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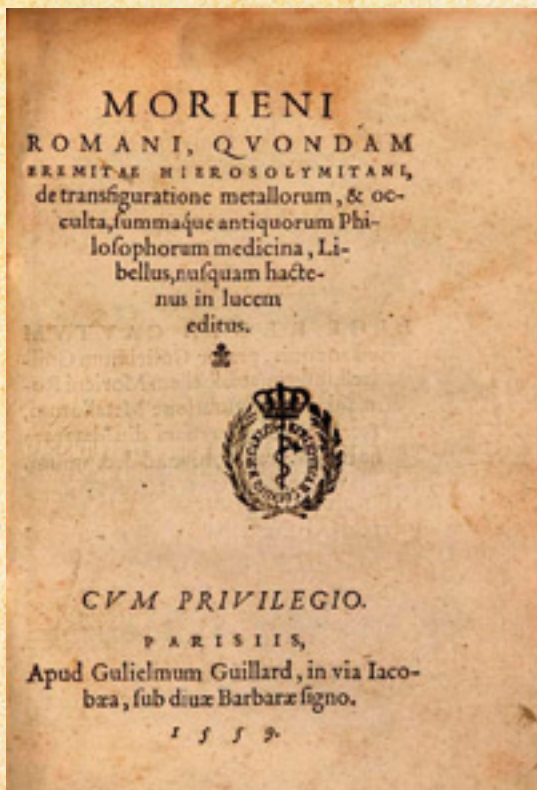
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The Transmission of Alchemical Knowledge

AN ALTERNATE VIEW

by Timothy O'Neill



THE TRANSLATION INTO LATIN of the Arabic text, *The Revelations of Morienus to Khalid Ibn Yazid Mu'awiyya*, in 1144 by the Arabist Robert of Chester, a native of Ketton in the English county of Rutland, has usually been cited as the primary reason for the great revival of interest in alchemy among 13th century Europeans. This work has long been held as the manuscript which reintroduced alchemical interest to the West and eventually sparked a great revival of the art in the mid-1200s.

Title page from the first printed Latin edition of the *The Revelations of Morienus* (Paris, Gulielmum Guillard, 1559). [Source: <http://books.google.co.uk/books/reader?id=XpVUE5X5d50C&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&source=ebokstore&pg=GBS.PP3>]

◀ **Detail from a miniature from Ibn Butlan's *Risalat da`wat al-atibba* (L.A. Mayer Museum for Islamic Art, Jerusalem).** [Source: <http://www.chemheritage.org/discover/media/magazine/articles/25-3-al-kimya-notes-on-arabic-alchemy.aspx?page=1>]

According to traditional histories of alchemy, the art was 'lost' to the West during the Dark Ages and was then revived in the context of 13th century Aristotelianism as taught in the universities of Europe. However, as we shall see, more recent research upon this text and upon the survival of indigenous European alchemical texts suggests that the transmission of alchemical knowledge and the revival of interest in the art was by no means so simple or straightforward as the older view implies.

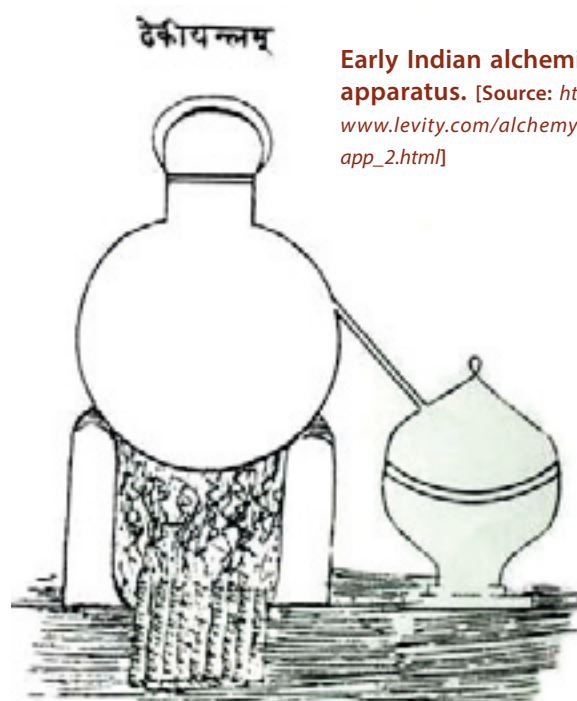
The ancient and widespread set of ideas we call 'alchemy' appears to have suddenly emerged both in the East and West about the second century CE.¹ At roughly the same time that the Chinese Taoist philosopher Wei Po Yang wrote his treatise on the elixir of immortality, the Greek philosophers of Alexandria, Egypt, began to compile the Hermetic corpus, that large body of documents attributed to the mythical sage Hermes Trismegistus. Even though its focus was purely philosophical, the Hermetic corpus formed the theoretical backbone of all later practical alchemical work on the transmutation of metals and the creation of the elixir of life.

Jack Lindsay, in *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (University of Virginia, 1970) traces original Aristotelian and Stoic ideas that gave birth to the pre-Hermetic literary references to alchemy found in Greek plays and poems. The conclusion that alchemy was practiced centuries before it surfaced as a literary entity in the late second and early third centuries is not too surprising, since even the Greeks acknowledged the great antiquity of the art. When alchemy, per se, surfaced in such documents as the famous *Leyden Papyrus X*,² a papyrus codex written in Greek dated from sometime around the late 3rd century or early 4th century CE, it was in the form of collections of very practical recipes for dyeing, metallurgy and other crafts.

During the golden age of Alexandrian alchemy, the philosophical conclusions of the Hermeticists and the practical work of the recipe-makers gradually coalesced into such early alchemical texts as the *Visions of Zosimos*.³ As the Roman Empire was gradually Christianised following the rule of Constantine, interest in alchemy gradually waned; however both the Byzantine and Arabic schools collected and improved upon many of its techniques, texts and ideas. Although the direct influence of the Alexandrian school of Egypt upon later Western science was minimal,⁴ its indirect effect, particularly through Islamic sources, was quite marked.

Eastern Influences on Western Alchemy

In any evaluation of Eastern influences upon Western alchemy, it is important to realise at the outset that the orientation, aims and methods of the East vary quite strongly from those found in the Alexandrian school. The Indian school of alchemy was rooted in the medicinal uses of plants within the medical context. The Hindu Ayurvedic system of medicine popularised the use of metals such as gold and mercury in its treatments.⁵ Unlike Chinese alchemy, the goal was longevity, rather



Early Indian alchemical apparatus. [Source: http://www.levity.com/alchemy/in_app_2.html]



Chinese alchemy: Dragon (male Yang) and Tiger (female Ying) joining their essences in the alchemical tripod. [Source: http://www.goldenelixir.com/jindan/ill_dragon_and_tiger.html]

with mercury which travelled into India, thence to Arabia and the West, receiving modifications and additions at each stage of the journey.

Islamic Alchemical Tradition

We reach the real key to the 13th century Western revival of alchemy when we consider the Islamic alchemical tradition. As in both India and China, Islamic alchemy tended to value the medicinal properties of metals and plants much more highly than in the West; however, it is in Islam that we first discover a pure fascination with the transmutation of metals, in and of itself, much as in the West.

Islam obtained the seed essence of its alchemy from the Alexandrian school, and to some extent, from the much later school of Byzantium. As was the case with so much learning, Islam not only preserved alchemical knowledge, but also materially improved upon it. Geber,⁷ the most famous Islamic alchemist, substantially improved the laboratory technique

than physical immortality. Indian physics held an advanced atomic theory long before Democritus (c. 460-370 BCE), yet it remained purely theoretical, adding nothing to alchemical practice. Practical work with metallurgy and pharmacopeia began quite early in India, yet there was little interest in the transmutation of metals, unlike the Islamic and European schools for whom it formed the major fascination.

In medieval India there arose a school of alchemists whose main attention was the medicinal use of mercury.⁶ It is possible that these alchemists influenced the Arabic schools, who in turn passed on to the West their preoccupation with mercury, an interest which later appears among alchemists such as Paracelsus (1493-1541).

Chinese alchemy focused almost exclusively upon the problem of physical immortality rather than medicinal or transmutative works. Theories have been put forward as to the direct transmission of Chinese alchemical concepts to the West via Central Asian trade routes and the famous 'Silk Road'. However, it appears much more likely that it was the Chinese fascination



Islamic alchemy: Chemical and pharmaceutical processes from a manuscript in the Freer Gallery in Washington. [Source: http://www.alchemywebsite.com/islamic_manuscripts.html]

Turba Philosophorum ('Assembly of Alchemical Philosophers'), Basel, Ludwig König, 1613. An anonymous text based on earlier Greek sources which was originally written in Arabic circa 900. It is comprised of a series of orations by famous figures in natural philosophy such as Pythagoras. *Turba* was among the earliest and most popular medieval alchemical texts in Europe. [Image and text from: <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/alchemy/ia.html>]

and theoretical structures of Alexandrian alchemy, and was quoted as a final source by European alchemists for hundreds of years after the 13th century revival. The prevalence of Arabic words in European alchemy, and even in modern chemistry, many of them coined by Geber, demonstrates the great impact of the Islamic school. Thus it appears that when the first translation of a text, namely, *The Revelations of Morienus*, first appeared in Europe (Paris, 1559) from this influential Islamic school of alchemy, the West began to reclaim its own Aristotelian heritage. However, although the influence of Islamic alchemy was great, the influence of the Byzantine school and even of indigenous European alchemical texts must also be re-evaluated.

The Mythical Morienus

Lee Stavenhagen's translation of the *Revelations of Morienus* in the 1970s⁸ raises serious questions about this text, both as to the date of its transmission, its influence and its importance. The English scholar, Robert of Chester, together with a certain Hermann the Dalmatian,⁹ translated the *Koran* into Latin by 1143. It was long held that in the following year, 1144, Robert of Chester then turned his attention to the *Revelations*.

