.

3 *Formulate hypotheses regarding recurrent or dramatic images.*

This rule encourages the formulation of possibly true ideas regarding meanings that may be associated with the image. Such hypotheses are possible answers to questions posed about the image. For example, “What emotions are associated with this image?” Considering the image as symbol, “What meanings are suggested by the image?” “Where did the image come from?”

4 *Generate courses of action suggested by recurrent or dramatic images.*

Here one can engage in imaginative dialogue with figures and objects suggested by the images (Perls, 1976). Such imaginary figures could even be parts of one’s own personality (Jung, 1968). Given such imaginary dialogue, one can follow with the question: “What am I going to do about it?”

These rules can be applied to areas as diverse as education, counseling and personal self-regulation.

For example, in education there is concern about *creativity* in learners (Woolfolk, 2005) as well as *independent critical thinking* (Facione, 2006). In general, anything we can do to assist

persons to master their cognitive processes, including imagination, should further the development of both creativity and independent critical thinking. More specifically, imagination, through its potential flexibility, can be put to use in the pursuit of a variety of creative projects. Moreover, images can also be used to summarize the state of evidence relevant to a wide variety of reasoning projects.

In counseling, the use of imagination is often very helpful to clients in the pursuit of their goals. In some forms of counseling, clients are often asked to engage in “guided imagery” (Ellis, 1985; Maultsby, 1971; Perls, 1976). For example, if clients are fearful of failure in a particular endeavor, they can be encouraged to imagine themselves as successful in that area and begin to get comfortable with a changed circumstance of success.

In self-regulation, one can use images in the development of a multi-year plan for one’s future (Grallo, 2007). The plan can be a portfolio of images, questions, insights, goals and strategies designed to shape an unknown but beloved future. More specifically in the plan, the images can serve as inspiring (archaeological) symbols from the past or as motivating (teleological) symbols for the future. These images could be visual, auditory, semantic or anything else that can delight or disturb us towards learning and growth. Achieving greater self-regulation has been associated with a wide variety of desirable life outcomes (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004).

All of these applications should address the identification and removal of blocks to relevant images: that is, all should tend to reverse the dramatic bias. If images are always with us, and if images come to us free of charge, and if images make up an important part of our living, and learning, then what are we going to do about them from now on?

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Bert Breiner



Imagination & Science Fiction

Types of Science Fiction

Think of imagination, and, sooner or later, works of fiction (especially, perhaps, works of science fiction and fantasy) will come to mind. These are areas in which the imagination is often considered to ‘run wild.’ These works of fiction share this quality with some of the fine arts such as painting and sculpture. However, the use of imagination in science fiction varies considerably and on the basis of the amount of license that is allowed to its free play, the genre is often subdivided into three different types: (1) hard science fiction, (2) soft science fiction, and (3) fantasy. In ‘hard science fiction,’ science really counts. Writers in this genre do not allow themselves to contradict any known laws of science. The stories may, and often do, assume levels of technological and, to a certain extent, theoretical advancement beyond the levels achieved by contemporary science. However, writers in this genre do not allow themselves to contradict the known laws of the hard sciences and limit themselves to technological and theoretical developments which are consonant with the current level of scientific knowledge. It is stories in this genre which are often considered scientifically ‘prophetic.’ They often describe the scientific realities of the future. One example, among many, comes from the *Washington Post* obituary of the Chilean professor, diplomat and entrepreneur Santiago Astrain. The obituary noted that “in 2001, he was

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awarded the first Arthur C. Clarke Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award. John McLucas, chairman of the foundation in the United States, said: 'He was instrumental in taking Sir Arthur's 1945 vision of geostationary satellites and making the reality that now connects the people and countries of the world. In a very real sense, Astrain made Clarke's science fiction science fact'" (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/03/AR2008070303468.html>).

In 'soft science fiction,' authors will allow themselves such things as travel faster than the speed of light. According to the known laws of physics, it is not possible to travel faster than the speed of light. Allowing travel faster than the speed of light, however, is essential for many science fiction stories involving space travel. This, however, assumes a major change in the laws of physics as currently understood and is justified only by the possibility of new discoveries which will fundamentally alter the current understanding of theoretical physics. In general, 'soft' science fiction will only allow itself to depart from accepted science to the extent necessary to develop the story line. The term 'soft' science fiction may also be used to apply to stories concerned with the so-called 'soft sciences' of psychology, sociology and even philosophy. Sometimes, both of these elements are combined. A classic example here would be Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series. In these books interstellar space travel and the development of a predictive science of history (based on a highly developed science of psychometrics) are both integral to the story line.

The third subdivision is called 'fantasy,' although there are those who insist that it be counted as an entirely separate genre. Fantasy permits the creation of worlds and universes with laws of nature are regularly at variance with those with which we are familiar. It is the genre of magical universes. Indeed, magic is often an integral element in fantasy writing. An example of this genre would be the *Deryni* series by Katherine Kurtz. This universe, based loosely on the historical period of the Middle Ages,

involves a race of magical humans living side by side with ordinary humans. Indeed, for the magical race of the Deryni, the Christian Sacrament of the Eucharist is often referred to as the 'highest magic.' Another, better known example, would be the two series of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, by Stephen R. Donaldson. Donaldson has created a fantasy world with its own internal structure and a 'natural law' which works on very different principles than the 'natural law' of the world with which we are familiar. It is a magical, or, perhaps better, a mystical world.

Science fiction stories, however, do not deal only with scientific fact and possibility, whether hard or soft. They are stories because they explore the implications of science (or fantasy) not in its own right but in the context of the author's understanding of the human condition. Science fiction stories deal with what it means to be human and what the implications of human nature are in light of our constantly growing knowledge of and ever-expanding interaction with the rest of the world of nature. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the major questions of philosophy are also staple themes in science fiction writing. There are stories that deal with the major questions of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and esthetics.

Given the sponsorship of this symposium by the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, it is worth noting that theology itself has been a frequent theme of science fiction stories. To take just one example, several stories have dealt with the Incarnation of Christ, the fall of humanity and the effect that the discovery of intelligent and moral life on other planets would have on them. Suppose, for example, that we actually do discover a race of intelligent and moral beings on the other side of the galaxy. What does God sharing a human life with us say about another race of beings entirely outside of this history? What does this situation say about the Incarnation?

Three science fiction stories that address these questions come immediately to mind. There is James A. Blish's *A Case of Conscience*, C.S. Lewis' space trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*), and Ken MacLeod's short story *A Case of Consilience*. Each addresses the meaning of the Incarnation in light of the discovery of intelligent and moral life elsewhere in the galaxy and each reaches conclusions with radically different theological implications.

Some Uses for Science Fiction

All fiction and all art imply the use of imagination. I would even argue that all thought implies the use of imagination. For Aristotle "mind grasps form in images." If that is true, then all of the mind's manipulation of images and what it gets from the world can be regarded as an act of the imagination. However, when we talk about imaginative literature or the rich imagination of science fiction writers, there is little doubt that we are talking about a kind of imagination that is, in some ways, radically different what we normally do in everyday thinking. In what sense is this fictional use of the imagination radically different from the way we form and manipulate images in our daily interaction with the world? How is the fictional imagination different from the practical world of problem solving or from our almost daily quest to better understand the world around us and the people with whom we live?

The clue to the answer lies, I believe, in Lonergan's analysis of the basic structure of human knowing which is particularly developed in his major work, *Insight*. To grossly oversimplify, Lonergan posits four levels in our cognitional process. The first level is 'experiencing.' This is the level which provides the input which we then seek to understand. The second level, which presents us with questions for understanding, is basically the level that we associate with those many types of

questions which begin with “who, what, where, when, why, how, how much, what kind, etc.” The third level presents with ‘questions for judgment.’ Basically, the third level takes the answers that we provide for the second level questions and asks whether the answers we came up with are in fact the correct answers to the questions we were asking. The basic question here is, ‘Is it so?’ On the fourth level, there appear questions of value and deliberation.

Now one of the major functions of fiction in general and the science fiction and fantasy genres in particular is what is often called ‘the willing suspension of disbelief.’ This means that when we are reading a work of fiction, we do not generally proceed to the third level questions. In other words, we are not normally concerned whether the narrative and descriptions provided by the creative writer are ‘true.’ The question whether the elements of the story are as we perceive them is irrelevant. We know that we are perceiving a world created for us by the author and that we ought not to expect that the events and descriptions he or she provides will be truthful representations of any other story or world, including the world of everyday ‘real’ life. In reading such works of fiction, we agree from the beginning not to demand of the elements of the fictional work that they present us with an adequate response to the questions presented to our consciousness by the experience of our everyday life.

Fiction generally, and this is perhaps particularly true of science fiction and fantasy, never intends that its stories be subjected to the requirements of factual judgment. For example, when C.S. Lewis has one of his characters travel through space in a sort of coffin-like mode of transportation, he is not presenting some scenario that he wishes his readers to subject to the exigencies of factual judgment. He wishes us to simply take it as given. He concedes that “it is not so.” What he and all science fiction writers want us to do is to accept what might lie beyond these unusual images, whether the images be of intelligent and upright reptiles or of moral crustaceans. The authors are trying to

get us to follow along with weird images in order to arrive at the particular dilemma of the story. Here is the particular value of such works of fiction. If they ask us to accept what might lie beyond the unusual images and often wild fantasies, they are assuming that there remains, in the context of the story, an element of intelligibility even though the contents of the story cannot meaningfully be subjected to third level questions. In other words, even though we cannot meaningfully ask of these stories whether the narrative or the description are 'true,' there is still some meaning which the author intends to convey, some meaning which we may, correctly or incorrectly, grasp as we read the story.

