

***OPEN SILENCE: AN APPLICATION
OF THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY
TO LITERARY CREATION***

by

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Above the senses are the objects of desire, above the objects of desire mind, above the mind intellect, above the intellect manifest nature.

Above manifest nature the unmanifest seed, above the unmanifest seed, God. God is the goal; beyond Him nothing.

From the Kāthak Branch of the Wedas (Katha-Upanishad)¹

¹ Shree Purohit Swāmi and W B Yeats, trans., *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937; London: Faber and Faber, 1985) 32.

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ABSTRACT

Open Silence: An Application of the Perennial Philosophy to Literary Creation is a dissertation that combines a creative component, which is a long, narrative poem, with a framing essay that is an exegesis on the creative component. The poem, entitled *The Silence Inside the World*, tells the story of four characters, an albino woman in a coma, an immortal wizard, a dead painter, and an unborn soul, as they strive to comprehend the bizarre, dream-like realm in which they find themselves. The narrative utilizes various metaphysical elements of the Perennial Philosophy for the creation of character, event and setting, and also uses the concept of Imagination as the power and place of creative endeavour. The poem comprises 8,170 lines of blank verse arranged in three-line stanzas, for a total of 62,816 words.²

The exegesis accompanying *The Silence Inside the World* explains the creative value to the writer of the philosophy underlying the work. It does this by examining the artistic and critical experiences arising out of the writing of the poem. The first half of the exegesis, entitled ‘Intentions: *Tzimtzum*’, explores the biographical background of the author, those influences not only on the motivation to write such a creative text, but also on the original desire to investigate such creativity and spirituality in the first place. It also examines those elements of the Perennial Philosophy felt necessary for incorporation into the creative component. The section then delineates the factors Harold Bloom considers necessary for the creation of strong work and considers how the intended creative project may fulfil these requirements. Finally, ‘Intentions’ presents those creative, mythic and symbolic

² Word count includes title page and chapter titles.

materials gleaned from the critical process that are likely to be prove useful for the creative component.

The shorter, second half of the essay, entitled ‘Reflections: *Tikkun*’, examines the intricacies of the drafting process for the poem and for the thesis as a whole, as well as the lessons gathered from the project and its overall success. The section ends with suggestions for further work not only for the present author, but also for others, writers and critics alike. The full exegesis, which comprises the segments ‘Introduction’, ‘Intentions: *Tzimtzum*’, ‘Reflections: *Tikkun*’, and ‘Conclusion’, totals 37,077 words.

STUDENT DECLARATION

I, Edward Arthur Ronald Livings, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Open Silence: An Application of the Perennial Philosophy to Literary Creation* is no more than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signed: Date:

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
STUDENT DECLARATION	5
CONTENTS.....	6
INTRODUCTION	9
INTENTIONS: <i>TZIMTZUM</i>	
1.1 On the Crooked Path.....	15
1.2 First Tricks	21
1.3 Dare Seize	28
1.4 Leap of Tradition	34
1.5 Pens at Ten Paces.....	51
1.6 Applied Intuition.....	81
1.7 Upaya Ensemble	91
THE SILENCE INSIDE THE WORLD	
1. Beyond the Last Gate.....	106
2. Two Gifts	114
3. Stone and Blood.....	121
4. The Service of Names.....	130
5. The Soul Mirror	136
6. Blood Seeds	142
7. The Striking of Shadow	149
8. The Story Game	159
9. Zane's Story	168
10. Jessie's Tale	172
11. Remesh's Account	174
12. <i>Murga</i> Flight.....	180
13. Of Crooked Signs.....	185
14. Leap and Echo.....	191
15. Matters of Trust	198
16. A Vow for Fate	206

17.	Broken Hope	214
18.	The Ice Temple	223
19.	Above the Abyss	231
20.	To Meddle	240
21.	The Cave of the Scylarii	245
22.	Serpent Song	251
23.	The Design in Stars	255
24.	The Sentinel Tree	265
25.	Shultar's Secrets	274
26.	The Next Breath	283
27.	Only Chance	293
28.	The Garden of Play	297
29.	A Vision of Rescue	305
30.	The Death of Shultar	311
31.	Facets of Awe	317
32.	Birth of a God	322
33.	Closer to Home	328
34.	The Call of Dust and Flame	340
35.	The Sacrifice	350
36.	To Unravel Herself	356
37.	A New Poise	360
38.	The Gem of Synrath	366
39.	Another Juncture	373
40.	Prelude to a Death	382
41.	The Song of Unknowing	394
42.	The Rule of Fate	401
43.	Sparks Weaving	408
44.	Always Choice	416
45.	A Surge of Silence	422

REFLECTIONS: *TIKKUN*

3.1	Frenzy and Toil	430
3.2	Transitions of Being	446
3.3	What Comes After	459

CONCLUSION.....	464
APPENDIX ONE: CHAPTER SUMMARIES.....	470
APPENDIX TWO: GLOSSARY.....	484
APPENDIX THREE: AQAL.....	502
APPENDIX FOUR: FULCRUMS OF DEVELOPMENT.....	510
APPENDIX FIVE: FURTHER TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE.....	516
APPENDIX SIX: TYPES OF IMAGINATION.....	518
APPENDIX SEVEN: ARCHETYPES AND PROTOTYPES.....	533
APPENDIX EIGHT: MODELS FOR NARRATIVE.....	536
APPENDIX NINE: CURRICULUM FOR <i>IMAGINATIO</i>	542
APPENDIX TEN: DUAL NARRATIVE.....	550
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	571

INTRODUCTION

I have made thy word to be true before Nut,
and thou art mighty before the gods.
‘Speech of Isis’³

The inspiration and context for a text can be assumed to come from a number of sources depending on one’s philosophical inclination. For those of materialist bent, a text is generally deemed the result of conscious and unconscious thought processes, with possibly a nod to the collective conscious and unconscious of the race. For such people language is often considered the sum, sign and inspirer of all human endeavours, and itself may be a construct of the social environment of the human. However, for those who believe that the spiritual, not the material, is the foundation of the universe and who believe also that the spiritual is the goal of the human being, inspiration for texts is considered likely (and for strong texts, essentially) to come from much deeper (or much higher) sources, from the soul itself, from the spirit that informs the soul, and maybe from the unknowable Mystery underlying all manifestation. One expression of this Mystery is what has come to be called the Perennial Philosophy, and it is the intention of this project to explore how this philosophy can be used in the creation of a text whose aim is to bring a reader closer to these deeper/higher sources.

This thesis has two components, one creative and one critical. The latter is split into two parts that frame the creative component, which itself is a long, narrative poem entitled *The Silence Inside the World*. In his seminal book *The Perennial Philosophy* Aldous Huxley mentions the two classes of scripture in India, ‘the Shruti,

³ E A Wallis Budge, intro. and comm., *The Book of the Dead: The Hieroglyphic Transcript and Translation into English of the Ancient Egyptian Papyrus of Ani* (1895; New York: Gramercy, 1999) 624.

or inspired writings which are their own authority, since they are the product of immediate insight into ultimate Reality',⁴ and 'the Smriti, which are based upon the Shruti and from them derive such authority as they have'.⁵ This division can be applied to the thesis. There is the poem itself, which, as the exegesis will make clear, is an engagement with Imagination, with the power and place of ultimate Reality, and thus a type of Shruti. However, the exegesis is not a typical Smriti. What is not evident in Huxley's noting of the two classes of scripture is that any 'insight into ultimate Reality' of necessity requires preparation, if not for the experience itself, then at least for the transcription of that experience so that others can engage with it. Thus, the exegesis is a type of extended Smriti, for not only does it analyse and comment on the poem (the Shruti), but it also explores the artistic and critical preparations for, and experiences of, the poem's creation. The exegesis also can be seen as an example of what the American transpersonal philosopher Ken Wilber calls 'mandalic or paradoxical thinking',⁶ the mind attempting to reason about what is beyond itself: the transrational/transpersonal realms, those higher reaches of soul and spirit that can only be directly experienced through intuition. Based on this concept, then, the creative component of the project, because it is intended to be an art piece designed to give a reader an experience of those higher reaches, can be seen as an example of 'mandalic art'.

The two parts of the exegesis reflect the two aspects of Smriti suggested above: the preparation and the analysis. The first part, which is titled 'Intentions: *Tzimtzum*', will explore the biographical background of the author—not only those influences on the motivation to write the project's creative text, but also those

⁴ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954) 4.

⁵ Huxley 4.

influences that prompted the original desire to investigate such creativity and spirituality in the first place. It will also examine those elements of the Perennial Philosophy that could prove useful for the creative component either as form and content or as possible methodologies for the actual writing process, its ongoing transcription of inspiration. Furthermore, it will delineate those factors Harold Bloom regards as necessary for the creation of strong work and consider how the intended creative component may fulfil these requirements. Finally, 'Intentions' will compile the approaches and mythic and symbolic materials gleaned during the critical process that are likely to be used in the creative component.

The sub-title for this first part is *Tzimtzum*, a term taken from Lurianic Kabbalah. *Tzimtzum* refers to the divine concealment (or contraction or withdrawal) that the Infinite Godhead performs in order to create the conditions for the eventual emergence of the manifest world.⁷ The 'emergence' of a creative text requires similar preparatory work, a 'clearing of space' into which the Godhead (ultimate Reality, Imagination) emanates a thin line of divine light (inspiration) and encourages those creative and critical processes required to turn the inspiration into a manifest text.

The second half of the essay, entitled 'Reflections: *Tikkun*', will examine the intricacies of the drafting process for the poem and for the thesis as a whole. It will also present those lessons learnt dealing with the difficulties of the creative process and examine the success of the project as a whole. In addition, it will offer

⁶ Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm* (1983; Boston: Shambhala, 1990) 67.

⁷ Sanford L Drob, *Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 2000) 18.

suggestions for further work not only for the author of the project but also for others, writers and critics alike.

The Lurianic sub-title for this part is *Tikkun*, which is taken from *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the Restoration of the World,⁸ the process by which man, through the ‘raising of the sparks’—those elements of divinity caught in darkness—reunifies the masculine and feminine principles of God that were separated during creation in the event known as ‘The Breaking of the Vessels’ (which could be seen as the inadequacies of early drafts). This usage for ‘Reflections’ is a recognition that the project itself is one attempt at ‘raising sparks’ through an iterative process involving inspiration and rational endeavour, and that the divine enterprise itself, if you like, will continue long after the completion of the poem and its accompanying exegesis, with further projects based on outcomes of the creative and critical components.

The major element of the thesis is the long, narrative poem created using the insights gained during the project. *The Silence Inside the World* is a metaphysical epic that features a group of characters who meet in a bizarre, dream-like realm and try to comprehend their appearance there: Jessie, an albino woman in a coma; Zane, an immortal wizard from an apparent fantasy realm; Remesh, a dead painter from the near-future of the woman; and Rynobar, a star-demon from Zane’s world who discovers she is an unborn soul. These characters face each other and their own deepest secrets as they struggle to evade Abzzu, a strange creature of smoke and lightning, and travel towards Mt Alkerii, the dream mountain in the middle of Thexlan, the land that is all lands. The narrative utilizes, for the creation of character, event and setting, various metaphysical elements of the Perennial Philosophy,

⁸ Drob 19.

including the hierarchy of worlds, the superimposition of these worlds, and the soul's progress along the Great Chain of Being (which necessarily involves reincarnation), as well as the concept of Imagination as the power and place of creative endeavour. The narrative's poetics constitutes blank verse put into three-line stanzas reminiscent of the *terza rima* in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

The thesis then is an examination of how the Perennial Philosophy in its depiction of the divine in action can aid the creation of a strong, imaginative text, which itself examines the divine in its aspect of Imagination and story and traces how the soul may evolve towards the divine. As Kandinsky says in his important work *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards.⁹

This thesis can be seen as an effort to understand and possibly reduce that complexity for those interested in exploring the spiritual, both through and with art.

⁹ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. and intro. M T H Sadler (1914; New York: Dover, 1977) 4.

INTENTIONS: *TZIMTZUM*

But by virtue of the Imagination, the universal cosmic knowledge is available to whoever, poet or prophet, raises his mind into those regions: ‘One thing alone makes a poet’, Blake affirmed, ‘Imagination, the Divine Vision’.

Kathleen Raine¹⁰

¹⁰ Kathleen Raine, *W B Yeats and the Learning of the Imagination* (Ipswich: Golgonooza, 1999) 94.

1.1 On the Crooked Path

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
Alfred Tennyson, ‘Ulysses’¹¹

Over twenty years ago I wrote my first novel, a fantasy entitled *The Rainbow God*. After re-writing it several times I submitted it to publishers and began work on a trilogy¹² that was to comprise a prequel to this book.¹³ I never finished that trilogy, the complexities I’d introduced into the plot being beyond my capacity at the time to unravel. As for *The Rainbow God*, it was rejected a number of times and was eventually relegated to my filing cabinet, along with the ‘trilogy’ drafts.

During the later stages of this period I discovered a love of poetry, and this probably contributed to my diminishing interest in speculative fiction; other reasons were the preponderance of what I saw as formula books, ‘fat fantasies’ and the like, and the dominance of overblown theme series.¹⁴ For almost ten years I devoted myself to writing poems, with occasional forays into short fiction. However, one character from my ‘trilogy’ kept nagging me. His name was Zane, a young idealistic magician and seeker of wisdom.

When I first wrote about Zane he was a minor character in the first novel of the prequel trilogy. In this novel, tentatively entitled *Choices*,¹⁵ Zane was part of an order of magicians called the N’Dami. These were not black or white magicians, but

¹¹ Alfred Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson: Selected Poetry*, ed. and intro. Douglas Bush (New York: The Modern Library, 1951) 90.

¹² Inspired by the success of J R R Tolkien’s three-volume novel *The Lord of The Rings* (which was actually a tale comprising six ‘books’) trilogies were then, and still are, *de rigueur* in the fantasy genre. Indeed, it is not unheard of to have multiple trilogies or more involving the same characters and/or worlds. Robert Jordan’s *The Wheel of Time* currently stands at 12 volumes, a prequel and 11 books in the series.

¹³ Though a prequel is nominally one book, in the speculative fiction genre the prequel can comprise any number of books whose events occur before those of the original book and are related to its story in some way.

¹⁴ For example, while I enjoyed the first three *Dune* books, the quality of writing and idea decreased rapidly as the series continued, so that the series became to my mind purely a money-spinner.

colour magicians,¹⁶ an idea I had found in a book by Philip Bonewits, who in 1970 received the world's first Bachelor of Arts degree in Magic and Thaumaturgy. His system, based on 'pagan, nonliterate, and associational classifications of colors',¹⁷ and related in some degree to the chakra system, divided magic into domains that suit a magician's skills and interests and are not judgements of a practitioner's moral standing. Red Magic deals with the body and so involves killing and healing. Orange Magic deals with ego-strength and materialism, as well as the physical and economic sciences. Brown Magic deals with hunting, the wilderness and the ecological sciences. Yellow Magic involves the mental sciences, such as mathematics, logic and philosophy, as well as learning (hence the sub-title of his book), and is the colour of Thaumaturgy, 'the art and science of wonderworking'.¹⁸ Green Magic includes 'the botanical sciences, fertility and creativity, beauty and art'.¹⁹ Blue Magic deals with emotions, the social sciences, religions, theology, and is the colour of Theurgy, the use of 'magic for religious purposes, for "attaining salvation"'.²⁰ Indigo Magic is the colour of weather control and other sciences of the sky. Purple Magic refers to violent and physical passions, and the political sciences. Ultraviolet Magic deals with pure power in the psychic realms.²¹

¹⁵ The first and second novels of the prequel trilogy were only written to first draft stage.

¹⁶ Philip Emmons Isaac Bonewits, *Real Magic: An Introductory Treatise on the Basic Principles of Yellow Magic* (1971; London: Open Gate, 1972) 122-124.

¹⁷ Bonewits 119.

¹⁸ Bonewits xiii.

¹⁹ Bonewits 122.

²⁰ Bonewits 224.

²¹ It might then be said that this dissertation is a mixture of Yellow Magic (the exegesis being an examination of the art of literary 'wonderworking'), Green Magic (*The Silence Inside the World* being an art piece), and Blue Magic (because the poem attends to metaphysical matters).

In *Choices* Zane was an apprentice Yellow Magician, one of those who studied magic but was not usually a practitioner. After a crisis of faith about the laws of the universe, during which he tried to kill himself, Zane left the story to pursue his quest for wisdom. I was so taken by his character and his quest—Where and how does one find absolute wisdom? (my own interest then and now)—that I made him the main character of the second trilogy novel, *The Cobwebs Clear*.²² This may have been the reason for my not being able to complete the trilogy; I was writing two stories, the one started in the first book, a formulaic good magicians versus evil magicians tale, with a bit of modern technology thrown in (the setting was in the near future of Earth, after a world war that somehow had opened up the powers of magic), and the one involving Zane’s quest, which was more along the lines, I realized some years later, of Hermann Hesse’s eponymous protagonist in *Siddhartha*.

Even as I wrote poetry and tried my hand at literary fiction, Zane still plagued my imagination. Over the years I delved into his character and his world, both in my journal and in occasional short story drafts. Yet this delving seemed incomplete, unsatisfactory, as evident in the many false starts to, and alternative skeleton versions of, his story. This work was compounded by the arrival of another character that also nagged at my imagination. Her name was Jessie Willis,²³ a young albino woman who was a student of ancient literature and who somehow had an intuitive connection with Zane, though they were of different universes. They wanted their story told, but I wasn’t sure what their story truly was. It was as if I were lacking in some specific combination of craft and, more importantly, philosophical and spiritual knowledge—

²² The titles of the prequel book were obviously working ones only, though they did seem appropriate at the time, the naivety of the beginner writer.

how could I write about a successful quest for wisdom when I hadn't discovered such wisdom during my own years of reading, writing, meditating, and the studying of higher order mathematics, music, and martial arts (more of this later). I had become stuck, and I wasn't sure where to look.

I began to acquire the requisite craft during my further explorations into poetry and fiction and from my literary studies. The spiritual and philosophical knowledge didn't come quite so easily, as I wasn't sure what was needed for the story. Then I encountered the Perennial Philosophy as detailed in the critical works of the English visionary poet Kathleen Raine.

For a writer interested in works of the imagination, of which, in poetry, the Romantic poets are exemplars and, in fiction, tales of the weird and fantastic are a type, the Perennial Philosophy was a liberating discovery. As Raine puts it, the 'Perennial Philosophy in all its branches holds that not matter but mind—consciousness—is the ground of reality as we experience it'.²⁴ This basic tenet not only appealed to my own intuitive experience, but also to my lyric and dramatic instincts. My interest in the philosophy increased when I discovered the concept of the Great Chain of Being, as here described by Ken Wilber, who has been investigating structures of consciousness, especially as delineated in various Eastern and Western mental therapeutic systems, for many years:

According to the perennial philosophy, reality consists of several different levels or dimensions, from the least real to the most real. This is the Great Chain of Being,

²³ The character's name when she first appeared in my imagination was Keea Willex, but to avoid confusion I will use the name she is known by in the completed narrative, as I will do for any other characters that appear in the exegesis.

²⁴ Kathleen Raine, *From Blake to A Vision* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1979) 5.

reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Matter, body, mind, soul, spirit—those are five levels or dimensions. Some traditions have seven levels—the seven chakras, for example. Some traditions just have three levels—body, mind, and spirit. Some traditions have literally dozens of levels... The point is that in human growth and development, the Witness, or real Self capital S, starts out identified with the material self, then the bodily self, then the mental self, then the soul self, and finally reverts to, or awakens to, its own true nature as spirit. Each stage includes the previous stage, and then adds its own unique aspects in order to form a larger union, until there is ultimately a union with the All.²⁵

It began to dawn on me that Zane's story was connected with the search for the All, for ultimate knowledge, and that the dramatic tension in his story, both internally and externally, might arise from his misconceptions of this knowledge and the application he makes of these misconceptions. Thus, it became obvious that appropriate study of the Perennial Philosophy and its elucidations might not only reveal methodologies for a structuring of Zane's quest, but also provide details for setting and character.

The goal then is for *The Silence Inside the World* to be a strong, imaginative record of one man's search for ultimate knowledge and of his application of that knowledge. The use of the word 'strong' recalls the way Harold Bloom talks of those poets who can misread their precursors and create worthwhile works:

Poetic history, in this book's argument, is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves... My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death.²⁶

²⁵ Ken Wilber, *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killam Wilber* (1991; North Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1994) 100.

²⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; New York: Oxford UP, 1975) 5.

Though Bloom seems here to be referring to poets only, his thesis can be applied to any sort of writer, as he himself implies in his comments about Norman Mailer, whom he sees as trying to evade the influence of Hemingway.²⁷ My precursor in the field of fantasy, as he seems to be for most mythopoeic writers, may well be J R R Tolkien. Other precursors, given that I originally planned for *The Silence Inside the World* to feature poetry as well as prose, would certainly be the Romantic poets, who foregrounded the importance of the Imagination and attempted to reveal the reality that lies behind the ordinary. This reality is a central concern of the Perennial Philosophy and, as Kathleen Raine has discussed in her writings, the Romantic poets were fully aware of this and were part of a tradition stretching back to at least Ovid and forward to Yeats:

Indeed, the entire European tradition of imaginative poetry, with all the rich variety of image in which ancient and enduring themes have been dressed, in various places and at different times, proves to be strung upon a single thread. To find this thread in one poet is to hold a clue to all; Yeats and Shelley, Blake and Milton, Dante, Virgil, Ovid, Spenser, and Coleridge all speak with the same symbolic language and discourse of the immemorial world of the imagination.²⁸

As this exegesis will soon make evident, to know of such tools is one thing, to be able to utilize them appropriately and significantly is another. And there is always in any endeavour that mixes philosophy and story the challenge of preventing that philosophy from dictating rather than aiding the creation of the text:

True imaginative learning is a search for truth and reality, not for information as such or in the service of some theory or ideology.²⁹

²⁷ Bloom 28.

²⁸ Kathleen Raine, *Defending Ancient Springs* (1967; West Stockbridge: Lindisfarne, 1985) 94.

²⁹ Raine *Learning*, 83.

1.2 First Tricks

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind'³⁰

Threshold

It is Friday night and you have come to pick up the singer/bass player of your group for your weekly garage practice session. On his bed is a thick paperback with a yellow cover and the picture of a mythical landscape seen through a frame of dark trees. As you pick it up, your friend says, 'I couldn't get into it. Nothing happens in it for ages. Anyway, you're more into science fiction, aren't you?' You open the book and read the first few words, 'This book is largely concerned with Hobbits', and keep reading it even when your friend is ready to go. He says you can borrow it. You finish the book before the weekend is out, and have read your own copy, the three volume edition, more than half a dozen times since. When the group needed a name you suggested Strider, the name of one of the central characters, and it was accepted.

Before expanding in this section and the next on the discoveries and intentions mentioned in 'On the Crooked Path', I will provide more details about my creative interests and activities, to set the ground, so to speak, of and for the unfolding of the project itself.

³⁰ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H Reiman and Sharon B Powers, (New York: Norton, 1977) 223.

Some of my earliest reading, possibly because my father was in the Air Force during World War II, was war literature, both fiction (especially the Biggles books) and non-fiction: *Dardanelles Patrol*, *The Frogmen*, *The Colditz Story*, *The Dam Busters*. For many years I wanted to join the Air Force and become a fighter pilot. However, when I eventually applied and went in for the battery of tests, the recruiting officer took one look at my spectacled face, showed me directly to the eyesight testing room, and pronounced that my eyes were so bad I wouldn't be able to enlist as a cook's assistant. Naturally I was disappointed, but this was more because of the detail of the rejection than the rejection itself—I was already at an age when I was questioning my direction and was becoming more attracted to the freedom of university and my imagination than to the regimentation of military life.

The first 'real' book I ever read, long before the military took hold, was a 300-page version of the life of Robin Hood, and this inspired my interest in classic Boys' Adventure stories. These included books such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *Treasure Island*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Kidnapped*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *Around the World in Eighty Days*, as well as Enid Blyton's Famous Five and Secret Seven stories. I also collected Phantom, Green Lantern and Spider-Man comics for many years, though was constantly reminded by my parents that such reading fare was childish. Eventually I progressed from these texts of hero-adventure and wish-fulfilment to forbidden ones like Ian Fleming's James Bond books, read using torchlight under the bedclothes.

Around this time I developed a fascination for science fiction, partly because of TV shows such as *Outer Limits*, Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone*, and *Star Trek*, partly because of the general interest at the time in space travel, and partly, I think now, as a form of escapism from a difficult childhood. I read all the books written by the big three of science fiction, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C Clark and Robert Heinlein (and

particularly loved the idea of Future Histories), plus other SF masterpieces, such as the hard technology book *Mission of Gravity* (my father's favourite). I moved from these to the works of A E van Vogt, especially *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*, an obvious influence on the Star Trek scenario (with its first part, originally published as the short story 'Black Destroyer', also cited as a source for the film *Alien*), and the Null-A novels. Then came books exploring 'softer', more social issues, as in those written by Ursula Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Dispossessed*, *The Lathe of Heaven*. As the sixties progressed my appreciation of speculative fiction in the media moved from the original Star Trek to *2001: A Space Odyssey* (my all-time favourite film for many years) and the TV show *The Prisoner*. The latter starred Patrick McGoohan as a former secret agent who is taken to The Village, a surreal retirement home/prison camp for spies in which everyone is addressed by a number (he is Number Six) and from which he tries to escape time and again, only to be caught by weird balloon-like entities. Eventually he becomes Number One.

Early in this period I tried to combine my interest in spy heroes and science fiction by writing a story of an Australian secret agent (inspired by the Australian TV spy drama *Hunter*) who lived on a small yacht (my aunt and uncle owned one) and who rode a black Triumph motorbike he called Bess (my father raced motorcycles at Victoria Park before he was married). The character's name was to be Dick Turpin, or some variation of this (I had just seen a mini-series on that famous highwayman, whose horse was Black Bess). The story would involve Dick investigating the existence of an UFO (another of my interests at that time) under Ayres Rock (which I had visited during a Scouting holiday). The first scene featured Dick's yacht being blown up and Dick escaping the blast and the oil-flames on the surface because he has good lungs from snorkelling and scuba-diving activities (I had been a keen skin-diver

for a while). I wrote four hand-written pages, then stopped, mainly because I had no idea how to plot out such a story, or how to match my words to my ideas. I never showed the pages to anyone, or said anything about being interested in writing. I don't think I even considered being a writer at that stage. I was inspired by a concatenation of separate passions and then the inspiration passed, or was pushed aside because it was too hard to handle, too hard to reveal, too hard to accept. I kept the pages for many years but eventually misplaced them.

Such reading and such creative hints obviously exemplified and influenced many typical male childhood fantasy career wishes—fighter pilot, submarine commander, astronaut, racing car driver, secret agent, super hero. Yet, they also introduced themes and exemplars, conscious and unconscious, that might shape a creative personality's efforts to find an appropriate mode of expression in which to explore not only these conscious and unconscious elements, but also those pressures that drew out the creative trajectory in the first place, the quest for authenticity.

During my Catholic secondary school education I moved from Form 1B to Form 2A and was thrilled with the transition. I had made it to the A stream, the stream that studied languages instead of technical drawing, the stream comprising the more intelligent of the students, though both streams (unlike the other 'lower' ones) also studied mathematics and science, the epitome of fifties' and sixties' education value. It didn't matter that I went from being at the top of the grade to being in the middle. It didn't matter that my English and language scores were always the same level as my maths and sciences. It didn't matter that I wore glasses. All I was interested in for a long time was gaining knowledge in those subjects that would help me join the Air Force. I was travelling the path I thought I wanted, and wasn't able to acknowledge any intuition that there were other paths more appropriate. However,

this intuition was strong enough to find a way of breaking through. In my final year I, along with many others inspired by the burgeoning popular music industry, took up guitar.

When I went to university to study the sciences I joined a garage band and practised every chance I could. There was an excitement in four people producing a song that soared with, and into, its own energies. There was a freedom, when playing lead, in allowing the fingers to find a true and beautiful melodic dialogue with the song, the music coming ‘from memory, from synthesis of memory, and from nowhere’.³¹ There was an impetus even to build on these excitements and freedoms, to embrace a career in rock music, where ‘we can do what we love’ all the time. However, other band members wanted to finish uni first or consolidate their jobs, and I had to admit I too should probably finish my course, ‘as a back-up’. This may have been a failure of nerve on all our parts, or quite a sensible decision considering the career choices we all eventually did make. Still, we kept at our practice sessions, built up a solid repertoire of creative covers, and started playing gigs. We even began to talk about writing original material, and I was designated the lyricist. Yet my early song lyrics (which I had started to write even before joining the group, on brown bottle bags from the pub at which I worked) were awkward and unsuitable for exposure, and the band situation changed before I could build on these efforts.

During this time I was studying Applied Mathematics and, by my third year of university, was excited by Special Relativity and Quantum Mechanics. I was so taken

³¹ Mark Domoney, well-known Australian session guitarist who has performed on countless TV and variety shows and played with almost everybody in the industry, including John Farnham, Olivia Newton John, Broderick Smith, Kate Ceberano, in a recent (2005) private conversation about inspiration in music and literature.

with the idea of this quest for the fundamental laws of the universe that, instead of taking up a job offer in the computer industry at the end of the year, I stayed to complete my Honours, my thesis being on Black Holes. I fully intended to pursue an academic career in cosmology, but was unhappy with the penury of a student and so applied for the Public Service. I also enrolled in an MSc, but the topic offered by my supervisor was an investigation of the intricacies of an equation in tensor mathematics, a project too divorced from the deep questions in which I was interested, and I soon let my enrolment lapse.

There were other changes. For some time I had been uncomfortable with the inequality in the ‘roadie’ workload of the various members in *Strider*. This, along with the dawning of another creative interest, made it easy for me to leave the group, which I did a short while after I started working for the PMG.³² The new interest was kung fu (I had joined a club during the summer holidays after finishing fourth year), and I trained heavily for several years, eventually gaining a ‘black sash’, the equivalent of a black belt. Here was an endeavour that didn’t rely on other people (other than instructors, if they didn’t turn out to be charlatans). I enjoyed the gaining of physical skills, the freedom in letting the body move in defence or attack of its own accord, and the developing of my philosophical interests, which had been a major factor in my originally contemplating the martial arts as a possible domain of mastery.

I had been raised a Catholic by a mother who attended church rarely and a father who was christened Church of England yet was fundamentally an atheist.

³² Post Master General’s Department, which was split up into Australia Post and Telecom Australia (now Telstra) about six months after I joined.

However, in my teenage years I discarded the teachings of Catholicism as too dogmatic and restrictive in its views on sexuality, and too dismissive of other modes of contacting the divine. I became interested in alternative fields of knowledge: ESP and parapsychology, UFOs and ancient astronauts, Eastern philosophies and the esoteric. Kung fu thus gave me an active forum for exploring the connections between the world of man and the world of the Spirit (or whatever name one gave it: Buddha, the Tao, the One, Consciousness, Jesus the Imagination, Kether), though eventually I grew dissatisfied with the art form, seeing much greediness and guru-mentality. I continued my training irregularly for many years, but did not stay with any school or system for too long. I was searching, but still had no idea for what. And this search was being waylaid by the exigencies of 'normal' life: job, courtship, marriage, the approach of children. Such social commitments were important and joyful contributions to life, so maybe, as some loved ones did think, my old intuitions of creative meaning were merely fads in the way of valid life purpose. Or maybe not.

1.3 Dare Seize

Anyone who has ever been visited by the Muse is thenceforth haunted.³³
T S Eliot

Threshold

You have spent months on a research project of your own design. The results are in and you must write your report. You had learnt about such writing at university when recording chemistry and physics experiments, but this is your first professional report. You scribble notes on small cards, throw them on the floor, arrange them into an appropriate structure, handwrite a draft. Now it is time to type up your draft for submission to the typing pool, for you know no one there would be able to read your scrawl. You enter the computer room, the soft whirr of magnetic tapes in their housings, the chrome sparkle of sentinel consoles, your footsteps too loud on the cork floor with its straightened bundles of cables stretched across. You approach the teleprinter, which a colleague told you could be used as a typewriter when disconnected from the CPU. You sit down, test the pressure of keys, start. As the minutes disappear into word absorption, and the continuous-roll paper output mountains behind the machine, you feel excitement crackling through you. The ideas are yours, the words are yours, the effort is yours. Someone else will read this and comprehend the parameters and success of the project, will understand. Your fingers cramp and their tips tingle as you re-read the completed draft.

While I was working at Telecom I met a fellow SF reader. We spent every lunchtime playing chess and discussing the conceptual and philosophical questions that the

³³ Quoted by Walter Allen, ed., *Writers on Writing* (London: Phoenix House, 1948) 46.

better books raised. Eventually we decided that, as there were too many ‘crap’ books,³⁴ books that weren’t stimulating our ‘sense of wonder’,³⁵ we would write our own. We spent months plotting out the story of Arve and Arken, who belong to a pre-industrial world that they discover is part of an experiment by interstellar travellers. I was to write the first chapter, he was to write the second, and so forth. I wrote my chapter, but he didn’t.³⁶ Although the novel was to remain unwritten, I was thoroughly caught by the exhilaration of creating a story for others to read, of creating a living world of character and action and exotic setting, something that would be notches above my earlier experience of translating research into text.

I enrolled in a correspondence course, attended classes at the Council of Adult Education (CAE), and started writing science fiction short stories. One featured a Sherlock Holmes character (I had read Conan Doyle when younger) solving the death of a scientist in a closed room that contained a super-computer, while another explored the situation of a brain removed from its dying body. Although I read scientific journals in the research laboratory in which I worked as a mathematician, I soon found I was not interested in the research needed to write such hard technology stories, and I moved on to fantasy. Under the influence of Robert Howard I wrote sword and sorcery stories, and under the influence of H P Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith I produced ‘weird tales’.

³⁴ I had not at this time discovered Sturgeon’s Law (originally referred to as Sturgeon’s Revelation), which was apparently first mentioned by Theodore Sturgeon, author of such SF classics as *More than Human* and ‘Slow Sculpture’, at the World Science Fiction Convention of 1953: ‘Ninety percent of science fiction is crud [crap]. But then ninety percent of everything is crud, and it’s the ten percent that isn’t crud that is important.’ Source: <http://www.physics.emory.edu/~weeks/misc/slaw.html>, 23/11/05.

³⁵ As defined by Sam Moskowitz (ed.) in the introduction to *A Sense of Wonder*, an anthology of science fiction short novels, ‘a sense of wonder’ is that quality that imparts ‘an emotional breathlessness as well as intellectual stimulation’ (London: New English Library, 1967) 7.

³⁶ He has since gone on to head up his own telecommunication company, and has admitted that his ‘bliss’ (see footnote 96) comes during boardroom negotiations.

I managed to publish some pieces in a local university SF magazine,³⁷ but had no luck with the professional publications. As I read more in the field and learnt more craft, I decided to try my hand at the novel form, for I perceived that genre as more likely to lead to critical and financial success. I wrote the novel drafts mentioned earlier, but was once again unable to obtain publication. Undeterred, and because I had found a character that fascinated me, I returned to the short story and novella forms. I also had started writing poetry.

When I left *Strider* I did not abandon my lyrical interests. Having always been a book-nerd at my single sex school and a stunned rabbit at dances and parties, I had great difficulty in relating to the opposite sex, or even being able to express my feelings. I found the writing of poems to girlfriends a valuable communication tool (though I was eventually to discover that no matter how well such things are written, good verbal and touch communication is mandatory for navigating troubled relationships). Although sincere, the pieces I wrote were amateurish, being full of platitudes, clichés and flowery language put into verse forms half-remembered from English classes at school, with clunking rhythms and rudimentary rhymes. I didn't think to read poems for knowledge of craft or content; all I was intent on doing was putting my feelings down for those who usually liked what I wrote about them and us. I wasn't trying to be a poet. I didn't really know they existed. And then I met one; several in fact, but one in particular.

One of the workshops I attended at the CAE was entitled Fantasy Writing. This was exactly what I was looking for, until I sat down in the front row and discovered that the tutor was a well-known Australian poet and, although the session

³⁷ *Yggdrasil*, published by the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association.

was primarily looking at how to use fantasy in one's writing, most of the writers present were poets and the general thrust of the exercises were towards poetic expression. I found myself striving to construct the fantastic in verse, for I had not written anything 'confessional' as yet and my only verse models were the songs Tolkien put into his stories, the Shakespeare, Lawson and Paterson I had been exposed to at school, and the magical chants garnered from fantasy and horror stories. I struggled through the day-long workshop, yet was inspired enough to think about poetry as an art form and not just as an outpouring of emotion. I was becoming acquainted with Wordsworth's recollection in tranquillity.

Some months later, as a result of my attendance at that session, I received an invitation to help form a monthly science fiction and fantasy workshop group. One of the other people to turn up at the first meeting was a woman I had met at the Fantasy workshop. Although a poet, she quickly adapted to the genres explored in the group. Through her influence I started to read and write poetry that was first inspired by the fantastic, but soon turned into the confessional, into investigating my emotions instead of blithely transcribing them. A year or so earlier I had picked up in a second-hand bookstore a copy of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. I had thought at the time that the book would help me with instant goddess figures and symbols for my fantasy writing (I obviously hadn't read the blurb closely enough), and so was disappointed when confronted by its dense and meandering concentration on the tracing of muse language and narrative. However, when I experienced the fact that poets actually existed in, and wrote about, the contemporary world—its events, its people and their interactions—and had fallen under the influence of one, the book took on a new meaning, and I devoured it much like I had done with Tolkien: intense

attention, though at a slower pace, but with far less comprehension (which has improved upon subsequent readings).

Several years later, after a period of emotional upheaval and more concentration on poetry as a craft, I wrote what I felt was my first real poem, which was about the experience of watching an ultrasound being performed for my new unborn child. With this piece I knew I was a poet, knew I had finally found the artistic medium I had been seeking for many years. I could now look back at my writing history and note a progression from hard technology SF—the logical extension of existing scientific and technological ideas and the use of intellect to solve physical challenges in the generated environments—to a greater engagement with the emotions and their attendant environments, fantasy to horror to poetry. This could be seen as a movement from left brain to right brain, or even a correction of the tendency to over-value Thought and a realignment within me of Jung's other functional types: Intuition, Feeling, Sensation.³⁸ I even realized how my previous activities could be fitted into a poetry rubric: mathematics as both an exposure to universal forms and patterns, and a synthesis exercise in logical and creative thinking; rock music as a foundation for what Pound calls the *melopoeia*³⁹ element in the craft of poetry; martial arts as a kinetic and kinaesthetic foundation for the felt-body experience in poetry; and these last two endeavours, with their emphasis on extemporising (going with the flow of music in lead playing or the flow of strike, block and counter-strike in combat

³⁸ Carl G Jung, 'Approaching the unconscious', *Man and his Symbols*, ed. Carl G Jung (1964; New York: Anchor, 1988) 60-61.

³⁹ The phrase refers to words being charged by sound. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1951; London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 37.

sparring), as evidence of how to open oneself to inspiration, to what is beyond one in poetry, what a rock guitarist would call ‘from nowhere’ and a Taoist would call *wu-wei* (not forcing)⁴⁰ or a Zen martial artist would call *mushin* (empty mind or no mind):⁴¹

In mushin, one unself-consciously acts in accord with the underlying principles of the Universe.⁴²

After such realizations I knew my intimations of creative destiny were not a fad. I was ready to plunge into poetry, its ‘craft or sullen art’,⁴³ as my true calling.

⁴⁰ Alan Watts (in collaboration with Al Chung-Liang Huang), *Tao: The Watercourse Way* (1975; Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), 76.

⁴¹ Kenneth Kushner, *One Arrow, One Life: Zen, Archery, and Daily Life* (New York: Arkana, 1988) 42.

⁴² Kushner 48.

⁴³ Dylan Thomas, ‘In My Craft or Sullen Art’, *Collected Poems: 1934-1952* (1952; London: Everyman’s Library, 1984) 120.

1.4 Leap of Tradition

Nor is there singing school but studying
 Monuments of its own magnificence . . .
 W B Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium'⁴⁴

Threshold

Each week you take a seat in the university library near the English Literature poetry aisle and re-read the assigned texts for that night's lecture and tutorial. Sometimes you wander up and down the aisle looking for texts required for essays. One night you are idly running your fingers along the spines of books, and the gold lettering on burgundy background of one stops you and triggers the image of an armoured poet before the springs on Mount Helicon—Defending Ancient Springs. The book contains essays on Coleridge, Shelley, and Blake and Yeats, poets you are studying in your yearlong subject Blake to Eliot, and others whose names are unfamiliar to you. You take it home and quickly realize you have found one end of Blake's golden thread.

For a writer interested in philosophy and works of the imagination, Kathleen Raine's book was a revelation. Here is Raine talking about Edwin Muir, that great Scottish poet and first translator (with his wife, Willa) of Kafka:

He discovered late what was known early to Dante and Milton, and discovered in the course of their poetic thought by Coleridge, Shelley, Blake, and Yeats, the great symbolic language of tradition. The world-tree and its fruits, the birds of the soul, sun, moon, river, loom, dragon, gate, and dark tower, may be likened to words of that language, whose meanings, though not otherwise definable, are exact. Knowledge of

⁴⁴ W B Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W B Yeats* (1933; London: Macmillan, 1961) 217.

these symbols is essentially a kind of learning, but it is the learning of the imagination, not of the merely conceptual mind. It is the learning of the poets.⁴⁵

And here, in her essay on Yeats's debt to Blake, she identifies this tradition to which all such imaginative poets belong and draw upon:

There is a learning unknown to textual scholars and literary historians no less exact than theirs; and this learning of the imagination (from his studies of theosophy, the Cabala, and Swedenborg he already possessed the key) Yeats instantly recognized in Blake...In Europe spiritual knowledge is embodied and transmitted principally within that tradition which descended through Orphism to Plato, to the neo-Platonists and the Gnostic sects, and to their successors both within Christendom (Dionysius the Areopagite and Dante were of them) and outside it. It is the language of Alchemy and of the Cabala...It is the language also of all symbolic art; or one might say that symbolic art is the natural language of such thought. The measure of its exactness is its conformity to the spiritual knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy.⁴⁶

When Raine mentions in her essay 'On the Symbol' that 'poetry in the full sense is symbolic discourse, discourse by analogy'⁴⁷ and that the symbol has 'as its primary purpose the evocation of one plane in terms of another',⁴⁸ that one plane being of a reality and consciousness 'other than that of the sensible world',⁴⁹ then, even though I had once been a scientist of sorts, with interests in the laws of the physical universe and in the power of reason, I took notice. I did so for I too felt that poetry was more than the 'description of sense impressions or personal emotions, or the evocation of group emotions',⁵⁰ even though my own writing of poetry was still in

⁴⁵ Raine *Defending*, 13.

⁴⁶ Raine *Defending*, 69-70.

⁴⁷ Raine *Defending*, 108.

⁴⁸ Raine *Defending*, 108.

⁴⁹ Raine *Defending*, 107.

⁵⁰ Raine *Defending*, 108.

its infancy. Because of my experience in the sciences and my interests in fantasy, in literature that was not realist, I could understand her assessment in ‘The Use of the Beautiful’:

Imaginative poetry alone has a real function to perform; for the pseudo-arts of realism perform no function beyond that of endlessly reporting on the physical world; which quantitative science (whose proper function it is) can do very much better. But true poetry has the power of transforming consciousness itself by holding before us icons, images of forms only partially and superficially realized in ‘ordinary life’.⁵¹

Though it might be argued there is a difference between the abstractions used and generated in quantitative science and the more concrete particulars of life that realistic literature expresses, the sense of Raine’s argument that realism is inadequate because it more often than not deals only with the physical world rather than its connections with higher worlds appealed to me. It was as if I had suddenly found the overlapping terrain of all my experiences in music and martial arts, my reading of Eastern philosophies and practice of meditation, my shift in interests from the rational to the emotional, from technology to fantasy. I had found a tradition in which I could feel comfortable, enthused and inspired, that of the Perennial Philosophy. Here was a tradition that had an enabling power, not just for my poetry writing, but also for the narrative project that had been plaguing me for a number of years, Zane’s quest for absolute wisdom.

As noted by Aldous Huxley in his book of the same name, the Perennial Philosophy (the translation of the phrase coined by Leibniz, *Philosophia Perennis*) is:
 the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even

⁵¹ Raine *Defending*, 160.

identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being...⁵²

The reason it is called 'perennial' or 'universal' is that 'it shows up in virtually all cultures across the globe and across the ages'.⁵³ The tradition teaches that:

it is desirable and indeed necessary to know the spiritual Ground of things, not only within the soul, but also outside in the world and, beyond world and soul, in its transcendent otherness—'in heaven.'⁵⁴

Thus, Spirit is both the ground and goal of existence, and the major points of the philosophy are essentially those Ken Wilber has listed:

One, Spirit exists, and Two, Spirit is found within. Three, most of us don't realize this Spirit within, however, because we are living in a world of sin, separation, and duality—that is, we are living in a fallen or illusory state. Four, there is a way out of this fallen state of sin and illusion, there is a Path to our liberation. Five, if we follow this Path to its conclusion, the result is a Rebirth or Enlightenment, a *direct experience* of Spirit within, a Supreme Liberation, which—Six—marks the end of sin and suffering, and which—Seven—issues in social action of mercy and compassion on behalf of all sentient beings.⁵⁵

Before examining this path, I need to point out that since 1983 Ken Wilber has no longer considered himself part of the Perennial Philosophy tradition. While acknowledging the Perennial Philosophy is 'especially in its most sophisticated forms...a fountain of unsurpassed wisdom',⁵⁶ he no longer admits such doctrines as 'unchanging archetypes, involution and evolution as fixed and predetermined, [and]

⁵² Huxley 1.

⁵³ Wilber *Grace*, 77.

⁵⁴ Huxley 8.

⁵⁵ Wilber *Grace*, 79.

⁵⁶ Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001) 158.

the strictly hierarchical (as opposed to holonic/quadratic⁵⁷) nature of reality'.⁵⁸ The one item of the Perennial Philosophy with which he still concurs is:

the notion of realms of being and knowing, and then I only staunchly defend three of them: matter, mind, and spirit (or gross, subtle, and causal). I sometimes expand those realms to five (matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit), but I am willing to strongly defend only the former.⁵⁹

The fact that Wilber still countenances the one doctrine of the Perennial Philosophy that is central to this project may give my work credibility, but his authority is not essential. The main concern in my exploration of the Perennial Philosophy and related traditions, including the full gamut of Wilber's psychological and philosophical work, is to discover those concepts and devices that will enable me to complete Zane's narrative. The true authority will be the resultant work, not whether the various theorists consulted are in agreement.

The path that Wilber talks about has many variants, but what is common to them all is the necessity to climb what has been termed the Great Chain of Being, being and consciousness as 'a hierarchy of dimensional levels, moving from the lowest, densest, and most fragmentary realms to the highest, subtlest, and most unitary ones'.⁶⁰ In books such as *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (written when he was 23) and *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm*, Wilber points out that while the West has been adept at handling the lower stages of cognitive development, through the theories of such people as Piaget and Loevinger and the therapeutic advances of Freud and company, the East has been researching for millennia the

⁵⁷ Explanations of holons and quadrants occur further on.

⁵⁸ Wilber, *Theory* 158.

⁵⁹ Wilber, *Theory* 158. I will present definitions of gross, subtle and causal shortly.

⁶⁰ Wilber, *Eye* 126-127.

higher levels of development, which in the West have only been the province of mystics of all persuasions (for example, Rumi, Eckhart). Putting both sets of developments together, Wilber formulated what he has termed ‘the Spectrum of Consciousness’:

The lower and intermediate portions of this model are based on the works of Piaget, Werner, Arieti, Kohlberg, Loevinger, Erikson, Freud, and so on; the higher portions are based on the *philosophia perennis*.⁶¹

And this refinement of the Great Chain of Being comprises such groupings as ‘the prerational (subconscious), the rational (self-conscious), and the transrational (superconscious)’.⁶²

In subsequent books, Wilber has developed, refined, and expanded his model, sometimes in response to criticisms of his work, more often, naturally enough, to accommodate the results of his own research:

I sought an *integral* philosophy, one that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world’s great wisdom traditions.⁶³

His search led him to consider the variety of historical, scientific, philosophical and psychological models mankind has been building over the centuries:

At one point, I had over two hundred hierarchies written out on legal pads lying all over the floor...“natural science” hierarchies...those discovered by the developmental psychologists...linguistic hierarchies, contextual hierarchies, spiritual hierarchies. There were stages of development in phonetics, stellar systems, cultural

⁶¹ Wilber *Eye*, 262.

⁶² Wilber *Eye*, 264.

⁶³ Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (1995; Boston: Shambhala, 2000) xii.

worldviews, autopoietic systems, technological modes, economic structures, phylogenetic unfoldings, superconscious realizations...⁶⁴

And this research led him to a four quadrant model, each quadrant typifying certain domains of investigation into the Kosmos, which ‘contains the cosmos (or the physiosphere), the bios (or biosphere), nous (the noosphere), and theos (the theosphere or divine domain)—none of them being foundational (even spirit shades into Emptiness)’.⁶⁵ The quadrants were formulated by realizing that some of the hierarchies refer to individuals, some to collectives, some to internal events, some to external ones, and that each of the elements of an hierarchy is essentially a holon (the term is Koestler’s), ‘wholes that are parts of other wholes’,⁶⁶ as an atom is part of a molecule which is part of a cell which is part of an organism, and so on. Wilber discovered that there is in fact a Great Nest (a Great Holarchy) of Being,⁶⁷ with developmental lines in each quadrant meshing with lines in other quadrants:

The Kosmos is a series of nests within nests within nests indefinitely, expressing greater and greater holistic embrace—holarchies of holons everywhere!⁶⁸

Wilber’s overall schema has the acronym AQAL, which refers to ‘All Quadrants, All Levels’, but the essential elements of the model, along with the quadrants explained above, are Waves (Levels), Streams (Lines), States and Self.

Thus, there are:

the various levels or waves of consciousness (stretching from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit), through which pass various developmental lines or streams

⁶⁴ Wilber *Sex*, xiii.

⁶⁵ Wilber *Sex*, 45.

⁶⁶ Wilber *Sex*, xiv.

⁶⁷ See Appendix Three for diagrams of the Great Nest and the four quadrants.

⁶⁸ Wilber *Sex*, xiv.

(including cognitive, affective, moral, interpersonal, spiritual, self-identity, needs, motivation, and so on).⁶⁹

A person could be at a high cognitive level, a medium moral level, and a low needs level, so that development does not proceed in a step-wise fashion (one criticism of his early models), but in a ‘fluid flowing of many waves and streams in the great River of Life’.⁷⁰ Furthermore, at any time a person can have an altered state of consciousness, a peak experience of one of the transpersonal realms of consciousness (psychic, subtle, causal, nondual). These states are apparently ‘variations on the natural states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep—which seems to be why a person at virtually any stage of development can experience any of these nonordinary states’.⁷¹ However, for a person to turn such a temporary experience into a permanent trait, the self of that person must integrate the experience by beginning (or continuing) development along an appropriate stream/line towards the wave/level represented by the state of consciousness experienced. In other words, the self, which can be thought of as ‘the *center of gravity* of the various levels, lines, and states, all orbiting around the integrating tendency of the self-system’,⁷² must continue traversing its fulcrum of self-development:

A fulcrum occurs each time the self encounters a new level of consciousness. The self must first *identify* with that new level (embed at that level, be in fusion with that level); it eventually *disidentifies* with (or transcends) that level so as to move to a yet higher wave; then it ideally *integrates* the previous wave with the higher wave.⁷³

⁶⁹ Wilber *Sex*, xviii.

⁷⁰ Wilber *Sex*, xviii.

⁷¹ Ken Wilber, ‘Waves, Streams, States, and Self—A Summary of My Psychological Model (Or, Outline of An Integral Psychology)’, http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/books/psych_model/psych_model1.cfm, 23/11/05) 2.

⁷² Wilber ‘Summary’, 4.

⁷³ Wilber ‘Summary’, 4.

If there is a failure in the operation of any of the elements of this three-fold process (fusion, transcendence, integration), then a pathology of some sort will appear. Thus, overall or *integral development* is:

a continuous process of converting temporary states into permanent traits or structures, and in that integral development, no structures or levels can be bypassed, or the development is not, by definition, integral.⁷⁴

There is no need to go into further details of Wilber's current model, including investigations of waves/lines in all his quadrants, or to provide details of various criticisms of his work,⁷⁵ as my interest is specifically in the first quadrant, the 'I' quadrant, the domain of interior experiences (cognitive, emotional and spiritual)—Zane's domain of exploration—and the criticisms are generally of a type that deal with inter-quadrant situations or with concerns about his overall approach. What Wilber has provided for my own work, and for an overall appreciation of the thrust of the Perennial Philosophy, is an adequate explanation of the dynamic between states of consciousness and levels of development. He also provides me with what, as he says in his introduction, his book *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* is built upon—*orientating generalizations*⁷⁶—even if they are quite complex ones. In fact, the realizations that a) peak experiences are available to anyone at any stage of development, but need consolidation, and that b) a person can be accomplished in, say, the causal level of experience through meditation but be pathologically developed in morals or psychosexual matters, are, with other insights, of strong benefit to my decoding the intuitions regarding Zane's story and the techniques and concepts required to fully transcribe it. It is as if my initial inspiration were a 'peak experience' of the Zane

⁷⁴ Wilber 'Summary', 3.

⁷⁵ See Collins, de Quincey, Harvat, and Heron.

level of consciousness, and my subsequent work at that ‘fulcrum’ a process of consolidating my writing self-structure to that Zane level. There is identification with the story, then transcendence of it (as a Witness), and finally an integration of it by the Witness (the writer), the latter two elements being necessary for the actual transcription of the story and for the analysis of its creation that the second part of this exegesis will explore.

Now for some details of the cognitive line of development, which is an important one for growth in the first quadrant, my area of interest, especially its upper realms (through which my characters are travelling). Wilber’s schema, which I intend as an illustration of a structure model of consciousness development from body to mind to soul to spirit, includes 1) Piaget’s cognitive line of development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, formal operational), 2) the recognition of an advanced rational form of cognition known as vision-logic, and 3) the four generally accepted stages of transpersonal development (psychic, subtle, causal, nondual). The terminology Wilber uses combines, for the lower levels or stages, Piaget’s with Gebser’s cultural worldview terms. Each worldview term refers to the type of ‘cognitive map of the world created at each basic level or wave (both individually and collectively)’:⁷⁷ archaic to magic to mythic to rational to existential (or aperspectival). Wilber then attaches these lower level descriptors to the list of descriptors for those transcendental realms Western and Eastern mystics have explored for centuries. This gives the developmental line as nine levels or waves,

⁷⁶ Wilber *Sex*, 5.

⁷⁷ Wilber *Sex*, 612.

though Piaget did divide each of his four major cognitive stages into at least two substages (early and late):⁷⁸

1. Sensorimotor (Archaic and Archaic-Magic)
2. Preoperational (Magic and Magic-Mythic)
3. Concrete Operational (Mythic and Mythic-Rational)
4. Formal Operational (Rational and Rational-existential)
5. Vision-Logic (Existential)
6. Psychic
7. Subtle
8. Causal
9. Nondual

As indicated earlier, another way of looking at all these stages is as ‘fulcrums of development’. Taking into account research into the intrauterine state and the birth process, which indicates evidence for a fulcrum at that level, Wilber defines the full complement of fulcrums as follows:⁷⁹

- F-0: Conception and birth
- F-1: *Sensoriphsical* (the establishment of physical boundaries; the Sensorimotor stage of development)
- F-2: *Phantasmic-Emotional* (the establishment of emotional boundaries; Preoperational)
- F-3: *Rep-mind* (the establishment of conceptual-self boundaries; also Preoperational)

⁷⁸ Details of these stages appear in Appendix Three.

⁷⁹ Wilber *Sex*, 612-613. See Appendix Four for a more detailed description of each of the fulcrums and their associated general therapies.

- F-4: *Role/Rule* (the emergence of role boundaries and rule operations;
Concrete Operational)
- F-5: *Formal-Reflexive* (the emergence of formal operations; Formal
Operational)
- F-6: *Existential* (the emergence of a pure observing Self; Vision-Logic)
- F-7: *Psychic* (The Path of Yogis)
- F-8: *Subtle* (The Path of Saints)
- F-9: *Causal* (The Path of Sages)
- F-10: *Nondual* (Ultimate, The Path of Siddhas)

(This last fulcrum, which involves the ‘complete integration and identity of manifest Form with the unmanifest Formless’, is not ‘one level among others, but the reality, condition, or suchness of all levels’.⁸⁰ Thus it can not be categorized a fulcrum as such, but is technically the final integration stage of the previous fulcrum.)

At each of these fulcrums (except F-10) there occurs a differentiation from an environment (material, emotional, mental, societal, and so on), an initial state of undifferentiation or indissociation, and then an integration of that environment to an appropriate functional degree in preparation for the next fulcrum. That is, the self-system transcends one level and includes it by moving to a higher level, with which it first identifies so that it can function at that level. At each fulcrum there is a creation (or an uncovering), of consciousness, of mind, of ego, of soul, of spirit, of Witness, and with each basic level there is an associated worldview that predisposes the self-system to certain moral and ‘power’ relationships with those entities in its immediate material, emotional, mental, societal, and higher environments.

What is interesting about fulcrum transitions is that each generally involves the attainment of both ‘a freedom from the previous, lesser domain, and a freedom in the new and “roomier” domain’.⁸¹ Wilber tends to use this concept only for the higher levels (*spiritual freedoms*) and only talks, following Habermas, of the legal, moral, and political freedoms available to all members of a world society as a consequence of ‘the global, centauric vision-logic and its moral stance’.⁸² However, the principle seems applicable to all levels, so that the self-system gains *freedom from* the demands and limitations of the lower level and has *freedom in* the new level to function within its wider worldspace. For example, at the formal operational level, a self has a freedom from the tyranny of roles/rules and its associated membership/belonginess forces and has the freedom in the formop worldspace to be reflexive, to pursue self-esteem matters, and to engage in worldcentric activities. However, what is of interest to this project is the existence of (and possible preference for) the higher-level freedoms, which are listed below:

Psychic/subtle—freedom from ‘the ordinary gross-level fluctuations of pleasure/pain and sensual-mental desire and frustration’, and freedom in the ‘deeper space of psychic and subtle awareness’ that moves prior to these fluctuations.⁸³

Causal—freedom from the subtle domain and from all manifestation, from *samsara*, from an awareness that identifies with ‘the mechanism of suffering and

⁸⁰ Ken Wilber, ‘The Spectrum of Development,’ Ken Wilber, Jack Engler & Daniel P. Brown, eds., *Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development*, (Boston: New Science Library, 1986), 74.

⁸¹ Wilber *Sex*, 652.

⁸² Wilber *Sex*, 651.

⁸³ Wilber *Sex*, 652.

separation’, and freedom in ‘the vast expanse of boundless, unmanifest, formless Emptiness that is consciousness as such’.⁸⁴

Nondual—freedom from the ‘causal tension or rarefied fear of manifestation’, and a freedom in ‘(and as) the entire Kosmos of Emptiness and Form, spontaneously so’.⁸⁵

As may be obvious by now, all the stages described by Wilber can be said to reside in one or more of the various domains of existence in the slightly expanded Great Chain of Being (matter, body, mind, soul, spirit), with the domain of Matter being the physiosphere and biosphere prior to hominid/human emergence (when considering the stages as being applicable to a society) or the birth of the person:

Body—Sensorimotor and Preop

Mind—Preop, Conop, Formop, Vision-Logic

Soul—Vision-Logic, Psychic, Subtle

Spirit—Causal, Nondual

Whatever the terminology used for the structures of consciousness and their associated worldviews/worldspaces, whether for individuals or collectives, interior or exterior, my concern is with individual growth towards the divine, and the mechanisms of such growth, or its opposite, regression. That is, my concern is with what the Irish poet, painter and mystic A E (George Russell) calls the ‘politics of eternity’⁸⁶ as opposed to the ‘politics of time’.

Thus, my own interests are in the last two domains above, soul and spirit, and in how an artwork such as *The Silence Inside the World* can depict movement to,

⁸⁴ Wilber *Sex*, 652.

⁸⁵ Wilber *Sex*, 652.

⁸⁶ A E (George Russell), *The Candle of Vision: Inner Worlds of the Imagination* (1918; Dorset: Prism, 1990) 58.

through, and beyond these domains. Before looking at this proposition, however, I feel it might be worthwhile to introduce a number of other concepts and processes that I have gleaned from Wilber's various writings and which I have found extremely useful for my appreciation of psychological, spiritual and literary processes, especially in relation to transcribing the growth or otherwise of my characters. As I have indicated previously, my intent in this project is not to parrot a system of thought but to borrow from any system those concepts, process, motifs, and so on that will enable me to understand the themes and particulars of Zane's story and trigger my imagination and intuition in order to create (or 'manifest') that story in a strong, imaginative form.⁸⁷

When we accept the idea of levels within a stream or line of development, we can imagine them as storeys in a building.⁸⁸ (This seems an adaptation of Jung's dream of the multi-storied house and its relationship to the personal and collective conscious and unconscious.)⁸⁹ To walk from one room to another on the same floor, or to move the furniture around, which is a change in the surface structure of a level,

⁸⁷ In other words, such activities are aiding me in what Kathleen Raine calls 'the learning of the Imagination'.

⁸⁸ Wilber *Eye*, 103.

⁸⁹ 'My dream thus constituted a kind of structural diagram of the human psyche; it postulated something of an altogether *impersonal* nature underlying that psyche.' C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, rec. and ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (1963; New York: Vintage, 1989) 158-162.

Wilber calls *translation*. To go from one floor to another, which is a change in deep structure, he calls *transformation*. Thus, on any level one can choose to preserve one's place in it, remain in identification with it (dissociation), or one can choose to release one's identification (differentiation) and move up or down. These various movements thus depict four forces operating on a self. The release is a type of 'death', because one is leaving a level. To ascend is a choice for 'Life' (engagement with a greater/wider universe of experience), to descend, a choice for 'Death'—for, once at a developmental level, to return to a lower one is to regress. To move across a level so as to complete one's development at that level is a choice for 'life' (engagement with the different forms of the same universe of experience). It is these types of movements that *The Silence Inside the World* intends to explore: the translations and transformations (and resulting freedoms) of the main characters as they negotiate fulcrums of development along the Great Chain of Being, generally in an upward direction, with an occasional regression and its consequent repercussions.

In addition to the idea of horizontal and vertical movements, Wilber has developed the notion that any 'psychosocial institution that validates or facilitates translation we call *legitimate*; any that validates or facilitates transformation we call *authentic*'.⁹⁰ *Legitimacy* is a horizontal scale, and is a measure of the power of any psychosocial institution to provide integration for the self-system within its current level of development. In Wilber's opinion, one quite important function of any society is:

⁹⁰ Wilber *Eye*, 266.

to provide its members with a legitimate and legitimizing world view, one that is capable of validating existence on the average expectable level of structural development reached by its members.⁹¹

Authenticity is a vertical scale, and is a measure of the power of any such institution to provide the means for transformation, not only for the self-system to reach the average level of the society surrounding it, but also for the self-system to seek transformation to even higher levels.

Wilber also goes on to define the two likely major characteristics of those institutions that are capable of acting with good *authority*. The first of these is that it is *functional*, as in someone who is ‘authorized to perform certain tasks and functions, for example, plumbers, doctors, lawyers’.⁹² Teachers are a further example, and have the added situation in that, although they tend to operate in a compulsory environment, their task can be said to be *phase-temporary* or *phase-specific*, and a student leaves their authority when they graduate. Though not all functional and phase-specific authorities are benign and nonproblematic, if a psychosocial institution does not have either of these factors, it is likely to be problematic.

While Zane’s story deals with transcendental transitions and does hint at problems with authority in a number of situations (as defined above and in the more traditional sense), the above set of Wilber concepts (from the Great Nest of being to authority) may be even more relevant to discussion of the function and authority of art generally, and poetry in particular, in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

⁹¹ Wilber *Eye*, 266.

⁹² Wilber *Eye*, 269.

1.5 Pens at Ten Paces

The poet's only hope is to be infinitely sensitive to what his gift is...
Ted Hughes⁹³

Threshold

You are attending a semester-length seminar on American poetry: Dickinson, Bishop, Ashbery, Simic, Strand. Some poems are intriguing in their beauty—How does that one evoke the movement of sunrise on the balcony scene without mentioning that the sun is rising? Other poems are baffling in their deliberate obtuseness, for no apparent reason than 'this is how the mind works'. You encounter critical concepts you think untenable for a reader, let alone a poet. The fact that in one tribal culture the 'alpha male' is the one who can destroy more of his belongings than anyone else during a selection ritual doesn't seem to explain by analogy why anyone would invest so much time in reading a labyrinthine text for no expectation of reward, as if in unwrapping a gift and finding nothing inside, the gift is in the act of unwrapping. Then there's the theory that a poet reacts to other poets and not to the real world, a subtle reductionism of the primary creator to the secondary: all texts are reactions to other texts, so none can ever be privileged. You write your semester paper on that one, a dialogue between poet and critic, with aphoristic commentary in the margins. The challenge gnaws at you.

Harold Bloom claims in his important book *The Anxiety of Influence* that all writers are responding to other writers, that a poem exists in relation to a precursor poem, and that a poet when 'confronting his Great Original must find fault that is not there, and

⁹³ Ted Hughes, 'Context', *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed. William Scammell, (1994; New York: Picador, 1995) 1.

at the heart of all but the highest imaginative virtue'.⁹⁴ Assuming Bloom is correct in his analysis, and leaving aside the possibility of unknown influences (through the language itself, for example), who and what are my influences, my precursors, and what effect have they had on my work, especially the writing of *The Silence Inside the World*?

To backtrack a moment. Once I began to write the story of Arve and Arken,⁹⁵ I immediately felt that I had found my 'bliss', as Joseph Campbell puts it.⁹⁶ The discovery, in hindsight, was an obvious one: I had read intensely since I was quite young; I had dabbled in song lyrics before and while playing in *Strider*; I had started to write poems to girlfriends and lovers; I was more comfortable with the written word than with speech sometimes, especially in emotional matters. This new interest was not a fad, as it might have been judged when seen as the latest in a long line of discarded interests—mathematics, music, martial arts—yet it would still take me many more years before I found the genre and the themes that would enable me to express fully my creativity.

As outlined in 'Dare Seize', I wrote science fiction and fantasy short stories, some of which were published in a local SF magazine. I then wrote the fantasy novel I called *The Rainbow God* and two prequel books, though none were published. Perusing them recently I discovered how derivative of my reading parts of them were, though, with the emergence of the Zane character, there was a hint that my laboured apprenticeship in writing might eventually lead to something worthwhile.

⁹⁴ Bloom 31.

⁹⁵ Discussed in 1.3 'Dare Seize'.

⁹⁶ See Campbell's discussion of the need to 'follow your bliss' in Joseph Campbell (with Bill Moyers), *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 117-121.

As seems to be the case throughout my life, I was then sidetracked from pursuit of artistic creation by life itself: job, marriage, family, divorce. During this period of emotional upheaval and intense retrospection I discovered the joys of poetry and the realization that poetry itself was something one could approach professionally, so to speak, and not just read for pleasure or write occasionally when in the common throes of love or despair (and badly, too, though the dabbler rarely grasps this). I then spent the next ten years or so reading, studying and writing poetry in my spare time.

Who were my influences in poetry during this period? Because of my interest in martial arts and Eastern philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism, I read Basho, Li Po and Tu Fu. Because of my speculative fiction background, I read the poetry of some of the weird tales writers I had loved and their antecedents and descendents: Edgar Allan Poe, H P Lovecraft, Robert Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and Richard L Tierney. These, especially Smith, who was once hailed by San Francisco newspapers in 1912 as ‘the compeer of Byron, Shelley, and Keats’,⁹⁷ led me back to Baudelaire and the Romantics, and university study exposed me to more of their work and to the major modernists, Eliot, Pound, and Yeats. Then there was the discovery of Kathleen Raine’s work and through her the Perennial Philosophy and a close re-acquaintance with William Blake, whose poem ‘The Tyger’ I had once memorised as a young schoolchild for a solo recitation class exercise.

⁹⁷ L Sprague de Camp, ‘Sierran Shaman: Clark Ashton Smith’, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy* (Sauk City: Arkham, 1976) 200.

As can be gathered from above and from previous sections, my formative literary influences were wide and varied, both in speculative fiction and in poetry, and these have since found form in many of the characters, motifs, events and concepts later embodied in *The Silence Inside the World*. But who are the most important influences? More to the point, are they Bloomian precursors whom I am meant to battle for space in the creative universe crowded by all past literary works? And what are the books that *The Silence Inside the World* has to compete against in the sense of exploring the same subject matter, and how does it differ from them?

In order to identify those texts that will contribute to answers to these questions, I think it best to divide my history of reading into the categories arranged below. Naturally enough, the numbers in each will reduce with each successive one, and any overlaps between the categories will aid the analysis.

1. Reading Exciters
2. Writing Exciters
3. Writing Influences
4. Project Influences
5. Project Precursors

Reading Exciters

These are the books and authors that excited my early passion for reading, especially of speculative fiction, and fulfilled it for a number of years. The following list is more extensive than previously discussed and includes texts already mentioned.

Before there was even a genre called science fiction there were the scientific romances of Jules Verne and H G Wells, which I loved. From them I moved onto such Golden Age writers as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C Clark, Robert Heinlein, A E van

Vogt, and E E 'Doc' Smith. The next generation of SF writers I read included Poul Anderson, James Blish, Ray Bradbury, Gordon R Dickson, Frank Herbert, and Ursula Le Guin. And there were those writers of dystopia, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, and others such as Fred Hoyle and John Wyndham.

The obvious writer in the fantasy genre that I read and re-read was J R R Tolkien, but there were many others, including Stephen Donaldson, Michael Moorcock, and Roger Zelazny. Weird tales is a sub-genre of fantasy and I read many of the major contributors to that field. In the heroic fantasy (or sword and sorcery) field there was Robert Howard (the creator of Conan), Fritz Leiber, E C Tubb, and Karl Edward Wagner (creator of Kane the immortal swordsman). In the horror genre I moved from Edgar Allan Poe to H P Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith, the cosmic and mystical environment of their stories more interesting to me than the later more realistic fare of Stephen King and his many imitators.

From literary fiction and other genres there were the Sherlock Holmes stories, John Fowles's *The Magus*, the work of Hermann Hesse (especially *Siddhartha* and *Magister Ludi*), James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which was a senior text set in my Catholic secondary college, and W Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*.

Obviously, much of my reading for many years was of the fantastic in its various guises, and this reading matter was chosen for a number of reasons. Generally I was looking for that sense of wonder for which science fiction especially is well suited, that emotional breathlessness and intellectual stimulation this literature of ideas excites through its exploration of the ramifications of technology (hard and soft) on the human. In my fantasy reading there was also a desire for hidden realms, for hidden knowledge, and generally such reading was of 'high fantasy':

An interesting distinction...is between high fantasy, set in a fully realized secondary world, and low fantasy, which features supernatural intrusions into our own world.^{98 99}

Yet, the proliferation of ‘heroic’ adventure series such as Howard’s Conan stories and E C Tubb’s Dumarest saga also indicates a contrary desire, not a drive for cognitive stimulation, a going within of the mind or the emotions, but a going outside, escapism through mediated action, through immersion in wish-fulfilment, the only redeeming feature possibly being a misplaced searching for concepts of heroism.

However, I now think there was much more than the search for stimulation or escapism in my choice of the fantastic in my reading. What speculative fiction, especially fantasy, gave me, though I wasn’t conscious of this until recently, was a sense of the reality of other worlds and an opening to the hierarchy, the holarchy, of all worlds. In its pursuit of rationality the materialist and positivist philosophies had discouraged imagination and virtually denied Imagination altogether—virtually denied the idea of separate realms, of higher realms that influence and in turn are influenced by this world—and the fiction of these philosophies exemplified this approach. What I was looking for, but didn’t know it, was a literature that had a more comprehensive view of spiritual worlds and their inter-relationships.

⁹⁸ The entry for FANTASY, John Clute and Peter Nicholls, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993; London: Orbit, 1999) 409.

⁹⁹ As Tolkien writes in his essay ‘Tree and Leaf’, the story-maker ‘makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is “true”: it accords with the laws of that world.’ J R R Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf, Smith of Wootton Major, The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (1964, 1967, 1975; London: Unwin, 1979) 40-41.

Writing Excitors

These would be the authors and books that directly or indirectly inspired me to start writing. However, as discussed in ‘Dare Seize’, the impulse to write seemed to come more from an experience of seeing my words before me and from dissatisfaction with SF books at the time than from the stimulation of any one text or author. More than likely my reading in speculative fiction focussed my urge to creativity into ‘a critical mass’ of desire, the resulting explosion providing me with direction. Although this urge to creativity was obviously with me long before I read Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, if I had to name an important text, that would be it, for it was a major opening into wonder, thus a trigger for more wonder, even if I had to start generating it myself.

Writing Influences

Here I would include those authors and texts whose ideas (both in art and craft) and themes have stayed with me. From science fiction I would say that the concept of Future Histories (Asimov, Blish, Heinlein, Dickson, and so on) has intrigued me to the point of my planning a whole series of stories of which *The Silence Inside the World* forms a subtle, though major, part. Closely allied with the exploration of humankind’s future is the depiction of an individual’s growth in power (usually psi) and intelligence, for example, Frank Herbert’s work in *Dune* and *The God Makers* and the various ‘superman’ explorations, from the Null-A works of van Vogt to Roger Zelazny’s mythologically-based stories. The secondary world aspect of high fantasy and the metaphysical investigations (however basic) of writers such as Moorcock and Zelazny have also informed my own literary speculations. And from both fields, as well as from Gothic literature, there’s the motif of the immortal hero

(closely linked to the ‘superman’): The Wandering Jew, Melmoth the Wanderer, van Vogt’s Robert Hedrock (*The Weapon Shops of Isher* and *The Weapon Makers*), Heinlein’s Lazarus Long, and Karl Edward Wagner’s Kane.

Then there are those poets whose work inspired and influenced my early poetry writing: Robert Browning (‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came’), T S Eliot, Robert Graves, Edgar Allan Poe, Ezra Pound, Percy Bysshe Shelley (‘Ozymandias’), Dylan Thomas, and Walt Whitman. Once I realized my love for poetry and began reading more of it, a whole new group began to exert influence: Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Yeats, Kathleen Raine, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, Edwin Muir, and Peter Redgrove. As for craft issues, first there were Eliot and Pound with their emphasis on the historical tradition, especially the latter’s *ABC of Reading*. Then there were those poets who emphasised inspiration and the Imaginative Tradition: Robert Graves with his *White and Black Goddesses*; Yeats with his *A Vision*; Raine with her ‘learning of the Imagination’ (with its emphasis on the Perennial Philosophy: Platonism, Neoplatonism, Kabbalah, Alchemy, Sufism in the West, Hinduism and Buddhism in the East); and Hughes with his shamanistic approaches and his analysis of Shakespeare’s Tragic Equation in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*.

Project Influences

In this section I would like to examine some of the authors or works mentioned above to discover specific influences on this project. From speculative fiction I would have to nominate Tolkien, Moorcock and Zelazny, from literary fiction, Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, and from poetry, Dante, Blake and Milton. These writers essentially form two groups: those who were influences at the time of the story’s original inspiration,

and those who were influences during the intervening years and during the actual implementation of this project (the poets, mainly). Other writers from both camps may also have influenced me, or some of the many writers mentioned earlier may have influenced literary decisions I am not aware of; if so, these are unconscious, and by definition, outside the purview of this examination. For the purpose of identifying possible precursors in Bloom's sense of the word and analysing their effect on my work, these names will do.

On my first reading, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* stunned me with its depiction of a Secondary World and its mythic resonances. Unlike its many imitators, this book not only had a rich implied history that had connections to the mythologies in our own world, and had detailed, self-consistent landscapes and languages, but it also featured a hero who was reluctant, was ordinary (in his own world),¹⁰⁰ and was not endowed with powers other than perseverance and love. One of my protagonists, Jessie Willis, may be an ordinary person in her own world¹⁰¹ and does effect changes in the story through love, but this trope is present in so many narratives, realistic and fantastic, that to proclaim Tolkien as an outright influence, and thus a precursor to be evaded, is unwarranted. The book's strongest influence was that it showed me the possibilities in fantasy writing and mythopoeia:

mythopoeia (Gr 'myth-making') The conscious creation of a myth...In literature, the appropriation and reworking of mythical material, or the creation of a kind of 'private' mythology.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Although a hobbit, with a liking for the home and hearth, those simple pleasures of normal hobbit life, Frodo was different from his fellows in having a curiosity for the 'outside world', as his uncle, Bilbo, had before him.

¹⁰¹ Relatively so, though her albinism did mark her out as different from others.

¹⁰² J A Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1977; London: Penguin, 1992) 563.

However, apart from its example of the creative labour required for an engaging Secondary World, and the effect of such an approach, I don't see any real connection to my project.

The works of Moorcock and Zelazny are another matter. Moorcock's albino sword and sorcery hero Elric of Melniboné is an obvious influence on the creation of my albino character Jessie, though she is not a magician nor a warrior, only a reader of ancient literatures and a fighter when required. There is also a hint of influence from Melville's *Moby Dick*, which I read at university and loved. What I see as common in both these instances is the sense of whiteness as both weakness and strength: weakness because albinism is a defect in the body, and strength because the characters involved are able to use (consciously or unconsciously) their unnaturalness as a weapon for survival.

The melancholic Elric is one of Moorcock's Eternal Champions, those denizens of his Multiverse¹⁰³ who serve heroic ideals by battling Chaos, even if these champions seem to act from self-interest in some cases. The Multiverse idea—'a Universe in which multiple PARALLEL WORLDS co-exist, constantly (but never permanently) intersecting with one another'¹⁰⁴—might be seen as an influence on my creation of the eternal and all-inclusive realm of Thexlan. However, it is more likely there was a common influence on both creations through current scientific ideas of parallel universes and the mythological and esoteric traditions of multiple worlds, though these traditions tend to emphasise a hierarchy of worlds rather than a flat network of parallel worlds.

¹⁰³ As stated in the MOORCOCK entry of Clute and Nicholls (822), the term was 'probably derived from the works of John Cowper POWYS'.

¹⁰⁴ Clute and Nicholls, 822.

When I first created Zane, who at the time was likely an alter ego, I envisaged him as a hero in adventure tales similar to Elric's. I'd always been drawn to the idea of such series characters: there was my reading of Spider-Man and Sherlock Holmes, then that of sword and sorcery heroes such as Elric, Conan the Barbarian, and Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, and finally that of the more sophisticated speculative fiction explorations of Gordon Dickson and Roger Zelazny. Maybe this interest was because of the wish-fulfilment aspect of episodic heroism: the repetition of success in the face of danger; the safety of the unchanging personality who succeeds because he/she is already an exemplar; and possibly the evasion of those sorts of changes, those 'deaths', brought about by encounters with reality or through deep introspection. However, while I admired such literature, I found myself unable to write it. Though I wanted to put my hero into combative or mysterious situations and watch him find his way out, with 'the treasure and the girl', I was more interested in the character of my hero. I was also interested in the reason I created Zane as a seeker after wisdom in the first place. I wanted him to succeed in this quest, a quest I myself had been interested in for as long as I could remember.¹⁰⁵

Along with my speculative reading as a teenager I had also read deeply in the paranormal, magic, and Eastern philosophies. I wanted to discover the secrets of the universe, the answers to the big questions, hence my interest in cosmology, philosophy, the unknown, the irrational, the anomalies in science and history. For years I struggled with these questions while I embodied society's concerns with job, mortgage and family. I did not travel far in my quest, and neither did Zane, until, as

¹⁰⁵ Recently I asked a favourite aunt, who has held a long interest in esoteric matters, at what age I showed a similar interest. She answered that I started asking her about ghosts, magic and the like when I was 10 or 11.

stated earlier, I discovered the Perennial Philosophy and other characters and motifs found me.

