

## Time and Eternity

The decisive question for man is very simple, said Jung:

*Is a person connected with something that is infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life.*

He added:

*In our relationships to other men too, the crucial question is whether an element of boundlessness is expressed in the relationship. (MDR p357)*

What is this eternal? That is to ask: What was before the Big Bang, of which we cannot say 'before' for there was no time? What is it beyond the curved boundary of space, of which we cannot say 'beyond', for there is no space? It is just the Nothing. It does not exist.

But it is a very strange sort of non-existence, for everything that does exist comes out of it—and not only did it come in the beginning but still does in every moment, for the Big Bang has a dual nature. From the point of view of time it was an event in time, maybe 13 7 billion years ago, certainly a specific time; but from the point of view of the eternal it is in a perpetual now. Not only did it happen but it still happens; and we know nothing of it except the unceasing pulse of its creation, its putting out from itself and taking back; its births and its deaths, its destruction and its creation, its earthquakes and tempests and the sweetness of its spring mornings—all on equal terms with each other. The early peoples thought of it as a fertile darkness, therefore a Mother; and all they knew of her, as it is all we know of her, is the inexhaustible out and in of her creation.

We think now that in the stellar world the same pulse beats, that out in space matter spirals down into the black holes, out of being into the Nothing, returning elsewhere in a perpetual creation, as if being and non-being eternally exchange their substance. Everywhere, Being and the Nothing breathe in and out of each other like lovers—most consciously for us in our own hearts, in the anguished experience of the Nothing, and the return out of it of all that is. Consciousness is always to feel both, and at the same time.

Consciousness is when we know that, when we feel the weight of the eternal in the moment. It does not happen often since, as the thrush says in Eliot's *Burnt Norton*, 'humankind cannot bear very much reality.' But we have felt it ourselves and had nowhere to put it, no context to fit it into, so generally we forgot. But over the centuries there have been plenty of people who didn't forget because they wrote about it or painted it, or joined it up in the memory with other such moments and made a new context for it. The most treasured things in our literature are such constructions. They start always in childhood, before the weight of accepted ideas has descended upon us and dulled the perception. It is the time that Wordsworth speaks about

*...when meadow, grove and stream  
The earth and every common sight  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.*

It is the world of the dream and is always within us, though the spring from which it rises may need cleaning or perhaps its whereabouts have been forgotten—as when Wordsworth complains,

*It is not now as it has been of yore;  
Turn wheresoe'er I may  
By night or day,  
The things that I have seen I now can see no more.*

Another witness to that time is Thomas Traherne, an orphan in seventeenth century Hereford cared for by a benevolent but distant uncle, telling of how in his solitariness he first saw the world. Notice how time and the timeless are woven into his vision like warp and woof in weaving that make the fabric.

*The corn was orient and eternal wheat, which never should be reaped nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold. The gates were at first the end of the world. The trees when first I saw them through one of the gates, transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things.*

That short passage contains it all. The cycle of corn, from seed to ripening to harvest and back to seed is nature saying what Plato also said: that time is the moving picture of eternity. And that uniting of time and eternity seems to bring something remarkable with it: a sense of infinite value.

*The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold. Boys and girls tumbling in the streets and playing were like moving jewels. I knew not that they were born or would die but all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places.*

And hard on those words comes an immense excitement in the heart.

*The gates were at first the end of the world. The trees when first I saw them through one of the gates, transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things.*

He is still a child, but his heart is responding like that of a lover.

*Eternity was manifest in the light of the day and something infinite behind everything appeared, which talked with my expectation and moved my desire.*

Kin speaks to kin; the heart leaps forward as for some long expected friend or companion or lover. It is a matter of what Jung called the feeling function, a part of consciousness concerned only with value, and long excluded from science and philosophy for that reason—yet essential. For thinking has its place; touch and sense perception have their place; the strange inner sight of intuition has its place. But it is only the feeling can bring the whole thing alive for us, only the feeling function that makes it matter.