Often science fiction writers are presenting to us a theory. It might be a theory of justice, or a theory of God's relation with contingent beings. Like any theory, to judge its adequacy we would need to examine its consonance with the facts, as well as how well it predicts and explains things. However, in science fiction these theories are presented in terms of images that we cannot test. We cannot go out and find an intelligent crustacean. How then should we react to a message that is based on a series of un-testable images? How are we going to say "yes" or "no" to the author's message?

I believe, in part, that what happens here is that we go back and find analogies between the images presented in the science fiction story and materials in our own experience. These images "ring bells" and jar memories. We know of different places where people have suffered with prejudice, where they have lost loved ones, where they are in quandaries about what to do. These provide an anchor which enables the story to become meaningful no matter how fantastic its elements may appear when subjected to third level questions about the 'actuality' of the events, characters, and artifacts involved in the story. This enables us to get involved in the story without calling our faculties of critical judgment into play. Actually, third level considerations of critical thinking do play a certain role in interacting with works of science fiction and fantasy. It is, however, a limited role. Their initial and

primary function in this context is confined to asking and answering questions about the internal consistency of the story. If some element of the plot or characterization is at odds with other elements of the story, this will adversely affect our appreciation and enjoyment of it. People will say things like, “It just doesn’t work” or “It doesn’t hang together.” However, although there remains a limited role for third level questions in reading works of fiction, this does not fundamentally alter the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ which is necessary, to some extent, for the appreciation and enjoyment of any work of fiction.

This analysis of the willing suspension of disbelief within the context of Lonergan’s cognitional structure will be the basis, later in this article, for our discussion of the role of science fiction and fantasy as a tool for challenging prejudice and attacking bias.

Questions Raised by Science Fiction

This analysis of the use of imagination in fiction generally and in science fiction and fantasy in particular raises some interesting questions and opens the door to some interesting possible applications of the genre, particularly in teaching.

On one level, it causes us to think a little more deeply about how imagination works. If all thought is a form of imagination and the manipulation of images, then what is the difference between a manipulation of images that seeks to be subjected to factual judgment and a more fantastic manipulation which is understood not to be submitted to such factual judgment (e.g. unicorns, flying horses, space travel faster than the speed of light, etc.)? Clearly the fantastic images are composites containing elements derived from human experience, while the images themselves are fantastic. This invites us to realize a distinction between simple and composite images. All of those fantastic images are composite images. They are different from

simple images, like “red”, “round”, “hard.” What is the importance of this distinction in the way the mind works? It may be that this is a more fundamental and important distinction than we often realize. For example, this distinction may provide some insight into the ongoing interest in Anselm’s ontological argument. Briefly, the structure of this argument is as follows: God is the greatest – greater than anything that can be thought or imagined. If God does not exist, then this is a contradiction. Existence is greater than non-existence. Therefore, God exists. When most people hear this, they think it is ridiculous, and it does, in fact, seem to be very easy to refute. “I can imagine a winged horse. That does not mean such a horse exists. I can imagine a tropical island at the North Pole. That does not mean that I can go to the North Pole and find a tropical island. Just because I can imagine something as existing, doesn’t mean that it does in fact exist.”

I think that the reason that the ontological argument fascinates people after all these years is that it rests on the distinction between simple and composite images. The idea of an infinite being may be something radically different from a composite image. It is not like the composite images with which fantasy works. It is a very different thing. And if you add to that a theory of knowledge, which says that there is some congruence between what our knowledge and the object of that knowledge, the question becomes even more acute. However, a discussion of the ontological argument and the nature of its thought images is decidedly beyond the scope of this paper. It is, nonetheless, important to realize that considering how images and the imagination are used in different ways of thinking can raise important questions for philosophy, psychology and theology.

Science fiction and fantasy do, in fact, generally make use of composite images. However, they rearrange images from our actual experience into forms and constructs which bear little or no resemblance to the actual realities which we encounter in the real world. We may well encounter ‘wings,’ on birds and insects, for

example, but not on horses. Yet we can imagine a winged horse and can even imagine how such a creature might function.

It is this ability to construct and to manipulate composite images that enables the science fiction and fantasy genres to be particularly useful in a number of areas. One such area is education and, in particular, overcoming the role of bias and prejudice as barriers to learning. First, let me make a distinction between bias and prejudice. Lonergan, in *Insight*, describes ‘bias’ as a systematic rejection of further relevant questions. It is the exclusion of an insight and ‘to exclude an insight is also to exclude the further questions that would arise from it, and the complementary insights that would carry it towards a rounded and balanced viewpoint’ (Lonergan 214). A ‘bias’ keeps us from even entertaining certain questions for exploration and blocks us from perceiving their relevance to whatever problem we are considering. By ‘prejudice,’ on the other hand, I mean a systematic pattern of thought, the regular application of answers already worked out as assumptions applied in new areas of endeavor and to new problems and situations. Often, of course, this will lead us to overlook important differences which might limit the application of previous judgments and assumptions to new areas of inquiry or to new situations. To the extent that we are blinded to this possibility, a prejudice may easily function like a bias in that it will systematically exclude from our consideration further relevant questions. However, this need not be the case and it is important to realize that prejudice, in and of itself, is not necessarily negative. Its use allows us to generalize and so to function in a complex world without the crippling need of beginning every inquiry completely from scratch.

Lonergan hardly mentions ‘prejudice.’ However, in his discussion of ‘censorship,’ he develops some ideas which are, I believe, related to my understanding of ‘prejudice’ mentioned above. “There cannot be selection and arrangement without rejection and exclusion, and the function that excludes elements from emerging in consciousness is now familiar as Freud’s

ensor” (Lonergan 214). The level of experience is a constant input of physical, mental, emotional and psychic data which is submitted to our consciousness for second level questions (who, what, where, why, when, how, what kind, how many, etc.). We could perhaps characterize Lonergan’s cognitional theory, to paraphrase a medieval dictum, as *experiens quaerens intellectum* (the experiencing subject seeking understanding). If this is true, then it is fairly obvious that our mental health requires a process of sorting and sifting the almost endless data of experience into more manageable amounts of information. This appears to be akin to the positive function of ‘censorship’ in Lonergan’s account of bias. It is also, I believe, the basically positive function of prejudice. The term prejudice is problematic because of its usual negative connotation. However, it is used here in the more basic dictionary definition of “a preconceived preference or idea” (*The American Heritage College Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Prejudice’). Actually, it is used here primarily in the etymological sense of “pre-judgment” or the application of a prior judgment to a new situation. Prejudice, in this sense, assumes that the understanding that has been put together based on previous experience is generally transferable to new experiences. So understood, it is a function of mental health. It differs radically from bias, however, in that it is not based on a systematic exclusion, either of experiences themselves or of further relevant questions. New experiences and new insights can, and often do, challenge prejudices. It is much more difficult to challenge the more aggressive and structured acts of exclusion associated with bias.

Therefore, the task before teachers and other educators in confronting bias is different from the task of confronting prejudice. In both cases, however, the willing suspension of disbelief which is demanded by a work of fiction and, especially, the wider suspension of disbelief required by much science fiction and fantasy writing provides a powerful tool for raising further questions beyond the judgments of initial prejudice and, more dramatically, perhaps, for breaking down the resistance of bias to

entertain further relevant questions. The earlier discussion of the willing suspension of disbelief was presented in terms of a short-circuiting of third level questions of judgment. The willing suspension of disbelief demanded by works of fiction precludes moving on to questions of ‘is it, in fact, so?’ There is, to borrow a phrase from Husserl’s phenomenology, a ‘bracketing’ of further questions about the truth/reality/actuality of the elements of the fictional story being read.

Loneragan makes the following insightful observation about fantasy: “To suffer such incomprehension [the consequence of bias] favors a withdrawal from the outer drama of human living into the inner drama of fantasy. This introversion, which overcomes the extroversion native to the biological pattern of experience, generates a differentiation of the persona that appears before others and [i.e. from] the more intimate ego that in the daydream is at once the main actor and the sole spectator. Finally, the incomprehension, isolation, and duality rob the development of one’s common sense of some part, greater or less, of the corrections and the assurance that result from learning accurately the tested insights of others and from submitting one’s own insights to the criticism based on others’ experience and development” (Loneragan 214-215).

The incomprehension and isolation Lonergan speaks about here are, I believe, the direct result of short-circuiting third level questions of judgment about the images and understanding developed in the second level answer to the range of who, what, where, why, when, etc. questions. While they rob the intellectual “development of one’s common sense of some part, greater or less, of the corrections and the assurance that result from learning accurately the tested insights of others and from submitting one’s own insights to the criticism based on others’ experience and development,” they also reduce the anxiety connected with questions of judgment. It would appear that prejudice and bias operate particularly in relation to third level questions of judgment. This would make sense given the definition and

function of prejudice discussed above. The negative effects that Lonergan discusses in the brief quote on fantasy, relate to the solipsistic fantasy of the daydream. Lonergan refers to them not only as incomprehension but as isolation as well. This is where the clue to understanding the positive value of science fiction and fantasy may lie. Unlike the solipsistic fantasy of the day dream, reading a work of science fiction or fantasy means entering into the thoughts, understanding and mental constructs of someone else. Here the reader experiences the images and constructs of someone else's imagination.