Stavenhagen's analysis of the five earliest texts of the *Revelations* prior to its first printed appearance in 1559, demonstrates that the 1559 version was the result of many centuries of 'patchwork-quilt' editing, involving several differing manuscripts.¹⁰ The myth of a single translation by Robert of Ketton (Chester) quickly disappears on several grounds, and the only reference to an Arabic original appears in some 13th century Islamic texts. The actual original does not survive.



Even a cursory reading of the text demonstrates that this is no encyclopaedic compilation of Alexandrian alchemy, but rather a purely Arabic text given an Alexandrian varnish through the introduction of the mythical Christian sage Morienus. Clearly, the *Revelations* were not the single, all-encompassing source of the 13th century revival of European alchemy they were once thought to be.¹¹

Of course, the Islamic world's influence on European alchemy was great. But if Islam was the source of the European familiarity with the Alexandrian tradition, then why were the Italian humanists of the 15th century so anxious to translate the Hermetic corpus for themselves when it became available in Greek rather than Arabic?

Other Sources of the Revival

The *Revelations*, despite their general inadequacy as either an important alchemical text or a source based on the Alexandrian school, were popular enough to have survived in many



The Corpus Hermeticum,
1st edition in Latin, 1463.

[Source: <http://mikemclaughry.wordpress.com/>]

Egypt that seeped into Europe via Islam and Byzantium were far less important to the 13th century revival than Theophilus and Heraclius and the indigenous European recipe-book tradition.

Thus, when we come to the first translation of the surviving Greek texts of the

Hermetic corpus into Latin by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) in the 15th century, we can understand why the European intellectual community was so eager to have direct access to the whole Hermetic corpus in its original language. All that had previously existed were fragments and

pseudo-fragments such as the *Revelations of Morienus*.

The humanist search for a universal religion is visible in both Pico de Mirandola (1463-94) and Ficino.¹³ They tend to quote Moses, Jesus, Pythagoras, Plato, Hermes

and Zoroaster all in the same breath, on the basis that they all referred to a single, secret, ancient wisdom. The Hermetic corpus was seen as the purest expression of this tradition, and in it the humanist philosophers hoped to find the true origin of Christianity.

The Renaissance revival of hermetic alchemy, as opposed to the recipe-book alchemy of the 13th and 14th centuries, was certainly due in large part to the availability of Ficino's translation of the corpus, yet the survival of the recipe-book tradition into later alchemy and chemistry was mainly ascribable to the efforts of the extraordinary Swiss doctor and alchemist, Paracelsus.¹⁴ Much in the manner of the Oriental alchemists, he shifted his attention away from the transmutation of metals

manuscript copies before the first printed edition, demonstrating that Islam was certainly a direct influence on the 13th century revival. However, research into other early European alchemical documents has shown that Byzantine texts such as the early Latin *Turba Philosophorum* ('Assembly of Alchemical Philosophers'), and many purely technical manuals such as the *Mappae Clavicula*, the *Compositiones ad Tingenda* ('the Lucca manuscript'),¹² as well as the work of Magister Salernus, Theophilus the Monk, and Heraclius' *De Artibus Romanorum*, all of them 12th century or earlier, also exercised an important influence upon the 13th century revival.

“The Renaissance revival of hermetic alchemy was essentially brought about through Ficino’s translation of the Corpus Hermeticum.”

Thirteenth century alchemists such as Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, Avicenna, Vincent of Beauvais, Bartholomeus Anglicus and their followers, were essentially encyclopaedists of earlier sources. Except for Bacon, they are theoreticians rather than laboratory technicians. Their work is really part of the much larger revival of Aristotle that took place throughout the new European universities formed during the 12th and 13th centuries. The key sources for these alchemists were precisely these Latin and Arabic recipe books, rather than the genuine Hermetic corpus. The few fragments of Alexandrian doctrine from

toward the use of pharmacopeia in medicine.

He also favoured a much more open transmission of alchemical ideas. Both for practical and philosophical reasons, many previous alchemical texts were coded and burdened with extraordinary obscurity, a device meant to warn away the uninitiated from the dark and powerful secrets of matter. Paracelsus wanted all knowledge to be available, yet his innate verbosity tended to obscure his own alchemical works, despite all his efforts at clarity! Paracelsus forms the true link between the medieval alchemical tradition and the iatrochemists of the 17th and 18th centuries, such as von Helmont, the true forefathers of modern chemistry.

We have seen that the transmission of alchemical knowledge from the East to the West and from era to era within the European context is far more complex than the old model of a simple 'revival from the East'. The role of the *Revelations of Morienus* is not so pivotal as once thought, and the influence of Byzantine and early Latin texts on the 13th century revival are probably more important than once thought. The continuity of Western alchemy from the Graeco-Egyptian milieu of Alexandria through the early chemists of the 17th and 18th centuries is far stronger than once thought, and the genesis of modern chemistry is in greater debt to the tradition of medieval recipe books than once supposed.

Endnotes:

1. Lapp, Ralph E, *Matter*, New York: Time Incorporated, 1965, p 15
2. Stillman, John Maxon, *The Story of Alchemy and Early Chemistry*, Dover Publications, 1960 (1924), p 79.
3. Zosimus of Panopolis, who lived in Egypt around the beginning of the 4th century CE, was a pivotal figure in the development of alchemy, from a practical metallurgical and technical craft to a fully developed mystical experience. Scholars have claimed that for Zosimus, the "procedures of conventional alchemy are strictly preparatory to the purification and perfection of the soul". G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Princeton, 1986. p 123. (ed.)
4. Stillman, op. cit., p. 174
5. Basham, A L, *The Wonder That Was India*, Grove Press, Inc., 1959, p. 499.
6. Ibid., p. 498
7. The name assigned by modern scholars to an anonymous European alchemist born in the 13th century, who wrote books on alchemy and metallurgy in Latin under the pen

name of 'Geber' which is the shortened and Latinised form of the name Jābir ibn Hayyan, a renowned 8th century Islamic alchemist. In Europe for many centuries it was assumed that 'Geber' was identical with Jābir ibn Hayyan and that the books had been translated from Arabic (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Geber>). The noted scholar in this field, E J Holmyard, has this to say on the subject: "The question at once arises whether the Latin works are genuine translations from the Arabic, or written by a Latin author and, according to common practice, ascribed to Jabir in order to heighten their authority. That they are based on Muslim alchemical theory and practice is not questioned, but the same may be said of most Latin treatises on alchemy of that period; and from various turns of phrase it seems likely that their author could read Arabic. But the general style of the works is too clear and systematic to find a close parallel in any of the known writings of the Jabirian corpus, and we look in vain in them for any references to the characteristically Jabirian ideas of 'balance' and the alphabetic numerology. Indeed for their age they have a remarkably matter of fact air about them, theory being stated with a minimum of prolixity and much precise practical detail being given. The general impression they convey is that they are the product of an occidental rather than an oriental mind, and a likely guess would be that they were written by a European scholar, possibly in Moorish Spain. Whatever their origin, they became the principal authorities in early Western alchemy and held that position for two or three centuries." (*Alchemy*, Dover Publications Inc., 1957, pp. 134-35). (ed.)

8. Stavenhagen, Lee (translator & editor), *A Testament of Alchemy: Being the Revelations of Morienus to Khaid Ibn Yazid*, Brandeis University Press, 1974.
9. Holmyard, *Alchemy*, p. 105. (ed.)
10. Stavenhagen, op. cit., p 60.
11. See also Braid, Angus, *A note on dating the Latin Morienus* (<http://theamalricianheresy.wordpress.com/a-note-on-dating-the-latin-morienus/>) (ed.)
12. Stillman, op. cit., Ch. 5.
13. Dresden, Sem, *Humanism in the Renaissance*, World University Library, 1968, p. 36
14. Kearney, Hugh, *Science and Change*, World University Library, 1971, p. 114, passim





Seeking Cosmic Consciousness

Cosmic Consciousness is that unique moment beyond the descriptive power of language, when the spirit is lifted up and out of its physical dwelling into union with the Infinite.

by Amanda van Vuuren

ROSICRUCIANS REFER TO the existence of an experience of supreme importance which they term 'Cosmic Consciousness'. Its essence cannot be captured in words, but some of those who have experienced it have tried to convey an approximation of the overwhelming intensity and joy that such a moment brings. Their reports make it clear that for those to whom it has occurred, it has been the supreme experience of their lives. All pain, all conflict, all imbalance disappears in the clear light of perfect bliss, knowledge and true being.

Although this ultimate pure experience of cosmic consciousness may lie beyond the reach of

most people, all of us are capable of experiencing it to some degree. Almost all of us have had occasional moments of transcendence, times when we were lifted out of ourselves into more serene and joyous realms. These are often the shining moments of life, moments of our greatest happiness. Although they may be fleeting and ephemeral, nowhere near the intensity and height of genuine cosmic consciousness, they are nevertheless true fleeting glimpses of the ecstasy to be found in unity.

Furthermore, for some, such moments are remembered only with the greatest effort simply because they occurred when they were still very

young. But the flavour of the experience lingers on in the subconscious, leading us to believe in the potential for something greater than anything we have known to date.

Too often, moments of clarity and Light are lost in the frenzied pace of everyday life and buried under the debris of activities and possessions. The soul becomes weighed down beneath the clutter of mundane existence. The types of activities that occupy most of our waking hours have little or no affinity for spiritual experience. Yet, there is something within the human soul that longs for transcendence, and is dissatisfied without an occasional glimpse of the Infinite. Perhaps that is one reason why so many individuals remain restless and discontented, despite affluence and success. We yearn for joy, but too often forget how to find it.

Joy, however, is not that elusive. Although transcendent moments usually begin spontaneously, it is possible to set up situations and states of mind where such experiences are more likely to occur. These prerequisites may vary from person to person, though most individuals have found that there is a greater possibility of becoming elevated into higher levels of awareness under one or more of the following conditions.

Quiet Moments of Meditation

No matter how numerous our responsibilities or how hectic our routine may be, we can, if we desire it strongly enough, find some small period of time to be alone and quiet. During this time, if we empty our minds as much as possible of thoughts, plans, ideas, memories, resentments and desires with which it is cluttered, we then become open to the possible infusion of unifying bliss.