Roger Zelazny was another favourite speculative fiction writer, especially because he worked in both science fiction and fantasy:

For me, science fiction has always represented the rational—the extension into a future or alien environment of that which is known now—whereas fantasy represented the metaphysical—the introduction of the unknown, usually into an alien environment.¹⁰⁶

Zelazny produced a number of imaginative and intriguing short stories, novelettes and novellas,¹⁰⁷ many of them clearly influenced by capital ‘L’ Literature, as is the case with many of the other writers associated with the movement known as SF New Wave. I could see *Moby Dick* in his classic story ‘The Doors of his Face, the Lamps of his Mouth’,¹⁰⁸ while ‘The Force that Through the Circuit Drives the Current’¹⁰⁹ is clearly a nod to Dylan Thomas’s ‘The Force that Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower’, and ‘Exeunt Omnes’¹¹⁰ owes much to *The Tempest*. But it was his novels, predominately *Lord of Light* and those of the Amber series, that influenced some of the concepts in *The Silence Inside the World*.

The hero of *Lord of Light* is Sam:

¹⁰⁶ Roger Zelazny, ‘Constructing a Science Fiction Novel’, *Frost & Fire* (New York: Avon, 1990) 117.

¹⁰⁷ The general guidelines for SF fiction categories are short story (0-7,499 words), novelette (7,500-17,499), novella, (17,500-40,000), and novel (over 40,000).

¹⁰⁸ Roger Zelazny, *The Doors of his Face, The Lamps of his Mouth and other Stories* (1973; London: Corgi, 1975) 9-46.

¹⁰⁹ Roger Zelazny, *Unicorn Variations* (London: Sphere, 1985) 101-106.

¹¹⁰ Zelazny *Unicorn* 172-175.

HIS FOLLOWERS called him Mahasamatman and said he was a god. He preferred to drop the Maha— and the —atman, however, and called himself Sam. He never claimed to be a god. But then, he never claimed not to be a god.¹¹¹

The setting is a future world colonized by survivors of Earth's destruction. The original colonizers, The First, have set up a society based on the Hindu pantheon, with the deicrats (Zelazny's term) using advanced technology to acquire godlike powers, which they use to keep the population at a lower level of development. The story centres on Sam's political and power struggle to liberate the humans of the planet, his principle subversive weapon being the use of Buddhist philosophy.

Though the novel wasn't a direct examination of the concerns involved in my quest, it did demonstrate to me the possibilities of literature utilizing and/or examining religious philosophies, just as Tolkien had demonstrated the use of mythology.

The other work of Zelazny that was a major influence on my thinking was his Amber series. In ten novels Zelazny depicts the struggle for power in the one true world, that of Amber and the Courts of Chaos, other worlds (that multiverse motif again) being shadow worlds, reflections of the one true world with its blood-line hierarchy of kings and princes, all those who can walk the Logrus and/or the Pattern—power mazes in the shapes of fundamental patterns of the universe—and so gain magical command over the shadows. Again the influence here was in concepts, mainly the idea of multiple worlds (a hierarchy as opposed to Moorcock's flat Multiverse network) and their creation through the interplay of basic patterns.

When we move onto literary fiction, a text that is obviously close to my concerns is Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, whose eponymous hero is engaged in the spiritual quest during the time of the Buddha. After ascetic, sexual and commercial

¹¹¹ Roger Zelazny, *Lord of Light* (1967; London: Millennium, 1999) 9.

adventures, Siddhartha finds his own answers as a ferryman on the shores of ‘the long river in the wood’.¹¹² When his old friend Govinda asks him if he has ‘not discovered a certain knowledge’¹¹³ that has helped him to live, Siddhartha answers: ‘Wisdom is not communicable. The wisdom which a wise man tries to communicate always sounds foolish...in every truth the opposite is equally true...’¹¹⁴

Here was a book that gave me a hint of that knowledge Zane was seeking, though in the end, the wisdom that Siddhartha gave his friend was communicated to him through image and direct apprehension, not through words, the irony being that this truth is communicated to the reader through words, through the imagery and the rhythms of the river, the poetry of the faces Govinda sees when he kisses Siddhartha’s forehead (the seat of the Third Eye, the sixth chakra):

He no longer saw the face of his friend Siddhartha. Instead he saw other faces, many faces, a long series, a continuous stream of faces—hundreds, thousands, which all came and disappeared and yet all seemed to be there at the same time, which all continually changed and renewed themselves and which were yet all Siddhartha.¹¹⁵

Although the wisdom communicated had impact, for I re-read the book a number of times, it seemed incomplete, as if it needed a context that was more universal, a context that didn’t come to me until I encountered the Perennial Philosophy and could place the wisdom in an overall experiential structure of timeless knowledge. And

¹¹² Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*, trans. Hilda Rosner, intro. Donald McCrory (1922; London: Picador, 1998) 153.

¹¹³ Hesse 204.

¹¹⁴ Hesse 204.

¹¹⁵ Hesse 211.

maybe I was still caught in issues of personal power, at a fulcrum at which the ‘peak experience’ lessons of Siddhartha were not enough to turn a state into a trait.

Then there are the poets. Certainly the works of many of the aforementioned poets have influenced my lyric writing, for better or for worse. However, in the narrative mode that informs *The Silence Inside the World* I can only think of such major poets as Dante, Blake and Milton. Whatever Bloom may think of the problem of belatedness for those writing lyric poetry after Wordsworth, that poet, it seems to me, has no influence on my project. His great long poem *The Prelude* is a first person exploration, set firmly in the ‘real world’, of the discovery of the poet’s creative self (fulcrums F-6 and F-7, perhaps), while *The Silence Inside the World* is a long, narrative poem set in a fantasy/metaphysical land of sorts, with multiple characters, and told in the third person, except when characters engage in story-telling. A stronger candidate for a precursor poem might be Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* (which again is a first person narrative, though this time set in the realms of the Christian after-life), for both poems are engaged with theological and philosophical issues, are, in the words of Joseph Milne, ‘attending to the divine’.¹¹⁶ Apart from this commonality of theme and the fact that *The Silence Inside the World* is also written in three-line stanzas (blank verse as opposed to *terza rima*), there are more differences than similarities, some of these being the same elements as noted above: multiple third and first person characters and viewpoints, the use of fantasy motifs. One major similarity, naturally enough, is the concept of hierarchical spiritual worlds, a concept lost in the ‘three provincial centuries’ (Yeats’s phrase)¹¹⁷ of materialist philosophy,

¹¹⁶ Joseph Milne, ‘The Philosophical Spirit in the Renaissance’, *Temenos Academy Review* 4, (London: The Temenos Academy, Spring 2001) 20.

¹¹⁷ Quoted by Kathleen Raine in Gary Lachman, ‘Poetry & Platonism: a conversation with Kathleen Raine’ (www.lapismagazine.org/archives/L04/raine-lachman-int.html, 27/11/2005).

René Guénon's 'reign of quantity'.¹¹⁸ One major difference, for this poem as well as for Milton's, is the reliance on Christian metaphysics as compared to the attempt to blend several 'surface structure' traditions, including Western Esoteric and Tibetan Buddhism, in *The Silence Inside the World*.

When we look at Blake, his ideas of Eternity and Time and his portrayal of the archetypes of Eternity as they function in that realm and in Time are certainly elements that influence my poem, though only as a peripheral shadow. Blake generally insists on a division between both realms, while I am using the idea of their commingling as part of what I have called the Threshold Equation (see next chapter). That is, both realms are the one realm, that of Imagination, and the differences between the two states are caused by the state of the viewer, the participator in the world, which we all are.

Finally, there's Milton. I remember being stunned when I first read *Paradise Lost*, especially the descriptions of the war in heaven and Satan's flight through the void. However, along with Dante and Blake, Milton did not influence the original inspiration of Zane, but certainly he and the other two are a presence during the writing of *The Silence Inside the World*, as their themes are close to mine: inspiration and the divine.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in 'Premises and Poetry', Kathleen Raine, *The Inner Journey of the Poet and other papers*, ed. Brian Keeble (New York: George Braziller, 1982) 18.

Though the above writers are influences, are they precursors as Bloom uses the concept? Am I battling them in some way so as to find a place in literature? If I am battling them, in what ways am I ‘misreading’ them so I can clear an imaginative space for myself?

Project Precursors

As is apparent from the previous five sections, six likely candidates for precursors would be Tolkien, Moorcock, Zelazny, Dante, Blake, and Milton. These are major writers in the fields in which I am faring: mythopoeic literature and imaginative poetry. In some respects the three poets are more important than the three prose writers, because the form of *The Silence Inside the World* has evolved into narrative poetry (as explained in ‘Reflections: *Tikkun*’). However, Tolkien, Moorcock and Zelazny are influences and precursors in the field in which my poem may be received in this contemporary marketing world and so still require consideration.

Other possible poet precursors might be Shelley and Keats and maybe Browning, for such ‘quest’ poems as ‘The Witch of Atlas’, ‘Endymion’, and ‘Childe Roland’. However, considering their influence on my thought and writing has not been as great as the three major poets mentioned above, I would not consider them strong candidates.

Then there are those I would term ‘market competitors’, writers who may have influenced me on minor motif or theme, or who are mining similar veins, those who may precede me in writing history by a generation, or half of one, or are my contemporaries. Though I need to take such competitors into account when staking out my claim, they would not be precursors, those who trigger the urge to creativity in the first place and whose debt one battles to evade so as to not seem a sad imitation.

I suppose it could be said I evaded Tolkien, Moorcock and Zelazny (and all my speculative fiction influences, Asimov, Clark, Heinlein, Le Guin and so on) by originally abandoning such fiction, though this would actually be a defeat by a precursor or precursors, not an evasion of influence. However, the evasion was temporary. Although I wrote mainstream ‘confessional’ poetry for a number of years, I soon found historical, scientific and speculative subjects and themes gradually surfacing. The imaginative returned, as if Tolkien and company were waiting for my poetic craft to increase to the point where I could handle the speculative possibilities that attracted me to science fiction and fantasy in the first place. Of course, that meant I now had a double load of precursors, those from speculative fiction and those from poetry, though it could be argued that any SF writing about theological and philosophical themes is also struggling with the shadows of such as Dante, Milton, Blake, Shelley and Keats.

So, how do I evade these precursors, be they six or legion? Harold Bloom talks of six ways a strong poet evades the influence of his precursor(s). I will examine these ways in relation to my candidates and to any other texts or writers (such as Hesse) that are strongly connected to the project.

Clinamen

The first evasion Bloom calls *clinamen*, the ‘swerve’ a poet takes from his precursor, the sense of saying that the precursor ‘got it wrong’ and the new poet is finishing the job:

The *clinamen* or swerve, which is the Urizenic equivalent of the hapless errors of re-creation made by the Platonic demiurge, is necessarily the central working concept of the theory of Poetic Influence, for what divides each poet from his Poetic Father (and

so saves, by division) is an instance of creative revisionism...The poet so stations his precursor, so swerves his context, that the visionary objects, with their higher intensity, fade into the continuum.¹¹⁹

How have I swerved from my precursors so that I could write my poem? In contrast to Tolkien and his large field of imitators, *The Silence Inside the World*, while exhibiting some motifs of heroic fantasy, is primarily a contemplative approach to the heroic quest, is more like an example of a metaphysical “hero’s journey”, the elixir brought back being of wisdom rather than a mythology for England, as was Tolkien’s stated aim. *The Silence Inside the World* does not involve a Dark Lord who seeks to control the world (unless Zane is seen as one; though it is not a usual genre motif to have the hero also the villain, the protagonist as antagonist). It does not involve a quest for power weapons to be used to destroy the Dark Lord or any other clearly defined antagonist. In fact, the quest involved is for understanding, not for an object of power, or a group of objects, to be gained (as in most formula ‘fat fantasies’) or to be returned/destroyed (as in *The Lord of the Rings*). It does not involve a protagonist of humble beginnings who discovers he or she is in reality a lost heir to the kingdom and an incredibly gifted magician and leader destined to defeat the villain and save the kingdom or world or universe. It does not have a slew of other races such as elves and dwarfs, nor dragons or other now-hackneyed fantasy creatures. While there is a party of companions, they have not been assembled for their separate skills as in an SAS combat team. And finally, *The Silence Inside the World* is written in verse, not prose, a decision (details given later) that may also serve as a clinamen from all my other speculative fiction influences, precursors, and ‘market competitors’.

¹¹⁹ Bloom 42.

One further difference (clinamen correction) from my three speculative fiction precursors is the treatment of female characters. Tolkien is notorious for his neglect of female characterization, and Moorcock and Zelazny have not in general developed strong female characters, especially in those texts previously cited. *The Silence Inside the World*, however, features Jessie Willis, who is fundamental to the development of plot and story. Of course, only a reader can say whether my treatment is better than those of my precursors, but at least I am aware of the need to include the female perspective, especially as I want my poem to touch on the gamut of human endeavours along the Great Chain of Being.

Tessera

The second revisionary ratio is *tessera*, in which:

the later poet provides what his imagination tells him would complete the otherwise “truncated” precursor poem and poet, a “completion” that is as much misprision as a revisionary swerve is.¹²⁰

Who am I completing? First of all there’s Blake with his insistence on the distinction between Eternity and Time and his depiction of the forces within the human spirit as archetypes. My musing on the Perennial Literary Tradition says that this idea seems deficient, for it does not follow the complete line of Wilber’s Spectrum of Consciousness. If art exists to translate or transform an individual along the Great Chain of Being, and if the highest level of this chain is the state of nondual reality, with Formless existence (like being conscious in the deep sleep state) being the one just below it, then Blake is in error to depict Eternity as the place of his archetypes. They belong two levels below the Formless, in the subtle realm. Though he is right to

praise the power of Imagination, he isn't right to fold it into the persona of Los or of Jesus the Imagination. These personages, in the Wilber system, could be seen as stages towards nondual reality and as triggers or exemplars to those stages.

Imagination can carry us beyond the archetype. In fact, Imagination may be the power that created the archetypes in the first place, the field out of which all worlds, all stories arise, or so I am assuming within *The Silence Inside the World*.

Second, there's Hermann Hesse and his *Siddhartha*. As indicated earlier, though I felt the novel contained wisdom of the type I was looking for, the story seemed incomplete, possibly because it didn't address contemporary concerns, such as how to apply such an approach to spirituality in a normal life as opposed to that of a Brahmin who decides to be a wisdom seeker. My reading in the Perennial Philosophy also indicates that Hesse's wisdom does not include enough ontological 'evidence' for my satisfaction. There is nothing in the book about the levels of being and the stages of development necessary for a being to achieve enlightenment.

Though the novel is an accurate portrayal of those processes inherent to the Eastern conception of spirituality, because there is no grounding in Western approaches both to normal and to pathological cognitive and spiritual advancement, the story lacks general applicability. Of course, whether this argument is chicken or egg is an interesting point. When I was younger I was only interested in finding a single Way that would lead me to absolute knowledge. Eastern meditation approaches seemed to be the answer, though my own variety of interests and life's little knots and tripwires prevented my full application of such a methodology. Now I sense that a proper Way

¹²⁰ Bloom 66.

should take into account such pressures and distractions, as should an art piece that purports to enact, express and reveal such a Way.

Kenosis

The third ratio is ‘*kenosis* or “emptying,” at once an “undoing” and an “isolating” movement of the imagination’.¹²¹ In it, the strong poet performs

a revisionary act in which an “emptying” or “ebbing” takes place *in relation to the precursor*. This “emptying” is a liberating discontinuity, and makes possible a kind of poem that a simple repetition of the precursor’s afflatus or godhood could not allow.

“Undoing” the precursor’s strength *in oneself* serves also to “isolate” the self from the precursor’s stance, and saves the latecomer-poet from becoming taboo in and to himself.¹²²

Bloom’s pragmatic formula for this ratio is stated thus:

Where the precursor was, there the ephebe shall be, but by the discontinuous mode of emptying the precursor of *his* divinity, while appearing to empty himself of his own.¹²³

Have I emptied myself and my work of the influence of a precursor, of the precursor himself? I’m not sure. As the ratios become more complex, more intense, the ability of a poet/writer to self-diagnose becomes more fragile. Maybe the concept of Orms—those wish globules thrown out by Mt Alkerii, the dream or story mountain, the home of all stories—is an attempt at *kenosis* of all influences, by emptying each poetic ego of ownership, by emptying each poem of authority, even my own, though of course the story that declares this concept is mine on one level (the same for all other poetic egos, being channels for their poems), and not mine on the ‘kosmic’ level. That such a concept is in keeping with the Perennial Philosophy

¹²¹ Bloom 87.

¹²² Bloom 87-88.

¹²³ Bloom 91.

means that I am acknowledging others in the tradition while also saying that these others not only went in the wrong direction (clinamen) or failed to complete their poetic thought (tessera), but didn't realize that their personal and poetic egos had little to do with the poems they created. These poems were already somewhere else waiting to be discovered, a full acceptance of inspiration. Even those poets who disavow inspiration are of the devil's party without knowing it.

Daemonization

After kenosis comes *daemonization*, the process of the Counter-Sublime:

Turning against the precursor's Sublime, the newly strong poet undergoes *daemonization*, a Counter-Sublime whose function suggests *the precursor's relative weakness*.¹²⁴

In *daemonization*, the augmented poetic consciousness sees clear outline, and yields back to description what it had over-yielded to sympathy. But this "description" is a revisionary ratio, a daemonic vision in which the Great Original remains great but loses his originality, yielding it to the world of the numinous, the sphere of daemonic agency to which his splendour is now reduced. *Daemonization* or the Counter-Sublime is a war between Pride and Pride, and momentarily the power of newness wins.¹²⁵

Again it seems that Mt Alkerii and related concepts comprise the key, for the poem itself is an attempt at exploring and expressing the numinous out of which the daemons that inspire poetry come. Though it could be argued that my major poetry precursors Dante, Milton and Blake were also exploring the numinous, the answer to this is to say that *The Silence Inside the World* is operating on the assumption that all

¹²⁴ Bloom 100.

of them are mere Orms in the core of Mt Alkerii, and that their openings to the numinous are mine also. In fact, the intention is that *The Silence Inside the World* not only reveals instances of the numinous, but also provides for the reader subliminal methodologies for accessing more instances, cleansing ‘the doors of perception’.¹²⁶

Askesis

The fifth ratio is *askesis*, purgation and solipsism. The ‘Prometheus in every strong poet incurs the guilt of having devoured just that portion of the infant Dionysus contained in the precursor poet’¹²⁷ and he handles this through the sublimation of his aggressive instincts:

Poetic sublimation is an *askesis*, a way of purgation intending a state of solitude as its proximate goal. Intoxicated by the fresh repressive force of a personalized Counter-Sublime, the strong poet in his daemonic elevation is empowered to turn his energy upon himself, and achieves, at terrible cost, his clearest victory in wrestling with the mighty dead.¹²⁸

Instead of correcting or completing the precursor’s poems or repressing the presence of the precursor, this ratio deals with the precursor head on. The sublimation practised in this ratio is:

a self-curtaiment which seeks transformation at the expense of narrowing the creative circumference of precursor and ephebe alike. The final product of the process of poetic *askesis* is the formation of an imaginative equivalent of the superego, a fully developed *poetic will*, harsher than conscience...¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Bloom 101.

¹²⁶ ‘A Memorable Fancy’, plate 14, in ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’, Blake 93.

¹²⁷ Bloom 115.

¹²⁸ Bloom 115-116.

¹²⁹ Bloom 119.

In *askesis*, then, the movement of the poet is ‘not towards a sharing-with-others as Dante does’ [with Virgil, in *Purgatorio*, XXVII], ‘but towards a being-with-oneself’, and so ‘is a revisionary ratio that concludes on the border of solipsism’.¹³⁰

And it is here that I may have to abandon the search for instances of the use of these ratios in *The Silence Inside the World*. This is because this ratio and the following one recount the direct confrontations between ephebe and precursor, and I feel it presumptuous to claim I am yet strong enough to have done so with my precursors. Only an antithetical critic would be able to identify whether or not I have, and how and where this may have been achieved.

Apophrades

So now to the final ratio, which is *apophrades*, the return of the dead. When the strongest poets, such as Yeats and Wallace Stevens, are visited by the dead, by their strong precursors (usually when these strongest of modern poets are clarifying their own contribution to poetry, what they wish to be remembered for), they are able to:

achieve a style that captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors, so that the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being *imitated by their ancestors*.¹³¹

I do not know how to look at *The Silence Inside the World* without seeing it as my poem. However, a reader may be able to see the influences of those precursors I’ve named and others of which I may not even be aware, and identify places where I

¹³⁰ Bloom 123.

¹³¹ Bloom 141.

have succeeded or failed in evading the influence of such writers, especially through this particular phenomenon:

the triumph of having so stationed the precursor, in one's own work, that particular passages in *his* work seem to be not presages of one's own advent, but rather to be indebted to one's own achievement, and even (necessarily) to be lessened by one's greater splendour.¹³²

Besides, it is unlikely that *The Silence Inside the World* is a late enough work of mine (I plan to write poetry for many more years) to be concerned with poetic reputation and so attract 'the return of the dead'.

The above sequence of revisionary ratios can be reduced to the following: the ephebe first corrects the precursor's poems (Clinamen); then completes them (Tessera); then, upon finding out that those two activities don't accomplish separation, the newly strong poet empties himself of that which in the precursor influenced him, that is, represses him (Kenosis); then fills himself with the daemon, the numinous that once belonged to the precursor (Daemonization); after which, so empowered, he tackles the precursor head on, by surrendering to his (the newly strong poet's) own poetic ego/will (Askesis), and finally wins or not, by seemingly making the precursor indebted to him (Apophrades). An even simpler version would be:

1. He (the precursor) didn't get it right.
2. He didn't go far enough.
3. He's not that good anyway.
4. I know more than he does.

¹³² Bloom 141.

5. I'm going to tell it like it really is.
6. He really is more like me.

There is still one evasion technique that Bloom has not identified, because it is one that reduces the impact of his theory, at least for the practising poet. Ever since I first read *The Anxiety of Influence* and subsequent books such as *A Map of Misreading* I have disagreed with his assumption that all poems (and for that we can read all stories, plays, film scripts, essays and so on) are reactions to other poems: 'The meaning of a poem can only be another poem'.¹³³ What about the poet's reactions to other forms of life? What about the reader's reactions to the poet, given the reader's own level of experience with life and with poetry? Even if Bloom would allow that the inspiration for a particular poem comes from 'real life', however that is defined, he still insists that the writing of the poem is so constrained by the presence of the precursor—the poem and poet that introduced the ephebe to poetry in the first place—that unless the fetters of indebtedness are broken, the new poem is hobbled in some way. His whole theory rests on the assumption that such a precursor poem and poet opens up within the ephebe the potential for poetry, as if a father (or mother) opened up the possibility of life within the child and the child needs be permanently indebted for that opening.

It seems to me that Bloom is relying too much on Freud's analysis of the Family Romance, for what is evident to any adult is that individuals generally outgrow this dynamic. They detach themselves from their parents. They move out into the world and seek their own fortune, which is gained by the judicious use of their own skills and experiences. They move towards the summit of their potential as

¹³³ Bloom 94.

physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual beings. They grow out of their entanglements with their families and produce new families. They learn to act out of their own centre, though it is admitted that to reach their centre—their ‘song-spark’ as I term it in *The Silence Inside the World*—they must shed what is not theirs, the skins of their upbringing that don’t serve to aid their centre. For many, such a process of shedding is long and torturous and may not bring success. So I suppose Bloom may be right in suggesting that the creation of a strong poet has its parallel in the creation of a strong individual. However, such individuals do not require a strong personal father for their development. Many succeed quite nicely not knowing at all who their father was or after suffering horrendous abuse from fathers or father figures. Many succeed brilliantly after childhoods with quite ordinary fathers. To assume, because Nietzsche implied that encounters against strength create strength, that strength actually requires such encounters, of the human or poetry kind, is false logic. We needn’t even fall back on saying that the world can be the strong antagonist and the poet is reacting against the world. The world doesn’t need to be completed or swerved from; it only needs to be engaged with. Strong individuals acknowledge the influence of their parents then go on with the task of fulfilling their potential, are pulled forward by some intimation of the future, are not pushed forward by the past. Each of us is drawn forward to meet and create our Self, which is a concept that operates for the poet *qua* poet as well as the poet *qua* person. Such a process Jung calls individuation, and it happens whether or not the Family Romance is strong or weak.

Furthermore, I sense that the drive to create such a theory as Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence is an attempt both to undermine the poet and to elevate the critic, specifically Bloom. If all poems are responses to other poems, then poets are critics in

reality, and thus critics are poets. I sense Bloom undergoing his own *kenosis*: he is emptying out the divinity of poets while seeming to empty himself (because he also is an epebe, a would-be strong poet), though not in actuality, for the theory is *his*. Who can come along now and out-theory his theory of influence without subscribing to it in the first place? What matters, though, is that a poet will always be able to write a poem even if critics do not exist, but if there were no poets, no poems, critics would not have any subject matter, unless they create some, and then they would be poets.

However, Bloom's theories may still be relevant when we consider the whole problem of what it is we are experiencing when we engage with 'reality' and try to communicate that experience to others. As Eliot once noted:

Some one said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.¹³⁴

Not only do we now know more of 'reality', but we are also contaminated by what we know: we cannot experience the world without such experiences being mediated by the words of those who were before us, whether parent or great writer. The world of nature is not the same after Wordsworth saw and wrote about it as it was before. And so we cannot write of nature or Nature/Spirit without overcoming what has already been written about these domains. We are 'poets' by our engagement with the world, with all forms of life, whether written text or sensual experience, and become 'strong poets' by applying something like Bloom's ratios as ways when we want to experience the world afresh, without the blinkers and rose-coloured glasses of those who have come before us. If we want to communicate this raw experience to others we again have to use the words and concepts available to us in such a way that we are

¹³⁴ T S Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920; London: Methuen, 1969) 52.

not regurgitating what was seen or said before. So, in order for *The Silence Inside the World* to be a strong poem of the divine, a poem that will provide something along the lines of what David Tacey calls a ‘new experience of the sacred’,¹³⁵ something that will aid in a ‘fundamental re-enchantment of the world’,¹³⁶ then Bloom’s ratios may not only show how to evade the pressure of one’s textual influences and precursors, but also how to clear the vision so as to experience the sacred in as pure a form as possible for transmission to others. In the end, only a reader will know if I have managed to avoid both types of contamination in the writing of *The Silence Inside the World*.

¹³⁵ David Tacey, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1995) 147.

¹³⁶ Tacey 152.

1.6 Applied Intuition

Call the world if you Please “The vale of Soul-making”.
John Keats¹³⁷

Threshold

It is lunchtime and you are walking to a city pub to meet a work friend and discuss speculative fiction. The night before you had finished re-reading the last book in a new fantasy trilogy ‘Comparable to Tolkien at his best’. The setting of these books is the Land, a place of wondrous beings and deadly confrontations, a place where vivid Earthpower, a magic of stone, wood and water, inter-penetrates the landscape and all it contains. You start to cross the plaza in front of the hotel and walk past a tall, thin evergreen tree poking out of its protective metal cage. Suddenly, out of the corner of your eye, you see numinous light flare about and through each leaf and twig and shimmer with rainbow glints for the paused split-second it takes you to turn and stare at the wonder, which fades to memory-dazzle.

As a theoretician of consciousness, Ken Wilber has introduced a number of useful concepts, not just for therapists and philosophers, but also, I believe, for artists, especially this writer. When we look at the journey of the self-system, we wonder what it is that draws the self from one level to the next. Wilber and other theorists might say that there is a telos operating, that we are being drawn ‘back’ (a Platonic ‘remembering’) to the Ground of our being. When the infant bites its thumb and registers pain, but feels nothing when it bites its blanket, it grows to understand that it has a separate body from its environment (fulcrum F-1). But what is it that the mature

¹³⁷ John Keats, ‘Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Sunday Morn Feby 14th’, *Selected Poetry and Letters*, ed. and intro. Richard Harter Fogle (1951; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) 329.

rational being needs to experience for it to realize it is has a soul and is a spiritual being (fulcrums F-6 and F-7)? Some form of Beauty, or Good, or Truth. It is my contention that Art can trigger such ‘peak/peek’ experiences for the rational being that is ready for exposure to higher realms. This is surely what Kathleen Raine means when she says that poetry is ‘the language of the human soul, through which the spirit speaks’¹³⁸ and that the true function of Art, of poetry, is to transport the reader to Eternity, which is just another name for one of the Higher Stages along the Great Chain of Being: ‘Poets of the imagination write of the soul, of intellectual beauty, of the living spirit of the world’.¹³⁹ As she also says, ‘A work of art is precisely an expression in words of some intuition of imaginative reality’.¹⁴⁰

Anything that moves a being along the chain (transformation), or prepares that being for such a movement (translation), or triggers the telos, the impulse for movement, in the first place (peak experience), is a worthwhile endeavour. Once we recall Wilber’s discussion of legitimacy and authenticity as applied to psychosocial institutions, we can see that art pieces, too, can be divided into two types: legitimate, those that help translate a person, and authentic, those that help transform, whether temporarily (peak experience) or permanently. And what powers these transitions is not just imagination but capital ‘I’ Imagination.

¹³⁸ Brian Keeble, ‘An Interview with Kathleen Raine’, *Temenos Academy Review 7: Kathleen Raine Memorial Issue* (London: The Temenos Academy, 2004) 36.

¹³⁹ Raine, *Journey* 18.

¹⁴⁰ Raine, *Journey* 21.

But what is Imagination, especially in relation to the Great Chain of Being? In her explorations of Blake and Yeats, Raine indicates that Imagination is not only the power that makes the poet, but is also the realm of investigation for the poet:

But by virtue of the Imagination, the universal cosmic knowledge is available to whoever, poet or prophet, raises his mind into *those regions*: ‘One thing alone makes a poet’, Blake affirmed, ‘Imagination, the Divine Vision’ [my italics].¹⁴¹

C M Bowra in his seminal study of the Romantic Imagination says something similar:

Indeed, imagination and insight are in fact inseparable and form for all practical purposes a single faculty. Insight both awakes the imagination to work and is in turn sharpened by it when it is at work.¹⁴²

The Romantics were concerned with the things of the spirit and hoped that through imagination and inspired insight they could both understand them and present them in compelling poetry.¹⁴³

The implication of both these assessments is that Imagination equals inspired insight and imagination, and deals with ‘things of the spirit’, Raine’s ‘universal cosmic knowledge’:

Imaginative knowledge is immediate knowledge, like a tree, or a rose or a waterfall or sun or stars...Imagination as understood by the Romantic poets is nothing less than the fundamental ground of knowledge.¹⁴⁴

How does such insight, such use of the Imagination occur? Ken Wilber notes:

¹⁴¹ Raine *Learning*, 94.

¹⁴² C M Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (1950; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) 7.

¹⁴³ Bowra 10.

¹⁴⁴ Raine *Learning*, 23.

St. Bonaventure...taught that men and women have at least three modes of attaining knowledge—"three eyes," as he put it...the *eye of flesh*, by which we perceive the external world of space, time, and objects; the *eye of reason*, by which we attain a knowledge of philosophy, logic, and the mind itself; and the *eye of contemplation*, by which we rise to a knowledge of transcendent realities.¹⁴⁵

The *eye of flesh*, with its act of simple empirical cognition, called by Hugh of St Victor *cogitatio*, seeks knowledge of the material world (the domain of *sensibilia*¹⁴⁶). The *eye of mind*, by using the mind's eye in the act of *meditatio*, seeks truths of and within the psyche (the domain of *intelligibilia*¹⁴⁷). The *eye of contemplation*, in the act of *contemplatio*, reveals 'the knowledge whereby the psyche or soul is united instantly with Godhead in transcendent insight'¹⁴⁸ (the domain of *transcendelia*¹⁴⁹). The two domains of knowledge represented by the first two 'eyes' could be termed Relative Knowledge, what Madhyana Buddhism (founded by Nagarjuna) terms *samvritti*, whereas the third type of knowledge is of Absolute Truth, *paramartha*. It is in the use of *contemplatio* that the great Romantics attained their 'inspired insights', their knowledge of 'things of the spirit' (*transcendelia*), though their interest was not just in experiencing such knowledge, such illumination, but also in transmitting it to others.

It seems to me that there are many different types of Imagination, especially in its formulation of 'imagination and inspired insight', which is a type of *contemplatio*—let's call it *imaginatio*. There is a hint of this in Raine:

¹⁴⁵ Wilber *Eye*, 2-3.

¹⁴⁶ Wilber *Eye*, 39.

¹⁴⁷ Wilber *Eye*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ Wilber *Eye*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Wilber *Eye*, 39.

Traditionally, there are four worlds, or levels, and poetic inspiration may take its origin in any one of these four—that of the natural world, the world of the individual soul, that of universal archetypal reality, or, it is claimed for certain sacred scriptures, from a source beyond the human order altogether. Mystery is in its nature immeasurable.¹⁵⁰

From nature comes the work of poets such as Hopkins and John Clare, nature poetry ‘enhancing, celebrating, the sensible world and its creatures and our living participation in it’;¹⁵¹ from ‘the world of feeling, of the individual soul—much of Shakespeare, Keats’s world, Thomas Hardy, or the songs of every folk-tradition’;¹⁵² while, ‘from beyond this world of feeling...another voice, as from an order that would once have been called the celestial’,¹⁵³ the great poetry that ‘speaks for the universal mind all share—Dante and Shakespeare, Shelley, Rilke, Yeats’.¹⁵⁴ Now, while these worlds may not exactly match up with the gross, the psychic and subtle, the causal, and the nondual realms, the idea is obvious: that the best of poetry is not simply the record of observations of ‘Single vision & Newton’s sleep’,¹⁵⁵ but that which has the ‘resonance from higher worlds of meaning and qualities’.¹⁵⁶ Such poetry ‘speaks *from* the spirit innate in all, *to* the spirit innate in all’,¹⁵⁷ and the intent of such poetry is to free up this spirit, the eye of contemplation—acts of *imaginatio* to enhance *imaginatio*:

¹⁵⁰ Kathleen Raine, ‘What is the Use of Poetry?’, *Temenos Academy Review 7: Kathleen Raine Memorial Issue* (London: The Temenos Academy, 2004) 19.

¹⁵¹ Raine *Learning*, 101.

¹⁵² Raine *Learning*, 101.

¹⁵³ Raine *Learning*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ Raine *Use of Poetry*, 19.

¹⁵⁵ William Blake, ‘Letter to Thomas Butts, November 22, 1802’, *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E Grant (New York: Norton, 1979) 462.

¹⁵⁶ Raine *Learning*, 101.

¹⁵⁷ Raine *Learning*, 101.

Only when each 'degree' [each world] is open to that upon which it depends can the universal life circulate and flow within the Tree whose roots are above and whose branches [are] in the lower worlds.¹⁵⁸

Or, as Ted Hughes also puts it, poetry is 'the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error'.¹⁵⁹

So Imagination is both a place and a power, with the latter itself both a vision of that place, that realm, and the act of (re)creation of that vision. One division of Imagination into types is clearly Coleridge's:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify...

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.¹⁶⁰

Another division is obviously Blake's:

¹⁵⁸ Raine *Learning*, 102.

¹⁵⁹ Ekbert Faas, 'Ted Hughes and *Crow* (1970)', *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe—With Selected Critical Writings by Ted Hughes & Two Interviews* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1980) 198.

But when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce, all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration.¹⁶¹

What do I here before the Judgement? without my Emanation?

With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration?¹⁶²

An analogical formulation of these terms and phrases would be ‘Imagination: Fancy:: Daughters of Inspiration: Daughters of Memory’.¹⁶³ Thus, it seems to me that, given the analysis of the Spectrum of Consciousness in earlier chapters and the above realizations of various poets, there are degrees of Imagination and Fancy. Essentially, for a poet who is open to it, inspiration can come from any state of the spectrum, and what the poet does with that inspiration depends on whether he or she has a sense of the extent of the Great Chain of Being; and the clarity of this sense and of the poet’s understanding is reliant to some degree on where the poet resides in the Great Chain and with which eye (flesh, mind, contemplation) the inspiration is received.

Some may argue that all sources of inspiration reside within the human psyche (leaving aside whether or not the psyche, the self, has been ‘constructed’ by its social environment and/or by language). The Perennial Philosophy doesn’t disparage the idea of a personal or a collective unconsciousness; nor does it ignore the possibility

¹⁶⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Biographia Literaria’, *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. and intro. Donald A Stauffer (New York: The Modern Library, 1951) 263.

¹⁶¹ Blake, Preface of ‘Milton’, 237.

¹⁶² Blake, Plate 14, ‘Milton’, 257.

¹⁶³ A is to B as C is to D.

that elements in the world of *samsara* are constructed by other elements. However, its chief concern is *paramartha* (Absolute Truth), not *samvritti* (Relative Knowledge), and so it acknowledges levels of being beyond the personal and the collective, as discussed earlier, and recognizes, in the imaginative literary tradition, the existence of inspirers from these realms, whether they be muses, Yeats's Instructors, Graves's White Goddess, or Hughes's Goddess of Complete Being.

Of course, what must be remembered about the application of the various types of Imagination¹⁶⁴ is that the insights obtained through them will be interpreted according to the worldview in which the poet is operating. A poet fully involved in the Conop level, in mythic-belongingness, may interpret a subtle level inspiration/insight/peak experience as a message from his or her personal deity, and use it to reinforce sociocentric devotion, rather than realize that the deity is just a path through to the subtle and causal realms, where all deities dissolve. Of course, if the poet is on the threshold of shifting to a higher level, the right insight may trigger or fuel the transition, whether as a direct transformation or as a translation leading to transformation, and the resulting poem(s) will show or enact the transition(s), and be seen as a poetry of self-transcendence.

Once we look at the personal/rational realms, however, complications arise. As Raine and Hughes, among others, have argued, 'the three hundred years of rational enlightenment'¹⁶⁵ have resulted in a denial of inner worlds and a change of premise, through the materialist ideology, from spirit as the foundation of the world to matter as its foundation. Thus, if an inspiration arises from the personal and

¹⁶⁴ See Appendix Six for a detailed examination of the types of Imagination when considering the source of inspiration and the level of the receiver (poet).

prepersonal realms and the poet acts with the latter premise, no matter what level/fulcrum he resides upon, then the insight can only be accommodated as an intuition about his current level and thus only lead to inadequate translation:

Within the terms of the secular, materialist ideologies still current in the West and westernized world, the role of the poet as legislator of values cannot rise above the level of political spokesman or protestor for some sort of civil rights. This might lead to some reform or change of government, but not to the raising and widening of consciousness itself.¹⁶⁶

This is because such a poet is only working with Fancy (because Imagination is disavowed); like Blake's Daughter's of Memory, there is no insight, no inspiration, only a shuffling around and recombining of 'fixities and definites', which are obviously held in memory, whether conscious or unconscious. However, for a poet at vision-logic, say, who believes that poetry is 'not a mere passive reflection but an agent in the evolution of consciousness',¹⁶⁷ then even an insight from the personal and prepersonal realms will be aligned towards higher realms, and likely lead to transformation of the poet and his/her readers.

Of course, the effect on the reader depends on what worldview the reader is operating with and what premises, in that these would colour the response to the 'inspiration', the experience, provided by the text. A person fully involved in the Formop level, in rationality and individualism, may interpret a psychic level inspiration/insight/peak experience, whether direct or mediated through a text, as, for

¹⁶⁵ From Ted Hughes's first 'Myth and Education' essay, *Children's Literature in Education* 1 (APS Publications, March 1970, 55-70), quoted in Ann Skea, *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*, (Armidale: University of New England, 1994) 6.

¹⁶⁶ Raine *Use of Poetry*, 20.

¹⁶⁷ Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition Volume I, Bollingen Series XXXV-11* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1968) 265.

‘matter’ premise, either a call to arms for ecological repair through systems theory or an indicator of regression back to pre-rational thinking that needs to be combated; while for ‘spirit’ premise, such an insight might be seen as a call to join an earth-based religion and carry out ecological repair through spiritual development and care for the immediate environment. Since the poet cannot know the level or readiness of the readers, the important thing is to prepare the work as well as possible, in truthfulness to the original inspiration, so that something of that insight can be transmitted to others whatever their level: ‘A simple tale, told at the right moment, transforms a person’s life with the order its pattern brings to incoherent energies’.¹⁶⁸

And so, the imperative is to create poetry in its purest sense: ‘Poetry, and poetry alone, operates on the vertical axis of the four “worlds”, opening a way of communication between lower and higher, narrower and fuller experience’.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Hughes, ‘Myth and Education’, *Winter* 153.

¹⁶⁹ Raine *Learning*, 102.

1.7 Upaya Ensemble

Three things that enrich the poet:
 Myths, poetic power, a store of ancient verse.
 Robert Graves¹⁷⁰

Threshold

A day and a half of chanting, of meditation to the beat of a flat Native American drum, of discussions about Dreamtime Beings and vision quests, and you and the other students are told to find a tree, sit with your back to it, close your eyes, and listen to the wind. At first it is difficult to hear anything other than your mental chatter, but soon your breath slows, your body and thinking fades from attention, awareness widens. You see the wind in your mind's eye as you follow its to-fro patter-bump through the forest, then its rising, swirling slice through the air above. The more you listen and merge into listening the more you ride the spiral paths it takes from the eight-point horizon to a funnel gap high and to the left; and the higher you ride, the more you know this as the pattern the wind will always make: to disappear behind the sky and somehow emerge everywhere at once, horizons flowing into this one instant.

In his first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, Ken Wilber discussed the necessity of travelling towards Buddha-nature, even though, when we arrive, like a man who believes in a flat earth and then travels around the world, we arrive in the place we started:

¹⁷⁰ A Triad in the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* ('The Red Book of Hergest'), Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth* (1948; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966) 20.

This reflects the fact that, in Nagarajuna’s [sic] phrase, “There is no difference whatsoever between *nirvana* and *samsara*; and there is no difference whatsoever between *samsara* and *nirvana*,” and Dogen’s statement that “the goal and the path are one,” and similar statements by the Masters of every tradition that enlightenment and ignorance, reality and illusion, heaven and hell, liberation and bondage—all are non-dual and not to be separated. Thus “you are already where any path can take you.”¹⁷¹

However, because we do believe we are not there, that we are not enlightened, we need to start travelling, which requires us to have a means for this journey, just like we need means to travel the ‘flat earth’ (by train, boat, carriage, balloon, as Phileas Fogg does in Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*) and discover it round:

The means whereby we travel “towards” Mind are technically called *upaya*, “skillful means,” a word that is often translated as “trick” because we are tricking ourselves into looking for what we have never lost.¹⁷²

(In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley describes a similar term, ‘expedient means’, those ways that Ashvaghosha writes about in his treatise *The Awakening of Faith* ‘whereby unitive knowledge of Thusness may be achieved’.)¹⁷³

Wilber then uses the work of Dr Hubert Benoit, who analysed the ‘inner gesture’ process that can help us surrender ‘all of our concepts, mental images, and mental objects’ so that we may reach a state of satori.¹⁷⁴ This process, which produces an ‘attitude of vigilant expectation’,¹⁷⁵ can be seen to underlie all *upaya*, and has three essential factors:

¹⁷¹ Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, (1977; Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1989) 308.

¹⁷² Wilber, *Spectrum* 308-309.

¹⁷³ Huxley 330.

¹⁷⁴ Wilber, *Spectrum* 310.

¹⁷⁵ Wilber, *Spectrum* 313.

Factor 1: Active Attention—a special type of intense yet relaxed alertness...a burning attention-authorization to what is Now, watching inside and outside with equal eye. When this active attention is carried out correctly, it results in:

Factor 2: Stopping—the suspension of thought, of conceptualization, of objectification, of mental chatter...It is a suspension of space, time, form, and dualism, and in this condition an utter mental Silence prevails...If this “stopping” is clean and complete, it will result in:

Factor 3: Passive Awareness—a special seeing that is *seeing into nothing*...And one instant of this pure awareness *is* itself Mind. Whether we realize it or not, it *is always already the case*.¹⁷⁶

One could say then that any psychosocial ‘institution’ (which would include literature and thus texts themselves) that somehow encourages these three factors would create a puncture through Relative Knowledge and open up a moment of Absolute Truth.

One could also say that every moment offers this possibility, which is why the practice of Mindfulness (‘of bringing the scattered mind home, and so of bringing the different aspects of our being into focus’)¹⁷⁷ is so important a ‘trick’ in Tibetan Buddhism. Even if the moment doesn’t create a puncture, it can at least provide an opportunity for growth along the Great Chain/Nest of Being, so that in the proper attention to a future ‘present-moment’ the person will be closer to creating such a puncture. That is, every moment, and everything done in the moment, such as reading

¹⁷⁶ Wilber, *Spectrum* 314-315.

¹⁷⁷ Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, eds. Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey (London: Rider, 1992) 61.

a text, can be a fulcrum. If the text itself encourages/engages/presupposes fulcrum experiences, is itself an *upaya*, then growth must be easier and a taste of One Mind closer.

Another way of looking at the *upaya* process is through the use of Gregory Bateson's analysis of learning as enunciated by Morris Berman in his book *The Reenchantment of the World*. In Bateson's view there are three types of learning. The first type Bateson calls proto-learning, Learning I, the 'simple solution of a specific problem',¹⁷⁸ as when a rat learns to push a bar to receive food. The second type he calls Deutero-learning, Learning II:

Progressive change in the rate of Learning I. Understanding the nature of the context in which the problems posed in Learning I exist; learning the rules of the game.

Equivalent to paradigm formation.¹⁷⁹

Berman suggests that '[c]haracter and "reality" have their origins in the process of Learning II; indeed, character and reality prove to be inseparable',¹⁸⁰ which is similar to Wilber's contention that there are different worldviews for different cognitive levels. As Berman notes of Bateson's findings:

Behaviour, says Bateson, is controlled by Learning II, and molds the total context to fit in with those expectations. The self-validating character of deutero-learning is so powerful that it is normally ineradicable...Of course, many individuals go through "conversions" in which they abandon one paradigm for another. But regardless of the paradigm, the person remains in the grip of a deutero-pattern, and goes through life finding "facts" that validate it.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (1981; New York: Bantam, 1988) 354.

¹⁷⁹ Berman 354.

¹⁸⁰ Berman 213.

¹⁸¹ Berman 214.

What this seems to be saying is that the person is stuck on whatever level they are operating, even with translations, and is accepting facts that support that level while dismissing negative responses or lack of responses (those things that do not validate the premise or learning of the level) as anomalies, a common feature in the scientific paradigm when discussing, for example, paranormal events. If we take the case of the child at fulcrum one biting its thumb and experiencing pain, it may at first dismiss the event, then try again, be hurt, then again, each time not only experiencing the pain of the wound but also the pain of puzzlement about the failure of its ‘model of the world’, which at this point is itself. Eventually the child discovers that there are other things it can bite that don’t bring such pain, and so begins to modify its conception of itself and its environment, its worldview. The child doesn’t change paradigm, doesn’t translate, but changes its conception of the paradigms at that level; it transforms its consciousness. This is a type of what Bateson calls Learning III:

An experience in which a person suddenly realizes the arbitrary nature of his or her own paradigm, or Learning II, and goes through a profound reorganization of personality [consciousness] as a result.¹⁸²

The process of this jump in learning is akin to the double bind situation that Bateson discovered in the case of schizophrenics. Without going into the details of his theory, the point is that the setting up of a double bind can also cause creative responses, as in the case reported by Berman of the porpoise that was trained to the point it was decided to reward it only when it came up with a new trick:

The creature goes through its entire repertoire, either one trick at a time or in sets of three, and gets no fish. It keeps doing it, getting angrier, more vehement. Finally, it

¹⁸² Berman 354.

begins to go crazy, exhibit signs of extreme frustration or pain. What happened next...was completely unexpected: the porpoise's mind jumped to a higher logical type. It somehow realized that the new rule was, "Forget what you learned in Learning II; there is nothing sacred about it." The animal not only invented a new trick (for which it was immediately rewarded); it proceeded to perform four absolutely new capers that had not before been observed in this particular species of animal. The porpoise had become trans-contextual.¹⁸³

One could say that the porpoise had gone from the Daughters of Memory to the Daughters of Inspiration.

This use of the double bind, as Berman points out, is similar to that of the koan technique. In Zen Buddhism the koan is usually based on a statement once made by a Zen master from a state of satori, and is used to promote an 'extraordinary state of spiritual tension'¹⁸⁴ out of which an 'intuition of the truth of Zen' is attained.¹⁸⁵ As here described by D T Suzuki, one of the greatest twentieth century authorities on Zen, the koan was developed as a pointer that would function in two directions:

- (1) To check the working of the intellect, or rather to let the intellect see by itself how far it can go, and also that there is a realm into which it as such can never enter; (2)
- To effect the maturity of Zen consciousness which eventually breaks out into a state of satori.¹⁸⁶

Such an event constitutes a breakthrough to a special type of Learning III, from all paradigms of rational inquiry to an opening into transrational reality. And once such an opening, such a peak experience, occurs, further training will stabilize the opening, will convert the state to a trait, will result in continuous satori, nondual reality.

¹⁸³ Berman 229-230.

¹⁸⁴ D T Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism: Second Series*, ed. Christmas Humphreys, (1949; London: Rider, 1974) 95.

¹⁸⁵ Suzuki 95.

What the above analysis provides is not only a sense of what happens at a fulcrum (a jump from Learning II to Learning III), but also a realization of how such a jump can occur, how an *upaya* works: through a type of double bind. What is not so obvious is the sense that it almost doesn't matter what paradigm is used at the Learning II level, as long as it contains a double bind. In this, I am reminded of the question discussed by the sorcerer Don Juan in Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*:

This question is one that only a very old man asks...Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life I could say I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere...Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere, but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you.¹⁸⁷

If one interprets this as 1) all paths lead nowhere other than to the knowledge that we are in the Tao often without knowing it, and 2) that some paths enable this realization more than other paths, then maybe what Joseph Campbell terms a person's 'bliss' is the best path through and along the Great Chain of Being for that person. Even Suzuki talks about the fact that seekers after satori may not choose to pursue Zen and the koan tradition, even if they have the requisite mental equipment for its 'spirit of inquiry':

It may be that he [a devotee] is more attracted to the Shingon or T'ien-tai method of discipline, or to the recitation of the Buddha's name as in the Pure Land sects, or to

¹⁸⁶ Suzuki 95.

¹⁸⁷ Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968; Middlesex: Penguin, 1976) 106-107.

the repetition of the Daimoku as in the Nichiren sect. This is where what may be termed his religious idiosyncrasies rule, which are due to his previous karma.¹⁸⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that any path can ‘further’ development along the Great Chain of Being, the trick for each of us is to find, through courage and clarity, the path, the ‘bliss’, the domain of living, that enables relatively easy translation and transformation at all times, though this ease does not preclude the possibility or even necessity of a double bind occurring, which will propel us into transformation, even if we are unwilling.

I now would like to draw together the key insights, techniques and approaches illuminated in the preceding discussions. The resulting ensemble would then contribute towards an understanding of the parameters of the project and form the basis of a methodology that should benefit the creation of a strong, imaginative text.

The first group of ensemble elements are at the macro level of the project:

1. *The Silence Inside the World* will act as an upaya, a trick to enable Learning III growth towards the upper reaches of the Great Chain of Being, by exposing the reader to insights from those realms (from transcendelia) and triggering further insights (through contemplatio and imaginatio).
2. *The Silence Inside the World* will be a peak experience of the Great Chain of Being and comprise peek/peak experiences of various levels in the lives of its characters, as well as examples of translation and transformation, both positive and negative.

¹⁸⁸ Suzuki 125.

3. *The Silence Inside the World* will function as a koan, as a creative double bind, a pointer to the limits of rationality and a stimulator of satori-type events. The resulting punctures should come through the encouragement of active attention—stopping—passive awareness, achieved through the particularities of language and poetics and the dynamics of setting, character and plot.

The second group of ensemble elements relates to the micro level of the project, to the particularities of character, plot, event and setting. The information in this group, which was gleaned from the Perennial Philosophy, will contribute to the creation of *The Silence Inside the World* but will not be slavishly followed; it will be used as ‘orientating generalizations’ and raw material for imagination. Thus, the details given below are quite general. Particulars will be presented in ‘Reflections’, where relevant, or in appendices.

This group can be further split up into three subsets. The first involves those major narratives/structures identified from the Perennial Philosophy as useful in enacting or enabling Learning III opportunities and upper level peak experiences for the characters of *The Silence Inside the World*. These can be further divided into two types.

First of all, there are those systems that deal with ascension towards the nondual, which is a task all of the characters in the poem are engaged in, though they may not be conscious of it. One such process is the seven level chakra system, which is closely aligned with the Spectrum of Consciousness. Each chakra is situated in a part of the body and deals with an aspect of human consciousness. For example, the third chakra, Manipura (‘lustrous jewel’) has the symbolic colour yellow, is located in the solar plexus, is associated with the element of Fire, and has the function of Will

and the emotions of laughter, anger and joy.¹⁸⁹ Another system is the Kabbalah, with its Tree of Life displaying the ten *sefirot*¹⁹⁰ (ten ‘Archetypes of Value and Being’¹⁹¹), and its 22 paths of development to and through the various *sefirot* towards Ein Sof (‘The infinite Godhead’¹⁹²), which is beyond the highest sefirot, Kether (‘Crown, Will, Delight’¹⁹³).¹⁹⁴

The second type of narrative involves, effectively, the descent from Spirit to manifestation, which is what occurs to those characters who are have died or are awaiting birth, and seems symbolic of what can happen in all ‘death’ moments. This narrative is summed up in the bardo process as described in the *Bardo Thödol*, the actual translation of which is *Liberation by Hearing on the After-Death Plane*, though the book is commonly known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The book describes the 49 days of the after-death period and the various encounters the soul (or, as preferred in the Buddhist tradition, the ‘consciousness-principle’¹⁹⁵) experiences during this time as it strives for enlightenment or a meritorious rebirth. With each failed test or transition, usually because of accumulated negative karma, the possible outcomes become worse, from Liberation into Buddha realms to rebirth as god or brute or human. This descent in value is akin to a negative or reverse Spectrum of Consciousness.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ See Table of Correspondences in Anodea Judith, *Wheels of Life: A User’s Guide to the Chakra System* (1987; St Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1995) 46-47. Details of this table are reproduced in Appendix Eight.

¹⁹⁰ Also spelled *sephiroth* and *sefirah*.

¹⁹¹ Drob 18.

¹⁹² Drob 18.

¹⁹³ Drob 18.

¹⁹⁴ Appendix Eight has more details of these systems.

¹⁹⁵ The ‘sum total, or aggregate, of *karmic* propensities, composing, or bound up with, personality and consciousness’, W Y Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927; New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 86n.

¹⁹⁶ For more details see Appendix Eight.

The second subset of the second ensemble group involves those symbols and motifs identified from the Perennial Tradition as pertinent to the exploration of spiritual growth. Examples of symbols would be cave and light, river and sea, maze and gate, the tree of life and its fruits, birds of the soul, cauldrons, the patterns in stars, dark towers and gardens. Motifs would include characters, elements and encounters from myth and legend, some of which may well be disguised: the broken sword, the gods' blacksmith, games of chance and imagination, riddles and monsters, dragons and winged beings.

A third subset involves those questions examining the nitty-gritty of the various techniques outlined above. Examples are

1. At what fulcrum is each of the major characters?
2. What double binds are operating on them?
3. What paths are they on, and are these 'of the heart'? In the terminology of *The Silence Inside the World*, are the characters aligned with their 'song-sparks', and if not, why not?
4. What peak experiences do they have?
5. What premise is each character operating with?

Much of the above can be simplified into what I will call, following Ted Hughes's identification of Shakespeare's Tragic Equation,¹⁹⁷ the Threshold Equation. Every fulcrum transition, every peak experience puncture, involves a threshold, a choice either to step forward, usually into the unknown, where one is changed, 'death' leading to 'Life', or to step back, 'life' possibly leading to 'Death', a harder path, a

¹⁹⁷ See Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

path without a heart. In fact, not only is every moment a fulcrum for whatever level one is at, it is also a threshold into the nondual. As Walt Whitman observes, ‘All truths wait in all things’,¹⁹⁸ and these truths, including Absolute Truth, are available if one but has the eyes (of contemplation) to see, as Blake attests:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower:
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.¹⁹⁹

Thus, *The Silence Inside the World* will depict its characters undergoing their Threshold Equations (their transitions along the Great Chain of Being) and thus enable its readers to share in and learn from such translations and transformations. The poem will achieve this by a writing process that itself enacts the equation. In other words, the poem is an effect not only of those drafting operations where creation is occurring—the writer being open to inspiration—but also of those redrafting/rewriting operations during which the status of poetics, scene, event and character interaction is checked against the equation. The first case, of creation, will partly occur through the methodology of the *upaya*. That is, the act of writing itself is an *upaya* that involves the writer opening himself to inspiration from or insights into (peak experiences of) the four transpersonal realms. The intention thus is to be open

¹⁹⁸ Section 30 of ‘Song of Myself’, Walt Whitman, *The Portable Walt Whitman*, ed. Mark van Doren, rev. Malcolm Cowley (1945; New York: Penguin, 1977) 63.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Auguries of Innocence’, Blake 209.

to what Imagination wishes to disclose about Absolute Truth through story and poetic music. This being the case, the use of the above-mentioned common symbols and narratives, the understanding gained through ‘the learning of the Imagination’, will not be prescriptive. In fact, one result of this investigation into Imagination may be the notion that all story, all acts of Imagination, are co-created with those higher realms, with the assistance of such learning but not restricted to it. A modification of this result may then be the understanding that story itself, *Imaginatio*, is what comprises nondual reality.

Another important aspect of the Threshold Equation is the sense that with all truths contained in any instant then all worlds are coterminous. This is consistent with the observation earlier that there is ‘no difference whatsoever between *nirvana* and *samsara*’. Thus we can say Nirvana equals Samsara, Eternity equals Time, Heaven equals Hell, all Bardo states are equivalent, and so on. Of course, these worlds are only experienced as one when ‘the doors of perception’ are cleaned;²⁰⁰ otherwise, the worlds are separate and our lives filled with the pain of separation.

This understanding of coterminous worlds can be seen as a major application of the nondual realization depicted in the following statement (quoted by Wilber) by the great Vedanta mystic Sri Ramana Maharshi:

The world is illusory;
 Brahman alone is Real;
 Brahman is the world.²⁰¹

One way of illustrating this understanding will be to have *The Silence Inside the World* depict a setting where such an equivalence of worlds occurs. This enactment is

²⁰⁰ ‘A Memorable Fancy’, plate 14, in ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’, Blake 93.

²⁰¹ Wilber *Sex*, 310.

implicit in the original connections with the two main characters already mentioned, Zane and Jessie, who come from two different universes but are somehow connected. As will be explained in ‘Reflections: *Tikkun*’, the other two main characters also come from other domains, and so the meeting point for all of them, Thexlan, will be a nexus of all their worlds, as well as of the personal and transpersonal realms. And thus the poem itself will become a sacred space (a *temenos*), with Thexlan (and more specifically, Mt Alkerii, the dream mountain) its centre: ‘a point at which hierophanies occur, at which the barriers between the physical, psychic and spiritual dimensions of reality become permeable and transparent’.²⁰² Moreover, with the emphasis on story that *The Silence Inside the World* seems to encourage, one possible implication of the Threshold Equation is that not only are each of these worlds and dualities equivalent, but that all experience is *Imaginatio*, that act of *contemplatio* that not only sees but creates.

What all the above means for *The Silence Inside the World* is that every aspect of the story and the storytelling should somehow be consistent with the intricacies of the Threshold Equation, for only then can a reader fully experience a Learning III peak experience of transitions along or through the Great Chain of Being, and so be led to the wisdom of Imagination, ‘the fundamental ground of knowledge’.²⁰³ The intention of *The Silence Inside the World* then is to tackle Blake’s ‘great task’:

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Harry Oldmeadow, *Mircea Eliade and Carl Jung: ‘Priests without Surplices’?—Reflections on the Place of Myth, Religion and Science in Their Work*, Studies in Western Traditions, Occasional Papers No. 1 (Bendigo: Department of Humanities, La Trobe University, 1995) 16.

²⁰³ Raine *Learning*, 23.

²⁰⁴ Plate 5, *Jerusalem*, Blake 315.

THE SILENCE INSIDE THE WORLD²⁰⁵

*Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.*

W B Yeats, 'Long-Legged Fly'²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ For reference purposes, Appendix One contains chapter summaries, what may be called the poem's 'Argument', and Appendix Two is a glossary of terms used in both the poem and the exegesis.

²⁰⁶ Yeats 381.

1. Beyond the Last Gate

The way-gate slams, with the deep rolling sound
of a cavernous bell struck once, so deep
the long cadences shiver the bone's core.

The woman flinches from a dream of light
so intense she remembers nothing but
a grief quickening as she whirled away.

She blinks. The wavering starlight shows trees
and tombstones braided with shadows. She starts
to turn. Darkness engulfs her from above.

She is reminded of a feather cape
she once made, but this smothering is thicker,
wilder, a whiff of bile, more like a beast

thrashing its meal. She feels no breath from it,
recalls her father locking the hall cupboard,
her hot breath against fur coats, his command:

'Stay there until you learn how to behave
like a child of God instead of a whore.'
Just ten years old, all she had done was spread

her new church dress for everyone to see
and smiled for her mother. What is a whore?
Splinters of ice jag through her consciousness,

form dark maws that suck light from memory
till breath and sense begin to whimper-fade
no matter how she struggles, how she prays.

Then hands grip her arms, shake her. Darkness falls.
Her mind stumbles like every child alighting
from the merry-go-round. Hands hold her tight

as she hauls breath through posture, sense and thought.
Strong hands. Without the just-wrench of her father
pulling her from the packed and humid gloom:

‘Never do that again. God does not love
those who wallow in filth. They go to Hell.
Go to your room. You will not eat today.’

She shakes her head, then hears a deeper voice,
and tender, not her father’s: ‘Can you stand?
Are you all right?’ Tilting her head she shudders

at the dark shape before her. He lets go,
stands back. She hugs herself, observes his bearing,
the knee-high leather boots, the hooded cloak,

the tunic and dark breeches. He is tall,
wiry, a hint of stealthy elegance.
A bulging sack hangs behind his right shoulder.

She wonders what saga she now is dreaming,
what new distillation of her strained studies
is tainting thought and vision, recent pain.

She trembles at his wary stillness, notes
deep worry lines on his dark, angled face,
grey eyes like veiled mirrors that follow her

but allow nothing past, as if protecting
a deep fragility, or worse, a core
of emptiness. She wants a simple truth.

He removes his cloak and hands it to her.

‘You were like a statue, then you began
to twist and thrash about, flailing the air

as though drowning, and when I grabbed you, shadows
slid from your body and slithered away.

I fear this graveyard is not safe for us.’

The thick cloak is lined with fur and she welcomes
the warmth, not knowing till now she is cold,
has bare feet, wears only a thin nightdress.

Her knees buckle as she looks about her.

He goes to help, but she pushes him off.

‘Who are you and what am I doing here?’

He hitches his sack, smooths his long, dark hair.

‘I know I have been here before. Each time
is never the same, the people, the landscape,

the path we follow. Memory for me
is wayward, like leaves swirling in a river.

Of two things only am I sure, my name,

and that we must travel this sacred road,
learn what we can before we reach its end.

That gate will not open for us.’ He pauses.

‘My name is Zane.’ His hand is warm and gentle,
calloused edge, knuckles. A fighter, she guesses.

‘Mine is Jessie.’ He bows slightly, then points

at her scant clothing. ‘What do you remember?’

His voice is command-strong, yet frayed a little,
as from fatigue. She closes her eyes, sees

other snippets of childhood: the rose sparkle
of water spray she hurtles through again,
again, her mother urging her, then quiet

when her father appears; the serene owl
one night in her tree, its vanishing wink;
the whispered snatch of story-time, with dragons

that tickled, trees that talked, and singing swords
that opened the white way to paradise;
her cramped tears in the middle of the night

with her parents shouting, then that slap-silence.
But as she knows such memories are not
just theatres of time for carefree indulgence,

are links to bitter-dark that rarely fades,
and flares when open, she tries to recall
anything of her time before this place,

tells him of bare grey walls, fusty aromas,
something tight at limb and chest, how blood tastes.
Like one who also knows of brutal secrets

his face remains impassive as he nods.
She hugs the cloak to her, looks at the hill
behind the stone wall: 'I want to go home.'

The hilltop is efflorescence, all curves,
shapes, textures, all shifting angles and colour,
a vast chameleon hiding in nothing.

Sometimes it seems a hovel of mud huts,
other times a metropolis of gleam
and moving shapes of smoke and strangling flame,

machines flitting about towers like moths.
The activities of man and man's structures
make no sound, wonders seen through jellied air.

Suddenly there is a tremor beneath
their feet. Jessie hesitates, starts to run,
stops when she sees him standing still, eyes closed,

head craned as if tuning for distant notes.
A moment later, another vibration,
which spirals through her body, and her atoms

scatter, like dandelion clocks she blew
while sitting against her favourite tree
as a child, an hour of peace for each puff.

After the third tremor she breathes again.
Nothing appears to have changed, except for
a new gist of substance within her limbs.

Somehow now there is light enough to see
her hands in front of her. Where Zane is dark
of feature, like deep water in a cave,

she is wan, though hazed with blood radiance.
Jessie brings her hands closer, is amazed
by deep tracteries of veins visible

through her translucent skin. Now she remembers
her white hair, her pale blue eyes that flash red
or purple in bright light, her frailty,

how she was deemed a judgment on her parents
for past sins, a test of faith, for her also.
A pale witch they called her, not just her skin,

but her manner, the projection of pride,
choosing to sit with tree and grass and air
and not play or read or converse with others.

She knew more than they. The patterns of lines
would tell her things about the world. A vein
abruptly throbbing would signal a summons

from her father. A spasm on her thigh,
a visit from other brethren, or worse,
the minister, who often stared at her

from the bedroom door. A twitch in her palm
and she knew to leave the house before dawn,
stay all day with her tree and watch the wind.

When her mother left them, she searched the patterns
all over her body for any clue
to the reason, found only jumbled lines.

As she drops her arms to demand firm answers,
the steel and ivory gate behind them
creaks open and a bulbous mass of shadows

avalanches through, twists around to hammer
the quick-shut gate, the stone wall on each side,
gathers itself like a giant amoeba,

rushes forward. Dozens of twisted faces
leer or wink at them then vanish within
the roiling tangle of misshapen bodies,

limbs at awkward angles, the stench of slime,
flecks of stagnant colour. Shadows of tombstones
and statues detach themselves, slink towards

the foaming mass, which swells with jeers and moans,
then splits around the two companions, joins
behind them, slowly starts to pulse-press inwards.

Zane chant-gestures and a bone staff appears
in his hands. He swings at each fetid limb
that stretches towards them, pivots and strikes

again, again, each blow a crimson blaze
that sear-blasts the limb; but too many reach
towards them, and each one that touches stuns

skin and nerves, till the whirling man is lurching
into his blows and Jessie is shriek-huddling
like a small child left inside a rage-mob.

A sizzle-rush of air engulfs them all.
The dark mass collapses to either side
of a dazzling female being, hair swaying

in waves of black, red, white about her poise
as she floats down the path, skin fair then dark,
the air filled with a lute-shimmer of music.

As she passes, tendrils of hair stroke them,
healing their wounds, while others fling away
foul remnants the creature left as it fled.

She pauses, nods at them in turn, then glides
down the winding narrow path to the archway
with its broken emblems of flight and chasm.

Jessie's body is still twitching with static
from the goddess's touch, her breasts and belly
tingling wildly, but Zane sprints after her,

demands she stop and face him. His speed blurs
Jessie's vision, yet the goddess glides swifter
than he, no effort, no glance back. He stops,

gapes, drops a hand. When Jessie reaches him
Zane is shaking with confusion and urge,
as though this goddess were lure, sorrow, secret.

She waits till his posture straightens, then asks
what was happening and why. He walks on
without answering. She pulls him around,

ignores his glare and raised staff. 'Answer me!'
He breaks his staff in two. The pieces vanish.
'We have to go. Those shadows may come back.'

Jessie crosses her arms. He sighs and points
to the slowly rising vapours of rose
and orange light circling the far horizon.

'The tremors signal *Glymsen*, the new day.
I've seen so many dawns here, none the same.
As for what then happened, I have no knowledge

other than the danger is real, is close.'
His tone is urgent, his gaze cold. He shrugs,
turns, strides towards the broken light ahead.

2. Two Gifts

Jessie studies the graveyard she is leaving:
 no flowers left by mourners, no trimmed lawns,
 no foraging insects, no swooping birds.

The tombstones lie in drifts of dust, inscriptions
 weathered beyond repair. Gloom muffles all
 so that even singing would choke and fade,

if anyone could remember a song.
 A chill snakes along her spine and the thought
 of walking on her grave catches her throat.

Once it leaves the graveyard, the path becomes
 a narrow road covered in the same dust.
 There are no footprints. The light is so dim,

perspective so warped, she bumps into Zane
 before realizing the shape she sees
 is not a road-curve shadow but his back.

Zane shows her the sign suspended above
 a bridge damasked by mist. Scored on red wood
 are lines of script that change like flame whenever

she recalls the alphabet of each tongue
 she knows. Rubbing her eyes, she hears inside
 her mind a female voice say, 'Trust in this,'

but still the script moves. Zane touches her shoulder:
 'Something about silence. Can you read it?'
 She sigh-shrugs, so he peers again, moves forward.

The instant he mounts a step the air chills,
 the mist swirls. A male voice booms from within:
 'Can't you read? Now take a wish and be judged.'

Zane plants his other foot, his voice the stealth
of an old hunter. 'No one judges me.'
'Don't be too sure of yourself,' says the mist.

Zane takes another step. Glares. 'Show yourself.'
From deep below the bridge a whistling starts,
rises louder, shriller, the closer, faster

it comes, a concatenation of frenzy
as air tumbles, colours shatter, breath teeters
to the crescendo of a thunder-blast,

then abrupt silence. When their vision clears,
before them stands a monk in tattered robes,
ascetic body tinged like a moon halo.

He smiles, bows, then offers his begging bowl
with his left hand, his right limb a stump only.
Jessie stands before him. 'What did it say?'

He rattles the bowl. 'Some things only open
to wisdom after all else is well tested.
That's why we travel. Take one and be judged.'

She peers within and sees a broken shell,
a leather pouch inscribed with triple spirals,
a long, bent nail, crimsoned by rust or blood,

a green feather, a globe of crystal filled
with spinning flakes of gold. She takes the pouch,
which is heavy, hums softly at her touch.

The monk faces Zane and notes his crossed arms.
'Not choosing is a choice.' He waves his stump.
'And not all choices lead the way we think.'

Zane snorts his disdain. 'No one judges me.'
'Except yourself. Take a look anyway.
You have nothing to lose, this time as always.'

Zane smiles as he chooses the nail. Before
the monk can return the bowl to his robes,
Zane cuts his palm and drips blood into it.

The monk nods as he fades into the mist,
a slow spinning mass that draws to a point
above their heads, then wink-swallows itself.

The bridge is made of wooden struts and pylons,
but its planks are shafts of quivering light.
As Jessie opens her gift, Zane steps up

to a swarm-frenzy sounding far below.
The light beams bend with his weight, and he sees
between them a colossal maw of darkness,

like looking from the bottom of a well
at a stark black sky, the sides swiftly folding
back its mass to a mountain underneath.

Zane breathes a sudden ease that he will know
what lies past all darkness, or cease to know,
if only the bridge planks would weaken further.

But they stay firm. He steps across the bridge
in disappointment, sits at a low bench,
rubs his palm, wonders about endless quests.

Jessie inspects the gem she found, is startled
by the rainbow shapes inside that spin-tumble
at a slower rate than she rolls the jewel

between her fingers, and by the sensation
of living warmth it exudes. She puts it
back into the pouch, steps onto a beam

that instantly becomes a wooden slat.
When she reaches the apex of the bridge
she spies the glide-glow of their goddess saviour

in the distance, the luminosity
reclaiming and filling the shifting landscape,
shields her eyes as the radiance erupts,

a thousand bonfires lit at once in front
of a giant cauldron of focussed mirrors.
Seconds later, eyes still stinging, she senses

a strange eagerness quicken step and breath.
She notices too how the fringe of light
at the horizon has stopped climbing, leaving

most of the sky filled with stars, though all things
are now visible, clearly emanating
their essence, even Zane, whose darkness glimmers.

From high overhead comes a sound like crows
in fierce debate. Jessie feels she could leap
into the sky and join them, and their cries.

Zane heaves himself up. She watches him shift
his sack and wonders what stories it holds.
As they stride down the road, she pats her pocket,

tries to recall more of her former life—
nothing, as if remembrance were a candle
always being snuffed out before her eyes.

If not her past, what of this bizarre present
that trigger-echoes images of fable?
Something about rulers of sun and moon,

something about hidden jewels of the soul,
something about blood sacrifice and hope.
But why recall stories instead of life?

Soon Jessie loses count of hills they climb,
a way to measure time where nothing moves
except themselves, no sun but narrow band

of varied light that rings the world and leaves
a frost patina on all but the living,
her nimbus a firefly's afterglow.

Finger at her throat, Jessie barely feels
a pulse, more like sludge stirred by random flutter
than beat of vital force. She strains against

the mounting fact of death: the fields of briar
and thistle; silence under foot; the constant
squeeze-weight of cold that steals beneath her skin

to smother breath, carriage of bone and sight;
her lack of memory; though now she knows
this afterlife is nothing like rote lessons

drummed by cane, purple glare. This is not hell,
nor heaven, nothing like those sacred vistas
unveiled in ancient texts upon her desk.

And here, a strange companion, so unlike
anyone she would ever meet, except,
perhaps, in dream... She stops, stares after him,

scans his face when he turns to hurry her.
 The spinning chasm in her belly says
 she's known a dream-incarnation of him.

But when? She closes her eyes, tries to force
 her mind down thin traces of recollection.
 One of them persists: a boy skipping pebbles

across a surface speckled by green light,
 the lure of solid radiance within
 waving and clutching water weeds, the strain

of reach through clinging liquid, abrupt plunge,
 limbs clawing for air, one final burst, gasp
 as light and breeze again touch skin, the thanks.

She senses Zane peering at her. 'The more
 we walk,' she says as they move on, 'the clearer
 become some memories. What about you?'

He does not answer. Whenever he shuts
 his eyes to probe the murk of his mind, all
 he feels are ghost inklings that bring disquiet,

the belief he has planned this path before
 and may again, the thorny satisfaction
 that his way brings sleights of soul down upon

all here, futile havoc for those he loves.
 Deeper thrusts of will pierce the gloom, but show
 images shuffle-merging endlessly:

constant discord of battle-cry and sobbing,
 smoke haze, blood tang and fever, tumble stars,
 no constant thread of self, no hint of reason.

Zane does not answer, does not look at her.
Jessie scowls, then notices how his aura
ebbs and flows like a dispute, turns away.

As they walk, the grey dust billows about
yet does not choke them, even though it enters
mouth and nostril. Silences enfold them.

3. Stone and Blood

They round a bend and see a huddled form
beside the road. It does not move as they
approach, does not flinch when Zane touches it.

A strangled hissing rises from its throat,
like hot, hammered metal plunged into water.
As Jessie turns its head, she sees a gaze

like eye-holes of some statue, but without
the trick of light that summons life to marble.
The man is cold to touch. Her stomach spasms

as she starts to cover him with her cloak.
Zane admonishes her, wants to move on.
She glares her defiance till Zane relents,

draws a circle around the man, unhitches
his sack and takes out a lyre unlike any
Jessie has seen or read about. He plucks

the strings, long, glossy black hair tightly wound,
and corrects the tuning, flame notes, eyes closed.
He sits beside the man and starts to play.

Jessie perceives the air swirl into shape,
an embodied darkness that brings to mind
recollections of sermons and rank depths.

She shudders, but is drawn to sway within
the binding rhythm, the resurging song,
the erupting visions that cleave the will.

The music swells from simple four-beat measure
to intricate melody-skeins of fire,
wind, flow and pause as Zane's fingers explore

the lean boundaries of chaos and stasis,
his voice a low counterpoint to the pitch
of his strings, the wild pace-turns of his playing.

Within moments, Jessie sees what Zane sees
behind closed eyelids. She hears him command
the man back from the depths, is just as shocked

when new eddies of darkness coalesce
into two lofty shapes of wings and shadows
that hint at hidden spheres of light and heat

and are flaying at each other with whips
of fiery darkness. First one then the other
staggers under the blows, but when Zane casts

a ball of light at them, the taller one
hisses then streaks skyward and disappears.
The other one folds its great wings and waits.

All through the conflict, Jessie isn't sure
if the beings are present in mind only
or also in the circle with the man.

Zane stops playing, gestures the sign of locks
reversed: 'Who are you?' The dark being laughs
and Jessie thinks of magpies carolling.

'Though your magic has no effect on me,
tell me where first we met and I will answer.'
Jessie feels Zane struggle, sees rapid scenes

of battles with sword and flame against men
and creatures concocted from man and beast,
sees voluptuous women held in globes

suspended over mist and gaping lakes,
but is not sure if these are history
or spinning phantasms of lust and spite,

or if there is any difference here.
She loses contact as he plunges deeper
into his story, yet still she can see

the winged being, who has been watching her
all this time. She hears a child singing nonsense
rhymes, finds herself crying. She sees tears, too,

in the star-shimmer orbs of the weird creature
and realizes Zane is again speaking,
though with strained voice. ‘We met one night outside

my village. You were searching for those lost
from the star realm and I was practising
the laying out of sand songs’—a pause, and

Jessie again hears singing—‘with my sister.
You are Rynobar, a *hoya*, though you
never harmed us, unlike other star-demons.’

‘And you are Zane the Immortal, denier
of gods and life, though not when we first met.
I do not think you will succeed this time.

Or ever. What is behind life can never
vanish, though we have argued this before,
which you always forget, and will again.’

Zane chuckles. ‘And what of your search, my friend?
Found your lost *hoya*?’ Rynobar spreads out
its wings, presses its palms together, bows,

and fades from sight. Zane studies this new absence
that echoes behind his eyes, packs his lyre,
smudges the circle, watches Jessie massage

the cold limbs of the man till he awakes,
then helps her lift-prop him against a boulder.
His face is round, with almond-shaped brown eyes.

His mane of black hair drip-straggles with sweat,
like an over-taxed athlete, though his belly
and thick frame would belie such a pursuit.

After blinking a few times he stares wildly
around him, drops himself into a ball,
starts to rock. Jessie coos to him, calms him,

tells him how they found him beside the road,
and asks how he came to be there, says nothing
of the scars she saw as she massaged him.

‘My name is Remesh.’ He pauses to search
his memory, blanches, says nothing more,
rocks a little as he stares into space.

Zane pulls Jessie aside. ‘We should leave him.
He’ll slow us down.’ She indicates his lyre.
‘What about Rynobar?’ Zane starts. ‘You saw?’

‘Not everything. What does it want with him?
And what is a star-demon anyway?’
Zane paces back and forth. ‘I don’t quite know.

In my world, *hoya* come down at night, kill
anyone who wanders far from protection.
Rynobar was not like that, but was searching...’

Remesh's raspy voice sounds behind them.

'So everyone I meet is on a quest.'

Zane moves towards him. 'And how would you know?'

The man eases himself to his feet, dusts himself down, smiles, does not allow Zane's height to intimidate him. 'It appears death

gives one certain knowledge. You both are seeking an atonement of sorts, though why you bother is beyond me. Dead is too late. There's nothing

but the wait for nothing, no formal judgment, no blessing or curse for life's strategies, just illusion of company, then nothing.'

Jessie can't accept his words. Death is more than nothing, though not her father's belief in punishment or reward, constant guilt.

'So why don't I know what you know?' she asks.

Remesh half turns to her. 'Maybe you don't want to accept you're dead. If you are real.'

Zane smiles. 'What of me, who has never died?'

Remesh shrugs. 'We all have our fantasies.

I'm starting to think you're both part of mine.'

'We are all real,' Jessie insists, then wonders how to prove a thing so obvious, here where nothing is familiar, except

thoughts and memories dredged from deep within.

She has felt cold, she has felt muscles move.

Her body is as she remembers it,

colour of hair and skin, smallness of breasts.
 Yet, can she know her memory is true?
 To pinch her skin, as in a dream, can't help.