The implications of the willing suspension of disbelief which is required on the part of the reader still results in a certain short-circuiting of third level questions involving judgments of the truth/reality of the imaginary elements of the story. It may well be that anxiety is associated in particular with third and fourth level cognitive processes (judgments of fact, value and deliberation aimed at establishing a particular action or attitude to be adopted in a particular situation). If this is so, it means that a person who has accepted to undertake the willing suspension of disbelief is also relieved, to a certain extent, of the anxiety which would be provoked by subjecting the elements of the story to third and fourth level cognitive analysis. If the analysis of this paper is correct, it is precisely at those levels that prejudice and bias are most dramatically operative. They function to relieve us of the constant anxiety of taking responsibility for the correctness of our understanding. "Understanding" here means the product of second level cognitive processes; that is the result of an attempt to answer the myriad who, what, where, when, etc. questions with which experience presents us.

It might be useful to say a word about the special place of science fiction and fantasy within the world of fiction as all whole. To a certain extent, all works of fiction share in this willing suspension of disbelief and, therefore, have a certain potential for challenging prejudice and attacking bias. We have suggested that the composite images of fiction assure the writer and reader of a

common medium of communication. Even though the story is never intended to be subjected to judgments of fact, the author can hope to deliver an intelligible message to his or her reader. The different genres of fiction differ greatly in the kinds of composite images they use and in their relation to the images of everyday thinking. The more verisimilitudinous the work of fiction the more immediately reminiscent of the images we normally use in thinking through answers to second level questions. The more reminiscent the images are of everyday life, the more likely they are to invoke our bias and our prejudices. Ordinary fiction generally tries to maintain a comparatively high level of verisimilitude and seeks to strike the reader as being as lifelike as possible. Such fiction might indeed be able to provide a level of new experience and/or insight which would successfully challenge a prejudice. It is unlikely, however, that it would deeply impact the more impervious and deeply rooted judgments of bias.

Science fiction and fantasy, however, regularly create images that deliberately stretch our credulity. Winged horses, intelligent crustaceans, thinking planets, these things are not at all verisimilitudinous, and they are not meant to be. They constitute a deliberate attempt to liberate our use of images from the usual and the real. Because they mark such a far-reaching departure from the images of the ordinary world and of ordinary life, they are much less likely to evoke the anxieties associated with our life in the real world and so they are less likely to provoke the defenses of our biases. The more removed from believable images a story is, the less likely it is to provoke the prejudices and biases of everyday life. It is an enforced trip from reality. People who have spent a large amount of time overseas often report that they see their home country and culture in a different light upon their return. At its best science fiction and fantasy take us on the kind of journey that enables us to see our own home in a new light and from a slightly different perspective.

Bias, as we have seen, is the stronger and more pernicious of the two interferences with learning that we have been talking

about it. Bias appears to be particularly deep seated. Indeed, Lonergan discusses it as being operative on the primitive level of 'neural demands' (Lonergan 215-216). It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into a fuller discussion of prejudice and bias. Such an investigation, however, is important. There is need for a fuller look at both bias and prejudice in relation to their role as major hindrances to learning. Particularly fruitful, I suggest, would be a deeper analysis of them in terms suggested by this paper or by Lonergan's brief analysis of bias and 'censorship' in *Insight*.

Summary

When I taught ethics as an adjunct at Audrey Cohen College (now Metropolitan College of New York), I regularly used science fiction stories as a basis for class discussion. At first, the class would simply view the exercise as an amusing application of the ethical theories discussed in class to an imaginary (and sometimes fantastic) situation which was obviously unreal. Of course, that is precisely how many students viewed the ethical theories themselves. For many students ethical theories were (hopefully) interesting products of some philosopher's imagination which were, at best, only occasionally tangent to the real world of everyday life and problem solving. The result was an unusual degree of freedom from whatever biases and prejudices were active in the students' usual way of dealing with the real world. In the realm of science fiction and fantasy anything goes! The result was a free and creative discussion, which, experience had taught, was not as easy to achieve when the subject under discussion directly evoked the anxiety which the students habitually brought to real life problems such as abortion, race, the death penalty, etc.

Eventually someone would make a connection between the totally unreal situation of the story and a possible application to

something in the real world of everyday life. By the time this happened, often the damage had been done (or the advantage won, depending on your point of view). New insights had at least been entertained and considered before the defense mechanisms of bias and prejudice had had a chance to raise their anxiety-ridden warning flags. That is not to say that their effect could ever be completely neutralized, but their force was often attenuated enough to enable an uncomfortable confrontation with points of view that could no longer be as easily dismissed as before their legitimacy had been accepted in the safety of a world of fantasy and imagination. My original use of a science fiction story had simply been an attempt to introduce an unusual element into the course which might capture the students' interest by its novelty. The use of science fiction and fantasy became, however, a regular element of my ethics courses once I saw how these genres seemed able to at least attenuate the strength of long-held biases and prejudices.

I will give an example from own experience of reading science fiction. It is based on Blish's *A Case of Conscience* mentioned earlier. In this story, a Jesuit priest accompanies an expedition making first contact with an alien (in this case reptilian) life form. He is part of the team as a linguist and the equivalent of an anthropologist, only in this case studying alien cultures and psychologies. He encounters a race of intelligent and highly moral beings who have no concept of religion or of any kind of transcendent power governing the universe. He is quickly forced to the conclusion that one of two heresies must actually be true. The Church's teaching must be wrong either in its doctrine of grace or in its denial of a radical dualism seeing good and evil that would see good and evil as two equally creative powers governing the universe. This account hardly does justice Blish's development of these elements in a story which has, deservedly, become one of the better known classics of science fiction. It was one of the first science fiction stories I read and at the time, I must confess, I had a fairly strong prejudice in favor of the Christian

worldview and of Christian theology. Perhaps it did not quite reach the level of a bias, but it was, nonetheless, strongly and only semiconsciously held. The fantastic story of these intelligent and highly moral reptiles was, however, so far removed from the 'real world' and the willing suspension of disbelief required so great that it was possible to enter into the priest's dilemma as presented in the story. There was, after all, no question of subjecting the Church's teachings to third level questions concerning their truth or even their adequacy. There was no such race of moral and areligious reptiles. It was a fantasy world of Blish's creation: it did not exist and it could not, therefore, meaningfully challenge any of these doctrines in terms of their relationship to the real world of human life and experience which was, after all, their original and primary frame of reference.

The experience of entering into the priest's theological dilemma did bring with it a series of emotions. In fact, the role of affect in fantasy and imagination has not been discussed in this article at all, although Lonergan does, once again, provide some useful insights to be pursued in such an investigation. On the cognitive level, the story did have an unexpected and, at the time, unnoticed, effect. I later realized that the author had set up a situation which would illustrate the kinds of information that would be relevant to proving or disproving a particular theological thesis. It provided a heuristic for this particular theological debate by describing the kinds of facts which might be relevant to formulating a third level judgment about the theological propositions being discussed. Did the story change my attitude toward the Church's teachings which were central to the story? No. However, it did broaden my perception of the points of view involved and of the issues at stake. By the time I finished struggling with the conscience of Blish's priest, I could 'imagine' a situation which might call into question the traditional orthodoxy of Western Christianity. With this insight, came a new appreciation for the elements in the 'real world'; facts which, in turn, provided an explanatory context for a fuller understanding of

the doctrines under consideration.

This presentation has been an attempt to articulate some of the questions that arose in the context of my experience using science fiction stories in teaching classes in ethics. It became clear that these stories were able to help students overcome some of the initial interferences to learning and understanding associated with bias and prejudice, especially when dealing with some of the more controversial areas of ethical disagreement. The very tentative thoughts presented here are an attempt to articulate what might, in terms of Lonergan's general cognitional theory, allow us to understand this particular functioning of science fiction and fantasy in challenging prejudice and in attacking bias.

REFERENCES

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All of the science fiction and fantasy works referred to above have been published in multiple editions and several have been anthologized several times. Since none of them has been cited directly, no particular editions are cited here.

Bert Breiner,
Carmen Harra
(left), and Vicky
Malczanek,
moderator





Theodor Damian



**A Poet of the Transcendent:
Mihail Crama, *The Realm of Dusk***

The poetical universe of M. Crama (*The Realm of Dusk*, Ed. Cartea Romaneasca, Bucharest, 1972) runs in parallel to the physical universe in which he lives. This universe is not to be thought of in its actual evolved state only, but also in its primordial state; thus it becomes a dream world from another realm, a world that is to be discovered with surprise, as it is sweet and unmoved. One looks at it as a spectator and does not dare to touch it, lest it collapses. One would not want the dream to vanish.

The poet is somewhere above reality. He looks from yet another time into the past. He asks,

“What age I wonder, what month, what year is above the world ?” (*Desert*).