Many people with an Eastern background would not dream of starting the day without an initial period of prayer and meditation. In the industrious, frenetic West where 'every moment counts', where only 'the early bird catches the worm' and where we must always 'get up and go', we might do well to incorporate this realisation of

the human need for regular psychic rejuvenation into our concept of how life should be lived.

It is difficult, under the pressure of competitive existence, to eliminate the clutter of thoughts and worries that besiege our mind. With practice, however, it is possible to substantially reduce the storm of mental impressions and to reach a point of calm and openness, like the eye of a hurricane, where temporary waves of harmony may slowly seep in and perhaps, if we are lucky, even cascade into a flood of cosmic awareness.

Music

It has often been said that of all the creative arts, music is the closest that man has got to the infinite harmony of the spheres. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) expressed it very simply: "*After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.*"

More than one gifted composer has insisted that he has created nothing himself, but merely written down the music he heard in his mind. It is almost as if composers were different from others, mainly in their capacity to hear music which is already there, but from which the rest of us are excluded. Perhaps, like a radio, they can tune into a wavelength that the equipment of others cannot receive. Through the medium of music however, we can hear for ourselves the glorious melodies which are the sound of cosmic unity. That is why listening to music can be a pipeline to mystic experience. As the music soars, so does our soul, into realms of sublime harmony.

Communion With Nature

Throughout its existence humankind has sought to find the 'Infinite' in a relationship with the natural world. Lower forms of life, mineral, vegetable and animal, lack our consciousness and intellect, but they are closer to the source of all being and have a natural and instinctive link to the unity of all creation.

From time immemorial, prophets and seers have gone up to the mountains, into the woods,

or into the deserts to seek a closeness with this link. In modern times we too can often find in nature a setting where we become re-attuned to this unity and become receptive to an infusion of cosmic bliss. Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), a most perceptive and articulate student of nature, wrote in his journal (7th January 1857):

"But alone in distant woods or fields, in unpretending sprout-lands or pastures tracked by rabbits... I come to myself. I once more feel myself grandly related and that cold and solitude are friends of mine... I thus dispose of the superfluous and see things as they are, grand and beautiful."

We have used our gifts of curiosity and intelligence to achieve a great deal that is worthwhile and enriching. In doing so, however, we have lost much of the natural instinct that united us to the whole of creation. Without this umbilical cord to the infinite, we are cast adrift upon a sea of meaningless achievement; hence the widespread alienation and despair amid the artefacts of affluence and power. We desperately need moments, even if occasional and fleeting, that are a reminder of the eternal, orderly unity of which we are a meaningful part. Such moments of transcendence and expansion of awareness can increase our creative ability and enrich our lives. They are moments well worth seeking.

Unio Mystica

Oswald Croll (c.1563-1609)

THE ALCHEMISTS leave themselves and totally go out from themselves... They hasten from the imperfect to that which is one and perfect, the knowledge and contemplation whereof..., is a sacred, Heavenly and hid silence, the quiet or rest of the senses and all things..., when at length all minds shall be altogether but one thing, in one Mind, which is above every Mind.

It is the intimate vision of God, which also happens by the Light of Grace to the separate Soul even in this world, if any man set himself about it now, and be subject to God. Thus many holy men by virtue of the Deific spirit have tasted the First fruits of the Resurrection in this life, and have had a foretaste of the Celestial Country.

The Stone that fell from Heaven

The Quest of the Holy Grail

Part Two

by Earle de Motte



THE PERIOD OF THE full flowering of the Grail myth in literature occurred in the 12th and 13th centuries. During that time about a dozen romances on this theme were written by troubadours or court poets. The tales popularised the virtues of chivalry, courage, fairness, honour, respect for women, courtly love and the protection of the weak. What made these poems different from other tales of adventure was the way in which the quest was linked to a mysterious object called the 'Grail'. When the Grail myth was combined with the legend of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, the resulting fusion enhanced the power of the romances to set forth ideals of conduct intended to raise

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Source: http://www.philipcoppens.com/sog_art4.html

the consciousness above the ugly realities of life in the Middle Ages.

In part one, 'The Grail as an Object,' attention was drawn to its identity as a physical object or relic, and also as a symbol of some spiritual goal or state of mind. As a physical object two ideas were touched on: the Celtic or pre-Christian Grail, which was a platter or container; and the Christian Grail, which related to the objects and purpose of the Eucharist. The source of these ideas derived from mythological elements of the 'Matter of Britain and Ireland,' embellished by the imaginative and creative skills of the *trouvères* and *troubadours* of France.

During the high period of the Grail sagas, a poet of the German school of Grail poets, Wolfram von Eschenbach, made a dramatic shift in the myth's content by giving it a more universal character. About twenty years after Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Boron wrote their Grail romances, Wolfram wrote his *Parzival*. He claimed to have received his information about the Grail and its origins from a certain Kyot de Provence, who in turn obtained it from a document found in Toledo, Spain, that was written in Arabic. The presumed author of this document was a 'heathen' astrologer called Flegetanis. The document stated that the Grail message was written in the stars and that, during the war in heaven between God's forces and the host of Lucifer, an emerald fell from

Lucifer's crown. Standing aside from this great conflict were the 'neutral' angels who, upon seeing the precious stone falling caught the emerald and carried it to earth, where they left it under the protection of the Grail family.

In this story the Grail was a *stone*, not a cup or some other object. Wolfram said it was kept in a castle named *Montsalväsche* (Mount of Salvation) and protected by Grail Knights, 'a Christian progeny, bred to the pure life.' The stone itself was thought to be endowed with marvellous powers, one of which was to impart immortality.

There is some indication that mental alchemy played some part in Wolfram's thought. We note a reference to the idea that when the symbol of the stone is combined with that of the phoenix, it conveys dramatically the truths about life and death, an initiatory theme, with the stone acting as a catalyst so that the phoenix may rise from its ashes.

The name of the stone was *lapis exillis*, and its spelling of what looks like two Latin words has caused much bewilderment as to its precise meaning. It has been called the 'stone of exile,' 'stone catalyst,' 'fallen stone,' or 'stone of death.'¹ Perhaps Wolfram intended it to have a multiple meaning. Like the attributes of other forms of the Grail, this emerald was like a talisman in that it had the power to destroy, to nourish, to cause growth, to give and sustain life. This last power enabled the Guardians (who in Wolfram's poem were identified as Templars) to have a longer life or to look younger than their age.

The Grail and the Philosophers' Stone

Wolfram's Grail in the form of a stone was, like some of his other ideas, a conceptual shift. In the earlier Welsh version of the Perceval story, entitled *Peredur*, the Grail Bearer in the Procession held a platter with a human head on it, blood and all. The French and other versions popularised the

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idea of the Grail as a *chalice*. Wolfram introduced this concept of the Grail as a *stone* in the nascent stages of European alchemy, which became more widely known in the 14th to 17th centuries. It would seem as if the secret tradition kept alive through Grail literature was about to give way to another vehicle, that of transcendental alchemy.

In Wolfram's thought we can see the affinity of this stone with the mysterious stone of the philosophers. The Philosophers' Stone was said to transmute base metals into gold, lesser men into kings, or initiates into adepts, depending on whether one was talking about matter and its transmutation, or human beings and their transformation. Malcolm Godwin says on this point when assessing *Parzival*:

*"Many commentators have argued that the story of Parzival carries a hidden and secret astrological and alchemical description of how an individual is transformed from the gross body to even higher and higher forms."*²

Wolfram actually encouraged his readers to 'read between the lines' and consider his tales as initiatory documents. This is what many scholars have tried to do, by focusing their interest on such questions as these: Why did he state that Chretien got the Grail story wrong by depending on the one source, a manuscript (now not known to exist) provided for him by his patron, Philip of Flanders? Why was Wolfram's source any more reliable? Why did he change the emphasis from the associations with the Christian mystery to something having Hermetic and Semitic overtones? Why did he bring in previously unheard of names like Kyot de Provence and Flegetanis? Why was the true story of the Grail found in a library in Toledo, Spain, where Jewish, Islamic and Christian scholarship flourished and were enriched by the exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of tolerance? Why did Wolfram reflect alchemical and Rosicrucian ideas in his writings? Why did he equate the Knights Templar with the Grail Guardians? And, furthermore, why did he expand the Parzival story to include his father's adventures in Arabia?

Templar Knights and Knights of Islam

The scenario for the previous Grail and Arthurian romances was mainly Europe. Wolfram extended the setting to the *Outremer*, a medieval name for Palestine, where Christian knights were on the front line in the confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Yet contacts were made at a higher level between the Knights Templar and the knightly orders of Islam. It became possible, through respect for the virtues of chivalry on both sides, for an exchange of goodwill and the opportunity to learn from one another. First-hand knowledge of the ancient mystery schools as they survived in the Outremer, together with Arabian



Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival: page extract from a handwritten manuscript not later than mid-13th century, [Source: BSB-Hss Cgm 61, <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de>]

science, alchemy and Sufi mystical practices, were available to the Crusaders who were influenced by their contacts. It was to be expected that the Templars would incorporate some elements of ritual and initiatory practice into their own program of personal development.

Either Wolfram himself was a Templar, or he was closely associated with those Templars who had been exposed to the alchemical thought and initiatory rites of the mystery schools. It is therefore possible to assume that he used the Templars as the manifest model of the idealised conception of the Grail Guardians in his age. It is believed that they performed initiatory rituals in their 'commanderies' that would place them in the spiritual lineage of the ancient mystery schools. They were a brotherhood effectively blending religious piety with exceptional military prowess in their outward activity, while practising rituals of a secret initiatic nature within their own circles so as to assist the spiritual advancement of their members. It has even been argued that the two persons mentioned in conjunction with the discovery of the Grail story, Kyot de Provence and Flegetanis, were not real persons but instead respective pseudonyms for the two high Templar officers Hugo de Payens and Hugo de Champagne, and an Arabic book (the *Felek thanis*) of traditional

secret teachings.³ In the light of Wolfram's avowed purpose of concealing names, places, and events in code, this idea does not seem too fanciful.