And then there is the loss. In all mystical writing there is loss equally with possession. This seems with the way in which being and non-being are genuinely parts of each other, genuinely breathe in and out of each other, make by their interchange the very substance of matter. If the reality is like that, how can the consciousness not be? So Traherne complains, as would Wordsworth two hundred years later, that

*... with much ado I was corrupted and made to learn the dirty devices of this world, which now I unlearn in order that I may enter into the kingdom of God.*

In that great love-poem, the Song of Songs, possession and loss run loss runs through it as a repeated refrain:

*My beloved put his hand through the key-hole and my bowels were moved at his touch. I rose to open to my beloved. My hands dropped with myrrh and my fingers were full of the choicest myrrh.*

That is the moment of possession. Then comes the loss.

*I opened the bolt of the door to my beloved but he had turned aside and was gone. My soul melted when he spoke. I sought him and found him not. I called him and he did not answer me.*

In the Greek mystery cults the darkness from which things come was called the *musterion*, the hidden thing: also the sacred thing because everything comes out of it. They too thought of it as a mother, as did the Gnostics after them, who called her ‘She who is *before* all things’ They gathered round the mystery and looked into its darkness but always it remained impenetrably dark. We do the same when we look at a dream. There are certainly things in it which we can take away, but we soon come to the edge beyond which is the same always pregnant darkness. It is the same mystery, will always be the same mystery; and it is what all systems of meditation are fundamentally about.

In our culture the mystery is generally called (I think) ‘God’, which is a good shorthand for that which is unknown, unknowable and yet the source of being—so long as we remember that the word really is shorthand and the reality really is unknown.

All we know of it is what it makes. We should not look for logic in it, for there is no logical reason why anything should exist. But it moves us. It speaks to us in that very mysterious way which is by its beauty—which has no logic either. And we humans know it best when we feel its energy in ourselves, rising from the same unknown source and moving us into our own share in its making.

There are two creation-myths in Genesis, radically opposite to each other. In the first myth the theme of the inner creativity in every creature is foremost—and in the second not at all. In the first, all things as they are created become at once creators. They do it through that doubling in their natures which is sexuality. ‘Male and female created He them’. The Two in some form or other is necessary for creation. All that is made male and female becomes actively part of creation. If we take the first line line:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..*

The ‘God’ that this refers to is called Elohim in the Hebrew. Lord Yahwe doesn’t come until the second myth. Elohim is not a lord. He-She is male and female and all opposites, virtually identical with nature itself. Yahwe is pure male. The interval between the two myths represent a momentous event: the coming of the patriarchy.

*Now the earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.*

In this beginning the waters are the feminine part of Elohim; the Spirit which hovers over them is the male. Elohim is intrinsically creative. Creation is not something that nature does; it is what nature is. In every moment its cells are born and die.

*And God said, Let there be light.*

The process is about to become conscious. Then comes something that seems to accompany that.

*God sees that it is good.*

It is a value judgement. The value of the world is part of our consciousness of it, and surely the principal part. This Elohim-God creates for its own sake, because it is ‘good’. After that comes the separation of light from darkness, of dry land from the waters—and then comes the naming of the parts. As things separate so language is made. As much as the creation of the world this is an account of the

making of consciousness. And all the way through there is one central theme, that Elohim-God finds it good.

And when He and She start in on living things they are made male and female too: and by that they are co-creators with the eternal pair. The animal species are made in the same mode, always the Two. The fish, reptiles and birds come first, then later the animals—in a process remarkably close to how the world in reality did evolve. And so we come to the humans, the furthest point in God's creation, as they are the furthest point in evolution. And they too are male and female. Throughout it is repeated that God looks at it and sees that it is good,; and all creation is of the same mind. This is Ok, it says. Life is good. And the birds make more birds, the foxes make more foxes, the humans make more humans. The humans will soon make art too for in them the doubling is also within themselves and a conscious creativity bubbles up from the inner male and female. That always creative 'unconscious', when we feel it within ourselves, is our closest contact with what Jung calls the infinite.