Better to accept this place, follow paths
 mapped by those who have come before, and if
 self-delusion, then nothing leads to nothing.

As if reading her mind, Zane counsels faith.
 'No matter what we believe this world is,
 or is not, and our destiny in it,

we are here and have only this grey road,
 unless,' and he stares at Remesh, 'we have
 a liking for the condition of stone.'

Remesh sniggers. 'And where does this road lead?'
 For an answer, Zane edges with his foot
 another circle, smaller than before,

sits cross-legged beside it, takes a bag
 from his vest. 'I remember the first time
 I saw my mother use this, a dawn rite

all families in my village conducted
 to ensure good fortune for the men fishing
 on Lake Tarlkarni, for whatever wares

we needed to ease life. The *murga*, path
 of prayer.' He opens the woven bag, pricks
 a finger with the point of his small knife,

lets fall three drops of blood into the bag,
 shakes it, then pours sand grains onto his palm.
 'It is said Ghajat was first formed from these.'

Jessie sits beside him. ‘What do you mean?
What is Ghajat?’ He gestures around them.
‘Ghajat is my world. Maybe this world, too,

for I sense similarities: *Glymsen*,
the sway of song, the vision-hints of landscape.
Yet I have wandered so long, many lands,

the memory hoard is too vast to hold
no matter how many tricks I have tried.
But skill and sight are never lost, if used.’

He sprinkles grains around the circle, hums
a tune Jessie suspects she also knows,
maybe an air her own mother once sang.

The grains form a black outline to the space.
Zane takes some more. ‘Before there was a world,
there was only grey sand, and the first Kenri

sung Ghajat into existence from it.
So we prepare our sand songs before dawn
to renew the world and seek aid.’ He casts

the grains over the circle and begins
to chant. Though Jessie can’t decode the language,
pictures of sunlit pools and flowers blooming

form in her mind, and she feels her pulse quicken.
She smells the aroma of summer grass,
of soft rain, sees wings emerge from those flowers.

Remesh, however, coughs his disapproval.
‘If there was only sand, where did this god
come from?’ Zane smiles. ‘Maybe the sand itself.

No matter. The only truth is the song.’
Jessie urges Remesh to let Zane finish
without interruption. They watch as swirls

of sand coalesce into flowing patterns,
change colour with every note of his song,
become a detailed living map, with gorges,

mountains, and a ribbon of road on which
can be seen figures surveying a map.
Remesh jumps into the air, and his figure

does the same. ‘That’s impossible,’ he mutters,
watches as Zane’s song defines even more:
a field of red trees, fortress clumps of rocks,

a coastline with lapping waves and low island,
a swamp, a walled garden, abodes of light,
hilltops with swaying trees, how the road passes

a series of ancient craters and ends
at the base of a strange volcano, though
the more fierce he sings, the more details blur.

Suddenly the air above the map splits
and a small object speeds towards the mountain.
Shadows seep out of the landscape and follow.

Before they can see what happens, white clouds
shaped like immense beings made from deformed
spheres and cubes fill the space above the map.

They look up, notice white tendrils of mist
about them, and shudder. The map dissolves
to grey sand. Zane bows his head, claps his hands,

then scoops the grains into his bag. He looks
at them. 'I remember her stories now.
This is not Ghajat, but Thexlan, creator

and final world of all possible worlds.
That mountain is Mt Alkerii, from which
all things arise, to which all things return.

My mother once told me that the first Kenri,
Larandor, came from here, may even be
Thexlan, may yet live deep in Mt Alkerii.

We should find all our answers on its slopes.'
He puts away his bag of grains, and stands.
'Or a deeper awareness of our questions.'

When Jessie and Remesh query him further
he ignores them, reminds them of the mass
that may be falling somewhere above them.

Back on the road, no one speaks as mist swirls,
as high whispers tug at the ear, and each
wonders what things can ever be judged real.

4. The Service of Names

When the mist dissipates, they find themselves
passing through fields of high, wilted spike-grass.
In the distance can be seen a scarecrow,

which quickly becomes a tall, thin-faced woman,
the grass parting before her, a bow-wave.
Her black hair flops across a face that seems

caught between smirk and grimace. She greets them
with a slight nod, regal acknowledgment,
then graces the air with a quick high laugh.

They see her staff is covered by small skulls
that emerge near the base and spiral-stream
up its length, becoming flesh, gazing eye,

before vanishing with smile after passing
under her hands and crowning the staff briefly.
Others flow downwards, all rage and despair,

sometimes delight, as they wrinkle and fade.
She is dressed in rags. Eyes sparkle with humour,
scent of lilac blossoms all about her.

She holds her staff, poise patient, acute gaze.
Jessie discerns questions are not in order.
She gives her name and that of her companions.

‘Thank you,’ the woman says, and strokes her staff,
‘but tell me who you really are and why.’
Violet flames dance around Zane. ‘Why should we?’

The woman chuckles. 'What have you to lose, now you have volunteered your names?' She raps a skull half way along the staff. Zane staggers

as though cuffed by a giant. His eyes blaze, but Jessie restrains him. The woman nods. 'Names are everything in this world, so be

careful to rely on them. Now, your answers.' Remesh hides a smirk. 'I seek to know who I was.' The hermit taps another skull.

Remesh turns white as knees collapse. 'Too smug. If you wish to follow this road and live, you will need to know the right answers. So,'

she draws a circle on the road and strikes the centre three times, 'here's a hint for you.' They watch the grey surface disappear, nothing

taking its place. They reel with vertigo, clutch at each other, at the shredding air, as they feel themselves fall outside their selves

into nothing there, bodies only mist, minds the wind that weaves vapour from itself, the rhythm behind minds a shifting pause.

The staff strikes twice. The travellers fall back from the sealed chasm, wipe their eyes of sweat, grip shaking limbs, find breath, find sight, find speech.

Jessie recovers first, perceives that gaze burrow deep inside her, but dares not flinch. 'Who are you and what do you seek from us?'

A finger hovers near a glowing skull.
The woman leans forward. 'Not without merit,
though my answers may not help you find yours.'

My name and my nature is one. Guess it
and I will help you on your way.' Zane waits
on the balls of his feet. 'And if we fail?'

The woman smiles like a teacher rebuking
a favoured, frustratingly-wayward, pupil.
'We go our separate ways, nothing more.'

Remesh moves alongside Zane, though his stance
is nothing like the predator attention
of the fighter, is barely held alarm.

'I don't trust you. I don't believe you would
help us for nothing in return. What game
are you really playing? I say we leave.'

Jessie sees the woman's eyes pity-glisten,
knows now that some give without need of payment:
'No. We have nothing to lose.' Zane agrees,

but the task is almost impossible
without a hint. 'And I don't mean that image
with which you tricked us before. Too dramatic.'

'Each hint will mean one less thing I can do
for you when you win.' Everyone agrees.
'My first hint is that I do what I ask.'

There is silence as everyone recalls
her exact words, though Jessie interrupts
to ask if false answers are penalised.

They won't be. Jessie continues. 'You know our names, which are everything, yet imply we do not know our nature as our name.'

She pauses. 'What you asked was to tell you who we really are and why. This you know.' The woman nods. 'So you want us to know.'

The woman nods again. Jessie's scalp tingles as images and ideas fire-cracker each other so fast she gasps, shivers, steadies,

body elation-flushed. 'This is your function, is the function of Thexlan, of all worlds, to help reveal what is already known.'

The woman gestures that Jessie continue. 'You are Thexlan, at least its advocate. As Larandor is for Ghajat. Its symbol.'

Zane joins in. 'But Larandor formed Ghajat. He's not its symbol.' Jessie faces him. 'In Thexlan, names, symbols, nature are one.'

She returns to the woman. 'To name you is to refine your nature. I call you Enheduanna, my world's first known author,

who balanced the human and the divine, as good a name as any, which declares service to creation, to revelation.'

The woman's laughter quivers throughout Thexlan, and they are cocooned by the sound. They stare as all the world flows from her rags and staff,

as laughter issues from each skull, as light
erupts from cavern eyes to glaze each blade
of grass, each curve of rock and hill, to cleave

the gap beneath each grain of mass, from which
each thread of sound and light and texture comes,
the world a prism of all seas of nothing.

‘Well done,’ she says, the land again distinct.
‘I gladly take the name you guess, for now,
and owe you much, three answers for your grace.’

‘If you are a symbol-song for all this,’
Zane gestures around him, ‘how were you made?’
‘I have always been. Besides, we create

whatever world we live. Before I thought
or dreamed, there was no I to know the I,
and after, dream-thoughts cascade into life.’

‘So you are a second without a first,’
Remesh suggests, his tone consciously even.
Enheduanna’s face shows slight annoyance.

‘I will ignore that, which was never meant
to be a question. What is it you really
wish to know?’ He closes his eyes a moment.

‘Am I dead, and if so, why am I here
and not with my one God?’ Her sage eyes soften.
‘Your god is always with you, though you sin

in his name. Those sins prevent you from seeing
his true nature, which is yours.’ Remesh scowls.
‘Fulfilling my God’s word is not a sin.’

‘That depends on whether your heart is filled
with your god or you hear him with a heart
turned rock by harsh desire. It’s up to you.’

Remesh uncurls his fist and moves away.
‘And your question?’ Enheduanna says
to Jessie, who bows her head. ‘I have none.

May I ask it of you some other time?’
‘Of course. You’ll know what to ask at that point,
though you may be beyond an answer then.’

Enheduanna continues the course
she took across the fields. As the staff strikes
the ground and the grass parts, the skulls start singing.

And abruptly she is gone, though the wind
carries a muted musical susurrus
that echoes in their ears for hours after.

5. The Soul Mirror

For some time the road is nothing but hills,
each one higher than the last. Though their vigour
is greater here than in their former worlds,

the way saps them quickly, as if the meeting
with Enheduanna asked more of them
than she gave. Soon they top another rise,

are thankful for the flat terrain they find,
can see how the road continues straight, till
it bends around a distant breast of earth.

After a while, as they stride out with something
like a child's abandon to downward slopes,
they feel the road coil itself to itself,

a silk ribbon twisted, its two ends joined.
They fathom the instant as utterly
endless, flooded with the exhilaration

that comes from rolling down a grassy hill
the first time, before the regret of stopping.
The event passes before each of them

knows the others have conceived the same thing,
and they continue their glide-pace advance
without mentioning such a passing fancy.

As they approach the mound they detect drumming
under their feet. Closer still they hear singing
coming from the bare summit where smoke rises

to form a troop of grey and silver horsemen,
their voices like cascades of tiny bells.
When the last rider fades high above them

there bursts streaming showers of pulsing orbs
that chase each other in widening circles
to the horizon, and the drumming stops.

Remesh sneers as he faces Zane and Jessie.
'And I suppose you're going to tell me
that those are fairy folk, this mound their home.'

'It seems to me,' Zane says, his tone low, even,
'the drummers are more than likely the owners.'
He turns towards the base, which is embedded

with upright slabs of basalt fused together.
He points out how one is mirror-sheened, while
the rest show signs of constant weather-scour.

Jessie recalls the distant brilliance
of the floating goddess that morning, wonders
whether the mirror is result or cause.

Zane steps towards it, but she pulls him back.
Remesh joins them: 'What are you afraid of?'
She tells them about the sight, is uncertain

plain curiosity is called for here.
Zane nods, stares into her pale eyes. 'But surely
you want to know about this road, this world?'

Jessie shrugs. 'I don't have his certainty
that consciousness fades to oblivion.
And I don't have faith in sweet paradise.'

Zane touches her arm. 'How do you explain
this place or your presence here? Just a dream?'
She looks upward. 'Yes. Everything a dream.'

But no one who wakes up. Not me. Not you.
Everything not real.' She drops to the ground.
Zane bends down, but she turns her face away.

'Do you want to be a rock like he was?'
He grabs her shoulders, forces her face upwards.
'I happen to think all dreams have some truth.'

Zane looks at both of them. 'Let's all agree
to accept we are alive in this place,
that we are separate and have a purpose.

If we find reasons to doubt these, then fine.
Until then, let's not waste what souls we have
in futile argument.' The others nod.

Zane moves closer to the flickering mirror,
which is taller than horse and rider, wider
than three abreast, heavier than tradition.

His image shimmer-sways briefly, then firms.
Slowly a milky swirl forms around him,
blotting out the reflection of the road.

The swirl grows, divides, forms shapes that become
people and creatures, some bleeding, some screaming,
some open-mouthed, some mouthing their disdain,

his mother, father, sister, brothers, lovers,
foes, mentors, friends, over millennia
of endeavour and failure, sin and grace.

Shivers circle his spine. Sweat beads his skin.
Breath flutters in a long diminishing,
along with his body, till he is vision.

Zane watches his image move through events
of consequence with each being, though shown
from their viewpoint; how with them he pursued

only his path of knowledge, a wild wind
seeking its spiral centre, battering
all centres outside its circumference.

He feels himself shatter into the gamut
of emotions he has provoked in others,
becomes the mirror itself and each scene,

as if a drop of rain in a storm-cloud,
the storm itself, the drop about to dimple
the skin of sea, break open to itself.

But then with strain like bending tree to earth
he reels in his filaments of mind, wrenches
himself from the darkening mirror, and falls.

Zane awakes with his head in Jessie's lap.
The revelations drum incessantly
at his temples: pain wreaked on him, by him,

through him, and the rising fear that he is
destined to live the mirror for all time,
finding no way to break the wheel of life.

Though still groggy, Zane sits up, asks what happened.
Remesh offers his hand. 'You only looked
at the mirror a few seconds then fell.

You've been unconscious a minute or so.
Did the mirror harm you?' Zane rubs his cheek.
'Not in so many words. It shows you things.'

Jessie hands him his sack. 'What did you learn?'
His gaze at the slab is all the reply
she needs, doubt, burning fascination, awe.

She approaches the mirror, steels herself,
a pale resolution that quickly splits
into many pale selves, all ages, sexes,

a parade of flesh-roles from gentleman
to temple harlot, each self drawing others
to the contamination of its life.

Like Zane, she suffers all that ever happened
from both sides. Like Zane, she starts to know why
the complicity of pain and release.

She merges with each event, with the mirror,
with the mirror's own image. Grief and laughter
take turns to remind her of fear and fate,

affiliation of lightning with earth,
a liberation path, the quickening
between silver and glass. Like Zane, she falls.

Jessie awakens to the taste of water.
The first thing she sees are Zane's eyes. They flicker
with the afterimages of her trial,

star-bursts and shot-streams and cataract-ripples,
and she sees completely past his blockades,
feels a vigour of affection link them,

yet knows the mirror may have opened them
too raw to counteract each other's rawness,
that emergence from black into shared light.

Zane props her against a boulder and waits
for Remesh as he moves towards the mirror.
They see nothing but his image stretch out

its hand and touch his, an instant, and then
he steps away, mumbling about his God
again proving itself a disappointment.

6. Blood Seeds

Instantly, the drumming begins again
and the air about the mound hums. The mirror
swarms with dazzle-light and wild forms that change

into wizened female dancers who twirl
about a blazing cauldron, till exhaustion
spurs one then another to leap inside.

Breath and blood resonate deep within Jessie,
the urge to dance so her whole being soars
and yields to the benevolence of flame.

She turns to consider Zane and Remesh,
their outlines becoming distant to her,
like memory of day once sleep arrives.

Jessie steps closer to the mirror, feels
hands restraining her, peers at frantic eyes,
knows dimly that her time is still ahead.

She allows the men to absorb her weight
as they retreat towards the road. They watch
a stream of butterfly-winged maidens spiral

from the top of the mound and float towards
the stationary stars far above, voices
high and mellifluous, like summer birds.

As the music fades, Jessie shakes herself,
says nothing about what happened or why.
No one looks back as they resume their journey,

the distances between them filled with silence
and will o' wisps their passage seems to summon
from the dust at the edges of the road.

When the wisps fade, Remesh approaches Jessie.
 ‘Where did you meet Zane? In Ghajat, or here?’
 She tells him of the gate and the strange city.

‘He acts without hesitation,’ he says.
 Jessie sighs. ‘And you act with revealed knowledge.’
 Remesh taps her arm. ‘And what of you, then?’

She doesn’t know. This world has dream-sense only.
 There is a road, companions of a sort,
 the mystery of what is to be done.

Atop the next rise already, Zane urges
 them to join him quickly. They rush to him,
 the slope steeper than those before, and gape

at a plain filled with rows of stunted trees
 poking through a miasma of pale light
 that ripples as trees flicker, without wind.

As they descend, waves of putrescence threaten
 a detour—senses and stomachs heave-reeling—
 yet fade to minor nuisance at the bottom.

The trees are linked to the road by a network
 of wavy crimson lines from base to verge.
 Jessie realizes each snaking trail

is blood seeping from entrails wrapped around
 the limbs of each dead tree. She steps near one
 and starts to sink, yet before Zane yanks her

back onto the firm road she hears a voice
 much like her own, and thinks she sees a tree
 blaze with incandescence and become bare

of flesh before sprouting leaves. When she looks
the tree, silver fir, is still dripping gore.
The afterimage dances before her.

Zane and Remesh stare at her. She is wearing
slacks and boots, tight sweater, large woollen jacket,
Zane's cloak folded on the road between them.

She tells them these are the usual clothes
she wears when bushwalking, that the encounter
with the tree somehow gave her a small grasp

of how thought can become true in this place.
'Just like a *makir* or Dremaan,' Zane comments,
explaining that those who perform the *murga*

are *makirs*, who by tradition are female,
while the Dremaan—especially the Kenri,
who is the dream sentinel of Ghajat—

is as far above the *makir* in skill
of making as the *makir* is above
the rock in skill of breathing. 'Maybe here

we all can be Dremaan, with skill and insight.'
Zane wonders how this will affect his quest—
he has no time for dull competitors.

He retrieves his cloak. 'Don't do that again.'
She dusts herself down, gestures to the trees.
'Surely this road is not only concerned

with what lies at its end. What if we fail
to reach it? What if there is nothing there
and we dismiss the only chance for learning

why we are here by always rushing there?’

Zane paces before her. ‘We can’t dismiss our safety.’ Remesh grabs him. ‘We are dead,

or still dying, and fading into nothing.

What does it matter what we do or say?’

Zane stares down at him. ‘Believe what you will,

but I have known this world longer than you.

Even if we are dead, I know there is more than mere nothingness awaiting us.’

Remesh glowers. Zane does not flinch, but widens his eyes into combat vision, soft focus on all, lowers his breathing, primes strike-muscles.

Each settles their stance. Each waits for the other. Each thinks of blows that hurt. Each barely knows this preening has reasons other than faith.

Jessie starts to interpose, but a voice subdues them all. ‘You haven’t changed, Zane. Always the search for what cannot be found, unless

you detach yourself from the urge to search.’ For a moment they think no one is there, that the road itself spoke, then the air sizzles

around them, body hair on end, hearts racing, throats dry, extremities sparking, ears popping, and a gold-skinned version of Zane steps through.

He is dressed in brown tunic, breeches, sandals. He bows to Jessie. ‘Who are you?’ she whispers. ‘His past, his future, his ideal. Or none.

I call myself Gedon, who was forgotten.’
 Zane confronts him. ‘And why are you here? Now?
 I didn’t summon you.’ Gedon shrugs, smiles.

‘Maybe I summoned you, and also them,
 to do my bidding, which is always yours,
 if you remember.’ He laughs, and the road

crumples an instant. Remesh throws his arms
 around in exasperation. ‘What rubbish!
 I was told death would be a simple task.

There would be a reward for duty done.
 But I was fooled. There never was a God,
 as I was led to believe. Now this nothing.’

His face contorts with despair and confusion.
 Jessie moves towards him. He backs away.
 ‘Leave me alone. This is plainly illusion.’

He steps onto the verge and starts to sink.
 Jessie and Zane rush to him, but are held
 by Gedon’s gaze. ‘It is his wish. For now.’

By the time he sinks to his knees, the motion
 has slowed, and then stops. He appears unsure.
 ‘Now we can help,’ Gedon says as he strides

towards the tree on the left side of Jessie’s.
 He grabs a coil of flesh, stretches it fine,
 and wraps it around Remesh, who looks up

in surprise as eddies of blood ooze down
 the intestine and slowly engulf him.

The birch tree emits a low-pitched hum, glows

more ruddy, more exuberant, like flame
 from a furnace than from a dying candle.
 It spreads to Remesh, who sinks to his groin

though now his face registers puzzle-doubt.
 Abruptly he decides to extricate
 himself, using the entrails as lifeline.

Soon he lies panting on the road, no smears
 of blood on him, tree draped with viscera.
 ‘What happened?’ Jessie asks. He shakes his head.

Zane turns to his double. ‘What do you know?’
 Gedon wraps himself with another tree.
 ‘I know what you know, and it doesn’t help.’

The hazel bursts into a swelling rush
 of light and heat. They are thrown to the ground.
 When their sight clears, the tree is blood once more.

Jessie checks Remesh, who is shaking wildly
 and refusing to talk, then turns to Zane.
 ‘Why is Gedon like you? What does he mean?’

Zane stares at the trees, head cocked. ‘We should leave.’
 Jessie helps Remesh to his feet. ‘Why now?’
 ‘Because we are never meant to stay long.’

Closing her eyes, she observes a cocoon
 of contradictory whims, white affection,
 black dread, undone by a serrated edge

of excitement and stupor, yet can’t tell
 if these feelings exist inside or outside.
 This new unease makes her agree with him.

As the group begins to walk, a breeze gathers
from both sides of the road and nudges them
from behind. Gone completely is the stench,

in its place the elevation of flowers.

They look back and, though the glow is still pale,
the trees are prouder, are wreathed in fine tendrils

that sway and lift within the breeze, then drop
their tips into the streams below, to drink
until they burst and spray the air with seed.

7. The Striking of Shadow

Sometime later the travellers traverse
a pass that opens to a low depression
with palm trees, red sand, thin pillars of rock,

some as high as nearby knolls, same brown colour
but smoother, as though polished by harsh winds,
though now there is no breeze, or by design:

the nearest pillar shows finely inscribed
whorls and circles that resolve into patterns
Jessie and Remesh recognize as phases

of the moon surrounding blank and dark suns.
Other pillars have many moons and suns,
or none, different intervals for eclipses.

The columns are scattered about the valley
like termite mounds, though there is a large clearing
about the central one, which has no pattern

except for seven bands of incised shading,
each of different texture, though equal height.
At its summit is a clear crystal globe

that from time to time projects shafts of light
onto other pillars, which hum as one
while shooting tight beams of intense flame skyward.

The first time this happens, Zane sees a hole
appear in the third band, shift sideways upwards,
then disappear when the shaft of light ends.

He wonders what will occur when the hole
reaches the summit. Will the globe explode
or will the hole reappear at the base?

An impulse for wild ruin now grips him,
quickenng his breath, flush-tensing his body,
battle-cry threatening to burst his chest.

With an effort he controls himself, hopes
no one has noticed his excitement, joins
Remesh and Jessie as they leave this pillar.

After more twin displays of light and flame,
with no clear sign of change to world or sense,
except a subtle shifting of star pattern

or the brief flaring of a star, the group
decides to move on. As they leave the valley,
Zane looks back, sees the pillar shoot a beam

towards them. It strikes him and splits in two,
both strands of light spiralling about him,
two snakes that then merge into the one being.

The light is so swift no one else sees it,
and Zane doubts the event, for as the beams
danced around him, he felt no sting of power,

no burning sensations, nothing but ice
at the core of his being, the beams nothing
but fate honouring his ardent song-spark.

A few yards from the valley their ears pop,
skin tingles, nape hairs bristle, air sting-sizzles.

The road in front bulges upward, thins, splits,

stretches horizontally, forms loops, curls,
tresses, shapes itself an enormous tree
through which the road now travels, as if always.

Then starts a muffled hammering, with sparks
showering the road from one side, each spark
splitting into two again and again

before vanishing with crack-wisps of colour.
Peering into the hollow of the tree
Jessie sees the back of a thickset man

working an anvil, short tongs in left hand
holding something against the massive forge,
right arm lift-dropping a double-head hammer,

corded muscles in double-beat pound-strokes.
As he limps without discomfort towards
his deep water trough, the thing he is grasping

seems itself made of the heat waves and steam
that quickly fill the hollow on the plunge.
Looking up, he beckons her and the others

to wait. They watch him inspect his creation,
the wafer-thin object held to forge-light,
smile in satisfaction, wrap it in felt.

He waves them to the hollow opposite,
joins them after cleaning off sweat and grime.
He puts the parcel on an oval table

grown instantly from the floor as he entered
and looks at Zane. 'So you have come again,
though not to ask me to repair your weapon.'

Zane stares at him. 'What weapon? Who are you?'
The smithy chuckles. 'Your means of salvation,
though only you can do that, when all dies.'

Jessie can't contain herself any longer.
 'I'm sick of riddles. Tell us who you are.'
 The smithy bows. 'My apologies, daughter.'

My name is Dukor, husband-son of Neshxi,
 whom Zane has met many times, many guises,
 as have you all. Some may think me a god,

but I am merely a worker of worlds,
 a Dremaan, as we all are at some point
 during this long homecoming into wisdom.'

Still with a scowl, Jessie confronts Dukor.
 'I am not your daughter. Nor anybody's
 now I am dead, as everyone is here.'

Dukor rubs his beard. 'Again I am sorry.
 I called you daughter because in some ways
 the worlds in Thexlan form one birth, one song,

and I, like all Dremaans, parent and midwife.'
 He peers at her from under bristle-eyebrows.
 'As for your states of death, forget them here.'

Nothing is as it seems, as with the life
 you led before appearing here. Death is
 any brief instant when you forgo life.'

'Then we aren't dead,' Remesh says with relief,
 'and this is some foul dream or fantasy.'
 Knowing all such queries do last forever

Dukor does not answer, but leads them through
 a door that was a mere pattern of grain
 into a smaller chamber of the tree

lit only by chinks high above their heads.
Mounted at eye-level around the wall
are a number of large, white, round objects.

As eyes adjust to gloom, they see each plate
is a slowly swirling vapour contained
within a thin border of whorling flame.

‘I have seen such frames before,’ Zane observes,
‘but showing scenes of impossible realms.’
Dukor nods. ‘This is my art, to make *Turma*,

canvases that act as maps and as doorways,
as containers for memories and dreams,
as triggers for things forgotten or lost.

Many are called to pay the price, but none
can predict what will appear when the work
is breathed upon, or how this will affect

its owner. And no one can rid themselves
of their *Turma* once bought.’ Remesh averts
his eyes from the one he is studying.

‘No need to worry.’ Dukor adds. ‘No picture
will form until you buy it.’ ‘And the price?’
Remesh asks as he returns to his study.

‘No more than you can pay, only the breath
that compels a true picture, and the life
you lead once you discover such true breath.’

Zane trails his index finger through the middle
of one disk, watches the milky-white substance,
more like thickened smoke than layers of oil,

follow his motion, creep along his finger,
and slowly start to drag it to the centre,
before discarding it as something foreign.

The finger emerges clean. 'Who or what
decides the breath is true?' The blacksmith smiles.
'That's the secret of my art, as of all.

But now you may find an answer yourself.'
He begins to unwrap his latest *Turma*.
'Those on the wall are for one; this, for three.'

Though slightly bigger than his other works,
this one retains the rim of fire, the white
smoky canvas, thin when looked at edge-wise,

of great depth and suggestion when held up
to any light and looked at far too long,
as when staring at one's eye, nose to mirror.

Jessie folds the felt cloth and turns away
from the whispered summoning of their *Turma*.
'But none of us knew of these things before.'

Dukor shrugs. 'I was inspired to make one
such as this. Now the three of you are here.
Call it fate, if you like, but this is yours.'

He places the artefact on a dais
that grew from the wooden floor as he moved.
Zane, Jessie, Remesh reach for it as one,

instinctively taking hold of the rim
with left hands equidistant. They peer into
the swirling depths and, as one, breathe a sigh.

The vigorous motion snap-stills, as though
contemplating the flavour of their breath,
then fractures soundlessly into minute

globules that change colour, that fly within
the fiery frame, that fuse with one another,
flatten, stretch, break and recombine again,

weave themselves into a picture unlike
anything they have ever seen, not even
Zane's sand paintings: a deep landscape of mist,

and rocky outcrops shaped like ragged profiles
of feathered and long-snouted beasts. They hear
the high whistle of wind or bird, the piping

of frogs. They watch a bubble push aside
the scum atop a nearby pool, and gag
when it bursts with a strong whiff of decay.

Wrenching her sight from the scene, Jessie turns
to the blacksmith. 'What is this place?' He shrugs.
'The vision is true to all of you. Maybe

it represents your common past or future,
maybe a symbol of your common soul.
I make the canvas; you reveal the image.'

She returns to the picture, feels herself
lured in so far she hears a rustle-cracking
of brush behind her, large creature advancing

slowly towards her without haste or stealth.
She spins around and is back in the chamber,
the others as puzzled and awed as she.

Swarthy face tinged by white, Remesh asks her,
 ‘Besides the mist and rocks, what did you see?’
 ‘Nothing, just a sound’ she replies, then looks

at the two men. ‘What about you? Sounds? Smell?’
 Remesh: ‘A cylindrical mass of flies
 opening its maw to discharge jewel streams.’

Zane: ‘The fright-marvel of slithering into
 a pool of viscous liquid that melts flesh,
 then becomes that pool again, without motion.’

Intrigue slants his gaze. ‘What’s wrong?’ Jessie asks.
 ‘I remember the day my brothers gained
 their boat rights. In celebration and homage

to Haal, the ancient goddess of the lake,
 our father took us to a quiet cove.
 I was young and only wanted to play

amongst the rushes and the trees, or climb
 around the headland to see what was there.
 My father warned me not to go too far

but I ignored him, as I did the counsel
 of the *Forii*, our ancestral rule-voices.
 I found a narrow pool, began to jump

from one rock to another with the poise
 and speed of mighty fighters in the midst
 of battle, like those in my mother’s stories.

I slipped and fell much deeper than I thought
 a pool on the lake shore could be. I struggled
 against tentacles of water and worse

snatching at my limbs. The flickering surface
dwindled, air bubbles shrank from me, in me.
I thrashed once more, then felt my body hush.

Before my sight completely dimmed, I saw
a haloed face, dark eyes splintered with fire,
playful cat-gaze, with hint of venom swiftness.

I awoke on the beach to laughter-scorn.
My father and brothers claimed I cried out
Help as I slid under, and always after

would chide me when I chose my mother's lessons
before the manly arts of lake and boat,
but I was sure I had called out to Haal.'

He turns to Dukor. 'Maybe these are nothing
but scenes of past troubles, reminding us
of what we hate about ourselves or others.'

Dukor passes a hand over the *Turma*.
'As I said, each shows meaning for its owner.
I suggest you look for a common truth.'

Remesh raps his knuckles against the doorway.
'Zane's childhood experience is not mine.
I don't recall anything from my life

about flies and jewels. Besides, truth is mist,
elsewhere, as here. We have nothing in common.'
As he walks away, Jessie grabs his arm.

'Except having to walk this road. Let's take
the *Turma* and discuss the visions later.
Nothing is by chance, even if bizarre.'

Zane joins them. 'Besides, we have to keep going.'
Remesh nods, and for a short while consensus softens the taut air that had filled the chamber.

Suddenly Dukor choke-gasps with amazement. Turning, they see him dwarfed by a thick pillar of revolving smoke growing from the *Turma*,

a clicking roar like millions of wrath-hornets. The pillar widens and bends towards them, but Zane dodges it, grabs the glowing frame,

and dashes it against the wall again and again as the column lashes out like an enraged serpent. The *Turma* bends,

the creature stiffens. One last slam against the wood and the *Turma* shatters. The pillar shriek-rears like a thunder-head filled with lightning

then collapses into a stinking vapour that forces everyone onto the road. The haze drifts skyward, slowly dissipates.

'Nothing like this has happened to my work,' Dukor says. He looks at them with suspicion, whistles a triple command to the air,

and returns to his vast smithy, which starts to shrink and slowly fold back into silence until there is nothing but the grey road.

For a long while they continue to stare and wonder if they had imagined all, but for the broken *Turma* in Zane's hand.

8. The Story Game

‘What now?’ Jessie asks. Zane places the frame inside his bag and points to where they see Mt Alkerii, finger-thin in the distance.

‘With the *Turma* destroyed, there’s nothing more to discover here. Let’s be on our way and worry about any visions later.’

As they walk, the landscape in a brown haze, with sound of wind running through crevices, Jessie ponders the lack of sun, drops back

to ask Remesh what he knows. ‘I presume this land of the dead is without the light of salvation,’ he says with a tight smile.

She is not sure if he is serious or is baiting her. She looks straight ahead, keeps voice even. ‘What religion are you?’

Remesh looks skyward for some seconds, sighs. ‘I once belonged to the Monady Church.’ Her stomach quivers, though there seems no reason.

‘I’ve never heard of it.’ He laughs aloud. ‘Likely because we are of different times. Or else different universes, if tales

of parallel worlds are true, which I doubt. There is only one world, one God, one way to rejoin God, one Heaven. So I thought.’

‘What way?’ She shakes a little with recall of her father’s prayers, messianic glare. ‘By helping those who believe in the many

to find the right way themselves.’ Her breath cramps
 a little. ‘How?’ He also stares ahead.
 ‘By any means, which is why I am here.’

Before Jessie can ask him to expand,
 Zane joins them, whispers caution. He points out
 how a few stars are now starting to waver.

‘In Ghajat, the stars only move at night,
 and here they appear to have the same law.
 We’d better find shelter, or fear attack.’

Taking some grains from his song-bag, he whispers
 a spell of finding and tosses them high.
 They swirl into incandescence, then point

towards the hollow of a nearby hill,
 before fading and dropping to the ground.
 Zane starts to move there, but Jessie stops him:

‘So much for caution.’ ‘We have no choice now,’
 he replies, steps off the verge, turns around,
 spreads his arms, a sure conceit: ‘See, no danger.’

Remesh joins him, and they stride around tussocks
 of white, five-petalled flowers on long stalks.
 Picking one up Jessie stifles a shriek

as the face at its centre winks at her.
 Abruptly the eye detaches itself
 and is borne away by the wind, to join

those other tiny insects gathering
 nectar from inner sanctums of the flowers.
 Laughing, she follows the men up the hill.

Their shelter is a hut of broken boards
and thatched leaves, just sufficient to keep out
the biting gusts that come with rapid night.

Jessie can hear voices summoning her
within the vortices of wind, the dead,
the misplaced in heart and soul, the forgotten,

all those who call her to a type of death.
She knows, now, that in Thexlan she can't follow
their bright tumult until she knows what follows.

After marking protection signs at door
and windows, Zane throws wood on a fireplace
that looks like it has been used every night

for a million years, so deep are the ashes,
their texture like Zane's *murga* grains, their colour
the road's charcoal grey. Maybe all of Thexlan

lies in a vast hearth, and their passage through
just the breeze flicking cinders to complete
their service of breath to the hearth's creator.

Jessie envisages worlds nesting worlds,
but draws little relief from the idea
as wind jostles wall and ceiling for access.

'What is so dangerous out there?' she asks
as Zane puts away his fire kit and sits,
lifts his palms to the flames inches away,

a faint bewilderment filling his features.
'As I've said, star-demons come down to kill.'
'That's just fear-fantasy,' Remesh replies.

‘The stars are furnaces of light and matter.
Nothing exists but what we can touch, measure.’
Zane passes his hands through the fire and smirks.

‘Maybe in your world. Not Ghajat or Thexlan,
though I suspect all worlds have the same root.’
Remesh grunts and moves away. Jessie follows:

‘How do you explain Rynobar?’ He stops.
‘Who?’ ‘One of the two *hoya* we encountered
when we found you. Maybe they were both trying

to kill you.’ He shakes his head. ‘If I’m dead
how can they do anything?’ Jessie shrugs.
‘Maybe they need souls for their furnaces.’

Zane speaks from his seat. ‘Maybe they are souls
looking for bodies to possess. I’m sure
Rynobar has proposed such an idea.’

Jessie leaves Remesh to consider this
and sees Zane playing with the flames again.
She sits on a log beside him. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘At the mound and elsewhere I have felt cold
and heat; here the flames give light but no heat.
Maybe Thexlan is nothing like Ghajat.’

Remesh grins. ‘This is the realm of the dead.
You encounter only what you bring in.
Maybe there is no fire in you. Not ever.’

Zane rushes and subdues the plump man quickly,
drags him to the flames. ‘Maybe I have more
fire than I need. What about you, Remesh?’

What did you bring, leave behind, never have?
We don't know you.' He grabs a burning brand,
thrusts it towards his face. 'Does this help you?'

Jessie knocks it away, though the blow hurts.
The men move apart. Remesh rubs his face,
takes up a position across the fire.

Zane notices Jessie nursing her hand.
'Let me look.' She glares at him and returns
to her seat. 'Leave me alone. Both of you.'

As the wind dies down footsteps sound outside
the barred front door. There is a single knock.
Zane conjures a staff from a heavy bough.

The second knock rattles the door and frame.
'We are already dead,' Remesh insists,
'so nothing can harm us. Just let it in.'

A voice they recognise as Gedon's issues
from beyond the door, and the air gild-shimmers.
'Yes, let me in. You know I can't hurt you.'

Zane refreshes his warding spells. 'You sound
like me, but *hoya* are cunning. Leave now
and feast on less suspecting travellers.'

For an answer, gold slivers of light flare
through the door and Gedon appears, all scowl
and crossed arms. 'How hospitable of you.'

As he moves to a seat, Zane accosts him.
'Why are you plaguing us? Who are you, really?'
Gedon leans back. 'Just a seeker, like you.'

I am you. Or else an imagined you.’
Jessie sits near him. ‘Imagined by whom?’
Gedon raises his left eyebrow. ‘Good question.’

He takes her injured hand. ‘But you are hurt.’
She senses warm assurance in his touch.
He closes his eyes, slows his breathing, passes

one hand back and forth above the bruise, stops.
She feels the flesh tingle, watches it blister
frenetically for a second then hiss,

then wrinkle back into pale skin, marked only
by a pink outline that gradually fades.
‘Thank you, Gedon.’ She touches the raw skin.

‘You said you were forgotten. Why? By whom?’
Gedon considers Zane. ‘Another time.
Besides, it is as good a name as any.’

Jessie flexes her hand. ‘So what are you?
A god, demon, Dremaan, or something dreamed
by all of us as wishful interlude?’

‘I’m not sure where there is a difference.’
He pokes the fire. ‘All we can know is this.’
Remesh shuffles in his seat. ‘What of God?’

Zane nods. ‘I agree. There is always more.
I want to know the why, the how of being.
Or else existence is a waste of time.’

Gedon rolls his eyes. ‘Always the same quest,
though you never mention the other one,
both hopeless as a sword cutting itself.’

Zane's eyes fill with fresh rage and for a moment
the twin beings lock wills like two great beasts
over territory. Breath and thought teeters,

till Zane laughs, Gedon nods, tension snap-fades.
Jessie and Remesh exchange puzzled looks,
and the room settles into awkward silence.

Turning her body away, Jessie takes
the rainbow gem from its pouch, which had stayed
on her person when her clothes changed. Its highlights

still move mysteriously, but one facet
shows a tree with ten stars in its bare branches,
another, strange maze shapes. She returns it,

takes a quick look around the rundown room,
rummages through dusty shelves, broken cupboards.
Remesh walks over to her, questions her,

informs her that the dead do not need food.
'What if I'm not dead?' she says. 'I am hungry.'
Gedon joins them. 'The habit of your life.

Still, even here such addictions have power.'
They turn as a mist appears in the room
and slowly forms into a ruffled servant

standing before a sumptuous banquet table.
Remesh pats his belly, but makes no move
to join the feast. Gedon accepts a drink,

sniffs its bouquet, rolls eyes in mock regret.
'What you eat here you have only brought forth
with your mind, which may not even be yours.'

Zane whirls on him. 'My mind is always mine.'
 Gedon turns one palm outwards. 'You are here
 because you deny such knowledge and being.'

Jessie tosses aside the tasteless fare,
 watches the feast and servant disappear.
 'How do we attain such wisdom? With thought?'

'Ask him.' Gedon points to Zane. 'He knew once.'
 Zane throws a branch on the fire and sparks shower
 all around them. 'As always, you talk nonsense.'

Gedon points to a spark floating in circles.
 'Wisdom is not accumulation, but
 an unburdening, which is easier

when you follow that song-spark deep within.
 You gave me that, but have forsaken it,
 and will drag all of us into disaster.'

Everyone stares into the flames that jump
 and tumble-dance as wind rattles the hut.
 The burning wood emits a smell like myrrh.

Remesh thumps two logs together and smiles.
 'I propose a game, since no one is tired
 and sleep apparently not needed here.

It's called *Fable, Lie or Life*, and is simple.
 One of us tells a story and the rest
 choose whether it is made up, or from life,

or something else.' 'What do you mean?' Zane asks.
 Remesh looks at them over steeped fingers.
 'A story can come from that complete tale

governing all life. Not real to one life,
not false to all. Difficult to do well,
if at all.' Zane leans forward. 'And who wins?'

'The speaker, if the listeners are wrong.
The listeners, when they choose the right type.
With Gedon as judge if we can't agree.'

Zane hunches near the fire so that flames flicker
across his face like hieroglyphs, coughs once,
stretches his neck, then begins in a whisper.

9. Zane's Story

'I was born on the shores of Lake Tarlkarni.
My father was a fisher—and my brothers,
who were nine years older than I—all strong

in the ancestral voices that guide us.
The *Forii* were never that strong in me,
and my dreams my own. My mother saw this.

Here, as elsewhere in Ghajat, women sang.
Before dawn my mother would sprinkle sand
on a cloth, hum a tune of conjuring,

and the day would bring whatever she sought.
All women had this art, but as no girls
were born to us, I was trained in this skill.

A storm took my father when I was eight.
Some of the villagers saw this as doom
for my mother breaking *makir* tradition.

They did not shun us, for men often died
on that lake near the mist-edge of the world,
but they were wary. Then, after a year,

my sister was born. Dimples. Tight blond ringlets
like my father's. Green eyes, not seen in Tarlkar
before then. Olive skin, lighter than mine.

We named her Kerrilea, the bright joy,
though the others cursed her as *hoya*-spawn,
as if strange births were unlike *murga* gifts.

At Kerrilea's fifth birthday, my mother
would have started training her, as is lore,
and I would have returned to fisher ways.

But weeks before, my mother made a garland
of rocks and the ancient lake swallowed her.
I saw her too late, arms outstretched, head high.

She couldn't hear me because she was singing
to someone in the lake's star-phosphorescence,
someone who was keening for her. My father.

Some say my mother died because a *hoya*
visited her after my father's death.
Some say she wished to be with him again.

Some say my sister was a cunning demon
bent on destruction of our family,
the village too. But the truth is much simpler.

Lake Tarlkarni forms the edge of Ghajat.
Above that edge is Aimal, Shultar's home,
with groping shadows and plummeting blasts,

like cautions told to children before sleep.
Shultar is a Dremaan, mistress of lake
and our land, and would often demand tribute,

eight barrels of *sorra*, a purple plant
that grows on the lake's bottom. Failure meant
the casting of lots to see who would die.'

Zane takes a deep breath, stares into the fire.
'My mother was chosen that year. Not chance,
but the terror-reprisals of our neighbours.

Two years later the tribute again failed.
Shultar asked for Kerrilea. My brothers
held me back while the headman lit the fire—

the drawing of lots, the ancestral voices,
 never wrong. Her screams haunt me every night.
 Her imploring eyes I see every day.'

Once more he pauses, his gaze to the flames,
 then rubs his eyes, throws back his head, and stretches,
 and all know the pause has become an ending.

Remesh claps softly. 'Very entertaining.
 And very skilful. By setting the story
 in a place none of us have seen, or know,

you make it hard for us to judge its truth.
 Still, I think it *Lie*. Too much background detail,
 tragedies so like mere divertissements.'

Jessie waves her hands. 'What of his distress?
 The story feels true, though I can see how
 the tragedies seem like they've been contrived.'

Remesh demurs. 'The sadness may be real,
 but it is a clever weave of emotion
 to deflect attention from fabrication.'

Zane stands. 'Though the events are from my life,
 both of you may be right, in a strange way.'
 Jessie moves towards him. 'What do you mean?'

'I may be a tale myself, a sand painting
 woven into words someone tells another.
 Thexlan is womb and home to dreams, to stories.'

Remesh lets out a bellow and then slaps
 Zane on the back. 'I might believe your tale
 was *Life*, if I accepted Jessie's instincts,

but your last comments show a skilful jest.
So, a false story. Do you agree, judge?’
Gedon blinks, his mind wrestling with Zane’s musings.

‘All stories have pleasure, once you unravel
the spirit inside. But I cannot judge
upon this tale till Jessie casts her vote.’

She frowns. ‘I believe Zane has told a truth,
though whether it is history or fable,
his life or essence of all lives...who knows?’

Gedon glances at Zane. ‘Because I know
a little of his path, I will judge *Life*,
though others would say *Fable*. Jessie’s next.’

10. Jessie's Tale

Jessie looks at each in turn. 'I'm not good
at making up stories. That's why I read
the past and stories that help me forget.'

She sighs, closes her eyes. Her breathing slows.
She rolls her shoulders twice, as though uncoiling
from herself. Eyes flash open, firelight-glitter.

'Around the globe called home is endless space
in which ships travel filled with sleeping pilgrims
who do not breathe. Their focussed dreaming pauses

the universe-weave, cleaves the emptiness
of vast reach, drops itself through, then reknits
the arc of crossing closer to its goal.

When a ship touches earth again, its people
awaken from their single blink, unload
seed and beast, channel water, build stockades

against those hordes who come to repossess
what was conquered. Soon towns and roads begin
to leach the land of sustenance, of title.

The pilgrims infest their world, wrestle-war
for wealth they can eat, carry or display,
wreck the elements till nothing remains

but the ribs of their vessels and the stench
of despair. Others arrive, quickly leave.
Nothing remains. Maybe a beetle rolls

ripe dung across the land until it reaches
the size of a world.' She sighs. 'Maybe not.'
Jessie looks at each of them, then leans back.

Gedon nods approval, but not so Zane.

‘There is nothing beyond Ghajat but mist,
as here in Thexlan. ‘Not true,’ says Remesh.

‘In my time craft strive to reach other worlds,
though not in the manner Jessie describes.’

Zane shakes with incredulity. ‘And why

would people destroy the world that feeds them?’

Remesh shifts around, the thought of such greed
reverberating deep-dark within him.

Zane continues: ‘Such a race deserves death,
though not the worlds they conquer.’ Jessie clasps
her hands. ‘That is my wish also.’ Zane narrows

his eyes, wonders if her claim at the start
as to a lack of skill was just a ploy
to off-balance them in the story game.

As his admiration steepens, he knows
such cunning tactics call for equal guile.

‘As I think about your tale, I recall

a vision from my distant past of worlds
in mist-swirl formation. Yet I vote *Lie*,
for the story seems a life not yet lived.’

Jessie looks askance at him, but says nothing.

‘While this time my vote is *Life*,’ Remesh says.

‘The storyteller wins again. My turn.’

11. Remesh's Account

'There is a tree with bitter yellow fruit.
 There is a man who mourns his lover's death.
 There is a god who does not wish to live.

The man begs his god to retrieve the soul
 of his lover. The god agrees, but only
 if the man brings him the fruit of that tree.

The man journeys far, but all those he questions
 decline knowledge of the tree. His hope withers
 till he meets a dishevelled mage who knows

how to reach the tree, to be revealed only
 for a share of the fruit. The man agrees.
 Given a small boat, he is told to sail

where the horizon folds over itself,
 to find an isle of magnificent birds
 who will try to prevent him taking fruit,

for they feed on it. To attend the man,
 the mage sends his familiar, a fiery
 baboon that speaks in riddles. The man sails.

At first he must sway the wind to bear him
 on the right course. The wind agrees, but only
 if the man cremates himself above ground

when he dies, which may happen any time.
 Soon the craft skims the waves faster than birds,
 faster even than the bending of rainbows.

A sun-moon cycle later the man senses
 the world drop, and the sea surges a wave
 that lifts him far above the tracks of clouds.

When the boat teeters on the edge, he sees
the island just above him. The wave lurches,
but the wind ferries his craft to the beach.

Watched constantly by the baboon, its talk
of ghosts in flesh, of demons in disguise,
of maps that only lead to fading maps,

the man enters the dank and fertile jungle.
All about him are the frenetic cries
and whoops of unseen beasts that even quieten

his riddling companion. He battles through
dense foliage and rank aromas, tripping
on roots, falling into holes filled with feathers

and dead leaves, ignoring always the sounds
that seem to say, 'Go back, ruin draws you.
Go back, your soul is at risk. Go back, now.'

He spurns phantasmagoria of shapes
and fetid pools, grotesque camellias,
noxious orchids, the zigzagging escarpments,

and stumbles into a clearing, the ground
littered with shards of gleaming rib and skull,
skeletal hands not always with five fingers.

The man pants for a long time, hands on knees,
head barely raised. Before him is a presence
more like a mountain forest hanging from

a giant earth pole trailing knotted cables,
a monstrous apparition of a tree
with lily-white flowers and immense clusters

of yellow globular fruit, spectral sheen.
Around the tree, flocks of rainbow-flecked birds
with long gossamer tails wheel in wide spirals

before returning to its laden branches
to eat more of the fruit, then quickly launch
once more in rapid cataracts of colour.

Each time the birds pass near him, their wings flash
keen prisms into his eyes, fixing him
with their brilliance. The baboon's sudden chatter

jolts him out of his reveries. He straightens,
takes out the brooch his lost beloved gave
with the words, "I will always be near you,

a halo of scent till we are pure scent."

The birds roost again and watch him approach.
As he stretches out to pluck the first fruit

he can reach, he hears his beloved's voice.

"Please, my sweet, let me rest among the dead.
You will see me soon. But if you continue,

we will never see each other again."

Recalling the wizard's words, he ignores
the voice, plucks three fruit, one for the god, one

for the mage, and one for himself—he needs
to know the truth. Each time the tree pause-trembles
and the birds let loose shrieks that cloud the air

and dim the glow from the remaining fruit.

With the third cry they surge upwards like flames
in a forest combusted in wild fire

and disappear into the too-hushed jungle.
Nothing moves as the man bites the first fruit.
The pulp is fine, but the juice is so acrid

it burns tongue and throat. The man gags, but frantic
to know the tree's secret he bites again.
Nothing happens. He closes his eyes, summons

the face of his beloved. Again, nothing.
He tosses away the core and returns
to the beach the way he came. He sails back

to where he set out, gives the second fruit
to the wizard, who allows him to watch
the ritual: he splits the fruit in two,

takes out the kernel, pounds it in his pestle,
pours in the juice, opens a vein, lets fall
three drops of blood. The brew hisses and bubbles.

He pours it into a goblet, drinks half,
gives the rest to his pet, who has been silent
ever since the birds vanished. Nothing happens

till the familiar begins to chant
a formula in an unknown tongue, while
the mage dances about it widdershins.

The more emaciated he becomes,
the more the animal acquires the shape
and stance of a human, then beyond-human,

its features swelling, its body and limbs
thickening and lengthening, like a god,
and in one stride it disappears from sight,

the wizard now a flimsy sheet of skin
that dissolves into dust scattered by light.
After much travel and travail the man

returns to the vast temple of the god,
near the edge of a chasm. Noxious fumes
rise from beneath, swirl about the huge columns.

The man steps over the threshold and calls
for the god. "Neti, Neti." Vapours merge
into a massive statue, which consumes

the proffered fruit whole, attains flesh and breath,
then contracts to human size. The man asks,
"What of my beloved?" "Soon," Neti says,

settling into a cross-legged position
on the temple floor and remaining silent.
When the building judders with sudden thunder,

Neti smiles at the giant shape approaching.
Now wearing the mage's rage-torn visage,
the god-like baboon towers over them,

for the wizard had also lost a lover,
had made the same pact. Neti ate the fruit
to become a god but then refused payment.

The wizard strikes the god and the stone temple
crumbles into the chasm. The man plummets
and feels the fumes ravage his flesh and spirit,

then finds himself clothed in feathers, and eating
the yellow fruit of the tree. Other souls
surround him, including the contrite god,

but nowhere can he discern his beloved,
not in the jewelled eyes of the other birds,
not in the bilious taste of the fruit.'

For a long time the listeners are stunned,
then Jessie speaks. 'The story makes no sense.
What happened to the beloved? And why

did the god lie? I find the story mean.'
Remesh stands and puts more wood on the fire.
'It's what happened to a man. Life's like that.'

'Whether true or not,' she says, 'I feel cheated.
The man did what he was asked, yet was robbed
of his reward.' Zane calms her. 'But did he?

No one told him to eat the fruit first. Maybe
it was a drug. Maybe he is still there,
a statue holding a half-eaten fruit,

the baboon panic-chattering in riddles,
his beloved hovering about him,
imploring him to wake up. I like it.'

'So how do you vote?' asks Remesh. They both
decide on *Lie*, while Gedon judges it
a mix of *Lie* and *Fable*. Remesh wins.

Gedon now stands. 'The night is ending, time
for us to take up our own humble story.
I hope the road will grant us what we seek.'

He opens the door, smiles, and they watch him
melt to auric-sheen light that flows so swiftly
clouds of dust motes stream-melt into his wake.

12. *Murga* Flight

Jessie sees Zane put both hands to the ground,
 dig fingers into earth, close his eyes, listen.
 ‘*Glymsen* is coming.’ He takes out his song-bag

and knife, starts to prepare a *murga* space.
 Remesh taps him on the arm. ‘What are you
 going to request in this ritual?’

‘Speed and ease of travel. Maybe some answers.’
 Remesh points his hand to the world outside.
 ‘Since thought is so strong here, why can’t you open

a direct path from here to Mt Alkerii?’
 Zane glances at Remesh, ponders a moment,
 then nods his head. ‘It might be possible,

though I’m not sure such a thing has been done.’
 He closes his eyes, thinks through all his lessons.
 ‘Both of you will have to help.’ He gives them

some grains, sits them around the circle, tells
 them to form a clear picture in their minds
 of the mountain they saw in the map *murga*.

He tunes his lyre, then, as they sprinkle grains,
 he starts playing, instrument and voice spinning
 a plea-chant that fills the room with warm mist.

The *murga* grains waver, refuse to gel
 into a constant picture, whirl through colours
 like all seasons in an instant, then lift

from the ground and speed-swirl into the mist.
 Jessie struggles to hold the mountain image
 as the mist jostles her and the heat rises.

She feels the floor drop, then vanish completely,
knows herself part of the spinning mist, sees
the *murga* itself open into space,

in which appears a tiny shard of darkness
that rapidly grows, and she realizes
they are speeding towards their summoned goal.

Her smile falters as the mist shudder-shifts.
The music lurches, strives to regain tempo,
is cuffed again. The mist ruptures. They fall.

Jessie sees a woman in a bed, wrists
bandaged, older woman holding one hand
and crying, someone else chanting in shadow.

Zane sees a sword plunging into the chest
of a grey-haired man who wrenches a jewel
from the pommel and throws it into darkness.

Remesh sees a woman gather a mob
of children into a small room and sit
singing songs with them as the flames draw near.

After picking themselves up from the ground
they survey their surroundings: no dawn yet,
which means the danger still of *hoya*, or

whatever else interfered with their *murga*.
They have landed someway along the road,
which here is smothered by thick, motley creepers

and bent-over tall reeds, dense foliage
beyond these on both sides, striated dark
quivering, now becoming still. The stench

of a bone factory, maggots in marrow.

Suddenly a roar like a million frogs
judders the air, the reeds, the leaves, the road,

draws all into a giant murky membrane
that towers over the group. The rank shape—
world-skin scrunched into a giant fist—trembles,

shreds itself to a rain of haggard creatures
armed with spears, then bamboo shafts spouting poison,
then cross-curved knives that make a whistling sound.

Zane shoves Remesh and Jessie behind him
and surrounds them all with a barricade
of flame that repels creatures who approach,

but does not prevent them from hurling missiles.
He conjures a wooden staff to deflect
the attacks, is stunned to see Jessie standing

near him, using twin sticks to ward off missiles
out of his range. She shows great skill and speed,
but there are too many for both of them.

One hits her left temple. The sight of her
spinning from the blow and hitting the ground
so maddens Zane he summons all his will

and fans the flames into a raging mass
that billows with such speed towards the creatures
they cannot evade their doom. Moments later

there are only slivers of vegetation
on the verge of the road and smouldering
shadows where their strange attackers once stood.

Though there are no ill effects from the blow,
Jessie lets Zane inspect the wound. She finds
the touch of his long fingers strangely soothing

as he cleans the wound, presses the skin flaps
together, applies a salve, and sing-whispers
a healing heat, the precision and flair

of a master craftsman in a bazaar
while a buyer watches the handiwork.
She lets herself relax and, as eyes close,

hears her mother calling her to get ready
for church. She doesn't want to go—no one
else to talk to, nothing to do but listen

to the minister's drone in the hot-cramp
wooden chapel with glory-windows shut,
or those screech-sermons that make her sit up

in sweat-fear her father will test her later—
but if she doesn't go, another sin,
her father will use the strap or do worse.

Her eyes snap open with fear as she thinks
her father is before her with a gag
to stop her screaming, then sees it is Zane

with the cloth he used to wipe away blood.
She smiles her thanks and slowly finds her feet.
To Zane's question about her martial skills

she explains that a childhood friend taught her
moves and techniques during the games they played,
though she hadn't thought about them for years.

They only move a few yards down the road
when they feel tiny tremors ebb and flow
through their soles. A stronger series rocks them

and they look up to see a mist-plume spurting
high in the distance to touch stars. It thickens
in the middle, flattens to a wave-ring

racing across the land and ruffling all.
When the wave passes overhead, the land
buckles and tilts, their senses prickle-hum.

A short while later they notice the light
at the horizon is yellow with green,
and a little higher than their first day,

notice too the dancing stars are still moving
ever so slightly, and know this to mean
increased danger from *hoya*. As they walk

two ravens appear from nowhere, dip-sway
in front of them, rock wings as they ascend
to a high branch and watch them, all in silence.

13. Of Crooked Signs

The road travels through lightly wooded fields,
with tiny birds flitting through the trees or
wheeling above them in great swathes, the circles

of flight dictated by instinct of flock
not leader, single wing beat, bank and soar.
In the distance is the curve of low hills

that are tinged with saffron, like prostrate monks.
Zane sniffs the air. 'There's a faint whiff of salt.
A sea, though it must still be someway off.'

He sees Jessie sniff and scowl. 'What is wrong?'
'The seaside means sun, but my lack of pigment
meant I could never enjoy it. I wanted

to swim, to be like other boys and girls,
but fun was not my father's faith.' Except,
she almost adds, when she was very young,

and he used to make finger-people vanish
then return again, to her glee. 'Because
I feared the sun, the forest was my haven.

The smell of leaf and fresh earth. The way light
makes shapes of spaces between leaves and branches
when you look through the canopy of trees.

Leaf to bough to space, my gaze leapt and paused.
Hours later my father would summon me.
I would get home always two minutes late.'

'What was your father's faith?' Zane asks. 'A rigid
belief in holy book and pain,' she says,
'though the book only came when I was older.

If I dared ask questions to point out flaws
 in scripture, the pain increased, so I stopped.’
 Her voice is bitter. Twitching vein at temple.

Though his father and the village boys taunted
 Zane about his *murga* training, their scorn
 arose through ancient laws and roles, but not

her father’s abuse, more a fault of soul
 than an outrage to change. ‘What of your mother?’
 ‘She left not long after he joined his church.

He claimed my affliction drove her away.’
 Jessie pauses. ‘My dearest recollection
 is her hushed voice singing nursery rhymes.

I liked the one about the crooked man.
 Maybe because I’m crooked in some way.’
 She pauses again. ‘I hate missing her.’

‘My mother also sang, humour and wisdom.
 Before bed, my sister and I would listen
 to fables and tales of Ghajat and Thexlan—

true world that forms Ghajat—and the wish rings
 Mt Alkerii flings over and through Thexlan
 every morning. How these rings form that world

and our world anew, maybe other worlds,
 where they are she did not know, but could fill
 our dreams with tales of birds with wings like shells,

enormous cities, worlds that rise and fall
 in the tear-blink of an elephant’s eye,
 gossamer creatures that float in scorched darkness.

She told how the rings are composed of Orms,
world bubbles from the depths of Mt Alkerii,
which bear answers to prayer and dream and hope,

and how at times gem fragments of Orms drop
out of the rings, Keth shards, which can be used
to predict the future or find the past.'

Jessie recalls the strange gem in her pouch,
but thinks it is too well-crafted to be
a Keth shard, though what it could be is vague.

She looks at him. 'I thought you didn't know
much about our task or our destination.'
He strokes his chin with his thumb as his gaze

turns inward a few seconds, then he shrugs.
'Maybe all the stories we have been telling
are starting to unlock my past, my plans.'

A sensation of dread knots Jessie's stomach,
whether from the tone of his last two words,
or the strange sight before her, she can't tell.

Their road continues over a small plain
of flat basalt rock in which are incised
swirling lines a drunk engraver would make.

With each new step the area vibrates,
then the rock between the markings slides upwards,
becoming walls of white stone ten feet high,

inscribed with interlaced spirals and crosses,
some crudely slashed and gashed, anger-despair
of other travellers blocked by this trial.

Jessie wonders whose monster they will meet
in the centre of the stone maze, and what
lesson awaits them if they do survive.

She joins Zane at the wall blocking the road.
‘What do we do?’ He checks along both sides.
‘It’s not too wide for us. We go around.’

Remesh agrees and steps off the left side
of the road, disappears as through a door,
which shuts behind him, and completes his stride

to their right, then staggers when he sees them.
Zane walks past him, looks briefly at the verge:
brown dirt, a scattering of milk-white pebbles,

tiny tufts of thin grass, swings his leg over
the ground. The limb vanishes. He leans back
and sees his lower leg emerge from air.

He shakes his thigh, and the suspended foot
wobbles. Some probing confirms there is no
severing of the leg, so he moves back,

leans his vertigo against the wall, shuts
his eyes briefly. A hand touches his arm.
He gives a smile to Jessie’s concerned look,

then begins tracing the sigils and runes
on the rough stone, some geometric, some
ornate, some finely cross-hatched, some distorted.

‘I’ve seen something like these before, but not
on a building. Something smaller. Much smaller.’
He knocks his forehead against the wall, stops,

turns to Jessie. 'You study ancient scripts. Can you decipher these?' Remesh guffaws. 'I thought you were a powerful Dremaan.'

Zane spins on Remesh. 'Why don't you help us, instead of these useless comments.' Remesh glares back. 'I know nothing of magic symbols.'

Zane grabs him by the throat and lifts him high with one hand, even though the man weighs more than he. Jessie leans her weight on Zane's arm,

is surprised at his corded strength of muscles. The struggle continues as Remesh wriggles, chokes, then Zane lets go. Remesh slumps to the ground.

Zane glares at him. 'I don't care what you do, beat the stone with your hands or head, but help!' Just as he turns back to the wall, he sees

Jessie standing, head aslant, in front of a huge inverted triangle containing smaller and smaller versions of itself.

'You've seen this before?' he asks. 'Not the same,' she says, 'but such a symbol could mean *woman*.' As she studies the triangles, they seem

to shift back and forth, rhythm of her pulse. Her gaze is drawn deeply into their centre, then her eyes widen. 'I know what to do.'

She turns slightly from him, hunches a little and plunges two fingers into her groin. As she thrusts them back and forth a few times

her mind is enthralled by the memory
of passion and patient intimacy,
though her lover's face is hidden by shadow.

She is alert to what she's doing, what
she's remembering, of who's watching, how
the channel of triple energies forms

as she smears the juices into the runnel
of the innermost triangle, and how
power flash-blazes through each nested symbol.

In the instant before the stone within
the outer triangle dissolves, she wonders
if she created the opening, or

merely uncovered what was always there.
In the same instant the lover's face turns
from moonlight memory, and has Zane's smile.

14. Leap and Echo

After checking the door for sign of ambush,
they enter single file, a floating ball
of light before them: Zane, Jessie, Remesh.

Immediately they face a blank wall
and are forced to turn right. A few steps on
is another wall, paths to either side.

The floor is packed dirt, trodden by the passage
of countless pilgrims. The breeze touches them
on all sides, is cool, with sickly-sweet fragrance.

‘Which way now, Jessie?’ Zane asks. She joins him
and takes a deep breath. Her shoulders drop slightly
as she exhales, then draws another breath

into her lower lung, holding it there,
sensing its poised vitality vibrating
through and quickening muscle, organ, skin,

sensing its echo too in the breeze lifting
the fine hairs on her right arm as it rises
of its own accord and points to the left.

‘Once we take that path,’ Zane notes, ‘we should stick
to the left wall, thus ignoring those paths
that look useful but would lead us astray.’

They walk steadily, left hands touching rock.
As they leave yet another cul-de-sac,
Zane cranes his head skyward. The high walls block

the bank of light from the horizon, leaving
the faint stars above for illumination,
yet their vision within the maze is clear.

He looks behind him, sees the others glowing more than normal, magenta iridescence stretching like lifelines between each of them.

As Zane turns back to the front, the air chills and a dark mass hurtles down from the sky to form a monstrous, snarling, bat-winged creature,

body-bulk of vapour and spider webs, shell-plate head with long, razor-thin, hooked beak, clicking claws, a *hoya* unlike his friend

Rynobar of the star-blaze limbs and body. A cry from Remesh says another *hoya* has appeared behind them. Zane hurls light-balls

at both of them and pushes his companions into a small room. He conjures a curtain of indigo flame at the doorway, but

before he can cast a flame barrier to protect them from above, the two *hoya* leap the walls and advance towards the group.

Zane and Jessie conjure their weapons, step towards the star-demons, who hesitate at this audacity, then laugh in voices

like glass breaking and loom-charge towards them. Then another blur of winged darkness plunges into the room, not to join but to batter

one *hoya* aside and attack the other. Zane recognizes Rynobar and rushes to help. He throws a bolt of incandescence

at the first *hoya*, follows up with blows
from his staff that keep the creature off balance,
throws a net of fury-light over it,

and keeps pummelling till Jessie pulls him
away. The other attacker is limp
in Rynobar's arms. Zane sees his friend sobbing,

asks what is wrong. 'This should never have happened.
Now the stars are moving during the day
and these *hoya* are in league with a darkness

even beyond us. I can't leave them here.'
Rynobar picks up the other star-demon,
unfurls vast wings, soars skywards without sound.

After checking for wounds and speaking briefly
about the strange events, the travellers
decide their only path is to move on.

They only make a few more turnings
before coming across an open space
in the centre of which is a still pool.

A thin causeway runs around it, with many
openings to other dark passages,
too many for the left wall strategy.

Remesh slumps against the wall. 'What now, Jessie?'
She rubs her eyes, the battle with the *hoya*
rupturing what link she had with the maze.

Zane tries a *murga*, but the grains refuse
to settle into shape. He sends a probe
around the space, but it is just as listless.

‘If your *hoya* friend was here,’ Remesh says,
‘it could fly above the maze, guide us out.’
Zane ignores him, because he notices

that Jessie has been distracted. He touches
her arm. She doesn’t notice. She is looking
intently at the black water that glitters

occasionally with the overhead stars.
Her eyes are shifting rapidly as if
she were striving to snare a fleeting scene,

sear it into mind. All at once she throws
herself into the pool and sinks from sight
without a sound or splash, without a ripple.

Zane dives after her, but finds himself skidding
across the causeway on the other side.
He dives again, but ends up where he started.

He joins Remesh to scan the pool for bubbles,
or other signs of life, then chants a spell
to part the black stillness, reveal her fate,

but nothing happens. ‘What now?’ Remesh asks.
A voice sounds from the passage behind them.
‘She should return, but it may be some time.’

Wings barely fluttering, Rynobar glides
out of the dark and stops in front of Zane,
who greets the *hoya* with a puzzled smile.

‘Thank you for your help before, but what is
this place and where is Jessie?’ Rynobar
says he knows little, but the pool is used

by *hoya* when they have captured weak souls.
Having gone in by herself, she will be
drawn back soon enough to her path in Thexlan.

Although reluctant to talk to the *hoya*
for reasons he can't fathom, Remesh asks
if Rynobar can carry them out, or

at least guide them while flying overhead.
'It is not possible. When seen from high
the maze is a shifting blur of shape patterns.'

'But you found us after taking those *hoya*,'
Remesh says with a harshness that surprises.
Rynobar peers at him with lava eyes.

'That's because I was able to drop back
to the exact place in the maze I left,
and then I followed your trail from that room.'

With the hope that music will sooth their tensions
and draw Jessie back, Zane pulls out his lyre
and begins to play, in a halting rhythm.

The discords, someway between muffled sobs
and shrill keening, fill the space so that nothing
is untouched by their dark concern and grief.

Eyes closed, Zane restrains his rage at this loss
and lets his fingers tap into pure sorrow,
the sound like cold wind caressing bare trees,

or a new shoot breaking through frozen earth.
Using sustained notes, Zane tries to transmute
the seething din of his mind into calm.

He barely registers a tiny echo
coming from deep within the music, yet
also apart, like a distant wind chime.

Then Remesh nudges his arm and he opens
his eyes to see the pool stippled with starlight,
waves rippling to the rhythm of his music,

the pattern drawing their gaze across water
to where Jessie stumbles out of a passage
one third of the way around the pool's edge.

When they reach her she has collapsed, face gaunt,
clothes ripped, sweat-smearred, hands and face scratched and bleeding.
Rynobar brushes the others aside,

leans over Jessie, drapes its giant wings
around her till no one can see within.
As the *hoya* chants softly, subdued light

filters through its wing tips, the colour spinning
rapidly through the rainbow as though searching
for an apt tincture for healing. It settles

on roseate light, and while the soft thrumming
echoes throughout the chamber, the glow brightens
and dims as though the tune were a breeze ruffling

the drapes protecting an eternal flame.
After some seconds Rynobar steps back.
Eyes blinking, Jessie declares, 'I'm not dead.'

'How do you know?' Zane asks as he helps her
stand up, notes weariness and certainty
in her pale eyes. 'I don't know why I dived

into the pool. Intuition. And then
I found myself in a bed, could smell Daphne,
my favourite flower, could hear machines humming,

but couldn't open my eyes, couldn't speak,
though I sensed people nearby.' Her eyes glisten,
for she is sure that one of those hold-squeezing

her hands was her mother, not seen for years.
She massages her forehead as she tries
to make out the other person...the skin

much smoother than her mother's, yet mist-cool.
'Then a weariness crept over my mind,
quicker than I could battle, other people

rushed into the room, I felt immense pain,
like skin being ripped from muscle and bone,
then woke up outside the maze, though I couldn't

be sure if it was the entrance we used,
or the exit. I followed the left wall
in a stupor as time circled itself.'

After Jessie rests a while, the group enters
her tunnel, right hands on rock, though each person
feels a keen itch at the back of the neck

as they slowly retrace her journey, more
twists and dead-ends than the way in, more glances
upwards each time starlight reveals their path.

15. Matters of Trust

Just when Jessie is sure the exit is
around the next corner, the passageway
opens into a small chamber, with Gedon

seated nonchalantly on a flat rock.

The gold being looks up at her, then glances
at Zane, Remesh, lingers on Rynobar.

‘I see the troupe is whole once again, and,
you have discovered death is not the only
reason to travel the grey road of Thexlan.’

Zane stamps his staff. ‘What are you doing here?
What do you want?’ Leaning against the wall,
which moulds itself around him, Gedon says,

‘You called me here. Or maybe I called you.’
He shrugs, and the slab shrugs. ‘It doesn’t matter.
We are all here till someone lives or dies.’

Again Zane stamps his staff in sheer annoyance.
‘How can you know what task we face unless
you inflicted it upon us?’ He glares

at the gold being. ‘Tell us who you are.
Maybe you’re the one who will live or die.’
Zane smiles, and Gedon returns the same smile,

no rancour, more humour, gaze resolute:
‘But you may not survive, and so not know
the true meaning behind this quest of yours.’

Jessie thinks this banter is more than useless.
‘We have to keep moving. Either you have
something for us or we find the maze exit.’

Gedon nods, then stands. 'In fact, I have two.
A warning: Trust no one, not even me.
And this.' He holds out his clenched right hand, waits.

Remesh mutters, 'Again, more paradoxes.'
Gedon lifts one eyebrow. 'To exist is
a paradox of choice, for you to live

another thing must die. The food you eat,
the restrictions on others your own presence
requires.' He lifts his hand. 'So, what's your choice?'

Zane considers the options before them:
'We can't trust him.' Rynobar nods, then says,
'Whatever we do he will win. I favour

defusing his threat now than having it
hang over us. Only by trusting him
do we discover if he is worth trusting.'

Zane bows his head to the star-demon's logic
and steps away. Rynobar locks his gaze
on Gedon, gently touches the clenched fist.

When they discuss the moment afterwards
they all agree the palm was empty when
first unfurled. They all agree a small object

appeared from nowhere, a squat cube of stone
that quickly formed the columns of a temple
portico, aged and gloom. They all agree

that nothing changed yet they were drawn inside,
to walk the badly-worn flagstones alone
towards a darkened niche, the air cool, clean.

Rynobar sees a shaft of swirling smoke
suspended above a hollow with wood
laid out as for a fire, but still unlit.

Remesh sees nothing at first, will claim later
there was always nothing, does not know how
to tell of a babe the colour of maggots,

its face and voice his own, the words it spoke
confounding him as when first he met truth:
'That time is false, if this time claims the same.'

For Zane, the temple hasn't changed. Again
the niche is empty and again a voice
coming from within commands him to bow

if he wishes to master everything.
Again he declines, not because the goal
is one he does not desire, but because

he will never allow another being
to rule him. He will find another way
to master all knowledge, all power, all.

With each step, Jessie sees clearly, becomes
more puzzled by what she sees, what sees her:
an oval shape resolves into a face,

eyes closed, bare lines, smooth sheen of rock, a smile
halfway between bliss and surprise, awareness
of those eyes watching her with her own eyes.

Then another step, a ripple of mind,
and the sweet sting of rupture as two faces
male and female, blaze and flow, scowl and grin,

appear on either side of that first face,
their eyes open now as more faces part
the dark with ceaseless interplay of light

and music, of movement, and Jessie feels
this rhythmic poise form the body, mind, saga
of her dialogue with the dance, feels too

herself as the dance, as each pulse of life,
as the open eyes of the two lost faces
always turned from each other, until now.

When everyone blinks, Gedon is not there.
All that remains is the small temple model,
which crumbles into the sand as they look.

After long silence, there is hesitant
discussion, more shuffled silence, a question:
'Has anybody changed because of this?'

No one confirms a change, but Zane can tell,
because nothing changed for him, that some others,
tone of voice, shift of bearing, were affected,

and wonders if this were Gedon's intention
and why. Was this about trust? What could he
gain from such manipulation of minds?

How could he uncover Gedon's true nature
when he still did not understand his own?
This thought he realizes is not his,

but comes in the voice of one of his teachers,
a croaky whisper from the distant past—
or, the future, another voice insists.

He grabs his head as it fills with the clamour
of advice, his father, brothers, all those
whose wisdom he sought, all those he evoked

within a circle and questioned, all those
whose minds he invaded when they were dying
as he snatched at the art of life and death.

His mind reels within the maelstrom of sound.
He wills everything to silence, but nothing
happens. He applies his will like a sword

clearing a path through charging warriors,
but the melee thickens further and threatens
to engulf him. He sees an opening

and rushes towards it, but is held back.
He releases his will, allows the sound
to bear him through the rushing gap, and comes

face to face with Gedon, who winks, then opens
his mouth into another chasm, out
of which come minute, rainbow-coloured versions

of himself, each of them opening mouths
for more minute versions to burst out, all
singing the advice, but in harmony.

The song bears him into a floating warmth,
a constrained comfort much like he imagines
a child experiences in the womb

though here all memory is his, and light—
soft, fibrous—replaces the dark he knows
exists as a baby grows into being.

He rocks from sharp pain. He opens his eyes
to find Jessie hovering over him
and his cheek stinging from her slap. The look

of relief in her eyes tugs at the music
fading in his invigorated mind,
and he savours the momentary concord.

‘What happened?’ Jessie asks as she helps him
stand. ‘I suppose I answered my own question.’
Nothing more is said till they leave the maze

and watch the walls slide back into a pattern
on the road and the surrounding flat rock,
two bubbling flows filling the complex path

from both exits to a hole where the pool
should be. They collide with a roaring sound
and jetting spumes of smoke. After a while

the pattern fades, the hole shrinks to a mere
depression like a footprint in the middle
of the road, which the dust quickly fills in.

Zane goes up to Rynobar. ‘Well, my friend,
I suppose you will return to your search.’
The *hoya*’s wings flutter. ‘If you permit,

I would like to travel with you a while.’
Remesh stares vehemently. ‘I say, no.
We don’t need a *hoya* to kill us later.’

Jessie glares at him. ‘How can you say that
after what happened in the maze?’ He waves
his hands around. ‘It could all be a trap.’

Barely controlling his anger, Zane raises
himself to the balls of his feet and whispers,
'I can vouch more for Rynobar than you.'

Remesh splutters. 'Then what about this search?
How can we be sure it won't bring us harm?
This road has already brought too much danger.'

The star-demon sniffs the air, as if testing
for the source of the man's aggression, or
checking the man's aura, his inner self.

Eyes narrow, and the mouth twists with disquiet.
With severe effort, Rynobar relaxes.
'I seek lost stars, first in Ghajat, now here.'

Jessie blinks her eyes, but can't firm the edges
and colours of the *hoya* as she looks.
One instant it is solid, the next, barely

there at all, only diaphanous shapes
of light that change colour and size as they
float over, slide through, and absorb each other,

like watching through the surface of a sea
the bright and many-coloured creatures living
deep within and occasionally exposing

themselves to the watcher and the night sky.
She can't be sure what gender it is now,
though the curves suggest more female than male.

'What makes you think the lost stars are in Thexlan?'
She watches the fluorescent patterns steady,
the boundaries of the curved body firm.

‘As you surely suspect, Thexlan is all there is, can be, or ever was, disguised, however, by the gates before our eyes.’

Zane can’t recall his friend talking like this.

‘What do you mean by gates? And what makes them?’

‘They are the ways we choose to see the world.

They are closed to things we decide are not possible or worthy of our attention.

They can open wider, but only if

we desire to see things that are unwelcome.

I have exhausted my search, so it’s time to find whatever will open me further.’

Muttering that Thexlan is a phantasm anyway, Remesh gestures his disgust and walks a little distance down the road.

After glancing at the stars, Zane tells Jessie and Rynobar to start after Remesh while he casts a quick *murga* to check progress.

He then looks back over their line of travel. In the distance he sees a swirling creature of lightning splinters and darkness, which glides

then stops every now and then. A grim smile plays across his face as he hurries after the others, and the beast catches a scent.

16. A Vow for Fate

The road before them rises gently through
fields filled with purple flowers that give off
a scent that reminds Jessie of the incense

inside a church, though Zane is taken back
to his childhood, to the barrels of *sorra*
harvested from the floor of Lake Tarlkarni.

He shudders, clamps down on the memory
of screams as flames ravage his sister's body.
He clenches fists, renews vows, stares ahead.

Though she has her own images to clear,
Jessie notices Zane's discomfort, starts
to move towards him, is held by a touch

on her arm, a quiet cough. She turns slightly.
Rynobar's face is softened with concern.
'When one heals another, one takes a measure

of that person's pain, the reasons for it,
the reasons preventing any self-healing.'
Jessie sees again how the *hoya's* body

is constantly changing shape and size, sometimes
the contours of a female, sometimes male,
sometimes both at once, or neither, though now

the changes are less dramatic, less frequent,
and the form becoming more and more female.
Rynobar looks back to the vanished maze.

'What happened to you is still happening.
Like him, there are deep needs you must confront.
And such tasks can only be borne alone.'

She glides off before Jessie can reply,
 if she could, for her memory is still
 fragments of sound, kaleidoscopes of scenes,

hospital and childhood, the niggling puzzle
 of why and when, of mother-loss and coma,
 what was meant to happen, here, anywhere.