The notion of the Grail as a stone and the idea of making the Templars the Grail Guardians helped Wolfram to develop the main thrust of his message, namely, a fresh perspective of the Brotherhood of Man. His Grail sagas covered four generations of Perceval's lineage, and the scenario includes both Europe and the Orient. He attempted to show that dissimilar genetic inheritance, cultural variations, and religious differences can be accommodated at the individual and social level in the spirit of tolerance and love. We see this in the general plans of the stories.

Perceval and Firefiz

In his youth Perceval's father goes to Arabia and marries a Moslem queen. They have a son, Firefiz, who is thus the product of mixed cultures. Perceval is born of his father's second marriage to a woman of European race. The two, when they grow up, are professional knights who happen to engage each other in fierce combat, their identities being unknown. In the last stages of the skirmish they identify each other, put down their weapons, and embrace in brotherly love. The black and white



The symbolical image of the Castle has integrated well into the Grail story because of its initiatic connections. Pictured here is the Cathar fortress of Montségur in the romantic landscape of southern France. [Source: <http://www.survoldefrance.fr/photos/highdef/1/1037.jpg>]



Firefiz (note the alchemical colours) is finally given a place at the Round Table only reserved for Christians.

Most interesting is the way Wolfram uses the idea of the precious stone to develop a new concept of the Grail Castle. His Grail Temple located at Montsalväsche,

*"...was seen as a microcosm of the universe topped by a huge ruby, representing the maternal heart of the world and called the Holy Rose. The whole imagery was absorbed, or most likely created, by the Rosicrucians."*⁴

But still more exciting is the effect on successive generations of his notions of the Grail Temple and its location. In most other accounts the Grail's home was an otherworldly castle (an image that describes psychologically the crossing of the threshold from the conscious to the unconscious). But in Wolfram's case, whether he intended to do so or not, the castle has been taken to mean an actual fortress in a specific place on earth. Places like the Cathar fortress of Montségur, or the monastery of Montserrat in the jagged mountains of the Pyrenees or a cave in Languedoc, have become popular places of speculation and visitation.

Since the 1930s Montségur has been much worked over by excavation and written about by scholars and journalists. Its particular interest has been heightened by the fact that the fortress fell in 1244 to the Albigensian Crusaders, whose purpose was to eliminate the heretical Cathars,

and also by the fact that this area of France was known to be frequented by Gnostics, Templars, alchemists and Rosicrucians. Though not identical in their beliefs and practices, they all seemed to be part of the Great Tradition of esoteric wisdom dating back to Greece and the Fertile Crescent.

Wolfram, then, may be credited with enhancing the quality of the Grail myth, and it was to him that Richard Wagner turned as a starting point in the creation of his own operatic trilogy on the Grail sagas. The very idea of calling the Grail a (precious) stone, gives it a cross-cultural dimension in mythology. One could point to the emerald in the eye of Horus, the pearl on the brow of Siva, the stone in the castle of Brahma, which is like a small lotus flower.

The jewel and its position on the forehead, for instance, is suggestive of the mystic 'Third Eye', the pineal gland, the organ of psychic perception or clairvoyance.

The final Grail experience has been described as the equivalent of *mystical illumination*. It is also significant that, associated with religious or mystical figures of the past, we have read of the stone tablets of Moses, the Emerald Tablet of Hermes, the Kaaba stone at Mecca (also fallen from heaven), the Lia Fail at Tara, and the

"The very idea of calling the Grail a stone gives it a cross cultural dimension in mythology."

Philosopher's Stone of the medieval alchemists, each having sacred or magical qualities.

Wolfram's stone, fallen from heaven, takes the Grail out of the Celtic 'otherworld' and links it with the spiritual object of religious cultures across space and time. The world of the Grail in the Age of Chivalry, troubadours and Minnesänger, was, until Wolfram wrote his *Parzival* and the *Young Titurel*, European and Christian centred. This was a time when Christians and Moslems regarded each other as 'infidels', militant competitors for the soul of humanity. Wolfram courageously brought them together in spirit amidst a climate of great intolerance of non-Christian doctrine, through his skilful use of allegory. By this early attempt to broaden the concept of the Grail, he challenges us in this world that technology has reduced to a global village, to bring to realisation the true quest of the Grail, that of spiritual development through personal effort linked with the need to transform humanity as a whole.

Acknowledgement

- This second and final part is adapted from Chapter Two of *The Grail Quest: Search for Transcendence* by Earle de Motte, AMORC, 2003.

Endnotes

1. The alchemists' stone was also explicitly called the 'lapis exilis' in some verses ascribed to Arnold of Villanova and mentioned in the fifteenth century *Rosarium philosophorum*: Hic lapis exilis extat precio quoque vilis; Spernitur a stultis, amatur plus ab edoctis. "This insignificant stone is indeed of trifling value; It is despised by fools, the more cherished by the wise." (ed.)
2. Godwin M, *The Holy Grail*, Bloomsbury, London, 1994, p.170
3. See also Jung, Emma and von Franz, Marie-Louise, *The Grail Legend*, Princeton University Press, 1998 edition (1960) p.149: "According to Wolfram-Kyot, the Grail was discovered by Flegetanis, a pagan natural scientist who read about it in the stars. Many scholars believe that in Flegetanis they discern the well-known mystic Thabit ben Qorah, who lived in Bagdad from 826 to 901, who translated Greek alchemical writings and who also appears as Thebed in Latin alchemistic literature. But according to P. Hagen the Arabic for Flegetanis is Felek-Thani, which is the name of the guardian of the second planetary sphere, that of Mercury. According to Wolfram, Flegetanis' writing was found by the Provençal Kyot in Dolet (Toledo), and after lengthy researches, he also discovered a chronicle in Anshouwe (Anjou) which agreed with Flegetanis' story. As R. Palgen has noted, this one source which Wolfram mentions points unequivocally to Arabic or Sabeen astrology and alchemy." (ed.)
4. Godwin, *ibid.*, p. 160.

GREAT

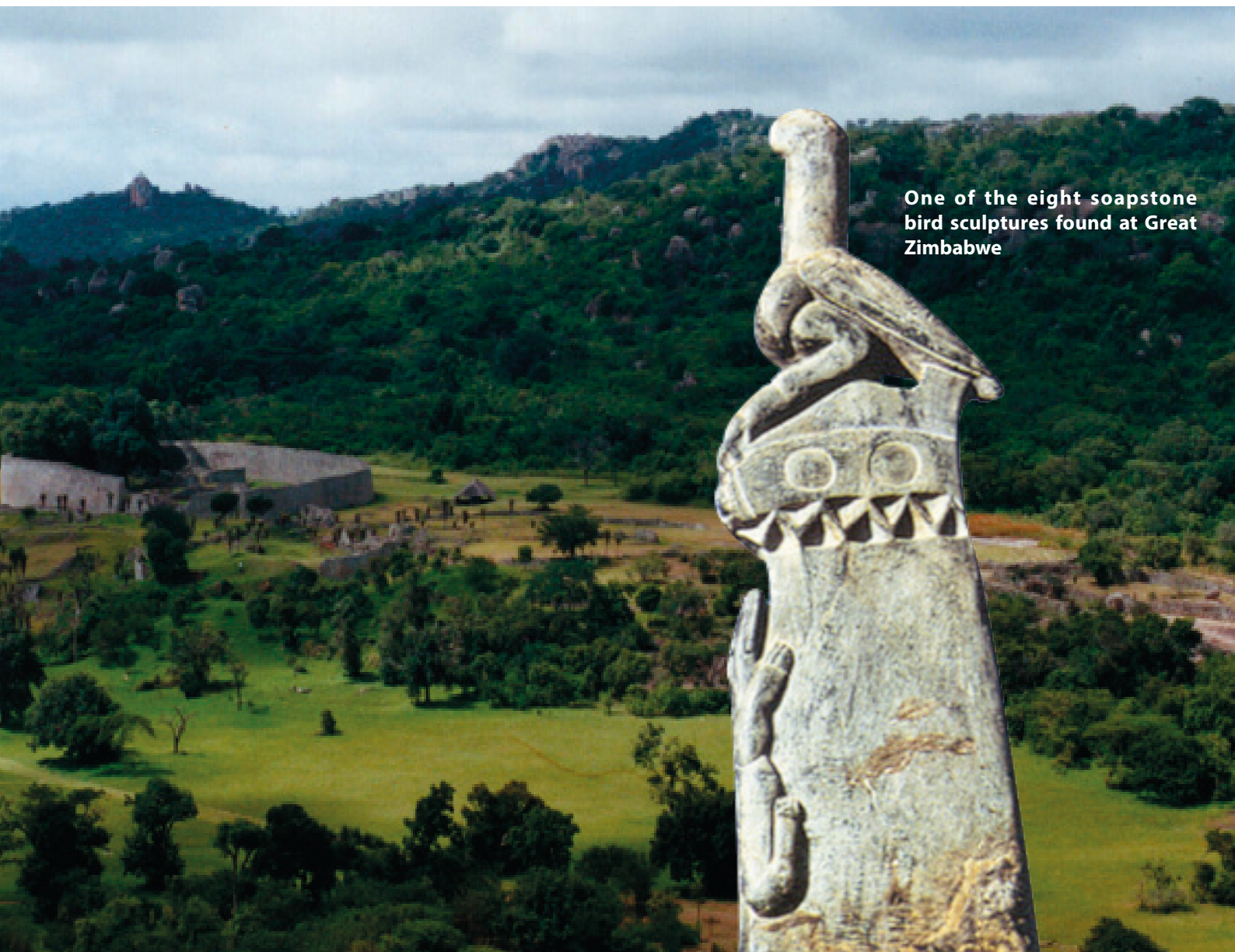


A LOST AFRICAN CITY

by Bill Anderson

(With thanks to Jahala for his invaluable help)

