

Endmatter

NOOGENESIS: WEAVING OURSELVES ON INCARNATION'S LOOM

by Ingrid H. Shafer

Who are we?
You speak so
casually of God and humans
humans and the rest of nature, and I sense
a shift almost imperceptible but critical, crucial
at the crux of things . . . a paradigm shift, another
Copernican revolution from the traditionally
Christian position of human beings being
human in nature but not of nature
strangers in their nest, not
part of the web, toward
humans both at home
and at the center
Are we the hub
the *axis mundi*
of the cosmic
spinning
TOP?
Am
I
?

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Do
 we
 rear
 out of
 Richard
 Wilbur's
 horizontal
 perfection, flat
 in the twin sense of
 two dimensionality, the coil not yet a helix single or
 double and the flat plane of desert sand dullness before it grows
 reflexive-reflective mirror to what is to come? Are we
 divinely inspired dust rising
 up and up in galactic
 gyrations, funnel
 cloud birthing
 ourselves
 midwife
 to the
 cosmos
 taking shape around
 us?

We are paradox, *koan*, surd, at once totality, constructed of
 nature's components derived from the violent eruption
 of space-time-matter out of
 singularity
 some eighteen thousand million years ago
 distant derivatives of that fiery birth and
 yet not only nature but also charged with
 something/Someone else/Else—
El?

Dancing over
 the primordial waters the brooding Spirit churns and hatches
 Her young, *Homines sapientes*, us, animated by His breath
 revealing/concealing the mystery of the *Logos*

Bats in Wilbur's cave, fluttering round and round
 in our safely walled and padded womb, seeing clearly all
 we need to know for survival, as long as our brains
 are not bedeviled by significance's blinding sun
felix culpa of happiest intellection:

Doomed bats encephalized, escaping Plato's cave to turn
in ever widening mind gyres, coiling round and round and round
until the falcon loses sight of the falconer and must find
his way home, going round and round and round
above the ashes, dancing Shiva's dance of
destrucreation
alone: for He is the dance and the dance goes on

Shiva-Kali-Cybele-Coil!

Serpentine watch spring, ouroboros wound and unbound
cobra set to strike and mysteriously animate
the brass gears of Newton's cosmic clock
I remember the blue-black watch springs and shiny toothed wheels
in the mason jars on my father's ink-stained desk, jars filled
with amber gasoline cleaning solution during those dreary
lard seasoned green bean lean, fried polenta, saccharin bitter
benzene hexagon ring reeking postwar years, and Papa bent
over his inert, silent patients, tenderly implanting
fragile hearts to give automata ephemeral pseudo life

From Matter to Life to Mind. Through atoms to flesh
and flesh to spirit. Or is it the other way around?
Day after day unwidowed widow Penelope
shears her sheep and combs fleece into fibers and twists
fibers into threads and weaves threads into text(ile)
preparing a diaphanous wedding veil for the *hieros gamos*
of Zeus and Hera and the Marriage of the Lamb
unconsciously shuttling the Word into flesh
Night after night to keep from being
compelled to share usurper Antinous' spiritless couch
she unweaves with cracked bleeding fingers textile into threads
and untwists threads into fibers and uncombs fibers into fleece
thinking of Son Telemachus, Oedipus Undone, tracking the missing
father not to murder him but to find in this primal bond himself
Red-eyed she counts the sheep which graze
on the milky way meadow, deconstructing the reconstructed
and reconstructing the deconstructed, humming the
unsounding sound which rings through and rings eternity
while her homing man, Odysseus-Ulysses roams across the wine-dark
storm-tossed deep with Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor
and the rest of Jimmy Joyce's crowd: all those searchers, dimly
aware that they will finally find what they seek when She pulls
them to Herself and says: YES I WILL YES!

Jewgreekelt Bloom's moon to moon polyphonous fugue
 toward home through labyrinthine Dublin knits Stephen's and
 Molly's worlds of spirit and flesh into his own, his and Stephen's
 worlds, while allowing the Son of the Mind to father Himself
 on Communion's Protean loom. Circumambulating the cosmic
 omphalos he seeks the *mysterium coniunctionis*, Molly's warmth and
 flesh, Dublin's double half moon goal, virgin-whore, mother-wife
 terrible and fascinating Nora-Molly, to pour himself into and be
 reborn in the divine *krater* of her eternal sea, reclaiming what
 the serpent had stolen from Gilgamesh