She is not dead, is clearly someplace else
 as well as here, this Thexlan Remesh thinks
 is a half-way house between life and either

paradise or complete annihilation.

For him, judgement, for her, a dream unlike
 any she's ever had, though she can sense

a familiarity, an old secret
 kept from her father, who could never value
 anything beyond the strictures of faith.

Jessie hears Remesh panting as he strives
 to stay ahead. She suggests he slow down
 and, when she catches up, asks him what's wrong.

'Whenever I look at Rynobar, fear
 wracks me, as though she were my past sins, or,
 in some way, my future ones, thus my judgement.'

She decides not to delve into his sins.

'So what will you do?' His look gives her shivers.

'Stay well away and hope someone kills her.'

Too shocked to answer, Jessie merely nods
 and moves off a little. Remesh's rage,
 righteousness and mania remind her

too much of her father. She couldn't do
anything against him for all those years,
but leave home and never look back, and now

these companions fill her with the same fears,
same sense of helplessness. Should she rage too?
Then she remembers the first time she stretched

for a branch from another without fear,
though the gap was much larger than expected,
the secure confidence of leap and grab

only tapped when there was encouragement,
a presence not a parent but a friend
whose face even now she can't yet recall,

whose existence Jessie dared not reveal,
though her mother guessed, her own wistful smile
when recalling imaginary friends.

The friend taught Jessie many other things,
then vanished in a splinter of blood music.
Yet how could such memories help her here?

Zane looks up to see the others stretched out
along the road. He wonders if their maze
encounters are meant to so divide them.

Did Gedon form the maze, or is he part
of some larger plan? In some person's dream?
Zane hates to think he is being controlled,

but doesn't know how to discover this
unless he fulfils his own quest, the answer
to the corruptibility of life,

the insistence of death, the need for both.
Too many times he has opened a book
that promised solutions, or woven spells

designed to bring him closer to the source
of total knowledge, and discovered nothing
but more questions, more mystery, more doubt.

Maybe the only answer was to end
the search, or the province of the search, or
the need for anyone to search at all.

A long-forgotten memory snags breath:
a circle in sand, a drum between knees,
a chant over and over to a tune

he was sure existed before time birthed
itself out of the silence outside silence,
the black dragon that sings time's moving breath.

Someone had taught him the tune, but the words
were carved in crystal, his very own writing,
though he never could remember the act.

This someone was supervising the rite,
or maybe he was watching himself, once
exhaustion set in and he collapsed, fleeing

his body in delirium, and floating
above it, and looking down at a mirror.
A voice called him and he turned to a fissure

in the sky the width of lightning, the colour
of cold lips. The voice told him to renounce
his quest or else be damned to wander always

in dark disappointment, all love forgotten.
'Only when you accept that gain and loss
are both the same, oasis and mirage,

that what you seek is only true when neither
desire nor plea, then you will be set free
of contention, though never free of fate.'

The voice was soft, like when his mother sang
the bedtime tales of quiet heroes slaying
those monster foes that ravaged land and life,

and then returned to mortal life, good sons,
loyal fathers, no battle lust to taint
the home, no further gleam for destiny.

But always he bristled at any power
not his own, so dismissed the voice and vision.
With no need for wisdom he could not live.

Besides, he knows himself already damned,
though he has forgotten why, his true fate
to dissolve the means of fate, and not care.

He looks up to see Remesh sprinting back
down the slope and screaming at them to hide,
as there is an apparition approaching.

Zane directs them to an overgrown hollow
and stands guard, balls of lightning in each hand.
His breathing quickens at the thought of combat.

Within seconds a large, long-snouted creature
with speckled scales and eight stout legs strides over
the hilltop. A wide enclosed pannier

of wood and leather is strapped to its back,
and inside a white-haired man holds the reins.
Two large ravens launch themselves from his shoulders

and circle the travellers' hiding place.
Zane gets ready to cast the balls, but Jessie
whispers that she doesn't sense any danger.

The man stops his beast as near as he can
to their hollow. 'No need to hide from me.
Hurry up. We've got a long way to go.'

His voice is deep, is without any tenor
of malice or duplicity. As soon
as Jessie appears, the man waves at her.

'I have your message. I'm sorry it's taken
so long to answer.' She narrows her eyes.
'What message? Who are you?' The wizened man

whispers to his mount, and the beast kneels down.
'All in good time. Now, climb aboard.' He whistles
to his ravens, who burst skyward, wing inland.

'There's enough room for you and your three friends.'
Zane stops her. 'I don't trust him.' She walks past
and climbs one of the bent legs. 'That's your choice.'

Remesh follows her, while Rynobar flies
directly to the pannier. Zane pauses,
then hitches his lyre-bag and joins the others.

'Welcome. My name is Azra, for today.'
Jessie introduces the others, though
the nodding, old wizard seems to know them.

‘Remesh. So you made it through The Ice Temple.

Sorry I didn’t get to you in time.’

Remesh looks askance at him. ‘How is it

you know me?’ Azra gestures around him.

‘We all know each other in Thexlan, once we recognize our nature, which is one.’

Azra surveys Zane’s calm pose. ‘So, you’re trying the sacred path again. How’s my good friend Elgron? Have you passed his water test yet?’

As when trying to answer someone speaking in a foreign tongue, Zane has no choice but to lapse into vague gesture, puzzled look.

‘A hard path you’ve chosen, my friend, but one that should bring you great success. As it will for everyone here. Always a fine tale!’

He clicks his tongue, and the beast, which he calls Phaox, gets to its feet, more gracefully than expected from one of such great bulk.

Azra directs it to follow the ravens, then sits back in his seat, reins loose, as Phaox nimbly speeds across the broken terrain.

Jessie taps him. ‘Where are you taking us?’

He points to the gathering clouds above.

‘To my home, where we’ll be safe for the meantime.’

He turns to Remesh. ‘What of The Ice Temple? Did you find your key?’ Everyone observes his right hand involuntarily reach

inside his coat. Disbelief fills his face.

‘How did you know about that? No one knew.

Except...’ He stares wide. Azra nods. ‘Ah, yes,

how is Nikolina? She is my daughter,

though of course, how could you know. I am sorry

she gave you so much anguish. Always was

a wayward child. So sweet, when things go right,

though she often doesn’t see it that way.

Still, your key is sure to help us all later.’

Remesh ignores Azra and hunches deeper

into his seat, face twitching, eyes blank-staring.

The white-haired man looks ahead. ‘Not long now.’

17. Broken Hope

The landscape they travel over is brittle,
as if a blast of steam has scalded it.

Only here and there a few ragged tufts

of grass or scraggy tree. No animals,
no birds, no habitations. Jessie wonders
about this change from other places seen.

She asks Azra. 'Thexlan has become barren,'
he replies. 'Or maybe it's our own minds
that are bleak, in fallow, Thexlan as bright,

as vibrant, as it always is.' He clicks
his tongue once more and Phaox picks up speed.
'All this to help us shift our pulse of soul.'

Jessie squints at him. 'I don't understand.'
Azra smiles. 'It's simple, as are all wisdoms.
Do you recall the day you went horse riding?'

Her father had sent her to study-camp,
but the last day, encouraged by her friend—
someone not from school, someone always known,

someone holding her hand after the beatings,
someone always telling fantastic stories
those cold nights her thin blankets weren't enough,

always showing her magic tricks, and always
telling her to listen to her own song—
she sneaked out to visit a riding school.

'Remember how you were scared, and the horse,
named after a great female warrior,
knew your fear, as all creatures can, and wouldn't

obey your commands. It was only when
 you relaxed, when you forgot everything
 but feel of leather reins woven through fingers

and ease of body in saddle and stirrup,
 dropping the heels, cocking the wrists, when you
 gave her one last pat on her neck, spoke softly

but firmly, when you kicked her flanks, leaned forward,
 only then did your ride truly begin,
 a revel of movement, from walk to trot,

canter to gallop, wind pluming your hair
 and the horse's mane, your laughter, its whinny,
 indistinguishable, and when you stopped,

those flanks sweaty, those muscles full of fire,
 exhilaration like breathing all worlds,
 only then did you recall who you are.'

Jessie doesn't know she has closed her eyes
 till Azra stops talking, pulls back the reins,
 then whispers: 'Here we are. My humble home.'

She opens her eyes. Although it is still
 morning, dark tumbleweed clouds fill the sky,
 the land a shifting patchwork of their shadows,

except in one valley fountained with light.
 Azra waves his hand. The blaze vanishes,
 leaving behind a ruddy flickering.

A few strides downhill shows the travellers
 that Azra's abode is of dimpled glass,
 which glow-prisms the small fire at its centre.

In answer to Zane's raised eyebrows about the earlier radiance, Azra says, 'A little trick to avoid getting lost.'

The next shock comes after they disembark and start walking towards the house, its walls made of bottles of all shapes, colours, lengths,

stacked orderly one on top of another, the chimney the neck of a huge decanter. The door is made of heavy slabs of driftwood.

'Welcome,' Azra says as he pulls the latch. 'Given the look of the weather, we may have to remain here till tomorrow morning.

Come, come, it's cosy. I'll make us some tea.' Walking on a thick, woven hallway runner, they file past coat-rack, wooden cabinets,

then enter the middle room, which is furnished liberally with cushions, couches, low tables, the small fire casting soft encouragement.

Jessie strolls about the room and examines the bottles in its walls, some crudely blown, with misshapen knobs or twisted flaws, some

designed with whorls and other complex shapes embedded in glass, crystal, or clear metal. Most contain furred pages just as diverse.

Azra appears beside her, air of teacher with student. 'Ah, you've noticed my collection. Do you remember now?' She props herself

against a wall as her mind reels with sudden
recollection: sand grinding skin between
her toes, in crotch, under arms, anywhere

clothes rubbed against delicate skin, red now
even with protection of hat, long sleeves,
cream; her tears when skin soon peeled, when her father

admonished her mother for this one picnic,
this one solace for lack of summer thrill,
for any thrill other than Sunday School.

She remembers playing with a girl. Jenny.
They dug holes in the wet sand, made tall castles
like those summoned from dreams, driftwood drawbridges

and buttresses, seaweed for flags, shell windows,
a sprig of blade grass for the magic tree
set in the middle of the inner ward.

She sniffles as he hands her a green bottle.
'Do you remember what the message said?'
She shakes her head as she takes out a scrap

of newspaper with crayon scrawl: 'My father
will kill my mother and me. I'm trapped. Please
help us. Miss Jessica D Willis. Please.'

But where is the other note? It was Jenny's
idea when they found the bottle in seaweed,
to scribble secret messages behind

bushes so Jessie's mother would not see.
Was she the same friend at the riding club
years later? Why had Jenny disappeared?

She wipes her eyes, glances around the room,
but no one seems to have noticed her anguish,
or are leaving it to their host to handle.

She turns to him, is momentarily
disarmed by the clear, firm gaze he gives her,
his lambent eyes almost all pupil, iris

a fine ring of vibrant green. 'Who are you?'
He bows slightly. 'Simple enough, young Jessie.
I am an answerer of messages.

I find them on the shoreline where I rummage
for supplies, and whenever one tells me
of need, I open the bottle, and help.

You do need help, don't you?' She turns on him,
rage rupturing her features, her mouth working
but no words coming for some seconds, till

she squeezes her temples, and takes a breath.
'I needed it back then. Where was your help?
My father yelled at us, beat us, drove us

into silence and despair, never stopped.'
Her words spew out, her hands beat at the air.
'I was trapped.' She crumples against the wall.

Azra's lustrous eyes fill with moisture. 'Not
totally. You sent a message.' She stares
at him in shock. 'Out of sheer desperation.'

He dips his head, as in partial agreement,
then adds, 'More out of hope. And it was answered.
You do remember who helped you write it?'

She gapes at him. 'No, not me. I am never that young, that gender. Not my path, my role. But you'll recognise her. If not already.'

Remesh coughs. 'What is he talking about?' Jessie throws down the bottle, stares at it when it bounces but does not break, and rushes

outside. Zane makes to go after her, but Azra holds him back. 'Let her go. This world is not easy even for those from here

or from Ghajat, which is closer to Thexlan than her world. We all need time to adjust. Thankfully, we have plenty of it here.'

He turns his attention to Remesh. 'Now, tell me about my daughter.' The man squirms, then points to Zane, who is sniffing the air.

'What's wrong?' Azra asks him. The Dremaan drifts around the room, his head at a slight angle, his eyes narrowed. 'I feel great power here.'

Azra gestures outside his home. 'The storm. It means a darkness drawing near its peak. Which is why we came back here. When it fades,

we can be on our way.' Zane sniffs again. 'Not that. Something much closer. In this room.' Azra nods. 'I wasn't sure you were ready.'

He ransacks a corner filled with tea-chests, broken furniture, sailcloth, coils of rope, lanterns and spars. He extracts a long object

wrapped in waterproof cloth and tied with hemp.
He hands it to the Dremaan. 'This is yours.'
Zane receives it with both hands, and a look

between recoil and hope, then holds it high,
a votive offering of last resort.
With one sharp tug the bindings fall away.

He unfolds the crinkled material
to reveal a matt black metallic scabbard
inscribed with silver runes, sigils and signs

Jessie would identify as belonging
to traditions distant in time and place,
though the sword hilt is fashioned like a creature

no traditions would have seen, eagle wings,
bull head, leonine body, pommel ring—
set between the bull's curvaceous horns—empty.

'This can't be mine. I don't recall such metal,
such symbols, such workmanship, in Ghajat.'
'You won't know unless you look,' Azra says.

As Zane grasps the hilt his countenance brightens
with anticipation. The sword emerges
smoothly, then his elegant action falters:

the bottom third of the weapon is missing,
broken slantwise across the crystal blade,
which is etched with similar scripts, and which

reflects firelight into bursts of spark-gleams.
Zane's shoulders slump. 'I was hoping this time...'
Azra gestures for him to sheath the weapon.

‘That task awaits you. Why else are you here?’
 Zane straps the scabbard to his back. ‘To master
 everything.’ The man squeezes Zane’s right arm.

‘That is always your mistake. Now, Remesh,’
 he returns to the tea, ‘I hope you’re done
 with distracting me. Zane, please bring in Jessie.’

Jessie does not answer when Zane calls her.
 He widens his sight and sees a dim form
 sitting at the base of a cypress tree.

He walks over and sits beside her. ‘Nothing’s
 the same here,’ she says. ‘This tree is not like
 those I climbed or hugged when I was upset,

not like the ones I saved against the merchants
 who did not care that the forest took decades
 to recover, who only cared for money.

I hugged this tree and felt nothing. No judder
 of recognition. No aura of life
 flowing from crown to tap-root, back again.’

She slams her palm against the wood. ‘This tree
 is dead, even though there are leaves and catkins.
 I want to go back to my world. I want

to feel living bark against my cheek, see
 a caterpillar make its certain way
 to a kink in the wood where it can weave

its ribbed cocoon and await change to wings.
 This place has no soul. I...I have no soul.’
 She drops her head to her clasped bony knees.

Zane rests a hand on her back, strokes her lightly in clockwise spirals, more for the distraction than giving comfort. He doesn't know how.

'I don't understand this place,' Jessie says, still bent over. 'Maybe we're not meant to,' Zane replies, then wonders if his words are

a commentary on his own ambitions.

For an instant he thinks the sword vibrates in response to his words, to his own doubts,

but when he focuses on the sensation that is more like a tremor in the blood than the din of imminent storm, it withers.

Though her muscles are still tense, he stops rubbing. 'Let's go inside. Apparently Remesh has a story for us.' Her head droops lower.

'I'm tired of these stories. They don't lead us anywhere. I want answers.' Zane finds himself nodding to her words. 'I agree.

But maybe each tale holds a hint for each of us, especially if we believe its own truth.' He stands up, offers a hand.

'Besides'—he laughs—'what else is there to do?' She wriggles her back a little, ignores his hand and stands. 'I suppose you're right. Thanks.'

They wander back inside. Azra hands them an engraved china cup of steaming broth. Everyone sits down and waits for Remesh.

18. The Ice Temple

'When quite young, I had a recurring dream
of long wood-nails spewing out of my mouth.
There was no pain. I opened my mouth further,

spat-pulled them, anything to help the flow,
for I felt a desperation to speak.

By the time the nails made a pile as big

as I was, my mouth empty, I'd forgotten
the grand truth that needed to be revealed.

So then, I pushed a nail into my arm,

watched my flesh swallow it like a rock dropped
into a pool. Then another. Each nail
left behind a bruise, and I found myself

making patterns on my skin, knowing that
one day the nails would again fill my mouth,
and I was bound to do it all again,

until my body was all bruise, all nail.

I awoke with the urge to make those patterns
come alive, hoping the dream would then vanish.

I was an orphan sent to a new home
in a small country town where prejudice
was a blood transfusion given at birth.

My olive skin, dark hair and eyes, my status,
worked against me, through my schooling and after.

I was always in trouble. Then I met

Balis, the town's artist-savant, of sorts.

I followed him around and pestered him
till he began to teach me all he knew,

most of it laborious but essential:
how to draw from life, with life, how to shade,
how to size a raw canvas with at least

four layers of gesso, how to stretch it,
what oils and acrylics have what effects,
varnish depth, colour illusions and mix.

Finally, he gave me a brush, told me
to paint what it was I felt the whole world
should know, the one thing that was mine to say,

the one thing I would shout from a high rooftop
with everyone assembled before me.

The picture took me days and was quite crude,

a corpse with hundreds of nails sticking out,
point first, drenched in blood and gore, garish colours,
anatomy wrong, perspective askew,

but I was proud of the open eyes glazed,
not with death, but with some sort of dark longing
I felt deep within me. Balis was sickened.

He refused to teach me anything more.
He claimed the eyes were his. Maybe they were.
Maybe I had been studying his eyes,

as well as his brush work, all through my training,
brief though it was, for some clue to how one
conveys that insistent churning within.

I packed my gear and left. A few days later
he hanged himself. A strange pleasure filled me,
glee of irony, when I was informed

he hammered nails into his wrists to let
blood drain on a canvas spread on the floor
as he swung from the roof. That painting sold

to a collector who hung it beside
the preserved eviscerated remains
of a musician who had knifed herself.

For some reason I never found out, Balis
made me his heir, so the painting gave me
enough money to buy a city home.

I painted all day, partied all night, sought
inspiration in all illicit pleasures,
whatever could trigger that hidden dark.

The best place for parties was The Ice Temple,
owned by Nikolina. We became lovers
after I first went there, but never once

did I find out what I was searching for,
because I didn't know that I was searching,
until too late. All I wanted to do

was shock my peers and my buyers with more
and more depravity, debauchery.
My exploits fuelled the excesses on canvas,

bought by those in neat homes, who sought confinement
of their own murky chasms in a style
where cure is a prudent trophy of pain.

My taste was much purer. The only painting
I could allow into my living space
was a splurge of colour that formed a flower

from one angle, simple, delicate brushstrokes,
hidden heart in its corolla, a thing
with wings from another angle, mere clouds

when you looked at it from the front. I always
wanted to know where Balis found that one—
He was too rigid to ever paint it.’

As Remesh rubs his forehead, his sleeves fall
from his arms. Jessie notes again the network
of pale scars she’d seen when massaging him.

Rynobar too notices the scar tissue,
wonders why man and society could
inflict such self-disfigurement, and doubts

that such a world could ever survive long
under rampant elevation of self
that is in truth a denial of self.

Zane is too busy stirring his cup while
striving to judge the truth or otherwise
of Remesh’s tale, to notice the scars.

A crack of thunder overhead, and all
realize the roof is not made of glass,
but wooden shingles, from flotsam and jetsam.

Zane can sense the cloud turbulence above,
and squirms a moment, distant intuition,
as if the coming storm and he were one,

as if he and the storm’s focus were one,
as if the roiling in his belly were
always smouldering there, so deep, so patient.

His being seeks some still point above him,
within him, two savage eddies, one link,
one pinpoint of rest that contains another

much deeper yet much wider, like one looking
at the surface of a lake from the bottom,
watching a bubble rise, widen, then burst

as it reaches the surface. Zane's absorption
bursts at the same time and he finds himself
watching Remesh drop his hands and continue.

'Nikolina was dark, lissom, petite,
yet so strong a presence that none who entered
The Ice Temple dared stray outside her guidelines.

Not that she left much. All manner of vice
was allowed in the back, except the use
of children. She even had her own brood,

those belonging to clients who had died,
their own hands or others', deliberate
or accidental, didn't really matter,

with authorities too corrupt themselves
to worry. She lavished gifts and attention
beyond that of a doting mother. All

else was allowed between those who consented.
The stale public danced and whispered amongst
themselves about what they imagined happened

behind the saloon mirrors, all the time
never seeing their true images in
those mirrors. What went on was always worse

than they imagined. Nikolina, dressed
in shimmering white every night, her black
hair flowing like an outpouring of grief,

a long cigarette holder in her hand
that the audience never saw her use
but imagined uses for anything

but smoking. It was a prop, a prompt only.
She knew how to play her public. The dancing
never stopped, the intoxicating potions

never stopped, the whispering never stopped.
Now and then a lucky reveller saw
what went on behind the glass. Now and then

one would never return and no one asked
about them again. Now and then we moved
amongst our patrons and they touched our hems.

I loved her. The more I loved her, the less
I painted. The more I loved her, the less
she saw me. The less I painted, the more

degenerate my acts inside the club,
the mutilations, the humiliations,
multiple partners, the licking of lesions

caused by lash, cane and rack, the proud decline
to less than beast, the succour of submersion
into blind thrust and scream. Yet always part

of me wanted to know why she cared only
for the lost children. I didn't need to
know the reasons for her depravity.

They were mine also. The longing to say
to life there are no rules for happiness,
no punishments in an age where the ruling

gods were power and money. Death was always
an ending of all amusements, so make
fun while breath lasted. Yet I could not fathom

her concern for these children. The more questions
I put to her, the more she turned away.
With flesh and drugs I brought her back, for both

of us were addicted to that denial
of self-care the world instilled in us all,
all the better for material greed.

But always, though with increased subtlety,
I came back to my questions, of her childhood,
of her needs, of those children, of our needs.

Not one thing would she tell me, except that
The Ice Temple was so called for her heart,
cold, dead. Finally she discarded me.

I retreated to my loft and lost months
in stupor. I saw no one, barely ate,
did not paint. One day I pulled a nail out

of a wall and began to scrape my flesh.
The pain distracted me, yet also showed
how despair feeds itself, a rabid dog

chewing its own leg. The more I gouged flesh,
the more guilty I felt, yet could not stop.
Focus and release. Distraction and blame.'

He reaches into his pocket, then others,
 becomes frantic. Zane goes over to him,
 shows him the gift he received from the monk.

‘Is this what you’re looking for?’ Remesh nods,
 then asks: ‘Where did you find it?’ Zane just shrugs.
 ‘On my travels. Thexlan has many wonders.’

As Remesh turns the nail over and over,
 he wonders how he could have carried it
 through death anyway. He looks up again.

‘Then one day I saw my brushes, decided
 on a self-portrait. I thought of that first
 surreal corpse, shuddered. I painted a tulip

in a halo of smoky dusk, called it
Nikolina. Then a chrysanthemum,
 also suffused with smoky light. And others,

all titled *Nikolina*. Nine days later
 I heard The Ice Temple had been burnt down,
 and *Nikolina* and her children killed.

The fire happened the day I started painting.
 There were rumours she lit the flames herself.
 I’m certain she would not have harmed her children,

unless to save them from the world. Each painting
 after I called *Nikolina and Child*.
 No one bought any, but I didn’t care.’

He looks at the nail one last time, puts it
 in his pocket, then gives a hearty laugh
 that draws a thunder-echo from above.

19. Above the Abyss

Remesh sees Azra staring back at him.

‘So how can Nikolina be your daughter
when I invented her for this performance?’

The old wizard waves his hand in dismissal.

‘We both know the answer to that, my friend.
You have the story you must tell yourself.’

The painter leans towards him. ‘What’s your story?’

Why this house of bottles? How is she more
than a character in a mad man’s tale?’

Azra gives a wry grin. ‘Another time.’

He turns to Zane. ‘This would be a good chance
to hear the story of the broken sword.’

The Dremaan smiles. ‘Maybe another time,
after I tell of my apprenticeship
to Shultar.’ Jessie stares in disbelief.

‘The sorceress who had your sister killed?’

He nods, gathers his breath, then looks around.

‘After my brothers let me go, the stench

of roasted flesh settling over the village

like mud and detritus after lake flood,

I gathered my fisher’s tools: knife, spear, rope,

the net that tangles gills, and sailed across

the lake, not caring that the night was bright,

that star-demons exist, that my wake was

phosphorescence arrowing shore to shore.

I reached the landing of her keep. No one

was there, no person, no spirit, no shadow.

I kicked open the door, announced my presence.
Laughter greeted me. Unseen hands threw me
against a wall, stretched me as on a rack,

disarmed me. Then she came into the room.

“You have the stupidity of your kinsmen,
yet I have always felt a rage that can

be channelled.” She put her face up to mine.

“What is it you wish?” Though her breath was sweet,
something underneath it reminded me

of the stench at the village, or a smell
one might expect within an ancient grave.

“Your death,” I answered. She sighed. “As I said,

just like the others. So predictable.”

She peered into my eyes. “We all die someday.

You will have it then. What else?” I stared back.

“My sister. She did not deserve to die.”

“We all deserve death, for why are we living?

You have much to learn.” She stood back and cocked

her head as she surveyed me for some time.

I was certain she could see my deep thoughts,
including those that come only in dreams.

“Yes,” she whispered, like a priestess who sways
before the swaying snake, then kisses it.

She slid beside me, leg entwining mine.

She placed her head on my chest and looked up,
eyes full of mischief I could barely fathom,
though my body knew much more than I did.

This seemed to please her as she trailed her fingers
up my inner thigh. So began my training.
Each day I would seek ways to murder her;

each day unseen servants would hinder me.
Weeks later I realized each defence
was handled with restraint—I felt the spirits

had been ordered not to harm me, though some
were gentle no matter how much I fought.
Not long after, I could tell each one by

their touch, though none could ever speak to me.
Each day, when I wasn't planning my next
attack, or executing it, or bearing

her punishments, Shultar was showing me
how to use imagination to harness
the energies of Es Xayim, the tree

of power that connects Ghajat to Thexlan
and forms the underbelly of Ghajat.
Each night she would visit me, restrain me,

show me the moist secrets woman entrusts
to man, which ennoble him to the point
he wishes no injury to his pleasure

except when it is her pleasure. Each day
I strove to kill her, each night, pleasure her.
Then came the day I tried to kill myself.

Shultar's castle was suspended above
the world's edge. Upon the outer rear wall
was a dead yew tree whose branches stretched over

the mist swirling from the abyss. I tied
a rope to a branch, climbed the battlements,
looked down through mist, shifting segments of black.

I thought of Kerrilea, failed revenge,
wondered if Shultar's servants would stop me,
would warn her. As I adjusted the noose

and stepped into space, softness brushed my face,
gentle like the caress a mother makes
when a child leaves home for renown and fortune.

I swung for an eternity. At times,
I choked as weight dragged me into the heaving
dark. But other times there was no sensation,

as though the abyss were light lifting me
to light, like a note of music ascending
from a bird's throat and joining every note

sung or played or imagined within speech.
Soon these moments wove in-out of each other
and I began to fade, as if the world

were a sand painting I was brushing clear.
Suddenly through the mist I saw a face—
Zane gapes at Jessie, pupils wide with shock.

'Your face. Scarlet-puffy from tears and effort.
Eyes that flashed happiness and hidden grief
as you looked at your swaddled newborn child.

Then you turned to me and said, "Only you
can save our daughter. Follow your song-spark
to the core of its fate and save us all."

Somehow I swung back to the battlements,
found myself lying on the ground, the rope
loose around my neck. I was lifted by

those unseen hands, whose voices I could hear
for the first time, and taken to my room.
As I lay there, the vision fading quickly,

I vowed I would no longer be a slave
to anyone, would be master of all.
And now I had a plan for my revenge.'

Remesh starts clapping. 'Splendid tale. Nice touch
with the vision, though we can disprove it.
Jessie, have you ever seen Zane before?'

She paces the other side of the room
and throws her hands about, like one debating
with herself. 'I can't remember. I feel

there is subtle life in his words, a trace
of truth, but I can hardly grasp its end.
How can I know him? My world is not his.'

'Yes, but every world is a part of Thexlan,'
Zane says. 'And links can be forged between them.
To you, my dying may have been a dream,

just as your face and your words were a vision
to me. You saved my life, you set me on
my true path. Never again would I let

any world determine my fate. Suspended
above that void I saw nothing and knew
the only thing was what I made myself.'

Jessie gives a blank look. 'But I have never been pregnant. You've imagined the whole thing.' Zane shakes his head. 'I saw you and the child.'

Maybe the scene was a dream you were having.' Rynobar laughs. 'Or an event that will happen.' They turn to her. 'What do you mean?'

The *hoya* leans forward. 'If time does not really exist, then both tales can be true. For Zane, his death attempt is in his past.'

For Jessie, the child may be in her future.' The pale woman's gestures of puzzlement are more frantic. 'I can't avoid the view

there is truth in Zane's depiction.' The *hoya* nods several times. 'Your intuition, then, that sense of patterns underlying all.'

But Jessie isn't listening. She hunches in her chair and stares at the fire. Zane takes a step towards her and she huddles further

into herself. He stands back and stares also at the flames, which, in their constant sway-flicker, their flare and furrow, their sliding fuse-colours,

like storm clouds erupting through one another, remind him of the billowing effusions in the shapeless void beneath Shultar's castle.

A rattle of windows and Azra's ravens appear. Their cawing is so loud, each bottle begins vibrating in response, the pieces

of paper within them contorting wildly.
Azra leaps from his chair, listens intently,
then urges everyone to run outside.

‘The storm has become a much darker thing,
a peril we’re not yet ready to meet.’
Soon Phaox is taking them down a lane

as Azra directs the creature to follow
the direction of the ravens, which is
away from their path earlier that day.

Jessie looks back, is stunned to see a dark
swirling mass near the distant road—the thing
widens as it moves, and slows as it widens.

Its smoky tentacles search every hollow
of the landscape, and then the roiling darkness
reaches Azra’s house. It heaves itself into

a towering mass of flickering lightning.
It stiffens, and Jessie holds her breath as
a tendril pokes the grounds about the house.

Then the dark mass hunches briefly before
launching itself along their trail. Its speed
increases as its bulk contracts and surges.

Hearing Azra’s calm commands to their steed,
Jessie squints against the wind of their flight
and glimpses a change in the landscape colour.

She sniffs and realizes they are heading
towards the sea. As Phaox charges round
a large hill, she makes out a ragged island

a little offshore. Azra nods to her.

‘If we reach that island we should be safe.’

His voice falters. ‘Though I would not go there

by choice. The endless Scylarii live there.

Let’s trust they are still sleeping, which they have since before they fashioned time, so some say.’

Jessie wants to say that she thought no one slept in Thexlan, but is distracted by a sound behind her. She thinks for a moment

the beast is baying as it gains on them, sees Zane standing near Phaox’s hindquarters. He is swinging the crystal sword in circles,

broken blade roaring like an angry bull and flare-pulsing with vivid energies. She wonders if the Dremaan’s exaltation

is feeding his sword, with it goading him in turn. She hears him chanting the same phrase over and over: ‘Time to fight for death.’

Phaox lurches abruptly and tilts forward. Grabbing the back of a seat, Jessie fears for Zane, but quickly notes how steady is

his battle stance, legs astride, knees and hips fluid poise to each lurch, tilt, heave and roll. She glances to the side and realizes

they are scrambling down a long, loose sand dune. Then Phaox stagger-slows. The shadow’s tendrils has snaked ahead of the body and latched

onto Phaox's tail. Zane chops at it
with his sword, while chanting another song.
His left hand is shaped like a tiger's claw

and it begins to glow with dazzling spikes
of scarlet energy. He casts his hand
forward and a ball of light speeds to where

the tendril joins the body. At the same
time the energy ball strikes, he chops downwards
with all his strength and the tendril breaks off.

Phaox lurches forward, front legs already
in the ocean. A second tendril slithers
towards them, but Zane is ready this time.

The tendril dodges his lightning spell, but
the delay gives Azra time to urge Phaox
across the channel and up a rock slope

to where it can settle on a wide ledge.
Then a huge wave slides sideways from the sea
and mounts the beach towards the pulsing shadow,

which shrieks, shrinks away, slithers to the base
of the dunes, settles like a massive watchdog,
with its heaving-pulsations, steady panting,

its crimson flickerings, hypnotic gaze.
Though the creature makes no sound, all of them
can feel a fierce howling inside their heads.

20. To Meddle

Jessie turns to Azra. 'What is that thing?'
The wizard climbs down from the pannier
to inspect Phaox's wounds. He is worried.

The mount is panting and shivering wildly.
Its skin colour, too, has faded, the tendrils
having drained some spirit as well as blood.

He strokes Phaox between its eyes and whispers
a spell of healing. The mount's eyelids droop
and the body sags into a deep sleep.

'We are stuck here until Phaox recovers.'
Zane pokes his shoulder. 'What about that thing?'
Azra shrugs. 'I have seen nothing like it

during all my travels, though I have heard
of a thing called Abzzu, which is the shadow
of all shadows, if that is possible,

which I suppose it is, given that Thexlan
is the place where anything can exist.
Maybe pain summoned it to change through pain.'

Seconds later his ravens land near him.
He bends towards them, nods, looks at the others,
takes out a small parcel tied with silk scarf.

He unwraps a deck of cards, shuffles it,
turns over the top card, which shows a dragon
fanning its wings of flame into a cave.

He grimaces, returns it to the deck,
which he wraps and places back in his coat.
'So you know what thing has been hounding you.'

Zane surveys the faces of his companions
and takes charge. 'We have had hints, vague encounters,
but nothing certain. We don't know as yet

if that thing is what we saw in our visions,
nor why anything would be chasing us.'
He pats his sword. 'But we can handle it.'

Azra sighs and points at the pulsing mass.
'That thing is both more than can ever be
known and as simple as false memories.'

For the first time since they began their flight,
Rynobar makes her presence known. 'So why
flee a shadow we never knew we had?'

Jessie remembers the blankness that smothered
her near the gate into the cemetery.
'We can only embrace what we are able

to suffer with understanding. We flee
because we fear.' Remesh looks to where Zane
is now crouching on the rock ledge, gaze locked

with the flame-torn creature. 'Maybe because
we only find bliss in conflict, the quest
for mastery of all that's around us.'

Jessie follows the painter's look and has
to admit Zane's aura is glowing more
than it has since the clash within the maze.

Who else is impulsive enough to summon
such a monster? Then she recalls what Azra
had said earlier. 'Who are the Scylarii?'

His face pales. ‘Their progeny are what our nightmares experience when they have nightmares. They were, will be, before us, after us.’

Thexlan is home to other destinies than the human. The Scylarii are best met in sleep, for we can always awaken.’

Jessie sits down. ‘Why do they sleep? I thought nothing slept here.’ The old man pats his steed. ‘Because it’s not their time.’ He checks its wounds.

‘Some say their dreams are what we live in Thexlan. Should they waken, we may vanish. Not something I would like to test.’ Jessie nods agreement.

‘We can’t stay here forever,’ Remesh says. ‘I know,’ Azra answers, ‘but I can’t see a way to escape.’ The painter slaps Phaox

and queries with lifted eyebrow. ‘The ocean is too deep for it to swim. Maybe one or all of us will have to face that shadow.’

No one hears Zane climb back on board. ‘There is another way. I know of the Scylarii. They have wings.’ Azra stares in disbelief:

‘We’d be mad to wake even one of them.’ Zane turns his palms. ‘I don’t intend to wake anything. All creatures move during sleep:

the dog, with its twitching legs, chases cats. We need only feed the beast the right dream and it will fly us far away from Abzzu.’

‘That thing needs to be faced,’ Azra declares.
‘Instead, you meddle in matters with cosmic
consequences.’ Zane shrugs. ‘Not the first time.’

All through their argument, and after, Jessie
is studying the shadow mass. She notes
how a ripple travels from end to end,

regular intervals, how ligatures
of lightning play about it in a rhythm
faster than each ripple, yet tuned to it.

She notes the colour is never consistent,
but varies with each pulse, much like a fish
changing colour when it fins along or

when wavelets change angle and depth of viewing.
The creature seems a huge, smoky snake crackling
with hidden energies and blazing skin.

Jessie remembers sitting in the crook
of her tree and glimpsing a black snake settle
in a coil where she climbed the trunk each day.

She watched it for hours, as sun dropped behind
cloudbank and surrounding peaks. Soon she started
to shake with cold as well as fear, but knew

the cold would affect the snake even more
than it would her. When it was almost dark
she inched down the trunk towards it. She held

a cluster of seed-pods she meant to use
for distraction if the creature awoke.
When only a few feet away, she saw

the snake open its eyes and regard her.
There was no malevolence in those slits,
just curiosity. She threw the pods.

The snake raised its pale brown snout, made loud hisses
in short bursts, flattened its neck and forebody
towards the ground in slow, sinuous waves,

then settled back. She waited a few minutes
then threw the rest of her pods. This time, nothing.
She scrambled along a branch opposite

the snake. She swung herself down, almost screeched
when the branch dipped, held, dipped more. As she swayed,
the snake uncoiled itself and rippled through

the grass, its path directly beneath her.
The branch creaked again and dropped a few inches.
There was a crack. The branch dropped even more.

Then her hands could no longer hold. She couldn't
see if the snake had gone or not. She let
go and jumped sideways once her bare feet touched

the uneven ground. Landing on her belly,
she looked up to see the tail of the snake
twitch once and disappear into the bush.

21. The Cave of the Scylarii

Jessie hears Zane leaving the pannier,
has an urge to see those who dream her life.
She calls after him, meets him on the ledge.

They walk in silence. Azra has told Zane
the Scylarii sleep in a cavern somewhere
on the seaward side of the isle. As far

as he knows, no one has ever seen them.
He has heard that there are immortal guards
who have kept the curious away, knowing

what will pass if the Scylarii should wake.
He and the others plan to care for Phaox
and keep watch lest Abzzu should summon allies.

The ledge extends around most of the island,
a flat causeway for its inhabitants
or their servants. As Zane and Jessie reach

the seaward side, they are greeted by wind
that is bitterly cold and whips salt spray
into their eyes. Before them is a maze

of boulders and shifting layers of pebbles,
which forces them to scramble slowly over
the sea-drenched surfaces. Zane first considers

the mounds of debris a ploy to discourage
carefree explorers, but Jessie points out
the fractured cliff face and its sliding scree.

Seconds before pointing out the rock fall,
movement had drawn her sight to the cliff top
and the view of a person standing near

an outspread tree with white globular blossoms,
which reminded her of the jewel she carried,
but when she blinked, person and tree were gone.

Not long after they pass around the edge
of the island, the whispers disappear
from Jessie's mind. She finds it easier

to concentrate on the climbing and needs
Zane's help less. The wind shrieks into their faces,
while waves throng to smash against the isle's bulk.

Zane points out an opening in the cliff.
The closer they come, the stronger the stench
of rotting seaweed and decaying flesh.

Zane tears two long strips from inside his cloak,
dips them in a rock pool, hands one to her.
Once protected, they traverse the last rocks

in front of the sea cave, then pause outside.
Zane unsheathes his sword, points it to the four
quarters, then above him, all the while chanting

words in a sibilant tongue that makes Jessie's
skin seem infested with ravaging insects.
She feels the air still-thicken about them,

knows he has built a wall of energy
that dampens sound and light, to hide their presence
and protect. They step into the warm darkness,

and she is surprised that she can still see
with the clarity of the daylight world.
Again she wonders where Zane has acquired

his powers, and why he is travelling
the sacred road if he is such an adept.
And why is she here, who is not so strong?

He halts. The pebble pathway turns right angles
and the rock is etched with body-length profiles
of figures more than twice his height, some human,

some with animal heads, though Jessie knows
none of them, even given her wide reading,
all portrayed with incised markings for garments

and jewellery and weapons, their eyes hollow,
the fluctuations of light from outside
giving the appearance of subtle movement

in limb or eye. Zane sends a tenuous
trickle of pale energy at the wall,
and she thinks the first figure—human body,

head of raptor—flickers around its edges
briefly then turn its stern face towards them.
She blinks, but the figure is again profile.

Zane leans towards her and whispers: 'The guards,
like their charges, are hovering in dreams.
We must be wary.' Jessie follows him

down the passageway and perceives their shield
thicken further. As they pass the first figure
the head becomes more beast than bird and Jessie

wonders if the gloom is the only guard,
which assumes the shape of whatever image
of authority or punishment lurks

guilt-deep in the mind of each interloper.
Would she meet her father in some new guise?
Could she trace whatever guilt was not hers?

At each turning the sense of being watched
from the rock persists, though Jessie can't see
any other etchings, is seeing less

the farther along the passage they travel,
as if a thing much greater than mere darkness
were dampening Zane's spell. Then she detects

a change in the texture of air, a numbing
of their faint sounds of passage, like lost echoes,
and knows they have entered an immense cavern.

She shudders with the thought that maybe Zane
suggested this mission purely for power
and knowledge. She hopes he is skilled enough.

Instantly her eyes are seared by tense light
and she fears the Scylarii have detected
their presence. A shadow eases the pain

such light always drives through her fragile vision,
which she quickly sees is cast by Zane's hand.
'I'm sorry. I forgot about your eyes.'

When her sight recovers, the blaze becomes
a dull glow emanating from Zane's sword,
a risk of radiance in shifting darkness.

She looks past him, gasps, then clamps a hand over
her mouth as Zane glares at her. For an instant
she totters, and thrusts out her other hand

for support from a nearby stalactite,
then recoils from a touch not of rock, more
like flat toughened hide with serrated edges.

Her knees crumple as she stares all around.
Mounds and coils, trailing limbs and bulges rise
and settle, recumbent leviathan

of scaled flesh, no cave surface that is not
transfigured by multiple flesh and wing,
twitching claws longer than Phaox's legs.

Each scale shimmers with rainbow colours, even
when Zane moves his sword and the scale is shadowed.
As she peers at the nearest one, the colours

resolve into a scene of champions
on horse back parading through cheering crowds,
a second shows *hoya* absorbing victims,

while in another she is stunned to see
Remesh and Rynobar searching for plants
for Phaox's wounds, clashing constantly.

Jessie judges Zane mad to even think
he can control such a mysterious
and powerful creature. Surely his venture

is already displayed, past-present-future,
on one of the pulsating scales, the wit
and thoughtfulness of choice forged long ago.

She rouses with urgency of retreat,
starts to pull his arm, is abruptly gripped
by screaming pain inside her head. She sinks

to knees, fists squeezing her temples as fire
splinter-surges through her mind. She rolls into
a ball, feels her screams shatter all her senses.

Then she is gasping, all pain gone, as though
the inferno had burnt it away, but
for the bile splattered on the granite floor.

22. Serpent Song

After sitting up and wiping her mouth,
 Jessie is stunned to see Enheduanna
 leaning on her skull staff and watching her.

The intensity of gaze and its gleam
 remind Jessie of the meeting with Dukor.
 With a shock she knows the woman is also

Neshxi, the *Turma* maker's mother-wife.
 Enheduanna bows at Jessie's insight,
 and Jessie bows back. 'You guard the Scylarii?'

'In a manner of speaking. We all do.'
 Her eyes glitter in the dark. Jessie looks
 for Zane, but finds no sign of him, nor any

of the Scylarii. The cavern is empty,
 except for a halo of shining motes
 that dance in shafts of light that also move

in the rhythm of breath, hers or another's.
 She wonders if she might now be within
 one of the Scylarii's scales, maybe always.

She wonders where Zane is now, and as fast
 as she thinks, the answer forms in her mind:
 'He is dealing with his presumption elsewhere.'

'Where are we?' Jessie asks inside her head.
 'As I'm sure you have guessed, this moment is
 a breath-scale of the Scylarii, as all

things are, or will be, or once were, including
 themselves.' Neshxi's gaze fills Jessie, amusement
 replaced by a glistening gulf: 'Tell me

why you are here.’ Jessie sends images of the pursuit by Abzzu. She shows Zane discussing dream control of the Scylarii.

‘Yes, that one has always been impudent.’ For a second Jessie thinks Neshxi said *my son*, not *that one*, but cannot be certain.

‘Let me tell you a story,’ she continues. Jessie finds the mental voice and its pictures comforting, the kindness-scent of compassion

that can abide any fault. Yet a part of her knows the guardian can inflict great pain, even for those already dead,

that Neshxi can sudden-spin any soul to the start of its task, with full distress of all it had once faced and would again.

She listens: ‘Before any world began, there was a sea without a sky. Before any sea began, there was a quick whisper

without a voice. And before any whisper, there was nothing. When a silver bird flew out of the sea, feathers of foam, and sang

its song, a fish had already begun searching for its mate, twin of gill and fin. For every bird, a fish, for every song,

another sea. Soon the kosmos was filled with seas, so that between them land emerged and around this a blind serpent appeared,

dense with glitter and breath, to prevent all
vanishing back into nothing. Each sea
is reflected in its scales, each song is

the hum and ring of rubbing scales as body
swells with breath. Whenever the serpent sheds
its skin, seas drain, skies vanish, but the song

of the dead skin becomes the new skin's dreams
and each land remembers itself, while blazing
with the urgency of new dreams, new lives.

But if the serpent were somehow to waken,
slither away into undergrowth, nothing
would remain for memory or for dream.'

Jessie squeezes at tears swelling her eyes
and hopes the guardian can forgive this
invasion of the Scylarii's repose.

As she snuffles, Jessie hears Neshxi whisper—
as though the story had never been told—
'But why are *you* here?' The answer seems clear:

she did not choose to come to Thexlan, but
when she starts to speak, the cavern is dark.
She hears a slow creaking, as of bed springs.

She smells sweat-musk. She turns her head and sees
the full moon shining through her open window.
Scent of jasmine from her mother's gift-bush.

Jerks as he tweaks an erect nipple, moans
when he blows breath over her breasts and down
her belly, such shiver of delayed touch.

His teeth nip at the insides of her thighs
and she arches. Hands clench her buttocks, lift
moist ridges of skin to his tongue, which flicks

and sucks, the reverberations of flinch
and groan nipping at throat and sprinting heart,
wave on wave of glitter-burst, deeper, deeper

till her body shriek-quivers and she craves
his deeper presence. She pulls at his hair,
his shoulders, hauls him above her, in her,

the rocking pulse of clench and pause, the rapt
reunion with single rhythm, no self
to lose, to find, only the shiver-bliss

from touch to leap to shatter-breath to tremor
of tingle-open skin, linked heave and sigh,
long blossom of moonlight as fingers spark.

23. The Design in Stars

Jessie opens her eyes to find Zane standing above her. He hauls her to her feet, says in a strained voice, ‘There’s nothing here for us.’

Their journey back from the now-empty cavern is shorter than the outward trip; and as neither of them is keen to explore further

their encounters with Neshxi, their report is much shorter still. Azra tells them that, when they left, the creature shifted its bulk,

in anticipation of an escape, but then settled back, not moving except for the cyclic ripples along its flanks.

Jessie takes up her surveillance of Abzzu and replays in her mind the last few hours, a sense that something seen or something dreamed

can offer a solution to their problem.

As always, the idea emerges not from effort, but after attention elsewhere,

while she watches each wave slide and retreat, fringing and fingering the sand, like breath, her body snagged by pant-spin memory,

her mind hush-woven by the mirror play of glint on wave-stroke, current on seaweed, salt-spray on breeze, the shimmer-shift of ease.

She tells the others her idea, but Zane is uncertain he has sufficient power.

What he does not reveal is Neshxi’s warning

that he should rely less on strength as key
to all ventures than on whatever wisdom
would open, instead of hide, his song-spark.

Jessie scrambles to a new vantage point,
where she can see both the creature and Zane.
She hears him begin a low chant and knows

the preparation for the task will need
much vigour. She sees on a higher ledge
the strange, white tree, thin branches wavering,

no sign of guardian or shining globes.
She removes her pouch, examines the sphere,
knows the tree etched upon it is the same.

She imagines that the ten tiny suns
may represent those people she will meet,
those important in Thexlan and back home.

The chant-rhythm quickens and Jessie stares
at Abzzu. She is sure its undulations
have begun to slow since Zane's dark clouds formed

above it, flickers of energy fading,
proof of her vision's gift, that here, more than
elsewhere, it appears, living things need light.

She sees too that the waters in the channel
are receding and hopes the creature will
be too numb to notice or probe. She moves

to where she can watch the next stage. Zane stands
legs apart, arms raised, voice deep, sonorous,
the air cracking with the pulse of his chant,

earth quivering underfoot. Jessie hopes
the magic will not disturb the Scylarii,
but knows that Neshxi would make sure of this.

She glances at the channel's narrow entrance.
Zane has built a high invisible wall
against which waves crash with greater and greater

frenzy. He pours energy into each
as it passes him and feeds off their frenzied
clawing at the barrier and their fall,

pumping this into the next wave, the next,
until a coruscating wheel of magic,
with him at the centre, grows brighter, spins

faster, screeches higher. Waves beat the wall
in rapid succession, till suddenly
the water recedes and gathers itself

into one enormous wave-bulge. Zane drops
his arms, voice silent. As the wave draws near
the shallows, it thickens and climbs, bursts through

the place where the wall was, looms higher yet
as it climbs the sloping, exposed sea floor
towards the beach, upraised hammer of green.

The shadow monster, distracted by Azra
and Remesh guiding Phaox to the end
of the causeway, turns too late. The wave-hammer

falls, tons of compounded ferocity.
The engulfed landscape explodes with the sound
of giant shields clashing. Clouds of steam billow

across the isle, buffet whatever is
standing. When they clear and the sea returns
to its stanch rhythm, the creature is gone.

Jessie struggles with an exhausted Zane
along the path to where the others are
grinning wildly as they climb aboard Phaox.

They strap Zane in, cover him with a blanket.
Soon their mount is climbing the dunes and racing
across the unusually quiet land.

Zane leans back and cycles four-by-four breath
through his fatigued body. The summoning
of the sea-wave had drained all his resources,

had drawn on nearly every magic skill
he possessed, but to what end? Without doubt
Abzzu will coalesce, renew pursuit.

Maybe it has minions who can track them.
Maybe one of the party is aligned
with it, had summoned it the night before.

He stares skyward, notes that the clouds he summoned
have thinned to a dark membrane that lets through
a view of the slowly moving star clusters.

If, as some say, their patterns exert power
over the journeys of men, if these patterns
are fixed, then those of men are pre-determined.

And what of Rynobar? *Hoya* who sways
the lives of others, or itself a being
governed by an unseen pattern, or both?

Maybe everything connects in fixed ways,
 their encounters with the monster already
 set down in the designs and fire of stars.

By discerning such patterns, they could be
 ready for those conflicts awaiting them.
 He shivers, groans. Someone tightens the blanket.

Zane sees that any flair at reading stars
 would also be fixed in their wheeling movements,
 every thought, every dream too. His mind teeters,

ice mass at edge of fracture. As he seeks
 to regain rule, a voice whispers, 'Why bother?
 Your failure or success in any task

is already fixed by the past. Let go.'
 And he knows this message is also fixed.
 He squirms around, feels those hands steady him.

Breaking away from this spiral of thought,
 he abandons himself to a shrill sleep
 of stars plunge-wheeling into maws of laughter.

'He has a fever,' Jessie tells the others.
 'Do you think we can get some help from where
 we are going? Rest may not be enough.'

After showing Remesh the reins, explaining
 the voice commands, and slowing Phaox so
 the painter can safely take over, Azra

checks Zane's pulse, pads of three fingers on wrist.
 'I understand your concern, Jessie, but
 he breathes easily and there is no pain.

Still, it's wise to be careful. We will visit
a friend of mine. There is a well nearby
with healing properties. Then we'll continue.'

'To where?' Jessie asks. 'Are we just evading
that thing or is there a specific goal?
Before you met us we were travelling

to Mt Alkerii. Now we're being chased.'
She waves her arms. 'I don't understand this.
I don't understand my place in this quest.'

Azra's face is solemn. 'And have you ever
understood your life?' She lifts a pale arm.
'Not this. I couldn't go out in the sun.

I made no friends at school because they thought
me a freak. My father claimed I was tainted
by my mother's sins, yet would not explain.

No one dared touch me for dumb-fear they would
become like me.' Azra glances at Zane
and Jessie realizes she is shrieking.

After a pause she says, 'Nothing made sense.'
Azra nods. 'Yet you succeeded.' 'At what?'
'Your studies.' 'Because there was nothing else.

I found I had a gift for ancient tongues,
became a researcher of the far past,
because the present was always too painful.'

'At least you understand the past, which must
help your present and future.' She demurs.
'I became more puzzled the more I studied.

There is so much there that has never changed.
Human beings still wreak pain on each other,
still treat the world as possession, not duty.

Existence has puzzled them, wearied them.’
Azra tugs at his ear. ‘And they have always
loved others and accepted their existence

with humour and wise counsel. For each anguish
there has been exhilaration. For each
evil there has been love. For each confusion

there has been a wisdom. If it were easy,
there would be no accomplishment. If it
were impossible, there would be no meaning.

Those things we do not understand draw us
to wisdom. Those things we do understand,
we share. Whenever we share, we love more

than ourselves.’ He sweeps his hand past the view
before them. ‘All of wisdom is out there.’
He points to a vein in her arm. ‘And here.’

Out There. Remesh shakes his head as he listens.
Looking out over the horns of their mount
he sees nothing but stunted trees, cracked earth,

dust devils, wisps of withered spinifex.
It is as if he is looking at one
of his paintings, though he has never done

a landscape. The vast desolation mirrors
the depth of his own feelings before meeting
Nikolina. He still can’t understand

why his style had suddenly changed. The darkness still had him in its grip. Maybe the change had been a response to hope. Yet she had

killed her charges and herself. Where was hope in that? Is she elsewhere on Thexlan now, doing penance for her sins? Is he also?

Thexlan is every land, Azra has said, so somewhere Remesh might find himself painting the lurid description of his soul. Maybe

this landscape is a painting done by him in another world. Every story is in Thexlan, every scene imagined or

painted. Every sculpture. His knuckles whiten as he grips the reins and he wonders if Phaox is somebody's imagination.

Which comes first, the image or its enduring manifestation in Thexlan? Like Jessie, he does not understand how everything,

how anything, works, and what he is meant to be learning now. After Nikolina died he painted flowers until no one

bought his work anymore. When he ran out of money he did anything he could to survive, including selling himself

to many he recognized as past patrons of the club, though they never recognized him, so taken up were they with the newest

fashions of distraction and artifice,
an abstract conceptualist Remesh
once dismissed as a poseur. Maybe he

himself was the poseur. Maybe he had
no original painting in his veins.
Maybe he was just as lost as his teacher.

He looks at his hands, sees nails piercing them.
He feels no pain. He wonders why the others
don't see them. He blinks, and they disappear,

leaving the pounding of arterial
walls in his wrists. Is he alive or dead?
If dead, why can't he recall how it happened?

And why worry about the brooding creature
chasing them? There is no purpose. They live,
they die, live again in some realm where fears

still plague them. What use is Thexlan at all?
What can he learn but how lost he is now,
has always been, how despairing life is?

Azra taps him on the shoulder and points
to the right. Remesh nods, slowly turns Phaox
towards a dark smudge on a distant hillside.

Azra spoke of a friend. Maybe this person
can answer without resorting to riddles.
He isn't a child anymore. Give me

a clear answer, he has wanted to scream.
Why did she reject what he could give her?
His shoulders slump. Yet he could offer nothing.

He was as mired in corruption as she,
without the benefit of children's arms
to plea for love and help, the wrench of care.

Phaox lurches and he summons himself
back to the present, as he guides the creature
to a clearing near an old country mansion

overshadowed by a giant tree gleaming
with silver leaves and wind-chimes of bamboo,
glass, strips of polished metal, but no sound,

no movement. He hopes to meet Nikolina
in Thexlan, give her hope other than fire,
if there is to be a next time for them.

Remesh notices Azra's puzzled look
as they slow to a stop and nothing happens:
no face at window, no door opening.

24. The Sentinel Tree

Azra walks towards the front porch. He stops without mounting the steps. No one appears. A single bird cry, then all is dense silence.

Though Zane's thin clouds partly obscure the sky, there is no light inside the house, except what the silver leaves reflect through the curtains.

Azra peers around both sides of the house while the rest wait, then cocks his head and calls, 'Devina.' The sound echoes, fades abruptly.

He calls out again. Nothing. He walks back to where Remesh and Jessie are supporting Zane, Rynobar behind them, her face twitching

with concern. 'I don't like this,' Azra says as he rummages through his inner pockets. 'She would leave a message if going far.

Maybe she's been called to a minor crisis that's taken far longer than she expected.' He pulls out a small, ivory bird-whistle,

blows a short trill. The tree's leaves shimmer-swirl, focus reflected light to the front door, which opens noiselessly. He gestures them

to go inside. 'Make yourselves comfortable. I'll get some tonic for Zane's weariness.' As Azra steps towards the old well hidden

by a hawthorn hedge, all the wind-chimes start clattering madly, just like violent winds battering the branches. Both Rynobar

and Remesh had just mounted the first step.
Azra's face is pale. 'The tree is Devina's
sentinel. I fear some evil has happened.'

Remesh raises both hands in innocence.
'I don't know Devina. Never been here.
I bet it's her.' He points to Rynobar,

who says, 'I have been here before, to talk
about my search, but not for a long time.
I don't know why the tree would react so.'

She glares at Remesh. 'Maybe because he
is the only one here who is dead, who
does not yet believe this journey is real.'

Remesh glares back. 'All of us have our doubts.'
He jabs a finger. 'Maybe you were spying
for your fellow *hoya* to kidnap her.'

'Stop fighting,' Jessie shouts. 'Whatever caused
the tree's reaction, we need to remember
why we're here.' The others nod and help her

move Zane, who is still only half-awake,
to a wooden bench away from the tree.
The wind-chimes settle to an angry chatter.

Azra returns with a pitcher of water.
Its sweet fragrance, honey, rose bloom, refreshes
them all. Zane lapses into dreamless rest.

Remesh and Rynobar stand feet apart
from each other, exchange defiant stares,
and frown as they ponder the situation.

Jessie and Azra move away from Zane.

‘Who is Devina?’ she asks him. ‘What makes you think the tree is responding to danger?’

‘Maybe it and Devina are the danger.’

Azra denies this thought vigorously.

‘Her path is to be the one who preserves.’

They watch Remesh take a step, then stop when the tree begins to jangle again. ‘Maybe she’s been subdued by Abzzu, with the tree

bewitched to trigger conflict.’ Azra nods, then stares intently at the others. ‘Yet we know there is darkness within this group.

‘Maybe those two called Abzzu for their own reasons and are not really enemies.’

Remesh overhears him and laughs. ‘And why?’

‘I know nothing of Thexlan and its beings.

I travel with these others to learn why

I’m here. What would I gain from such a pact?’

Azra moves to the guard tree. ‘Maybe Abzzu is some repercussion of your past sins.’

The tree shudders with his touch. He takes out

his whistle, and scratches more runes on it with a small knife. Zane, who has just awoken, gets up on one elbow. ‘Remesh is not

the only one who has sinned. What of you?’

Azra ignores the question and continues

to mark the whistle. ‘That’s right,’ Jessie adds,

‘no one is without sin. Maybe that thing was called by us and since we fear to face the consequences of our sins, it grows.

Have you always been in Thexlan? Have you not lived the human life like we have? Who are you really?’ Azra glares back at them.

‘Haven’t you listened to what I’ve been saying? Thexlan is, as you put it, human life. It is all life. It is All, and the nothing

beneath the All. I am human and also an archetype that draws the human forward. As are all you.’ Remesh begins to shout:

‘I’m sick of your paradoxes. Are we dead or not? Human or not? Tell us what we need to know. This place is not the world

I once lived in. There’s nothing human here. No wine, no sleep—’ Jessie touches him gently. ‘There is fear and there is love. We are still

human and still live, whatever the fashion. We do what we always do, muddle through, hope we’ll find answers at the other end.’

He pulls away from her. ‘What if there is no other end, no answers either way?’ She scrunches her face, then relaxes. ‘That

is an answer of sorts, a decree, too: to live with what we know, what we assume, can guess, accept, can tolerate.’ She points

to Azra, who is cleaning his new runes.

‘He’s probably as puzzled as we are.’

Remesh nods, and joins Zane, now sitting up.

Jessie strides to the tree, which shivers once,

sigh music. ‘What are you doing?’ she asks

Azra. ‘Trying to trace Devina’s movements.

There, that should do it.’ He plays a shrill tune,

and the tree’s leaves swivel in unison

to focus light into a narrow beam

that plays around the hill. After completing

one circuit, it moves down the hill, then sideways,

a spiral path. The wind-chimes hum like bees.

All at once the beam retreats a few feet

and begins to circle a small, dark hollow

in the side of the hill, then becomes still.

After motioning the others to stay,

Jessie follows Azra. She watches him

skirt past the hollow, then edge towards it

from below. The reflection from the beam

shows the alarm in his face. By the time

she reaches him he is kneeling beside

a small form. After examining it

for a few seconds, fingers deftly probing,

he lifts it with both hands and nurses it

to his chest. He says nothing as he walks

past her, but she sees tears scalding his eyes.

When he reaches the tree he sets the bundle

gently on his lap. Making cooing noises,
 he starts to stroke it, though the barely-breathing
 creature isn't responding. With a shock

Jessie realizes that what she took
 as coloured patterns on animal fur
 are tracts of scarred skin, where something has stripped

the fur, and cut crude markings in the flesh.
 Her gullet fills with bile, and she turns slightly
 away, forces her body to ignore

the surge-trembling of shock, rage and disgust.
 Moments later she removes her coat, places
 it around the still form. Azra thanks her.

She wants to do more, but can only watch
 his healing care. The old man perceives this,
 gives her a frail smile. 'In another time,

Devina and I were lovers. Still other
 times, both mother and child, father and child,
 brother and sister, friend and foe. This is

the way of souls, until soul is not needed.
 In all our turns there is always a third,
 a cat or some other domestic creature,

to keep reminding ourselves of the part
 nature plays in the pilgrimage of soul
 through nature to God. This is Siraporn,

our new companion.' The chocolate-eared cat
 is purring now. 'She is battle breed. Sitting
 on her warrior's shoulder she would launch

a claw attack at the enemy's eyes.
Savage to all foes, tender with her owner.
Clearly she defended as best she could

and was punished.' Jessie goes to the well
and brings back a bowl of the healing liquid,
some of which she dabs on the wounds, the rest

she allows the purring feline to lap.
The wizard smiles his thanks. 'She will recover,
but much faster if Devina were present.

We must find her.' He looks up to see Zane,
supported by Remesh and Rynobar,
standing before him: 'We will all help you.'

He thanks them, then everyone notices
the tree has not reacted to the presence
of the newcomers. Azra shrugs and sighs.

'This is beyond my ken. Maybe the tree
wasn't responding to them at all, but
to some distorted fear the attack caused.'

Remesh offers the animal the back
of his hand. Siraporn sniffs, hisses sharply.
He does not move. The cat bares its teeth, growls,

hisses again. Remesh moves his hand closer
and coos its name. Siraporn sniffs again,
licks the skin once, settles back in the lap,

closes its eyes. 'What was all that about?'
Zane asks as the painter props him beside
the now-silent tree, settles down with him.

‘The Ice Temple had many rituals.
Some involved blood-letting and sacrifice.
But not of people. As I said before,

Nikolina did have a few strict rules,
though animals were another thing. Maybe
the tree detected some of this in me.

Clearly Siraporn did.’ He rests his head
on the top of his knees, takes a deep breath.
Seconds later, he feels Azra’s firm gaze,

its warm glow of compassion. He looks up.
‘How do we find Devina?’ Azra gives
Siraporn to Jessie, takes out his whistle.

The tree focuses its beam, which returns
to the hollow, then continues its spiral
search. Minutes later it reaches the bottom

of the hill and begins sweeping across
the plain in large arcs. Abruptly it pauses,
then begins tracking a faint path that leads

directly from the hill. Azra calls Phaox.
‘She’s been taken that way.’ He plays the whistle
and the beam vanishes. Jessie looks up

from her charge. ‘And Siraporn?’ ‘We’ll take her,
of course. She should be able to detect
Devina’s presence when she’s close enough.’

‘And Zane?’ Remesh asks as he hoists the man
to his feet. ‘I’m fine,’ Zane says. ‘The exhaustion
is leaving me. And nothing else is damaged.’

As they climb aboard, the sentinel tree
sounds a joyous peal, which follows them down
the hill and onto the widening plain.

25. Shultar's Secrets

Once Phaox settles into a fast rhythm,
 Zane swivels in his seat and faces Jessie.
 'What do you think really happened back there?'

He quickly glances at Azra's stern face
 gazing in the direction of their travel.
 Jessie tightens her coat around the cat.

'What do you mean?' 'It's all quite obvious.
 The only person who knew we were coming
 to see Devina was Azra. If Abzzu

took her, how did it know we would need her?
 If someone else, who, why? I think we should
 make ready for a trap during this rescue.'

Jessie pats Siraporn and is rewarded
 with a lick of her hand. 'Such distrust will
 surely send us crazy. The only thing

to fear here is obviously stagnation,
 is not allowing ourselves to learn, change.
 So let's open ourselves to trust,'—she smiles—

'but with weapons ready.' She indicates
 Zane's sword. 'I'd feel safer if that were whole.'
 Zane adjusts his baldric. 'My thought as well.'

Remesh turns around. 'Can you tell us now
 how it was broken?' Zane studies the road.
 'I challenged the gods in my world. They lost,

but then, so did I. Another long story.'
 Jessie notes the featureless terrain stretching
 towards the horizon. 'I'm sure there's time.'

Zane shuts his eyes, drops his shoulders, relaxes,
takes a deep breath, begins: ‘After I tried
to kill myself, Shultar softened a little.

One morning she showed me into a room
I had never seen before, which held trophies
and artefacts from her travels throughout

Ghajat and beyond. It was here I saw
my first *Turma*, a living land of snow
that reflected the colours of a glowing

sphere above it, brighter than anything
I could imagine, light like all the skies
I had ever seen combined into one.’

He gestures to the horizon. ‘Ghajat
has always been like this too, the sky changing
colour day by day, but not wholly open

to every colour, like that *Turma*, though
the swirls around that sphere were not like life.’
He strokes his jaw. ‘Shultar also told me

she was training me to be a Dremaan,
though she didn’t mention the other schooling.
Maybe she did love me in some warped way,

but all I could remember was the look
Kerrilea gave me before the flames
consumed her life. I resolved to learn all

I could from Shultar. She must have a weakness.
A while later we paused before an alcove.
Set on a pedestal was the bronze statue

of a goddess beckoning with bare flesh.
 There was nothing wanton about that pose.
 Half-lidded gaze. Smile like one who is privy

to the secrets of Chos. Left hand palm outward.
 Her right forefinger pointing to the ceiling.
 Shultar said she was the reincarnation

of this goddess and someplace in Ghajat
 was a statue of the goddess's lover.
 I knew it would resemble me, and shuddered.

"Why are they apart?" I asked. "Their sects are
 at war." "Why?" She didn't answer. I had
 a strong vision of shadows stalking me,

plunging a knife between my shoulder blades
 while she watched from a doorway. And this vision,
 like all my thoughts, she could read, and control.

"I have also saved your life," she said. "Twice.
 I saved you when you first tried to kill me,
 because I had saved you once before. Water."

She said nothing else and I was appalled
 by her presumption. She may have saved me,
 but the murder of Kerrilea, death

those other times, all reasons to kill her.
 Our twin incarnations repeating murder
 with variation until... He looks skyward.

'Maybe there is no *until*. Like the stars,
 our patterns repeat forever, through lives
 and mirror-lives, same actions, same results.'

Jessie twirls her hair. 'I can't believe life is so useless. To repeat ourselves till the kosmos disappears is ludicrous.

What about free will? Even if we go into other lives, surely we can break such patterns, choose better paths, always learn.'

Zane rubs his forehead. 'There is nothing *better*, nothing to learn but to accept one's fate. And mine was to punish my sister's killer.'

Remesh leans back in his seat. 'Because Shultar took Kerrilea away from you, or because she disobeyed eternal law?'

Zane scowls. 'Both. I was Shultar's nemesis, natural and divine judgement, a role I gladly took.' Jessie's eyes fill with pity.

'To take a life is not a time for joy. You glorified in your role, which is maybe why you are still here.' Zane's dark eyes are shining

with righteousness. 'She deserved her death. More. Though I did not fulfil that task.' He slumps. 'I am ahead of myself. Two more years

I studied chants, gestures, symbols, rites, all levels of trance and vision. Soon I could see the blurry outlines of Shultar's guards,

and found another reason to hate her. They were the souls of those drowned in the lake, including my parents. Shultar had drained

their minds of all that could lead to compassion.
They obeyed every order, no awareness
of their state or what they did. So I thought.

Then I discovered the weakness I needed.
Whenever the *sorra* tribute arrived
Shultar would banish me from her earth temple,

but I always noticed a sickly-sweet
perfume, like rotten flesh cooking in cider,
suffusing the castle for many days.

Every time I tried to spy on her work
the spirits would whisk me away. No matter
how much stronger I became in the art

of changing the world to suit my designs,
I could not evade their exact attentions.
One month, just before the tribute was due,

I decided to evoke my own helper.
I spilt blood around my circle and chanted.
Shultar's spirits must have thought, as I hoped,

I was training, and did not interfere.
After the third spell, the air about me
grew chill, while outside the circle, a pillar

of swirling mist assumed the shape and substance
of a person caught in a ruddy nimbus.
My Kerrilea. I was overjoyed

to see her and thought her tears were the same,
but she didn't know me. I had snatched her
from whatever Paradise she had earned

and when her tears faded she became angry.
The nimbus flared with crackling energies.
It took all my knowledge to control her.

Then she begged me for release. I refused,
but nothing I could say would convince her
the vengeance I was seeking was for her.

At one point her eyes cleared and she called me
Bibble, her play word for brother when learning
to speak. “Why do you mess things up, again?”

I didn’t know what she meant and assumed
she, like all summoned spirits, was resorting
to deception to unravel the magic.

I did not look into those eyes. I shut
my senses to screams, the smell of burnt flesh,
forced her to spy on Shultar and the *sorra*.

I spent the night pacing in my small circle.
When Kerrilea returned, I spelled her
into a mirror. I saw Shultar take

the tribute and distil the plants for hours.
She was hollow-eyed, skin pasty and blotched,
her movements jerky, her breath in hack-spasms.

Here was the reason she would disappear
for days before the *sorra* was delivered:
each month, death was as close to her as breath.

Eventually she had a vial of purple
liquid she exposed to starlight while chanting
the same sibilant words over and over.

Her voice became weak and her body withered
as she chanted and swayed and the cold stars
danced themselves senseless above her dark castle.

By the time the vial was a dazzling blaze,
she was almost too feeble to lift it.
The instant she drank the fluid, she fell

unconscious to the floor and did not move.
If I were ever able to gain entrance
at that point, I would soon have my revenge,

but her sentry spirits were vigilant.
I watched as her body grew younger, firmer,
stronger, throughout the remaining night hours.

The mirror became blank. After returning
my sister to her former shape, I gazed
at her one last time. We both shed tears, though

hers were of delight at being returned
to whatever Paradise was her fate.
Once she left, I began planning my vengeance.'

Suddenly they are thrown around as Phaox
jerks to a stop and trembles violently.
It takes Azra some time to calm the creature,

soft voice and gentle stroking of its neck.
'We must find some shelter,' the old man says.
'Phaox's wounds are plaguing it again.'

Jessie leans over and pats its flank. 'Why?'
Azra points to the far edge of the field
of stars behind them. Barely visible

is a pinprick of darkness, hardly moving,
with a short, thin tail. All the dancing stars
in front of it are fanning to the side.

As they watch, they see a small burst of lightning
far below the new celestial body,
realize Abzzu has reformed again.

Azra urges Phaox into a trot
as the others watch the strange sight above,
with occasional glances behind them.

Zane points to what looks like a ruined fort
set atop a hill far off to their left.
No one speaks until they have to dismount.

‘It’s not a fort at all,’ Remesh observes,
‘but a jumble of boulders like...the marbles
of giants. Plenty of places to hide.’

They climb the sandy slope, quickly discover
a hollow between three of the rocks, large
enough for Rynobar to spread her wings

without disturbing Phaox at the side.
After casting healing spells for their mount,
and building shields of protection against

the approaching night, they gather some wood
for a fire, though Remesh thinks this is foolish.
After starting the blaze, Zane turns to him:

‘Abzzu knows our path, will find us when it
wants to. Besides, it’s some distance away.’
‘Maybe that’s because we’re not ready yet,’

Azra observes when he returns from Phaox.
 ‘Some of you seem to know about that thing
 above us. Is it connected to Abzzu?’

Zane looks up, gives a half-smile. ‘It appeared
 in a *murga*, but we know nothing else.’
 Azra looks skyward. ‘I sense things in motion

started long before this cycle of Thexlan,
 long before any cycle, a hard fate
 for all of you, whatever you may choose.’

‘If Thexlan is everything possible,’
 Remesh asks, ‘how can it exist in cycles?’
 ‘Thexlan is Mystery, too,’ Azra answers.

Jessie raps Azra with a piece of kindling.
 ‘I don’t think we’ll get far with this discussion.
 Some more stories should help us through the night.’

Azra nods, leans back. ‘Who’s first?’ Remesh asks.
 Zane and Jessie exchange looks. ‘Since you asked,
 how about you?’ they both answer with smiles.

The artist closes his eyes for so long
 the rest think he has gone to sleep. Just as
 Jessie leans forward to prod him, he speaks.

‘Don’t worry. I have a story for you.
 It’s about a man I met in a bar.’
 Jessie sniggers. ‘Sounds like a joke I heard.’

‘No joke, this,’ Remesh says. The wind wails briefly.
 The smoke from their fire leans in the direction
 of the meteor. No stars can be seen.

26. The Next Breath

'When Nikolina died, I was already
wavering between self-pity and rage.
My work was the only thing that made sense,

though the public didn't think it had any.
My money gone, and other ways of living
too degrading, even for me, I managed

to find a job serving drinks late at night
to those better than me, or so they thought,
some for a quick drink before heading home,

some to meet friends, seek lovers, some to scrounge
a deal, some to stare at the rim of life
or lose their gaze in the froth, some to talk.

One night I spotted a well-dressed man sitting
in a corner booth on his own. He sipped
a whiskey and dealt himself cards laid out

in various patterns. He would read them
for a few minutes, make some notes, then gather
up the deck to deal a new spread again.

He did this for several hours, but each time
I arrived with his next glass, the cards were
turned onto their faces, their backs designed

with a moon-tangled tree on a black background,
their size bigger than normal playing cards.
Almost a week it was the same routine.

Then one night, after all the dreamers, drunks,
schemers, false lovers, those lonely and lost,
and those with dead hope ready for their last

look at the world before knife, poison, leap,
rolled back their eyes, after these had gone home
to fate or duty, he beckoned me over.

He was tall, thin, with red-black snake tattoos
the back of both hands. He shuffled the deck
and sat me opposite him. He laid out

nine cards in a spiral pattern and turned
over the outer one. My skin felt like
it had been dipped in prickly slime. The picture

was of my first painting. Only my mentor
had ever seen it. Before I could ask,
he held up a bony hand, while the other

drummed the central card. “All answers are here.
Do you want to know?” I nodded. “Then silence
is required.” He did nothing for seconds

but stare at the upturned card, and I felt
an open-shiver in my mind—for somehow
he was viewing it with and through my eyes.

Suddenly I knew that card represented
my first instance of decision in life.
The next card was the first painting I sold.

Not the one from my mentor’s dripping blood,
but the first I painted in my rooms: naked,
horned angels cheering the slaughter of children,

which I later discovered in an alcove
deep in the recesses of The Ice Temple.
Nikolina had purchased it by proxy.

The opening gambit in our affair.
Given her protectiveness of her children
I always wondered what made her buy it,

some sort of censorship, or recognition
of her own hidden desires, the self-murder
of innocence. Did she hate me for it

or respect me? Then the first one I painted
for her after we became lovers, two
ruby demons disembowelling each other.

The first when I met her children, a corpse
devoured by crow-headed maggots. The first
painting ordered by a private collector.

The last I painted before she left me.
The first I painted after she left me.
The first after I heard about the fire.

He tapped the last card. I had only painted
flowers since, so I couldn't figure out
what it could be. The more I stared at it,

with something like his gaze, the more I felt
the card showed my first painting after death.
I don't know what gave me that absurd thought.

Maybe it was his open smile, so guileless
yet so arcane, like the scudding of clouds
on a windless, full moon night, desert silence,

long fingernail of his left index finger
drawing circles on the cardboard. I knew
if I turned over that card I would die

soon after, then would paint that picture, whether
in hell or heaven, image of my soul,
a judgement that would seal my afterlife.

When I was found hours later, hiding under
a bridge during a wild storm, river water
lapping my ankles, my clothes torn, blood-spattered,

they thought my bizarre babbling was from guilt,
because a badly-burned body had been
found in the blackened ruins of the tavern.

The blood was mine. The fire was caused by lightning.
I never painted again. Was afraid
I would die before finishing it, then

find myself in the afterlife condemned
to re-painting it again and again
but never completing it. Just like us.'

The owl hoots again and wind brushes cheeks
with the touch of feathers. Everyone shifts
uneasily in place. The fire sheer-sizzles,

sends up a plume of sparks as a log settles.
Remesh has closed his eyes again. The others
study the writhe-smoke or the shapes of boulders.

Siraporn cries out in her sleep, and Jessie
strokes the cat, who had settled in her lap
when they first sat down, until she relaxes.

Jessie then realizes it's her turn
to tell a story, but can't think of any
worth telling. Her own life was uneventful

compared to the lives of her companions.
 And to repeat what she'd read in her studies
 would be cheating, unless it was improved,

though she didn't have their inventiveness.
 Her best story might be this present life,
 but are lived stories better than told ones?

She stares into the fire. Always she hated
 such strutting of colour as an affront
 to her condition, but here she can marvel,

can sink herself into the convolutions
 of flame and curve, the clamour of consumption
 and shifting weight, can track a spark propelled

from the furnace like a bequest to darkness.
 She understands now how imagination
 can unravel dream and fate in contortions

of flame, and for a second thinks she sees
 the face of her mother resolve itself
 into a tree of sparks, then a bright fissure,

then another face, her own oval shape,
 small ears, but dark skin, hair and eyes, a twin
 of younger age with someone else's poise.

The only thing she can not see is pallor,
 recalls that some fuels burn white-hot before
 they become ash. The dark twin smiles, then speaks:

'Imagine absolute nothing. No presence.
 No potential. Nothing with opposite.
 Not time. No absence of time. Nothing but

your capacity to imagine nothing.’

The wind has faded. There are no night sounds.

The flames are tethered in firm radiance.

No one had seen the image in the flames,
but all had seen Rynobar behind Jessie,
a wingtip on each shoulder, their two forms

flowing into each other as the flames
flickered wildly, and they all thought her voice
of higher pitch, though with a younger tone.

‘Imagine this nothing spitting out two
strange realms, which together add up to nothing.
See how they part ways, outside and in nothing,

how they vibrate with reverse rhythms, how
they ripple with contrary colours, how
they interact without touching, both halves

of existence laughing and playing chasey.
See how each begins to split, always into
opposites, and how the network of movements

begins to intersect, recombine, split
again, a dance of universes spinning
about the common ground of zero. See

how each universe evolves thought and action,
reason and contemplation, inspiration
and construction, here more light, there more dark,

here the chaos of swirling particles
in a shaft of light, there the balance beam
tilted with unequal weight but unmoving.’

Their campsite is as still and as expectant
as that balance beam for the slightest ruffle
of weight by dust expelled by further tales.

Zane has a vision of Rynobar's wings
overlapped with others, like multiple
dragonfly wings of different size and contour,

each set a double universe, each set
sliding, twisting, spreading, folding, through, out—
shimmering petal-feathers blossoming.

'Now imagine the pattern of this dance
outside time, which only exists within
each universe, their beginning, their end.