T ZIMBABWE



One of the eight soapstone bird sculptures found at Great Zimbabwe

THE SAVANNAH WOODLAND between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers, in the present day country of Zimbabwe was, for 700 years, the focus of what were two of the greatest of Southern Africa's civilisations. The mysterious capital of these African civilisations, which reached its apex long before the arrival of the Europeans, is known nowadays as Great Zimbabwe. The word 'Zimbabwe', whence the modern state has taken its name, comes from the Shona language, *dzimba dza mabwe*

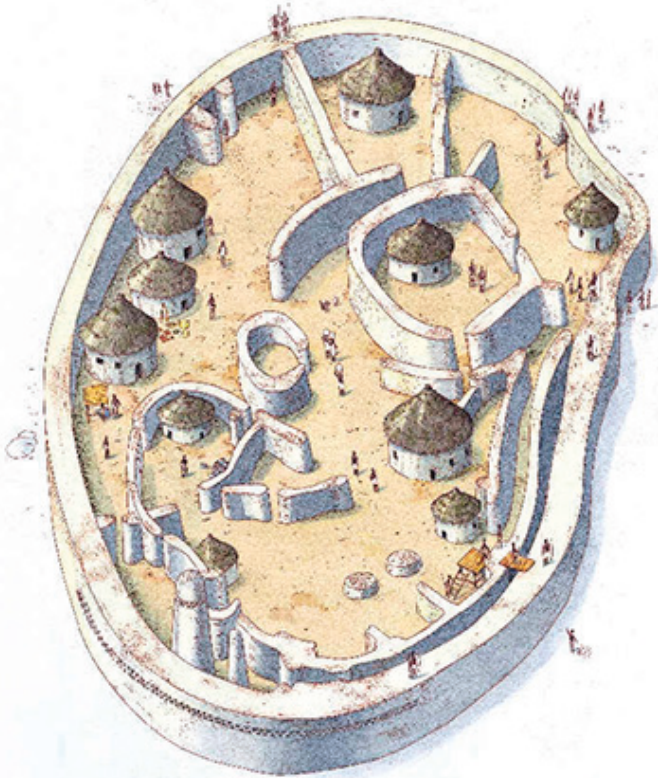
('houses of stone') or *dzimba woye* ('venerated houses'). It was the capital of the Munhumutapa Empire, and is the largest of over two hundred ruins in the country. The city was the centre of a large trading kingdom of the Shona-speaking Karanga and Rozwi peoples, whose descendants still live and flourish in Zimbabwe.

The Karanga people, who came around 1100 CE, started the great stone buildings. The 'Hill Complex', the spiritual and religious centre of the city, which is almost an impenetrable

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Reconstruction of the Great Enclosure

[Source: ETHIOPIA TIMES. Issue #19. March 7th, 2009]



fortress, was largely built by them. They also constructed the inner wall of what is now known as the 'Great Enclosure', as well as other buildings in the Valley Complex. They had an intricate knowledge of soil, climate and vegetation. Significant political and economic developments occurred. The Karanga cleared the woodland for their cattle and agriculture, and copper was smelted for ornaments and wire.

It was around 1450 CE that the Rozwi people displaced the Karanga, their period lasting up to around 1800. The famous stone carved Zimbabwe birds are the best-known examples of their cultural and religious art. One of these birds has been included in the flag and national emblems of Zimbabwe. The meaning of the bird is a mystery, but it has been linked to the bateleur eagle, and is a symbol of the religious belief in the royal ancestral spirits, who acted as guardians, caring for and sharing in every aspect of the daily life of the people. When the king died, his spirit joined theirs as they soared over the plains below.

The central power of the state lay in the hands of a priest-king and the priests who controlled

their religion, and the complex ancestor rituals associated with it. Through the vadzimu or deceased ancestors, they, and especially the king, acted as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and the ordinary people. Their wealth and growing trade allowed them to develop a military and economic kingship of astonishing power and efficiency.

The Rozwi people demonstrated notable architectural skills with many building works accomplished. They also worked iron, traded ivory and produced gold from the rich deposits on the plateau. These they traded with the Arab traders from the East African Indian Ocean towns, which all passed through the Swahili city state of Sofala in Mozambique. For centuries Sofala was the coastal port for the gold trade with South Central Africa, and through which, in return, came imports of Syrian glass, Persian faience and Chinese celadon. There was also an important textile industry, together with pottery making and soapstone sculpture. At its height, Great Zimbabwe controlled a trade network from the Kalahari to the coast of Mozambique, and held sway over a land area of some 100,000 square miles.

The Hill Complex

The ruins of Great Zimbabwe lie in a green, wooded valley in the *middleveld*, near the present-day provincial capital of Masvingo, on Zimbabwe's central plateau. They cover nearly 1,800 acres and are famous for the excellence of their architecture. The site is divided into three distinct architectural groupings known as the 'Hill Complex', the 'Valley Complex' and the 'Great Enclosure'. It may have had as many as 20,000 inhabitants at its height. Many extravagant theories have surrounded its origin, including its being founded by the Queen of Sheba!

The Hill Complex, the oldest part of the site and dating back as far as 320 CE, is an acropolis or a citadel on top of a long granite hill some 250 feet above the valley floor which is covered by enormous granite boulders. It has magnificent

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views over the whole site, and the surrounding area as far as Lake Mutirikwi. Successive generations of occupants linked the boulders together with huge elliptical stone walls, made without any mortar, constructing enclosures and narrow passageways. This was where the Royal Enclosure was. It was the first part of the site to be built and was the main living area for successive kings for centuries.

As you make the ancient ascent up the steep rock face, to the western entrance, every step brings the summit into clearer focus. As if in an allegory of life itself, those who ascended to the Royal Enclosure, were escorted by priests, dancers and musicians, to the abode of the sacred king towering above. Here was the seat of royal and spiritual authority, of a king who never descended to the valley. His apartments were adjacent to those of the Great Ancestress, the senior sister of the ruling line, who had an important voice in decisions of state. We can see in their representation the symbolism of male and female, the two polarities, positive and negative, the two points of a triangle necessary for the third point, completion, to manifest.

The eastern side of the Enclosure has an almost 'Delphic' ambience. Here was a huge natural altar and a narrow fissure, from which it was believed an oracular voice sounded. It was in this area that the sacred Zimbabwe birds were found, the sacred symbol of their religion.

The Valley Complex seems to have housed the lesser members of the court, possibly the junior wives of the king in the Royal Enclosure above. Its forty-two

enclosures and walls are on a smaller scale, and it is here that the modern cafeteria, museum and craft-shop lie, adjacent to the remaining collection of turrets, platforms, pillars and house-mounds.

Of all the areas at the site, the Great Enclosure is the most impressive, with its Great Outer Wall, sensuously curved and decorated with a chevron pattern. This massive structure encircles the enclosure. It is 831 feet long, and in places 31 feet high, and 19 feet thick at the base. It is the largest ancient stone structure south of the Sahara. The

"The eastern side of the Enclosure has an almost 'Delphic' ambience."

fabled 'Conical Tower', the focus of this complex, dominates the interior. Here, as you wander through

the tumbled masonry, towering walls and narrow passageways and gaze at the Conical Tower, your imagination runs riot. Today, it is flanked by two overhanging Muchechete trees, giving it an air of sanctity, as it stands like a mighty, silent sentinel.

By 1500 CE, Great Zimbabwe dominated the Zambezi valley both militarily and commercially. Because of this, their ideas about divine kingship spread throughout the valley and changed the social structures of most of the peoples living there. It was so far inland that it never felt the political or cultural effects of Islam. In the 16th century the Portuguese arrived in Sofala. The

Of all the areas at the site, the Great Enclosure is the most impressive, with its Great Outer Wall, sensuously curved and decorated with a chevron pattern. [Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wall_of_the_great_enclosure_\(far\),_Great_Zimbabwe.JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wall_of_the_great_enclosure_(far),_Great_Zimbabwe.JPG)]



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forces of economic and political power shifted southward and westward. Around 1800 CE, Great Zimbabwe fell into disuse and was largely abandoned, as the power base shifted elsewhere.

We may never know exactly how true this interpretation of these graceful ruins is. That is one of life's mysteries. But we can marvel, when we visit the site, at the ingenuity of humankind, and appreciate that ideas can traverse time and space, and that the thought processes of the human mind is basically the same, no matter in which epoch or land it manifests.

This was a fully African civilisation, untouched by any cultural ideas from outside. When you visit Great Zimbabwe, perhaps in the early morning mist, or the thick golden light of evening, stand



for a moment and contemplate the beauty of the awe-inspiring ruins, the greatness of humanity, and the glory that is the Cosmic.

Wisdom of the Ancients

IS THIS SECRET SELF nothing more than the wild fancy or vague chimera of a few but famous men about whom time and history tell us? Has this long chain of spiritual tradition no links that are made of stronger substance than superstition? Yet these riddles which baffle us must also have baffled Babylon, to take a single example of an early civilisation. If there were thinkers of that epoch who arrived at some kind of a solution which agrees in essence with that which was arrived at by those of India, China, Egypt, Greece and Rome, it might be worth our while to investigate that solution. The result of such an investigation will be either to strengthen our present position and to weaken theirs, or to weaken our own dearly cherished beliefs and to confirm the doctrines of the ancients. And the only sort of investigation which is of any use to this inquiry is a practical one.

I have taken the trouble to carry out such a research, though not without some difficulty, and in the sequence have been compelled to testify that the wisdom of the ancients is not altogether a

by Paul Brunton

(Adapted from *The Secret Path*, 1969 edition).

fanciful thing. Indeed, I have discovered that their doctrines, instead of being the unreal coinage of dreamers' heads, contain much in which we who live and work in the bustling world may place credence.

The modern mind does not care to resort to the famous thinkers of antiquity to have its problems solved. Thereby it misses much. It may be that the meditations of these sages of antiquity can yield not a little fruit for the students of modernity. We may attempt to cut ourselves adrift from the great philosophies of the past, but, since they were based on the eternal principles upon which all true thinking must be based, we shall be forced to return. Philosophy fell from power when the over-intellectual reduced it to mere disputation; it will be restored to its rightful place when the over-sophisticated souls of today awake to the need of a more enlightened outlook than the present confused teaching can afford.