Double DNA cords coil round each other like strands in a rope
 inseparably entwined until heat breaks the hydrogen bonds
 and severs wholes into coyly detached complementary
 halves, the way boiling unravels silk filaments
 from around chrysalides, while almond eyed matrons stir
 the steaming vats with giant bamboo combs and poles
 unwinding the cocoons to harvest strong spider web fine strands
 and turn aborted moths into an expanse of shimmering
 snow-pure potentiality to be inscribed by the brush of one
 such as artist-poet-warrior Lu Chi, taking his place at the
 hub of things to contemplate the mystery of the universe
 with its myriad objects, trapping meaning in the cage of form
 as solitary DNA strands cool off and attach themselves
 like Plato's bereft halves to lost complements or their
 substitutes, once again fusing *yin* and *yang*

Pondering Life's Scripture, with its nucleotide codon ideograms
 constructed of trigram chains like the *I Ching's* 64 macrocosmic
 hexagrams, we close in on the elusive force which translates
 inorganic matter into organized life and thrusts mute stuff
 toward significance

We dredge for Nietzsche's lost manuscript not in culture, but in
 nature's cosmogenic power core

Mapping our genes we uncover the primordial grammar of the
 biosphere, the Mother Eve of languages, progenitrix
 of life's blueprint out of which arose the missing link female.
 who would pass her mitochondrial DNA to a future world
 teeming with her children

We may yet uncover the stable foundation beneath Nietzsche's
 random chain of rearrangements and reinterpretation
 and complement the clock mechanism of his positivist age
 with a cyclic organic metaphor: bud-bloom-fruit

Is the DNA double helix an exe-file assembled eons ago before
one of its eventual effects discovered mind and consciousness
and self and tried to incarnate crude aspects of its rationality
in computer bios chips and multigeneration AI? Is it cosmic
choreographer of subatomic dance routines on the temporal stage
as molecules form and coalesce into organic wholes
to Pythagorean melodies? Is it blueprint for
Wheeler's paradox of looped consciousness
about to retroactively give birth to its own preconditions?

Peel the onion skins of the genetic metaphor to their core
where Nothing = All, and *atman* is both *brahman* and *anatta*
saying hello to the Cusan

as you
fall
in
to
t
h
e

abyss of the Incarnate Word, dark void illuminating the common
code which yields coherent meaning in the *Logos* made Flesh, the
self-disclosing, generous, generative Other

Eat your heart out, Derrida: There is nothing outside
this—though not exactly your kind of—text. All of creation
is grounded in God-Who-Is-Love, YHWH the *tetragrammaton*
the One Who formed us in the divine image and fired that image in
the flame of *Yah*, indelibly branding
every strip of DNA, hologram chip containing the whole

The Word came down
into Flesh, so that Flesh might rise up toward Word
Saint Francis and Tolstoy and Gandhi looked for God's Kingdom
within, and treasuring all that buzzes and hops and squirms
they witnessed to the common unfolding at the heart of the
universe, and Auden's simple wisdom, that we must love one
another or die

With Endo we learn to see Christ in the beady eyes of a myna bird
or the limp of a stray mangy cur, learn to respond to the text
common to all creatures, life's swirling double spiral stairway:
a down and an up, Christ, the Word, the *Logos*, at once the path
and the goal

The twisting DNA rope evokes Jacob's ladder, the
 kabbalistic *sefirot*, and the interlaced ribbons of savage
 swarming, merging life in Saint Columba's Celtic Gospel. On
 evolution's screen, telescoped into human temporality
 unique lives merge and separate, blinking in and out of existence
 transient incarnations along stable if branching tracks
 which run back into the primordial soup of learning cells
 and point forward toward the not yet of countless probabilities
 each point both itself and a moment in the life
 of the meta-organism, *gloriosi corporis mysterium*
 which swells and stretches the bubble of human thought
 beyond its terrestrial limit, earthbound draft ox aleph Alpha
 metamorphosing into ontic Omega flight, intuited in Hegel's
Geist and Chou Tzu's *T'ai-chi-tu* and the Vedantic *tat tvam asi*

Today we find ourselves thrown, sputtering and screaming
 into the gene pool, challenged to co-invent ourselves, without
 the luxury of lazily leaving it to Professor
 Archibald's snake. In and through noogenesis
 we imagine and imagining we project
 the world to come. Before-beneath-beyond
 us opens the terrifying and fascinating vista
 not only of evolution but of self-conscious evolution
 evolution squared and cubed
 from Hegel to Whitehead and Teilhard and beyond
 as we grope toward majority, actualizing the divine
 image within ourselves, unveiling the old-new
tetragrammaton
 Four-Letter Word
 A T G C Grail
 in the Holy of Holies
 Penelope-Ulysses-Bloom-Molly's yearning stilled

Author's note. In this poem I try to capture through analogy
 concepts that resist reduction to empirically verifiable terminology.
 I experiment with the "limit-language" of ambiguity, allusion,
 multivalence, and layered metaphors to communicate a sense of
 meaning that hovers somehow at the edge of one's field of vision.