Etch the pattern into skin, into blood,
into sinew, into the honeycomb
texture of bone, just before breath, and know

you are nothing till that breath kindles nerve
and movement, as those universes dance
and split and merge again, until that moment

they form two then none, then comes the next breath,
the next dance, and we are both inside breath,
inside dance, and outside all, which is nothing.'

A log shifts, sending up spark-constellations,
and presence recovers motion again.
Jessie blinks, blinks twice more, as from a daze,

the tale's last words echoing in her ears
with the sensation of a voice like hers,
yet different enough not to be an echo.

Once the voice ceases its inflections, Zane
 does not see Jessie's confusion, because
 he's caught in his own musing. Finally

here is a clue to that secret long sought:
 how worlds are linked, are braids of the one kosmos
 that emerges from nothing and are fated

to fade to nothing once their energies
 are duly spent, or they collide to nothing
 if brought violently together much sooner.

After the tale, both Rynobar and Jessie
 are unable to account for what happened,
 though they do perceive it may be related

to the *hoya's* mission. During this talk,
 Remesh says nothing, being so confused
 by what he saw while their two forms were merged.

Azra cocks his head, turns to Zane. 'Feel it?'
 Zane nods, takes out his song bag. Jessie peers
 at him. 'What are you doing?' He bends down.

'*Glymsen* is coming, and there's time enough
 to complete a *murga*, to rid ourselves
 of Abzzu.' They all protest the idea,

especially as his last *murga* failed.
 'But I didn't have this.' Zane takes his sword
 from its sheath and plunges it in the soil.

'This is the blade of those who serve Ghajat.
 If any power can stop Abzzu, this can.'
 He refuses to reconsider, so

the others move to the edge of the hollow,
watch him cast a circle around the sword,
watch him place the *Turma* fragment inside.

As Zane chants, the air in the hollow chills,
the Thulsword flashes with indigo light,
rushing rhythms that pause sporadically.

Then a picture of Abzzu with its lightnings
rippling through and around it forms above
the *murga*, and slowly turns as Zane gestures.

The first tremor of *Glymsen* reaches them.
Zane claps three times and a solid white ball
with a silver halo appears above

the Abzzu image and fine trceries
jump between them. The second tremor rocks
the landscape, but the *murga* doesn't move

until Zane drops his arms and the two parts
move slowly towards each other. The lines
of power between them thicken and tighten

as Mt Alkerii discharges its ring,
which ripples through the landscape towards them.
Abzzu and the white ball touch the same instant

the Keth ring reaches the hollow. The flash
of a thousand *Glymsens* stun-pulses through
everything. The world tilts madly and shatters.

When the land stops heaving and their eyes open,
the *murga* is gone, the hollow is filled
with rubble, a band of cobalt light streaked

with indigo rises from the horizon,
and Azra is looking in horror at
Zane's crystal sword sticking through Jessie's stomach.

27. Only Chance

They all crowd around her. There is no blood, though Jessie is shaking and Rynobar has to wrap his arms around her while Azra

checks her. 'Are you in pain?' She shakes her head. Zane bends down beside her. 'I am so sorry.' She looks at him with dazed eyes, but still nods.

Zane takes hold of the sword. 'What are you doing?' Azra asks. 'Only a Kenri can handle the Thulsword properly,' Zane says. 'How else

can we check the wound?' He places a hand on her stomach and chants a spell of numbness. Then, before others can react, he yanks

the blade from her flesh. She jerks with the action, eyes wide open in shock, but does not utter a sound. Rynobar starts to fold her wings

around Jessie for a healing, when Azra points out the skin closing without a wound, as if the sword had never impaled her.

Zane mutters, 'That's impossible. Unless...?' 'Unless what?' Azra demands as he shifts Jessie, who is still staring at her stomach,

to a sitting position. Zane steps back. 'I'm not sure. I need to think about this.' He points skyward, where all can see the sphere

still moving slowly across, its black tail starting to open up, like a ship's wake. 'Maybe what happened is linked with that object.'

Remesh confronts him. 'Or maybe your *murga* failed us yet again, and almost killed her.'

He pokes him in the chest. 'You're not as clever

as you think you are.' Zane raises his fist, covered in flickering tongues of blue flame, but Rynobar holds him back. He checks Jessie

one more time, glares at the others in turn, stomps away, puzzlement, anger, concern thrashing the composure of blood and breath.

He walks over the peak, sits on a rock.

Maybe he should leave. It was only chance that had brought them together. Or was it?

While Zane muses on this, the *Forii* come, voices that were his father's, his grandfather's, all the generations of Tarlkar headmen,

voices that now echo Remesh's charge:

'You are evil if what you desire is not as vital as what the village needs.

Leave, if you can not live as the group lives.'

He admits the logic, but will not leave, for a nagging intuition tells him

they are necessary for his own task, especially with the marvel of Jessie's survival of the *murga* incident.

He rubs the spot where the artist poked him.

Zane's annoyance craves release. He strips down to the waist, warms his body with arm swings,

leg raises, joint rotations, muscle stretches,
begins a set of martial exercises
that use all limbs and body parts. He kicks,

punches, multiple blows, tosses his body
high into the air then drops himself low,
horizontal and vertical spins, tumbles,

graceful arch of body and limb, swift thrusts
in combination with blur-rapid changes
of stance, till sweat soaks his pants, and he is

not thinking at all of his movements, nor
of Jessie and the Thulsword scene, not thinking,
nothing at all but reflex and response

to all conceivable combat manoeuvres,
body whirling, mind resting in its centre,
no presence in the world's presence, no mind

but the world itself in the dance of contest
with itself, time outside time, within time,
the instant bliss of movement in itself...

The sound of gravel under foot—he stops
a flurry of punches, and crouches low,
all senses tuned to flutters in perception:

behind him he knows from footstep and breath
that Jessie is watching, that she is anxious
for resolution, that he must appease.

He notes her folded arms, uncertain eyes.
He dresses quickly, then moves towards her.
An arm's length away he says, 'I was wrong.'

His voice has a thin quaver of contrition
that astounds him as much as it does her.
'I don't know.' Jessie's voice is hesitant.

'We need to be more careful, even when
we have good intentions.' She rubs her stomach.
'I don't know what happened, but I don't want

to go through that again.' Jessie looks straight
into his eyes and Zane fidgets, as when
his mother chided him for needless *murgas*.

She touches his arm. 'The ravens told Azra
we need to go. Are you coming with us?'
He smiles and follows her back to the others.

Soon Phaox is taking the same direction
as the night before and the meteor
is growing larger and picking up speed.

28. The Garden of Play

They travel through undulating terrain,
the valleys so filled with damp morning mist
that progress is slow, conversation stilled.

At one point Phaox is creeping along
a dry ravine when all at once a break
in the mist reveals a massive stone wall

that extends left and right and is much higher
than the tree on the isle of the Scylarii.

‘Where are we?’ Jessie asks, as Siraporn

stirs in her sleep. Zane cranes his head towards
the wall, then thins his eyes, closely confirming
what he knows of the stonework and its carvings.

‘A wall like this was built around Adiska,
the jewel city of Ghajat, to keep out
the drifting sands some said emerge from Chos.’

He points to picture-graphs of sun-topped towers,
of regal figures palms up to the wind,
of prostrations in bricked up caves. ‘It failed.

If my mother is right, all cities echo
the first and perfect city, all key features,
and there should be a small gate hereabouts.’

Jessie shudders as she recalls what happened
at the graveyard gate. Are all openings
guarded by such shadows we must confront?

‘Are you all right?’ Azra asks as he gently
places Siraporn in a shoulder pouch
slung across his chest. She shrugs, smiles her thanks.

Once at the wall they discover the stones
 have been fitted together without mortar,
 so close no blade could be pushed between them.

‘A magnificent feat of engineering,’
 Azra says with admiration. ‘As is
 all else here,’ Remesh adds, with a wry grin,

‘from a certain point of view.’ No one laughs,
 so he continues. ‘Should we split up now?’
 Azra tugs his ear. ‘Best we stay together.

We don’t know what we are facing.’ Zane hitches
 his lyre-bag over his shoulder. ‘Good point.’
 Jessie ruffles Siraporn’s ears. ‘Besides,

she’ll let us know if her mistress is close.’
 Because it leads downhill, they take the left.
 After they move at least a hundred paces,

Siraporn begins to squirm in the bag
 and yowl. Azra soothes her and they continue.
 Sometime later, the ground dips and the structure

kinks slightly. The cat yowls again and Jessie
 notices a narrow door in the crook
 of the wall. Zane draws his sword and waves them

behind him. He tries the handle. No movement.
 Remesh sidles up to him. ‘Let me try.’
 Once on his haunches, he takes his wood-nail

and jiggles the workings of the door’s lock
 for a minute or so until they click
 into place. He chuckles. ‘Nothing to it.’

Zane scowls at this conceit, shoves him aside.
Sword at the ready, he opens the door.
They find themselves in a tight, twisting passage.

Zane whispers a short spell and his sword hums
briefly then gives off a low, pulsing glow.
They move quickly, though Jessie perceives someone

watching them, as at the Scylarii isle.
She wonders if any guardian here
would be so forgiving of blatant trespass.

The air is thick and clammy, as though sweaty
beasts of burden had passed through recently
carrying maggot-blown bodies from battle.

Siraporn has become quiet again
and more than once there is a muffled curse,
elbow swinging out, heel trodden upon.

Zane stops abruptly and everyone bumps
into each other. Another door blocks
their way. He gestures silence before trying

the handle. The door opens noiselessly.
Extinguishing its light, he thrusts his sword
before him as he glides through, promptly gasps.

The others bustle after him, are brought
to a standstill, eyes wide with wonderment,
as of a child's first gift, and disbelief.

After the corrosive drab of their journey
so far, here is profusion of bright colours,
multiplicity of texture and perfume,

a thousand species of flowers, some known—
 bluebell, pansy, freesia, azalea,
 dahlia, chrysanthemum, violet, orchid—

most unknown; filament buds, florets, petals,
 shapes of circle to ellipse, small and tapered,
 fronds the size of elephant ears, bush-bursts,

sunburst and peacock ground cover, haze-shine
 just like swarms of tiny metallic insects
 flitting from gold nectaries deep within,

spectrum of trees, courtiers, sentinels,
 boughs hung with lanterns, streamers, shimmer veils
 like webs of pulsing fireflies, the sound

of stringed instruments, sometimes wild like windstorm,
 sometimes lugubrious like blackened tears,
 endless accompaniment of reckless laughter.

Jessie blinks, rubs eye sockets, but the scene
 remains. Her spirit lifts upon this finding
 of contentment like that revealed in childhood.

Delight swells within her when a small creature,
 vivid tawny fur, lopsided ears, bounds
 up to them, sniffs Rynobar's wings, mews once,

then dashes back into a mass of heather.
 Azra grapples with his bag as the cat
 yowls, tries to claw her way out. Savagery

surprises and she topples out before
 he can restrain her. The instant she lands
 she sprints, ears flat, after the tawny creature.

‘Should we go after her?’ Jessie asks while checking Azra’s arms for scratches. ‘We don’t know if it’s a trap,’ the old man replies.

Remesh waves his arms around. ‘Look at this. This is too beautiful to be a trap.’ Zane grabs the painter. ‘Some of the most deadly

creatures are also the most beautiful. What about Nikolina?’ But Remesh wrenches his arms away and starts to dance

around the clearing, leaps and pirouettes, as if the garden’s perfume held a drug that affects only him. ‘Her beauty was

only outer.’ His voice quavers. ‘But here, it’s pure beauty. Can’t you feel it?’ He grabs two globules from a bush with scarlet leaves

and shoves them into his mouth. The plum juices run down his chin as he dances. ‘Delicious. See. There is no danger here. I would know.

I’ve touched more corruption than you can ever imagine. There is nothing like that here.’ He starts to spin on the spot, head right back,

mouth open, as though the air were a spigot for drinking the garden’s heady wine-aura, twirling faster and faster, till it seems

he will drill himself into the earth, or fly apart, victim of forces invoked. Startled by his antics, no one dares move.

Suddenly he staggers back, like one struck,
then lurches from side to side, rapid rhythm
of teeter, before toppling to the ground.

Jessie, the first to reach him, finds him giggling.
'What happened?' she asks as she wipes his chin.
His giggling intensifies, then he coughs

and starts to wheeze, his words choked between pants:
'That...was...fun...You...should...try...it.' Then his features
stiffen, body spasm-arches, collapses.

Jessie shakes him, but his eyes remain closed.
She bends to his mouth to ascertain breath.
'He's not dead,' a child's voice above them says.

'Only weary.' They look up to see branches
part and a blond-haired boy grinning at them.
'I'm Alyston. Who are you? Do you like

my garden? Let's play.' The branches swing back
and the canopy rattles as he scrambles
down the tree then somersaults over them

to land with aplomb. 'I want to play now.'
He is dressed in white tunic with gold braiding.
A small quartz pendant hangs around his neck.

Turquoise blue eyes flash as he surveys them.
'I haven't had friends for such a long time.'
His face brightens. 'Now we'll have lots of fun.'

Azra approaches him. 'Have you not seen
a red-haired woman brought here recently?'
Alyston frowns. 'No one, but I did see

a small animal chasing one of mine.
Poor thing looked like it had been hurt.' He smiles,
then starts to dance and cartwheel around them.

Azra scratches his nose. 'That's Siraporn.
Will she be safe? Are there any wild creatures?'
Alyston's laughter surprises them, deep

like water tumbling through a hollow cavern.
'Nothing wild here. This is the safest place
you could desire. My mother sees to that.'

Jessie moves beside Azra. 'Has she seen
our friend?' she asks in a gentle voice. 'Maybe
you can take us to her.' Alyston scowls.

'She's busy.' He picks up a broken branch
and decapitates a row of sunflowers.
'Too busy now to talk to anyone.'

He tosses the branch against a tree trunk.
'I'm sure she'll talk with us,' Azra insists.
The boy looks from face to face and breaks out

into a mischievous grin. 'All right,
but first you have to play a game with me.'
'What are the rules?' Azra asks. The boy smiles.

'They're a secret.' He claps his hands, sits down,
closes his eyes. His breathing slows, appears
to stop. The air about Alyston shimmers,

heat waves from a desert mirage pulse-swaying
with wild colours and spreading rapidly
throughout the clearing. Everything they touch

shimmers too and emanates its own waves
until the scene fills with colliding, roiling,
serpentine colours. The companions back

away until they find themselves against
the stone wall. Zane tries to counter the changeling
light, but is still worn out from his encounter

with Abzzu. The air ripple-tingles them,
and as they breathe, it fills them with a mixture
of dread and excitement, as when first meeting

one's first lover. As the shimmering quickens,
the whole clearing vibrates with scintillations
of light, and a sound like a giant top

spinning out of control. Senses cascade.
Heartbeat and breath pound each other, until
a crack of thunder over bells, and darkness.

29. A Vision of Rescue

Jessie opens her eyes and finds herself
strapped to a bed. There are bars over windows,
walls covered in diagrams, edges dripping

with paint. Then she remembers. Not paint, blood.
Hers. The reason for restraint. Trapped once more
in the disbelief of uncaring jailors.

She too hadn't believed the nightly visions.
A dark man carrying a crystal sword,
climbing a mountain to challenge false angels,

thrusting his blade into the giant gem
that drained vitality from worlds below,
turning the angels to shadows of shadows,

the sword breaking in the process. A dream
sequence about her sexuality,
symbol books said, but she was sure the visions

were real. He was real, was searching for her.
Or one like her. She could feel the connection.
Overwork, her doctor said. Too much study,

not enough sleep and outings with new friends.
But she was confident she'd found the source
of stories about wandering immortals.

Not just a lush character for adventure
tales, nor marked killer for morality
tales, nor banished tormentor of a saviour.

Or maybe all of these and more, the cauldron
of utter fancy and imagination,
some apparently composed in his hand.

She'd even found traces of him in modern publications. The strange thing was, his style was fresher when closer to present day.

She named him Tamheduanna, Tam being the name she gave to one of her childhood imaginary friends, boy she could see

but never talk with; Enheduanna, name of the world's first non-anonymous author, Akkadian High Priestess of

the Moon-God Nanna, whom Jessie felt sure was inspired by the genius who helped Hammurabi frame his legal code,

who had cast the questions for Nostradamus, who had crept along the dank corridors of Gothic thrillers, and who was now writing

mundane love-angst poems and fantasies with trite-exotic imagery and symbols, as though nothing worthwhile was left to write.

None of this made sense to her or to her supervisors, who thought her research claim a weak clutch at originality.

They recommended a long leave of absence, rest for mind and re-creation of thesis.

She almost agreed, then saw a fan-photo

of a black-ink sketch the poet had auctioned at a convention, recognized the dark man of her dreams, both now and in the past.

She decided to meet the poet-artist.

Tom Linn was not the lithe man of her dreams,
was overweight, wore thick glasses, had acne.

Yes, he had started to write recently,
the weird texts were from his imagination,
as were his sketches, no dreams of god-heroes,

no dreams of her, and he'd remember if
they had ever met before. So polite,
except when he was leaving, and his manner

changed from hesitant bookworm to assurance,
with such focussed gaze she felt her mind open:
'Watch yourself later. Just show him your face

and remember Jenny's lessons.' She gaped
after him, thought her doctor may be right.
Later that night, when she stopped at a corner,

a rasping voice ordered her to hand over
her cash. She spun around, threw off her hood.
The thief was so shocked by her albinism

she was able to kick him in the groin,
elbow-crunch the back of his head as he
doubled-over, foot-sweep him to the ground,

and run. Once home, her heart triple-time beating,
she recalled Tom's advice and shudder-chilled.
Her dreams that night were not of the dark man,

nor of Tom Linn, but of Jenny, the playmate
she invented when no one else would play,
the feisty girl who taught her to defend

herself against those schoolyard taunts and fights,
the Jenny who knew how to create blossoms
by breathing on a speck of dust and chanting,

who trained with twin short swords and could defeat
all other students in her school, who grew
faster than she and, when an adult, vanished.

By day Jessie haunted her manuscripts,
by night she dredged her dreams and memories
or sought out Tom Linn. He had to know more.

When she found him he denied warning her
of the attack, was thankful for attention.
Against her better judgement she agreed

to have lunch with him, then dinner, then more.
They were lovers only once, a strange night
of jasmine and haunting intimacy,

his gawkiness replaced by self-assurance,
an intensity not unlike that instance
of his defence advice, and his love-skills

more thorough, more thoughtful than could be guessed.
He left her the next day, her neediness,
her delusions, her theories, his excuse.

She returned to her studies more determined
to prove Tamheduanna had indeed
written or influenced the texts she read.

She recognised his themes, his leitmotifs.
The mountain of salvation. Broken sword.
Lovers torn apart. She became convinced

all major cultural ideas were his,
 immortal lover, philosopher, muse
 to male and female alike, who grew younger

the older the world became. She began
 to take stimulants to pursue her studies,
 and relaxants to make her sleep and dream.

This mania spiralled out of control.
 The last thing she remembered was Tom's face
 as she was lifted from the blood-swirl bath.

No doctor, nurse, colleague believed her now.
 She could hardly believe the tale herself:
 an immortal who went backwards through time,

who inspired art and idea because
 he had seen already what could exist.
 What about free will and linear time?

Soon she stopped raging against the restraints,
 agreed to talk with her psychiatrist,
 admitted her dreams were delusional.

Weeks of such medicated grovelling
 saw her discharged. The day she came home, bluebells
 appeared in her garden. Winter had been

so dry blackbirds swarmed in surrounding trees,
 on roof tops, numbers unseen in the city
 for the twenty years her neighbours lived there.

Taking this as an omen, she collected
 her research notes and sent them with a letter
 to her supervisors: *If I survive,*

*consider them proof of my theory that
the immortal will rescue me, through proxy,
as he did the first time. If not, burn them.*

Then she swallowed her pill bottles and filled
her bath with warm water once more. She lit
candles and prayed that Jenny would help her.

As she eased herself in and closed her eyes,
breathing herself into that deep, still centre
she was once shown, she thought she heard faint music.

30. The Death of Shultar

*The hardest thing is learning to speak backwards,
those times I present in another's body.*

It's not as if I wake up yesterday

*and live it like you do your normal day,
then go to sleep, wake up the day before.*

Every moment is previous. My day

*runs backwards as heart beats, breath circulates,
body and mind inside out, twisting past
each other like a spinning barber's pole.*

*How easy to foretell your future, how
awkward to talk with you when I have said
such words to your future self. How to summon*

*the truth of all worlds, not trickles of sand
out of hands, but sand on an endless beach,
each of us the wind caressing a grain*

*here, a shell there, believing we are grain
or shell for the moment of that caress.
Often the wind swirls everything to movement,*

*and a grain thinks it other grains, or sea,
or the light shining on all, till once more
wind touches a grain and we mould a lifetime.*

*What is the lifetime of the universe?
The blink of sun above that beach whenever
a cloud passes. How many universes*

*are there in the kosmos that is forever?
As many grains of sand that could exist,
each one unique as soon as wind or light*

*or sea touches it. Somehow you and I
have touched the same grain together, or maybe
it is the elements that in their touching*

*have created this tale of you and me.
One day, past or future, our place will be
flow of air, sea, light, memory of sand.*

Zane clears his head of the music, half pain,
half delight. He looks about him and nods
to the balding, green-eyed man before him,

who is holding a sword in his one hand.
Zane is on the floor. 'Pick it up, and start
again. You'll never become a Dremaan

if you can't even control your own body.'
The man settles into a fighting stance.
After retrieving his own wooden sword,

and marvelling at its ease in his hands,
Zane settles into his stance, drops his breathing,
tunes eye, ear, muscle to an open focus.

The rest of the day is filled with feint, thrust,
counter-thrust, parry, block, the clack of wood
on wood, swift changes of stance, swivel, dodge,

duck, his cries of anguish at sudden strike
on hand, to stomach, though he does evade
more blows to head. He goes to bed with that

content fatigue of complex physical
actions mastered, muscles ablaze and lapsed,
mind keen, agile, elation of new vistas.

This training is nothing like Shultar's lessons.
His fists clench at thought of his enemy,
then relax when he remembers her death.

It took him months to realize he could
never bypass her guardians while she
was incapacitated, so each night

he undertook dream journeys and ranged over
the barren countryside in search of allies.
Each time he passed his village he took great

satisfaction in disturbing the sleep
of its inhabitants, who had consented
to Kerrilea's fate and were as guilty

as Shultar. He would punish them all, even
his brothers. One journey he felt the presence
of an aura as powerful as Shultar's,

with similar flair. Another Dremaan.
Although asleep, the Dremaan was alert
to all pressures of magic. At the instant

he detected Zane's soul he ensnared it
in a web of dream-stuff. His mind sought out
the dreamer and Zane knew the mage could read

everything of him at a single touch,
more than he wanted to reveal just then.
He summoned up the images of what

the village had suffered and what he had
endured because of Shultar. 'We do not
interfere in the affairs of our fellows,'

the Dremaan mind-whispered. ‘We trust the visions
we each follow. What you see as pain is
no different from any transition. Childbirth.

The butterfly breaking through its cocoon.
At times we are the means of change for others.’
Certain the man would dismiss him without

further thought, Zane announced Shultar was seeking
to use the Spell of Unknowing. The man
sat up, his aura fierce, demanded more.

Zane had not been idle those days his jailor
was indisposed each month. He studied scrolls,
parchments, mouldy books, and had found some lines

of verse in a drama written as fable.
Both hero and villain sought the spell used
to unravel other spells—the true hero

striving to reverse the curse cast by witch
on his lover, the power-frenzy villain
seeking to destroy the spell beneath all,

so full of self-hate, other-hate, was he.
Then the typical final battle after
three setbacks, the hero winning the clash,

the villain banished to serve as foundation
of the very spell he sought to undo,
hero and lover together once more.

A minor story by a minor poet,
but Zane had seen value in the idea.
He told the old Dremaan, whose name was Elgron,

Shultar was obsessed with finding the spell
that would undo Ghajat. He said she had
a Keth shard that showed her how to escape

the destruction she wrought, how to remake
Ghajat in her own image. These last details
were enough to force the Dremaan to act.

He knew of her long addiction to *sorra*
and devised a plan to taint the next shipment
with magic poison that would craze her powers.

The next month, after she imbibed her potion,
Shultar was feeble-maddened for days after,
so much so that Zane could summon his ally,

who had been waiting disguised near Tarlkar,
and they stormed through the Dremaan's barriers
into her chambers. Still, Shultar was able

to summon elemental and demonic
forces and a prodigious battle followed,
clash of typhonic energies, like mountains

tossing boulders at each other, till Zane
focussed all mind and thought, like ocean through
blowhole, to hew a chasm beneath her

and so drop Shultar into the abyss.
She fell, but was briefly saved by a spirit,
who at the same time caught hold of Zane's sleeve.

The three of them swayed above the growl-mist,
cloth tearing, limbs straining for grip or freedom,
foes cursing each other and the world, till

Elgron cast a minor spell of completion,
and the shade, whom Zane was to realize
later was his mother, slowly dissolved

to sighs. As Shultar plummeted through plumes
of mist, paroxysms of rainbows, she screamed,
'They died because of you.' And then she vanished.

Zane stared into the shifting haze, and almost
dove after her to make sure she was dead.
As her castle began to crumble, Elgron

snared a vagrant breach in the abyss, opened
a portal to the city of Adiska,
where Zane commenced his true apprenticeship.

And where he met his first true love, a student
who had been training at the Dremaan temple
since she was a child, azure eyes, fair skin,

wild, raven hair, a smile that tremors him
like *Glymsen*, till he is like a Keth ring
tuning his dreams and the world around her.

Before he sleeps, he fashions a dream-bird
from breath and her scent, puts a gift inside,
glitter-launches it to her room, to Jeera.

31. Facets of Awe

Remesh opens his eyes, steps back, then drops
to knees with shock. Before him is a pulsing
simulacrum of one of his first paintings,

a twisted corpse surrounded by putrescence
and eviscerated remains. He gags,
empties his stomach, watches horrified

as the bile flows into the scene, which grows
life-size, each painted aspect separating
from perspective to dimension, each brushstroke

moulding to object, or dividing space
from surface, all beating faster than blood,
as though he were feeding it with his own

frenzied imaginings. A pus-filled wound
slowly widens to reveal a slate path
cut through dark mist, then curving beyond sight.

The acrid smell of smoke mixed with burnt flesh,
and he is sprinting through the mist. Flame-sizzle,
frantic screams, and the mist ripples away

from each side of the path, like parting waves.
Soon he has crossed the horizon and is
approaching a cliff face. Wind howls from holes

in the middle of carvings on the rock.
The more he looks, the more the holes become
mouths, the carvings, blistered faces of children.

The stench thickens as mist darkens to smoke.
Ahead somewhere is the woman who set
the fire, who inhaled the same smoke and died.

On hands and knees, Remesh calls out her name.
 He slams into rock, then presses along
 the cliff until he finds an opening

with no smoke, little breeze. The passage walls
 quickly narrow, so he shifts himself sideways
 and squeezes through. Rock oppresses with weight,

air thins, darkness congeals, he feels himself
 fading like imprint on sand under waves.
 The tunnel turns upward and he smells musk.

He calls out to Nikolina, but echoes
 settle on him like dirt on lowered coffin.
 Hands, feet, grope for crevices as he hauls

himself along. One second he is struggling
 for breath, next he is falling down a slope
 of loose soil and broken tree roots, and smashing

against the statue of a foot. He pants
 for some time, then throws himself backwards when
 the little toe, as big as he is, twitches.

*For those of a thousand lives, memory
 is rich between each life. The swift recall
 of each moment, the stunned linking of these*

*with moments from previous lives, the endless
 repetition of repetition, sudden
 disengagement of pattern due to hollows*

*seen beneath the one pattern, growth as function
 of leap, the realization of double
 vision as central plan, bliss, path and goal.*

At first sign of distress, Rynobar leaps
 into the air, but falls back towards earth,
 wings no longer working, no longer there.

For a instant she imagines herself
 again in the night sky with other *hoya*
 gyrating in their seethe of constant splendour,

the shapes they make, inspiration not only
 for themselves, but for those who dare the dark,
 who dare the dread chasm of themselves when

facing that dark—the trigger of raw change,
 silent womb and tomb of thought, dream, sense, need,
 all things spinning in and out of that nothing

that is and never is, like dragonflies
 touching their reflection—though all she knows
 is perpetual dance and blank rest after.

She now wishes herself to be much more
 than foundation and goal, outcome of choice
 when first she knew others had disappeared.

Instantly two places fill her, the constant
 night that ripples with origin and exit,
 the narrow casket in between, where grows

a flicker of light through leaves, the bare touch
 of tongue to skin, the first blush, the last breath.
 The generation of poised blood calls her.

*In birdsong of early morning, clear grandeur
 of prior sunset, certainty of more,
 surprise at dawn itself, each breath as song.*

Azra watches the others wrestle with
 Alyston's spell and be overcome, watches
 each of their journeys into memory,

imagination, like moving tattoos
 on his body. He perceives the whole garden
 as body, knows where they are being led,

knows where he is being led, if he were
 to deem himself the only one not caught
 in Alyston's spell, not caught by desire.

A sigh explodes above him, air cram-shoves,
 ground buckles, tilts, rolls, drops, counter-blast rhythms.
 Azra recognizes timbre of voice

as lover, mother, sister, brother, father,
 child and friend over eons of fused lives
 that exist in the time a dewdrop falls

from leaf to ground. They are the one dewdrop,
 its condensation of moisture as fated
 as falling masses, its pattern of structure

as distinct as newly-minted snow crystals,
 lives as water mote joining water mote
 and circling through earth and air, call of heat.

There is a groan, another juddering
 of earth. He sees himself mopping the brow
 of a woman giving birth, though her body

is as big as a mountain range, his cloth
 as small as a leaf of grass. He has lost
 his hold on perspective. He sees the others

waking from Alyston's game, wonders why
he is still trapped in the spell, size of sperm
standing between the legs of a huge woman.

He sways madly, feels hands supporting him,
hears two sounds: his voice repeating a name
in disbelief, a child's snide, gleeful laughter.

*At noon, shadows again begin their preen,
sometimes a moon hardens its share of light,
flowers spark into bloom, eclipse of awe.*

32. Birth of a God

The pregnant woman towers over them
 as a range of bulbous hills, her skin mottled
 like razed paddocks, pools of sweat like full dams,

the sutures in her groin thick as tree trunks.
 Her crescendo moans and plea-cries are bellows
 that maelstrom the air; each contraction pitches

the garden through haphazard angles, tosses
 people, trees, rocks like chaff. From deep within
 her giant womb the laughter primes the rhythms.

Azra is repeating Devina's name
 in a daze. Zane tries to calm him, while Jessie
 helps Rynobar and Remesh to their feet.

'This can't be real,' Azra finally says.
 'Such change is an outrage, even in Thexlan.'
 He sighs, straightens his back. 'Or maybe not.'

Jessie considers this, then moves towards
 Devina's seeping groin. 'But why do this?
 What's to be gained by such abuse of nature?'

Remesh rocks his head sideways, to ease tightness
 in his neck. 'Maybe some form of forced growth.
 The longer birth is delayed, the more knowledge

and power it acquires.' He points out tubes
 and contrivances hooked into her flesh
 or shimmering over her eyes and ears.

Although pale and trembling, Azra surveys
 the scene with that detachment of a monk
 self-immolating to protest injustice.

‘Remesh is right. Whoever arranged this atrocious act wants to produce a god.’
He grimaces, then looks over to Zane.

Jessie returns from her examination.
‘It doesn’t matter who did this, or why.
Her pain is dire. We have to start the birth.’

‘But how?’ Zane asks, as baffled as the others
by the panting monstrosity near them,
more so when her face begins changing shape.

Azra points at Zane’s sword. ‘You need to cut
her stitches.’ Another loud moan, another
contraction, and the landscape reels. Birds burst

into the sky and the companions struggle
to stay upright. Zane draws his weapon, steps
towards the giant’s strain-dilating groin.

At once the air before him splinter-opens
and Alyston appears. ‘Leave her alone.’
He gestures, and a massive dog, all snarl,

quivering muscle, hunches between them.
Each time Zane moves, the creature rears its head.
‘Your mother is suffering,’ Azra shouts.

‘This delay in the birth is dangerous.’
The boy stamps his feet. ‘The longer it is,
the better for me.’ Jessie stands near Zane.

‘I don’t know how this happened, but you risk
your mother and the baby.’ The boy claps
his hands. A second dog appears. ‘You don’t

understand.’ Devina screams through clenched teeth,
 the garden lurches, light flickers through him.
 Zane whispers. ‘Did he grow taller just then?’

She nods, and realizes the connection.
 ‘I understand. You want to be a god.’
 Alyston gives her a petulant look.

‘I am already.’ He gestures around
 his garden. ‘How else do you explain this?
 But it’s still not enough. I want more power.’

Remesh pulls at Azra’s arm. Although pale,
 the old man answers with a steady voice,
 ‘He is the unborn child.’ ‘But who’s the father?’

Alyston pricks his ears and smiles. ‘I am.’
 ‘That’s not possible,’ Zane says as he lowers
 his sword to the dogs, and with his left hand

begins a binding spell. Azra steps forward,
 places his arm across the Dremaan’s chest.
 ‘Yes, it is. In Thexlan, time can fold back

upon itself. And we all have descendents
 and avatars who roam the braids of time.
 I know this person. In another place

he is Nikolina whom Remesh loved.
 And elsewhere he may be any of us.
 But now, he is his self-engendered son.’

Jessie grimaces. ‘A strange form of incest.’
 Azra takes a step towards Alyston,
 who glances sideways at him. ‘We arise

from our former selves. And we love these selves
in many other guises. There's no guilt.

The whole kosmos feeds on itself. You eat

food grown in the remains of ancestors.

And we create ourselves through the next image
we crave or hate.' He takes another step.

'Alyston is a future me, as always

when my next lesson is humility.'

He puts out his hand, lets the dogs sniff him,

then walks between them. They bare teeth, shift stance,

but make no other move. Another groan,

and the boy is now a taunting youth, features

much like Azra's, though with dark, hooded eyes,

hair changing to raven-black with each second.

Dark shadows swirl within his golden aura.

Alyston bows his head, though Rynobar

thinks he sees a smirk on the youth's thin lips.

Another moan, and he grows taller, wider.

While Zane cuts the sutures, Remesh and Jessie

detach the rigging used to feed and train

the unborn baby and restrain Devina.

Another contraction, and her brisk panting

is a windstorm in the garden. Within

a minute, the baby's head appears. With

the next contraction, the next push, the baby

gushes out in an amniotic ooze.

His body is normal size, but his head

is three times as big, the baby's dark orbs
wide open, gleaming with intelligence,
power and malice, its hands soundly clenched.

All at once the whole garden shakes itself,
like a dog after a swim in the ocean.
When everyone recovers, they are stunned

to see a normal-sized woman—Devina—
cuddling her normal-sized child to her breast,
no sign of Alyston. Azra joins them,

covers them with his cloak, regards them gently.
He turns back to the others, gives a bow.
'Thank you for your help. I will care for them.

This is my garden now.' He pauses. 'Maybe
the kosmos isn't as complex as I
once thought.' Tears rim his green eyes as he gazes

at the small sleeping form in his wife's arms.
'But you will have to leave now. This birth will
not go unnoticed by Abzzu. Take Phaox

and return to your road. There is still much
to be done.' As soon as he finishes,
each particle in the garden begins

to blaze with its own iridescent colour,
like the first hues of creation, when there
is only that spark of sound that divides

into first light, first motion, first design,
themselves sparks for all that will follow, ground
of inspiration for return to sparks.

As the scintillations of light spin wildly,
the pitch of their pulsations soars and whines
until notes shatter neighbour notes, the shards

reforming into shriller notes that shatter
again and again, climb to higher octaves
until Zane and the others feel their ears

become fragile like drum skin stretched too tightly.
Devina looks at Jessie, smiles, and pats
her stomach. Then she looks at the Dremaan.

Another smile, though with a hint of malice,
and for an instant Zane sees Shultar's face.
Someone laughs, and the whole scene splinter-flares.

33. Closer to Home

When eyes recover and their minds regain
the means to shape dot, line, surface and texture,
Azra, Devina, Alyston are gone.

The travellers shuffle towards the gate.
Around them is the stillness of prey watching
the stealth of a predator, shiver-silence.

After they climb into the pannier,
Remesh takes hold of the reins. 'Where to now?'
Jessie peers along the length of the wall

in both directions, then back on their route.
She thinks she sees a black, flickering mist
creeping towards their overnight campsite.

She points to the right, where the land slopes up.
'I think it's time to leave the depths of Thexlan.
The one way to learn the truth of this journey

is to cease hiding from ourselves, the dark,
to confront our fears from a place of strength,
so that everything else will be exposed.'

Remesh isn't so sure, but Zane stares deeply
at Jessie's face, sees the determination
and clarity in her eyes, and agrees.

Remesh turns Phaox around. 'Let's go then.'
As everyone settles into their seats,
Zane looks at the wall and recalls Adiska,

home of the Dremaan temple, his abode
for four years of training, skills of the body,
mind, spirit, from carriage of water bucket

down cobbled streets without spilling a drop,
to complex calculations of star movements,
to conjurations of demon and angel—

sometimes as mere facets of one's own soul,
loss, anger, bliss and hope; sometimes as those
imprints of communal souls that rule self:

parent, teacher, lover, trial and elixir;
sometimes glimpses into what dares creation,
that first cascade of nothing into something,

with its standing pools of will and awareness,
and last governance of all things, the spark
sought for, the dread silence within the spark.

Not enough time to learn all, master any;
the city was under constant attack,
not by armies or magic, but by nature.

The drifting hollow sands from within Chos
were on the march, desert that would not stop.
Everything covered turned to sand, as though

the whole world were fading, like Shultar's castle.
Only when the sands encircled Adiska
did Zane learn of the strong Dremaans called Kenri,

those who were destined to maintain not just
a part of Ghajat, like Elgron or Shultar,
but the whole world, though only for a time.

The current Kenri, Beraint, was near death,
his song-spark of power and vision fading,
though he doubted this, as all Kenri do.

Someone needed to challenge him, but no
Dremaan was willing to face him, or had
already failed the tests. That left the students.

But first they had to prove themselves Dremaan.
Being the last to commence training, Zane
was the last to be tested. He met Elgron

in the temple's central atrium, tiles
worn to dull sheen from centuries of feet
walking to lesson or *murga* or other

ceremonies in the service of fortune.
'What do you see here?' his master asked him.
Zane pointed to the statues of Dremaans

or Ghajat gods in their niches around
the courtyard and told stories about each.
Elgron smiled, merely repeated his question.

Zane pointed to the temple and the stars
seen through the open roof, and told those lessons
of the pattern-bonds between star and man.

Elgron frowned, pressed for a considered answer.
Zane looked down, eyebrows knotted with annoyance.
What hadn't he described? Around, above.

But not below. And not what was seen through
the eye rather than with the eye. He moved
to the side of the tiles, noted patched colours

like a child's finger painting out in rain,
focused his sight, relaxed his mind, to see
what had always been beneath sandalled feet.

Like a *murga*, the colours on the tiles
 began to deepen, strengthen, form line, curve
 and shape, an outer ring of painted figures,

boar, eagle, salmon, firefly, nubile nude,
 breast-feeding mother, weeping ancient woman;
 a central glyph: white feather, spiral web.

Elgron asked Zane to summon this same creature.
 For three days he evoked spirits and souls,
 demons and angels, for advice and power.

No food, no drink, no sleep, hallucinations
 of vision and sound that wove through each other—
 his mother's tales, his sister's screams, the touch

of Shultar's magics on his skin and mind—
 but still he persisted long after others
 had walked away. With an emphatic gesture

he dismissed all these fragments and wish-figments
 of illusion, sat cross-legged, slowed breathing
 to the light pant of autumn, sank his mind

into the pit of his belly, and waited
 without consciousness of waiting, for entry
 into whatever mystery remained.

For nine hours Zane sat motionless while all
 about him the clear sands of Chos formed shapes
 to tempt or overwhelm him: smiling goddess

who disrobed and swung her breasts before him;
 ogre brandishing in both hands war tools
 that changed from spear to axe to bow to all

manner of shield and projectile machines;
thin, bleary-eyed scholar with book and chart
and promise of wisdom in symbols drawn.

Finally Zane smiled. Through the depths of breath
he brushed the core of his song-spark, through breath
he realized the world was only breath.

As he stood, his eyes blazed with violet flame.
He told his master: 'The one creature who
can weave between all like the spider, who

can see distance like the high eagle, who
can leap into the gap between all links
and sight, is man.' The symbol rainbow-blazed

for an instant, opened into a staircase
leading down into darkness. Elgron pointed
the stump of his right arm towards the stairs,

told the new Dremaan to wait at the bottom.
There was one further feature to this quest
to find a new Kenri and save Ghajat...

An abrupt swerve in their steed's motion caused
by Remesh's lack of skill jolts them all
back to the present. He apologises.

Jessie studies the broad band of fringed light
on the horizon. Where is her bright sun
in its blue sky, the Milky Way at night?

If Thexlan was both ground and sum of all,
why did it not echo experience?
She doesn't know how obvious her thoughts

till Zane stands beside her. ‘If Thexlan is all worlds at once,’ he says, ‘the light may be purely spiritual, the means of substance.’

‘But matter comes first,’ she replies. ‘The dense sphere of energy flash-expanding, then contracting into particles and gases,

then slow accretion of elements till suns and planets are born. Then life, then tools, then cities, wealth, then destruction of life.’

Remesh jiggles the reins, shifts in his seat. ‘Yes, I believed in that. From dust to dust. Nothing but, even if it gains the skill

to fashion itself into its own vision.’

Zane catches the tone in his voice. ‘And now?’

Remesh checks the road ahead. ‘I’m not sure.

Certainly there seems to be a state after the dust of life, else we wouldn’t be here. But—’ His attention is caught by the need

to navigate a series of haphazard chasms and undulations. Zane takes on his thought: ‘But whether the spiritual is

also the beginning as well as end?’

Remesh nods. ‘I can’t see the use.’ ‘Same here,’

Jessie says. ‘Why return to what you’ve left?’

Zane stares out of the pannier to where Mt Alkerii arises from the plain.

‘Haven’t you ever wanted to go home?’

They all fall silent and are so caught up
in their own thoughts they do not see the wall
slide into the side of the rising slope.

Until that moment Zane has had no thought
of returning home, except for revenge.
He had hoped Shultar would destroy his village

during the madness of her last days, when
the poisoned *sorra* diminished her powers,
drove her to despair, and she lashed the land

about Aimal with continuous lightning,
which sapped her rage and skills to the point Elgron
could infiltrate the castle and help Zane.

Once she was dead, he was eager to ravage
Tarlkar himself, but Elgron restrained Zane
and whisked him to Adiska for his training.

Then came the challenge of the sands of Chos,
the battle with the dying, yet defiant
current Kenri of Thexlan, and Zane's capture

of the Thulsword, the prime symbol of change.
Once he wielded it, he thought of returning
to Tarlkar, but knew the task before him

so much greater, so much more elegant:
to discover the secret of unknowing
and not only destroy the village, but

everything else, while he remained outside
the unspell till he could remake Ghajat
into the place where his sister and mother

would never die, Jeera would never die.
 If he couldn't manage to stay outside,
 he didn't care, as long as everyone

suffered as he had suffered. There was nothing
 else to do. Home was the feeling that all
 was back in place: his mother singing tales

of worlds within worlds, he and Kerrilea
 competing for her attention, the two
 of them learning how to cast the sand painting

and bring fortune to the family. Home
 was the good past, as though evil were not
 what needed to be done to reclaim it.

He wipes his eyes, wonders if home could be
 a place to return to, stories to tell
 to loved ones, before setting out again.

*Crack open a lump of rock and at times
 there is nothing but dirt, at times a fossil,
 at times the glitter-eye of a black crystal.*

Jessie has never wanted to go home.
 Not even if her father died. She wanted
 to be far away from him and all others

who mouth God's words yet act with venom-smile.
 One day, when Jessie was rubbing her eyes
 after hours interpreting pictographs,

she saw the symbol for baby and thought
 of her mother, an ache-throb at the belly
 she was sure others would term homesickness.

She wanted her mother's arms around her,
like those days in church when Father was raving
about the world's decay and villainy

and she would lean on her mother to smell
the lavender in her crocheted jumper,
feel her hand pat Jessie's thigh and rest there,

cosy warmth that shields, soothes and does not judge,
like an arbour of roses, all thorns outward.
She was too young to know how harm could come

from one who said she loved you, then left you
to be hurt by others who profess love.
That day she blubbered hysterically, tears

almost ruining the ancient script—how could
she hope to see her mother again, who
had run away because of her afflictions,

according to her father? And now, Jessie
rubs temples and forehead, ache behind eyes,
that bearing-down-grief to tears or collapse.

Her mother is alive, somewhere. But Jessie
may not be, if she doesn't escape Thexlan.
Yet why would her mother be at her side,

while she is in a coma, though she never
came when Jessie was living with the mad?
That coma vision must have been a dream.

Home. She has not made one, except for lovers,
who murmur when inside her they have come
home, their lost home, but she is always silent.

Wandering through this vast unknowable,
 ever-changing landscape of tale and soul
 is the only home she may ever know.

*The white moth tears through silk to fire-husk air.
 Orb-weaver mating voracious. Star eggs.
 The dung beetle rolls black sun to its cliff.*

Remesh doesn't care about home. He never
 had one, except maybe at The Ice Temple,
 and even then the place had turned on him,

as he imagines all homes do. He snaps
 Phaox's reins, his confidence increasing
 the more the creature comes under control,

like a brush stroke on canvas leaving paint,
 shape first revealed in his imagination.
 Remesh sees himself guiding them throughout

this lost and barren world, which would revive
 with each step of their passage, into blooms
 of all his flowers, painted and imagined,

this world as most ancient version of his,
 or maybe as harbinger of all worlds,
 or both together, or these with negations.

All he knows is the comfort of these reins
 in his hands and the impulse to outrun
 not only Abzzu, but everything else

pursuing him, guilt, love, despair, that hunger
 for what he knew the world could not deliver
 and he struggled to depict. If he had,

such paintings would have been priceless, for he
is sure that what he craved was what drove those
who crammed The Ice Temple. Was it a sense

of home they, he, desired, or something else?

A sense of place, not to return to, not
for comfort, support, a handout before

being pushed back out the door, but a place
of purpose, of direction, which is what
Remesh feels now, even if the effect

of pursuit. Is there any other way
to engender purpose, a running keenly
towards a thing, instead of away from?

Maybe that's what Jessie meant when she pointed
uphill. He allows himself a tight smile.
Maybe these companions can teach him things.

*Take the calliper to the world. Scoured brass.
Wing-beat should tilt the clock into fire-works.
After the fall into dark, scaffolding.*

Sitting at the back, Rynobar frowns as
she views the others muse on home, and listens
to the murmur of star-song above her.

She can never go home. Often she wonders—
whenever night arrives and the song beckons,
whenever the lights in her body echo

the patterns dancing above her—if maybe
she carries her home, her kin, within her.
But even if she is all the stars, all

hoya appetites, there is a contentment
lost to her, what her companions would call
a sense of home, replaced by a compulsion

of fate, the necessary joy of movement,
of widening her song into the world,
of glimpsing the birth of light from her wings.

*Perfection of heat. Golden sphere. The strife
that impels separation, lust of union.
How water becomes earth becomes air. Hallow.*

34. The Call of Dust and Flame

Soon they regain the grey road and their speed increases. Jessie glances backwards, but can see no more of the shadow miasma.

She wonders if Abzzu has jumped ahead, waiting to pounce as they approach that dark flat-topped peak in the distance, rising from

a rust-coloured plain their road snakes across. She prays that there will be no more delays, and a little later notices how

the passing landscape is gradually changing. Gone are the massive cracks that hindered them. Even the flat greyness has been replaced

by swathes of prickle-moss and clumps of heather. The road is hard and smooth, with indentations crossing it at regular intervals.

Nudging Zane, Jessie points to Mt Alkerii. 'What else can you tell us?' His temple twitches as the Dremaan channels his memories.

'All I have is my mother's tales about the creation of Ghajat, and those lessons from Shultar and the Temple of Adiska:

When the grains of the sea of Chos formed land, it was still dust. Larandor, the first Kenri, took a handful of dust, breathed upon it,

chanted a spell of making. The dust formed a seed that turned other dust particles into seeds of the world. All the dust danced

to his song and formed shapes that flowed and grew
 as the music split into melodies
 that combined and split again and again.

Soon Ghajat was a world of earth and sky.
 Under it was Es Xayim, tree of lights,
 its roots drawing sustenance from the rings

Thexlan discharged from the first Mt Alkerii.⁷
 He points out weathered craters far ahead
 of them, two on each side of the grey road.

‘Kenri and Dremaan have seen those in visions
 and say they are remnants of former cycles
 of existence. They also say the Kenri,

who is the Dremaan for all of Ghajat,
 becomes the keeper of the tree of lights,
 which connects with Mt Alkerii, and listens

to the music the land makes as it flows
 and evolves, listens to the land’s requests.
 Each morning the folk of Ghajat make known

their wishes for good fortune, some by prayer,
 as I’m sure those of your worlds also do,
 some by the sand pictures that imitate

Larandor’s first spell, and the mount sends forth
 a Keth ring that not only contains answers,
 but also the next challenge for each world.’

He slumps in his seat. ‘That’s all I remember.
 And in this place, I can’t even be certain
 that what I recall is what truly happened.’

Remesh laughs. 'No memory ever is.
There are times I don't think it's necessary.
Animals don't need it, as they engage

with the world through instinct. Maybe that's all
we ever needed: a good set of instincts
etched into brain and spine.' He pats their steed.

Jessie disagrees. 'Memory guides thought
and choice. Memory carries all emotions
of experience, those we either wish

to avoid or to evoke. We are conscious
because of memory.' 'Or other way
around,' Remesh says. 'Either case, it's more

hindrance than help.' Zane shifts so angrily
in his seat the pannier rocks sideways.
'What of your paintings? Surely memory

influenced them. Would you throw that away?'
'Yes, rather than have that pain before me
each day. Without memory, there's no pain.'

Jessie lowers her voice. 'And no joy, either.
You are denying that which makes us human.'
Remesh chuckles. 'You yourself have decried

the destructiveness of man in your world.
You've called the human a plague upon life.
You deny the human in your own way.'

Jessie contemplates the changeable aura
of Thexlan. He is right. She hates mankind
for what it has done to her and her trees.

The world she faces now is a reflection
of how she saw her world developing.
Greed and lust had ravaged air, sea and land.

Yet the only way that mankind might die
is if it killed the world it has infested,
and so doing, destroy all other creatures.

Jessie finds herself crying. She is dead,
or nearly so, and still the schemes of craving
pursue her, as does her hatred of all,

including herself. She wants to be dust.
Yet is such oblivion possible,
matter, soul, spirit always changing form?

Maybe oblivion can not occur
because deep down even the most despairing
of souls has a masked urgency for life.

What will they find on Mt Alkerii, life
or another journey of life-in-limbo?
And how to tell one from the other? Faith?

Zane cocks his head. 'Does anyone hear that?'
Remesh slows Phaox to a walk. They hear
nothing, then a faint cry comes from a grove

to their right. They are too far to hear words,
but the tone of panic is obvious.
Remesh curses. 'But it's out of our way.'

Jessie glances at the meteor, then
Mt Alkerii, turns again to the trees.
She gives a little laugh. 'Everything is

in our way and on it.' Zane shakes his head.
'What about Abzzu and that thing above?'
He takes out his sword. 'This may be a trap.'

He does not add that sometimes he considers
the whole of Thexlan is an endless trap.
Jessie taps Remesh on the shoulder blade

and nods towards the trees. 'And maybe not.
This journey is supposed to be about
gaining wisdom. How can we ignore those

obviously in trouble?' Zane says nothing.
When Phaox stops at the edge of the grove,
his sword hums as though in anticipation.

The next time they hear the cry it is clearly
a plea for help. Zane takes the lead, with Jessie,
Remesh and Rynobar in single file.

Unlike the groves they have passed recently,
the trees are bare of leaves, trunks badly gnarled,
with motley-coloured bark, effect of blasts

by scalding winds, though now there is no breeze,
no sound at all, apart from scraps of sobbing
and that taut air full of sparks before storms.

They step over rotting logs and around
pools of rancid weeds. The smell is intense
with decay and from it their skins acquire

a film of slime that grows colder the deeper
into the coppice they go. Jessie thinks
of the ghost stories she read with her mother,

almost laughs at the stereotype setting,
but when a pool ripples and a pale face
glares at her then fades beneath the black surface,

she chokes back her derision. Its eyes were
like her own when in strong light—purple flickers.
She stiffens her composure and walks on.

As they enter the clearing, gilded light
with shadow edges, the temperature drops
even further. A large stone altar squats

in the centre. Chained to it is a female,
legs apart, breasts exposed, coffee skin glinting.
Again Jessie fights back a mocking jeer.

Surely this must be someone's wish-fulfilment
and Remesh right to suggest they ignore
the cries. Then Jessie remembers the way

some men in her father's bible group leered
at her new church dress just before her father
banished her from the room. Fantasy or

reality, the woman deserves rescue.
As Jessie takes another step, a ring
of lurid flames bursts from the ground around

the altar and a low voice within thunders
with laughter. 'She is mine,' it declares. 'Leave,
if you value your souls.' Jessie laughs back.

'How corny.' She reaches out. Intense heat
sears the palms of her hands. She laughs again
and the heat lessens. Zane starts to pull her

away, but she shrugs him loose, glares at him.
 He backs off. She sees Rynobar unfurl
 her wings, and gestures her compliance too.

The flames crackle and spit more violently
 and the voice becomes shriller. 'You must leave.'
 Jessie can see a vague shape standing next

to the altar. Something gleams in its hand.
 'I suppose you intend to ravish her—
 before or after you sacrifice her

to the devil you worship in your weak,
 childish way.' She titters, then starts to cackle:
 'Mighty lord, I offer this sacrifice

if you grant me my boon.' The dark shape blazes,
 brings the blade closer to the woman's chest.
 Jessie steps through the flames, then staggers briefly

when she recognizes the woman's face
 as her mother's. The shape isn't her father,
 but a more grotesque version, fire and smoke

and sneer, as when the layman gave his sermons.
 'Whom do you serve?' it asks, just like her father
 each day, and for an instant Jessie sees

herself lying on rough stone, arms and legs
 fettered, then gripping a small, sickle blade
 while looking down at herself on the altar.

Regaining her mental balance, she senses
 the heat behind her now. 'I'm not afraid
 of you,' she says as she crosses her arms.

The thing laughs and the intense flames press her forward. She remembers the suffocation outside the steel and ivory gate, knows

Zane had been right. This is a trap, of sorts. She lifts her arm, sees blue fire racing through her veins. Nothing but pain will be spilled now.

‘It’s not me you have to fear, little one. What do you fear? What have you always feared?’ Her father’s face becomes hers for a second.

She recalls her tree’s rough bark at her back, that comfort of knowing no one could find her nook. She clenches those feelings to her.

‘It is not my fault my mother left us.’ Her father leans towards her and she suffers that scorn of presence she always endured

when he towered over her, adult height to a child’s fragile haven. She stares up at him, smells his sodden breath, does not flinch.

His form shrinks back, though the smile does not change. ‘So what caused your affliction?’ Jessie feels her mind contract into a foetal ball

of shame. She has no answer. She knows whom she blamed: her parents, the world. She now grasps this isn’t enough. What lesson is there

in her albinism? What if she is the one to blame, for mortal sins committed in a former life, if she believed such

an arrangement, which she hadn't until
finding herself in Thexlan. What god would
assign affliction here, good fortune there?

For what purpose? Always her father's answer:
'Part of His plan for mankind. Do not judge
His creation. Accept His Mystery.'

Each time a stranger stared at her; each time
a child gasped, each time a so-called girlfriend
pointed at her while talking with the boy

Jessie had told her she liked, and they sniggered;
each time a teacher told her to stop staring
out the window, stop snivelling; each time

she was set to open her veins, smear colour
over her bare skin, and say to the world,
See, I am just like you; each time she breathed,

she cursed God's Mystery, cursed the idea
of Mystery. What use was life if one
could never unravel its rules, its reason?

But now, in the face of such a rejection
of Mystery in this rite she is sure
she has studied before, she has no choice

but to learn the motive of Mystery
or be condemned to stay within the flames,
watch her father cut her mother's throat, be

both of them in that bare instant of death—
holding the knife, feeling it cut her flesh—
awaken again, watch and do again.

Suddenly she hears music. Zane is playing
his lyre, and vital woe wells up in her
as in an instant she sees what he sees.

35. The Sacrifice

Zane waits at the bottom of the steps under the temple. After a few minutes, Jeera joins him there. She also had passed the test,

but Elgron told her to await Zane's efforts. 'Hopefully together you will be able to defeat the Kenri and save Ghajat.'

They wait in trepidation as a boat, guided by a man in shadow, glides over a silent underground sea towards them.

He gestures them aboard when the boat beaches and they head back into an iridescent darkness that quickly resolves into braids

of light high above them, like vaulted beams in a cathedral, stretching into distance, the length and breadth of the vast underbelly

of Ghajat, strands with running beams of light that sometimes shimmer-join in one long burst, but more often fade for long periods.

Sometimes all of them fail to ignite, plunging this underworld into a still ice-shiver that would numb all sense if darkness persisted.

They travel for hours and then see the strands of light converging to a single pillar flickering on an island before them.

They travel up a deep lagoon towards the centre of the island. Massive mangroves line the banks. Nothing moves. The only sound

is the sigh of their craft across the water,
which rejoins swiftly behind them and stays
flat and black even when the strands light up.

When their boat touches ground, Jeera and Zane
turn to thank the silent tiller man, but
he has vanished. They quickly make their way

to the massive trunk of light-braids awash
in halo swarms, the gaps between the flashes
less obvious, though the rhythm is speeding.

An old man dressed in tattered purple robes,
with a black sash instead of Dremaan white,
swinging a crystal sword, stands at the tree.

‘More victims to be tested by Beraint.’
The words and the rhythm of the blade echo
each other, speech, man and weapon one fate.

Jeera is quick to see what must be done.
She offers her right arm. The sword arc-slices
the air and passes right through flesh and bone

without any damage. Beraint nods once,
turns to Zane, who offers hands clamped together,
proof of fate-strength, and smiles at his beloved.

Again the blade hums as it swings, again
there is no damage, again Beraint nods,
then says, ‘There is one more test for you both.

For one of you to be the new Kenri,
fate would have given you *Anen*, the jewel
that fits here.’ He shows them the empty pommel.

Jeera and Zane look at each other, smile.
She takes the pendant from around her neck,
unclasps the small, silver sphere he sent her,

tosses it to Beraint, who inserts it
into the pommel, sighs, then bows his head.
'Now to find out who will feed Es Xayim.'

He charges them, sword-point nicking Zane's chest,
Jeera's left shoulder, as both students leap
aside, amazed the weapon can now hurt.

The Kenri pauses, blade above his head.
'You may have passed the Thulsword's Kenri test,
but with *Anen* it now can kill. Needs to.'

The students draw their own weapons, and watch.
Beraint starts chanting in time with his swings
and they realize he is summoning

the power of his song-spark, as well as
tapping into Es Xayim's fading strength.
As they dodge and parry the Kenri's blows

they chant their own inner songs and together
weave a simultaneous dance of strike,
block, counter-strike, wooden sword and twin swords

against the crystal blade, until Beraint
withers under their combined attack, drops
his weapon, falls against the braided trunk.

'Do it,' he says, 'before all the lights fail.'
Zane takes up the sword and plunges it through
the Kenri. They watch as it drinks his blood

and flash-blazes with scarlet incandescence
while he fades into dust that swirls and rises.
A voice tells them to thrust the weapon into

the tree, but Zane pulls it aside and watches
the blood-light start to fade. 'Now,' Jeera yells,
then grabs him when he starts to walk away.

'Why?' she asks. 'Because this world killed my mother
and my sister,' he replies. She shakes him.
'But you will die.' He wishes he had Shultar's

Keth shard and the knowledge to move outside
Ghajat, but resigns himself to this lack.
He shrugs. She peers at him. 'And I will die.'

He pulls away, his blazing eyes of fury
rimmed with tight tears. 'I pray Larandor will
forgive me and let our souls meet in Thexlan.'

'No,' Jeera screams, and attacks him. Again
there is clash of wood on crystal, again
song-sparks drive the fierce energy of battle,

again a Kenri is defeated, Jeera's
skill with her twin swords greater than all students,
including Zane, who ends up on the ground,

right arm aching from her disabling blows.
The Thulsword is dull-red and before Jeera
can plunge it into the tree, its lights waning

rapidly, the blood-vigour song-spark essence
fades with a sigh-tremor, as blade, tree, world.
She looks over at Zane, says, 'I love you,'

reverses the sword, stakes herself, the tree.
Zane dashes to her, but cannot pull out
the weapon. He watches it fill with blood,

hugs her tight, begs her forgiveness, their tears
mingling. In seconds her body sags, but
does not vanish. Zane sobs as the blood flows

into the tree, strands of light shimmering
with renewed life and power, rainbow colours—
the island, the whole underworld, aglow

as rapid pulses of energy travel
along the humming braids to quicken breath
in Ghajat and dissolve the sands of Chos.

When the Thulsword is drained, Zane pulls it out
and starts hacking at the tree as it starts
to absorb Jeera's body. He wants her

alive, the tree dead, all of Ghajat dead.
Then the tree speaks to him, her husky voice.
'My sweet, you cannot destroy Es Xayim,

nor can you bring me back. You are the Kenri.
Accept your fate. In that will be your healing.
I promise to be always near you, a halo

to help and protect, till we meet again.'
In his guilt and despair Zane ignores her,
slashes at nearby vegetation, screams

his defiance at Fate. He knows his task.
He will destroy Ghajat and remake it
with his loved ones returned, or destroy all.

With a single thought he creates a version
of himself to guard the sacred tree, conduit
for his Kenri power. As Zane moves away

he spies something fluttering on the trunk:
long strands of Jeera's black hair, which he folds,
kisses, then pockets. He summons the boat

and steers it towards Adiska, but not
before tossing *Anen* into the sea.
He will be the last Kenri of Ghajat.

36. To Unravel Herself

Jessie drops to her haunches, sobs for Zane
and his love of Jeera, whom she now knows
is Jenny, spirited childhood friend, sobs

for her sacrifice, though Jessie herself
cannot understand Zane's actions, blames him
for her friend's death, feels his grief, his remorse,

sobs too with the knowledge that even if
she can never escape the flames, the world
will constantly remind her of failed life.

How to find the secret of Mystery?
Part of her merges with Zane's music, plummets
and rises with gloom and blossom-bliss, while

another part tries to unstitch her musings.
She has read enough of fable and epic
to know how humans tackle and avoid

this question—clay figures, cave paintings, potions
of inspiration, degradation, flights
of dream, of amusement—without an answer.

She wonders if Zane's songs are attempts, not
to answer the question, but to evoke
an experience of core Mystery.

As with a music that starts low and climbs
in trills and cadenzas through pitch and rhythm
then seems to disappear in silent quavers

of the highest note and pause, Mystery
is not a riddle to solve, but a state
to be keenly felt. So why her affliction?

Maybe there is no reason other than
a trauma in the body caused by forces
beyond anyone's control, a chance change.

The only blame was how people responded
to her, though if she were to believe one
chooses one's next life, the blame would be hers.

Her head begins to throb under the strain
of such complex ideas. If one can choose
the next life, for those lessons contained there,

then it already exists, the choice also,
like a leaf buffeted by rain that falls
into a river. What use could there be

of a clockwork kosmos in which the end
is already known? Leaf tumbles to sea,
falls to the bottom, becomes mulch and fuel

for some future generation of tree
when the world axis shifts, sea vanishes,
leaf appearing once more to wait its fall.

She grips her temples and ignores the tread
of her father towards her. Jessie knows
he can not hurt her now, and never could.

In a crevice of her mind is an image
that would open with an answer, if only
she could dive after it, become it truly.

She sees herself as a raindrop absorbed
in the river in the sea in the moisture
drawn up by sun, sees herself as the cycle,

without losing awareness of each drop.
 She is each drop, can shift from any one
 to any other, be all at once, be

the whole cycle at once and everything
 the cycle touches, soil, pebble, flower, sun,
 everything that laps, sips, gulps, or absorbs;

be tiny mote, be planet, be between,
 be each thing at once, and all beyond each.
 The Mystery is itself, as she is.

Jessie has ceased being Jessie, yet knows
 which part of her sought such a state, which part
 seeks to help others through that state, which part

blazes within all others and all states,
 and how the illusion of state prevents
 the spark being known, being fanned to breath.

Jessie not Jessie always Jessie always
 not always memory of not and is
 and is not yet can be if only now

only the flow of flow of thought of image
 of sensation of insight of now of
 then, flow of flow and behind flow of flow.

She blinks, finds herself nodding to the music
 and watching tree and leaf and grass-stem glisten
 in the middle of a rainstorm. The flames

are writhing into steam that thins and scatters.
 The altar and its attendants have vanished.
 Jessie begins to shiver, cold and shock,

till arms wrap her with warmth. Her body crumples
as weariness takes her, more dizziness
as rain slows and thickens like spider webs,

which splatter her cheeks with cold, snowflakes falling
in between skeins of rain. She grins and chuckles,
puts out a hand and watches snowflakes melt

as soon as they touch flesh, then fade to mist
that briefly forms the faces of her parents.
Jessie whispers her thanks. The mist unravels,

curls around her a moment, then is scattered.
She breathes deeply, allows herself to be
carried back to Phaox and wrapped in blankets.

37. A New Poise

When Zane looks back at Jessie's grove, the trees
have sprouted deep, blue-green leaves and the hill
below is swathed in fine wavelets of grass.

A flock of bright parrots bursts from the trees
with constant screeching and much battering
of red-green to violet air, settle back

a little later, only to repeat
the spiral gesture, communal delight
in spontaneous weave of launch, flight, rest.

He wonders what really happened to Jessie
and why. Although exhausted, she is lighter
in some way, ease of aura, carriage, smile,

like one whose deep burden has been embraced
and revealed as an opportunity,
relief of fact, acceptance of fate's toil.

Remesh clicks his tongue at Phaox, steers it
to the road. Zane settles into his seat,
cradles Jessie's sleeping form, and begins

to notice how natural is the feeling.
Cold lightning strangles his spine for some seconds,
harrow intimacies, Jeera and others.

He starts to slide out from under her, but
she nuzzles into him and he relents.

The tang of her—a newborn's freshness edged

with zest for leap and lesson, bloom and blood—
shifts his gaze and he sees a brief smile play
on her lips. Like Jeera's. He turns away.

Jeera of the blue eyes glinting like ripples
 on Lake Tarlkarni, with sleek, crow-black hair,
 smile of crimson lips as she chided him

about his lack of flexibility
 his first morning of daily exercises,
 smile as she first beat him in weapon training.

Jeera of the smooth, sweat-radiant body
 a year after they met, the circle-dance
 of glances and throat-tangled words, of dreams,

broken by her sly cheek-nuzzle one day
 in a library nook, that night the slow
 press of hands to hands, slow lick at neck hollow,

nip of ear-lobe, blood quickening, the burst
 to relentless dissolve of skin through skin,
 rhythm cascades of heat and flutter-bliss.

Jeera of the open gasp the first time
 he fashioned a rainbow mist-bird for her.
 Jeera of the nuzzle-tears when she died.

Jeera. Jessie. The world is like a *murga*
 unfolding before him, grain, pattern, fissure
 within the painting, and maybe he is

back with his mother still learning the art,
 like that time the urgency of his need
 to prove himself an adept at this task,

rebel to his father's disdain, drove him
 into fevered focus and chant on chant
 early one day in his hideaway thicket,

sand grains jumping like boiling water, rhythm
of his breaking voice, flowing into pattern
as pinhole vision falls away to grey.

There was only silence, only a shiver
of presence as the silence opened into
deeper silence, like darkness fluttering.

He felt himself drawn further into silence,
presence fading to junctures of light-dark:
red-wild fecundity, blue-sear immersion.

Then came a counter-song, a melody
of yearning and despair, a prisoner
looking at sky through a small, barred, high window.

Caught between two familiarities—
the first ancient, though only just met, like
glimpsing one's original face on water;

the other recent, yet vital for glimpses,
like those tears needed to clear dust from eyes—
Zane felt himself a moth between two lamps.

An instant later he sensed desperation
of intensity in this second tug
at his awareness, knew the nuance there:

his mother singing him out of the *murga*,
drawing him home—smell of herbs in fish stew,
feel of bedding tucked around him. It worked.

How he missed her. But how he hated her
for leaving them to Shultar's moods and needs.
How he hated Kerrilea for being

the one chosen. How he hated the others
for allowing her to be the one chosen.
How he hated his guilt, hated his hate.

He swore there would be no more hate or pain.
For anyone. He would invoke the Spell
of Unknowing, no matter what it took.

When Jessie stirs and opens her pale eyes,
Zane doubts himself, his hate, his locked intent.
She looks at him. 'Have I been sleeping long?'

'Not long,' he says, then gestures down the road.
'Do you want to talk about it?' She shakes
her head, but smiles. He doubts himself still more.

Becoming conscious of his arms around
her, he lifts her slightly and slides away.
Though surprised by both his gesture of comfort

and his genteel retreat, she nonchalantly
mutters her thanks and brushes herself down,
before peering around to check their progress.

The road is still firm, though the soft verge shows
recent wheel marks and lines of footprints, all
leading towards Mt Alkerii, which lies

in the middle of an ochre plain, past
a series of heavily wooded hills.
Jessie squints towards the mountain and thinks

she can distinguish a complex of buildings
nestled in the gentle slopes at its base.
Her gaze drifts higher. The steep sides are creviced

by shadows. She shudders as she imagines
Abzzu lurking there, then regains composure
as though there's nothing to fear anymore.

She cranes her head further. The mountain rises
like an obelisk to the gods, but is
dented, like a target stuck in the ground

for ball games. She wonders what they will find
at the top, which seems flattened by incessant
battering against the hard dome of sky.

Jessie turns to the Dremaan. 'We still have
a long way before we reach Mt Alkerii.
I'd like to hear about your crystal sword.'

Zane looks up at the meteor, its speed
almost matching their own, its trail of dark
a little wider, then looks behind them

to where he can see Abzzu as a low
black cloud swaying over Alyston's garden.
'I suppose we're not in any close danger.'

'Worrying about Abzzu won't help us
confront it when the time comes,' Jessie notes.
Taken by the calm-logic in her voice,

Zane regards her and is surprised by her
graceful poise, her serene gestures, her aura
a bright mauve nimbus that stirs as she moves.

'Yet you don't appear to fear it,' he says.
She shrugs. 'I do feel more centred, more certain,
yet Abzzu is a danger, for it wants,

or needs, from us.' Remesh turns from the reins.
'What would that be?' 'I'm not sure,' she replies.
'I do know we help ourselves through these stories.'

Zane stares at Mt Alkerii in the distance.
A shimmer about it brings to mind Jessie,
her aura a ripple of single colour,

like desert mirage curtains overlapping
each other in constant fluttering motion.
Taking his lyre, he strums it for attention.

38. The Gem of Synrath

‘Since the first person saw patterns in stars
or wondered how to capture and use fire
or pleaded the return of some lost thing—

a child in the forest, a parent crippled,
light vanishing from eyes and breath—or listened
to the wind chase its tail, then caress trees

as if murmuring secrets of desire
and command, we have always wanted more,
have always dreamed of being gods or better.

We dance, chant, draw patterns in sand, compel
breath and blood to wisdom and power, look upwards
out of the cramping dark from which we came

and to which we wish never to return,
though the killing stroke is as close as laughter.
Something there is drives us beyond ourselves.

Dust sculpted to land, broken by wind, moulded
to bricks, built into towers, into gleaming
cities, walls rising from loathing and fear.

We are never satisfied. We are never
content with simple success. It has taken
many cycles of thought for me to dream

the final dream, many more to decide
how that dream must be concluded, and why.
Now I shall tell you of the broken sword.

The night I became Kenri, and lost Jeera,
my first love, who gave herself for Ghajat,
I had a dream, not blood, not shining swords,

but a great tower gleaming in the distance,
tall like a spindle for the wheeling heavens.
I saw myself climbing the wooden stairs

that coiled around the outside basalt walls.
At each turning there were round window panes
through which I could see bird's-eye images

of peoples and creatures thrashing and howling
and gyrating across landscapes of dream
and fate. Each spiral displayed different sins,

different virtues, as though birth and rebirth
of souls into higher and higher lives,
the consequences of acts over lifetimes.

Through one casement I beheld myself peering
in a window looking at myself, saw
the tunnels of my eyes and the bright darkness

keenly staring back at me. I awoke,
swore I would find that celestial tower,
swore I would find a way to topple it.'

He looks at the others, and perceives now
that in Thexlan the longer they have journeyed
together, the more open each one's dreams,

visions, memories become to the rest,
like salt dissolving into water, or
jewels reflecting their facets back and forth.

Rynobar sees most, for she had known him
in Ghajat; Remesh sees least; and now Jessie
can read his soul, though without judging him.

'I wandered for years, loving no one else,
but always seeing Jeera disappearing
round corners, or hearing her husky voice

in market chatter and outside my window
at mid-night. I studied mages and sages,
lived as mercenary or bodyguard,

killed those who stood between me and more knowledge.
On the days I heard Kerrilea's laughter
and knew my guilt once more, I would drink, fight,

drink again. One such night I heard a legend
of a rich land where gods ruled from a tower,
overseeing the lightning and the seasons,

a land where there was no hunger, no blight,
of fruitful harvests and bright lives, of wisdom.
The man who told me the tale had white hair

and the sign of the white snake on his cheek.
He sold me a weathered map, which I followed,
though never convinced it was not a lie.

The tower was nothing like my dream, being
a squat temple atop a hill enclosed
by a wall that separated the gods

from their people. I was warned not to enter
if not invited, but have never taken
such advice kindly. I climbed the low wall,

which had no guards except the fear of power,
strode up the hill to the tower and its spread
of buildings, was greeted like a lost son.

Though the world beyond the hill had all seasons,
the land of Synrath was eternal spring,
motley-gambol of creatures, blooms in nectar.

Each day we feasted and fought, and each night
we feasted and loved. Whatever was needed
arrived out of thin air, much like my time

with Shultar's spirits, but swifter. Not one
warrior died who wasn't resurrected
before the night's festivities began.

Each dusk a golden method of bells summoned
these gods to their ancient temple, from where,
as told me by the tawny-haired, dark beauty

I won as booty during tournament,
they would confer hopes and dreams on their subjects,
in the way of *murga* and Es Xayim.

Not being subject, not yet god, I was
forbidden to participate or watch.
Such commands to me are like tests of fate.

One day I transformed myself to a dove
and watched their ceremony. They were gathered
around a massive mirror in the floor.

Hands joined, they sang of health, wealth, and delight.
The air around them shimmered like fireflies.
Their chant reached a crescendo and the mirror

became wildly phosphorescent, with rays
of energy shooting from it and circling
that chamber so fast and bright, shards of lightning,

I had to cover my eyes with my wings.
When I could look the gods were incandescent.
Those who had fallen in our games of war

and lust were whole again, those who had craved
a new face or body were so transformed,
and I marvelled at how this crystal mirror

aided both ruler and subject, a blaze
of compassion cleansing both man and god,
love of life drawing from itself for more.

When they left I discarded my disguise.
As I circled the gem and studied each
gleaming facet, I remembered the portals

in my dream. I saw those crippled in mind
or body begging on the streets for food
or the means of oblivion. I saw

those with clay masks for faces chained to plough
or rows of benches, rows of machines, rows
of weaponry, their children lining up.

I saw infertile fields, saw savage storms
and sudden drought, saw crumbling homes, saw men
kill for nothing more than a scrap of pride.

I knew I was not in the company
of gods but leeches. Like Shultar. I strode
to the centre of that mirror, in which

was incised a dragon eating the sun,
and drew my sword. I would topple this tower.
The Dremaan blade could reshape anything.

The instant I started to chant, the gem
rippled with shadow-edged light, like lake waves
under stars, and the profane gods rushed back.

When they saw me, they joined hands at the edge
of their gem and aimed their leech spell at me.
I raised my sword, plunged it into the lens,

which fissured in a torrent of wild forces
that tossed me across the shrine. I awoke
and all the buildings were gone, the gods gone.

I found the Thulsword stuck in rocky ground.
As I gripped the hilt I was mesmerized
by a vision of their deaths. I saw coils

of light erupt from their bodies and swirl
around the room in a maelstrom of storm—
high-pitched shrieks, boom-crack of lightning, air riven

by ruptures like those below Shultar's keep—
then weave themselves towards the mirror gem,
a spiral of rippling intensities,

my sword as focus. As power roared through
the channel made, the stunned gods shrivelled into
husks of skin that quickly dissolved to dust.

With a sigh their temple, their waterfalls,
their pools of golden fish, their lavish gardens
with trees of speckled birds and silken blossoms,

their stone pagodas filled with jewelled divans,
their grottos of treasure and wine, their steeds,
their sundering wall, all faded from sight.

The Thulsword, which seconds before had sizzled
with the power flowing through it, was cool.
As I started to pull it from the ground,

I was aware of the surrounding land
and its peoples. Though I had no concern
either way for their health, I was content

with my defeat of their malicious gods,
who had usurped a gift that could have been
used differently. I expected to see

the returned energy restoring crop
and human face, but was shocked to see nothing
had changed, such good fortune beyond their grasp.

With a wrench the sword came free. I fell back
and stared at the broken end of the blade.
I burrowed frantically into the ground

for the missing shard, but to no avail.
It was only later I realized
I had ceased to age, and I often wonder

if the energy of that event had
somehow been absorbed by me as a curse,
some sort of reprimand for my own actions.

Not that it matters. There will always be
towers to climb, enjoy, deny, and topple.
He strikes one last loud chord, then palms it silent.

39. Another Juncture

Remesh gives a little clap. 'A good tale.
Must be a wondrous thing never to die.'
His tone borders on querulous, as always.

'Actually,' Jessie says, 'the opposite.
In my studies I researched every story
of immortal wanderers. They all spoke

of elation at first, then learning gained,
delights savoured, the journeys and adventures,
sin without repercussion, then the boredom,

the despair, the loss of loved ones, the constant
display of change while they remained the same.
And Zane in some way influenced those stories,

maybe wrote some of them. Always alone
and never savouring the focus-tang
of the ever-present moment that only

death inspires. There is no bliss in that type
of immortality for any person.'

'What other types are there?' Remesh asks her.

Zane leans forward. Jessie may have divined
his despair, but what of his desperation?
Does she know anything of his true path?

Jessie considers her epiphany
before the altar. Immortality
is a condition that only the kosmos

could claim. She does not understand how Zane
can never die, unless it is a function
of never being born. He has not lived

in her real world, as though he were invented
for, or by, story, and condemned to wander
because his story is not knowable,

not just incomplete. Yet, there's his effects
on her world, invisible traveller
reversing through time until ... until time

itself is born. Where could he go before
time exists, and how is it possible
to be always there, yet here with them now?

Although immortal, he is singular,
the rock the stream flows over and around,
yet never worn away by the grave fluids.

He can never be a part of the kosmos,
true punishment by the gods, bitter fate.
Her heart turns for him and she vows to help.

'The truest immortality is when
you give yourself to what is larger than
yourself, when you understand there is no

you, never was, only the larger thing.'
Remesh snorts. 'And you could suffer abuse
by those in charge of this true, larger thing.'

Rynobar stretches wings, narrows eyes, smiles.
'I thought you once belonged to such a group.'
The artist glares at her over his shoulder.

'Yes, once. A home when the tavern burnt down.
A work that filled me with the same contentment
my painting used to give.' He drops his head...

When Remesh refused to turn up the last
card on the night of the fire, the seer said
one more thing as he gathered up his deck.

‘I was you in another life, and Balis,
and the children Nikolina destroyed.
She loved them because she knew they were you.

The cards have told me I will die tonight.
You will soon see your god and kill for him.
The world will kill you, but you will not care.’

Then the man collapsed on the floor and died
before Remesh could summon any help.
When the last breath sighed to nothing, Remesh

felt a presence engulf him as he cradled
the man. A tender heat that grew much stronger,
wilder, the colder the dead man became.