A View of 17th century Naples by Gaspar van Wittel



The Power of Imagination

by June Schaa

WHY IS IT THAT WE CANNOT foresee clearly, definitely and without limit into the future? Perhaps we limit imagination to the simple reproductions of what we already know. But true imagination is the inward dream of Soul; it is the poet's mirror in which the Cosmic is reflected. Rosicrucians have long taught that imagination is the divine gift of Soul. It is the principle which is behind aspiration, the basis for the four perfect states of being. All aspiration is concerned with things that are conceived but

not yet attained. Through this sublime idealism, this creative imagination, we can transform the world, converting it from what we conceive it to be. Imagination sheds illumination on the everyday world. With its wisdom Benjamin Franklin invented bifocal eyeglasses and Einstein discovered relativity.

Before we attempt to understand the ways we may use imagination, let's first distinguish it from other forms of the mental process. To begin with, imagination is often mistaken for imaging, a

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According to Rosicrucian tradition, imagination is the supreme acting factor within the subconscious mind. It allows us to go beyond the limitation of space and time.



form of visualisation that reproduces mental images. Imagination includes imaging, but imaging and visualisation need not be a form of imagination; they are, instead, related to 'memory classification'. As an illustration: Concentrate your awareness on a nearby object. If it is a tree, for example, notice its colours, textures, odours and sounds. Now close your eyes. Recollect in detail the object you observed. This is imaging. On the other hand, if we conceive a different use, an alteration or a transformation of our tree or favourite object, then we would be using imagination.

Imagination is also mistaken at times for the active inductive and deductive reasoning powers. Minute by minute we are going backward or forward, or both, in thought. Consciousness is never stationary when awake. Through the use of these subjective powers of reasoning we are enabled to ask questions, classify and evaluate our perceptions. The more we reason or contemplate on either the sensory or imaginative information coming to us from without or within, the better we come to understand and utilise what we experience.

We have pointed out that imagination uses (but is not the same thing as) imaging, visualisation, inductive or deductive thinking. Imagination is not the product of concentration or contemplation, nor is it the passive state of awareness that leads to meditation. Instead, imagination only reaches us through these three major channels of thought. If not these things, what, then is imagination? From where does it come?

Complete Memory

According to Rosicrucian tradition, imagination is the supreme acting factor within the subconscious mind. It allows us to go beyond



the limitation of space and time. Unlimited imagination uses a vast subconscious storehouse of memory that we refer to as 'complete memory' or traditionally as the 'Akashic Records'. Creative imagination occurs when this complete memory combines with intuition to bring together unrelated but known elements in a new and surprising manner.

Complete memory, intuition and imagination form a supernal triangle on the immaterial plane. Ideal images appear upon the mirror of the meditative mind, are processed by reason, there to become the objects of the future. By way of illustration, in his imagination during 1865 Jules Verne took a seemingly impossible but well-planned mechanical trip to the moon one hundred years in advance of an actual moon landing. But futuristic ideas can also start with past events. Suppose I were to imagine how the earliest humans lived in prehistoric times. Here I am, then, imagining what seems to belong to the past. But, if in my conception my imagined idea were to become a reality by means of scientific research, then my idea of the past would also be a present event, and any proof that would substantiate my imagined idea would make it a reality in the future. Schliemann uncovered Troy because he first imagined it to be a city that had physical existence.

How may we encourage the inspiration that comes from the use of higher imagination? There are several methods and a few simple exercises we will now explore. The first, spontaneous imagination, begins with an instant impression out of nowhere, one that suddenly 'pops' into mind in connection to what we are doing at the moment. In order to stimulate spontaneous imagination, try frequently following this exercise: Become especially aware of your surroundings. See yourself realising what you perceive. This is good observation. As you see something while walking, be aware of what it is that you perceive. Discover the meaning it has for you. Total concentration on what we observe will open the door for subtle impressions to appear spontaneously. Suddenly we will become aware of a way to improve what we observe.

Intuitive Ideas

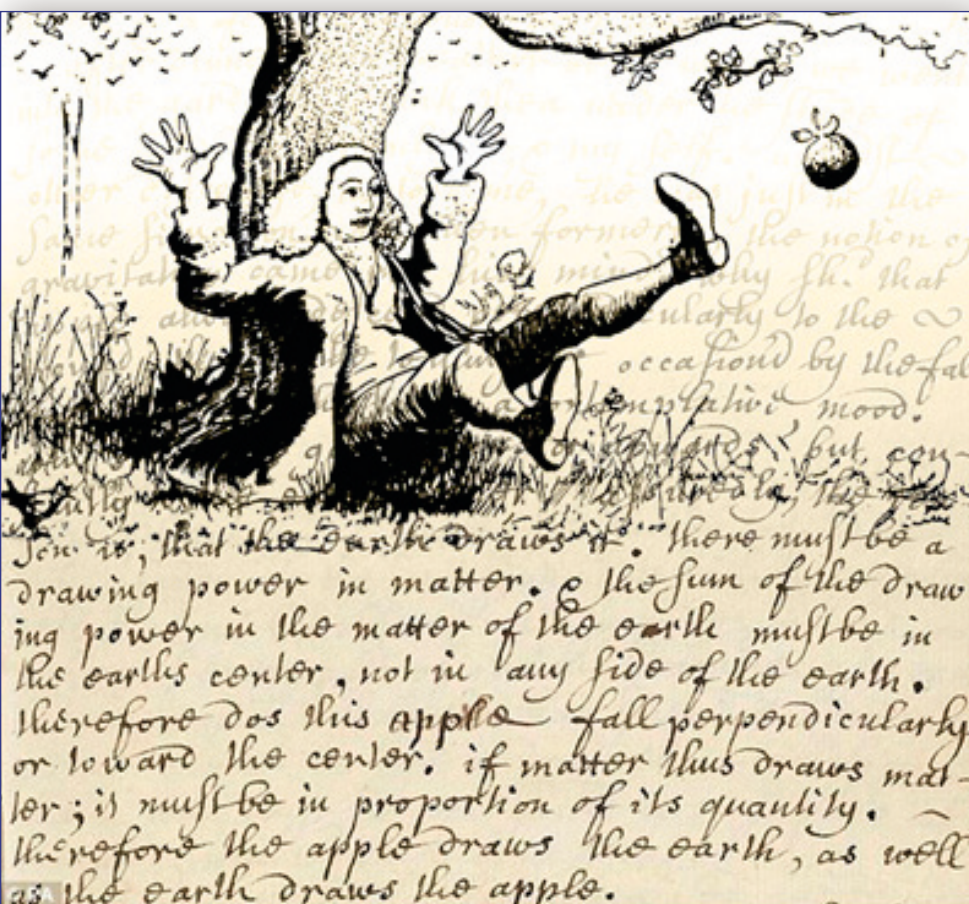
This profound exercise of frequent observation of the external world, while passively registering any intuitive impressions that may come, is not

done necessarily to bring about changes in what we perceive. Rather, the exercise is intended to help us develop a healthy memory of everyday things, as well as building up an association of intuitive ideas. By continuous and concentrated observation, we will ultimately bring forth in the imagination, out of such experiences, a fruitful idea. Such ideas may be practical or inspiring; something that will in some way improve the lot of others while adding to the universal harmony.

Whether truthful or not we might take the narrative of Newton observing an apple fall from a tree; from this observation he had an intuitive idea that led to the law of gravity. Newton combined spontaneous imagination with the second type of creative imagining called determinative. Determinative imagination is directly related to creative effort. It is used when we deliberately plan to bring about a change or transformation in something; for example, when we set out to find a new source of energy. Before activating determinative imagination we should be clear in our minds about why we desire to bring about a new idea or transformation in something. Defining motives and establishing goals may

eliminate building a future problem instead of a boon for humanity.

The next step involves conducting exhaustive researches into the subject in general, thus allowing spontaneous imagination to add changes to the existing object. When the necessary concentration and contemplation



From his observation of the falling apple Newton had an intuitive idea that led to the law of gravity. He combined spontaneous imagination with the second type of creative imagining called *determinative*.

[Image source: http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/72800/72835/72835_gravity_lg.gif. Letter source: <http://eideard.com/2010/01/18/newtons-apple-story-goes-online/>]

In the past we have tended to equate fantasy with the unfulfilled, repressed or dream-like character of subjective memory that is no longer conscious. Instead, true fantasy, as mystics know it, has its roots in the higher Akashic memory of the subconscious.

upon the desired subject has been fulfilled, the mind will naturally seek diversion. Now is the time to 'let go' of our mental work and allow higher imagination to take over. And what better place to 'let go' than in the midst of nature, the infinite source of cosmic correspondences! Newton sat, simply admiring nature, when an apple fell along with the answer to a temporarily forgotten question he had determined to solve.

Many of our great and cultural advances have come about through the use of spontaneous and determinative imagination. However, not everything we imagine is capable of becoming an inner and then an outer reality. The vivifying power of imagination also lies behind fantasy, a word that has been widely misunderstood. In the past we have tended to equate fantasy with the unfulfilled, repressed or dream-like character of subjective memory that is no longer conscious. Instead, true fantasy, as mystics know it, has its roots in the higher Akashic memory of the subconscious.

Today medical science is augmenting the traditional thought about fantasy. The meaning and importance of fairy tales in the lives of children, for example, are being seen by psychiatrists as having an important role and function. However, fantasy is not only a healthy form of imagination for children alone. It can also be used constructively by adults to bring about a desired transformation of personality. Psychologist J. M. Spiegelman in his *The Tree: Tales in Psycho-Mythology* (1974) added new light to an old concept. He said that when we direct our visualisation from the psychological truth of imagination, we release a type of fantasy



“Imagination requires the creative use of all faculties of mind working in harmony.”

that reaches the universal, archetypal, and mythological level.

New meanings and understanding come when we are not afraid to experiment with the images that the subconscious presents to us.