This poem is deeply influenced by my participation at the
 Templeton Symposium, "Human Viability and a World Theology"

(sponsored by *Zygon* and the Chicago Center for Religion and Science, 15–16 November 1991). Numerous associations were prompted by Philip Hefner’s symposium paper, which appears in this issue of *Zygon* as “Nature, God’s Great Project.” The “flat perfection” in Richard Wibur’s “A Problem from Milton,” which Hefner cites, provoked its own *bricolage* in my mind, associating with a passage in Willem Drees’s “Quantum Cosmologies and the ‘Beginning’” (*Zygon* 26 [September 1991]: 373–96) about the “flat universe.” The images came flooding in: flat, unreflecting sand, transforming into a plane covered with bits of shiny glass, the concept of reflection evoking Teilhard’s reflexion, crystals turning into living cells, cells dividing, spiral movements, whirling shapes rising out of the sand, and so forth. Then my mind traveled back to the beginning: YHWH’s breath above the flatness, blowing bubbles, the bubbles rising and bursting, galaxies spinning out in expanding spirals, cosmoses being born and dying, Shiva’s destructively creative dance, Sidney Carter’s poem “Lord of the Dance,” the bud-blossom-fruit analogy in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Hefner’s next image, also taken from Wilbur, of the bat in the cave, immediately engendered associations with Plato. It seemed that every other word in that draft somehow evoked a plethora of fresh associations, connecting with some of my other current projects: lecturing on the *Odyssey* and the concept of transubstantiation; reading Jacques Derrida and Harold Bloom and Teilhard de Chardin and James Joyce; writing an essay on the theological implications of the first two weeks of embryonic development. . . .

SELECTIVE GLOSSARY

- ANTINOUS:** Greek; literally “against spirit.” Main contender for Penelope’s hand.
- ATGC:** The four nitrogenous bases, adenine-thymine and guanine-cytosine, which, in pairs, bracketed by sugar and phosphate, constitute the two-stranded spirals we call the DNA double helix.
- AXIS MUNDI:** Latin; “axis of the world”; phrase traditionally used to indicate Christ.
- BLOOM:** Jewish “hero” of *Ulysses*, set in Dublin; also last name of Harold Bloom, Yale neo-gnostic literary critic who posits the masculine Oedipal desire to castrate one’s father at the heart of the literary impulse (inter alia in *Agon*) while arguing in *The Book of J* that the author of the Pentateuch is a brilliant woman poet.

- COLUMBA:** also known as COLUM or COLUMCILLE. Sixth-century Irish missionary in Scotland. The “Gospel of Saint Columba” is a term for the *Book of Kells*, an eighth- or ninth-century Celtic manuscript, in which text and illumination are inextricably interlaced to form a double transmission of meaning, and a metaphor for God in nature, as well as Christianity in paganism. James Joyce appropriated much of the symbolism of the *Book of Kells*.
- CUSANUS (THE CUSAN):** Nicholas of Cusa (or Kues), cardinal, theologian, canon lawyer, and mystic, best known for *De Docta Ignorantia* (“Of Learned Ignorance”) in which he argues that the maximum and the minimum are identical. Some consider him an intellectual ancestor of contemporary non-Euclidean geometry.
- DERRIDA, JACQUES:** Deconstructionist who insists that there is nothing beyond the text and that what we falsely consider unity is an infinite number of atomistic interpretations. Derrida uses the image of unraveling text into threads and threads into fibers.
- ENDO, SHUSAKO:** Contemporary Catholic Japanese poet and novelist who tends to show Christ in and through weak and suffering people and animals.
- EL:** Hebrew term for God (cf. *elohim*, or Gabriel: the “Strong One of God”).
- FELIX CULPA:** Latin; the “happy fall,” a theological concept of God “drawing straight with crooked lines” (maybe it was a good thing that Eve took that bite of the fruit!).
- GEIST:** German term used by Hegel and variously translated as “Mind” or “Spirit.” In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel depicts the journey of *Geist* as the odyssey of consciousness through an ascending spiral of opposed but mutually engendering stages. His well-known “bud-blossom-fruit” analogy demonstrates that he envisioned the Really Real as the process of its own becoming.
- GILGAMESH:** Third-millennium B.C.E. King of Uruk, turned Sumerian mythic hero who goes on a perilous journey in search of the plant of life after his friend Enkidu has died. He finds the plant at the bottom of the sea but loses it to a crafty serpent while he naps after the exhausting dive; in another version the snake steals the plant while he bathes at a spring. Although Gilgamesh fails to attain immortality, Mircea Eliade interprets the story as an illustration of the possibility of obtaining immortality, provided one successfully passes certain initiatory ordeals.