Remesh felt himself fall into the blaze
that flowed into the dead man’s gaping eyes
and opened into a lattice of flames

connecting every life the man had been,
will be, always, knotted ribbons of flame
extending the vast horizons within,

each knot a soul, all lives one soul, one god
that breathed such fire along all these soul sinews,
that palpitated with every life tongued.

When the spinning facets of vision-heat
became excruciating, like a million
bee stings on the eye ball, he gagged and blinked,

found the bar filling with smoke. Remesh crawled
out the front door and staggered down the street,
his mind whirling for more union with God.

Days later he joined the Monady Church.
He helped in soup kitchens, became a layman,
served on councils, played his part in salvation...

The instant passes and Remesh looks up,
realizes the others are still waiting.
He jiggles the reins, keeps Phaox at speed.

‘Sometimes such work is false belief. There is
no promise the larger thing will treat you
well when all that concerns it is itself.’

Jessie conjures a long, smouldering branch.
‘You don’t see.’ She swirls the wood in large circles
until aflame, light dancing in her face.

She offers it to Remesh. ‘Take the branch,
yet leave the flame behind.’ ‘Not possible.
The flame is wood burning itself with flame.’

A gust of wind almost snuffs out her branch.
In that instant Remesh, Zane, Rynobar
see Jessie’s body glowing from within,

an indigo radiance more refined
and powerful than the aura she’s worn
since their journey started, all murky smudges

burnt away at the altar confrontation,
leaving a vibrant flow of calm beyond
a reflection of veins showing through skin.

Then the branch roars back into flame and Jessie's
aura recedes, as though her lesson is
much more than even she would dare to know.

She snuffs out the fire. 'And so are we all.'
Zane stretches, then turns around to face her.
'But the flame will eventually consume

the wood, and both will no longer exist.
Where is your immortality? The ash?
Out of which another branch is ignited?'

'The kosmos is an enormous flame-branch,'
Jessie says, then shrugs. 'I can't tell you how
it keeps burning, only that we and it

are woven together.' Then she remembers
the sense of her insight. 'There is no we
and it, only the kosmos and its play.'

Again Remesh snorts, then thumps his chest. 'Well,
I only know this being. And each thing
out there is out there on its own as well.

We have no ties with any other thing,
and then we die, always alone, no hope,
the utter knowledge that all faith is useless—'

'And end up in this nonsense place discussing
the mystery of life until we learn
discussion is also useless,' she says.

Zane moves over to her. 'I can't deny
an astonishing thing happened to you
back there.' He tilts her head with his left hand

and peers deeply into her pale blue eyes,
which do not flinch under examination.
'I can almost take on your certainty.'

He waves his other hand towards Remesh.
'But I have to agree with him. I haven't
had your experience, and never will.

The world is separate. Always has been.'
His conviction surprises him. 'The only
immortality is my life, my curse.'

Jessie stares back at him. His face is hard,
eyes the colour of the black trail above.
'While you believe that, you are indeed cursed.'

Zane turns from her at the sound of a snigger
from the front. 'Your derision is misplaced,
Remesh, for you're not beyond such opinion.

You still haven't told us why we found you
almost lifeless by the side of the road.'
Remesh sighs. 'I wondered when you'd ask me.'

He clears his throat. 'A simple answer, really.
I was waiting for judgement. I had lost
my talent, my lover, my faith, had spent

so long searching for them during my life
that when I arrived here, I was too tired
to continue. All that remained was judgement.'

He does not tell them how he had already
faced the mirror slab and been shown his sins,
how he had tried to recross the mist bridge.

His shoulders slump. 'I did search for them here, for a while, but could find nothing,' he sweeps an arm around, 'in this forsaken place.'

Jessie moves closer to him, pats his back. 'So you allowed yourself to fade.' He shrugs her away and raises his voice. 'Until

you interfered.' Jessie slides back. 'But surely you know nothing can disappear in Thexlan.' He turns to her, face a rictus of anger

and perverted triumph. 'Why do we run from Abzzu, if nothing is ever lost?' Jessie keeps her own face full of concern.

'Essence isn't lost. Only our attachment to things, which keeps us from expressing essence, what Zane calls our song-spark.' He turns away.

She continues. 'I think we avoid Abzzu because we do not want to sacrifice what we think is our soul.' She stares ahead.

'You don't believe we have a soul?' Zane asks. 'How can you be in a coma, and also be here?' She shifts position so both men

can see her. 'Like everything else, the soul is fleeting. When we are ready, it fades into something much greater.' Remesh hisses.

'Why are you still here, if your revelation has shown you this truth of reality?' 'Maybe there is a thing I'm meant to do.'

Remesh pulls sharply at the reins and spins
around as Phaox lurches to a stop.
'I'm tired of this gibberish, these puzzles.

Everything here is a sham. We're all fake.'
He leaves his seat, starts to climb down from Phaox.
'I don't know why I bother with this quest.'

Even when he disappears behind trees,
the others can still hear him muttering
about the futility of their actions.

Zane moves to follow, but Jessie stops him.
'He'll return quick enough.' Rynobar offers
to watch the painter without being seen.

Knowing the ill-feeling between the two,
Jessie and Zane are unsure of this plan,
but when she looks at the star-demon closely

she sees an open caring in her eyes
and agrees. The great wings haul Rynobar
high above the forest of mountain ash

and keep her hovering there as Remesh
pushes his way through twisted undergrowth
to whatever haven will ease his mind.

'Remesh is such a fool,' Zane says, his voice
strained by exasperation. 'Can't he see
this self-pity isn't helping at all?'

He points to the renewed thicket of trees.
'Especially when that is on our trail.'
They see a swirling shadow smothering

the hill, the tops of its green trees like banners
tossing wildly in the middle of battle.

‘How long before it gets here?’ Jessie asks.

‘Three, four hours, maybe.’ Zane looks down the road.

‘And about the same to reach Mt Alkerii.’

He moves to the front seat. ‘Remesh had better

make up his mind fast, or I may leave him
once I figure out how to control Phaox.

If you can, attract Rynobar’s attention.’

40. Prelude to a Death

Remesh doesn't know or care where he's going.
To get away from words and touch, those things
that brought him out of his stasis, out of

stagnation, is what he needs now. To be
nothing, to be still and empty, to vanish
totally into dust. He doesn't care

if a Dremaan or a Kenri can take
such dust and fashion it into a world.
It wouldn't be his world, wouldn't be him,

just those parts of him without him. The dust
of dream and desire. Sorrow and despair.
Nothing of him, for he is truly nothing,

as Jessie has pointed out to them all.
What made her such an expert? Just because
of a lavish vision. What proof is there

she saw anything at all, anything
worth listening to? He too had been gifted
with a vision of meaning, one confirmed

by the clergy at his new church, who claimed
similar visitations by the One,
who gave him tasks to benefit the One.

He shudders when he recalls Jessie's tale
of dancing universes. Not her words,
but their true speaker. When Rynobar's wingtips

touched her, their auras merged like coloured ink
in water and she grew taller, more shapely,
her hair, her skin, her eyes becoming darker.

Just then a large, cold shadow passes over
and his drag-footsteps echo around him.
He blinks, and looks down on a hardwood floor.

He has walked inside a derelict building.
Or maybe it formed around him, some magic
designed by Thexlan to madden him further.

He notes rows and rows of wooden pews facing
away from him, and thinks of the old church
at the orphanage. He sees the red curtain

at the front and knows he is in a theatre,
much like the one Nikolina and he
visited at the start of their affair.

His eyes widen, breath spasms. The same hall,
same panelled stage, same sewn rip in the curtain,
same old-fashioned, suspended coloured lights.

That front pew was where they had sat alone,
no hands entwined, no knee pressing the other.
A small ensemble had played in that corner.

Now, nothing, not even their instruments.
All surfaces are covered in thick dust,
as if there had been no performance since.

What had they seen? Remesh sits down and cradles
his head in his hands. A short play about
a condemned prisoner the night before

his execution, how he argued with
the priest about last rites, how he turned from
friends and colleagues, blaming them for the crime,

the brutal rape and murder of a girl
picked up in a bar. The play shifted from
past to present, with lighting changes stressing

the hotel room of the murder, the cramped
confines of his cell, the sea-chest one step-
mother shoved him into when she had callers.

Remesh glances up as the curtains part
with a rattling sound. The killer's still form
lies on the floor as it had at play's end.

From the musician's corner there arises
a weird sound, much like the wheezing of someone's
last breath, stretched to the upper registers.

The body rolls over, sits up, adjusts
its clothing and lifts its face to regard
Remesh directly. It is Nikolina.

He is desperate to touch her, but finds
he cannot move. Nothing moves in the hall,
apart from her lips and facial expressions.

'You could never leave me alone,' she says.
'I didn't want love, just oblivion
of lust and depravity. We were fire.

Why did you spoil it?' He wants to tell her
it was the love she showered on her charges
that intrigued him, and yes, caused him resentment,

but his lips, tongue and breath cannot form words.
He wants to touch her once more, but no matter
how much he wills them, limbs refuse to move,

as though his body is chained and suspended
before the stage as before judge and jury,
like the prisoner had been when being sentenced.

Nikolina titters. Remesh knows why.
He was the prisoner portrayed. The play
was written long after his execution.

‘You couldn’t kill yourself, unlike your mentor,
so forced the world to kill you. Who was she?
Did she look like me? Or what you recall

of your lost mother? Or the female worker
at the orphanage who abused you when
you were sick with fever? Or all of us?

Muddle of image and fact. You could never
tell the difference, part of the reason why
your work was so disturbing, so intense.’

His disembodiment intensifies
to the point Remesh feels his consciousness
spinning above the taunting ghost on stage.

What had she looked like? Every female face
he’s ever known looks up at him, their strident
laughter echoing around and through him.

One face keeps appearing. He knows her now,
the daughter Zane saw being born to Jessie,
Keea, whose song-spark may be Rynobar,

and who Remesh knows he has killed, will kill,
eviscerated like his famous paintings,
details the police could not, will not, miss.

Had he really seen her? He hadn't seen
a thing since Nikolina banished him.
Except his last paintings and the last card,

unturned, of the thin man. He painted evil
because he was evil. Flower and shadow
were his attempt at madness. Or were they?

Why did he really kill her? Chance or plan?
What was the difference to a world that needed
to protect itself so it could learn more

about its ways? Like Jessie's burning brand,
evolution from seed to branch to fuel
to flame to the invisible heat past

the iridescent edge of flame. His work
had tried to expose the world's dark regression,
its misguided retreat back to seed, back

to a garden of pleasure that could not
possibly exist, never did exist.
A burning was required. His. Even now.

Remesh looks down at the dark stage and sees
a candle flickering in the corner and,
on a bed, two bodies writhing and moaning.

Two hands grasping two thin wrists. Two knees prizing
apart glistening thighs. Teeth clamping down
on neck and shoulder muscle. Haughty laughter.

Remesh feels the blood on his tongue, and spits
the same time the man does. Then his mind spins
into shock upon finding himself looking

up at his eyes, wildness cloaking dead depths.
He feels her body's excitement as his,
feels the hunger of the body above

hers flowing into desperation, rage,
into invasion of skin and breast when
she sees the knife in one hand, feels the other

clamped over mouth. Each plunge of blade is timed
with each thrust into groin, until he spasms.
She becomes numb to pain, but not to terror,

as she feels the point of the knife nick nipple,
ear, and eye-lid, lips and cheek-bone. Blood swallows
her sight as though he knew that at some time

he would see through those frenzied eyes. The point
twists into socket in a desperate
venture to remove sight and memory,

but still she feels everything, even after
her lungs fill with blood and her heart is cut
from her mangled chest. Blood-drenched hands pull out

her entrails, array them on walls, his canvas,
map of life spiralling into sheer absence.
Somewhere there is manic laughter, then sobbing...

and Remesh feels a hand touch his dropped head.
He looks up from the pew, sees Jessie next
to him, Zane in the aisle, his sword at ready,

Rynobar hovering nearby, her face
impassive, though with a glint of assessment
in sun-twirling eyes, knowing what he knows.

Remesh looks at the stage, the curtain still
unmoved since he entered, the only music,
the sound of despondent sobs, dying snuffles.

The light shimmers like purple seaweed swaying.
A shadow shivers him again, and contour
and texture waver and stream into soft

slivers as the theatre starts to dissolve
into grey powder, leaving a large cave,
slanting pale beams from a fissure up high.

Zane checks the crannied shadows, then rejoins
Jessie who is standing beside Remesh
still seated on a ledge near the cave entrance.

At her feet are the remains of a flower
crushed when he climbed to his perch. She knows it
as the inspiration for his last paintings,

fluorescent bloom in the middle of darkness.
She hands Remesh the flower. He cups it
in both his hands and breathes on it. He waits.

Nothing happens, and his head droops. He dangles
the flower from his hand, watches its petals
spill to the ground. All at once a wind draught

sweeps them aside as Rynobar comes closer,
wings ruffling the air. She prises the flower
from Remesh's hands, holds it to her chest.

Her body quivers as light emanates
from deep within her and flutters about
the trampled flower, which then swells with shape

that hints at rose, tulip, chrysanthemum,
 a constant transfiguration of blooms,
 the cave filling with multiple aromas

that intoxicate and cleanse and enliven
 with each breath, with each particle of breath,
 as when making love under summer skies.

Rynobar opens her hands and the flower
 hovers briefly, then slowly starts to spin,
 streams of rainbow light revealing red ochre

figures etched on the cave walls, a parade
 of achievement, hunters with their spears, farmers
 with plough and sprays of seeds, city-state builders

with charter, crane and plumb line, machine pilots
 with fistfuls of lightning, flame eyes, dare-grins,
 their wings obscuring all but a dark sun.

The primal flower travels once around
 the cave, then Rynobar launches herself
 upwards, enfolds it with her star-etched wings.

As she hovers, luminescence fills her,
 flash-spears from feather tips and every limb.
 Remesh reaches both hands towards her, but

Rynobar moves away: 'It is not time.
 There are things I can do to help us all.'
 Her body moulds itself to arrow, aims

for the roof fissure. The others rush out,
 only to see a streaking burst of crimson
 arc high and vanish in a squint of sky.

Jessie and Zane grab Remesh as knees buckle.
He waves them away—‘I have to do this’—
and manages a few tottering steps

till Jessie brushes aside his objections.
‘You have nothing to fear from any help.’
He takes another step, staggers, agrees

to her logic. During the return trip
he asks why they had come after him.
As answer, Jessie points back down the road.

Some miles away a sinuous black smudge
is widening as it swallows the road.
‘I wanted to leave you behind,’ Zane says,

voice even, ‘but Jessie wouldn’t let me.’
Remesh thanks her. She lifts her palms. ‘Not even
Abzzu can come between us now.’ He nods.

Just before they reach Phaox, something rustles
the nearby bushes. With sword and staff ready
Zane positions himself before the others,

but nothing happens. They continue on,
reach their mount, and start to help Remesh climb
to the pannier. A small shape cries out.

‘It’s Siraporn,’ Jessie says as she rushes
to greet the animal, which purrs and nuzzles
as she picks it up. The cat is well groomed,

fur fully recovered, with glossy sheen,
muscles lithe, eyes alert, purr strong, insistent.
‘How do you think she found us?’ Jessie asks,

as Zane helps her into the pannier.
 He shrugs. 'Time is never sure here. Nor distance.'
 He takes hold of the reins and they depart.

After a few moments of jerky movement
 Phaox eases into a steady rhythm
 and Jessie is stunned to see the cat jump

onto the artist's lap, settle at once.
 Remesh flinches at first, then rests his hand
 on its fur. Siraporn nuzzles and purrs.

'Well,' Jessie says, 'that's certainly surprising.'
 She notes his red-rimmed eyes, sees calmness there,
 glimmer of acceptance and innocence.

She wonders if hers had looked the same after
 her encounter with silence and herself.
 Only Zane would know. She glances at him

and hopes fortune will favour him some way.
 If this journey is prelude for an act
 of revelation, when will Zane's occur?

She reflects on the landscape they are passing
 through now, not thistles and thorns, but lush grass,
 flourish of trees, green-gold facets of light,

wonders why such revelations occur
 only around death, state of mind that never
 truly exists if Thexlan is both ground

and parade of existence, maybe goal.
 Were her companions also leading lives
 in another realm, as she with her coma,

and dreaming such revelations that waking
would dismiss till the next big dream? A part
of her needs to dissect her revelations,

all such concerns, that part always divided
from the insight itself, an eye exploring
all but the eye, all but the fact of seeing,

while the rest of her, open to the act
of sight, and sight itself, what sees through eye,
mirror reflecting nothing but the mirror,

accepts the stubborn fact of Mystery,
which has her face, and those of everything
that existed, exists, or could exist.

Jessie has been graced a glimpse of that face
and can no more forget it as the tree
can forget the lightning stroke that scars it,

and branches change their course of growth and show
beauty beyond formulations of seed.

Then there is Abzzu. What part does it play

in revelation and choice? Is it truly
the locus of their fears? Does she dread it
or anything else? She looks at the mass

of flickering light, is filled with compassion,
much like she felt when she saw her companions
in pain. Maybe those gleaming energies

are a sign of its anguish—all it needs
is for someone to unravel its blight
of closed awareness, then frenzy will fade.

She taps Zane on the shoulder. 'Will we reach the mountain before Abzzu catches us?'

Zane urges their mount on. 'It will be close,

and we don't know if our arrival there will deter it. Maybe that's been its plan all along, to be guided there by us.'

41. The Song of Unknowing

A strange sound, more like rip than crack, more hiss
than boom, draws everyone's attention skyward.

The meteor is swiftly gaining speed

as it arcs across the sky, starving beast
abruptly unchained, while behind the sphere
the black wake widens, and through it is seen

a night without stars, the dark nausea
of bright nothing, bottomless well of silence
curving back on itself, swallowing echo.

They follow the tumbling mass as it drops
towards Mt Alkerii. It makes no sound
on impact, but the landscape lift-quakes wildly.

When they regain their seats and steady Phaox,
they see torrents of lightning, see smoke plumes
swirling from a crack half way up the mountain

then being drawn upwards into the wake,
which widens the more debris it receives.
Jessie's choked cry turns the others around.

Abzzu has reared its mass of shadow-sparks
through the black wake to the darkness beyond.
With each passing second, its pulses quicken

as it feeds on the abyss, and it swells
with turbulence, sends out thick tentacles
to encircle the world around the mountain.

Zane spurs Phaox forward. 'There's little time
to unravel this meaning.' Jessie sees
a curious smile pass across his face.

As they race to Mt Alkerii, they watch
nearby plant-life instantly shrivel, crumble,
as though what was being sucked from the mountain

was the foundation energy of Thexlan,
blood gushing from a sacrificial carcass
above a gold ceremonial bowl.

How long before the road itself began
to turn back to grey dust? And after that,
into what black furnace would the dust fall?

Much quicker than they expect—the destruction
to Mt Alkerii disrupting the weave
of time and distance—they find themselves hurtling

down a sloping highway past toppling buildings,
then slowing drastically as Phaox struggles
against the mob-flow trying to escape:

every dress from loincloth to powdered wig,
from tattooed face to soldier's garb, some screaming,
most silent, all holding to shapes they own.

What was once a bazaar is rubble—trestles
overturned, stalls collapsed, produce abandoned.
From nearby huts, people are loading goods

onto carts and rushing out of the city.
High above them, the wake is sucking gases
from the vent, while rocks of all sizes shower

the streets, each one caught in a fiery nimbus
that scatters when the debris strikes the ground,
which bends on impact before swallowing

the rock completely. With each scattering
of light, each rock fall, the nearby earth quivers,
then loses more consistency and colour,

like a wax landscape under desert heat.
Jessie grabs a woman running past, babe
in a papoose. Their clothes, once of fine cloth,

are in tatters, their faces streaked with grime.
The arm Jessie holds wobbles like soft rubber.
The woman keeps going and only stops

when her arm, already a bizarre angle
and stretched far beyond normality, seizes,
swings her to earth. Jessie rescues the child,

which has slid from its sling, observes the face
melting into itself, and hands it back.
‘What’s happening? Can anything be done?’

The woman looks blankly. Jessie shakes her.
The woman blinks and her eyes show alarm.
Jessie repeats her questions and stands back.

Her face twisted, the woman answers slowly,
like talking in fluid. ‘We are the guides
of the mountain and the sellers of dreams

discarded each morning when Mt Alkerii
dispatches its welcome.’ Her body wavers
in outline, and Jessie shakes her again.

‘Whatever struck the mountain is releasing
all possible dreams from its care.’ She shudders.
‘Soon there will be nothing left. Nothing left.’

The woman stares around her one last time
and stumbles to an overloaded wagon
whose wooden wheels are more oval than round.

Zane stamps the earth with his foot. The depression
springs slowly back to place, but leaves an outline.
He smiles. 'I've seen this same effect before.'

'Where?' Remesh asks, his eyes as filled with dread
as when he first meet Rynobar. 'Adiska.
When Beraint lost the power of his song-spark.'

He winces as shadows pressure his skull.
Jessie narrows her eyes. 'The tree of lights.
So Mt Alkerii can suffer like that?'

'Could be,' he says. Even with her composure
of insight, panic threatens to take over,
death of the kosmos no part of her vision.

'You became the Kenri. Can fix this, too.'
Zane's eyes glisten with concern and confusion,
yet he still has that enigmatic smile.

A new voice sounds behind them: 'I don't think
he's going to try, no matter how much
you may plea.' The group turns to face a youth

in burnished armour, holding a long spear
with two interlocking spirals of power,
one white like fresh snow, one red like spilt blood.

He is taller than Zane, with broader shoulders
and chest, black hair tied back, wide turquoise eyes,
and a poise Jessie knows she's seen before.

‘Who are you?’ she says. The youth smiles. ‘You know.’
She takes a step and eyes him up and down.
‘Alyston?’ He bows low. ‘At your command.

But only this courtesy.’ Levelling
his spear at the others, he looks to Zane.
‘Isn’t that so, Father.’ The Kenri nods.

‘What does he mean?’ Remesh whispers, and pales
a little when Alyston swings his spear
towards him. But Jessie ignores the threat,

walks straight up to Zane. ‘Your Spell of Unknowing?’
He peers at her. ‘Yes, I can see you’ve known.
In fact, I now can see everything clearly.’

Straightening his posture, like one who’s been
under a heavy load for centuries,
he places both hands on her shoulders, smiles

as if nothing strange has happened to them.
‘You don’t know how many cycles I have
endured being thwarted at the last second.

Each time I make a small change in the world
and each time I am closer to enjoying
Thexlan vanish. Your presence is the latest.’

He unsheathes his sword and cuts at her arm.
There is no damage. ‘You could be a Kenri,
which is what I need to finish this venture.

Then we can all rest in oblivion.’
The vent’s hissing makes it hard to note timbre
or tone of voice, but Jessie can see clearly

in Zane's dark eyes the cold determination
of his course. 'So I saved your life for this?'
'And I yours. The strange ironies of fate.'

She points to Alyston. 'Why do you need
a god? And I thought he was his own father?'
Zane smiles at him. 'Shultar is his real mother.

I found her during one of my trips here.
She is Devina, too, as are we all
at some point, though I still don't understand

that part of things. He keeps the plan in motion,
keeps us all off balance. Look behind you.'
Remesh and Jessie see Abzzu pulsating

just beyond the city borders, still reaching
to the ripped sky with a thick tentacle,
the rest of it blocking out the horizon.

All that is left of Thexlan is the mountain
itself and the damaged city below.
Tears rim Jessie's eyes as she recalls those

she met. Then something deep flutters within.
'You won't succeed,' she states firmly. Zane sneers
at her. 'Why not?' She ignores his disdain.

'If what you say is true, that this endeavour
has been replayed millions of times, and always
with variation, then it will continue

to replay. That is the bliss of the kosmos,
its eternal game. You're just as much pawn
as we are to you. We're all pawns, all players.

The kosmos sings itself through us, is us.
Haven't you learnt anything yet?' Zane laughs
and slaps his son on the back. 'Except, each

variation is not random. With each
I am closer to my goal.' Remesh brushes
aside Alyston's weapon. 'And that is?'

'As I said, absolute oblivion.
Isn't that what you wanted?' Remesh sighs,
massages his forehead. 'Yes I did, once.'

He looks up, conflicting emotions twitching
his face. 'But I've seen that's not possible.
Nor even desirable. We need life.'

Zane dismisses him with a wave of hand,
nods to Alyston, who nudges the others
towards a path at the side of the mountain.

42. The Rule of Fate

They climb steadily, the youth at the rear.
 Zane rolls his neck now and then to relieve
 doubt-tension of insight with dream and plan.

Could he truly be the initiator
 of such evil—the dictator's design
 when all else fails: destroy the universe?

Clearly Alyston thinks so. Just as clearly,
 Zane's memories, which were once jumbled like
 the remains of a town after great flood,

are now filled with images of destruction
 and repetition. Yet if his plan works,
 will not the nothing, the forever silence,

once more erupt into some sort of something?
 There is nothing and there is kosmos. Which
 is true? Are they goal and means of each other?

How can he know he is on the right path,
 how can anyone know? What has he learnt
 on this version of the journey that would

affect the outcome of the kosmos? If
 he did nothing, this too a choice, the kosmos
 will find some other way to sing its bliss.

At a cutting Alyston calls a halt.
 He tells the others to sit quietly,
 approaches Zane. 'You're lapsing. You warned me

about this, formed me to help prevent it.'
 He lifts a pendant from around his neck.
 'This should help.' Zane studies the smoky quartz

with its translucent veins that mesh and ripple
continuously, like lines of waves under
a shifting wind, realizes it is

a Keth shard, a rare fragment of dream-ring,
which can reveal the prophecy of all
that befalls Thexlan, if read properly.

He replays backwards all the episodes
of his current journey. His body trembles
with thrill-panics of insights and escapes,

then calms as he focuses on the scene
where he and Jessie cross the misty bridge.
The monk allows them each to choose a gift,

Zane's the long, bent wood-nail that since turned out
to have been Remesh's before he died.
What did Jessie choose? He rushes to her,

drags her to her feet, and begins to search
her clothing roughly. 'How dare you!' she shouts
as she pulls away from him. 'I'll dare more

before this time is done.' Remesh jumps up
to help her, but Alyston shoves his spear
at him. Zane grabs her again. She pulls back.

He cocks his fist. She stares coolly while reaching
inside her coat. 'I know what you want, Zane.'
She gives him the pouch with the spiral symbols.

He starts to apologise, but she turns
from him without looking, sits with Remesh.
Zane opens the pouch and tips out the gem,

which he immediately knows is *Anen*,
the gift he once gave Jeera and which fits
into the pommel of the Kenri sword,

though theirs was an unmarked silver sphere, not
this faceted jewel with its many etchings,
a new *Anen* conjured for a new cycle.

He unsheathes his sword and places the gem
into the pommel ring formed by the horns.
The blade starts to vibrate and tiny flames

flicker along its edges, but then die
when they reach the broken tip. Still, the weapon
thrums louder and louder, rising in pitch

the closer he brings it towards the quartz,
which also begins to hum, relics cut
from the same source and welcoming each other.

Zane closes his eyes and lets the vibrations
permeate his body, ripples of sound
intersecting and cancelling each other.

He focuses on those places where sound
piles up on sound, and within each a scene
presents itself. He races point to point

as he tries to locate the one that tells
the fate of his plan. With a shock like sudden
blow in a dark alley, he realizes

each scene is a variant of the one
he pictured the day when Shultar demanded
Kerrilea's death. He saw the Dremaan

stretched out above the mists of the abyss
and he standing there summoning up demons
and monsters to tear at her flesh and suck

at her soul. He had imagined her screams,
her cries for mercy, and the way he gloated
with his silence. Once she was dead, her soul

a tattered piece of fading mist, he had
imagined the same fate for those who stood
and watched Kerrilea burn. Everyone

would be destroyed as she had been destroyed,
and the more he discovered of Ghajat,
the more he saw the whole world was to blame.

One scene shows him singing a spell that draws
the darkness that is Ghajat and flings it
blazing into the mouth of Mt Alkerii,

to banish all dreams from Ghajat and every
other realm. Another scene shows him thrusting
a crystal sword into the sky and drawing

all energies to it till everything
is grey and he breaks the sword on his knee,
the released world-blaze consuming itself.

A further scene shows Alyston and him
beside the lip of Mt Alkerii, with
a woman chained inside the cone, throat cut...

A loud blast from someplace above disrupts
his musings. From the hole the meteor
had made, a crack is jagging down the mountain.

With rocks pelting them, they sprint up the path
hoping to reach the bend before the fracture
engulfs them in dream gases and debris.

A tumbling boulder strikes Remesh, but Jessie
grabs him and they stagger around the bend.
She sits him on a rock, stops the blood flow,

tells him the wound is minor. He thanks her,
then looks away quite suddenly. ‘What’s wrong?’
she asks. He tells her that he is amazed

at her compassion, for Zane, and for him.
Jessie’s stomach clenches. ‘What do you mean?’
Again he looks away, then says, ‘Your daughter.’

Ever since Jessie told the tale about
universes, Rynobar behind her,
with her, inside of her, the *hoya* speaking

with her, as her—no, as someone else, Keea—
she has known why Remesh and Rynobar
are wary of each other, has known what

Remesh will do to her daughter, has known
the painter’s fate before and now in Thexlan.
Jessie should be angry, would be if not

for her insights at the altar, though feelings
are not so readily transformed. Tears well
in her eyes, though she finds it strange to grieve

for a being not yet born, not yet dead.
Then her mouth opens with a shriek. She beats
at his chest with her hands, falls back, kicks him

as he tries to comfort her, slaps away
any hand that comes near, then hugs her knees,
sobs wildly until Alyston jabs her

with his spear. She brushes it aside, glares,
then moves to her feet, breath centred once more.
Ignoring the orders of Alyston

and Zane, she approaches Remesh, who isn't
sure what to do. Jessie touches his arm,
looks at him, her eyes filled with understanding.

They both nod, then turn as Zane yet again
commands them to keep moving. 'I don't care
what happened between you.' He is red-faced.

'But the next time you ignore what I say
you will be punished.' Jessie smiles at him.
'I don't think that's really possible now.'

Zane slaps her. 'What about that?' She wipes blood
from her lips. 'I forgive you.' He cuffs her
so hard she staggers. Remesh catches her

and shoots a look of revulsion at Zane.
'I thought I was depraved,' he says, 'but you
are beyond me.' He dabs away her blood.

'You don't have to goad him,' he says to her.
'I'm not.' She straightens up, turns back to Zane.
'You do what you have to.' She stares at him.

'And I will do what I have learnt to do.'
'And what is that?' 'Live my song-spark,' she says.
He raises his hand, but his son stops him.

'Not yet. We still have a long way.' Zane wrenches
his arm and glares at Jessie one last time
before turning back to the climb. He leaves

without looking around and is surprised
to find tears in his eyes. What is he doing?
Jessie saved his life once. And you saved hers,

another voice says to him, one that sounds
like a razor blend of Shultar and Elgron.
There is no debt. Only the rule of fate.

He remembers Jeera, her puckish laughter.
Her destiny was to love him and die.
Kerrilea too. Was Jessie to suffer

the same fate? Why did death occur to all
except himself? What dark, gut-deep churning,
with talons, fangs, and eyes cold with disdain,

steel voice of rage and bitterness, drove him
to kill those he loves? *No*, that voice insists,
you have always listened to your song-spark,

*always sought the deepest knowledge, and always
found it where death takes away those you love.
Because Thexlan killed them, it deserves death.*

The Spell of Unknowing is now in motion
and the dissolving world will dissolve sorrow,
his and all that of others, leave behind

the momentary bliss of satisfaction,
before that also dissolves into nothing,
dead clamp of nothing from which nothing blooms.

43. Sparks Weaving

Once they reach the summit of Mt Alkerii
 Zane strides to the outer edge of the path.
 Abzzu has almost swallowed all of Thexlan,

but when he stares into the greying cloud,
 when he strains his ears to its moans and crackles,
 he senses remnants of worlds he has travelled.

Nothing is lost yet, not until the mountain
 is totally destroyed. Everything else
 is fractured, is despairing of links broken

and distorted, links to lives, to the objects
 and emotions of lives, as though the cloud
 were a giant tumbling puzzle awaiting

the end of its distressing disbelief,
 awaiting the rebuilding of its parts
 as affirmation of a faith that is

greater than destruction. Was not the highest
 courage the belief in uncertainty,
 the acceptance that Mystery is more

important than certainty, than control?
 The greatest mastery is overcoming
 fear of whatever is outside oneself.

The Dremaan turns to his son, who has herded
 the rest into an alcove overlooking
 the enormous crater. 'I can't do this.

Thexlan deserves to contemplate its stories,
 live out its Mystery. We have to stop
 this bleak unravelling of Mt Alkerii.'

As he speaks, the grey cloud gives out a cry
of anguish, sound of space ripped into two,
which is reflected in Alyston's gaze.

Then comes anger, the youth's face turning crimson,
voice cracking with barely-constrained emotion.
'I was formed to destroy. You fashioned me.

You trained and prepared me, while in the womb.
You crammed my mind with images and knowledge
from every cycle of your journey, every

failure, poured into me your rampant zeal
to avoid repetition. Your doubt, too,
which battles my loyalty even now.'

His eyes cloud over briefly, a raw mixture
of that rage and frustration and despair
a child knows when spurned by judgmental parents.

Twice he rocks his head sideways, then exhales
with resignation. 'This is just another
failure scene, and I can't relieve your doubts.'

He levels his glowing spear at his father.
'Yet this too you have foreseen, and made ready.
To defeat even you if necessary.'

Zane shifts swiftly into a fighting stance.
'If you kill me, how can I then enjoy
my success?' Alyston adjusts his posture

and breathing to match Zane's. The spear thrusts out
without alert by muscle-twitch, eye-scan,
or sharp intake of breath, swift as snake strike.

The point nicks Zane's sword arm above the wrist.
As the spear returns to its ready posture,
blur of flame, Zane senses he may have trained

his son too well. The youth sees this and smiles.
'You will enjoy your success, even if
I have to disarm your body'—the spear

flicks out and back again, a bicep wound—
'or bind you using your own spells.' He gestures
and a wreath of energy spins around

arms and torso. But the Dremaan is ready,
and his own gesture cuts the wreath in half,
so that it falls to the ground and dissolves.

Movement blurs at the side, and Jessie shoves
herself between them. 'Stop this nonsense now.'
Alyston swings a gloved fist, but she ducks

with unexpected speed and skill. His eyes
widen with surprise, then narrow to scan
her combat poise. 'You wouldn't fight before.

What's changed now, if you won't let me hit you?'
She smiles, mind and body calm vigilance.
'He has, as I knew he would. As will you.'

'No I won't,' Alyston says as he thrusts
his spear at her body. She spins away,
then dives over the spear as he swings it.

'I was taught well, by a mentor of grace
and speed'—she points skyward—'and by my own
revelation of the song-sparks of kosmos.'

Rynobar glides towards them. In her arms
is a woman that, with a shock, Zane sees
is Jeera. She joins Jessie, twin swords ready.

‘Zane may have trained you to fight him, but not
to fight me,’ Jessie says as she steps back
from his lowered spear, senses fully open

to merest tremor of aura around
breath, muscle, glance, mental spark, her limbs primed
like bent sapling snare. ‘Or the three of us.’

Zane is too stunned to move, can’t understand
why they would help when he had hurt them so.
Jessie’s illumination at the altar

has taken her beyond his understanding,
has given her an acceptance of life
beyond individual self, so her help

is not for herself, is not for the kosmos,
which is endless, so it must be for him.
Then there’s Jeera, whose soul was never lost

at Es Xayim, whose presence has been near
throughout their travels, who always forgives.
Compassion shatters his last chains of doubt.

Yet deep inside Zane knows even this turn
echoes in the crucible of all dreams,
seed of his story, seed of every story.

His knowledge opens infinite. He sees
future moments on Mt Alkerii weaving
and branching, blending and changing, forever,

yet constant, as with a jewel-labyrinth
of mirrors, each with a different small flaw,
but the final image perfect and pulsing

with the breath of itself, shimmering through
all possible scenes of despair and triumph,
each of them content in cycles of breath.

Zane nods to the women and draws his sword.
Alyston backs away, swings his spear from
one to the other, eager smile and sneer.

But Zane has no intention to confront
his son; he leaves that for Jessie and Jeera.
Instead, he puts the Keth shard on his blade.

‘You’ve tried this many times,’ Alyston says,
his face now cheerless. A rising hum shrills
the summit, raising the hackles on all.

Zane yells to Remesh for his nail, and quickly
receives it. He pushes the blood-point into
the quartz’s thickest vein, slices it open.

With a wild scream Jeera rushes the youth,
knocks his spear aside with one sword and thrusts
the other at his throat. Alyston spins

and swings his spear towards her feet, then stabs
at Jessie who has moved in from behind.
She parries with a conjured staff and aims

a blow at his front hand. Alyston blocks
and mirrors her attack, his double-blow
numbing her hands so that she drops the staff.

He grins, advances towards her. Just as
he thrusts his spear at her chest, Siraporn
leaps from a nearby rock, lands on his head.

He yells as she claws at his eyes, jumps backwards
to avoid Jessie's kick, somersaults over
Jeera's double sword thrust, lands on one knee,

swings his spear in a circle with one hand
while the other flails at the screeching cat,
rips her off, tosses her into the crater.

Throughout the swirling chess-game of the clash—
punch, parry, kick, feint—part of Jessie thrills
in remembrance of combat drills she practised

with her imaginary friend so many
years before, one against one, one against
many, hand against hand, hand against weapon.

Jessie knows her actions are always centred.
When Zane struck her, she acted from an insight
deeper than memory and incarnation.

The pain in his blows was old pain transformed
into the locking away of old pain,
and her submission forced him to confront

what he had long forgotten, and accept,
even if they had done this countless times
before and barely survived such defeats.

Part of Jessie screams as Siraporn falls,
but the song-spark within her, lost part quickened
by her vision at the altar, calms her,

tells her the cat will find itself, as always,
elsewhere in Thexlan, fills her with the flow
that comes when focus is beyond one's fate—

so now there is no awareness of skill,
only the instant of the thrusting spear
and her swivelling sidestep as it passes

her waist and Jessie grabs it with both hands,
the force of her spin and wrench of his weapon
tossing Alyston to the ground. He leaps

to his feet, sidesteps Jeera's attack, grabs
his weapon to twist it from Jessie's grip.
As he starts to pull, she levers the spear,

guides him off-balance in diminishing
circles till she has thrown him to his knees,
the wooden shaft under his Adam's Apple.

Knee in his back, she arches him until
it seems the mountaintop is shuddering
with the tension of muscle bracing muscle.

Then everyone realizes the whole
mountain is vibrating haphazardly.
Alyston lets out a strangled laugh. Jessie

loosens the pressure at his throat. He laughs
again. 'You're too late. Mt Alkerii is
preparing its daily discharge of Orms,

dreams, desires, needs. But when the Keth ring reaches
the fissure, Mt Alkerii will collapse,
Orms will fade. No dawn. Nothing. Only silence.

Your wish may only be minutes away,
Father. You've won.' His laughter is cut short
by Jeera clubbing him over the head.

44. Always Choice

Zane considers the split-open dream fragment
and notes there is nothing but dust inside.
Has he destroyed all conceived destinies

or changed nothing at all? He understands
Alyston's sense of triumph, but is still
determined to undermine all such fate.

Inspiration leads him to smear the dust,
which pours out of the Keth shard in profusion,
near the broken tip of his crystal sword.

He remembers the vision of the woman
with her throat cut and knows that if he uses
Jessie's blood to repair his sword, the weapon

will allow him to survive the destruction
of Thexlan by hiding him in a pocket
of nothing, and he will emerge to make

not only a new version of Ghajat,
but a new Thexlan, a new Mt Alkerii,
to his own designs of justice and fate.

All at once he hears his mother's voice calling
to him from the middle of Lake Tarlkarni,
when the tribute ballots chose her for death.

He hears Kerrilea's screams as flesh bubbles
and sputters, as her clothes and hair flame-bursts.
He hears Jeera's words as the sword drains her.

'Do it,' says a voice behind him. He turns
and sees Shultar holding a struggling Jessie.
Rynobar is caught in a mesh of magic,

and Alyston is using his flame spear
to prevent Jeera and Remesh from helping.
'Did you think my son would abandon me

to your ancient plan?' She twists Jessie's arm.
'This woman will die. It's up to you whether
her blood heals the sword, or is wasted. Choose!'

Jessie has stopped struggling, and Zane can see
that her aura is deep and calm. He nods,
turns to watch Abzzu one last time, then walks

straight up to Jessie, thrusts his sword through her,
all the way to the hilt. Rynobar screams,
Remesh hurls curses, but Jessie stares down,

sees the pommel ring is empty. She smiles.
Zane withdraws the sword and Shultar collapses.
'I chose to think you had both hands because

you failed in the first of the Kenri tests.'
She clutches her wound, stares in disbelief.
'I was right.' He replaces *Anen*, spins

to fend off a maddened Alyston, parries
spear thrust and spinning orbs of lightning, slashes
at his son, but without intending wounds,

is relieved when Jeera and Jessie force
the youth back to where Rynobar can swoop
down, grab him, and drop him into the crater.

Zane kneels beside Shultar, her body ageing
quicker than when she needed *sorra* potions,
though the light in her eyes is still defiant.

He cradles her head, his feelings a swirl
of rage, relief, and something like affection,
though a wonder at all the waste numbs him.

Shultar coughs up blood. 'You still haven't won.'
The weight of her head lessens as her body
slowly fades. 'Thexlan is using you, too.'

Then there is nothing but a spinning spark
of flickering light that circles the clearing
and starts to rise. Jessie yells out to it:

'I want to ask my question now.' The spark
breaks open. The husk continues to arc
over the edge of the crater. The core,

more like a dancing flare of vital music
than solid light, drifts back down, lengthens, widens,
becomes a glowing human shape whose features

shift from male to female, from child to youth
to the old, those the companions have met
and been in their many journeys through Thexlan,

here and elsewhere. One form keeps reappearing,
Neshxi, and finally she stays. 'I wondered
when you would take up that promise.' Her body

shimmers with tints of all likely *Glymsens*.
Though awed by her raw radiance and power,
Jessie steps closer. 'How can we stop this?'

A shadow passes across Neshxi's face.
'All things that live will die, including Thexlan.'
'But Thexlan is everything,' Zane shouts out.

Neshxi nods. 'Mt Alkerii holds the seeds of all things possible, all things imagined, including the destruction of all things.'

Jessie glances at the cloud turbulence around the mountain, then at Zane. She thinks on all that has befallen them and listens

to what is unspoken in Neshxi's words. 'To destroy Thexlan was always Zane's fate. Ever since Ghajat was an Orm sent out

by Mt Alkerii. Even if he wanted, he couldn't deny his fate. All those deaths were a pattern to push him to this point.'

Neshxi strokes her skull staff and, as it fades, another vicious tremor rocks the mountain. 'There is always choice.' Then she vanishes.

Jessie points to Zane's sword. 'Shultar was right. My blood will be spilt whatever you choose.' She pulls the weapon to her chest. 'Do it!'

Zane pushes her away. 'That isn't right. My song-spark led me to this. Now it's time to see if I can break through even that.'

He slices open his arm, wipes his blood around the broken tip of the Thulsword, weaves a spell to keep the others away,

then rams the glowing blade into his stomach. Every part of his body screams and spasms with the searing and clenching pain, but Zane

keeps the dark from flooding his mind by singing
the *murga* spell, as Kerrilea did
when the flames were consuming her. He watches

the sword fill with his blood, and sends his mind
into the weapon the same way he knows
his sister sent her soul out of her body

before the pain became unbearable.
He feels how the blood refreshes the broken
structures inside the blade and when he senses

the blood drain of his body bringing on
the final dark, he retracts his bare mind
and wrenches the sword from his sagging body.

He staggers inside his spell barrier,
struggles for breath, slowly steadies himself.
Then he points the weapon skyward and chants

a spell of completion. Straight away Abzzu
spasms and for an instant a rent shows
what seems a scaly dark eye looking through.

The rent closes, and Abzzu stretches out
a bulbous grey tentacle towards Zane.
The instant it touches the sword, its dust

starts to flow into the crystal, which flashes
with each beat of Zane's chant. The more he sings
the faster the flow, till the incantation

surges to a scream and Zane is hurled backwards.
When Jessie and the others reach him, Zane
is standing up and swinging the new blade,

which thrums with each stroke. He smiles and hands it to Jessie. 'This isn't mine now. Let fate decide who will be its next rightful owner.'

45. A Surge of Silence

As the mountain pitches again, again,
 Zane strides to the inner edge of the path.
 He studies the bubbling and steaming lake

inside the crater, can distinguish Orms
 of wish and need, of universe and tale,
 every nursed sliver of imagination.

He senses Jessie move beside him, nudge
 his hand. He presses hers briefly, takes two
 steps, flings himself over the edge and arrows

his body for the plunge. Somewhere below
 is the means for him to undo what was
 begun so long between time. As he falls

he chants a spell of finding and, not knowing
 how harsh the surface, weaves a magic armour,
 which he discards moments later—the lake

being a liquid of honeycombed light
 that parts easily. His dive takes him deep,
 but not far enough. He tethers himself

to the current formed by those being drawn
 to the rupture. What better way to find
 the cure for his mistake than at the source?

As Zane swims down, he examines each Orm
 that passes him in the swift chiaroscuro
 of the approaching eruption, each one

a universe of thought and dream. He sees
 strange beasts copulating under red suns
 and eating their mates afterwards. He sees

tiny cells evolve into human beings,
into vast groups of creatures folding time.
He sees universes without life, just

revolving bodies of dust and rock glowing
and fading as darkness ripples the fabric
of their lost attraction for one another,

sometimes slow, sometimes rapid, like the rhythm
of seizure. Sees moments in a child's eye.
Sees moments in the fall of a tear. Moments

of a colossal wave circling a world
and engulfing everything, like a child
cupping its hands around a rainbow marble.

Moments of a luminous flame that never
flickers, even though there is only flame.
On pure instinct he reaches for this one.

As soon as he touches it, other Orms
are drawn to it, merge slightly like blow-bubbles,
are then popped free to spin into the flow.

In one, Zane uses the blood of his mentor
to fold back the dank roots of Es Xayim,
fashion Ghajat into a giant ball.

In one, Jessie fades into butterflies
that blink into rainbows as she awakens,
her mother beside her, the other presence

Jeera, who smiles before fading as well.
In one, nurses show Jessie the birthmark
of her new daughter, a winged sun. In one

Remesh and Rynobar embrace, and then
the artist retrieves his nail, hurls himself
into a snaking whiteness that appears

while Abzzu shudders as the mountain shakes.
In one, Zane sees all the journeys of Thexlan
as patchwork terraces on Mt Alkerii.

In one, a strange vessel powered by dreams
falls towards an indigo crack in space,
is caught there, the creatures within still sleeping.

In one, Zane sees himself singing a *murga*
to increase the *sorra* harvest, but storms
wrack the lake and his mother drowns herself.

In one, Rynobar is given the Thulsword
and hacks off her wings, which fly by themselves
into the searing blackness above her.

She flings the glowing blade into the crater,
reaches inside herself, pulls out a sun
that opens wide enough for her to enter.

In one, Gedon holds in a golden mesh,
someplace beneath Mt Alkerii, the sphere
of Ghajat and strives to unravel it

without releasing the blood energies
of its making. In one, Dukor creates
the Orm that holds the shadows of all Orms

and Neshxi breathes on it, and then the Thulsword.
In one, Zane sees himself tumble through life
on a world not his own, sees hands that shape

with metal, with ink, with clay, with mud-brick,
 sees cities dissolve into bracken lean-tos,
 into campfires at the junctions of rivers,

sees teeming creatures dwindle to one drop,
 sees rock become fire become spinning dust
 become clouds of light-strings become balled heat

become a pin-hole flickering the dark,
 sees his shadow on the dark, sees the dark
 embrace him and smile. In one, he bleeds stars.

Then Zane feels the current speed up and sees,
 through the myriad colours of the Orms
 below him, a dark rent that echoes elsewhere

in his own being, like loud double drums
 that quiver the belly. He also senses
 the Keth ring rising towards him. The rhythm

and melody of the wave as it gathers
 its Orms is the same as the nonsense rhyme
 Kerrilea sang to him one *Glymsen*:

Round to ground, inside down
Smile my cry, peel the crown
You're my sweet, outside drown

The upward rush seizes control of all
 movement and he kicks hard against the weight
 of dreams above him. He needs to be nearer

the rupture, though he has no idea what
 he can do. Suddenly his culling hand
 strikes supple rock and he drags himself downwards.

He judges the speed of the rising wave
and quickly realizes he may not
reach the fissure in time. He wills himself

through threshing light and tumbling flows, left hand
still clasping the Orm with its constant flame.
Abruptly his being quickens with power

and he plunges downward, mind fully focussed.
He stations himself alongside the rupture,
legs crammed into crevices widening

as the rock loses its rigidity.
The Keth ring surges towards him, a rhythm
that is so joyous, frantic, blissful, angry,

all those emotions wished for, feared for, by
everything that breathes, sings, weeps, curses, prays,
aurora of fulfilment rushing through.

Zane drives his right hand into the Orm, grasps
the flame. For a long instant nothing happens,
and then the blaze courses through him, so hot,

so fast, nerves sear and melt before they can
transmit the fact of pain, no time to name
the stench of consumption when silence surges—

If he is body he would sense and shiver.
If he is brain he would weigh and compare.
If he is mind he would invent and sing.

If he is identity he would stay.
If he is soul he would know all within.
There is nothing. Not eye. Not sound. Not sense.

Nothing to realize there is such nothing.
Not separation. Not fear. Not desire.
Not even a nothing being a something.

Not this. Not that. Neither one nor the other.
Not closed. Not open. Not neither. Not both.
Not even the eye regarding itself.

Then something breathes. Air rippling with heat, damp,
and the tintinnabulations of sound.
He opens his eyes and sees his arm wreathed

with rampant flame, thrusts it into the rupture.
The flame ignites nearby wish globes in flurries
of cataract light, and when next he sees,

the rupture is fused shut and the Keth ring
is still rising towards him, the flame vanished.
He arches his body, lets himself fall

to greet the rising world. As it nears him
he feels himself dissolve into it, hears
a music much like the voices of women

chanting celebration and adulation.
He suffers in the dance of dissolution
the rhythms of their song, the interplay

of melodies, some sorrowful, some joyous,
always in waves peaking higher and higher
as his body, his mind, his soul disperse.

He feels these intricacies of song gather
around him, fill him with the elegance
of feathers and that dawn-light dewdrops scatter.

He senses himself smiling somewhere, song
modulating to that smile. All sense fades,
yet he knows this termination is only

of history, not spark, imperative
to song. As the wave of the Keth ring surges
upwards, gathering Orms along its path,

the song scintillates frequency and pitch,
like bird-flock cries, bursts from the crater, climbing
and spreading through the sky, showering seeds

of dreams on the roiling grey shadow-grime,
sprouting imaginations of song-sparks
that unfold a bright landscape far below.

Zane opens his eyes to the hazy outline
of a pale face. As he strain-focuses
he sees faint figures dancing on the canvas

of her pupils. He sees the shapes of those
he loved: his mother, Kerrilea, Jeera,
and all their incarnations through each cycle.

Their hands are linked as they circle a tree,
wide branches, gossamer blooms, rainbow fruit.
Their singing kindles the tree, and he watches

one fruit fall to the ground and split wide open.
Light bursts from within. He blinks. Someone brushes
his lips with soft fire and intones a word

that will open. Already. Always.

REFLECTIONS: *TIKKUN*

To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what
is to be seen, and having some likeness to it.

Plotinus, 'Beauty'²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (1917-1930; London: Penguin, 1991) 55.

3.1 Frenzy and Toil

Because he kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble.
William Blake, *Jerusalem*²⁰⁸

This first section in the second part of the exegesis will examine the drafting process involved in the creation of *The Silence Inside the World* and indicate some of the problems involved and lessons learnt.

Pre-candidature Versions

As indicated in ‘Intentions: *Tzimtzum*’, the writing of *The Silence Inside the World* has taken many years from initial inspiration to final form in this thesis. Some of this writing occurred before the commencement of candidature and the pieces produced back then may be thought of as the story’s juvenilia. These include a fantasy novel in which Zane was a minor character and another fantasy novel in which he was the main character. After these novels I wrote a number of fantasy short stories, some of which featured Zane and some of which had protagonists similar in character to Zane. These other pieces I eventually realized were attempts to formulate Zane’s background and proved useful in part when approaching the final form of his story. Some pieces went beyond first draft, though none found publication (not for want of trying). As I was beginning to envisage Zane as a bard of some sort, I also wrote several poems that were meant to be ‘his’, traces of his immortal life in the world through which he travelled (which was then called Thexlan, but in this thesis is now called Ghajat). Below is a table listing all of these works:

²⁰⁸ Plate 95, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Blake 354.

Title	Type	Draft Stage	Words/Lines
Choices	Novel	First—early 80s	60,000 words
The Cobwebs Clear	Novel	First—early 80s	65,000 words
The Throne of Renthor	Novella	First—1982	25,000 words
Shadowglass	Novelette	Second—1983	11,000 words
Malbane	Novelette	First—1984	10,000 words
The Gem of Elost	Novelette	Second—1984	11,750 words
Fateful Encounter	Short Story	Second—1984	5,000 words
The Shadowsongs of El’Khestor	Short Story/Poems	Third—c1984	1000 words
A Dream that is Dying	Novelette	Second—1987	12,500 words
Shadowquest	Short Story	Incomplete	3,000 words
Vision in Stone	Short Story	Seventh—2001	5,200 words

Table 1: Early Zane material

Early Candidature Draft

Given such a wealth of material, I originally felt that all I had to do was somehow gather the pieces together and I would have a novel, or at least the raw material for one. However, several problems soon presented themselves. First, there was the abundance of different versions of Zane’s early years and the pivotal moments of his emergence as an immortal wizard. Second, though I had a number of stories and sketches of his life as an immortal, I had no idea of the culmination of his quest, of the climax to which all these encounters were leading. The ‘trilogy’ novels had featured one possibility, but I found I was no longer interested in this story’s direction: the battle against evil magicians in a future version of Earth. The short

stories, on the other hand, had led me to the point where I was starting to consider Zane both as a hero and a villain. Third, I was tiring of normal fantasy fare. I wanted to write something different, something that involved the normal world, the ‘realistic’ world, yet was still engaged with the fantastic. It was while musing on this dilemma that the character of Jessie Willis first came to me, and, like Zane, she persisted. I knew there was a connection between them, but again I didn’t want to use such obvious tropes as parallel or dream worlds in a simple boy-meets-girl dynamic, where one saves the other. I wanted to use the story of my two main characters in such a way that it would comment on the worlds/genres they both were representing, the realistic and the fantastic. However, these thoughts barely moved beyond bare musings, as I still had not figured out the main plot line for Zane.

In keeping with my original candidature intention, I commenced to write a prose novel of Zane’s life, starting from his first inklings as a Dremaan, the name given to his world’s magicians. I intended to dove-tail a new version of his childhood—a composite of the ideas I had already explored in some of the stories listed in Table 1—into a sequence of the remaining stories, with the hope that I would work out how Jessie fitted in and what climax was appropriate. During this time the characters of Kerrilea, Rynobar and Shultar appeared, and I also formed the idea of the sand paintings and the task of gathering *sorra* for Shultar’s benefit. I wrote 20,000 words of new material, which, combined with some of the old stories, would have given me a solid 40,000 words towards the ‘new’ novel. However, I soon found myself blocked. I had plenty of material, but the pace wasn’t right and the story was beginning to feel like a typical fantasy novel: young, nondescript character in a tumultuous world travels to discover himself and in the process saves the world. In fact, I began to feel that maybe the medium itself wasn’t the appropriate one for

Zane's story. I had originally planned to insert verse into the manuscript, as I had done with my MA novel²⁰⁹—a way of establishing another voice and perspective in the narrative—but now I began to feel I should write the whole story as a long, narrative poem.

The writing of such a long poem had several attractions for me. As I saw myself mainly as a lyric poet who occasionally wrote fiction, a long, narrative fantasy poem seemed an ideal way to combine my interests and skills. Of course, such a project would also extend my skills, and so would truly be a challenge, as Keats noted in his letter to Benjamin Bailey:

Besides, a long Poem is a test of Invention, which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder.²¹⁰

Furthermore, I realized that poetry could offer the usual possibilities of music, memorability, and the compression of a complex narrative through symbol and language resonance. Then there was the fact that as I delved into Zane's story I realized I was not merely writing a fantasy genre piece but was engaged in a metaphysical investigation, was participating in the Imaginative Tradition as delineated by Kathleen Raine, and so a long poem was appropriate, poetry being, as Raine has noted, 'the language of the human soul, through which the spirit speaks'.²¹¹

But what form should this poem take? Though I had read and appreciated such verse novels as Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask* and *what a piece of work*, I wasn't interested in writing sequences of lyrics that formed and told a story, often from the point of view of several characters. To my way of thinking, the lyric

²⁰⁹ Edward A R Livings, 'The Blessing: A Novel-Writing Project Illustrating One Creative Exploration of Self', diss., Victoria University of Technology, 2000.

²¹⁰ 'Letter to Benjamin Bailey, Wednesday 8 Oct. 1817', Keats 299.

²¹¹ Keeble 36.

sequence doesn't have that power of producing a sustained 'heightened and intensified form of linguistic expression' that long metered poetry can provide.²¹² I wanted to test my Invention, my ability to write a traditional long, narrative poem, even if the form itself was out of fashion and had been for a century or more.

Of course, there are a number of Australian verse novels written in a more traditional mode. Les Murray's *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* and *Fredy Neptune* come to mind, as well as Geoff Page's *The Scarring* and *Drumming on Water* and Philip Hodgins's *Dispossessed*. Though interesting in their own right, none of them were venturing into the fantastic and the metaphysical as I seemed to be doing, though John Jenkins's *A Break in the Weather* did utilize some science fiction themes. This lack of 'market competitors' encouraged me to continue with the idea of a long, narrative metaphysical poem, with the added advantage that tackling in verse the themes of interest to me would situate the work outside the fantasy genre that was riddled with dark lords and medieval landscapes.

However, it was one thing to declare the intention of finally writing Zane's story as a long poem, it was another to actually write it. For some time after I abandoned the prose novel I was immersed in that other thread of learning I needed for my project, the study of the Perennial Philosophy. I spent months reading texts such as the *Bardo Thödol* and Kathleen Raine's *Blake and Tradition*, as well as the works of Ken Wilber and texts on the Kabbalah and other esoteric traditions. I was seeking not only an understanding of the Perennial Philosophy and those symbols, narratives and concepts that may prove useful to the metaphysical journeys my characters seemed to be undertaking, but appropriate structures for the journeys

²¹² Frederick Turner and Ernst Pöppel, 'The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, the Brain, and Time', (<http://joelorr.squarespace.com/the-neural-lyre-poetic-meter-t/>, 11 December 2005, reprinted from

themselves. Eventually, however, I realized that I was procrastinating and that no amount of planning could substitute for the actual writing. Besides, one of the insights I had gleaned from my reading and subsequent musings was that Reason, as understood by Blake and as used by followers such as Kathleen Raine, was of little use when attempting to invoke the power of Imagination. What I needed to do was fall back on ‘imagination and inspired insight’, though without neglecting the place of Reason, as Bowra suggested the Romantics often did in their work:

The Romantics have their moments of inspiring thought and wonderful insight, but they lack this special strength which comes from sustained mental effort to poetry [prior to composition], and their work is therefore limited in this respect.²¹³

So I decided to plunge into the writing and see what came out of it.

Creative Draft One

My plan in the writing of this first draft was to allow the story to develop on its own. I had a rough idea where the story began, with Jessie and Zane first meeting in a graveyard, and a rough idea where the story would end, at the summit of Mt Alkerii. Everything else was fluid. I decided that if I were to be true to the Imaginative Tradition, I would allow inspiration to charter the work.

I have always handwritten the first draft of my poems. I used to do this with my fiction and non-fiction, but had long ago found it easier to write directly onto computer. I haven’t been able to do this with my poetry. Most of my lyric work starts with some sort of ‘given’—a line, a title, an image—and I spend a number of handwritten drafts teasing out the poetic implications of the given before transcribing

Poetry Magazine, August 1983, S. 277-301), N. pag.

²¹³ Bowra 289.

the first full treatment of the inspiration onto the screen. I then work directly to the screen for how many drafts it takes me to complete the poem.

For four weeks (the two weeks of a mid-semester break and the following two weeks while back at my teaching job), I wrote in two hardcover notebooks the first draft of *The Silence Inside the World*. I never knew each day what would happen to the characters other than the rough route they were taking to Mt Alkerii, which was based on a book describing the Sacred Way, the route that the Pythiad, the Thyiads, some initiates (*mystai*) and enquirers in ancient times took from Athens to Delphi. This route started from ‘the Sacred Gate in the city walls of Athens and having left behind the funerary monuments of the Kerameikos cemetery soon began to mount the ridge of Aigaleos’.²¹⁴ It then wound its way through the western countryside of Greece before diverging to Eleusis, then turning northward before swinging westward again to Parnassos. I liked the idea of having my characters travel such an initiation route, though I did not use more than the idea of the endpoints and the stopover at Eleusis as a basis for appropriate encounters along the way. For this first draft I had a character whom I thought was dead (Jessie), an immortal character (Zane), his desire to uncover something of absolute wisdom, and the repercussions of choices made before the poem itself (mainly those events and characters leftover from my early attempts at Zane’s story). As far as plot was concerned, I figured that once I set the characters in motion, the idea that at some point they would undergo initiatory ordeals would prompt my imagination for the necessary encounters and events.

So much for plot and incident, for content, now for poetics. Considering I was writing a first draft, I wasn’t interested in keeping a strict metre. I wasn’t even sure

²¹⁴ Neville Lewis, *Delphi and the Sacred Way* (London: Michael Haag, 1987) 9.

what metric I would be using, so I decided to write what I felt was an appropriate line, then go to the next one. I sensed that the lines were roughly ten syllables, but I couldn't be sure. The main intention during the writing was to maintain the impetus of the characters' interactions, always with the aim that they would end up on the summit of Mt Alkerii, where everything, hopefully, would be resolved.

By the end of the writing I had almost 5,800 lines of verse. For the sake of security I spent time transcribing this draft to the computer. I made some notes along the way, but generally kept the transcription faithful to the handwritten draft. At the end of this work I had a draft of 46,774 words. I also had a new main character, Remesh, who had appeared out of nowhere and had decided to stay in the story. His inclusion in the *dramatis persona* meant I now had four main characters residing in seemingly different states, two dead (Jessie and Remesh, though I was starting to wonder about Jessie's status), one immortal (Zane), and one uncertain (Rynobar).

Though I was pleased to have some sort of story on paper, I knew there were several significant problems facing the project, and countless minor concerns. The first problem was that the draft wasn't long enough. I now had a general idea of what was meant to happen to the characters, but I still had to flesh out those events, both inner and outer. The second was that, naturally enough, the story was patchy and inconsistent, both in the presentation of characters and in the concepts behind the world in which they found themselves operating. The third was, again naturally enough, the poor quality of the poetics. The lines may have been roughly the same length, but they were still virtually sections of cut up prose. They needed to be turned into a consistent metre.

All these issues led me to another reading and planning phase. My research into Kabbalah exposed me to the idea of the Fifty Gates of Understanding:

...the Tree of Life, which corresponds to Wisdom or Chokmah, symbolizes the universe in terms of Force; the Fifty Gates, on the other hand, corresponding to Understanding or Binah, symbolizes the universe in terms of Form.²¹⁵

The concept has much in common with the Great Chain of Being, in that ‘the spectrum between pure matter and pure spirit came to be described [in Cabalistic²¹⁶ circles] as a series of fifty steps or stages, called Gates’,²¹⁷ with Kircher, the Jesuit Qabbalist, declaring ‘that Moses passed through forty-nine of the gates, but that Christ alone passed the fiftieth gate’.²¹⁸ The idea prompted me to spend much time trying to reconcile the various systems I was attempting to suggest and/or utilise in my work. There was the chakra system with its seven colours for each of the stages of development: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. There was the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, with its ten sefirot and twenty-two paths. There was the Tarot, with its twenty-two major arcana. I wanted to find a structure that could accommodate all these, and, because I felt the need to expand the manuscript to meet the demands not only of the story but of the PhD candidature agreement, I eventually decided on creating a manuscript with 50 sections, each of around 150 to 200 lines. (In the back of my mind was the challenge of equalling, at least in quantity, some of

²¹⁵ John Michael Greer, *Paths of Wisdom: The Magical Cabala in the Western Tradition* (St Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1996) 49.

²¹⁶ Cabala and Qabbala are other versions of the word Kabbalah, sometimes used to distinguish between the Jewish tradition and the Christian-influenced esoteric tradition.

²¹⁷ Greer 50.

²¹⁸ Manly P Hall, ‘Fundamentals of Qabbalistic Cosmogony’, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/eso/sta/sta28.htm>, 11 December 2005.

my precursors in the epic: Dante's *Divine Comedy* with its 14,000 lines or so, Homer's two poems, the *Iliad*, 15,693 lines, and the *Odyssey*, over 12,000 lines, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 10,549 lines.) There would be seven days for the journey of my characters from the meeting in the graveyard to the summit of Mt Alkerii (an allusion to the seven days of creation and the first seven days of the *Bardo Thödol*), with each day comprising seven sections. The fiftieth section would involve the climax of the story and lead into the first day of the new creation. After more planning, which for me can tend towards procrastination (too much Reason), I tackled the redrafting of my manuscript.

Creative Draft Two

This draft took much longer to complete, partly because of professional commitments (I was still a part-time student at the time), but mainly because the work was more intricate and involved than the 'white lightning' writing, the inspiration-fuelled writing, of the first draft. First of all, there was the need to fill in story gaps and invent new events and characters. Some of this material was based on the desire to incorporate patterns, events and characters drawn from the various esoteric traditions studied. Second, there was the need to pay close attention to the metre. This latter task came about through an observation made of the first draft that the blocks of lines might prove too difficult to read, no matter how successfully Milton was able to use such a blank verse structure in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. I decided to set up a metric involving blank verse lines in three line stanzas, this structure being a homage to Dante's poem. Although I wasn't intending to develop a rhyming structure for these tercets, I also wasn't discounting the possibility of this in a future draft.

However, such a verse structure meant constant rewriting of stanzas whenever a line was deleted or a line or stanza condensed, which necessarily took much time.

In the end I had a draft of 10,681 lines, 80,848 words. I was pleased to have a substantial draft to work with, one that had a variety of characters and incidents, though I soon began to realise the draft still had substantial problems in character consistency, plot dynamics, and conceptual underpinnings. On top of these narrative difficulties there were concerns with the poetics. Though there were passages of tight lyrical or dramatic intensity, there were also many that were loose, that still seemed like cut up prose. Thus, the story was becoming clear, but there were many segments that were hazy and others that lacked the music one would expect from verse, even if narrative as opposed to lyrical. I decided that I should refine the story in the third draft and then refine the poetics in the fourth, which I felt would be the last one before the compilation of the thesis as a whole and its final editing.

The planning stage for the next draft involved the creation of what I called an Intermediate Draft. In this I set out what I knew about each of the characters and how I saw them interrelating. I also created a story treatment that explored the backgrounds of each of the characters in their respective worlds and filled in the back-story of the major events of the poem. Some of this information I gleaned from my drafts, some through speculative imaginings of the characters' lives, and some from consideration of their various roles, as individual, as archetype, as 'spectrum' type (what levels they belonged to, what transitions they were seeking or avoiding, what mysticisms they were meant to experience). As the poem involved different worlds with different rates of time I devised timeline drawings that showed how the characters interacted while they were in each of their worlds and how these interactions affected major events. And finally I created what I called avatar diagrams

that further helped me map the relationships between the various major and minor characters. This tool was useful because *The Silence Inside the World* deals with multiple levels of the Great Chain of Being and a character may be a personage in one level or world, but also be an archetype for a character who resides in another world.

Once I was clearer on my story and what incidents would support that story, I commenced the third draft.

Creative Draft Three

As a result of my intention to refine lines and episodes and to make every incident tight I expected the draft length to decrease. However, the opposite occurred. Some incidents in the second draft, because they had been invented at the time and were effectively first draft, needed fleshing out. I also realized I needed to invent a prologue to set the scene and the ending needed to be expanded in order to tie up more of the loose ends. By the time I finished this draft, which took two months of full-time effort, I had 11,037 lines, 83,661 words. The story was tighter, in that incidents were better delineated and characters and concepts were more consistent, but the poem itself felt too long. Something had to give.

At this point the poem went to an external reader, who confirmed that the piece was too long, though his judgement of correct length was even more severe than my own. The reader also made perceptive remarks about tone, which I hadn't realized, and about the pace of scenes and narrative threads. He also made a number of interesting suggestions for everything from poem and sub-section titles to the cutting of unnecessary scenes and lengthy character discussions. However, before I could act on his advice, I had to prepare a long overdue draft of the exegesis.

Exegesis Draft One

I was quite fortunate that around the time I planned to write the exegesis I was offered the use of a country property while some friends were overseas. This luxury of freedom from distraction enabled me to write a draft of almost 38,000 words. Some of this material was in reasonable draft form, while the rest, especially that relating to the 'Reflections' segment of the exegesis, was in rough note form. Prior to this writing there was the obligatory planning period, though this was not as long as previous ones, mainly because I was only trying to sort out the structure of both parts of the exegesis, with no need to consider poetics or character and plot dynamics. After returning home, I spent several weeks creating more notes and rough entries for the exegesis. I then refined those parts of the draft related to the 'Intentions' segment of the exegesis and ended up with a first draft of 29,876 words. After sending this material to my supervisors for comment, I commenced preparations for the fourth draft of *The Silence Inside the World*.

Creative Draft Four

Again there was a preliminary period of planning, during which I correlated the feedback I'd received on the poem from the various readers of the third draft and expanded my story treatment to address issues raised. As with previous drafts, there was also the consideration of latest ideas for character, event and structure gleaned from my reading and from the exegesis work. However, the major task of this period was a detailed scene breakdown of the third draft. I had recognized that the poem was too long for the story I was trying to tell and was not engaging the reader enough in the latter parts of the poem, mainly because there were too many digressions, especially at wrong moments in dramatic scenes. I also recognized that the

storytelling was too episodic in parts and the tension in the story was being lost. If I were to trim the poem I needed to identify which elements were essential to the story, which could be deleted, and how best to rearrange the remaining material into a more coherent and compelling narrative. I created a spreadsheet that contained data about the various parameters involved in each scene, such as characters, settings, events, plot points, and the types of conflict and narrative tension employed. I then put the scene summaries onto separate index cards and laid these out on a large table so as to obtain an overview of the story and the plot structure. This analysis enabled me to realize I could remove a whole segment of scenes involving a group of characters that didn't reappear in the story. After this deletion, I saw that the remaining material couldn't support a seven day, event-filled journey, so I decided to reduce the story to three days, a period in mythology that echoes the disappearance of the moon at the end of its cycle and which pertains to the hero's journey into the underworld.

Naturally enough, some of the symbolic structures I was working with had to be discarded or modified, for example, the use of the chakra colours for each day of the journey, and the changes themselves necessitated a wholesale rearrangement of the remaining scenes so that important information and disclosures could occur at the appropriate moments in the characters' journeys. Once I settled on a new scene arrangement, I began the slow, painstaking process of editing both story and poetics. Although there were some scenes that needed expansion because of the needs of the new version of the story, and other rearranged and deleted sections called for new transitions, I still managed to reduce the overall draft by around 20,000 words, the new draft's forty chapters comprising 62,725 words/8171 lines (excluding poem and chapter titles). Though the wordage is much less than what was originally envisaged for the creative component of the thesis (a 75,000 word novel), I feel that the effort

involved in creating the poetics and narrative for such a verse project is more than equivalent to that required for a marginally longer prose novel.

Exegesis Draft Two

Barring the discovery of any minor dislocations of story caused by the drastic cuts noted above, I now felt that the creative portion of the thesis probably only required fine tuning of poetics for it to be considered finished. The main task now was to complete the exegesis. First of all, based on the feedback I had received, I edited the 'Intentions' part, reducing it by over 4,500 words. Some of the material deleted was assigned to appendices, for I felt that the information, while not essential to the thesis, was still relevant to an interested reader. During this period I also checked all citations and began building the Bibliography. This extra work slowed down the process, but I felt that the final consolidation of the thesis would be speeded up accordingly.

Then came the writing of the 'Reflections' segment of the exegesis. Because it involved an analysis of the actual thesis writing experience (as already displayed above, with more detail in other chapters below), this draft took a little more time. The first draft was then revised after the final review of *The Silence Inside the World* and the exegesis itself.

Thesis Draft

Once all the draft segments of the thesis were written and reviewed as described above, they were assembled into a single document and the whole thesis edited for final review before submission to examiners. This editing mainly involved the tightening of the exegesis sections in regard to final insights into the drafting process

and the fine-tuning of the poem's syllabic and rhythmic structures and its language. The review comprised a structural edit by a supervisor and a copyedit by another external reader, and the resulting feedback led to a final round of editing that mainly dealt with language lapses and inconsistencies as well as more removal of unnecessary material into appendices. The final composition of the dissertation is given below:

Thesis Title page/epigraph	103
Acknowledgements	78
Abstract	365
Student Declaration/Contents	432
Introduction	1,313
Intentions: <i>Tzimtzum</i>	24,061
<i>The Silence Inside the World</i>	62,816 (45 chapters/8,170 lines)
Reflections: <i>Tikkun</i>	10,189
Conclusion	1,514
Appendices	22,403
Bibliography	2,046
Tables (not including those in appendices)	99
Footnotes	4,228

While the whole dissertation is 129,647 words, the formal thesis, comprising the creative component (*The Silence Inside the World*) and the critical component ('Introduction', 'Intentions: *Tzimtzum*', 'Reflections: *Tikkun*', and 'Conclusion') is 99,893 words. The split between these two components is creative, 62,816 words (63%), and critical, 37,077 words (37%), which, as explained above, is different to the planned ratio of 75/25, but considered close enough given the extra effort

involved in creating a long, narrative poem only slightly shorter than the intended prose novel.

3.2 Transitions of Being

I have been taught by dreams and fantasies
Learned from the friendly and the darker phantoms...
Edwin Muir, 'I have been taught'²¹⁹

In this section I will present some of the challenges overcome during the writing of *The Silence Inside the World* and major lessons learnt from the whole writing process. Obviously, most of these factors apply to me as a poet; however, there are some that refer to me as a person.

The Freedom in Metrics

As explained in the previous chapter, the project changed from a prose novel that would include verse sections to a long, narrative poem written in blank verse tercets. This decision brought with it the challenge of continuous readjustment of verses and lines whenever changes were made to nearby verses and lines. It also brought a paradoxical freedom within constraint, in that the need to count syllables and accents often resulted in moment-by-moment inspirations of incident or language that helped not only to preserve the metre but also to enrich the music and the story. That is, the need to meet metrical requirements obliged me to condense or expand scene material, and compelled me to invent new material in places I may not have considered if the constraints had not been in operation (which would have been the position if I'd still been writing a prose novel). Such moments of musical and narrative felicity were a

²¹⁹ Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems* (1960; London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 302.

welcome relief to the often-laborious work the metrical constraints required, and the poem itself was vastly improved because of such occasions.

The Roles of Reason and Imagination

One of the main outcomes of this project for me personally was the confirmation of an approach to creativity that I had long held. Whether as a result of an early exposure to Romantic poetry at primary school, or of a route to poetry that passed through music and the martial arts, with their emphasis on spontaneous composition (of lead licks, of combat blows) after repetitive training, or of some genetic or spiritual instinct, or of some combination of all of these things and others unknown to me, I have always considered inspiration an imperative to the creation of worthwhile works, and the ‘learning of the Imagination’ that I have undertaken these last few years, before and during this candidature, has confirmed this path for me. Even more than it was previously, Imagination is foremost in my mind whenever I compose poetry or fiction. The project has given me more confidence to follow this path, and the understanding of different types of imagination has enabled me to place the works of others, be they angst-ridden street poets or cosmopolitan wits, into a ‘spectrum’ framework of intent and effect, even if I feel these types of poetry are more about Relative Knowledge than Absolute Truth.

The project has also given me an understanding of the place of Reason, of analytical thought and approaches, in my own creative processes. Like the martial artist who throws thousands of punches and kicks in order to train body and mind to react instantly with the strongest, quickest, deadliest technique at the appropriate moment in combat, to perform the art when the instant requires it, the poet must train in technique and imagination in order to be ready when the instant opens into a strong

inspiration, and thus be able to transcribe the inspiration as fully and as accurately as possible. Of course, the inspiration may be a fuzzy, though emotionally charged, image, or a phrase that doesn't go away, and so the intellect must be recruited in order to help fill in the blanks. It seems to me that the reason Imagination is more often than not incomplete in what it provides to the poet is that the poet usually is not completely open to what is being given, may have blocked the channels of communication—too much ego involvement in the benefits of the art, for example—in such a way as to blur the signal from Imagination. At such times, which probably comprise 99% of occasions, the task of the poet is to free the true spark from the dross surrounding it. The other task of the poet is to prepare him- or herself to receive such communications in a better form, which means cleaning up the channels of reception, and this can only be achieved, especially for signals from the higher reaches of Imagination, by finding ways to remove ego from the process and by being more open to those higher reaches than the lower, more base, structures of the Great Chain of Being. To my mind, Reason should never be discarded, should be seen as being in the service of Imagination, in assisting 'the learning of the Imagination' and in helping unravel 'imagination and inspired insight', though the major duty of the poet is always to be open as wide as possible to Imagination. A poet with Imagination but not Reason may be intermittently powerful, but a poet of Reason without Imagination is a mere versifier, however competent or popular he or she may be. As Blake said in his marginalia to Wordsworth's *Poems: Including Lyrical Ballads*, Volume I (1815), 'One Power alone make a Poet—Imagination, The Divine Vision'.²²⁰

²²⁰ Blake 446.

As would be expected from a writing technique that relied on such inspiration, when I wrote the first draft of *The Silence Inside the World* in a four-week, white heat process, there were a large number of story gaps and inconsistencies in character, event and conceptual foundation. Imagination had given me a story, but the narrative was incomplete and muddled, which meant Reason had to be engaged so as to decode the true signal. The trouble, of course, is that one can never be sure if what one sees as a confusion or deficit is in fact that or is actually part of the story, especially when the story concerned is exploring creation, end times and the abyss underlying all. Rationality can only go so far. More than once I found myself having to rely on my gut instinct in deciding whether or not to 'fix up' an inconsistency or fill in a gap. One example was Remesh's first story: did it actually serve a purpose in the poem, given that it does not refer to any of the characters? In the end, I decided to keep the tale because its motifs were echoed in other parts of the poem and because it helped generate a mythopoeic feel.

I used a similar approach in the evolution of story structure. Although I spent months investigating various esoteric frameworks and laying out different coloured cards representing these systems so as to find a structure that could somehow accommodate them all, in the end I allowed intuition to guide me in the framing of events and character interactions. As an example, there was a time when the first draft of the early chapters in *The Silence Inside the World* did seem to follow the visionary stages of the Tarot major arcana sequence on the Tree of Life (Etz Chayyim) of the Kabbalah, so much so that when I told a poet friend of the correspondences the hairs on both our arms stood on end, but when I had to trim the length of the poem, some of those scenes had to go. I was unwilling to do this, because inspiration had given me

an interesting correlation, but a mixture of Reason and a faith in a higher form of intuition, a faith in vision rather than dogma, enabled my decision.

Thus, no matter how much research and thinking I did, how much planning, the important thing was the story and the music in which it was told. If these things took me in directions outside of the frame of my structural and scene planning, yet felt intuitively correct, then I allowed the narrative to follow that lead.