He lives in a reality superior to the one he is coming from, but of which he is still bound, hence the problem raised by his question.

The look he gives to the world is a diaphanous fulguration, a movement of an angelic wing like a declaration of love:

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“Unknown angels, we beat once more
that part of wing with which we touch eternity” (*Poets*).

The poet is a Hyperion, and the world with its characteristic life, a Catalina full of candor that challenges the reader not to touch her, exactly like in C. Pavelescu’s verse:

“Love is like a poet’s soul
not even your rustling dress would touch it
so that no regrets would get awakened.”

The poet flies above the world but is in constant sharing with each thing; he forms an ontic connection with things that situates him above and inside at the same time.

In M. Crama’s poetry, everything that falls under the incidence of time becomes past, as everything is looked at from the perspective of the present or the future as past, which constitutes the poet’s vision, and also a paradox beyond any egoism: the object of his love is everything he touches and with everything he touches, he enters into communion, renaming it, and thus, confirming its reality.

The poet recreates objects by renaming them. In fact, the world, one can say, is created in order to be incorporated into his vision, in order to be continually recreated. This demiurgic work takes place in constant impact with time which is a major theme in Crama’s poetry.

Through his connection with things, the poet is not a simple spectator of the world but an active participant. Nothing is indifferent to him. He values every thing exactly because of this intimate touch of it with his soul, otherwise pantheistically disseminated in all things.

Every thing has a value in and of itself, even when, in final analysis, forgetfulness will cover everything:

“Time has come to an end
without appeal once the final judgment given
No one knows
Who won, who lost
Who were the judges, who the defendants
Who bore the cross, who mounted the hill,
If there was a cross, if there were more
If there was a river, if there was a sea
If there was a fire, if there was a forgetting” (*Time*).

This forgetfulness seems to be rather formal, alluding to the central theme of Ecclesiastes: “*Vanitas vanitatis omnia vanitas*” (*The vanity of vanity all are vanity*).

Actually, through one’s thinking of them, beyond forgetfulness, things are recreated, as they uphold their value through the Word that originally brought them into existence.

Using the word to create, the poet is obedient to the Word that creates. He enters his world humbly and his humility becomes a major premise and solid foundation of his love for the world, of his consistent attachment to it, sometimes propagated as if yelling in despair:

“When it snows slowly over angels like over things
When the waters rush on and the rocks remain
When all is like at the beginning of the world
Yours I remain – Whose else could I remain?” (*Elegy*).

With time being the major constant of Crama’s entire poetical vision, it is impossible in his poetry not to discover the phases of the natural succession of things in time. Thus, the chaos, the nothing, the creation, the primordial state of the world, are

repeatedly illustrated in particular in his short poems entitled *The Egg*, in twelve versions. In the last one, the poet, from some kind of other existential sphere deplores the beginnings:

“That celestial dome vaguely lighted
The star glittering in the heel
That immense beauty!
Have you vanished, have you lost yourselves
Under the great, first dogma...” (*The Egg*, version XII).

In the framework of the temporal succession of things one can talk, reading Crama’s poetry, about a type of transcendence understood differently than we are used to: a transcendence that is personal, ascendant and that confirms and strengthens the contour of one’s identity.

This is about the departure and the finding again of the “I” in those who were before and through whom the “I” defines itself. Such transcendence reminds one of Heidegger, M. Buber, R. Garaudy and Staniloae, with the difference that in Crama’s works the relation I – Thou is not presented preferentially in linear manner, horizontally, but beyond that, in ascendant manner, therefore, vertically.

In Garaudy’s works, for instance, the transcendence of the person is fulfilled in the horizontal relation I - You; you are for me the condition and the object of my transcendence.

Poetically speaking, in Crama, and here he comes closer to Staniloae, the things themselves receive a personalistic dimension, becoming partner in the second person. This is possible only through the Word who by creating them remained in them and who thus instaures between poet and things a transcendent relationship of vertical type.

This personalized link between poet and things is equivalent to a birth that takes place continually, like a re-birth in fact, like a resurrection, a renewal that is performed through and for the other.

As for the physical birth, this is considered in a strikingly original way, as a loss. The poet defines it painfully in a verse: “I, your son, your splendid wasting”; yet with even more pain, and noblesse at the same time, in the verses entitled *Poem*:

“I was floating in the defoliation of being,
destined to be born from your flesh, from your blood
the original atoms I made them my friends,
with them I was to break out into light
at the same time with the holiest
repudiation of you.”

Childhood and adolescence represent an inexhaustible source for the poet’s anamnesis; he evokes those moments with the melancholy specific to the retrospective look.

The separation from the parents is painful; the parents enjoy the highest honor in the poet’s heart; in this context Crama defines the notion of patriotism, because the home country, or “patria” comes from “pater”, that means the land of the parents, or of the father.

This is how he writes in his profoundly patriotic poem titled *Place*:

“There is a place, somewhere, of the gods of Romania;
There must be father and mother too.
Mother, your dress after love –
Father, your beautiful imperial costume!”

The poet sees life like a flow, exactly like the flow of sand in a sandglass; the primordial beauty of creation is lost; childhood is behind, so is life. How Heraclitian is he when he talks about life:

“Simple elements are flowing in us:
carbon, nitrogen, iron...” (*Neither You*)

M. Crama sees the flowing in everything: in the body, in the world, in time, in what is, in what he does. Flowing is bound to time and to itself; the flowing is death and death is in ourselves:

“The hour is in me. It slowly approaches
Like animals on the prow.
There is no need
Of so much ruse
For a thing so simple.” (*Simple*)

However he is raising vehement protests against this implacable flowing:

“Who has ordained the law – the wretched hour
of our passing into non-existence?
– Oh, the hour of separation from you
round heavenly body emerged from the world’s seas.
How will that hour be
Which will wipe out
For ever the colours,
The trees, the scream –
My whole being broken down in its ultimate protest?”
 (*Who?*)

The stages of Crama’s poetical universe coincide most of the time with the great themes he is approaching. History, for

instance, with its contested and uncontested elements constitutes a major preoccupation in this universe.

The contested elements of history together make a kind of invisible face of the world that is transparent in the visible one; it transfigures history giving it a new meaning, linking it to eternity, which gives a major sense to the human aspirations.

The visible things keep an epiphanic character, the way an icon, through its symbolism, introduces in what one calls the mystery of the presence.

The relation between contested and uncontested makes the life of the subject richer, exactly because the contested things represent a major problem of life. There is a dynamic liaison between the importance of these kinds of things and the measure in which they are contested:

“Resurrection will be denied
with the violence the essential things are denied”

(Legend)

testifies with conviction the poet.

The transcendence of things is the support of their passing through life, through the world, the universe, it is the concept through which death, as definitive end, is understood with less fear and strictness; thus, the values of our existence receive a new dimension; eternity which already inhabits the things frees them from the barriers of death.

Reading M. Crama’s poetry one gets the impression that it wants to be a chronicle of that which happens beyond the curtain of things, starting with the foundation of the world. This chronicle has a double aspect: one of perspective, the other of retrospective. The perspective is bound to the concept of flowing, of transcendence, of eternity. The retrospective is bound to the concept of *anamnesis*. Through anamnesis the value of the past is

kept intact. Through transcendence the value of each thing receives sense and meaning.

The poet's anamnesis is dominated by childhood, and his childhood, as one sees in the entire volume, *The Realm of Dusk*, is dominated by the figures of father and mother. And his feelings for the parents are implicitly those for the homeland.

This coherent linkage of concepts in Crama's poetry is wonderful and especially correct, for it starts from the current given reality, and is transparent both in past and future, and through the prism of patriotic love goes toward the acquisition of meaning. The first factor in this equation is the root of reality and the second, the purpose of its dynamic.

The sweetness and innocence of childhood, and also the dynamic of the reality of life, are very often suggested in Crama's poetry by the image of the bird. It appears in several poems as a conceptual constancy, like a memento, like a motto.

The bird figures the time that flows in Heraclitian manner, as mentioned earlier, and that never ends. The frequency of the image of the winged creatures suggests the infinity of time and life.

One has the impression that Crama's birds are not dying but flying constantly and flowing from one time into another, sometimes coming back cyclically, at other times transforming themselves according to the characteristics of the next time they enter.

The images bird-time, life-eternity represent one of the major foundations of the philosophical reflection in Crama's poetry.

Eternity appears as ultimate answer and natural notion, beyond the protest, itself very natural as well, that the author is

staging painfully, vehemently against an unjust deity for a death not any less unjust.

In chronological order one could first distinguish in his poetry the joy for living a life understood as event, then the realization of death's coming and then the search for and the coming to the divinity in order to protest. In other words, one can distinguish the realization of the strange dialogue between the one who cries and the One who keeps silent, and in the final analysis, the search for a new solution, of the only one left possible: the freedom to fly toward eternity. Here is the protest once again:

“Who has ordained the law, the wretched hour
of our passing into non-existence?
– Oh, the hour of separation from you,
round heavenly body emerged from the world's seas.
How will that hour be
Which will wipe out
For ever the colors,
The trees, the scream –
My whole being broken down in its ultimate protest?”
(*Who?*)

This way of dialoguing with the One who keeps silent brings Crama closer to Arghezi and B. Fundoianu (*Adam's Psalm, The Leper's Psalm, Sulamita's Psalm*), with Fundoianu in particular when the protest becomes indignant:

“I am here
You are there
Like the great departed.
It isn't possible! – I call out
It isn't possible!”