- GLORIOSI CORPORIS MYSTERIUM:** Phrase from Thomas Aquinas's hymn on the Eucharist.
- GRAIL:** According to medieval legend, the vessel that contained the wine at the Last Supper and/or the blood-water flowing from Jesus' side. The Grail was reputed to give life and was portrayed like the eucharistic chalice as being entered by an infant. It is a feminine archetype, and the goal of knightly quests. Medieval preoccupation with the Grail emerged around the twelfth century and paralleled fascination with the Eucharist and the moment of consecration.
- HIEROS GAMOS:** Greek; sacred or mystical marriage of mythical primal parents.
- LU CHI:** Third-century C.E. Chinese poet and general who wrote a poetic essay on the art of writing poetry and (according to Archibald MacLeish) saw poetry as a means by which the world can be made to mean.
- MOLLY:** Joyce's Bloom's woman who says "yes I will Yes" at the very end of *Ulysses* after her famous stream-of-consciousness soliloquy.
- MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS:** Term used by alchemists (such as the sixteenth-century Gerald Dorn in his *Theatrum Chemicum*) to indicate the highest of all unions, beyond the *coniunctio oppositorum*, the union of Spirit and Nature.
- NOOGENESIS:** Emergence or generation of the Spirit (from Gr. *nous*, "mind"). Term used by Teilhard de Chardin in association with the coming of the noosphere.
- NOOSPHERE:** Teilhard de Chardin's term for the "thinking" layer or sphere of the earth, which he envisions as emerging out of the organic biosphere in and through our uniquely human ability to know and to know that we know.
- NORA:** James Joyce's lover and (eventually) wife who (I believe) appears in all his major woman characters.
- OMPHALOS:** Navel (term used by Joyce in *Ulysses*).
- OUROBOROS:** Mythic serpent that devours its own tail and thus represents not only organic immortality but temporal and spatial infinity. In 1865 F.A. Kekulé suggested the benzene ring formula, inspired by a dream of a snake biting its tail.
- PENELOPE:** Meandering Odysseus's faithful spouse who unravels her weavings every night, thus engendering a "never-ending" textile through nocturnal deconstruction.
- SEFIROTH:** Jewish-kabbalistic concept of five primordial male-female image pairs of beingness flowing into self-generation,

symbolized by a mystical tree that constitutes the union of all opposites.

SHIVA: Hindu destroyer aspect of divine creativity, often portrayed as covered with ashes and dancing (wearing ouroboros bracelets and anklets!).

T'AI-CHI-T'U: Chinese; literally, "Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate"; the yin-yang symbol, usually surrounded by the six fundamental Taoist trigrams of femininity and masculinity: the primal parents and their two sons and two daughters symbolized by combinations of solid (masculinity) and broken (femininity) lines. The *T'ai-chi* is also associated with the five Chinese elements or agents, Earth, Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire. Following Chou Tun-i's (1017–73 C.E.) seminal work, the concept of the *T'ai-chi* as principle of dynamic, evolutionary creation became essential to Neo-Confucian thought.

TAT TVAM ASI: Sanskrit; literally, "You are that"—the formula used in the Chāndogya Upanishad (and Vedantic philosophy in general) to indicate the coincidence of the *Atman* (individual soul) and the *Brahman* (cosmic soul).

TELEMACHUS: The son of Odysseus (called Ulysses in Latinized form) and Penelope.

TETRAGRAMMATON: Greek. Literally, "Four letters"—term for YHWH, the unspeakable name of God in Hebrew.

TOP: A multilayered term—a child's spinning top, the zenith, the rather whimsical name of one of the quarks (all of which are absolutely simple but appear in pairs or triplets). It's also the mirror image of the word *pot* with all of its archetypal associations.

WILBUR, RICHARD: Poet, passages from whose "A Problem from Milton" and "Mind" Philip Hefner cites in the paper he presented at the Templeton Symposium, Chicago, 15–16 November 1991, which appears in this issue of *Zygon*.

WHEELER, JOHN A.: Quantum physicist who proposes the paradoxical theory that a present-day observation can affect past reality, and that quantum physics posits a cosmos inherently constituted to evolve consciousness at some point in the future.

YAH: Short form of the Hebrew divine name (Yahweh), linked in the Song of Songs (8:6) with the flame of passionate love.