The Threshold Equation

Although in ‘Intentions’ the concept of the Threshold Equation was given a place of importance, the idea itself did not come to me till the writing of the first draft of the exegesis, after I had read and digested Ted Hughes’s *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. I felt the need of a unifying thread for the poem, something on which I could hang concepts and events, something that would make decision-making easier, and it occurred to me that I might be able to develop an equivalent to Hughes’s concept of Shakespeare’s Tragic Equation, the equivalence of the various worlds in the conceptual underpinning of my story providing a hint for its form. I tried various names for such an equation, some based on the effect I thought poetry should provide in general, and my poem in particular, and some being allusions to the tradition in which I was working. Examples, amongst many others, are the Gnosis Equation, the Shift Equation, the Many-One Equation, the God Equation, the Nondual Equation, the Open Equation, the Spectrum Equation, the Sublime Equation, and the Paradise Equation. The concept of thresholds—the place to which art brings one, the need to make choices when one is there, and the process by which such art can be structured to express and expose these things—was the one idea that seemed most pertinent to my understanding of the Perennial Philosophy and the Imaginative Tradition. Of

course, this attribution was retrospective, but I did feel that once I had the concept it should help me during further drafts of the poem.

This was easier said than done. The equation was a summation theme, if you like, of what I had intended and partly achieved in the early drafts prior to its ‘discovery’, and certainly was in the back of my mind during subsequent redrafting, but I don’t think I was ruthless in assessing every line, stanza, scene and chapter in light of its imperative. There simply wasn’t enough time to do this. Besides, I felt such rigorous analytical assessment would be a tipping of the balance towards Reason, which I did not intend to allow, the whole project having evolved into an issue of faith in Imagination.

A more practical challenge in one necessary application of the equation did bring its difficulties. Each of the main characters comes from a different world— Jessie (Earth of the late 20th century), Zane (Ghajat), Remesh (Earth of the early to middle 21st century, though possibly a parallel Earth), Rynobar (the star realm of Ghajat, the pre-incarnation world)—and their place of meeting, Thexlan, was meant to be each of these realms, as well as the sum of all realms, the archetype of all realms, and, by way of Mt Alkerii, the place of origin for all realms. How to depict such a world in a concrete and engaging way without resorting to the images of any one particular world or group of worlds? The answer for me lay in the use of such traditional images and symbols as noted by Kathleen Raine, the ‘world-tree and its fruits, the birds of the soul, sun, moon, river, loom, dragon, gate, and dark tower’²²¹, and as similarly noted by James Olney in a comment on Yeats’s work:

²²¹ Raine *Defending*, 13.

Winding stairs, tree, tower, and full moon, or, more basically and schematically, cones, triangle, square, and circle, or, yet more basically and numerically, two, three, four, and one...²²²

²²² James Olney, *The Rhizome and the Flower: The Perennial Philosophy—Yeats and Jung* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 238.

The answer also lay in the use of dream imagery and dream flow, and the intersection of narratives and voices. Although this strategy bordered on the abstract, in that it was catering to the ‘politics of eternity’ as opposed to the ‘politics of time’, to history, as Dante had accomplished with his use of contemporary and historical figures in *The Divine Comedy*, I could see no other way around my dilemma without compromising my stance on Imagination. An emerging theme in the poem was the sense that all worlds, all possibilities, all prisons and freedoms, were contained in the present moment, and it seemed to me that the only way to explore this theme was to conflate all worlds into one. In the end, I suppose, only a reader can judge if I have been successful in this major application of the Threshold Equation, it being an attempt to place the reader inside the threshold of all thresholds, inside the silence beneath all thresholds.

The Importance of Story

As hinted in the previous section, narrative itself had become an important aspect of *The Silence Inside the World*, both as a conceptual component of the story and within the story itself. When I sat down to write the first draft of the poem, I did not know I would have the characters telling each other stories each night of their journey, an activity that would soon develop into the *Fable, Lie or Life* story game. Some of the stories were originally designed to convey background information about various characters and incidents. Others were not the result of conscious intention but were written under inspiration, though latter consideration of them saw how they offered conceptual and symbolic support to the poem itself, even if in a subtle way. I also didn’t realize that the use of *murgas* (sand paintings) and *Orms* (Mt Alkerii’s dream/wish globes) would feature in the narrative and in fact allude to the creation of stories as a fundamental facet of the kosmos. It was as if ‘my learning of the

Imagination' and my own 'imagination and inspired insight' were leading me, by way of these elements, to consider the basic power in the kosmos as *Imaginatio*, the telling and expression of story, often through song (which, for a poet, is an understandable precondition). Recognition of this possibility led me to ponder and adopt a metaphysical insight into the dynamic of the Great Chain of Being: that the Formless (Wilber's causal realm) was the place where all stories reside and the function of life is to manifest, enable, these stories to flourish. This is the case even if one of the stories is about the destruction of story, Zane's apparent mission though Zane never realizes this until he reaches the summit of Mt Alkerii. This end story, I also realized, could never in fact be final, for, like the universes that appear and disappear with Vishnu's in-breathing and out-breathing, there will always be a new story, a new universe, the impulse of the Formless being creation, being story, being Imagination, the very act of *Imaginatio*.

The Poet as Person, and Vice Versa

This entry is more of an observation than a report of the writing endeavour. As I worked on the early drafts of the long poem I became aware of many instances of vague writing, for example, moments when I stated that something 'seems' to be happening or 'seems' to be the situation, and I realized that if I wanted to better engage the reader, I had to be more concrete, more certain, in the language used. I also realized that this lack of commitment in language, in some of the events, thoughts and actions of my characters, may well reflect some level of evasiveness in my own personality to the world both around me and inside me. This naturally led me to consider the connection between poet and person. If I was artistically aware enough to notice such lapses in the poem and was able to repair them during the

drafting process, would such work, through some sort of mental reverse engineering triggered by my self-awareness of personal flaws, improve those parts of my psyche that produced the lapses in the first place? Would I become more committed in my personal life and subsequently less likely to perpetrate such creative lapses in future writing? Only those around me would notice if I did change as a result of this project, but I certainly can report that the realization of evasiveness in my work has made me more aware of that tendency in my day-to-day dealings, and I do sense a ‘training effect’ both for my personality and for those rough drafts of new poetic and fiction material I have jotted down in recent months for completion once my candidature is finalised. Such a dynamic is certainly a welcome effect when compared to what Yeats considered was the dilemma of the artist: ‘The intellect of man is forced to choose/Perfection of the life, or of the work’.²²³

A more pertinent aspect of this connection between poet and person is connected with my ‘alter ego’, Zane. There are two parts to this. The first is that need within a person to create an alter ego. As is obvious when reflecting on my childhood and early teenage reading matter, my favourite fare was heroic fiction of one sort or another. This did evolve as I matured, but when I started writing I was drawn back to this arena. Zane was originally meant to be a sword and sorcery hero and also a seeker of wisdom. The latter aspect came to the fore as the project evolved even before candidature, yet the attraction for heroism was still in the background. Did the writing of *The Silence Inside the World* change this? I believe so, for there has been a shifting of emphasis away from action hero to creator hero, both in the conception of Zane as a character and in my own conception of the artist, a person who follows the

²²³ ‘The Choice’, Yeats 278.

hero's journey and brings back the elixir of Imagination, Blake's Divine Vision, Vedanta's Absolute Truth, for the reader. Do I see myself as a creator hero, or at least attempting to act as one? As a poet of the Imagination, I suppose I do, but then, as I hope I have made clear in the poem, all those who engage with Imagination, who tackle the task of tapping into their own song-spark, all those who have accepted that the primary task of life is the enabling of story, are themselves heroes.

The second part is a little more uncertain. Zane was a seeker after wisdom, a seeker after the truth of his song-spark, but was sidetracked by issues of revenge. Did he eventually acquire the wisdom he sought? He may not have experienced a full moment of Enlightenment, of nondual mysticism, but he did perceive more of his song-spark and he did engage with the parameters of destiny. He accepted fault and made sacrifice. Did I gain the wisdom I have been seeking since my earliest exposure to esoteric and creative endeavours? I'm not sure. Like Zane, I have had no lightning-bolt revelation, though the creative process has produced its share of unexpected insights into myself, into my work, and into the act of creativity itself. And like Zane, I have experienced a little more of my own song-spark and have accepted and tried to address, where possible, whatever deficiencies in person and poet the dynamic of the project has revealed. The final lesson of faith I will leave to the following section.

The Opening of Tradition

As is evident from various chapters of the exegesis, one of my struggles during this project was the understanding of, and attempted reconciliation of, those traditions that had appealed to me over the years. In my teenage years there was an interest in Eastern philosophies, specifically Taoism and its hybrid offshoot, Zen Buddhism. Then there was the interest in those 'rational' fields of cosmology, general relativity

and quantum mechanics that I had learnt about in my university training as a mathematician. There was also the extemporization modality I experienced when ‘performing’ in both music and martial arts. And there was the ‘bliss’ of creativity when I first started writing, which led to the White Goddess paradigm of Robert Graves, ‘the learning of the Imagination’ of Kathleen Raine (with its leanings towards Platonism and Neoplatonism and its Western esoteric branchings into Gnosticism and the Kabbalah), and the return to Eastern approaches of the Perennial Philosophy, with particular attention to the *Upanishads* and the *Bardo Thödol*. What I was looking for was a core philosophy and an ensemble of narratives and symbols that would enable me to perform the work to which I felt most drawn:

“I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Man’s.

I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.”²²⁴

In recent times I thought my search would be satisfied by finding or constructing some sort of open grand narrative, a system that would offer a means of experiencing and explaining metaphysical truths and of providing the means to express those truths for others to experience, a system that was totalising without being dogmatic, without being closed to self-examination and self-criticism.²²⁵ I thought the Perennial Philosophy was one such system, especially when considered as an experiential Way, as with the use of meditation in Eastern traditions. However, while I still feel this philosophy and its associated Imaginative Tradition is the Way that works best for me, what I have come to realize towards the end of this project is that too much of a reliance on ‘revealed’ symbols, motifs and structures can contradict

²²⁴ Blake 316.

²²⁵ See Appendix Nine for further discussion of such an open grand narrative.

the central message of this open grand narrative, this message being, in my opinion, that one needs to be open to Imagination and the practice of *Imaginatio* in order to ‘reveal’ Imagination. This difference between ‘revealed’ and ‘revealing’ I have adopted from a usage in Henry Corbin’s work:

I have recalled elsewhere that in its etymological sense the word *esoteric* denotes essentially interior, hidden things (*Ta ésô*) as contrasted with the exterior and apparent (*Ta éxô*) the exoteric. Thus understood, the contrast denoted by the two terms concerns above all the phenomenon of the ‘Revealed Holy Book’, the revealed and revealing Word [underlining is mine].²²⁶

To my mind, any tradition that consists only of revealed words and not revealing words/processes borders on dogma, and the true esoteric wisdom is not factual knowledge but a mechanism for obtaining insight, whether through prayer, meditation, yoga or imaginative expression and engagement. So, if Imagination provides a vision (in this case, an intuition in words) that contradicts the philosophy and its associated tradition, then the vision is to be preferred over the dogma of the system. Of course, the issue is complicated by the fact that the revealed word assists the student/writer/practitioner in preparing him- or herself for the possibility of vision. In my case, the cauldron effect of examining and re-examining much of this material under the auspices of the PhD furthered my own ‘learning of the Imagination’, through the development of a Spectrum Model and the Threshold Equation, and led me to an increased sensitivity to and faith in Imagination, which in turn helped me create what I feel is a strong, imaginative work. That is, the project was a *revealed* and *revealing* process that helped me create a *revealing* poem.

²²⁶ Henry Corbin, ‘Traditional Knowledge and Spiritual Renaissance’, trans. Kathleen Raine, *Temenos Academy Review 1*, (London: The Temenos Academy, Spring 1998) 30.

3.3 What Comes After

If only the lips may speak,
If only the god will come.
Kathleen Raine, 'Invocation'²²⁷

As with any large project, one always wishes to know at the start what will be known at the end, so that the outcome of the project might be so much stronger for the wiser beginning. The next best thing is to continue that learning into future projects, and so the following sections will detail what I consider worthwhile ventures that extend the current work, not just for me, but for others, poets, writers, critics.

Spectrum Criticism

As my commitment to creativity is much stronger than my interest in criticism, this section is more to do with others than with me. It seems apparent that what might be termed the Spectrum paradigm—with its elements of the Spectrum of Consciousness and the types of transitions and fulcrums along that spectrum—provides an interesting matrix against which to examine works of literature. A criticism using the model might well consider the following types of questions in order not only to answer the first of Coomaraswamy's judgements²²⁸—How well is it made?—but, more importantly, to answer his second—What human value has it?:

1. What are the premises (materialist, spiritual, holarchical) of the text?
2. At what level or fulcrum is the character in the story or the persona in the poem?

²²⁷ Kathleen Raine, *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine* (2000; Washington D C: Counterpoint: 2001) 4.

²²⁸ As explored in Appendix Six.

3. What sort of transition (translation or transformation) is the text encouraging in the reader, and does it succeed?
4. How do symbols, actions, interactions and events in the text produce the impetus to change—the shifting within levels or between levels—of characters and readers?

Such questions are similar in intent to those already asked during current analysis of texts, but I feel the Spectrum paradigm provides a structure for deeper interrogation of language, character and narrative and a broader perspective of value. However, I certainly would not advocate that a poem encouraging a subtle level perception of the kosmos is of greater value a reader than a poem enabling another reader to understand their ‘lower level’ emotions. A reader can only take out of a text what they are able to and ready to take out: a pure, causal level text may have no meaning to someone who cannot bring something to the table, an observation similar to that noted by Philip Larkin regarding Kathleen Raine’s work in his 1956 review of her early *Collected Poems*:

Perhaps the poetry of abstract vision carries a high failure-rate simply because the reader can come so little of the way to meet it...²²⁹

Still, I would contend that a text which generates a number of transitions for a variety of readers over a long period of time is certainly of more value than a text which encourages limited transitions for a narrow readership, no matter how valued those transitions are to that readership. For example, the left-wing poets sitting in dingy pubs during the Kennett era in Victoria may have felt that the performance of anti-Kennett verses was somehow consolidating their own beliefs and creating a sense of

solidarity with other protestors and activists, but the value of such ephemeral pieces, because they were narrow in their range of effect (even if quite strong *at the time* for a listener), is much less than that of Shakespeare's plays, which have entertained, instructed and inspired millions over the centuries; that is, the plays are engines, if you like, for a wider range of translations and transformations.

I would also assert, as noted in Appendix Six, that any text which does not in some way acknowledge the premise of spirit will be weaker than if it did. In other words, I do see a difference in value between Relative Knowledge and Absolute Truth, though the means of revealing the latter often requires the use of the former if the poet wants to engage an audience other than those who already have had a peak/peek experience of the higher realms, as Larkin considers for Raine:

...it may be that the way forward for a talent of this order lies, paradoxically, in a cruder, more strongly marked mode of expression.²³⁰

This comment reminds me of the rawness and vitality in the work of Ted Hughes, who certainly was able to use depictions of the natural world, which are 'precise and vividly sensual',²³¹ to evoke spiritual energies:

Just as myth and religion provide a framework of ritual within which these energies [Universal Energies, elemental, demonic, astral] can be experienced and explored in a controlled way, so Hughes uses poetry as a carefully constructed ritual in which powerful symbols link the poet and the reader with the 'elemental power circuit of the universe'.²³²

²²⁹ Philip Larkin, 'Abstract Vision: Collected Poems by Kathleen Raine' (1956; <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/classics/story/0,6000,105461,00.html>, 12 December 2005)

N. pag.

²³⁰ Larkin.

²³¹ Skea 10.

²³² Skea 15.

Essentially, then, I see the Spectrum paradigm as providing an opportunity to develop analyses of how texts move or don't move a reader along the Great Chain of Being and thus of placing poets and writers in a framework of effect and value.

Singing School

Now to my more pressing vocation of creativity. The first task facing me once this project is complete is to continue my own 'learning of the Imagination' in an effort to create more texts exploring the relationship between the human and the divine, more texts that seek to 'open the Eternal Worlds'. In Appendix Nine I have listed what I feel is a basic curriculum of Perennial Philosophy texts, poetic texts and others for anyone wishing to explore the Imaginative Tradition. My ongoing research into *Imaginatio* will involve these texts and any others that reveal themselves during my studies. Although I consider myself strongly sympathetic to the Perennial Tradition, I do sense that there is too much emphasis placed on Eternity in preference to Time, *nirvana* as opposed to *samsara*, with the latter being *maya*, illusion. Though such an emphasis may be necessary for one to redress the materialist age we currently inhabit, I feel that the dynamic between Eternity and Time, between Relative Knowledge and Absolute Truth is much more complex than some commentators and poets make out. It seems to me that such concepts are themselves victims of dualistic thinking and that the final imperative of the work I now wish to compose will involve consideration of a more intimate relationship between these domains, some sort of combination of the vatic and the primal. Considering I have come to realize I sometimes avoid the concrete of life in preference to an abstract view of life, a part of my studies will certainly involve more engagement with the physical world and its elemental energies. As I note in Appendix Nine, one can only learn so much from texts. The rest

one must glean from life in all its forms and patterns, through direct participation and other more subtle practices of ‘the learning of the Imagination’. Naturally enough, the results of these modes of study will help refine the Spectrum paradigm and the Threshold Equation, which I see of use in works other than the present one.

Threshold Texts

In the tradition I find myself in, the study of ‘monuments of intellect’ is a necessary part of the creative process, but not a sufficient part. This study needs to be applied in and through the writing activity itself. As hinted previously, *The Silence Inside the World* is part of a much larger project, tentatively entitled *The Nexi Cycle*. In a number of speculative fiction short story drafts written before and during candidature, I have been playing with the idea of a community of characters called Nexi, who are similar to the Dremaan in that they somehow open the world to influence from the divine, using a process called nexing (similar to *upaya*). The word ‘Nexi’ I derived from the word ‘nexus’, but the idea itself was an adaptation of the concept of the nexialist (this word likely based also on ‘nexus’), a practitioner of generalist principles, one of whom A E van Vogt featured in his novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*:

NEXIALISM is the science of joining in an orderly fashion the knowledge of one field of learning with that of other fields. It provides techniques for speeding up the process of absorbing knowledge and of using effectively what has been learned.²³³

These draft Nexi stories are set in the late 21st century and beyond and involve conflicts created by the collision of various ‘spectrum’ historical and personal forces. Once I have completed these stories, I hope to develop longer works exploring this Future History and the nexing concept itself.

However, my main interest is in poetry, and I have already started to consider several projects involving further poetic exploration of the concepts and learning garnered in this candidature. One such I envisage will involve a collection of lyric poems depicting transitions by individuals and communities (historical and imagined) through (or not through, as the case may be) the various levels of the Great Chain of Being. Such poems will depict the struggle to handle those energies involved at a fulcrum of development. In an attempt to transform abstract developmental ideas into concrete reality, another work will examine the historical and imaginative associations of the Yarra River as it flows from its source to Port Phillip Bay. And another collection will attempt to develop a poetic grammar of fauna and flora for Australian poets based on consideration of those symbols and meanings developed in Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* but clearly inappropriate for a non-European landscape. This last project, while not directly resulting from the Spectrum paradigm or the Threshold Equation, is one I feel is essential, in that it will provide language tools to enable further poetic explorations of Imagination, especially in the Australian context.

Naturally enough, any of these plans may shift focus, or be combined, or change completely, depending on daily life, my studies, and the exigencies of 'imagination and inspired insight'. What is important, however, for all my future work is a commitment to Imagination, so I can continue what I feel is one of the major tasks of art, to 'Bring the soul of man to God'.²³⁴

CONCLUSION

²³³ A E van Vogt, *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (1951; Panther: 1977) 51.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is
founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts.
‘The Twin-verses’ of the *Dhammapada*²³⁵

At the outset of this project, my intention was to create a strong, imaginative text. Did I achieve this? Although only my readers can really answer such a question, my own sense of the answer is in the affirmative. This is because I believe I have followed the one basic rule that any creative being, which means every human, must follow if he or she is to create a strong text (whether in words or in life actions), and that is to be aware of and express as well as possible his or her inner core of destiny, what I have termed in *The Silence Inside the World* a person’s song-spark.

As a response to those who believe the individual being is a social construct only, and thus the idea of an inner spark also a construct, I would say they are half right. There is construction, but not by society alone. Nor is it by language or by class or by power relations (either individually or in combination). The construction is by the kosmos itself. On one level the entity Earl Livings is a separate being in a universe that is other to that being. On another level, there is only the universe, the kosmos in its material, emotional, mental, social, spiritual aspects. The atoms making up that being named Earl Livings share electrons with other beings. The mind of that being has emotional connections with other beings, to the extent that their fortunes can be felt by him almost as strongly as they are felt by themselves. All his interactions with the world around him are constrained and mediated by the multitudinous aspects of the world, but are not predicated on those constraints and

²³⁴ Yeats, Part IV, ‘Under Ben Bulben’, 399. The line is most probably influenced by the reported last words of Plotinus: ‘Strive to bring back the god in yourselves to the Divine in the universe’, quoted in Paul Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought’, Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (1917-1930; London: Penguin Books, 1991) lii.

²³⁵ F Max Müller, trans. and ed., *Wisdom of the Buddha: The Unabridged Dhammapada* (1900; Mineola: Dover, 2000) 1.

mediations. There is something at the base of those interactions, something that experiences them. There also is something deeper than the base of those interactions, and these two things are identical. At the juncture of experience there is, according to the Perennial Philosophy, only one thing, the Mystery of consciousness, the Spirit that experiences itself in all its manifold perturbations, combinations, negations. As Ken Wilber states:

And so: as the center of self was shown to be Archetype; and as the center of Archetype was shown to be final-God; and as the center of final-God was shown to be Formlessness—so the center of Formlessness is shown to be not other than the entire world of Form.²³⁶

At the ultimate centre of one's song-spark, one's destiny, is the 'entire world of Form'. In fact, there is no 'one', except during those identifications with various stages of the Great Chain of Being before the realization of identity with the entire world of Form. Not that such an intellectual understanding of the 'divine plan' should preclude action by a 'being' both before the ultimate realization and after.²³⁷ One's song-spark determines one's interaction with the world and it is the task of the human to discover the true urgencies of that spark, then allow it to blossom into whatever action the individual deems appropriate. Some will become mystics, some artists, factory workers, soldiers, criminals, social activists, bureaucrats, and so forth.

Does this attitude to song-sparks as embryo spirit-in-action preclude free will? The answer depends on how one views story, those texts created through song-sparks. Are all stories lying somewhere waiting to be discovered or remembered (something

²³⁶ Wilber *Eye*, 99.

²³⁷ As the Zen saying goes, 'Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.'

akin to Plato's anamnesis), or are they created *ex nihilo* during the telling? If the former, is their place of residence in the personal or collective memory—in other words, in the past (direct imitation or in combination)—or in the future, waiting to be discovered, the Daughters of Memory versus the Daughters of Inspiration? If they are created *ex nihilo*, what does this actually mean? The faculty of such creation can't be nothing; it must be a power that doesn't rely on 'seeing' something already in existence, and so we come back to Blake's Daughters of Inspiration. Thus, the real question is, do we have a choice in whether or not we tell a story? The answer is no, for if we choose not to tell one story, that choice becomes another story, unless we choose to negate all stories, which the characters of *The Silence Inside the World* discover is impossible.

It seems to me, as someone who has not experienced enlightenment (except for jolts of inspiration, Imagination-in-action), that the Formless is the database, if you like, of all possible (and impossible) stories, and that it is the job of life, of the world of Form, to create a space for those stories to be told. Whether such a *Tzimtzum* occurs as an act of will and memory or as a response to inspiration is irrelevant. What is relevant is whether or not the story can be accommodated in the current space or requires a newly willed space, and whether or not the story has worth. Stories of vampires, for example, can't exist in the so-called 'real world', but can exist in the imaginative spaces of certain readers. And such stories retain their hold on readers in proportion to their ability to enable those readers to live life more fully, according to their own perceptions of life. As with all literature, vampire stories have the potential to allow opportune growth of intellect, emotion and soul, whether because they provide rest and an environment for investigation of wish-fulfilment, or, if well written, because they develop empathy for the 'other'.

The point is, all stories ‘further’ the individual in some way, offer an opportunity for some form of *Tikkun*. From a certain point of view, even a war furthers some stories,²³⁸ though often at the expense of others. This is not to say that any war, any assault on the human, on life, should be condoned. But one must recognize that these things do happen, and, because they do, such events often call into being those forces resolved to prevent them from happening again, by creating those alternative stories that will allow stories to flourish.

What the above indicates is that the writing of this thesis, which started a long time ago as an alter ego, wish-fulfilment fantasy, has, through consideration of the elements of the Perennial Philosophy, not only enabled me to write what I consider a strong literary investigation into the divine, but has caused me to re-evaluate my connection with the divine, both as poet and person. Do I write, or does the divine write through me? Do I act, or does the divine act through me? One could say, using a Romantic theory of inspiration, that the divine provides the inspiration but the human completes the vision, whether in text or action. However, unless one decides that the human is separate from the divine, then the divine is always telling stories through itself for its own benefit. If one denies the divine altogether, then there is nothing beyond the human will, whether individual or collective (conscious or unconscious), and we choose what order, what story, we wish to impose on the other. Without such a higher sense of order, all stories have the same arbitrary value, and we are locked into battles of might disguised as right. This higher sense of order, which I feel is unavoidable and would best be seen as an ‘open grand narrative’, can only be fully

²³⁸ For example, my mother, a Belgian, would probably never have come to Australia, and thus not met my father, if not, in part, for the events of World War II.

experienced through one's song-spark. When we are 'a will-in-action', we discover our spark. When we are a stronger will, we employ and express that spark. And when we are a much stronger will—which paradoxically means a relaxation of will, a letting go of individual will in order to experience a higher will—we discover the underlying unity of all sparks, which is Spirit, and also Spirit's will:

Man models himself on earth,
 Earth on heaven,
 Heaven on the way,
 And the way on that which is naturally so.²³⁹

At this point, according to the Perennial Philosophy, what one realizes is that there is only Spirit, the nondual identity of Form and Formlessness. One may also realize that this place, as it seems to me, is the repository and expression of all stories, a place that creators of all forms of text reach, if only for a moment of insight. The more we experience this place—the more aware we are of ourselves and our connection with this place (which is the kosmos), and so can enable further stories—then the more divine we act and become.

In the final analysis (which essentially means: after the experience of the nondual, however fleeting it is through our engagement with all orders of life, including art), the questions stated above are nonsensical: both the divine and I, as representative and symbol of the divine, write and act, and such activities, including this thesis, express, enact, enable and reflect the divine in all its glory:

For every thing that lives is Holy.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. and intro. D C Lau (1963; Middlesex: Penguin, 1972) 82.

²⁴⁰ Blake 102.

APPENDIX ONE: CHAPTER SUMMARIES

There is one story and one story only
That will prove worth your telling...
Robert Graves, 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice'²⁴¹

Below are chapter summaries for the poem *The Silence Inside the World*. They were originally constructed to help with the understanding of the complex story and character arcs for editing purposes, but are offered here as a type of old-fashioned 'Argument' for the reading of the poem.

Chapter 1: Beyond the Last Gate

In which Jessie Willis, an albino student of ancient literatures and languages, appears in a cemetery of Thexlan, the world of all worlds, and meets Zane, a warrior/magician from the world of Ghajat. They are attacked by a mass of disembodied beings and rescued by a mysterious goddess. After *Glymsen*, the refreshment of the world that occurs at dawn, they begin their journey on the grey road.

Chapter 2: Two Gifts

Zane and Jessie encounter a gift-giving monk on a bridge of light. Zane receives an old, bent, wood-nail and Jessie a pouch containing a strange crystal sphere. After crossing the bridge they discuss their memories of what happened before they met.

²⁴¹ Robert Graves, *Collected Poems* (1958; London: Cassell, 1991) 137.

Chapter 3: Stone and Blood

Jessie and Zane come across Remesh, who is being accosted by two *hoya*, two star-demons. One flees, but the other one, before it also leaves, reveals itself as Rynobar, an old acquaintance of Zane. Jessie, Zane and Remesh discuss the nature of their 'quests'. Zane conjures a floating real-time map on their journey. They notice a tiny meteor rip the map's sky and slowly head towards Mt Alkerii. They know that somewhere above them, such a meteor is moving.

Chapter 4: The Service of Names

The group meet an old woman bearing a staff of living skulls. During a name-giving game, Jessie names the woman Enheduanna, which is the name of her world's first known author. Enheduanna answers some of their questions about their predicament.

Chapter 5: The Soul Mirror

At the side of the road the group come across a large mound, in the side of which is a large mirrored slab. When Zane and Jessie look into the mirror they each experience past life choices and actions and the repercussions of these.

Chapter 6: Blood Seeds

The group travels through a plain of trees draped with viscera. Jessie has an encounter with one of the trees. They then meet Gedon, a gold-skinned version of Zane. Remesh tries to leave the quest by allowing himself to be swallowed by the verge alongside the road, then changes his mind. Gedon disappears.

Chapter 7: The Striking of Shadow

After travelling through a valley with stone pillars marked in sun and moon symbols, the group encounters Dukor, who resides in a tree that emerges from the road in front of them. Dukor is a Dremaan and makes *Turmas*, strange mirrors that reveal secrets and visions of those who possess them. He has made one for Jessie, Zane and Remesh, who experience different visions when they try it out. Suddenly a creature from within the *Turma* attacks them and in the encounter the *Turma* is destroyed.

Chapter 8: The Story Game

There are more discussions of their plight—for example, are they alive or dead?—as they travel down the road. As nightfall approaches, and with it the threat of attack from star-demons, who usually can only come down from the sky at night, the group seek shelter inside an abandoned hut. Zane and Remesh argue. Gedon appears and becomes the judge of *Fable, Lie or Life*, a story game Remesh has suggested they play during the night hours, since it seems that in Thexlan no one actually sleeps.

Chapter 9: Zane's Story

Zane tells a story of his youth and of the deaths of his mother and his sister Kerrilea. His mother drowned herself in Lake Tarlkarni, on the shores of which is Zane's village, Tarlkar, and Kerrilea was chosen by lottery as a punishment inflicted on the villagers by the female Dremaan Shultar for failure in their tribute to her.

Chapter 10: Jessie's Tale

The group discusses the truth or otherwise of Zane's story, then Jessie tells her tale of space exploration, which also is judged by the group.

Chapter 11: Remesh's Account

Remesh tells his story of a man seeking the return of his dead lover and of the wizard who helps him but who is also seeking revenge against a god that didn't help him in a similar quest. After the judgement of this tale, *Glymsen* arrives.

Chapter 12: Murga Flight

Zane attempts a *murga* (a magic sand painting) to carry the group closer to their goal (the dream mountain, Mt Alkerii, at the end of the grey road). The spell collapses early and dumps them on the road, after which they are attacked by a group of vicious changeling creatures. Jessie is wounded during the battle.

Chapter 13: Of Crooked Signs

Prompted by the smell of a sea nearby, Jessie talks a little more of her childhood and Zane reveals his mother's teachings about Mt Alkerii and its wish rings, which are composed of Orms, world bubbles. The group is then stopped by a stone maze. Jessie discovers how to open the entrance. After travelling inside for a while, they are attacked by two *hoya* in league with darkness, but Rynobar comes to their assistance.

Chapter 14: Leap and Echo

Later, the group comes to a dark pool in the middle of the maze, into which Jessie leaps. Zane's music seems to aid her return. Jessie announces that she is not dead, but in a coma back on her world. After disposing of the two *hoya* she helped defeat, Rynobar returns to the group and accompanies them.

Chapter 15: Matters of Trust

During their outward journey through the maze, the group encounters Gedon, who reveals a small cube of stone, which turns into a temple that each encounters alone. Afterwards, there is brief discussion, though Zane seems the one most affected by the experience. When they exit the maze and it disappears Rynobar asks to join the group. Remesh is antagonistic to the *hoya*, though he doesn't know why, and is soon persuaded.

Chapter 16: A Vow for Fate

The travellers encounter Azra, an elderly Dremaan, and his beast of burden, Phaox. Azra is going to help them on their journey, but, because the weather is turning bad, he decides to take them to his abode.

Chapter 17: Broken Hope

As they journey there is some discussion about the nature of the soul. At Azra's house, which is made of the message-bottles people throw into the sea, the Dremaan explains to Jessie how he helps those whose messages call to him. Jessie remembers an imaginary childhood friend, Jenny. Azra also gives Zane his crystal sword, though Zane is disappointed to find it is still broken.

Chapter 18: The Ice Temple

Remesh tells of his apprenticeship and career as an artist and of his relationship with Nikolina, who is the owner of a decadent establishment, The Ice Temple, and, it has transpired, is Azra's daughter. Though he loves Nikolina, the woman seems to love

her brood of orphans more, and Remesh loses her. Nikolina eventually kills herself and her charges by burning down the club.

Chapter 19: Above the Abyss

While storms gather outside, Zane tells of his apprenticeship to Shultar, both in Dremaan magic and in sex, of his frustrations in not being able to avenge Kerrilea's death, of his suicide attempt by hanging, and of his vision of Jessie with their daughter as he swung from a tree over the abyss under Shultar's castle. Suddenly they have to abandon Azra's house because of the approach of a diabolical, giant mass of roiling darkness and lightning. They barely manage to escape to a nearby island, with the creature unable to cross water.

Chapter 20: To Meddle

Zane suggests that one way to evade the creature, whom Azra has named as Abzzu, is to tame the dreams of one of the Scylarii, denizens of the island and possible dreamers of all existence, and use it to fly them away. Although a dangerous plan, the group agrees.

Chapter 21: The Cave of the Scylarii

Jessie accompanies Zane to the cave of the Scylarii. As they enter the cave and travel within they sense the presence of the Scylarii's guardian but do not meet it. Once in the central cavern, where the massive Scylarii is sleeping, they see that the scales of the creature seem to contain scenes of all types of life. Suddenly they are assaulted by intense pain.

Chapter 22: Serpent Song

When Jessie recovers, she meets the guardian, who turns out to be Enheduanna, whose other name is Neshxi, Dukor's wife. Jessie experiences a memory of lovemaking with someone from her world, though there is a sense that someone else may in fact have been present.

Chapter 23: The Design in Stars

Through analysis of her various memories, Jessie figures out an escape plan, which involves Zane using his magical powers to force the sea to smash down on Abzzu. After the escape, the group travels to the house of Azra's soul companion, Devina, who is the mother of Nikolina.

Chapter 24: The Sentinel Tree

Upon arrival at Devina's abode, her sentinel tree reacts violently to their presence and they discover that Devina is missing. They come across a wounded Siraporn, the latest incarnation of Azra and Devina's animal companion, and decide to mount a rescue attempt for Devina.

Chapter 25: Shultar's Secrets

As they follow Devina's trail, Zane recounts his discovery of the reason why Shultar demands the tribute of *sorra*, a purple weed that comes from the bottom of Lake Tarlkarni—it is a rejuvenation herb. He found this out by summoning the spirit of Kerrilea to spy on Shultar. Night approaches and the group finds shelter amongst giant boulders.

Chapter 26: The Next Breath

Remesh tells of meeting a strange man in the tavern where he works after Nikolina's death and his loss of talent. The man reveals a pattern of cards that indicate Remesh's life and possibly his fate after death. When it is her turn to tell a story, Jessie seems to become someone else, who talks of the evolution of multiple universes. Only Remesh notices how Rynobar, who was touching Jessie's shoulder during the tale, and Jessie merged into someone else that he recognizes. *Glymsen* approaches and Zane uses his sword, which is the talisman of those who serve Ghajat, in a *murga* to rid them of Abzzu. The attempt fails and the sword pierces Jessie's body.

Chapter 27: Only Chance

For an accountable reason Jessie is unharmed by the sword. Zane is accosted by the others for his irresponsible attempt and leaves the group for a short time while he muses on his predicament. Soon after, Jessie talks to him about the event and he decides to rejoin the party.

Chapter 28: The Garden of Play

They arrive at a giant, stone wall. Once beyond it they discover a fantastic garden presided over by Alyston, an impish youth who encourages them to play a game in exchange for leading them to his mother, who may know where Devina is. The game turns out to be a spell that plunges them into their memories.

Chapter 29: A Vision of Rescue

Jessie recalls her research into immortals and her belief in a man from another dimension who has gone backwards in time and been the creator and/or inspiration

for much of her world's great literatures and ideas. Overworked to the point of exhaustion and desperate to prove her thesis that this stranger—who once helped her evade an assault and may have guided her ex-boyfriend into saving her when she tried to commit suicide—would rescue her again, she attempts suicide once more.

Chapter 30: The Death of Shultar

Zane relives part of his time as an apprentice in the Dremaan temple in Adiska. He recalls how he enlisted the aid of Elgron, the teacher at the temple, to help him kill Shultar. He did this by explaining that Shultar was about to invoke the Spell of Unknowing in order to destroy Ghajat and recreate it in her own vision. Zane also recalls his love for Jeera, another apprentice at the temple.

Chapter 31: Facets of Awe

Remesh appears before a living version of one of his paintings, which takes him through a surreal landscape to a cliff carved with the faces of burnt children. He crawls through one of the holes and follows a tunnel in pursuit of Nikolina. At the same time, Rynobar finds herself in her star-realm home. She is torn between her desire for that world and her desire for experience of the world below. During all this, Azra sees the others in their aspects of Alyston's spell but is unsure if he too is in the spell, especially when he discovers a giant pregnant woman in front of him.

Chapter 32: Birth of a God

The group recovers to find the giant woman is Devina and she is pregnant with Alyston, who at the same time wants to prevent them helping her give birth too early, for the longer she stays pregnant, the stronger and more intelligent he becomes. They

negotiate with him and the birth proceeds. Azra stays behind with a now normal-sized Devina and her baby.

Chapter 33: Closer to Home

The others return to Phaox and the grey road. Zane recalls the assault on Adiska by the shifting sands of the sea of Chos and the testing of his powers by Elgron so that he could become a Kenri and possibly prevent Ghajat vanishing. The group's journey proceeds with each of them thinking about what the word 'home' means to them.

Chapter 34: The Call of Dust and Flame

As they travel they discuss Mt Alkerii, Kenri and Keth rings (those dream rings Mt Alkerii spouts into Thexlan each morning and which are composed of Orms, wish globules). Zane hears a distant cry and Jessie persuades them to investigate. They discover a woman being sacrificed on an altar in the middle of a grove of trees. Jessie realizes the woman is her mother and the would-be killer her father. She battles her past in conversation with her father and realizes she may be condemned to participate in the ritual, from all sides, over and over again. Then she hears Zane playing his lyre.

Chapter 35: The Sacrifice

The story evoked by Zane's playing and which Jessie instantly sees, is his encounter with Beraint, the fading Kenri of Ghajat, a Kenri being the Dremaan who upholds a whole world. Zane and Jeera have both passed the Dremaan test and they journey to the tree of lights beneath Adiska to wrestle the Kenri-ship from Beraint, as his decline in visionary power is responsible for the decline in Ghajat. They defeat him, but Zane chooses not to revive Ghajat, preferring to see it vanish because of what he perceives

as the world's responsibility in the deaths of his mother and sister. Jeera sacrifices herself so that Ghajat can survive.

Chapter 36: To Unravel Herself

Through empathy with Zane's sorrow at losing Jeera, Jessie undergoes a mystical experience of union with all things and learns to accept her parents.

Chapter 37: A New Poise

Zane and the others notice Jessie's new poise. The meteor overhead is moving faster and its weird wake is widening. Zane recalls more of his time with Jeera, but admits his attraction to Jessie. As they travel swiftly towards the base of Mt Alkerii, Zane decides on more storytelling.

Chapter 38: The Gem of Synrath

Zane tells the story of his encounter with a group of false gods, though his defeat of them caused his weapon, the Thulsword, the symbol of the Kenri, to break, and this event somehow conferred immortality upon him.

Chapter 39: Another Juncture

They discuss types of immortality. Remesh explains why he was allowing himself to fade to almost nothing when Jessie and Zane found him alongside the road. In exasperation at the puzzles and irrationality of their time in Thexlan, Remesh leaves them and wanders into a nearby forest.

Chapter 40: Prelude to a Death

Being blind to his surroundings as he wanders, Remesh suddenly finds himself inside an old playhouse, similar to one he once visited with Nikolina. Suddenly, the play he thought they saw begins, and he realizes it's the play written after his execution for an abominable murder. He meets Nikolina and relives the murder, from both sides, his victim the daughter of Zane and Jessie, whose soul or song-spark (a Dremaan concept) may well be Rynobar. As he sobs because of his action, he finds Zane and Jessie standing near him. The playhouse dissolves to a cave. Rynobar and Remesh begin a reconciliation. Rynobar flies off with a primal flower Remesh found in the cave. When the rest return to Phaox, Siraporn, who had disappeared in Alyston's garden, reappears. They race towards Mt Alkerii.

Chapter 41: The Song of Unknowing

As they head towards the town at the base of the dream mountain, the meteor above them picks up speed and crashes into the side of Mt Alkerii. They soon arrive and find pandemonium: Thexlan is fading, because of Abzzu draining its life and the mountain disgorging dreams and power from the rent caused by the meteor. They meet Alyston, who is now an adult and who announces himself as Zane's son with Shultar, trained by Zane to help him destroy Thexlan, or prevent him from renegeing on his plan. Zane reveals that Jessie, as proved by the crystal sword, could become a Kenri, and it is this power in her that he needs for his Song of Unknowing to succeed. Alyston and Zane march everyone to the path up the mountain.

Chapter 42: The Rule of Fate

Alyston notices that Zane is starting to relapse, so he gives his father a Keth shard, a remnant from those rings of dream, wish and desire that Mt Alkerii sends out each morning and which can be used to foretell the future or uncover the past. Zane remembers that the bridge monk gave Jessie a gift. It turns out to be *Anen*, the jewel belonging to the pommel of his sword. Once inserted there, the sword can now kill a Kenri, when otherwise it can't, and thus draw out that person's song-spark. He intends to use those energies to sequester himself and Alyston from the destruction of Thexlan. After Jessie and Remesh reconcile over the death/future death of Keea, her daughter, Zane strikes Jessie a number of times to demonstrate his power, and she forgives him.

Chapter 43: Sparks Weaving

Because of Jessie's compassion, Zane has a change of heart. Alyston understands his father's doubts, for Zane filled him with everything that he knew, but still he battles Zane. Jessie intervenes and shows surprising martial ability. When Rynobar arrives with Jeera, she and Jessie battle Alyston while Zane prepares to use the Keth shard to repair his sword and undo the Spell of Unknowing. Though the two women defeat Alyston, the mountain shakes as it prepares for *Glymsen*. Alyston signals victory, for once the rising Keth ring reaches the rent, the whole mountain will be destroyed.

Chapter 44: Always Choice

Zane realizes he could still kill Jessie, survive the destruction, and remake Thexlan. Suddenly Shultar appears from nowhere. She releases her son, grabs Jessie, urges Zane to kill her. Zane thrusts his sword through Jessie into Shultar. Jessie survives,

for he had removed the *Anen*, but Shultar doesn't. When she dies, Jessie calls out to her rising song-spark and Neshxi appears. The goddess explains how all things must die, including Thexlan. Jessie realizes it was always Zane's fate to destroy Thexlan, though Neshxi adds, 'There is always choice'. Instead of killing Jessie to somehow save Thexlan, he thrusts the sword inside himself, waits for it to soak up as much of his Kenri power as he can, then wrenches it out. He remakes the sword, gives it to the others.

Chapter 45: A Surge of Silence

Zane plunges into the vent of Mt Alkerii. After finding an Orm containing pure flame, he repairs the rent just as the rising Keth ring of Orms reaches him. He is borne upwards into a new *Glymsen* for a new Thexlan.

APPENDIX TWO: GLOSSARY

‘When *I* use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone,
 ‘it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.’
 Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*²⁴²

This appendix lists brief meanings for unusual terms and concepts featured in both the exegesis and *The Silence Inside the World*.

- Abzzu:** The creature of smoke and lightning pursuing the characters in *The Silence Inside the World*.
- Adiska:** The jewel city of Ghajat. Home to the Dremaan temple.
- Aimal:** The abode of Shultar, directly above the mist edge of Thexlan, on Lake Tarlkarni.
- Alyston:** Son of Devina/Shultar and Zane. Trained by Zane to help him succeed in The Song of Unknowing.
- Anen:** The jewel that fits into the pommel of the Thulsword and which is always discarded into the streams of fate whenever a new Kenri takes command of Es Xayim.
- Apophrades:** The sixth and last of Harold Bloom’s revisionary ratios, in which the strong poet achieves a style so that time seems reversed, as if he is being imitated by his precursor.

²⁴² Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland: Authoritative Texts of Alice’s Adventures of Wonderland, Through the Looking-Glass, The Hunting of the Snark, Backgrounds, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Donald J Gray (1971; New York: W W Norton, 1992) 163.

- AQAL:** Acronym for ‘All Quadrants, All Levels’, the name of Ken Wilber’s model of the Kosmos, which comprises four quadrants formed to accommodate all hierarchies of development, some of which are external, some internal, some individual, some collective.
- Archaic:** The first of Gebser’s cultural worldviews, in which the infant/group experiences pure sensations, perceptions, and emotions. Allied with the Sensorimotor level of development.
- Askesis:** The fifth of Harold Bloom’s revisionary ratios, in which the strong poet, under the guilt of having devoured that part of the precursor that gave him his original strength, and intoxicated by the power of the Counter-Sublime of Daemonization, turns this energy on himself in a being-with-oneself that borders on solipsism.
- Atman:** Soul, self, the highest part of the human.
- Authentic:** A Wilber term describing a psychosocial institution that validates or facilitates transformation.
- Authority:** A psychosocial institution is likely to have good *authority* if it is *functional* (for example, someone authorized to perform a certain task) and *phase-temporary* or *phase-specific* (the task has some bound; for example, school or university graduation occurs once knowledge is obtained).

- Azra:** The husband of Devina, father of Nikolina, and guide of Zane and the others. The answerer of messages.
- Balis:** The artist-savant in the country town where Remesh spent his childhood, who trained him in painting.
- Behavioral:** The Upper-Right Quadrant: Exterior-Individual. Objective. The 'It' domain of development, for example, physical organisms.
- Beraint:** The current Kenri, with whom Zane and Jeera do battle for the salvation of Ghajat.
- Body:** Matter formed into a container for the soul. The second level of the Great Chain of Being (GCOB) in its version of Matter, Body, Mind, Soul, Spirit.
- Brahman:** The reality of the universe, pure Formless Spirit.
- Causal:** The Godhead and the Formless. The eight level of the cognitive line of development (the Spectrum of Consciousness), Formless mysticism, the self-felt experience of Witness, and the ninth fulcrum of development. The Path of Sages.
- Chakra:** A psychic energy centre located in the human body.
- Chos:** The sea around and under Ghajat. Also the sands that appear out of the sea and form the lands of Ghajat.
- Clinamen:** The first of Harold Bloom's revisionary rations, in which the ephebe poet performs a swerve from his precursor, misreading the precursor as one who 'got it wrong'.

- Cogitatio:** Investigating the material world with the *eye of flesh*.
- Conception and birth:** The F-0 fulcrum of development. For those of ‘spirit’ premise, the arrival of the soul at conception.
- Concrete Operational:** (Conop): The third level of the Spectrum of Consciousness, and involves working with mental rules and learning social roles. Also known as Rule/Role Mind. With Mythic and Mythic-Rational worldviews.
- Contemplatio:** Investigating Absolute Reality with the *eye of contemplation*.
- Cultural:** The Lower-Left Quadrant: Interior-Collective. Intersubjective. The ‘We’ domain of development, for example, group worldviews.
- Daemonization:** The fourth of Harold Bloom’s revisionary ratios, in which the newly-arrived strong poet reduces the precursor’s power to the numinous and takes on that power himself, and because he is later than the precursor, is supposedly able to use this Counter-Sublime better.
- Devina:** Wife of Azra, mother of Nikolina (with Azra) and, as Shultar, mother of Alyston (with Zane). The one who preserves.
- Dremaan:** Those who are highly skilled in the art of ‘making’. A worker of worlds.
- Dukor:** Husband-son of Neshxi and maker of *Turmas*.

- Elgron:** The Dremaan in charge of the temple at Adiska. The teacher of Zane and Jeera.
- Emptiness:** The Formless, into which even spirit fades.
- Enheduanna:** The name Jessie gave to Neshxi when they first met. Taken from the world's first known author, who was an Akkadian High Priestess of the Moon-God Nanna.
- Ephebe:** The 'apprentice' poet who has been inaugurated into poetry by the works of a precursor.
- Es Xayim:** The tree of lights beneath Ghajat, which is the power foundation of that world through its 'root' connections with Thexlan.
- Eye of contemplation:** How we perceive the divine.
- Eye of flesh:** How we perceive the external world.
- Eye of reason:** How we perceive the mind.
- Existential:** The sixth fulcrum of development. The emergence of a pure observing Self. Also, the cultural worldview after Rational, in which thought looks at thought and is even more pluralistic and worldcentric than Rational. Allied with the Vision-Logic level of development.
- Fancy:** Coleridge: [Fancy] has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space...[and] must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

- Forii:** The ancestral rule-voices of the denizens of Tarlkar, composed of the commands and rulings of all headmen of the village stretching into the past.
- Formal Operational:** (Formop) The fourth level of the Spectrum of Consciousness, and involves the emergence of reason. With Rational and Rational-Existential worldviews.
- Formal-Reflexive:** The fifth fulcrum of development. The emergence of formal operations.
- Gem of Synrath, The:** The giant leech-jewel that allows the false gods of Synrath to maintain their realm of perpetual spring.
- Ghajat:** Zane's home world. A realm quite close to Thexlan in the hierarchy of worlds. A realm of archetypes.
- Glymsen:** The eruption of Orm rings from Mt. Alkerii that signal (and create?) the new day, and which also resound throughout Ghajat.
- Gnosis:** The direct experience of the divine.
- Great Chain of Being, The:** (GCOB) The levels of consciousness from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Ken Wilber has adapted this concept into the Great Nest of Being (see Appendix Three)—which is also called the Great Hierarchy.
- Gross:** The realm of Matter, Body, Mind. The lowest realm of manifestation.
- Haal:** The goddess of Lake Tarlkarni. Possibly Shultar.
- Holon:** In Ken Wilber's system: a whole that is a part of a greater whole. For example, an atom is part of a

molecule which is part of a cell which is part of an organism. The term was originated by Arthur Koestler.

- Hoya:** The star-demons of Ghajat.
- Ice Temple, The:** The house of decadence run by Nikolina.
- Imaginatio:** The act of Imagination. The drawing of story from any of the levels of the GCOB, but predominantly from the Formless.
- Imagination:** The power and place of creativity.
- Intelligibilia:** The domain of the mental.
- Intentional:** The Upper-Left Quadrant: Interior-Individual. Subjective. The 'I' domain of development, for example, individual consciousness.
- Jeera:** The first lover of Zane. A student of Elgron in the Dremaan temple at Adiska.
- Jessie Willis:** An albino student of ancient languages and literatures who is in a coma on early 21st century Earth but journeys through Thexlan to discover why she is there.
- Kenosis:** The third of Harold Bloom's revisionary ratio, in which the ephebe/strong poet performs an 'emptying' of the precursor's strength in himself, which effectively means emptying the precursor of divinity, of the numinous, while at the same time appearing to empty his own divinity as well.
- Kenri:** The first Kenri sang Ghajat into existence. Those who follow are Dremaans who pass the Kenri Test and then

become the ‘dream sentinel’ of Ghajat by looking after Es Xayim.

- Kenri Test:** All those wishing to be the next Kenri must open the staircase into the region below Adiska, must be accepted by the Thulsword when wielded by the current Kenri, and must have been drawn to the *Anen* during their life before the test.
- Keth Rings:** The rings of Orms projected into Thexlan by Mt Alkerii during *Glymsen*.
- Keth Shards:** Gem fragments of Orms that drop out of Keth Rings and can be used to predict the future or find the past.
- Koan:** A statement once made by a Zen master from a state of satori, used to provoke an intense state of spiritual tension for the sudden realization of a spiritual truth.
- Kosmos:** Ken Wilber’s term for the totality of existence. It contains the cosmos (or the physiosphere), the bios (or biosphere), nous (the noosphere), and theos (the theosphere or divine domain).
- Larandor:** The first Kenri of Ghajat.
- Learning I:** Gregory Bateson’s first type of learning: the simple solution of a specific problem.
- Learning II:** Gregory Bateson’s second type of learning: learning the rules of the game; paradigm formation.

Learning III:	Gregory Bateson's third type of learning: the realization of the arbitrary nature of one's paradigm, with resulting profound reorganization of consciousness.
Legitimate:	A Wilber term describing a psychosocial institution that validates or facilitates translation.
Level:	Refers to different types of consciousness: matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Same as Wave.
Line:	Refers to different types of development occurring in the human, including cognitive, affective, moral, interpersonal, spiritual, self-identity, needs, motivation, and so on. Same as Stream.
Magic:	The second of Gerber's cultural worldviews, in which the infant/group believes it can directly influence the world around it. Is egocentric. Allied with the Preop level of development.
Makir:	The women (generally) of Ghajat who are trained to perform the <i>Murga</i> .
Mandalic Thinking:	The mind attempting to reason about what is beyond itself.
Mandalic Art:	An art piece designed to give a reader an experience of Spirit.
Matter:	Basic building blocks of manifestation. The first level of the GCOB in its version of Matter, Body, Mind, Soul, Spirit.
Maya:	Illusion.

- Meditatio:** Investigating the mind itself using the *eye of reason*.
- Mind:** The development of mental and emotional awareness within the Body. The third level of the GCOB in its version of Matter, Body, Mind, Soul, Spirit.
- Monady Church, The:** The sect Remesh joins after his revelation, its theology based on one world, one god, one way to rejoin god, one heaven.
- Mt. Alkerii:** The dream mountain in the centre of Thexlan, from which all things arise, to which all things return. The source of the rings of Orms generated each morning.
- Murga:** The sand song ritual (path of prayer) performed by the Makirs of Ghajat with every *Glymsen*, in an attempt to ensue good fortune for the coming day and to summon from Es Xayim the fulfilment of their desires.
- Mushin:** Empty mind or no mind. The integration of mind and body so that the mind is free from delusions and can act in the present moment according to Ri.
- Mystery:** One name for Absolute Truth/Ultimate Knowledge.
- Mythic:** The third of Gebser's cultural worldviews, in which the infant/group thinks it can directly influence the 'gods' of the world to achieve its aims. Is socio- and ethnocentric. Allied with the Conop level of development.
- Neshxi:** Goddess of Thexlan. Also known as Enheduanna.

- Nikolina:** The daughter of Azra and Devina. The owner of The Ice Temple. The lover of Remesh.
- Nirvana:** Ultimate state of consciousness, which is beyond all paradises, heavens, hells, and worlds.
- Nondual:** The awareness of Forms and the Formless together. Ultimate Reality. Absolute Truth. The ninth level of the cognitive line of development (the Spectrum of Consciousness), nondual mysticism, in which the Witness is seen to be everything that is witnessed, and the tenth fulcrum of development (though not technically a fulcrum, because this level is the Isness of all levels). The Path of Siddhas.
- Orientating Generalization:** A simple idea or concept, or group of ideas/concepts, around which a project or text is built. The grain of sand inside the pearl.
- Orms:** Those wish-globules, or world-bubbles, containing the prayers, dreams and hopes of the inhabitants of Thexlan, cast out from its depths by Mt. Alkerii during *Glymsen*.
- Paramartha:** Absolute knowledge. Enlightenment.
- Paratantra:** Relatively true knowledge.
- Parikalpita:** Relatively false knowledge.
- Parinishpanna:** Absolute knowledge. Enlightenment.

- Peak Experience:** A momentary insight (peek) into a level of the Spectrum of Consciousness higher than the current level of the person to whom it happens.
- Perennial Philosophy:** The philosophy that assumes Spirit as both ground and goal of existence.
- Phantasmic-Emotional:** The second fulcrum of development. The establishment of emotional boundaries.
- Phaox:** The long-snouted, eight-legged beast of burden owned by Azra.
- Precursor:** The poet who inspires the ephebe to take up poetry in the first place.
- Premise:** The paradigm of a reader: either matter as basis of the kosmos or spirit/consciousness as the basis.
- Preoperational:** (Preop) The second level of the Spectrum of Consciousness, in which there is differentiation/integration of the emotional self. Also known as Rep-Mind. With Magic and Magic-Mythic worldviews.
- Primary Imagination:** Coleridge: The living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.
- Psychic:** The realm of nation-nature mysticism, with the emergence of true compassion for all beings. The sixth level of the cognitive line of development, involving the transcendence of the ego and identity with all of

manifestation, and the seventh fulcrum of development.

The Path of Yogis.

- Rational:** The cultural worldview after Mythic, in which reason is predominant. Is nonanthropocentric and worldcentric. Allied with the Formop level of development.
- Remesh:** A painter from the early to mid 21st century of Earth (or a parallel Earth) who is executed for murder and finds himself in Thexlan.
- Rep-mind:** The third fulcrum of development. The establishment of conceptual-self boundaries.
- Role-rule:** The fourth fulcrum of development. The emergence of role boundaries (social roles) and rule operations.
- Rynobar:** A *hoya* (star-demon) from Ghajat who has journeyed to Thexlan to discover the reason why other *hoya* have disappeared.
- Ri:** The underlying principles of the universe.
- Samsara:** The circle/cycle/wheel of death and rebirth.
- Samvritti:** Ignorance. Relative knowledge.
- Satori:** Enlightenment.
- Scylarii:** The non-human dreamers of Thexlan. The fashioners of Time.
- Secondary Imagination:** Coleridge: an echo of the former [Primary Imagination], co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation.

- Self:** The Witness acting through, identifying with, the various levels of the Spectrum of Consciousness or GCOB. Also, the center of gravity of the various levels, lines, and states.
- Sensibilia:** The domain of the sensory.
- Sensorimotor:** The first stage of Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness: the infant is in a state of primitive nondifferentiation, with Archaic and Archaic-Magic worldviews.
- Sensoriphysical:** The first fulcrum of development. The establishment of physical boundaries.
- Shruti:** Inspired writings that are the product of immediate insight into ultimate Reality.
- Shultar:** The Dremaan mistress of Lake Tarlkarni and the surrounding lands.
- Smriti:** Commentary based upon the Shruti.
- Social:** The Lower-Right Quadrant: Exterior-Collective. Interobjective. The 'Its' domain of development, for example, social groupings.
- Song of Unknowing, The:** The spell that undoes the creation of Ghajat and maybe even the existence of Thexlan.
- Sorra:** The purple plant from the bottom of Lake Tarlkarni that Shultar distils to prolong her life.
- Soul:** The Witness in its first awareness of Spirit. The fourth level of the GCOB in its version of Matter, Body, Mind, Soul, Spirit.

Spectrum of Consciousness: The hierarchy of consciousness derived from Western analyses of cognitive development and Eastern investigations of mystical experiences. Equivalent, from one point of view, to the Great Chain/Nest/Holoarchy of Being. One version is Sensorimotor, Preop, Conop, Formop, Vision-Logic, Psychic, Subtle, Causal, Nondual.

Spirit: The foundation and goal of the kosmos. The fifth and highest level of the GCOB in its version of Matter, Body, Mind, Soul, Spirit.

Stage: Same as level/wave/structure.

Star-demon: *Hoya*. Those beings of the Ghajat sky who come down from the stars at night and kill those unprotected.

State: Refers to peak experiences of the transpersonal realms: psychic, subtle, causal, nondual. With work, states are turned into traits of the individual.

Stream: Refers to different types of development occurring in the human, including cognitive, affective, moral, interpersonal, spiritual, self-identity, needs, motivation, and so on. Same as Line.

Structure: Same as level/wave/stage.

Sturgeon's Law: Theodore Sturgeon: Ninety percent of science fiction is crud [crap]. But then ninety percent of everything is crud, and it's the ten percent that isn't crud that is important.

- Subtle:** The realm of transpersonal archetypes, Forms and deities. The seventh level of the cognitive line of development (the Spectrum of Consciousness), involving Deity mysticism, and the eight fulcrum of development. The Path of Saints.
- Synrath:** The realm of those false gods who use a giant leech-jewel to maintain their power over their peoples.
- Tam:** The name Jessie gave to the childhood ‘imaginary’ boy whom she could see but to whom she could never speak.
- Tamheduanna:** The name Jessie gave to the immortal wanderer who apparently influenced the major cultural ideas and texts of human history and who moved backwards through time. Name is a combination of Tam and Enheduanna.
- Tarlkar:** The name of the village where Zane lived his childhood.
- Tarlkarni:** The lake on which Tarlkar is situated.
- Tessera:** The second of Harold Bloom’s revisionary ratios, in which the ephebe strives to ostensibly complete the work of the precursor.
- Thaumaturgy:** The art and science of wonderworking.
- Theurgy:** The use of magic for religious purposes, for attaining salvation.
- Thexlan:** The creator and final world of all possible worlds. The world of all worlds, of all potential worlds, of all

possibilities of existence. The womb and home to all dreams, all stories.

- Threshold Equation:** The equivalence of all worlds and moments as thresholds into the Mystery. The act of testing all elements in *The Silence Inside the World* as embodying the equation.
- Thulsword:** The blade of Ghajat's Kenri, both test and badge of office.
- Tikkun ha-Olam:** The Restoration of the World.
- Transcendelia:** The domain of the spiritual.
- Transformation:** Movement between levels, usually upward.
- Translation:** Movement within a level.
- Tzimtzum:** The contraction by the Divine in order to foster creation by forming a space for it to occur.
- Turma:** Map-portals, large, round, white disks of swirling vapour in a thin border of whorling flame, constructed by Dukor.
- Upaya:** 'Skillful means', tricks used as a means to travel 'towards' Mind (Self/Spirit).
- Vision-Logic:** The fifth level of the Spectrum of Consciousness, involving the ability to look at rationality and to transcend the empirical ego. Also known as Network-Logic, the Existential/Centauroic Self. With Existential worldview.

- Wave:** Refers to different types of consciousness: matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Same as Level.
- Witness:** The real Self, its nature being that of Spirit.
- Wu-wei:** Taoist term meaning ‘not forcing’, in the sense of going with the flow.
- Zane:** An immortal wizard and seeker of wisdom who is striving to invoke *The Song of Unknowing* in order to destroy Ghajat and possibly Thexlan.

APPENDIX THREE: AQAL

The map is not the territory.
Eric Temple Bell²⁴³

As explained in 'Leap of Tradition', Ken Wilber has formulated a model of overall cosmic development that he calls AQAL, 'All Quadrants, All Levels'. This appendix includes material that further illustrates particular aspects of that model.

The Great Nest of Being

Below are several diagrams showing the Great Nest and the four quadrants (with examples of developmental lines in each of them):

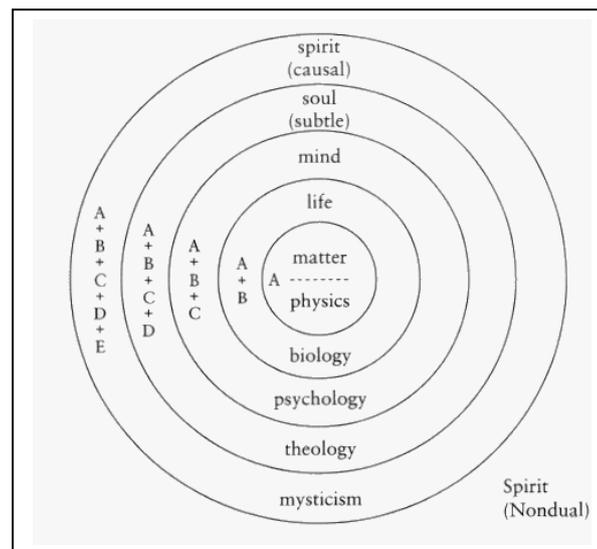


Figure 1: The Great Nest of Being. Spirit is both the highest level (causal) and the nondual Ground of all levels.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ An expression coined by Bell but which first appeared in print in a paper that Alfred Korzybski gave at a meeting of the American Mathematical Society in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1931: 'A Non-Aristotelian System and its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_map_is_not_the_territory, 01/12/2005.

²⁴⁴ Figure 12-1, Wilber *Sex*, 444.

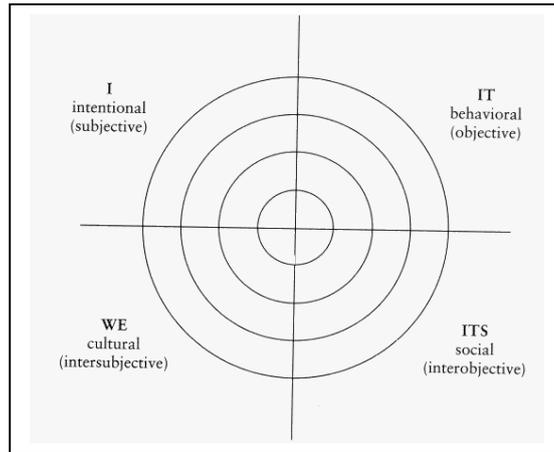


Figure 2: The Great Nest of Being with the Four Quadrants²⁴⁵

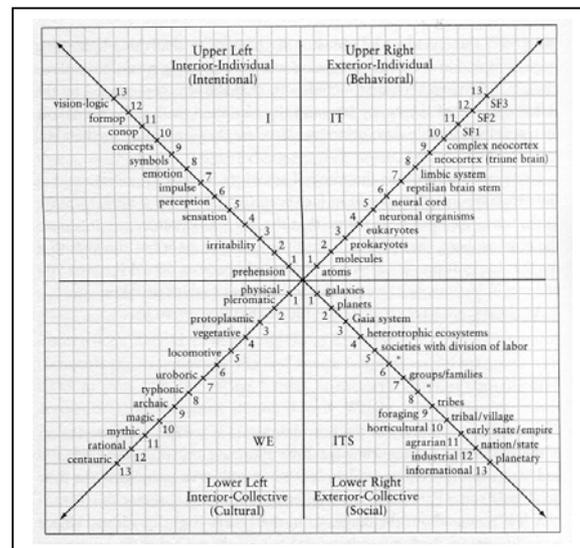


Figure 3: Some details of the Four Quadrants²⁴⁶

As an illustration of the overlap between this model and those from other traditions, below is a listing of the developmental holarchies of Plotinus and Sri Aurobindo. All the words are from these two great synthesizers of the West and East,

²⁴⁵ Figure 12-2, Wilber *Sex*, 446.

²⁴⁶ Figure 5-1, Wilber *Sex*, 198.

including those in parentheses, but not those in brackets, which are obviously Wilber's.²⁴⁷

Absolute One (Godhead)	Satchitananda/Supermind (Godhead)
Nous (Intuitive Mind) [subtle]	Intuitive Mind/Overmind
Soul/World-Soul [psychic]	Illumined World-Mind
Creative Reason [vision-logic]	Higher-mind/Network-mind
Logical Faculty [formop]	Logical mind
Concepts and Opinions	Concrete mind [conop]
Images	Lower mind [preop]
Pleasure/pain (emotions)	Vital-emotional; impulse
Perception	Perception
Sensation	Sensation
Vegetative life function	Vegetative
Matter	Matter (physical)
Plotinus	Aurobindo

Figure 4: The Great Hierarchy according to Plotinus and Aurobindo²⁴⁸

Cognitive Structures of Development

Below are descriptions for each of the nine levels/structures in Wilber's cognitive level of development (which is comparable to those illustrated above) and their associated worldviews:

Sensorimotor (Archaic and Archaic-Magic worldviews)—Occurs from birth to age two-three years, in which at first the infant is in a state of primitive nondifferentiation, *primary indissociation*, an inability to distinguish between itself and its environment. After differentiation of this state into a physical self and the physical other (differentiation/integration of the physical self), there is the emergence of what Piaget calls 'adherences' (as the '*mind begins to merge with preop, the mental images and symbols themselves are initially fused and confused with the*

²⁴⁷ Wilber *Sex*, 344. Plotinus's words are from Inge, W R. 1968 (1929). *The philosophy of Plotinus*. Vols. 1 & 2. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood.

²⁴⁸ Figure 9-1, Wilber *Sex*, 344.

external world').²⁴⁹ This results in the self holding a variety of beliefs: the command of things (magical beliefs); that things have life and obey because they wish to (animism); that everything exists for the benefit of man (artificialism or, as Wilber terms it, anthropocentrism).

Preoperational—preop—or Rep-Mind (Magic and Magic-Mythic worldviews)—Occurs from age two to seven years, in which the infant first separates itself emotionally from (generally) the mother (differentiation/integration of the emotional self). It is a time of ‘magic cognitions’: emerging images and symbols fused with the objects they represent, ‘fused and confused wholes and parts, and not mutually related wholes and parts’.²⁵⁰ From age four to seven, there is a shift from magical operations to mythic, from the belief that one personally can influence the world to the belief that one can influence the ‘gods’ around one to make changes to the world. The self progresses from working with images (pictorial representation), to working with symbols (nonpictorial representation), to working with concepts (which represent an entire class of things).

Concrete Operational—conop—or Rule/Role Mind (Mythic and Mythic-Rational worldviews)—Generally occurs from age seven to eleven years and involves working with mental rules (operating upon concrete classes) and developing the capacity to take different perspectives: the child can transcend his or her egocentric perspective and take the role of an other. It also involves the learning of roles ‘in a society of other roles’, the *differentiation* of one’s roles from other roles and the *integration* of that role in the worldspace emerging around one

²⁴⁹ Wilber *Sex*, 220.

²⁵⁰ Wilber *Sex*, 226.

(differentiation/integration of the mental self, the mind).²⁵¹ It is sociocentric and thus ethnocentric, and leads to what's known as 'the *conventional stages* of morality (Kohlberg/Gilligan), the *belonginess* needs (Maslow), the *conformist* mode (Loevinger)'.²⁵²

Formal Operational—formop—or Formal-Reflexive (Rational and Rational-Existential worldviews)—Early formop (11 to 17 years) transcends but includes concrete operational thought. It is the emergence of reason and involves the ability to hold in the mind all the various possibilities/perspectives in a situation, that is, the ability to hold an 'as if' stance. It is also highly reflexive and highly introspective; is experimental, propositional; is ecological ('in the sense of grasping mutual interrelationships'),²⁵³ relational, and nonanthropocentric. It has a worldview that entails a *postconventional* or worldcentric orientation and involves the languages of representation and reflection: describing the world 'as if it were simply pregiven to the equally pregiven (and disengaged) subject'.²⁵⁴ Failure of differentiation/integration in this state leads to an 'identity crisis'.

Vision-Logic/Network-Logic, the Existential/Centauroic Self (Existential worldview)—This level involves 'the capacity to look at rationality',²⁵⁵ to go beyond the mere problem-solving stage of formop, with the self beginning to transcend the empirical ego or the empirical self—initial apprehension of 'a pure observing Self', a 'transcendental Witness or Atman' (Soul).²⁵⁶ There is integration of reason with

²⁵¹ Wilber *Sex*, 233.

²⁵² Wilber *Sex*, 233.

²⁵³ Wilber *Sex*, 242.

²⁵⁴ Wilber *Sex*, 649.

²⁵⁵ Wilber *Sex*, 266.

²⁵⁶ Wilber *Sex*, 270.

previous stages, mind with matter and body and the realization of the insignificance of the self, the realization of death, Heideggerian ‘dread’: ‘a soul that is much too awake...a soul on the brink of the transpersonal’.²⁵⁷ The level also involves the languages of depth and development: ‘dialectical, dialogical, network-oriented, development’, a recognition that ‘beneath the “obvious” surfaces appearing to “pregiven” reflection, there lurk depths to be disclosed’.²⁵⁸

Summarising the efforts in the last few decades of a number of researchers in their attempt to rationally reconstruct the higher stages of transpersonal development from the numerous contemplative traditions, Wilber states that the evidence ‘strongly suggests that, at a minimum, *there are four general stages*...each with at least two substages (and some with many more)’.²⁵⁹ These stages he calls the *psychic*, the *subtle*, the *causal*, and the *nondual*.

Psychic—This first transpersonal level involves the transcendence of the ego/centaur and the direct experience of the Over-Soul (Emerson) or World Soul, a truly universal Self, common in and to all beings. This is an experience of identity with all manifestation (the unity of the physiosphere, biosphere, and noosphere), and so is a nation-nature mysticism. Here, small ‘n’ nature, the physiosphere and the biosphere, ‘is the symbol of spirit’²⁶⁰ (capital ‘N’ Nature—Spirit). Such experiences trigger the emergence of true compassion, because all beings are expressions of the one Self. The level itself entails the languages of vision and vibration: vibration as a ‘*quality of intensity of awareness*’, felt bodily (gross domain) vibrations capturing

²⁵⁷ Wilber *Sex*, 272.

²⁵⁸ Wilber *Sex*, 649.

²⁵⁹ Wilber *Sex*, 286.

²⁶⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Essays*, ed. and intro. Larzer Ziff (1982; New York: Penguin, 1985) 48.

‘the subtle energies and consciousness’.²⁶¹ Emerson is an exemplar practitioner at this level.

Subtle or archetypal—This is the home of transpersonal archetypes, those exemplary and transindividual/transrational patterns of manifestation. Experiences here are of subtle sounds and visions and are a type of Deity mysticism: ‘a divine union of Soul and Spirit [that goal and summit and source of all manifestation], a union *prior* to any of its manifestations as matter or life or mind’.²⁶² The realm involves the languages of luminosity and archetype: ‘Vision gives way to intense luminosities...and vibration is supplemented with a grasp of the subtle forms *from which* the gross domains radiate or vibrate’.²⁶³ Exemplars include Saint Teresa of Avila and Hildegard of Bingen.

Causal—At this level ‘the Soul and God are both transcended in the prior identity of Godhead, or pure formless awareness, pure consciousness as such, the pure Self as pure Spirit (Atman = Brahman)’,²⁶⁴ an experience of Supreme Identity as opposed to Supreme Union, and thus is termed Formless mysticism, the self-felt experience of the Witness. This realm, for which Meister Eckhart and Patanjali are exemplars, involves the languages of emptiness and dream: ‘Luminosity gives way to pure Emptiness, and the entire world of form...is seen as a dream’.²⁶⁵

Nondual—The entire manifest world arises once again, as perfect expression of Spirit and as Spirit: no objects, no subjects, only *this*. In this nondual mysticism, ‘the Self/Spirit awakens to an identity with, and as, *all* Form... This is not a particular stage among other stages...but rather the Ground or Suchness or Isness of *all*

²⁶¹ Wilber *Sex*, 649-650.

²⁶² Wilber *Sex*, 301.

²⁶³ Wilber *Sex*, 650.

²⁶⁴ Wilber *Sex*, 309.

stages'.²⁶⁶ Here the Witness is seen to be *everything* that is witnessed and the realm involves the languages of the extraordinary ordinary: 'Emptiness is Form, Form is Emptiness'.²⁶⁷ Exemplars are Hui Neng and Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The transition into and through these four transpersonal stages may be summarised by the following:

And so: as the center of self [centaur/ego, St Teresa's silkworm] was shown [through psychic/low-subtle/nature mysticism, St Teresa's butterfly] to be Archetype [high-subtle/beginning deity mysticism]; and as the center of Archetype was shown to be final-God [low-causal/Godhead/deity mysticism, Spiritual Marriage of butterfly with God]; and as the center of final-God was shown to be Formlessness [high-causal/formless mysticism, death of the butterfly]—so the center of Formlessness is shown to be not other than the entire world of Form [nondual mysticism].²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Wilber *Sex*, 650.

²⁶⁶ Wilber *Sex*, 310.

²⁶⁷ Wilber *Sex*, 650.

²⁶⁸ Wilber *Eye*, 99.

APPENDIX FOUR: FULCRUMS OF DEVELOPMENT

We must travel in the direction of our fear.
John Berryman, 'A Point of Age'²⁶⁹

This appendix expands on the discussion about 'fulcrums of development' in 'Leap of Tradition'.

'Fulcrums' is a pluralization of a term introduced by Blanck and Blanck 'to refer to the separation-individuation of the infant's self from the emotional (m)other, based on the pioneering work of Margaret Mahler'.²⁷⁰ Wilber applies this usage to those types of separation-individuation that occur along the cognitive line of development. As he notes, each 'of these fulcrums...establishes a new, important, and very different *type* of self *boundary*', a 'qualitatively new and distinct differentiation/integration (or transcendence-and-inclusion)'.²⁷¹

Below is a diagram showing the subphases of fulcrum development: "a" represents the initial fusion or undifferentiated state... "b", the process of separation-differentiation; "c", the stable, differentiated, integrated self that emerges... "d", the correlative, differentiated-and-integrated object world':²⁷²

²⁶⁹ John Berryman, *Collected Poems: 1937-1971*, ed and intro. Charles Thornbury (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989) 8.

²⁷⁰ Wilber *Sex*, 611.

²⁷¹ Wilber *Sex*, 612.

²⁷² Ken Wilber 'Development', 97-98.

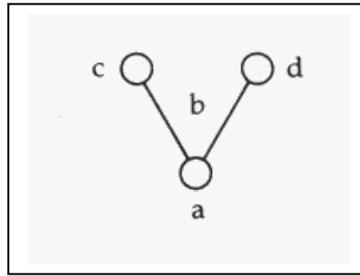


Figure 5: Subphases at Each Fulcrum of Self-Development²⁷³

The full complement of fulcrums²⁷⁴ described in ‘Leap of Tradition’ are given here with some of their associated general therapies (though it must be remembered that lower fulcrum deficiencies, caused by partial resolutions of transition, may disturb higher fulcrum encounters, and thus treatment may involve an admixture of lower and current level therapies):²⁷⁵

F-0: *Conception and birth*—based on the work of Stanislav Grof and others; negative experiences at this fulcrum may predispose a self to experience or approach other fulcrums in the same way; ‘rebirthing’ type therapies may help negate such dispositions.

F-1: *Sensoriphsical* (the establishment of physical boundaries)—the early sensorimotor period (0-1 years), with archaic worldview;²⁷⁶ failure to differentiate and integrate the physiosphere leads to psychoses of one sort or another and most adult schizophrenia; pharmacological or

²⁷³ Figure 7, Wilber ‘Development’, 98.

²⁷⁴ Wilber *Sex*, 612-613.

²⁷⁵ Therapies are taken from Wilber *Sex*, 619 (F-1 to F-4), and Ken Wilber, ‘Treatment Modalities’, Ken Wilber, Jack Engler & Daniel P. Brown, eds., *Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development*, (Boston: New Science Library, 1986) 127-144 (F-1 to F-9). Fulcrums 2 and 3 match up with Stage 2 (Preop).

²⁷⁶ Wilber *Sex*, 612.

physiological (custodial) intervention, possibly with ‘psychotherapy as an adjunct treatment’.²⁷⁷

- F-2: *Phantasmic-Emotional* (the establishment of emotional boundaries)—the late sensorimotor period and the beginning of preop (1-3 years), with archaic-magic worldview;²⁷⁸ failure to differentiate from the biosphere (indissociation) leads to narcissistic and borderline personality conditions; ‘structure building’ therapies.
- F-3: *Rep-mind* (the establishment of conceptual-self boundaries)—the preop period (2-7 years); divided into early preop (2-4 years), governed by images (pictorial representation) and symbols (nonpictorial representation), with a worldview of “magic”, and the late preop (4-7 years), governed by concepts (which represent an entire class of things), with a worldview of “magic-mythic”;²⁷⁹ failure to integrate the biosphere (dissociation through too much *differentiation*) leads to psychoneuroses, repression of the body; ‘uncovering’ therapies, such as ‘psychoanalysis proper...much of Gestalt therapy...and the integrating-the-shadow aspect of Jungian therapy’.²⁸⁰
- F-4: *Role/Rule* (the emergence of role boundaries and rule operations)—with worldviews of mythic and mythic-rational;²⁸¹ cognitive-script pathologies—involving ‘the *roles* a person is playing...and the *rules*

²⁷⁷ Wilber ‘Treatment’, 128.

²⁷⁸ Wilber *Sex*, 612.

²⁷⁹ Wilber *Sex*, 612.

²⁸⁰ Wilber ‘Treatment’, 130-131.

²⁸¹ Wilber *Sex*, 612.

the person is following'²⁸²—result if adequate

differentiation/integration does not occur; 'cognitive-script' therapies.