Inspired ideas contain a secret connection, which the seeker will always find hidden within nature or history. Perhaps you have

noticed that imagination, whether spontaneous, determinative or mythological, requires the creative use of all faculties of mind working in harmony. This proper use of imagination is well illustrated by the medieval alchemists' pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone. They taught that the process of creation is performed outwardly through a chemical operation and inwardly through active imagination. Old legends read in this light reveal new possibilities; old dreams are rapidly passing into realities. The domain of the mystic is an unexplored dreamland, an endless wonder world, the synthesis of the beautiful and the true.

Marie Corelli

Portrait of a Victorian Mystic



Marie Corelli

by Karen Schultz

Spirit, the creative Essence of all that is, works in various forms, but always on an ascending plane, and it invariably rejects and destroys whatever interrupts that onward and upward progress. Being in Itself the Radiant outflow of the Mind of God, it is the LIFE of the Universe.

-- Marie Corelli from the Author's Prologue in *The Life Everlasting* (1911) --

IMAGINE QUEEN VICTORIA in her circumspect England absorbed in such unlikely literary topics as out-of-the-body experiences and magical elixirs. In actual fact, the Queen personally requested each and every work issued from the pen of the magnetic young English novelist, Marie Corelli (1855-1924), whose prolific writings charmed the turn-of-the-century world. With the modern upsurge in spiritual and New Age interests, Marie Corelli deserves renewed attention as a feminine incarnation of genius.

She is best known for her first work, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, a semi-autobiographical novel published in 1886. For the uninitiated, *A Romance* deftly unfolds the mystical awakening of a young woman at the hand of the Chaldean master, Heliobas. The climax graphically depicts a journey taken into spiritual spheres, to the very 'Centre of the Universe' in the company of the guiding angel, Azul. In the revealing prologue to one of her last works, *The Life Everlasting* (1911), Corelli sheds light upon her extraordinary career,

opening with the debut of *A Romance*.

"I began to write when I was too young to know anything of the world's worldly ways, and when I was too enthusiastic and too much carried away by the splendour and beauty of the spiritual ideal to realise the inevitable derision and scorn which are bound to fall upon untried explorers into the mysteries of the unseen; yet it was solely on account of a strange psychical experience which chanced to myself when I stood upon the threshold of what is called 'life' that I found myself writing my first book, A Romance of Two Worlds. It was a rash experiment, but was the direct result of an initiation into some few of the truths behind the veil of the Seeming Real. I did not then know why I was selected for such an 'initiation' and I do not know even now...

*My mind was uninformed and immature and therefore I was not permitted to disclose more than a glimmering of the light I was beginning to perceive. My own probation, destined to be a severe one, had only just been entered upon and hard and fast limits were imposed on me for a certain time... Electricity is in all things and all things are electric. This was precisely my teachings in the first book I ever wrote."*¹

A Life Sketch

Little biographical information is available concerning the adventures within Marie Corelli. The few available biographies are almost worthless in their pedestrian approach to her life, mainly because Marie Corelli herself strove to keep her privacy sacred while she was alive. It has been said that she was



◀ Charles Mackey in 1859

a Rosicrucian and her writings show her to be a Christ-inspired mystic. After one has succumbed to the Corelli spell, it becomes difficult to separate myth from fact, though a likely story of her life can be pieced together with deeper consideration.

The private life of Marie Corelli, from her very birth onward, is shrouded in mystery. Supposedly, she was adopted in 1864, when

only three months old, by the British journalist, Dr. Charles Mackay. Other sources insist that her birth and adoption year was 1855 and that she later released the 1864 date to somehow legitimise her hazy parentage. At any rate, the fair Italian (or so she said) child went by the name of Mary 'Minnie' Mackay, the 'Rosebud' who, even at a very early age, believed in the presence of angelic beings. Her adoptive father also nurtured an interest in literature and helped to instil within her heart a lifelong devotion to Shakespeare.

As the convent-educated Mary matured music became an absorbing passion. With her instinctual gifts of improvisation she intended to become a professional pianist. She took on the pseudonym 'Marie Corelli' for her anticipated career in the concert halls and she wrote in her

spare hours. (We can see the similarity between the authoress and the heroine of *A Romance*.) Her one true friend was found at this time: Bertha Vyver, who was to devote a lifetime to her genius-friend as companion, caretaker and confidante. She was to write her memoirs after Corelli's death.

A peculiar relationship is provided in Marie Corelli's



◀ Bertha Vyver, who had known Marie from youth, & was witness to every success & heartbreak of Marie's career.

Corelli's eccentricity became well-known. She would boat on the River Avon in a gondola complete with a gondolier that she had brought over from Venice. Her gondola, 'The Dream', fetched 57 guineas after her death. The illustration of Marie Corelli in her gondola is a detail from a post card distributed without her permission to tourists who lurked about Mason Croft, her residence near Stratford-upon-Avon.



history by the presence of her older stepbrother, George Eric Mackay. He seemed to be quite a rogue, but Marie was deeply devoted to him and strived to promote his barely successful literary career. In tribute to him, she included passages from his *Love Letters of a Violinist* (1894) in her first romance.

Marie's poverty-stricken and overworked existence changed dramatically when the manuscript for *A Romance of Two Worlds* (the perfectly appropriate title having been suggested by her father) was personally accepted by a publisher, George Bentley. It was then that the aspiring musician became Marie Corelli, the celebrated young writer. Thereafter, her life was measured by literary milestones, one after the other, and Marie Corelli became a wealthy and even extravagant woman.

She was not possessed of an ascetic temperament in either appearance or taste. Marie's porcelain-white complexion, golden curls and blue eyes were highlighted by flowing gowns in soft pastels, usually blue. She almost lived a life from the pages of one of her romances, always surrounded by flowers, which were her passion. Though she nearly died of a lingering illness in the late 1890's, she retained her youthful countenance for many years. Of this topic she wrote,

"The Fountain of Youth and the Elixir of Life were dreams of the ancient mystics and scientists, but they are not dreams today. To the Soul that has found them, they are Divine Realities."

In spite of her remarks to the contrary ("I am often attacked, yet am not hurt"), Marie Corelli was emotionally devastated by the conservative critics who chose her as a prime target for their mockery. She apparently grew accustomed to the abuse in time. Fortunately for her, the public-at-large ignored the derision levelled by those who would never consider metaphysical inspiration as a possibility in the literary realm. But after a particularly vicious degradation of her seventh novel, *Barabbas: A Dream of the World's Tragedy* (1893), the author forbade her publishers to release any advance copies of subsequent books to reviewers.

Corelli's attunement to the quintessence of Nature, in its primeval and unseen wellsprings, served as muse for the prophetess of 'Radiant Energy':

"My creed is drawn from Nature, Nature, just, invincible, yet tender; Nature, who shows us that life is a blessing so rich in its as yet unused powers and possibilities. I should perhaps explain the tenor of the instruction which was gradually imparted to me... The first thing I was taught was how to bring every feeling and sense into close union with the Spirit of Nature. Nature, I was told, is the reflection of the working-mind of the Creator, and any opposition to that working-mind on the part of any living organism It has created cannot but result in disaster. And I learned how true it is that if Man went with her instead of against

Mason Croft



her, there would be no more misunderstanding of the laws of the Universe, and that where there is now nothing but discord, all would be divinest [sic] harmony... There is nothing which can properly be called super-natural, or above Nature, inasmuch as this Eternal Spirit of Energy is in and throughout all Nature."

A childhood dream was fulfilled when, in 1898, Marie Corelli and Bertha Vyver took up permanent residence in an Elizabethan mansion at Stratford-upon-Avon, the picturesque city hallowed by the presence of her beloved Shakespeare a few centuries earlier. She lived at Mason Croft until 1924, when she died of heart disease just after completing her twenty-eighth novel in her seventieth year.

Her Writings

After Corelli's success with her first novel, its publisher, George Bentley, intimated that he did not want another 'spiritualistic' novel as a sequel. So, partly to please him and partly to test her own versatility upon her new public, she produced her second novel *Vendetta* in 1886 and followed by *Thelma* in 1887, two melodramatic love stories which her audiences adored.

Then, returning to her favourite themes, she published *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* in 1889. Of *Ardath* she writes:

"In its experimental teachings it is the natural and intended sequence of A Romance of Two Worlds, and was meant to assist the studies of the many who had written to me for help. Whatever may be the consensus of opinion on its merits or demerits, I know and feel it to be one of my most worthy attempts, even though it is not favoured by the million. It does not appeal to anything 'of the moment' merely, because there are very few people who can or will understand that if the Soul or 'Radia' of a human being is so forgetful of its highest origin as to cling to its human Self only, then the way to the Eternal Happier Progress is barred."

Indeed, the epic *Ardath* was a bottom seller, but it remained Corelli's favourite throughout a long career. It is distinguished by the fact that Alfred Lord Tennyson appreciated the subtle message set forth from an exotic Persian setting, and he sent his dignified praises to the author. The novel concerns an atheistic young English poet, who, in another Heliobas-related trance, relives his former life as Sah-Luma, poet of the ancient city of Al-Kyris. After experiencing this potent drama, our restored Englishman can claim: *"God exists. I, of my own choice, prayer and hope, voluntarily believe in God, in Christ, in angels, and in all things beautiful, pure, and grand."*

It might be interjected here that Marie Corelli possessed an uncanny ability to describe lands

she had never visited: "I imagine it must be so, and I find it generally is so."

The next year, at Bentley's bidding for something that would 'sell' better, came *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris* (1890). This was one of the first of Corelli's novels addressing social evils, the absinthe drinkers of Paris in this case. As had become the pattern, her treasured 'spiritual' novels alternated with issues of a more general appeal. In keeping with this rhythm:

"The Soul of Lilith was my next venture (1892), a third link in the chain I sought to weave between the perishable materialism of our ordinary conceptions of life, and the undying spiritual quality of life as it truly is. In this I portrayed the complete failure that must inevitably result from man's prejudice and intellectual pride when studying the marvellous mysteries of what I would call the Further World, and how impossible it is and ever must be that any 'Soul' should visibly manifest where there is undue attachment to the body."