(*Elegy*)

and again:

“A time has come which disintegrates.
Definitely. What an injustice!” (Ages)

This unfruitful dialogue between the One who is and keeps silent and the one who protests, ends up naturally in an obsessive sadness due to the crying in vain, or the lack of response, but also due to the silence in which the cry gets lost, silence that envelopes the one who stands before it.

One can see along Crama’s entire poetry a trace of sadness, present in particular in his 28 elegies (in the volume *The Realm of Dusk*), as in many others as well. For example, the poem *Doina* dedicated to writer and literary critic M. N. Rusu, a poem that reminds one of two other major seminal poems, *Mesterul Manole* and *Miorita*, emphatically evokes a certain feeling of estrangement, solitude and sadness.

In fact, as any look that goes from present to past, the look the poet is giving to things is dressed up in a melancholic garment. He sometimes looks at the world as if he is already dead and is already pure spirit in the high spheres of the universe, reasoning on everything left irrevocably behind, and suffering acutely from the tragedy of estrangement.

In this state of solitude, he doesn’t even notice that he is invaded by the longing for things, longing that brings with it a dynamism absolutely necessary to creating anew through thought, word, and naming.

This level of the relation between man and things is indicated by the dynamics of the longing, as L. Blaga would put it, “dynamic that becomes foundation for the re-creation through the word.”

The longing moves, flows, struggles, explodes, conquers (V. Eftimiu) and this is how it becomes premise for the demiurgical work.

The longing transforms the dream in reality and beyond the pain of separation (not of the abandonment), the poet sees a note of optimism in the eternal giving of oneself, optimism built on search as well, as one can see in the poem *Braila*.

M. Crama is a sentimental writer. The longing and the search are his own. His solitude is justified by his nature only, which is not easily understood by others. Ioan Alexandru tries to define this state of the poet and his or her relation with those around and with the things when he distinguishes between being alone (*singur*) and being withdrawn from everything else. The poet is not alone but only withdrawn by his own will and as such, is not separated from reality.

Indeed, the great mystery of understanding the world consists of this type of withdrawal (*insingurare*), which does not become loneliness. This isolation allows one to look at the world from the outside while continuing to be inside of it, much like when one is in the world, but not of the world.

This state of the poet's relation with the world is about overcoming and passing over and does not indicate a split, but rather, the power for him to uproot himself from self-sufficiency and to bathe in the ray of the heart all things whose light he continues to receive.

The overcoming of the self presupposes the communion between the inner light of the poet with the one of the entire creation. Such a communion with the light that comes from the inner side of things sensitizes the poet's soul and gives him a cosmic dimension through which he can more easily fulfill his demiurgic work. He carefully listens to the life pulsating in things:

“A rustle I perceived around me”
forests or human beings?
A pain
as on the eve of the great light.”

(When I Was Twenty)

Through this communion of light, the poet becomes a liturgist of the Cosmos. His song of cosmic proportions vitalizes everything it touches, everything it penetrates. Through his creative song, through the impact his word has on things, he orders them and establishes the right position of man in the universe.

Coming back to the harmony of creation, of its governance, of nature, one comes back to silence. This silence is not to be understood as renunciation, but as a triumph over the chaos, for the way there is a dynamic of the longing, there is also a dynamic of silence in which the entire creation continues to flow its course. And even if sometimes forgetfulness covers the things, they continue to exist anyway, bringing with them the hope, the possibility and through their sheer existence, even if less evident, the possibility and the reality of their resurrection. And if sometimes forgetfulness covers the things, they still participate, even through their silence, in the life of the world.

In Crama's creative dynamic vision, through the descent to the essence, silence becomes a sacrament. And The One Who Is and keeps silent invites His protesting partner to overcome the protest generated by an external look at things and to penetrate beyond the epidermis in order to participate in the sacrament of silence, of knowledge, and thus, in order to become a true partner of dialogue, this time, through silence with The One Who keeps silent, and through creation with The One Who creates.

In such a type of relationship, the poet is becoming transparent to everybody else in order to facilitate access to the mystery of things and of man. He becomes a window open for the others. He will never be like a mirror where he would just contemplate himself; on the contrary, through the open window of his soul, he will connect with those around him and will guide them toward the word hidden in things. In this way, the poet will fulfill his true mission in the world, which consists of the huge effort not to possess others, but to awaken them to the eternal life, to transfigure those around him entirely in the perspective of their participation, as fully and as efficiently as possible, to the Truth.



Viorica Colpacci



Carmen Harra

Understanding Your Spiritual Nature

Our connection with God

Like everyone and everything, you are made of light. We are not just physical beings, living in a physical reality, but light-energy beings living in a realm of energy.

Your physical body is made up of four elements: hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon. The atoms of hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon are actually made up of the very smallest bits of matter, called particles. These particles are constantly moving around: What appears to be solid or liquid actually is just a lot of space and a very few particles vibrating within that space. In fact, if you pushed all the particles in your body together so that there was no space between them, the amount of matter left over would be a microscopic pile! These tiny particles have matter, but they often behave like waves, or units of light, so even that microscopic pile of “stuff” is actually a cluster of light. We see ourselves as solid beings, but to understand the eternal principles and how they affect us, we have to remember that in essence, we are light beings.

At a physical level, you have a body that is separate from other people and your environment: this book, your chair, the ground you walk on, and so on. But at an energy level, you have a light-energy “body” that’s woven into the grid of energy that makes up the universe. You are part of God and God’s creation in the same way that you are part of life on earth. Gaze at a picture

of a large crowd taken from a distance, and it looks like one mass made up of many dots of color. Your mind knows that each dot is a separate person, but looking from this perspective, you see one, not many. You see unity, not separateness. Similarly, while a prism will split light into rays of many colors, all the separate rays of light come together in that prism. Your light body is intimately connected with all other light bodies, and all energy, at all times. The nature of your light body's relationship to the energy of the universe is summed up by the Law of Totality, which is one of the eternal principles, and one of the divine laws that we need to understand and respect.

If you're very sensitive to energy (that is, you're intuitive), you can perceive the light energy of other beings. Have you ever felt that you're not alone in a building, even though you don't hear or see anyone? Or, have you ever looked up because you sensed someone was standing in the doorway looking at you? You knew someone was there because your senses picked up on subtle signals but also because you sensed a change in energy, or vibration. It's unfortunate that in America, we are very skeptical about intuition because it isn't something that we can control or replicate in a laboratory. We've been taught to value logic and reason, so if we have a "funny feeling," we'll often push it aside or laugh it off as just a quirky experience, but it's very real.

Doctors can measure the energy of a person in many ways: CAT scans, MRIs, EEGs, EKGs, and so on. You might not be able to tell that someone is lying, but a lie detector will pick up on subtle changes in breathing and heart rate that occur when that person isn't telling the truth. Blood, too, has energy, and my blood is likely to have a different vibrational speed, or frequency, than does your blood. Once, when my mother received a blood transfusion, her mood and attitude shifted dramatically afterward. I'm certain this happened because she received blood that had a higher vibratory rate than her own did (in fact, Jehovah's Witnesses do not allow blood transfusions because they consider

blood to be sacred and not to be shared with other people). Physician Paul Pearsall, in his book *The Heart's Code*, wrote of patients who received organ transplants and acquired the personal characteristics and memories of the organ donors. Patients reported strange dreams that, it turned out, were actually memories of how the organ donor had died. The memories and energy of organ donors exist are embedded in the tissues of the heart, lungs, kidneys, eyes, and so on. Someday, scientists may develop machines that can pick up on human energy fields and allow everyone to perceive other people's magnetic fields and auras.

There are "low vibration" and "high vibration" people, thoughts, or feelings. The higher a person or thing's vibration is, the more it is in tune with the Divine. As a light-energy being, you're capable of raising your vibration at any time. If you create a feeling of joy, perform an act of compassion, and live in accordance with the eternal principles, your vibration will increase. If you give in to fear, anger, hatred, and jealousy, your vibration will decrease. Your light-energy body will dim, becoming darker, denser, and heavier. You'll become vulnerable to dark, negative energies that will connect with you and make you think selfish, destructive, and even evil thoughts.

Psychologists say that sociopaths lack empathy and have brain disturbances. Energetically, they are light beings who are vibrating at such a low rate that they're completely unaware of their divine nature and their connection with God. Their negativity manifests as anger, violence, manipulation, and narcissism. You may have felt your vibration lowered when someone encouraged you to be sarcastic, judge others harshly, cheat "just a little," or gossip. In the man-made world, we're taught to ignore our conscience, which reminds us that we're acting in contrast to God's will. When we dismiss that small voice that says, "I shouldn't do this," we lower our vibration and become darker and heavier beings of light.

All of us can actually experience the divine in every single moment and choose to raise our vibration, making ourselves lighter and more luminous. When we do, we become more aware of our divinity and our connection to God. Then we're able to access divine wisdom, love, and compassion and feel energized, enriched, and vitalized. Doing good makes us feel light, buoyant, and united in love with all of humanity. The higher our vibration, the more we feel drawn to create even more joy and love.