- F-5: *Formal-Reflexive* (the emergence of formal operations)—the rational and reflexive ego differentiating itself from, and thus transcending, sociocentric (ethnocentric) or mythic-membership roles; emergence of a worldcentric view (worldviews of rational and rational-existential); identity neurosis; introspection (*philosophizing*) and therapeutic *Socratic dialogue*.
- F-6: *Existential* (the emergence of a pure observing Self)—self as observer distinguished from the self-concept; transcendence of the ego; integration of body and mind; worldview of existential and existential-psyche; 'existential depression, angst, inauthenticity, a flight from finitude and death, etc.';²⁸³ humanistic-existential therapy.
- F-7: *Psychic* (The Path of Yogis)—The 'culmination of vision-logic and visionary insight...the beginning or opening of transcendental, transpersonal, or contemplative developments';²⁸⁴ pathologies include 1) the spontaneous and usually unsought awakening of spiritual energies or capacities, 2) transient schizophrenic breaks or psychotic-like episodes, and also include various afflictions suffered by a beginner during contemplative practice, such as 3) psychic inflation, 4) structural imbalance, 5) The Dark Night of the Soul, and 6) split life-

²⁸² Wilber 'Treatment', 132.

²⁸³ Wilber 'Treatment', 136.

²⁸⁴ Wilber 'Development', 72.

goals;²⁸⁵ therapies are different for each pathology, but may include 1) ‘riding it out’, 2) and 3) ‘structure building’, 4) realignment of contemplative practice under the guidance of a qualified master, 5) perusal of the accounts of others who have endured this ‘purgatorial’ period, petitionary prayer to one’s own higher Archetype’, and 6) integration of the spiritual practice into one’s daily life and work’.²⁸⁶

F-8: *Subtle* (The Path of Saints)—The ‘seat of actual archetypes, of Platonic Forms, of subtle sounds and audible illuminations...of transcendent insight and absorption’;²⁸⁷ pathologies include integration-identification failure, pseudo-nirvana, and pseudo-realization;²⁸⁸ treatment tends to involve the engagement or intensification of the path of subtle-level contemplation or the move to causal level development.²⁸⁹

F-9: *Causal* (The Path of Sages)—The ‘unmanifest source or transcendental ground of all the lesser structures...Alternatively, this stage is described as a universal and formless Self (Atman), common in and to all beings’;²⁹⁰ the pathology resulting from a miscarriage of the ‘c’ process is Failure of Differentiation, ‘an inability to accept the final death of the archetypal self’;²⁹¹ the pathology resulting from a

²⁸⁵ Ken Wilber, ‘The Spectrum of Psychopathology’, Ken Wilber, Jack Engler & Daniel P. Brown, eds., *Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development*, (Boston: New Science Library, 1986) 122.

²⁸⁶ Wilber ‘Treatment’, 138-140.

²⁸⁷ Wilber ‘Development’, 73.

²⁸⁸ Wilber ‘Psychopathology’, 122-124.

²⁸⁹ Wilber ‘Treatment’, 141-143.

²⁹⁰ Wilber ‘Development’, 73.

²⁹¹ Wilber ‘Psychopathology’, 124.

miscarriage of the ‘d’ process is Failure to Integrate, ‘a failure to integrate the manifest and unmanifest realms’;²⁹² the therapy in both cases would involve further contemplative efforts (with the help of the teacher, especially for the first pathology).

F-10: *Nondual* (Ultimate)—As stated in ‘Leap of Tradition’, this is not categorized a fulcrum as such, is technically the final integration stage of the previous fulcrum.

Figure 5 shows the nine levels (structures) of consciousness along with their corresponding fulcrums of development (F-1 to F-9), their characteristic pathologies, and their general treatment modalities:

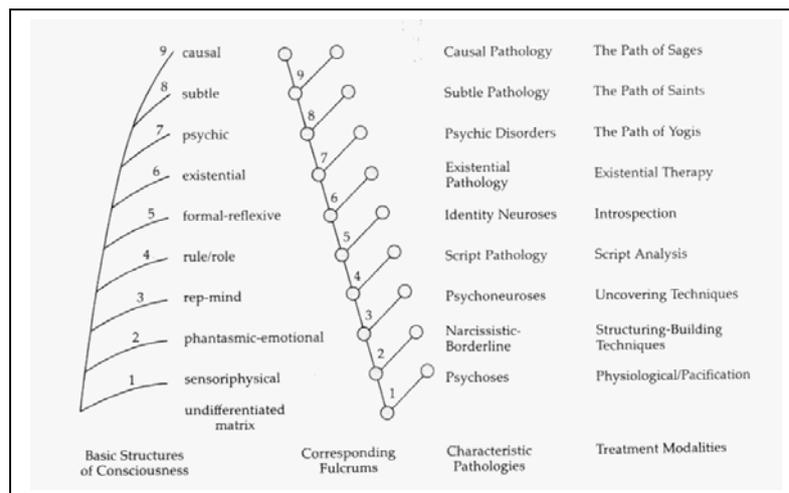


Figure 6: Correlation of Structures, Fulcrums, Psychopathologies, and Treatments²⁹³

²⁹² Wilber ‘Treatment’, 144.

²⁹³ Figure 11, Wilber ‘Treatment’, 145. ‘Structures’ is the same here as ‘stages’. F-2 and F-3 refer to the Preop stage discussed in ‘Leap of Tradition’ and Appendix Three.

APPENDIX FIVE: FURTHER TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Subject and object are only one.
Erwin Schrödinger²⁹⁴

In ‘Leap of Tradition’ I made use of the two-fold classification system of knowledge developed by Madhyamika Buddhism. In this system there is *samvritti*, which is the ignorance of the true nature of reality, and *paramartha*, which is enlightenment, the experience of Absolute Truth, which in the West would be called Gnosis. Later traditions, such as Yogacara and Vedanta, built a three-fold category of knowledge onto this classification. The Relative Knowledge of Madhyamika (*samvritti*) is split into two:

one class, called *parikalpita* by the Yogacara, results in pure imaginary knowledge, such as viewing a rope and thinking that it is a snake [in other words, a pathology]; the second class, called *paratantra*, is responsible for what we would call objective truth, such as seeing a rope and correctly calling it a rope.²⁹⁵

As for Absolute Truth, which, to return briefly to Wilber’s spectrum of conscious, is nondual awareness, Yogacara renames Madhyamika’s *paramartha* as *parinishpanna*, ‘seeing the rope and knowing that one is seeing one’s own True Self, Mind-only’.²⁹⁶ Western psychotherapies generally enable one to see the difference between snake and rope (Relative Knowledge), while Eastern psychotherapies generally enable one to jump from ignorance to enlightenment (Absolute Truth), as depicted in the following diagram:

²⁹⁴ Quoted by Ken Wilber in Wilber, *Spectrum* 38.

²⁹⁵ Wilber, *Spectrum* 178.

²⁹⁶ Wilber, *Spectrum* 178.

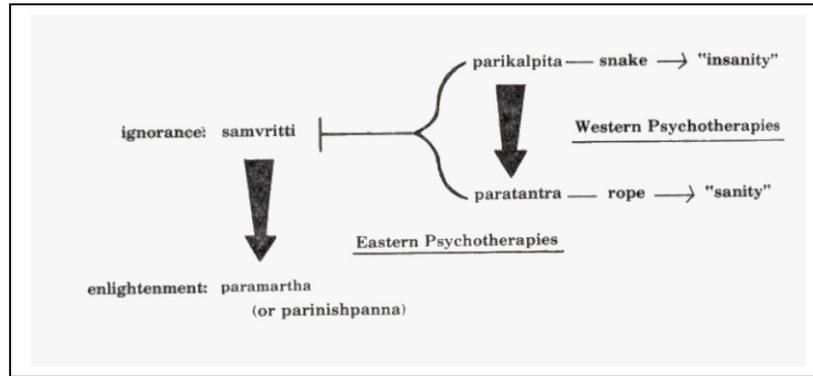


Figure 7: Epistemology and Psychopathology²⁹⁷

As indicated in the body of this thesis, art can be seen as a psychosocial process that enables a participant either to translate or transform his or her consciousness along the Great Chain of Being. Essentially then, in relation to the types of knowledge described here, art can help shift a consciousness from *parikalpita* to *paratantra* or from *samvritti* to *paramartha/parinishpanna*. Although visionary poets such as Kathleen Raine and her master William Blake are more interested in enabling the shift to higher realms of the Great Chain (leaving aside whether or not their chosen destination is Absolute Truth), the fact that later traditions than Madhyamika have seen fit to expand the classification of knowledge to include relative truth and untruth implies that the quest for *paramartha/parinishpanna* is more complex than a reliance on a direct shifting from ignorance to enlightenment. This being the case, art can take on different forms of operation, can involve different types of imagination so that the self-system can continue its climb towards Absolute Truth, towards nondual Reality. These different types of imagination will be explored in the next appendix.

²⁹⁷ Figure 13, Wilber, *Spectrum* 180.

APPENDIX SIX: TYPES OF IMAGINATION

All is conjecture here
And affirmation there.
Vernon Watkins, 'The Tolling'²⁹⁸

As various chapters in the exegesis and the previous appendix indicate, there is a division between relative and absolute knowledge, and literature, being a type of psychosocial institution, plays a function in enabling a person to acquire such types of knowledge. The main focus of this thesis is in developing techniques for the production of a strong text that explores the higher realms of the Great Chain of Being, and one aspect of this process has been the investigation of Imagination as understood by Romantic poets. However, as to whether what they revealed was in fact *parinishpanna* or a form of *paratantra* is dependent on one question: Where did a poet such as Blake situate Imagination?

The easy answer is Eternity. Yet where is this realm in terms of the Great Chain of Being or Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness? At times it seems to be located in the subtle realm, in which reside the archetypes, the patterns of and for manifestation, Plato's World of Forms:

Imagination the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow & in which we live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more.²⁹⁹

Yet, at other times it seems to be the nondual realm itself, as the following quotations suggest:

²⁹⁸ Vernon Watkins, *The Collected Poems of Vernon Watkins* (1986; Golgonooza Press, 2000) 211.

²⁹⁹ *Jerusalem*, Blake 346.

...the Human Imagination, which is the Divine Vision & Fruition
In which Man liveth eternally³⁰⁰

The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself.³⁰¹

The Eternal Body of Man is The **Imagination**³⁰²

This supposition is reinforced when one remembers Blake's question in 'A Vision of the Last Judgement':

'What' it will be Questiond, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.'³⁰³

In his book *The Philosopher's Secret Fire: A History of the Imagination*, Patrick Harpur talks about the need to develop Blake's 'double vision', which in the lines above shows Blake not only seeing the physical entity we call the sun, but also the metaphorical equivalent, a heavenly host:

We might call the Blakean double vision a Hermetic consciousness, for which there are no dualistic problems of subject and object, consciousness versus the unconsciousness and so on.³⁰⁴

In this situation we are reminded of Blake's advice to see not with but 'Thro the Eye'.³⁰⁵ Harpur affirms this requirement:

³⁰⁰ *Milton*, Blake 290.

³⁰¹ *Milton*, Blake 290.

³⁰² *The Laocoön*, Blake 426.

³⁰³ 'A Vision of the Last Judgement', Blake 416.

³⁰⁴ Patrick Harpur, *The Philosopher's Secret Fire: A History of the Imagination* (London: Penguin, 2002) 209.

³⁰⁵ 'Auguries of Innocence', Blake 212.

Indeed, the idea of ‘double vision’ should not, finally, imply seeing two things at once or translating one thing into another. It should be a single mode of seeing, as it were built into the eye, in which the doubleness of things—as in the best metaphors—is apparent at a glance because we are simultaneously seeing, and seeing through.³⁰⁶

However, what is not evident is whether Blake senses, ‘knows’, the guinea sun and the heavenly host as himself also, which would be the case if he were living in a nondual mode. It is as if he were experiencing insights into the higher realms, yet not turning them into permanent traits, even though he was living continuously with visions, with these insights, with peak experiences, all his life:

Sauntering along, the boy looks up and sees a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars... Another time, one summer morn, he sees the haymakers at work, and amid them angelic figures walking.³⁰⁷

There is no doubt that Blake certainly had cleansed his ‘doors of perception’³⁰⁸ to the point of having these visions (and maintaining the faculty after childhood), be they subtle, causal or nondual. However, the fact that he privileged Eternity over Time, in that he welcomed his return there when nearing death—‘He spoke of Flaxman’s death now, and added, “we must All soon follow, every one to his Own Eternal House, Leaving the delusive Goddess Nature & her Laws”...’³⁰⁹—showed he was not (yet?) a nondual adept, for such would not care one way or the other about life or death, having moved beyond attachment to all dualist notions.

³⁰⁶ Harpur 210.

³⁰⁷ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (1995; London: Minerva, 1996) 23.

³⁰⁸ ‘A Memorable Fancy’, plate 14, in ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell’, Blake 93.

³⁰⁹ Ackroyd 389.

As the above makes clear, there is some confusion about where Imagination resides exactly. In fact, Imagination may reside everywhere, though for the purposes of this investigation it might be better to consider how Imagination acts, through inspiration, on the poet and subsequently on the reader. Thus, when looking at the sources of inspiration and how inspiration may affect both the poet and the reader, one must consider three questions:

1. From where does the insight come?
2. At what level is the poet when the insight comes?
3. At what level is the receiver of the resulting text?

Examination of the answers to the first two questions should lead to a more substantial formulation of Imagination, while consideration of the third question, which in actuality initiates a variant on the Reader-Response concept, should result in an appraisal of the overall effect of a text, that is, its strength.

Let us assume that an insight, a vision, can come from anywhere on the Great Chain of Being, Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness. Naturally enough, the content of such an inspiration may relate to one or more 'lines of development' and the inspiration itself be linked to a number of consciousness levels, but for the sake of simplicity I will use the cognitive line as a generic axis for comparison. The table below shows the poet's current level of development against the inspiration source, where each axis of the table uses the structure of the Great Chain of Being, as explained in the accompanying Legend:

Source of Inspiration

		Prerational			Rational			Transrational ³¹⁰			
		SM A	Pr M	Co R-3	Fo R-2	VI R-1	Ps I-3	Su I-2	Ca I-1	Nd I-0	
Level of Poet	SM	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	
	Pr	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	
	Co	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	
	Fo	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	
	VI	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	
	Ps	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	
	Su	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	
	Ca	RTh	<i>Tran</i>	TF							
	Nd	NA	NA	<i>Trans</i>							

Table 2: Inspiration Source versus Poet Level

The legend for the entries is below:

SM = Sensorimotor

Pr = Preop

Co = Conop

Fo = Formop

VI = Vision-logic

Ps = Psychic

Su = Subtle

Ca = Causal

Nd = Nondual

Trans: Possible translation of the artist's consciousness, depending on strength of 'inspiration'/peak experience, readiness of the artist, and how the artist interprets the experience.

TF: Possible transformation of the artist's consciousness, depending on strength of 'inspiration'/peak experience and readiness of the artist, and how the artist interprets the experience.

PT: Insight/Peak Experience from this level may jolt the artist into appropriate transitions towards his or her next level of development.

³¹⁰ Or Prepersonal, Personal, Transpersonal.

RTh: Possible regression of the artist, depending on the strength of the experience, or possible jolt towards ‘therapy’, which may involve everything from dealing with repressions incurred at that level and now brought to light, to reconnecting with mythic forces/motifs that govern the artist’s life.

NA: Non-applicable, because a nondual adept is no longer a separate entity open to the forces within Form or the Formless, even though the ‘vessel’ or locus of nondual awareness will eventually succumb to such forces and die. (However, such an adept may need to expand, that is, translate, his or her experience of the nondual state as a reaction to the fact that identification *with* the world of Forms may not result in understanding *of* every ‘element’ within that world.)

The shaded section is the average level of consciousness in western society.

The horizontal axis for the table not only lists the various levels of the Great Chain of Being, but also assigns labels for the types of ‘imagination and inspired insight’ that would originate from those levels. The higher ones are subsets of Imagination and operate as sources of inspiration, knowledge of ‘things of the spirit’, in and through the transrational, transpersonal, realms. They are defined below:

Imagination 0 (I-0): An insight into the nondual state of consciousness, a type of double vision in which the person having the experience not only sees sun and host of angels but knows him- or herself as sun and host of angels, knows him- or herself as Witness and what is being witnessed. Such insight involves participation in, and an arising as, creation-in-the-moment—‘the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM’—and results in poetry of ‘the extraordinary ordinary’.³¹¹

³¹¹ In I-0 to R-2, the poetry ‘named’ is based on the languages assigned in the descriptions of each level in Appendix Three.

Imagination 1 (I-1): An insight into causal/Formless consciousness, which is the experience of the void out of which all forms descend, resulting in a poetry of ‘emptiness and dream’, of ultimate self-transcendence into ‘nothing’, of ultimate potentials.

Imagination 2 (I-2): An insight into subtle/archetype consciousness, awareness of how the world descends from the void through the seed-archetypes of the manifest world, and thus would be Coleridge’s Primary Imagination (which proceeds through all subsequent levels as involution). The corresponding poetry would be of ‘luminosity and archetype’, of manifestation (origins, as in involution) and of return (endings, as in evolution).

Imagination 3 (I-3): An insight into Psychic/Nature consciousness, the mysticism of ‘nation and nature’, resulting in a poetry of ‘vision and vibration’, of manifestation-in-action.

What must be remembered about the application of these types of Imagination is that the insight will be interpreted according to the worldview in which the poet is operating.

When we move from the transrational/transpersonal realms to those immediately below, we have the following types of imagination:

Rational 1 (R-1): Vision-Logic consciousness: experience of patterns and connectivity, the rational looking at the rational; the special relativity thought experiments of Einstein; intimations of soul. If the poet is ‘spirit premise’ (eye of contemplation), then a form of *Imaginatio* (possibly an evolution towards I-3) is likely to arise—poetry of ‘depth and development’, of self-actualization.³¹² If the poet

³¹² The types of poetry additionally suggested for R-1 and R-2 and suggested for R-3 down to M-2 are based on Maslow’s hierarchy of *deficiency* and *being* needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging,

is ‘matter premise’ (eye of flesh or mind), then poetry of reportage, wit, self-expression and therapy, or even language-play (aleatoric poetry, for example), will result—poetry of Fancy (though even Blake notes that Fable or Allegory, which is formed by the daughters of Memory, is ‘seldom without some Vision’).³¹³

Rational 2 (R-2): Formop consciousness: experience of rational modes of engagement with the world, resulting in a poetry of ‘representation and reflection’, of self-esteem needs and individualism, using Fancy or a type of *Imaginatio* depending on premise.

Rational 3 (R-3): Conop consciousness: (re)-experience³¹⁴ of conceptual boundaries, of rational modes, leading through Fancy or *Imaginatio* to a poetry of love and belongingness, of conformism.

Magic/Mythic (M): Preop consciousness: (re)-experience of emotional boundaries, producing a poetry of safety needs, either through Fancy or *Imaginatio*.

Archaic (A): Sensorimotor consciousness: (re)-experience of body boundaries, resulting in a poetry of physiological needs, through Fancy or *Imaginatio*.

What we should remember here is that for any insight-experience coming from a level lower than the current level of the poet the effect will be either to draw the poet back to that level (regression) or to propel the poet into examining the impact of that level on his life (therapy for himself, and/or for a reader, if the examination results in a poem).

esteem, self-actualization, and on some of Loevinger’s self-sense categories: conformist, conscientious-conformist, conscientious-individualistic, autonomous, most of which can be mapped to the Spectrum of Consciousness.

³¹³ ‘A Vision of the Last Judgement’, Blake 410.

³¹⁴ Assuming the poet is already at Formop level, any ‘inspiration’ from a lower level is a re-experience and thus an opportunity for ‘therapy’ or further ‘inclusion’ of that level in the current stage of consciousness.

Now for the receiver of the result of a poet's insight. If we substitute 'Level of Reader', say, for 'Level of Poet' and substitute 'Level of Text' (in a general sense) for 'Source of Inspiration', then we would see how the 'inspiration' of a text might affect a reader, depending on the strength of the text and the readiness of the reader to respond to the inspirations contained within the text, with the foregoing analysis equally applicable:

		Level of Text									
		Prerational			Rational			Transrational			
		SM	Pr	Co	Fo	VI	Ps	Su	Ca	Nd	
		A	M	R-3	R-2	R-1	I-3	I-2	I-1	I-0	
Level Of Reader	SM	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	Pr	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	Co	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	Fo	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT	PT
	VI	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT	PT
	Ps	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT	PT
	Su	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Trans</i>	TF	PT	PT
	Ca	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	RTh	<i>Tran</i>	TF	TF
	Nd	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	<i>Trans</i>

Table 3: Text Level versus Reader Level

In summary, it seems to me that the following tenets can be deduced from all that has gone before:

1. *Art, as in all things, exists to enable a person to advance along the Great Chain/Nest of Being.*

The person may be the artist him- or herself or the receiver of the poem, or both. In the first case, the resulting artwork may be therapy or self-expression on the road to self-actualization (and the work come about through an act of self-transcendence). Though this investigation has been looking at the

cognitive line of development, art can facilitate transitions along any line, for example, moral or psychosexual.

2. *Any cultural product that facilitates translation or transformation is art.*

This is true of a reality TV show that gives a teenager some ideas, however superficial, about how the sexes relate, or a sitcom that reduces the stress on a person after a long day in the factory or at the office, or a literary novel in which a person is absorbed in the intricacies of politics, relationships, or group or individual identity.

3. *The value in an artwork lies in how well it translates or transforms, how well it provides for 'Life'.*

The value may be for one person (for example, the hobby writer whose esteem rises a little after writing a short story that no one else will read), or for the millions over the centuries who read a group of plays about kings and tyrants. The distinctions of highbrow, medium-brow, and lowbrow, or literary and commercial, are attempts to identify *what* works on *how* many for *whatever* length of time for *what* effect. A pop song may sell millions, but be relegated to 'one hit wonder rarely replayed' ten years later, while a book of poetry may only sell a few hundred copies upon first publication (Eliot, for example),³¹⁵ but be a continuous seller ever afterwards once the public has realized the

³¹⁵ 'His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), was admired by a small but select circle that included E. M. Forster, John Middleton Murry, and Leonard and Virginia Woolf.' David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (1976; Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977) 497.

value therein (which would mean the public has undergone some translation or transformation of its consciousness of ‘what poetry should do, can do, is meant to do’).

4. *The peak experience provided by an artwork can be of any state on the Great Chain/Nest of Being and thus can trigger development or reappraisal.*

Any cultural artefact that facilitates ‘Life’ can be termed ‘enabling’, while any that encourages ‘Death’ can be termed ‘disabling’. A great painting or text enables positive translation and transformation, a shift of consciousness into a wider realm, while ‘untruthful’ propaganda or pastimes valued for their distracting or soporific effect on the populace (the gladiatorial games in Ancient Rome come to mind) disables development, may even regress people because it narrows their consciousness. Of course, such regressions and outright repression of consciousness growth, especially in a societal sense, can never be permanently maintained, and change eventually occurs. Besides, if one holds to the spirit premise it is possible to say, as David Carradine does in his book on kung fu training and philosophy, ‘On the other hand, everything furthers’,³¹⁶ which means that everything furthers growth, and thus growth will always happen, even if it takes many lifetimes.

5. *One person’s trigger may be another person’s ‘Huh?’ or ‘Boring’.*

Not everyone is ready to engage with whatever the kosmos can provide in the way of insight into itself. As Blake says, ‘As a man is, So he Sees’.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ David Carradine, *Spirit of Shaolin* (Sydney: Random House, 1991) 163.

³¹⁷ Blake, ‘Letter to the Reverend John Trusler, August 23, 1799’, 449.

6. *The job of the artist is to be open to whatever inspiration she or he is capable of receiving and doing the best with that inspiration.*

The details of this two-fold process would depend on the artist's premise. For those of 'matter', the process would include the gathering of facts and observations (of the personal or social or historical), the practice of technical skills (for poets in today's age, generally free verse), and maybe would include a faith in inspiration from the personal and/or collective unconscious (though aleatoric poetics would exclude such possibilities, unless used as a trigger for 'inspiration'). For those artists of 'spirit', the preparation and execution would include all this, but the faith would be of a type that believed in inspiration from all worlds. Also, the technical skills for such poets would include what Raine calls 'the learning of Imagination', a familiarization with the symbolic language of the soul and a leaning towards more traditional prosodies, at least for initial training.

7. *The best works by an artist are those that are not purely for the immediate benefit of the artist.*

That is, any intention that does not have a sense of care or service for others, whether to provide a laugh or a few hours page-turning diversion or a deep insight into the human condition, will mean that the only translation to occur will be the artist's. (Since transformation usually involves 'death' of an aspect of the person, 'selfish' endeavours by definition will only involve translation; if the translation over-emphasises agency, too much 'life', then a type of 'Death' is likely to occur.)

8. *One job of the critic is to identify what sort of transition the artwork is encouraging and whether or not the artist is successful in this.*

As Coomaraswamy notes,³¹⁸ there are two judgements to be made in a piece of art: *judgement of art*, how well it is made (the usual verdict, made through many styles of criticism: feminist, Freudian, antithetical, and so on), and *judgement of human value*, which in this case means, what transition or range of transitions does the art aim to foster? The latter judgement would involve consideration (in fiction, for example) of the stages the characters are in or the fulcrums they may be negotiating: whether they are seeking translation (an orphan seeking a loving family) or transformation (Siddhartha seeking wisdom), or even denying such things. Contrary to beliefs about the intentional fallacy, that one should only treat ‘the words on the page’, a literary critic has to be aware of the poet’s intentions and premise, for these influence the language of the piece. Obviously, one can’t know the full details of such things, especially for poets not belonging to the contemporary era. However, study of the ‘words on the page’ through an awareness of the historical situation of the poet and poem should open up understanding of intention and premise, and thus lead back to further study of the words in a hermeneutical fashion. The more distant the poem and the more different the premise, the more tolerance is required (akin to Coleridge’s ‘suspension of disbelief’), and the more one must unravel.

³¹⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Essential Ananda K Coomaraswamy*, ed. Rama P Coomaraswamy, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004) 29-31.

9. *The strongest art is that which has the greatest range of effects, in terms of transition power, over time.*

Shakespeare engages people of a range of levels, shifting them along a number of lines of development, and so can engage the one person over a range of growth. An airport novel engages a wide number of people for a minimum effect—light relief while flying; page-turner candy for the brain—but generally doesn't offer the same effect on a second reading. There is a hierarchy (holarchy) of causes and effects, though most judgements of power and duration can only be made by posterity, with the added complication that some art moves in and out of favour, not only because of fashion, but also because of change in premise of the culture judging it.

10. *Any art (which includes criticism) that does not overtly or covertly acknowledge the existence of spirit, let alone accept it as premise, is likely to be weaker in the long run than art that does acknowledge or accept.*

Naturally enough, the art in this comparison must be of a similar level of intention and/or achievement. For example, a fantasy novel using mythological beings and multiple universes may look as if it is 'spirit', but in fact isn't, because its intentions are only magic actions and heroic adventure, which makes it akin to a spy thriller using pseudo technology for its plot devices. On the other hand, Sylvia Plath's use of white goddess mythology to help cure her of her obsession with the loss of her father (as explored in *Chapters of a Mythology* by Judith Kroll),³¹⁹ in a poetry that is ostensibly 'confessional', has more strength and so will likely last longer than the purely

³¹⁹ Judith Kroll, *Chapters in a Mythology: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

personal material of an Anne Sexton, because Plath's work is engaging more levels of the Great Chain of Being.

These tenets effectively form a manifesto that can be of benefit not only to me as a poet in this endeavour and in all future ones, but also to others, poets and critics alike.

APPENDIX SEVEN: ARCHETYPES AND PROTOTYPES

—And yet this great wink of eternity...
Hart Crane, ‘Voyages II’³²⁰

Early in his career Ken Wilber formulated, and has subsequently used quite vigorously in his criticism of others, the concept of the pre/trans fallacy (ptf).³²¹ The fallacy, as he sees it, occurs whenever a theorist mistakes a pre-personal or pre-rational state of consciousness for a transpersonal, transrational state of consciousness. Two examples would be the Freudian relegation of all mystical experiences to the pre-personal domain, as a supposed return to the indissociative state existing before fulcrum one is traversed, and the Jungian elevation of all ‘oceanic feeling’ experiences to mystical events in the transpersonal realms. As my creative work for this thesis concerns itself with such experiences—one important facet being the relationship between archetype and individual—I certainly did not wish to fall into ptf and so was particularly interested in Wilber’s analysis of Jung’s use of the term archetype in relation to traditional use. I was also interested in, or, more precisely, perturbed by, Wilber’s denigration of the mythic realm, and felt a need to reclaim the mythic, especially for storytelling.

Wilber points out³²² that in the exploration of the concept of archetypes, even Jung is uncertain whether they are imprints in the collective unconsciousness (and ‘next to the instincts’) caused by the millennium of human encounters with such characters as the mother, the father, the mentor and so on, or ‘transcendental

³²⁰ Hart Crane, *Complete Poems*, ed. Brom Weber (1966; Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1987) 55.

³²¹ Wilber *Eye*, 215-260.

³²² Wilber *Eye*, 225-226 and Wilber *Sex*, 255-257.

archetypes' of the human before the human actually evolves. In fact, he believes that Jung's archetypes are actually the former and that Jung's alignment of them as the latter is an example of a ptf:

In other words, the Jungian archetypes are not the transcendental archetypes or Forms found in Plato, Hegel, Shankara, or Asanga and Vasubandhu. These latter Forms—the true archetypes, the Ideal Forms—are the creative patterns said to underlie all manifestation and give pattern to chaos and form to Kosmos...

The Jungian archetypes, on the other hand, are for the most part the magico-mythic motifs and 'archaic images'—they should really be called 'prototypes'—collectively inherited by you and by me from past stages of development...³²³

This distinction becomes clearer when we look at one result of Wilber's construction of the Spectrum of Consciousness and his use of Gebser's cultural worldview terms (archaic, magic, mythic, rational): the mythic realm clearly belongs to the pre-rational, not the transcendental., and any immersion in this realm, through its 'prototypes', for example, can lead to a regression to the violent and narrow consciousness associated with that realm. All is not lost, however, for Wilber points out that mythographers such as Joseph Campbell are utilising such motifs and narratives as a form of 'getting in touch' with our roots; and because we do so from the vantage point of the rational mind, we do not fall into regression:

I agree *entirely* with Jung on the necessity of differentiating and integrating this archaic heritage; I do not believe that this has much to do with genuine mystical spirituality.³²⁴

³²³ Wilber *Sex*, 256.

³²⁴ Wilber *Sex*, 256.

To a point I feel Wilber is correct, that there is a difference between the motifs that have evolved through history (Time) and the templates of the human and the world itself that exist (Eternity) before the human and the world. However, it seems to me that to dismiss those mythic patterns that have evolved, just because they first appeared in a worldview that was decidedly violent and ethnocentric, or only use them for reconnection with our past, is to deny their existence as signals and symbols of the divine. These motifs may not be transcendental, but they can be seen as approximations to those archetypes that form the human through involution; and because they are in some way a congregation and confluence of the effect of those archetypes, ‘those powers much closer to the source’,³²⁵ mythic motifs can even be *portals*³²⁶ to archetypes, which explains some of the power of mythopoeic literature, in that it is not only regenerative but also inspirational. Another way of looking at this difference is to say that the mythic motifs are imprints, are the human embodiment (such as the Great Mother), through natural and psychological history, of those archetypes, those Universal Energies (such as the Great Goddess), acting through and as human experience. That is, the human is being both pushed (by the ‘prototypes’) and pulled (by the ‘archetypes’ acting as ‘strange attractors’) along the Great Chain of Being, the confusion about these forces being compounded by the fact that every moment of existence is a combination of involution and evolution, with prototypes fulfilling the potential in archetypes and archetypes creating the conditions for prototypes to exist.

³²⁵ ‘Orghast: Talking without Words’, Ted Hughes, *Winter* 126.

³²⁶ A usage introduced to me by Wayne Cosshall, a digital artist and practising ritual magician, in a recent (2005) conversation about shifts in consciousness caused by artistic, magical and contemplative acts.

In the long run, what is important is the fact of being open to these forces and of accepting the Mystery that reveals itself every moment.

APPENDIX EIGHT: MODELS FOR NARRATIVE

We are a prayer.
Peter Redgrove, 'The Case'³²⁷

As explained in 'Upaya Ensemble', I used several systems of esoteric knowledge for initial conceptual work and plotting for *The Silence Inside the World*. Below is some further information about the three main ones: Chakras, Kabbalah, and the *Bardo Thödol*.

Chakras

The chakras are a network of energy centres that lie along the spinal column:

...the seven chakras are the primary energetic centres, the major nexuses of energy distribution for the rest of the human energy system... each chakra is associated with particular organs, glands, and nerve plexuses. Each chakra is also associated with certain states of consciousness.³²⁸

The table below gives some of the meanings and correspondences for each chakra:

Chakra	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven
Name	Muladhara	Svadhistan a	Manipur a	Anahata	Visshudha	Ajna	Sahasrara
Meaning	Root/support	Sweetness	Lustrous Jewel	Unstruc k	Purification	To perceive	Thousandfold
Location	Perineum	Lower abdomen	Solar Plexus	Heart	Throat	Forehea d	Top of Head
Function	Survival	Desire	Will	Love	Communication	Intuition	Understanding

³²⁷ Peter Redgrove, *Selected Poems* (London: Cape Poetry, 1999) 26.

³²⁸ Christopher S Kilham, *The Five Tibetans: Five Dynamic Exercises for health, energy, and personal power* (Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 1994) 15.

							g
Colour	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Indigo	Violet

*Table 4: Chakra Details*³²⁹

When the chakras are out of balance, the human physicality, psychology and spirituality are out of balance. In respect to the PhD project, I originally saw the chakras as one way of structuring the journey my characters would make, from Survival consciousness through to Understanding (which means to say, Cosmic Consciousness), and the original seven day journey used the colours for each chakra to hint at the processes that would occur during that day. As the poem evolved, the intention remained even though the journey was reduced to three days, the colours being combined in the *Glymsen* descriptions for each day. It would be fair to say that the system (as with the others described in this appendix) was not rigorously followed, but that the study of it enabled and informed the writing of the creative component of the project.

Kabbalah

The word ‘kabbalah’ is Hebrew for ‘collection’, and is applied to the system of esoteric lore that evolved out of ‘a mixture of early Jewish (*Merkaveh*) mysticism, Neoplatonism, and Gnosticism’.³³⁰ The Kabbalah, especially as expressed in the school of Isaac Luria (Lurianic Kabbalah) is considered to provide:

a coherent and comprehensive account of the cosmos, and humanity’s role within it...a fundamental mythology or ‘basic metaphor,’ which organizes *everything*

³²⁹ Taken from Table of Correspondences, Judith 46-47.

³³⁰ Drob 4.

around itself in a manner that is strikingly original, illuminating, and vital for us today.³³¹

As mentioned in ‘Upaya Ensemble’, the Lurianic Kabbalah uses (amongst others) the concepts of the Tree of Life displaying the ten archetypal foundations of the universe, the *sefirot*, and the 22 paths of development to and through the various *sefirot* towards the infinite Godhead, *Ein Sof*. The diagram below shows the structure of the tree and its ten *sefirot*, with development proceeding along various routes from Malkuth to Kether and beyond.

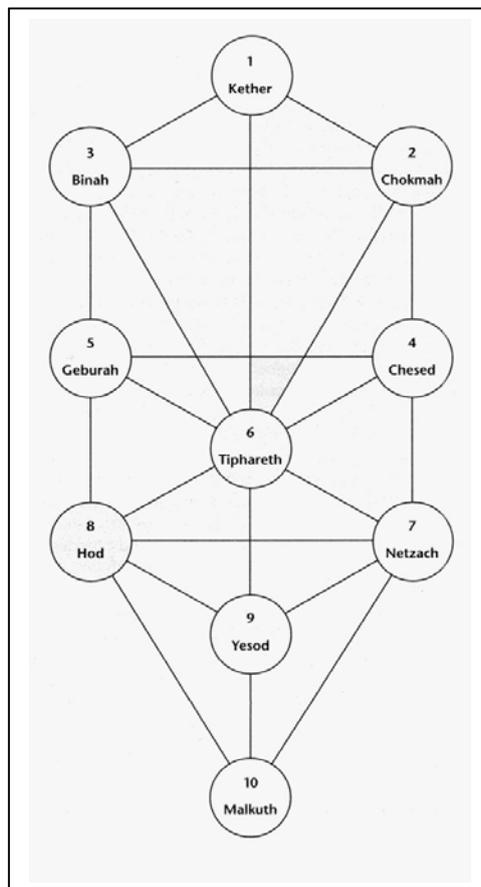


Figure 8: The Tree of Life³³²

³³¹ Drob xi.

³³² Greer 11.

It is this developmental aspect that I found useful for *The Silence Inside the World*, and, as with the chakra system, I originally used the sefirot, the paths, and the various magical and symbolic correspondences attributed to these elements to plan the structure of the poem and to plot encounters with relevant entities. However, the poem took on its own direction and most of these plans evolved according to the poetic and narrative insights generated during the drafting process. Notwithstanding this, those kabbalistic metaphors and symbols derived from my study are still subtly present in the text, as ambience to incident, character or setting.

Bardo Thödol

The *Bardo Thödol*, which means *Liberation by Hearing on the After-Death Plane*, is a treatise that should purportedly be read to the body of the recently deceased during the 49 day bardo period after death in order to help the ‘soul’ (the consciousness-principle) achieve Buddhahood, ‘Consciousness freed of all limitation’,³³³ or, failing that, favourable rebirth. While the Kabbalah and similar systems depict the upward movement along the Great Chain of Being, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as the *Bardo Thödol* is more commonly known, investigates the reverse direction, from encounters with the highest realms of the Spectrum of Consciousness to encounters with lower worlds/entities progressively downwards to rebirth into the world of matter. The stages of this process are given below:

Chikhai Bardo (The Bardo of the Moments of Death)

First Stage: The Primary Clear Light seen at the moment of death.

Second Stage: The Secondary Clear Light seen immediately after death.

Chönyid Bardo (The Bardo of the Experiencing of Reality)

Third Stage: When the karmic apparitions appear (which is said to start roughly three and a half to four days after the moment of death).

Days 1 to 7: The dawning of the Peaceful Entities, during which the *karmically* bound soul experiences seven stages of ‘ambuscade’, daily settings-face-to-face and trials and dangers with fifty-two Peaceful and Knowledge-Holding deities, which are no more than aspects of the deceased’s own karmic propensities. If the soul can recognize and embrace one of these deities, it can achieve Buddhahood in various heavenly realms. However, if the propensities of the soul are too great and/or the terror and awe when facing these deities is too great, then the soul will continue its journey ‘downwards’.

Days 8 to 14 The Dawning of the Wrathful Entities, during which the deceased has daily settings-face-to-face with ‘the fifty-eight flame-enhaloed, wrathful, blood-drinking deities’,³³⁴ which are also aspects of the deceased’s consciousness. Again there are trials and, if the soul can accept and embrace a deity, liberation will occur. If not, the downward progression continues.

Sidpa Bardo (The Reminder, The Clear Setting-Face-to Face in the Intermediate State when seeking Rebirth)

³³³ Evans-Wentz lxxii.

³³⁴ Evans-Wentz 131.

Days 15 to 49 The bardo body wanders and experiences pleasure or pain depending on its accumulated merit and, if it cannot negate its attraction to these experiences or cannot affect ‘a supernormal birth by transference to a paradise realm’, it is soon drawn towards the physical world, whereupon it seeks out an appropriate ‘womb-door’, which is generally determined by the karmic pressures on the wisdom-searching soul.

It was obvious to me that this cascading selection process could function as a fitting counterpoint to the development strategies (from the Kabbalah and Chakra systems) I wished to incorporate into my poem. That is, the whole idea of the Threshold Equation, with its concomitant commingling of all worlds, necessitated the combining of both types of process in order to illustrate the threshold moments of existence—that at any one moment, in any of the bardo realms, something is always dying and the choice for liberation is upon one. However, as with the case of the two system described above, the final draft of the poem did not rigorously adhere to the determinations of the *Bardo Thödol*, but incorporated its general concepts.

In conclusion, the intent of the study regime into the above systems and others not mentioned here was not to find a system or a combination of systems that would dictate symbols and narratives for *The Silence Inside the World*, that would be prescriptive, but to acquire a constellation of concepts, elements and procedures upon which my imagination would feed, or, to be more accurate, acquire a constellation which would allow Imagination to find its way through me to the page.

APPENDIX NINE: CURRICULUM FOR *IMAGINATIO*

Build then the ship of death, for you must take
the longest journey, to oblivion.
D H Lawrence, 'The Ship of Death'³³⁵

Throughout her critical writings Kathleen Raine has emphasised the need for poets to acquire what she has called 'the learning of the Imagination'. These critical efforts and her work in founding the Temenos Academy in London³³⁶ and its associated journals³³⁷ has exposed many to those Perennial Traditions she and others feel have been the mainstay of all civilizations apart from our own materialist one. My interest in those traditions was stimulated, as I describe in 'Leap of Tradition', by one of Raine's book and this project is a culmination of that interest and what I have called in the exegesis the 'Zane peak experience'. However, my explorations are far from over, and as a guide for myself and for other poets who may also decide to further themselves in 'the learning of the Imagination' I offer the following curriculum of texts and practices, which are obviously linked to the Perennial Philosophy. I certainly don't see these lists as exhaustive, merely suggestive of the directions a poet of the Imagination might pursue if she or he wants to write the 'language of the human soul', what I have termed in the exegesis *Imaginatio*.

Precedents for the above suggestion that a practical element is useful in order to provide useful inspirations into the higher regions of the Great Chain of Being can be seen in the work and study habits of such writers as Herman Hesse and W B Yeats. Donald McCrory notes in his Introduction to *Siddhartha* that, although Hesse was

³³⁵ D H Lawrence, *The Ship of Death and other poems* (1941; London: Faber and Faber, 1943) 71.

³³⁶ 'An Academy for Education in the Light of the Spirit', its motto being Plotinus's statement, 'There is nothing higher than truth'. For more information, see www.temenosacademy.org.

³³⁷ *Temenos* (1981-1992) and *Temenos Academy Review* (1998-present).

able to complete easily the first four chapters of the novel, he was delayed in the writing of the rest of the book:

After such a positive start to the novel, the delay in its completion, according to Hesse, stemmed from the fact that he himself had not experienced that transcendental state of unity to which Siddhartha aspires. In order to do so, Hesse lived as a virtual semi-recluse and became totally immersed in the sacred teachings of both Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. His intention was to attain that ‘completeness’, which, in the novel, is the Buddha’s badge of distinction.³³⁸

Then there is Yeats. As Kathleen Raine notes and most students of literature know, Yeats was ‘widely and deeply read in both English and European literature, and beyond’,³³⁹ including such explorations and mainstays of the Perennial Philosophy as Jewish and Christian Kabbalah and the works of Plato and Plotinus, as well as such works of Indian literature as the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads*. As she also notes:

It is clear from his programme of reading that when Yeats set himself to study ‘in a learned school’ he was in pursuit specifically of *imaginative* knowledge. Yeats was concerned *only* with imaginative thought, not at all with discursive rational thought and the materialist picture of the world.³⁴⁰

Yet this search for imaginative knowledge was not conducted through books alone:

It was with the same purpose that he set himself to expand and train his mind by the magical techniques taught by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and through psychical research.³⁴¹

³³⁸ David McCrory, introduction, *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse (1922; London: Picador, 1998) 26.

³³⁹ Raine *Learning*, 24.

³⁴⁰ Raine *Learning*, 26.

³⁴¹ Raine *Learning*, 26-27.

Then there is Kathleen Raine herself, who augmented her considerable studies into the Perennial Tradition (begun when she decided to study Blake from a Jungian perspective but soon realized his work could be elucidated far better through reference to his sources in tradition)³⁴² with meditation and Kabbalah pathworking study through her membership of the Society of Inner Light and the Golden Dawn:

Knowledge of the order of things that came to be understood by Kathleen, Rosamund [Lehmann] and me [Thetis Blacker] has illuminated our work, and influenced our vision in life. Suffice to say that for artists, writers and musicians, whose work is in the world of Imagination, the Qabalah is a marvellous map of the great pattern of how things are. It is a chart of Hidden Treasure.³⁴³

... in those pathworkings we encountered the archetypal places and people and creatures we have all seen and met in our great dreams, and in the fairytales we read in childhood, and in the legends of our country and the myths of the world.³⁴⁴

Finally, there are my own experiences. For several decades, as I describe in the early chapters of the exegesis, I explored Eastern philosophies, which included the practice of meditation and Tibetan yoga. I have also studied and practised shamanism and participated in rituals of magic. Although I would not claim to be an adept in any of these practices, I certainly can vouch for their effectiveness in opening one to insights into, at the very least, what Michael Harner calls the ‘Shamanic State of Consciousness’³⁴⁵ (which, as Roger Walsh points out, is likely to be at the subtle

³⁴² See Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition, Volumes I and II, Bollingen Series XXXV-11* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968).

³⁴³ Thetis Blacker, ‘Peregrinations,’ *Temenos Academy Review 7: Kathleen Raine Memorial Issue* (London: The Temenos Academy, 2004) 121.

³⁴⁴ Blacker 125.

³⁴⁵ Michael Harner, *The Way of the Shaman* (1980; New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990) 21.

level),³⁴⁶ and sometimes even into higher realms of the Spectrum of Consciousness.

These insights have contributed to my poetry over the years, as content and music, and, more importantly, as confirmation of childhood intimations of Imagination.

It is my feeling, then, that the encouragement of insight through appropriate practices favours imagination. That is, the goal of such a methodology would be immediate knowledge of ‘things of the spirit’ in such a way that it feeds into imaginative knowledge and results in compelling poetry.

Now to the lists themselves:

The Poets (A Golden String)

Homer	Ovid	Virgil	Dante
Spenser	Shakespeare	Milton	Blake
Coleridge	Shelley	Keats	Yeats
D H Lawrence	Robert Graves	Kathleen Raine	Dylan Thomas
Edwin Muir	Vernon Watkins	Ted Hughes	

Individual Texts³⁴⁷

<i>The Egyptian Book of the Dead</i>		<i>The Bardo Thödol</i>
<i>Gilgamesh</i>	<i>The Descent of Inanna</i>	<i>The Mahabharata</i>
<i>The Ramayana</i>	<i>The Upanishads</i>	<i>The Bhagavad-Gita</i>
<i>Thrice Greatest Hermes</i>		<i>The Nag Hammadi Library</i>

³⁴⁶ Roger N Walsh, *The Spirit of Shamanism* (London: Mandala, 1990) 237-239.

³⁴⁷ The Internet Sacred Text Archive, situated at www.sacred-texts.com/index.html, is a wonderful and comprehensive resource for ‘the most important books ever written’.

The Philosophers/Mystics, etc

Pythagoras	Heraclitus	Parmenides	Empedocles
Plato	Plotinus	Swedenborg	Boehme
Paracelsus	Giordano Bruno	Jung	Ananda Coomaraswamy
Henry Corbin	Joseph Campbell	James Hillman	Ken Wilber

The Traditions/Practices

Shamanism	Orphism	Hermeticism	Gnosticism
Sufism	Hinduism	Buddhism	Taoism
Zen	Alchemy	Kabbalah	Ritual Magic
Meditation	Yoga	Tarot	Runes

The Mythologies

Aboriginal	Sumerian	Biblical	Indian
Greek	Roman	Celtic	Norse, etc.

What is always to be remembered is that such studies, whether intellectual or practical, are not meant to be for the head but for the heart, as Kathleen Raine notes:

It is only the metaphysics that the poet has in his heart that is of the slightest use in his poetry. If poets have their metaphysics in their heads only and try to write verse, it doesn't work. It is only living experience that emerges in poetry, and this is just as true of the experience of the intellect as it is of the physical experience... The poem will only tell the truth that you know with your whole life and being.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ Keeble 35.

And it is this directive to live the knowledge that prevents the application of the Perennial Philosophy from falling into dogma. Unlike other systems that do not allow or do not encourage a personal, interrogative relationship with the axioms of the system (which means contact with that Mystery beyond or below the axioms), the Perennial Philosophy in its broadest form inspires the practitioner to approach the unknown, the summit of the Great Chain of Being. Its basic premise is that consciousness is the ground and goal of life and only by engaging with this premise can the practitioner gain Absolute Knowledge of consciousness, as consciousness, which is its destiny. Thus, because the Perennial Philosophy is effectively open to testing, it is what I call an ‘open grand narrative’.

Ken Wilber talks about there being three strands to the process of acquiring any form of knowledge, in whichever domain (*sensibilia, intelligibilia, transcendelia*):

1. *Instrumental Injunction*. This is always of the form, ‘If you want to *know* this, *do* this.’
2. *Intuitive apprehension*. This is the cognitive grasp, prehension, or immediate *experience* of the object domain (or aspect of the object domain) addressed by the injunction; that is, the immediate *data*-apprehension.
3. *Communal confirmation*. This is a checking of results (apprehensions or data) with others who have adequately completed the injunctive and apprehensive strands.³⁴⁹

Thus, for those trying to engage with Imagination, trying to enact and/or enable *Imaginatio*, the Perennial Tradition offers a tool kit of methodologies, examples, exemplars, and ‘portals’ (mythic and symbolic structures) to help develop the

sensibility—what might be called, following Keats, *Negative Capability*³⁵⁰—for being open to, perceiving, receiving, and acting upon ‘imagination and inspired insight’. The Perennial Philosophy tradition is the *injunction*, the insights received and the poetry created are the *apprehensions*, and the *confirmation* comes from those readers able and willing also to be open to whatever insights into Imagination are available.

Naturally enough, if an apprehension is not part of a community’s immediate field of experience, confirmation may not come and the ‘prophet’ who had the apprehension denied, hounded and expelled, or worse, until such time as his or her injunction (for surely a new apprehension implies a new injunction, or at least a new variation of an old injunction) is tried by others and the apprehension confirmed. When the new apprehension is a message ‘*from* the spirit innate in all, *to* the spirit innate in all’,³⁵¹ as all works of the Imagination aim to be, confirmation will always occur, though with no guarantee of when (as in the case with Blake), for the message, which is really someone’s deeper experience of spirit, will only be recognized once the ‘doors of perception’ are cleansed even further by the spirit in others.

Thus, the more open a system is, the more encouragement given to interrogation of premise and event, then the more likely it is that the system will confirm new apprehensions. In my opinion, the Perennial Philosophy and its associated Imaginative Tradition is one such system, for it is based on what the millennia have demonstrated is a comprehensive and effective way of looking at the kosmos, with the additional understanding that Mystery underlies it all, a Mystery

³⁴⁹ Wilber *Eye*, 44. Buddhists would likely see their Triple Jewel—*Dharma* (Law/Way), *Buddha* (Enlightenment), *Sangha* (Community)—as an example of this approach to direct experience.

³⁵⁰ ‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’, ‘Letter to George and Thomas Keats, Sunday 21 Dec 1817’, Keats 304.

that can be plumbed using *Imaginatio*, but never exhausted, for the Formless is exactly that, and so is infinitely malleable. In the end, what matters is the enabling of narrative, and those who are drawn to Imagination are trying to do what Raine said of Yeats:

Yeats's deepest commitment was no mere literary matter: for him poetry was not an end in itself but a means to the higher dedication of the Adept whose work is 'To know in order to serve.'³⁵²

³⁵¹ Raine *Learning*, 101.

³⁵² Raine *Learning*, 88.

APPENDIX TEN: DUAL NARRATIVE

I labour by singing light. . .
Dylan Thomas, 'My Craft or Sullen Art'³⁵³

For many years I kept a diary/journal, which had entries about my daily life and musings about my artistic life, with occasional transcriptions of dreams and jottings towards poems or short stories. Entries varied from exhaustive to brief and were written irregularly. Then I came across *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, a book designed to help individual's discover or recover their creativity. One of her Basic Tools was The Morning Pages, 'three pages of longhand writing, strictly stream-of-consciousness',³⁵⁴ its intention being to help one evade the Censor, that inner voice that continually criticizes one's creativity:

Make this a rule: always remember that your Censor's negative opinions are not the truth. This takes practice. By spilling out of bed and straight onto the page every morning, you learn to evade the Censor. Because there is no wrong way to write the morning pages, the Censor's opinion doesn't count. Let your Censor rattle on. (And it will.) Just keep your hand moving across the page.³⁵⁵

The promise of a technique that could help free myself from my own self-doubt and negativity and allow my creativity to flow more encouraged me to maintain an even more strict routine of journaling:

³⁵³ Thomas 120.

³⁵⁴ Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: G P Putnam's Sons, 1992) 10.

³⁵⁵ Cameron 11.

All that angry, whiny, petty stuff that you write down in the morning stands between you and your creativity...this stuff eddies through our subconscious and muddies our days. Get it on the page.³⁵⁶

The technique did help me to discover those attitudes holding back my personal and artistic growth, though, as in the normal way of things, such awareness is only the first step towards change and change itself is often a long and difficult process.

The next step in my development of the diary/journal as an aid to my art was the discovery of the Dual Narrative technique. As explained in ‘Appendix Two: Notes to Myself’ of my MA dissertation³⁵⁷ the technique aims to help the writer by being, as the writer Liam Davison put it when he introduced the technique to a group of creative writing teachers,³⁵⁸ ‘Letters to Myself as an Interested Reader’. The Dual Narrative is meant to be written before each day’s commencement of the writing work and, like Cameron’s technique, is designed to remove obstacles, clarify the (artistic) mind, and give impetus to the creative work that follows.

The technique proved useful during my MA candidature and I implemented it again during this current project. I did not strictly follow Davison’s formulation, but instead used my normal ‘morning pages’ routine as the place to consider ideas for the project or to resolve those difficulties I was facing in the execution of these ideas, and often this musing took place before I tackled the writing itself. The longhand extracts dealing with the project were then transcribed into the computer for later reference.³⁵⁹

The following extracts, from entries written during the early part of my candidature and even before it, are presented in order to illustrate how the Dual

³⁵⁶ Cameron 11.

³⁵⁷ Livings 274.

³⁵⁸ Liam Davison, ‘The Dual Narrative: Hindrance or Help’, a workshop given at Words@Work.2000.Conference, 16 June 2000, Chisholm Institute, Berwick, Victoria, Australia.

Narrative aided the evolution of my thought about form and content of this project and how it aided the evolution of those metaphysical and creative issues the project entailed. Thus they can be seen as an adjunct to both parts of the exegesis, ‘Intentions: *Tzimtzum*’ and ‘Reflections: *Tikkun*’:

Wednesday 23 February 2000

I have been thinking about the next project—the *Deep Reach* long poem³⁶⁰—the last few days, prompted by my reading of an art book written by Kathleen Raine on William Blake. The book reminded me of my sense of being a spiritual writer, of somehow proclaiming and invigorating Spirit, and that *Deep Reach* is my planned expression of this: a long poem blending all the wisdom traditions of the world. After talking with TJ yesterday about formal poems (ghazals), I realised that some structures can be embedded in others, a haiku in a sonnet, for example, like Shakespeare’s sonnet in the middle of blank verse (when Romeo and Juliet first meet), and that this would be one way of establishing the common humanity of the world while emphasising the divergences as well. Then, while driving to work this morning I realised that the central narrative of the book will likely be a love story—because this is the human endeavour that carries us up the ladder...Crudely put: *Love in Space*, but a love story that somehow depicts the full dynamic of the ‘Wilber Process’.

³⁵⁹ The current size of the file is 54,083 words, with many months of entries not transcribed because of time pressures.

³⁶⁰ My original idea for the PhD was a long science fiction poem set on board a space liner/ark adrift in space.

Thursday 17 August 2000

I've already started reading a Kathleen Raine book on Blake, *Blake and Antiquity*,³⁶¹ which looks at the sources of Blake's symbolism. These sources are rooted in the Perennial Philosophy, the relationship between it and literature being what I want to explore in the PhD. I'm excited about the *Deep Reach* project, which in some ways is a SF verse novel, but really will be an epic in the tradition from Homer onwards. Actually, it will be my attempt at combining lyric and epic, at combining, yet again, science and art, modern conditions and ancient traditions.

Wednesday 23 August 2000

One thing that has been puzzling me is that, if there is a deep loss of the sacred in our cultures, why isn't there an (unconscious?) hunger for the sacred. Maybe the popularity of mythic stories such as *Star Wars* and of New Age/Esoteric/Age of Aquarius things such as *Buffy*, *Charmed*, *Sabrina the Witch*, etc (lolly-esoterica, I suppose) is a sign of the hunger, yet the effect may not be enough, possibly because the symbols are either not persuasive/engaging enough or not deep enough...

Thinking about Kathleen Raine's Temenos Academy, *temenos* being a sacred space, and about the fact that all space-time is a sacred space when looked at 'from a certain point of view', then what I'm moving towards is a concept of everything, including our sacred spaces, being a *threshold* [and an *upaya*]³⁶² to the Mystery underlying all things, and that art functions as the *portal*...

³⁶¹ Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Antiquity*, a shorter version of *Blake and Tradition*, The A W Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1962, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1963, 1968; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

³⁶² Square brackets refer to comments made at a later date, usually during transcription or re-reading.

Tuesday 12 September 2000

I was musing about my writing when I had one of those sudden intuitions. I realised that Zane existed in our universe in a reverse time direction, that he was the reason for the stories of an immortal, but not in the sense everyone supposes—he gets older as the universe becomes younger. His presence here is due in some way to the collision of the two universes that he and Keea [the original name for Jessie] somehow avert...

Wednesday 3 January 2001

I did spend some time musing about *Marga* [an early title for my planned overall cycle of stories/novels set in and around *Thexlan*]³⁶³ yesterday. I wrote summaries of some of the books, but I still need to establish a timeline of major events... So, which one should I tackle first? I want to write about Zane, so maybe I can do a book of his early life, right up to the melding point. I have plenty of notes and rough drafts I could draw on, so this wouldn't be a bad idea...

Stephen King, I think, talks about unearthing stories, which implies they pre-exist somewhere. Where? The world of the Imagination [the world of Forms?]. Where is this in the metaverse?³⁶⁴ Maybe one story can be about storytelling. Yet, if King is right, how does that fit into my sense that stories are, or can be, collaborative [with whom or what?], that we create stories as well as find them? I have experienced the 'found' poem or story—the poem I wrote in the last two days is one. I had the opening, had the experience, and teased everything out of the 'given'. So are all creative activities just archaeology of the Imagination? Do artists just prime

³⁶³ Italicised square brackets refer to information added, for the purposes of clarification, during the writing of this appendix.

³⁶⁴ An early term for my version of Moorcock's Multiverse.

themselves through craft to be open to the given? What active part do we actually play—just the cultivation of our interest and of our craft, so that the given becomes attracted to us as a channel [we channel Idea into reality, eternity into time?]? Then where do the givens exist? In the ‘nothing’?...

The important thing is to tell the story as well as I can.

What is the story? Zane’s search for mastery and then his atonement.

Friday 30 March 2001

The Yeats book³⁶⁵ is reminding me of the spiritual basis for poetry:

The affairs of the soul, and not the affairs of the world, belong to the poet’s work.

Is this true? I see and hear so much poetry that is about the world, and if we extend the sense of soul to include all the levels of the Great Chain of Being (GCOB), Wilber’s ladder, then everything is an affair of the soul (cf. everything is politics). Is it only poetry that can continue to be of the world, even if it is away from the original place and concern of its composition, that this poetry, because it is deeper than the ‘world moment’, be truly a poem of the soul? The anti-USA and anti-Kennett poems are political poems that become irrelevant once the moment has passed. They are therefore not true poems, whereas Yeats’s ‘Easter 1916’ is a true poem because it is deeper than the political moment that prompted the poem in the first place; it has a universal sense about it that the anti-USA and anti-Kennett poems do not have. That is, ‘Easter 1916’ is a poem that is actually about affairs of the soul as they intrude in the affairs of the world and so is a true poem.

³⁶⁵ Susan Johnston Grof. *W B Yeats—Twentieth-Century Magus: An In-depth Study of Yeats's Esoteric Practices & Beliefs, Including Excerpts from His Magical Diaries*, York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 2000.

So how does this relate to transitions of either translation or transformation? Is any text that only translates not a true poem because it doesn't transform the soul? Yet such a text may prepare the soul for transformation, by moving it to a point of readiness and departure. 'Everything furthers' David Carradine says in his book; thus, everything is spiritual. Why then distinguish between true and false poetry? Doesn't all poetry affect either the soul of the writer and/or other souls, when soul is extended to include all possible movements? Even 'bad' poems can urge a soul into action, as any evil can. Is there truly no such thing as evil? Are what we consider true poems those that move beyond the personal triggering of transition to those that help others to move? And if a poem only confirms a person's current state, is this also good? A poem that says it's okay to be racist—is this 'good' because it confirms the soul's state at the time? What is the difference between a poem and propaganda?

Yeats: Only that which does not teach, does not cry out, does not condescend, does not explain, is irresistible.

When Yeats, and others like him, such as Kathleen Raine, talk about poetry being of 'affairs of the soul', aren't they really practising a propaganda of their own spiritual ideology? One solution to this quandary may be to attempt to write a non-ideological poetry, a poetry of transition instead of state, a poetry that leads but does not push, that reveals and encourages, that takes one to the edge but doesn't say 'Leap!'...Maybe the solution is to assume that, while other works may bring awareness from lower rungs to higher rungs, only poetry brings us closer to the highest rungs, though this may be treading on the toes of religion. Maybe because poetry is individual and is not dogma, it is better than religion, is a true way of finding the divine than is empty ritual. Yet, some rituals, some processes, do work,

for example, meditation, so poetry isn't the only mechanism of soul-flight. Is poetry the mechanism for some souls, and meditation for others?

Saturday 28 July 2001

So, what am I trying to do? Firstly, there is Zane's story, which has always been about the search for wisdom, since the first drafts I wrote in the early 80s. I wanted to write a fantasy series about an Elric-type character, who is searching for Absolute Knowledge, for Reality. The true path is meditation, but that seems undramatic. Zane's search is actually about his giving up of ego—he believes that the [various spiritual] procedures/injunctions may restrict his experience of Reality, because the injunctions are models, are maps only; thus, he decides to avoid such paths (all ideologies) and goes off to discover his own one....Zane wants to master everything, but ends up realising he is everything.

Which book gives me the chance to tackle the rise of religious experiences, Zane, with his journey through Thexlan, or Mora [*a sentient robot*], with his evolution of consciousness in *Deep Reach* [*my original idea for the PhD project*]? One is a stable ego, the other evolves quickly to supra-consciousness (how?). One is about religious evolution, one is about consciousness evolution [Are they different?]. Then there's Keea...Which 'book' will be appropriate to be an 'original contribution to knowledge'? Which one will best contribute to my own development? Which one am I more passionate about? All of them equally?

If I could only write one of them, which one would it be? **Zane**.

How could I make *Without Master* [*an early title for a novel about Zane's life*] suitable for a PhD project? Not sure. Certainly, since Thexlan is a land of dreams and Imagination, the study of symbols is still relevant. However, the poetic style isn't, unless somehow I embed poems into the narrative. Maybe Zane, being a

singer/musician, encounters ‘myth-dreams’ of various cultures in his travels and these use poetic devices for transmission.

Wednesday 19 September 2001

Last night I felt that Zane’s story seems to be a cross between Gene Wolfe [*The Book of the New Sun* tetralogy], Hesse’s *Siddhartha* [and other works], Pier’s Anthony’s *Tarot* books, and Zelazny’s *Lord of Light*, yet not quite this, because my setting is the Absolute [?], not a world that has emerged from it, even if this is not obvious at the start of the novel. Then again, maybe Thexlan is an ‘emerged’ world, though barely so. The difference I want to explore is the sense that Thexlan is recreated each morning during the hypnagogic time between night and day, sleep and wakefulness, and that the Makars, the Dremaans, are those who do this daily remaking, from the grey (?) dust that is the universe without song. Maybe red dust—red for blood [of the first Dremaan? Zane?] Or purple dust—red for blood, blue for air/water.

Anyway, Zane’s story is more overtly esoteric than most other SF books and I hope the setting is different enough too...Maybe I’ll need to write up the cosmology of Thexlan and the braided universes so that I have a better idea of the setting.

I must remember that I have to align the PP [*Perennial Philosophy*] with my work. Does the PP drive the setting, the story arc, and/or the character arc? All, probably, since Zane’s search is for the secret behind the world.

Thursday 11 October 2001

There was a moment yesterday (while driving) when, as I relaxed my mind, I felt my body relax, and I realised that maybe the Taoist philosophy has to do with learning how to relax the mind, remove it from attachment to the body, to the world, return it (the mind) to its natural state, and then the body, the world, returns to its natural,

relaxed state, where what happens is what happens and is what was meant to happen. A simple idea, but one that was viscerally realised during that moment.

I still have trouble trying to fully accept this realisation as the full wisdom, for I'm perplexed by the fact that the mind, even when it merges with Mind (the mind's natural, relaxed state), can't really be divorced from body, for the body too is a 'product' of Mind. Still, the experience I had...was real, and thus indicates a path to follow, a piece of the wisdom puzzle.

There is a sense that this experience is something Zane has to discover sometime during his journey. He is firstly selfish and aggressive, self-destructive and other-destructive because of bitterness and self-pity, but eventually he learns detachment. He desires Power, to unspell, unknow, the world, thinking he is really desiring wisdom, and he eventually discovers [when?] true wisdom. The simple wisdom of relaxing into his true state. [Possibly as the volcano is in meltdown and he realises how wrong he has been—he has never practised Care, but people have practised it on him—he suddenly has his realisation, after which he 'returns' to the Tao and jumps into the volcano, his demonstration of Care?]

Of course, I still worry about the sense of there being no apparent difference between realising the true state of transpersonal consciousness and creating it—do we open into a transpersonal experience or do we extend personal consciousness beyond the person, with that consciousness still being unique? If one person reaches enlightenment, why aren't all of us instantly enlightened?

I also have to consider how to use these insights and metaphors in a story about a realm that is the physical embodiment of the archetypes and their processes.

I also have to consider...the relationship between Thexlan and our universe.

Sunday 21 October 2001

Is Thexlan the world of archetypes and Imagination, or just our universe's imagination? Is Thexlan like The Dreaming? How to write about an archetypal world [Was Middle Earth one?] when it doesn't seem to have an independence, requiring the 'real' world for manifestation? Can Zane [be of and] journey through a world of archetypal energies? Is he such an energy himself? [Maybe not, which is why he is different from other beings in the world. They are archetypal or are results of 'man's' imaginings, whereas he is a man (?), being the being who, on one of his spiral manoeuvres, created the archetypal world?!]...How to tap into the archetypal world myself in order to display it for others? [Magic and meditation.]

Is the other braid also archetypal? Is it the shadow realm, which Zane unconsciously taps into because of his anger/bitterness/grief? He doesn't realise his Song of Unknowing is actually allowing the shadow realm to take over [merge with?] Thexlan—would this result in the annihilation of both, like matter and anti-matter?

Is Zane's journey one of individuation or transcendence? [The first must (?) occur before the second.] Which part of his journey do I write for the PhD? [Individuation?] Thexlan, obviously, but I need to know his other parts in order to prepare the connections between the various books.

- Do the Makars [Dremaan] use sand paintings to sing things into existence?
- Will there ever be a time (in Thexlan or elsewhere) when stories no longer will be needed? (A good question for a character to ask.)
- Does the grotesque exist in the archetype realm? (Eg. my idea of the long-delayed pregnant 'goddess', whose child will be the 'ruler' [or anti-Christ?] of Thexlan and everything else?)
- Will the book be composed of set 'episodes', at least in the first draft?

Probably:

1. Fisherman's life
2. Kenpai training
3. Journey to hermit
4. The mirror
5. The mountain (which is an imitation of the volcano)
6. The pregnant goddess (a former lover of Zane who wants the child to avenge her against Zane?!)
7. Book II of my old trilogy (?)
8. Encounter with deaf-blind-dumb woman who sculpts things then breathes life into them (?)
9. Giant vehicles that use skeletons of giant crabs as legs for mechanism => there must be a sea somewhere
10. The (near) destruction of the dream volcano (?) ('Smoke' rings, which are actually stories/myths from the Atman, rise from the volcano and disappear into other braids—are called there by Dremaan/artists/etc.)

Tuesday 6 November 2001

However, there's one big problem. I spent some time on the net yesterday printing out some Ken Wilber articles and when I read one of them last night I discovered that he had disavowed much of the Perennial Philosophy around 1983. Although he agrees with the concept of Spirit, other tenets he only accepts if they can be 'proved' by a broad science, a reconstructive science—in other words, if the concept can be reconstructed from experiential data. He's basically calling for a postmetaphysical Spirituality. One of the concepts he disagrees with is the *a priori* existence of levels of being beyond what humans have experienced collectively or even individually, the latter being occasions where those levels are actually being 'realised' from potential,

or so it seems to me. Now, I can partially sympathise with such an approach, as I too am wary of deterministic involution/evolution cycles and like the idea of emergent spiritscapes from potential. However, I sense a human-centredness about his approach, as if nothing could be in existence, could be manifested, unless triggered by a human consciousness. What happens if other consciousnesses [the Scylarii?] have evolved to higher stages before we humans? Do we travel their unfoldings of potential or do we unfold our own, never the twain to meet? Also, I wonder if the realms that are experienced/created are truly that or ‘what there is’ is interpreted by the participating consciousness. While I like the idea of creativity holding some power in his schema, I feel that the centrality of it is overstated—do all excursions down the mountain (his metaphor: we start at the top, in gross matter, and move down) create the lower layers of the mountain or just uncover them? [Alkerii is formed by the layers of sediment from the dream rings?] Do we, who may come after a consciousness who has had a different set of cultural influences, etc. on his/her ‘creation’ of the mountain section, experience that section the same or create our own version of that section? [A good topic for a discussion in Open Silence.] Is he just proposing his model to explain these differences? If so, fine; but why propose the creation of those levels? Maybe the levels pre-exist the excursion/incursion and the perceiver’s four quadrant influences change the reception/perception of the layer. Is it possible to distinguish between the two?

Friday 4 January 2002

Spent most of the day doing definitions of concepts and terms I'll be using in my proposal and which will influence my thinking for the book itself. I also read bits and pieces from Wilber's books, just to get an idea of how he sees the concepts of PP now and how I can apply PP to art, especially his version of PP. It seems now that any writing I do has to contain a mixture of the equivalent of 'uncovering therapies and meditation' if I want writing to do the equivalent of these in bringing people to the top of the GCOB. Yet there is still the doubt that literature can evoke the divine or connect one with the divine. (One almost has to be wary of literature being regressive and evoking mythic archetypes instead of subtle archetypes.) Wilber talks about St Bonaventure's eye of flesh, eye of reason, and eye of contemplation. What about the eye of imagination? Hugh of St Victor talks about *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*. What about *imaginatio*? (Is there such a word?) If imagination is a mental activity, then it's a part of the eye of reason/mind. Maybe it's on the boundary between *meditatio* and *contemplatio*. Then again, maybe it's after *contemplatio*; it's what the divine does. It can actually aid the other eyes in their work. Does the poet actually act like god at those moments, or is s/he just a channel for God to reveal itself? [What's the difference?]

Wilber says that in the magic stage the worldview is the belief that one can affect the world. Is my saying that imagination is a way of creating the world just an example of my being stuck in this stage? Most fantasy writing has a heavy emphasis on magic. Does this mean it is regressive literature? How do I make SOU [Song of Unknowing, *another early title for Zane's story*] non-regressive, yet still with an

emphasis on imagination? What is imaginative writing? Is any literature ‘anagogic’³⁶⁶—capable of triggering transcendence/transformation?...

I’ve just spent a half hour or so glancing through an anthology I bought years ago—*Anagogic Qualities of Literature*—that seems to say literature can trigger spiritual experience, though most songs or poems or passages written by sages and saints need readers familiar with the principles of the religious system to which the writer belongs for them to get the full value of the texts. That’s not my position. I suppose, in a sense, I want SOU to offer transcendence to a secular readership, like Tolkien does, and thus I need to use symbols and narrative devices a secular reader will engage with and react to, all the while without realising that they are being triggered into a sacred space.

Wednesday 16 January 2002

I spent a long while yesterday rethinking the start of the novel. I’m developing characters and events to set up Zane’s encounters with the reason he goes on his journey, but still haven’t finalised how these all fit together. I have so much old material that I want to use, but many of the pieces are inconsistent with each other. I still need lots of thinking in order to organise my drafts, let alone incorporate much of the other material I’ve found during my excavation of file and folder.

³⁶⁶ ‘[T]he term “anagogic” stands for “mystic” or “esoteric” in its broadest sense’, Joseph P Strelka, ed., *Anagogic Qualities of Literature: Yearbook of Comparative Criticism Volume IV* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1971) 1.

Thursday 7 February 2002

Yesterday I suddenly had the image of a group of stars one night forming itself into an androgynous-type of person who befriends Zane, possibly during his time in the castle on the lake. Maybe this 'god/demon' prefers Zane's company to that of the wizard/witch. I've also been thinking of the 'good' wizard of the N'Dami (Geraint?), who trains Zane for a while. I had a picture of him being like a Buddhist monk, in that he carries a staff with bells on it to warn insects, etc. of his approach. Then I thought this was too ordinary an image, and I suddenly saw that the music his staff made was caused by collections of tiny silver skulls [who talked?] hanging from the wood, all of them in different modes of visage: sad, happy, angry, etc. a multitude of variations on the theatre masks. The staff makes a noise a cross between a moan and a musical tinkle. The skulls represent people between lives, maybe, and Geraint is some sort of Bardo realm guardian/mentor/god/demon. [Maybe when a 'skull' is ready for rebirth or nirvana, it ascends the staff in a spiral path and bursts through the top of the staff in a blaze of light, the colour of which indicates which realm it moves to. Maybe Zane and company see their own skulls on it.]

It has also occurred to me that the book's power will rely somewhat on the depiction of the characters Zane meets in his travels [and the symbolisms], and that the more grotesque, intriguing, mysterious, and/or archetypal they can be, the better. I don't want to have characters that are clones of other fantasy characters. There has to be something different about them, something that reflects the subtle/causal realm in which they reside. A mixture of archetype and possibility/potential.

I've come to realise that I want this book to be something new in fantasy, something that isn't medieval based, isn't quest based, *per se*. Yes, there is a quest, for the Song of Unknowing, but this quest isn't for an artefact of power to be used in

the destruction of a dark lord, as most fantasies are, nor is it a quest, as in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, to destroy the artefact of the dark lord's power. In some ways, Zane is the dark lord. He wants the Song of Unknowing in order to unmake Thexlan, because he wants to unlock the mysteries of the universe, to find out what is beyond the material world, what is the ultimate reality. [This may be his ostensible reason; the other one being the revenge on the kosmos for the death of his sister.] In fact, there may be quests to stop him. [Abzzu?] I want SOU to be about spirituality, not about power, not about rebellion, revenge, nor restoration/reformation. I want SOU to somehow inaugurate a more spiritual approach to life...

Wednesday 20 February 2002

Managed to do a couple of pages for the novel and to spend time on the proposal... The interesting thing to come out of this proposal and my current reading of Joseph Campbell's *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*³⁶⁷ is the importance of imagination. SOU is really about imagination and becoming the divine through story, and imagination, somehow, acting, as Campbell would say 'as if'. It remains for me to work out where imagination fits in with the three eyes of knowing and the three types of knowledge—or are they all subsumed into it, so that imagination is the highest form, the only form of knowing and knowledge? [Maybe imagination is All, as in Coleridge and Blake; the void separating itself into the manifest world as an action of imagination?]

³⁶⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (1959; London: Souvenir Press, 1973).

Saturday 16 March 2002

I'm starting to reconsider SOU in light of my recurring interest in poetry. Should I recast SOU as a verse fantasy novel? Why? Because I want to write poetry or because the story demands it? The latter should be the reason. Why would Zane tell his story in verse? Is it one of the books Keea (?) comes across in her researches? Should I try to tell all of Zane's story in one book, using Keea as a frame story? Should there be verse and prose sections showing Zane's growing prowess as a writer the older he becomes but the younger our universe becomes, as he is travelling backwards? Is SOU a story he tells Keea during their brief relationship?

Tuesday 19 March 2002

The last few days, as a result of my block with SOU, of much reading and thinking about lyric writing and the Romantic agenda, I have found myself being drawn back to poetry as my means of expression and dialogue...

I'm not entirely sure that prose is the correct medium for a story about 'song', about the attainment of the perennial wisdom...

Months ago I asked myself that if I was only to write one more book, would it be *Deep Reach* or my Zane story. The answer was Zane, because, as a character (as my alter-ego, my archetype?), he had been with me for 20 years. Yet, if I am only to write one more book, do I want it to be prose or poetry? The answer is, **poetry**. Over the last few days I've been wondering about Zane's story and, once more, realising that, if I'm to write one more book, I would want to tell the whole of his story, including his journey backwards though our time...

There was a moment this morning when it felt right to consider writing SOU totally in poetry—an epic of the GCOB, which I was considering doing for *Deep Reach*...

Friday 29 March 2002

I woke up this morning with the realisation that the verse and metre form needed for SOU may be a type of pantoum or villanelle, with repetition of word or phrase, chaining its way through the epic...

Later in the day I did some research into the epic mode and was reading entries in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*.³⁶⁸ For a while I wondered if I was trying to create a metre/verse form that would somehow accommodate or echo or trigger other metrics—a universal metre. If I wanted SOU to be like I was planning *Deep Reach*—an epic for the world—then its form would have to echo all world poetry forms...

I've been reading some material from the Long Poem Group³⁶⁹ and certainly am wondering about the effectiveness of the Pound/Williams approach to the long poem—collections [sequences?] of lyrics. Anyway, I was considering that maybe I should be going back to traditional epic metres in some way, which is what the movement called Expansive Poetry seems to be suggesting.

³⁶⁸ Alex Preminger, Frank J Warnke and O B Hardison, Jr, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1965; London: Macmillan, 1975).

³⁶⁹ Newsletters available at <http://www.dgdclynx.plus.com/lpgn/lpgn1.html>, 13/03/2006.

Thursday, 23 May 2002

During my quotation note-taking on Tuesday I was caught up in Kathleen Raine's book *The Inner Journey of the Poet* and was reminded of her attitude towards Imagination and how she saw the function of poetry as mediating 'the spiritual visions and institutions of mankind', 'to make perceptible the invisible world of the imagination', that 'poetry is the proper language of the soul'. Yet, if the Eastern traditions are to be believed, the soul (personal) is also an illusion [but maybe a necessary one]; all that is, is the Universal Mind, the Self, Nirvana. How to write a poetry that, in a sense, denies life, because it affirms what is beyond the wheel of life?...

I'm reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is about liberation from samsara, but what happens to the being that obtains this liberation? Would anybody be interested in 'leaving life' [Keea, for instance], especially if the final goal is beyond the heavens and hells of all religious systems? [Must show these heavens and hells on the slopes of Alkerii—thus, the truest destination then is the ongoing enjoyment of and in the creative act?] Wilber talks of Nirvana and samsara as being one and the same, once one obtains liberation, so maybe that's where my work has to lead—showing that all there is, is with us now. Everything is 'always already' (Wilber). 'Everything furthers' (Carradine)...

What will *Open Silence* do? Help readers with liberation—during the bardo, during life? Help society/culture with liberation? Show what liberation is? How? Content? Form? Tone? Being objective and subjective at the same time? Being dualist and monist at the same time? What 'trick' am I trying to play?

Certainly I am following the story of Zane, which has lead me to the Perennial Philosophy, to Keea, to the braided universe, and to the idea of a post-Romantic verse

epic. I want to synthesise Eastern and Western spirituality (and magic?) in a poetic form that will shift people. Shift where? Towards their centres. Towards a better connection with Spirit. Towards a more aware connection with Spirit, since we are always already with and within Spirit. How?

Use the 49 day Bardo structure, the 22 paths of the Kabbalah, the 10 Sefirot, the seven chakras, the GCOB, etc...

A strong imaginative text:

- Wilber: GCOB/PP
- Bloom: strong poet
- Raine: Imagination and PP
- Injunction-Apprehension-Confirmation
- Dharma-Buddha-Sangha
- Active attention-Stopping-Passive Awareness

A creative exploration of the nexus between literature and the Perennial Philosophy.

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