In *The Soul of Lilith*, a young Egyptian girl is kept alive for six years by the 'vital fluid' administered by the Arabian occultist El-Rami. The monk Heliobas admonishes El-Rami when his experiment fails through his arrogance. We can imagine that as Heliobas weaves his person in and out of various novels, that those are among Marie Corelli's personal treasures. He is almost a symbol of her own Soul smiling upon these few works, *The Soul of Lilith*, however, was even less popular than *Ardath*, though it had been "gladly welcomed by a distinctly cultured minority."

"Filled with the fervour of a passionate and proved faith," Corelli next wrote *Barabbas: A Dream of the World's Tragedy* in 1893. This signalled the separation from her practical publisher, Mr. Bentley and *Barabbas* enjoyed worldwide success with a new publisher, Messrs. Methuen. The book

"God exists. I, of my own choice, prayer and hope, voluntarily believe in God, in Christ, in angels, and in all things beautiful, pure, and grand."



was eventually translated into more than thirty languages. The book is prized for its gently human portrayal of Christ, not to mention that of the infamous robber, Barabbas.

It was quickly followed up by *The Sorrows of Satan* which caused the greatest sensation to date (1895). Satan is personified in the human guise of Prince Lucio Rimanez who succeeds in seducing mortals with money and charm. Marie's stepbrother, George Eric Mackay, managed to stage a ridiculous dramatisation of the novel, but this in no way diminished the considerable popularity of the book.

In the years that followed, several new works flowed from Corelli's pen (including *The Murder of Delicia*, which was one of her most widely read books), proving to her fans that she could write fiction of a less cryptic persuasion.

The Master Christian (1900) was written during her debilitating illness, and it describes

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the unrecognised return of Christ as a boy *"sorrowfully observing the wickedness which men practice in His name."* Thereafter came a rash of less exalted novels and short stories since Marie Corelli decided to *"change my own line of work to lighter themes,"* to *"entertain the public with stories of everyday life and love such as the least instructed could understand."*

Spirituality and Metaphysics

A recurring theme in Corelli's books is her attempt to reconcile Christianity with subjects such as reincarnation and other mystical ideas. Her books formed a part of the foundation of today's search for new avenues of spirituality. Here is the key to the writings of the esotericist in her own words:

"These six books, namely: A Romance of Two Worlds, Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self, The Soul of Lilith, Barabbas, The Sorrows of Satan, and The Master Christian are the result of a deliberately conceived plan and intention and are all linked together by the one theory. They have not been written solely as pieces of fiction for which I, the author, am paid by the publisher, or you, the reader, are content to be temporarily entertained; they are the outcome of what I myself have learned, practiced and proved in the daily expenses, both small and great, of daily life."

For me these six become seven after I read *The Life Everlasting* (A Romance of Reality), published in 1911. I personally enjoyed this imaginative work as much as, if not more than, *A Romance of Two Worlds*. Does the following seem fantastic? A strangely illuminated 'fairy ship' carries the heroine's dashing soul mate of many lives who has come to reclaim his own. Our heroine is not content to rest upon the laurels of her lover's impressive spiritual attainments; she voluntarily undergoes a rigorous series of metaphysical 'tests' under the master Aselzion which ultimately prove her to be the dynamic equal of her soul mate. This is mystical romance at its best, this is the mature

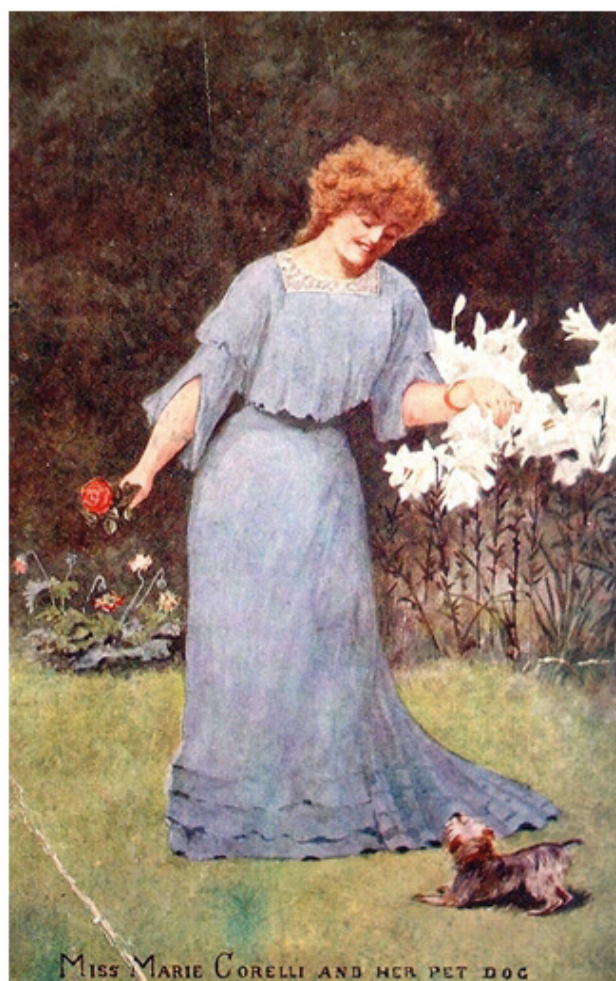
Corelli who continues to interweave esoteric truths into a captivating story.

"I am not the heroine of the tale, though I have narrated (more or less as told to me) in the first person singular, because it seemed to me simpler and more direct. She to whom the perfect comprehension of happiness has come, with an equally perfect possession of love, is one out of a few who are seeking what she has found."

"If I try, no matter how inadequately, to show you something of the mystic power that makes for happiness, do not shut your eyes in scorn or languor to the smallest flash of light through your darkness which may help you to a mastery of the secret."

Endnote

1. Quotations are taken, from the Author's Prologue to *The Life Everlasting*, 1911



Discipleship on Trial

by Raymund Andrea

THIS BOOK WAS written against the backdrop of the darkest days of the Second World War. The momentous events of two world wars in the space of 25 years had markedly affected the psyche of nations and brought humanity to a crossroads in history.

What was also facing a crossroads was "discipleship," a concept the author eloquently develops in this book. No longer could spiritual and esoteric orders remain safe behind their outdated traditions and theoretical musings. A time for radical transformation had arrived, but few had embraced it.

During the two great conflicts of the period, statesmen led the way in adapting to a rapidly changing world while many esoteric aspirants were tied to worn out slogans of esoteric philosophy and secrecy, and proving themselves utterly incapable of bringing about the changes needed.

Forcefully advocating a disciple "warrior spirit," Andrea does not imply militancy for its sake alone, but encourages a "fighting mentality" to be used in the service of others.



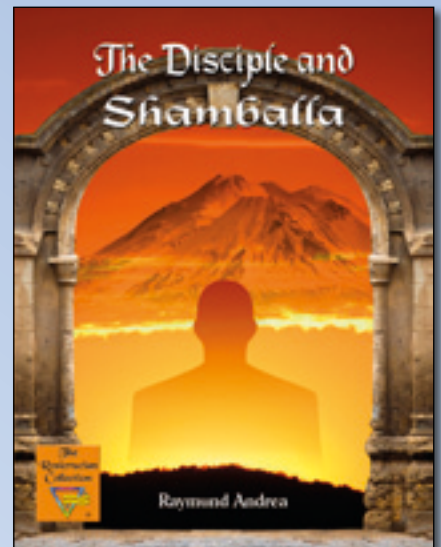
The Disciple and Shamballa

by Raymund Andrea

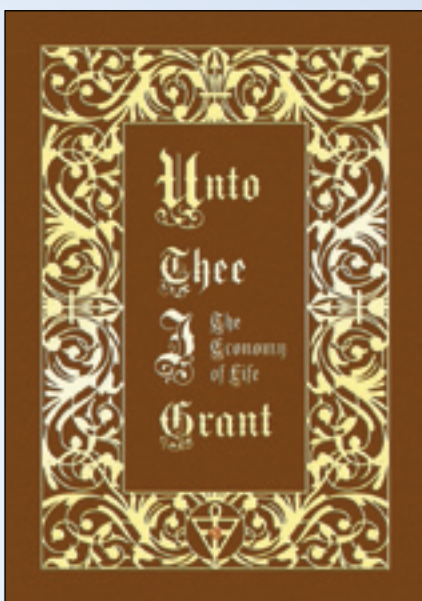
WRITTEN IN 1960, Andrea's last major work gives an unsurpassed account of the highest altitudes of the "mystic way," the universal path of spiritual enlightenment. One cannot help but be moved by the gentle urgency of his spiritual devotion to the highest realms of holiness.

Through proximity to the spiritual realm of Shamballa, the humble soul overcomes the "nemesis of Karma" and draws upon the source of infinite creative power to accomplish a remarkable transformation. Andrea outlines the life of the advanced student who has passed through a hidden portal to a secret inner life of instruction, far from the comforts of the armchair mystic. The living experience of such a person is replete with trials and tribulations that serve as catalysts for ever greater advancement and achievement.

Mental creation through visualisation and the application of will is a crucial part of the technique of spiritual advancement given by Andrea. When applied correctly, an inner alchemy is begun as the student increasingly comes under the numinous influence of Shamballa. The student's life from that moment on is redirected wholly and exclusively in accordance with the holy will of inner Master.



Unto Thee I Grant



ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED in English in 1750, this book has for over 250 years held pride of place on the bookshelves of many seekers of spiritual enlightenment. Translated from a set of Tibetan manuscripts, and possibly originally meant as a "guide-to-good-living" for Tibetan monks, even a cursory read convinces one that the chapters were compiled by a person (or persons) of high spiritual intent. The inspiration it has given to generations of seekers continues to this day. The simple, down-to-earth points of advice are timeless and as valid today as when they were first composed, possibly over a thousand years ago.

You can open this book on virtually any page and derive inspiration for the day from the two or three paragraphs you will read there. It is a wonderful and worthwhile companion for life.

FULLY INDEXED. Search for and find page references for all the most commonly used words and expressions.

The book consists of two parts: Part 1 is in the archaic English of the mid 18th Century, and Part 2 is in modern English.