If you apply the laws of the divine to your life, you'll live in a sacred and holy way and feel yourself lifted up as your vibrational rate increases. Even when tragedies happen, you'll feel the presence of God comforting you, because you'll have awakened to your divine connection to the Sacred.

In that moment when we do good, we're experiencing God and vibrating at a very high rate. People will experience that feeling for a moment but not realize how important it is. They'll think, "That felt good, but now I have to get back to my To Do list." Our days are filled with chores designed to bring us security in the physical world: grocery shopping, making phone calls, going to doctors' appointments, and so on. We rarely devote our time to the most important activities: loving fully, forgiving those who have harmed us, and so on. So often, people will say they're just too busy to do what they say matters most to them, but what they're really doing is making their fear of suffering and death priority over what's most important. If you died right now, you wouldn't be saying to yourself as you left this earth, "Oh, but I didn't finish putting my bills on a spreadsheet!" You'd be regretting all the times you told your children you were too busy to listen to what they had to say about their latest interest, or wishing you had said "I love you" more often.

We are meant to experience moments of pure love and compassion so that we raise our vibrational rate and become aware of our connection to God. When we recognize our relationship to Divinity, our thoughts, feelings, and actions easily

fall into alignment with what is divine and eternal instead of in being alignment with the fear of death, loss, and suffering.

Our Relationship to the Invisible World

Science, math, logic, and traditional physics have helped us create technologies that have improved human longevity and quality of life. Medicine, sanitation, aqueducts, electricity, and other inventions turned out to be quite valuable for our survival and quality of life. But ever since we came up with quantum physics about a hundred years ago, we've come to realize that what we think we knew about how the universe works is nothing compared to what we *don't* know. At the extreme levels of reality, from the largest to the smallest phenomena in the universe, all the rules about light versus matter and the nature of objects can't be explained according to the rules of everyday reality. Everything seems to be obeying a set of rules we can't begin to understand. What we're seeing evidence of is the workings of the Divine realm, which our human minds aren't yet able to comprehend (although we may be able to someday).

We're very limited in our perceptions. We find it hard to imagine or believe in anything we haven't experienced. When we get a glimpse of the way God's realm works—for instance, we discover dark matter in space, or we learn that sometimes a wave of light acts like a tiny particle of matter, and vice versa—we have no idea of what to make of it. However, these types of discoveries also open us up to believing that there's another reality we interact with, an invisible world operating independently from our own.

People who have had near-death experiences are forever changed because they've actually experienced this other, invisible world. They don't have faith in an afterlife, they have an experience of life after the physical body has ceased to function. They don't need anyone to convince them that they are eternal

beings. Recognizing their eternal nature, they're able to let go of the fear of death and suffering. They know without a doubt that all pain is temporary, and death is merely a passageway into a new existence.

I learned this lesson when I was five years old, when I wandered away from a family picnic to explore the nearby river, fell into the water, and was swept under the surface by a strong current. I remember everything going dark and quiet, and suddenly, I was in a beautiful, lush valley, surrounded by loving, gentle beings. I was so happy there that I wanted to stay, but they told me I had to leave, and instantly, I felt myself thrust back into my body and began coughing up water. That day, I discovered my eternal nature. I also opened doors in my mind, waking up dormant sections of my brain, and ever after, I had intuitive abilities that can't be explained by scientists.

If you've never experienced the other world, you might find it hard to imagine a reality that we can't see, feel, hear, taste, or smell. Yet, you probably have no difficulty "believing" in the existence of another reality called the internet. The worldwide web can't be located in time and space. You can interact with it, but you can't see it or touch it. You can only see evidence of it when you look at your computer screen. How would you describe the internet and its nature to someone who had never seen a computer? You'd probably say, "It's a place, like an information super highway, that you can't actually drive to, but it exists. And you can connect to it very easily, at any time, with the proper equipment. You can communicate to people all around the world instantaneously." Try to imagine how strange that description would sound to someone who has never seen a computer, and yet, it's accurate. The invisible world can be described in a similar way.

If you've experienced or sensed the realm of the divine, beyond time and space, and beyond mortality, you might have pushed that memory out of your mind. Maybe when you talked about this other reality to others, you were told that that you were crazy or that your imagination was running wild, or you experienced a trick of the mind. Unfortunately, most of us have been taught to quickly dismiss anything we don't understand.

Many children still retain their ability to communicate with this other reality that they were a part of so recently. My goddaughter, Elizabeth, was born two months after my grandmother, Anna, died, and when she was two, she saw a picture of my late grandmother, pointed to it, and said, "Anna," then pointed to herself and said, "Me." She did this several times—"Anna, me. Anna, me." Now she is eight years old has a personality just like my grandmother's. Also, a woman I know used to insist as a little girl that there was a man who lived in her house. She claimed this man would watch her and smile at her as she played in the afternoons while her siblings were at school. Her mother told her to stop making up stories, but many years later, when the girl had grown up, she got a call from her mother, who said, "Remember that imaginary friend you had as a little girl? What did he look like? Because I've seen him hanging around the house and he's angry, and pointing to the driveway" (the city was ripping up the end of the driveway to do work underground). When her mother described the man—wearing high-waisted pants, a red plaid shirt, grey hair—the daughter said, "That's him. That's exactly what he looks like." The two of them did some investigating and learned that this spirit was that of a man who had died in the driveway of their home many years before. They realized that he was upset by the changes being made to his space. He stopped appearing after the mother told him he needed to go away because he didn't belong there. (If you yourself ever see a lost soul such as this, recognize that he's confused about being dead and tell him to go toward the light, because this will help him to leave the physical world and reach his eternal destination.)

Accessing the Divine Realm

You don't have to have psychic abilities to be open to communication from the invisible world. God is there, ready to listen to you, at all times. The Latin verb *vocare*, meaning to call or summon, was transformed into the English cognate "invocate." And indeed you can summon God by invocation: Simply say, "God, I need help." But to hear the answer, to feel the presence of the Sacred, you have to banish the millions of tiny distractions cluttering up your mind. If you're frantically trying to figure out how to solve your problems, you won't be able to hear God's response. You must become quiet and still. If you have any thoughts, pretend they're simply words projected on to a screen and watch them fade away.

Pay attention to your pattern of breathing as you let your thoughts become mere background noise. "Breath" is an etymologically fascinating word, believed to have been introduced into human speech around 1,000 B.C. as the Indo-European word *speis*, a word which literally mimics the sound of blowing or breathing out. From there it developed into the Latin *spirare*, meaning "to breathe." But *inspirare* in Latin means literally "to blow into," such as the action of breath transferring sacred wisdom into a physical being. This is how the Bible describes God as having created man: "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis, 2:7). Interestingly enough, *speis* (very close to the Indo-European *speis*) is the Latin noun for "hope," or "faith." The root words of "faith" and "breath" are thus very much alike. Similarly, the acts of breathing and finding faith complement one another: We inhale divine inspiration and gain calming faith with each long, meditative breath.

When you want to feel your connection to God, let God blow hope into your soul. Feel yourself inhale, welcoming in the oxygen that nourishes every cell within your body. Feel yourself

exhaling all the toxins, anxieties, and fears that have been accumulating in your light body like sediments in water. Imagine breathing all of that dark energy out of you, and filling yourself with the light of the Divine as you breathe in again. Don't pay attention to the time and start thinking, "Okay, okay, already, I'm quiet, I want my answer!" That's like hanging up the phone on God! Be patient and keep the lines of communication open as you focus wordlessly on your breathing. You'll feel all the agitation inside of you settling down. Tranquility will replace your worries, and you will feel lighter, because you'll have raised your vibration and opened yourself to allowing God's light to rush in and fill you with joy, creativity, and wisdom. As the great German theologian and philosopher, Meister Eckhart, said, "The spirit of God, like a divine wind, a breath of living fire, blows through living beings, through the world and the cosmos, from eternity to eternity.... The divine wind blows through the inmost essence of all beings." In fact, the very name for the Almighty may be associated to respiration: In the Hebrew testament, God is referred to as Jahweh. This name is said to have derived from the ancient Hebrew verb *hawah*, which means both "to be" and also "to breathe." Some have even said that the tetragrammaton JHWH (just Jahweh without vowels, the original four-letter Hebrew word) parallels the sound of a full inhale-exhale breath; think of a baby's first startled breath, or the heavy breath one draws after surfacing from underwater.

While you're performing this placid exercise of breathing with awareness, remember that God may not answer right away. It may be that you're meant to learn something before you have clarity, but it's important to be open to what the Divine has to tell you. And sometimes, just feeling the peacefulness that comes from reconnecting with God is enough to make it easier to move forward and deal with all the challenges in your life, even if you're not always sure you're making the right decisions. If you connect with God regularly, you return to this harmonious state much more quickly once you begin focusing on your breathing

again, and you'll discover that you don't become upset as quickly as you used to. Answers to your questions will start flowing into you, sometimes quite unexpectedly, and you'll feel stronger and more courageous.

God Speaks to Us Through Our Physical Body

Our bodies are designed in such a way as to remind us of our connection to the cosmos and to each other. God doesn't want us to forget our true nature. Our ten fingers and ten toes reflect the fact that we experience cycles of ten years throughout our lives. Babies complete their first cycle, from conception to birth, and enter their tenth month as complete human beings. Our ten digits also remind us of the sun and the nine planets that revolve around it, because we're supposed to recognize that we're made of the same material as the cosmos, and that we're a part of it.

The lines in our palms reflect our destiny, which our soul knows about but which is hidden from our conscious mind. Our hands were designed to be conduits of God's energy. The hands have an enormous number of nerve endings, so they're exquisitely sensitive to touch and temperature, as well as to energy. We can receive and distribute energy through our hands, using "healing hands" to cure illness and disease. In meditation and prayer, the hands are used to draw in and send out energy, whether the palms are held upward toward heaven or pressed together in order to create a circle of completion, sending vital energy back into the body. When someone is suffering, simply holding her hand or touching her hand can be enormously comforting, because you are actually sending positive energy from your light-body into her own.

The human body is 80 percent water, which is a conduit of energy. If you constantly generate negative energy in the form of angry or envious thoughts or feelings, you'll pollute your body,

sending toxic energy to the tips of your fingers to the tips of your toes. Eventually, those toxins may create disease, weakening your body's ability to fight poisons from the environment. When the body is threatened by an infection, it generates mucous and white blood cells, and uses its fluids to try to flush out the infection. When tissue is inflamed, plasma loaded with white blood cells rushes to the site where the pathogen is located in the hope of preventing it from further harming the body. Life-giving, healing water can restore health, but when it is tainted by negative energy, it can't do its job properly. This is why it's extremely important to rid yourself of dark, heavy thoughts and feelings.

As a light-energy being freed of the physical body after death, you won't experience dark emotions like anger, fear, or sorrow. Those feelings are created in the human brain, and are experienced as physical phenomena (neuroscientist Candace Pert, Ph.D., has shown that emotions are actually neuropeptides in the body, that is, they take a biochemical form). When you feel angry or sad, the fluid in your body moves in response to this emotion, and you cry in order to wash out the dark feelings. Fear causes your sweat glands to activate and your heart to beat faster so that your blood flows through your veins and arteries more quickly, moving any toxic energy through all the areas of your body. Hundreds of years ago, physicians thought that to cure illness, you should cut into a patient and drain some of his blood. They understood that the blood carried poisons, but they didn't understand that the blood and other bodily fluids can be cleansed instead of removed.

The water in our bodies reminds us of our sacred connection to the life-giving water in our world. Our bodies reflect our relationship to our Sacred Creator in other ways, too. Each part of the body is connected to the other parts, physically and energetically, just as each individual human soul is woven into the fabric of the Divine. A friend of mine had minor foot surgery and thought she could go back to work the next day without any

problems as long as she took some mild painkillers, but was surprised to discover how difficult it was for her to concentrate and be energetic. She was so exhausted that she ended up going home early and sleeping for two days. She told me, “I don’t understand why I’m so tired. It’s just my foot that’s injured, not the rest of me.” In the West, we think of our bodies as machines made up of separate parts that can be individually fixed or replaced, and that the rest of our self can operate just fine even if one part of the machine is in need of repair. Every cell in the body knows when the foot is suffering, just as the Divine feels the suffering of every soul, because we are all connected together in God.

Once we understand our spiritual nature, we can begin to understand how the reality of souls and divinity operates. It has its own order and its own laws which can be difficult to grasp in the face of so much pressure to believe that our man-made laws are logical and practical. Comprehending how much wiser and better the divine laws are, we can begin changing our lives for the better.

The Mythical Dream Voyage in *The Cobbler of Hydra*

When the Romanian writer Mircea Eliade predicted “the rediscovery of the function of myths, of religious symbols, and of archaic behavior” in contemporary literature (*No Souvenirs* 119), he was anticipating fiction such as Mihai Niculescu’s “The Cobbler of Hydra,” in which Apollo, the god of Light and Truth, guides a spellbound traveler on a journey of self-discovery. In that story, myth discloses the subterranean, oneiric reality that redeems our lives, confirming Malinowski’s observation that “myth is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force” (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 20).

Eliade, who was a countryman and friend of Niculescu, conceived of a new fantastic literature that would assimilate modern discoveries in psychoanalysis, religion, and ethnology. It would “not be a literature of escape, unconnected with reality and history,” but would “rediscover the epic quality, the narration that the *nouvelle vague* abolished” as well as “the mythical element, the symbolical element, the rites which have nourished all civilizations” (*No Souvenirs* 278). “The Cobbler of Hydra,” which has the immediacy of a dream, epitomizes this new kind of literature.

The first-person narrator of the story is an unnamed Romanian tourist in Athens, resting in his hotel room on a hot afternoon. As sunlight caresses his face, he reflects on the trip that had brought him from London to Greece. The sun follows and guides the narrator, acting at once as impulse and as invitation to

indolence as he gazes through the window at the Parthenon, the temple of Athena standing on the Acropolis:

Over roofs huddling right up to the foot of the hill floats a dark-reddish haze, quivering. In the harsh light of afternoon, barren clefts with infrequent stains of dusty greenery between the edges of rock seem like patches left from a line of fractured columns and one side of the temple, mouldy yellow, expose their macabre, bony nakedness. The picture fascinates me. I run over it in my mind, dedicating it to future tourists. They will not find it in any guide. Such a thing only exists in reality. This *too* is a way of seeing the Acropolis (77).¹

The figure of the Sun God on the Parthenon recalls the cult of the sun god throughout Europe. In ancient Greece, the sun was identified variously as the creator of reason, god of the dead, author of life, and master of the energy of the universe. Plotinus associated the sun with the spiritual and the divine: “No eye that has not become like the Sun will ever look upon the Sun; nor will any that is not beautiful look upon the beautiful” (Grant 148, 172-75). Under the Roman emperor Constantine, Roman coinage was inscribed, “To the Sun, the Unconquerable Companion.” In Niculescu’s native Romania, the sun, the brother of the moon, was

¹ Athenian tour guides Maria Alexandrakis and Clio Mantzoufa describe the aesthetic effect of the Parthenon: “Severe in its simplicity, but elegant in every line; a perfect unity and at the same time the most individualistic accumulation of architectural work ever made. There is not a single straight line in the whole building. The perfect scientific study that created its curves gives us the impression of symmetry and parallels where they do not exist. Conceived by great artists, it was carried out by all the unknown talents who put their heart and soul into every piece of marble, every drum of every column, every drapery on the statues, every movement of horse, man or God. Whether you have studied it in books, seen it in photos, or never known of its existence, when you first set your eyes on it, it is a revelation. It should be seen in the sunlight with its marble grown golden with years against the vivid blue of the Attic sky, shadowed by clouds when every detail stands out, or bathed in the moonlight which gives it the mystery of the sublime” (28-29).

said to live in a palace in the sky. Sun motifs, usually a wheel or curved rays inside a circle, protected wooden churches and the gates of homes in Romania as recently as the nineteenth century (Stahl 25-27).

The sight of the Parthenon, which resembles the skeletal remains of a strange mythical creature, takes the narrator, as if in a trance, on a mystical voyage to an unknown island. Eliade observes that the Greek word for temple (*naos, néos*) means 'ship,' an image that evokes a sacred quest through Heaven, in an enclosed vessel that protects one from disintegration and dissolution, across water that represents nonbeing, darkness, and chaos (*Journal I* 204). Through his dream voyage, the narrator discovers the modalities of the sacred.

The journey seemingly begins on a whim. The narrator suddenly opens a guidebook and reads about the tranquil island of Hydra only to find that he has already decided to go there. The narrative then cuts to the quay at Piraeus, the port city of Athens. There, the narrator boards the *Nereid*, a steamer named after mythological sea-nymphs who were the daughters of Nereus, the god who, according to Hesiod, "thinks just and kindly thoughts and never lies" (Hamilton 41). Soon, the narrator witnesses an occurrence on the ship to port, the *Salamis*, named after a sea-nymph whom Poseidon carried away. A woman in black shrieks, "Adonis!" and spans a small boy who was climbing onto the ship's railing.

The woman's protectiveness recalls the passion of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, for the mythological Adonis. Aphrodite descended to Hades to place Adonis in the care of Persephone, who was so enraptured with Adonis that she refused to return him. Zeus settled the dispute between the two goddesses by deciding that Adonis would spend winter and autumn with Persephone and spring and summer with Aphrodite.

Adonis died while hunting, and crimson flowers sprang up at the place where a boar had gored him. Greek girls would celebrate the resurrection of Adonis when his flower, the blood-red anemone, was in bloom (Hamilton 117-18). We hear a celebratory echo of Adonis' resurrection in Niculescu's story as the *Salamis* departs: "The girls have begun to sing a long drawn out melody with a refrain repeated by all the passengers, who clap their hands rhythmically as the steamer moves away" (79).

From the *Nereid*, the narrator sees men herd a family of goats onto a boat. The men haul the billy goat onboard by its horn and tail, recalling the forced travel of both the narrator and that of the Cretan sailors whom Apollo, in the guise of a dolphin, brought to his temple at Crissa (Rouse 30-34). The first stop of the *Nereid* is at Aegina, an island named for a goat-nymph, and where stands the remains of a temple of Aphrodite.

The sun motif recurs when the steamer approaches the island of Hydra, which the narrator describes as "growing on the background of the horizon like a blue mountain denser and darker than the water, beneath the faded sky where the molten metal sun spins dizzily in a quivering halo" (82-83). The narrator smells the "sickly scent of spices from the island" (83), in a fragrant dream-world beyond illusion. Walking along the quay, the narrator spots a hotel sign that says, "Apollo," the first overt reference in the story to the sun god who is also the patron of poetry, fine arts, archery, and healing. As the narrator enters the house and mounts the staircase, he remembers that he left his bag downstairs. He turns around and slides down the banister just as he used to do when he was a child. The voyage to Hydra conjures a childhood beyond time. Horia Georgescu notes that Niculescu is "continuously obsessed by the idea of the fugitive moment, of the nothingness which is probable but impossible – and unacceptable – and which leads him in his secret heart, to the divine idea" (69). Myth, coded meaning distilled from recurring patterns of human experience, expresses this divine quest.

Inside the Apollo, the narrator finds an old man who seems to have been waiting for him. After choosing a room, the narrator goes in search for something to eat. In the street, the old man points to a café and then to himself, repeating the name “Apollo.” The narrator remembers the mythological names of other people whom he had met during his trip to Greece, such as Aphrodite, his hotel maid in Athens.

While the narrator is enjoying aromatic wine and fish in the café, there appears a hungry cat with a hypnotic gaze, her bones clearly visible under her fur. In an act of kindness, the narrator tosses a fish head and tail to the cat. As he is about to leave the café, the narrator reaches to caress the cat. It gets up purring and heads for a lane behind the café. The narrator has the strange impression that the cat is sleepwalking, treading just above the ground. The narrator tries to walk like the cat by lengthening his stride, but he trips over a stone and breaks the strap of his sandal.

The cat stops by a wall, “waiting, with her tongue out like a fallen petal and her eyelids drawn together into two threads of gold” (87). The cat is an emissary from the marvelous, weaving a fabric of illusion about the narrator in a transfigured world:

I sit down too beside her under the wall, over which, from a tree with sparse foliage, hang red flowers like lilies. I have never seen such flowers before. The stamens exhibit yellow knobs and from between them the greenish pistil, thickening at the tip, protrudes a long way. “Mustn’t the flowers be ashamed of their nakedness? No, they’ve nobody to be shy of, there’s no one to see them.” I take off my other sandal and my socks. I get up and walk a step in the sunshine. The hot stone caresses my soles. I haven’t felt so good since I was a child and went about with bare feet when I used to go bathing in the Argesh in summer (87).

This passage breathes the air of a mythological world. We recall that when Apollo first began to walk, the island of Delos, his place of birth, bloomed with flowers (Rouse 30). The red flowers evoke the resurrection of Adonis, and the warmth underneath the narrator's feet evokes the sensation of childhood.

As he is about to go off in search of a cobbler to repair his sandal, the narrator is amazed:

On both sides of the lane white, mauve and blue wisterias dangle over the wall, violet bougainvillea bushes grow, branches with red blooms like those of the tree beside me spread. And there is no one. In all the houses shutters are drawn over the sleep of the inmates – or perhaps they are uninhabited? The cat is moving away inaudibly with her padded step. She goes along with her eyes closed; only a faint whimpering is heard now and then, as though she is dreaming in her sleep. When did she become so beautiful? Her coat is shining like silk (87, 89)..

The sleepwalking cat mirrors the narrator's dream state as he climbs the whitewashed steps of the lane. At the end of a snow-like tunnel, the narrator sees an old woman in black on a verandah, who is bent over her spindle and distaff. The narrator greets her and shows her his broken sandal. Without raising her eyes from her spinning, the old woman gestures in the direction of the cobbler's shop. Meanwhile, the cat has disappeared.

A few steps further, the narrator finds the cobbler at work in his shop and introduces himself. The cobbler speaks to the narrator in Romanian, explaining that he had been born in the Romanian town of Braila and that because of his chest trouble he had come to Hydra for clean air. The cobbler reminds the narrator of David, a carpenter he once knew in his hometown, Oltenitza, and who had died of consumption in his late thirties -- about the same age of the cobbler. When the narrator was a child, David would polish his whip tops and make them shine. He would also

tell him ghost stories, warning the narrator never to turn his head when called by name late at night.

When asked if he had been to Oltenitza, the cobbler tells the narrator that he had once passed the town in a steamer, evoking the ship metaphor for the sacred quest in a bodily vessel. Death and warmth mingle in the person of the cobbler: “His deepset black eyes with their warm gaze seem sunk in his transparently pale face” (91). The narrator experiences a strange and pleasant calm as the cobbler works on his sandals and brings a luster to them. The narrator notices a new pair of sandals with silvery soles and crossed white bands on the cobbler’s table. Like the leafless calendar for the previous year hanging on the wall, the white bands hint at the finality of death.

The cobbler begins working on one of the sandals, sewing with a thread so fine that the narrator cannot see it. The cobbler guides “the unseen thread like a silent spell” (91). Weaving leads to hypnosis, joining the web of inevitability that connects the narrator to a prodigious reality. Niculescu’s narrative recalls the magical self-hypnosis that some Roman sun-worshippers used to practice and which, as Michael Grant tells us, enabled “its exponent to see the opening of the solar disc and the golden beams of the everlasting light” (175).

After he repairs the narrator’s sandals, the cobbler serves the narrator vainilla-scented cake from a fragrant dream world. The narrator thanks the cobbler, telling him that he wished Hydra were nearer and that he would like to come again. “You will come again,” the cobbler tells the narrator (91) – a return as certain as the motions of the thread and as eternal as the cycles of mythic experience.

As the cobbler sews, the narrator is overcome by a pleasant languor: “I try to say something and actually say it – but my lips remain motionless. The cobbler slowly raises his head and looks at me with a smile. Now we are conversing in silence and I am

surprised how our unspoken words meet, fitting themselves word to word inaudibly” (91). The narrator closes his eyes and seems to hear a murmur that moves inside a light that he senses without seeing. When he tries to open his eyes, a light blinds him, as if he had been too long in the sun. The narrator notices that the sandals are gone. In answer to his inquiring look, the cobbler tells him that they have been taken. The narrator tries to pay the cobbler for his work, but the cobbler refuses money, saying that it had been a pleasure and that he hadn’t spoken Romanian in a long time.

As he returns to the hotel, the narrator hears someone calling his name, but he remembers not to turn his head. He hears the name again, this time from within, as if his own name were but a distant memory, and his very being were dissolving. Passing by an open church, he sees a woman in black praying. As she rises to leave, candle flame flickers and pierces the darkness, lingering insistently as if from a spirit striving to reach the narrator in a life beyond death.

Back at the Apollo, which is scented with apples and basil, the narrator lies down, feeling hot and thirsty. The narrator takes an apple from the window ledge, but finds that it is withered and that it has no juice. Moonlight streams into the room as the narrator remembers the stories that David used to tell about fairies stealing away one’s wits in moonlight. The narrator dozes off, and when he awakens there is a jug of cold water in the window.

The next morning, before departing the island on a steamer, the narrator hears church bells toll. He learns that the cobbler has died of consumption, leaving behind a widow and a child. The narrator runs in search of the cobbler’s place, only to find himself in a lifeless world of weeds, shuttered homes, and a death-like stench. The church that he had passed the previous night has a rusty padlock and appears deserted. He notices a strangely funereal line of ants carrying something in their midst.

As he runs downhill to the steamer, the narrator feels as though someone were chasing him from behind, from his past and childhood. He sees himself running, “as if it were someone else, anyone; who runs because he has nothing to do, because there is nothing to be done; but keeps on running, unconsciously, vainly” (99).² On the ship, the narrator experiences the calm of the sea of non-existence:

The barren sky is lofty; the sky clear, and blue to its depths. Insatiably I listen to the countless swish of the foam, until the peace above and the peace within me spread a single peace, over which a thought that belongs to no one flits naked; and I forget that I still exist, cured of thoughts, desires and all (99).

According to Matei Calinescu, the fantastic short story resembles myth in being a manifestation “of a kind of primordial narrative imagination” that rends “the illusory veil of meaningless” (Calinescu “Imagination” 6; Calinescu “Function” 148). Through the Adonis and Apollo myths, Niculescu conveys the divine restlessness of one torn between love and death. Niculescu has found a correlative to the mythical beginnings of humanity in childhood’s first dawn of consciousness. As Eliade tells us, “every real existence reproduces the Odyssey... the exile must be capable of penetrating the hidden meaning of his wanderings” (Calinescu, “Function” 150). Through his narrative

² Eliade has in mind this sense of disassociation and disembodiment when he speaks of the human instinct for transcendence, the craving to be freed from oneself and to pass over into the other, the urgent need to break the iron band of individuality. Dream, the safety valve of this thirst for transcendence, as well as art, magic, dance, and love and mysticism -- these all testify from various angles to the fundamental and fated instinct of human nature for emergence from oneself and fusion with the other, for a flight from limited solitariness and a bounding toward perfect freedom in the freedom of the other (“Literature and Fantasy” 62).

technique, Niculescu validates archaic thought and ancestral memory as a means to self-discovery.

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