Love is its other name. It is not love in the shallow sense of 'desiring, preferring, favouring, wishing and similar things' but as *world-creating—cosmogonos*: an objective energy which draws us into it, of which we are both, as Jung says in that astonishing passage on love towards the end of *Memories Dreams Reflection* the victims and instruments—in the deepest sense, he says, the 'victims and the instruments of cosmogonic love'. (MDR p387)

The roots of such a profound thought are only in the first myth of Genesis. In the second myth we have something completely different. We are in the shallow world we are used to. Patriarchy has arrived and will dominate western history for the next three thousand years. God is no longer male and female: he is male, alone. Adam is pure male too. It is one-dimensional world. Men are men and women, women. The enormous dynamism between consciousness and its opposite within is cut out, and with it the trust in the natural consciousness of nature which gives to the first account such authority. In the second myth Adam is preposterously made first. The Garden is planted up around him and God brings the animals to him to be named. Eve comes last, drawn out of his own body, against the way of nature. Common sense may rebel against all of this it but the priority is now obedience. Eve's

kinship with nature, her close relation with the snake, makes her radically unconfirming. From the beginning she is on a collision course with the culture. And something of terrible import occurs. It is the creation of absolute evil. The link between nature's creative side (the Spring morning) and her destruction (the storm and the earthquake) is severed. The organic principle which holds all opposites together is cut through. Evil is cast into an unnatural freedom and becomes something very like an autonomous complex in the psyche which can take over the ego. But this is cosmic. The priests spoke of the Devil raging up and down through the world seeking whom he can devour. To be devoured by evil is to be possessed by it; and it does happen. But it is not in nature. Absolute Evil is the necessary creation of the All-Good God.

This profoundly critical analysis of our culture was implicit in Jung from the beginning. The fear of it is behind a resistance to his work so strong that it can seem incomprehensible. But it's quite sensible. He really did and does present a profound challenge to tradition in all its aspects, religious as much as scientific. Religion had no fear of Freud and neither had science. He kept to the rule of causality, His interpretations of dreams were far-fetched, for they needed the most ingenious chains of cause and effect to go to where they wanted to go. How does one get (we ask of one of Freud's studies) to castration fear from a dream of six white wolves with long tails sitting on a tree? But Freud could do it, and his readers suspended their disbelief. Causal determinism was the founding dogma of the culture and Freud paid homage to it. Jung didn't. For him cause and effect was irrelevant in the dream. He found there a different sort causality, patterns of relationship, events linked by meaning. It would develop in his life and after it into a theory of causality not exclusive of cause and effect but complementary to it. Darwinism, for example, might be wholly satisfactory if synchronicity could be added to it; but it would destroy science as it was known. In this weird pseudo science, as they thought of it, of psychology, the established culture could see that Freud was on the right side and Jung wasn't. And since he frightened the religious people by his rejection of the All-Good God, there were few who were not deeply disturbed by him.

Yet synchronicity was no new theory. It was an extremely ancient one and bubbles up in the faith healing, clairvoyance, medium-ism, Wise

Women with the Second Sight that abound in all cultures. Above all, there is no stopping the dream. And though direct contact with the psyche was forbidden because of its supposed dangers, illicit contacts with it went on, especially far from the city, in the countryside. There is a story in the Bible about the Witch of Endor whom King Saul himself went to consult. He had himself driven all such people out of the kingdom, so he had to go in disguise to the wild bit of the country in which she had taken refuge; but still he went, and no disguise would fool her. She knew at once, and Saul learnt many things that were unwelcome to him.

The forbidden psyche is structured in its opposites, yet so is the world itself. They are the essence of its being, twined as tight as strands of one string; as tight as the coils of the molecule of DNA; as tight as growth and decay in the body; as tight as the contradiction in the elementary particle. The examples of a radically dual aspect in nature multiply, the more we know about nature as it actually is, as opposed to how logic says it ought to be.

In our minds, those inner caverns where we wander and never find a boundary because there is no boundary, images come up into sight and drop down again; rise like plants and go back like plants in Autumn; and always more keep coming. Consciousness of all this is our burden and no paternal church or state can protect us from it. The stars don't have to be conscious. They do not fear the Black Holes, or grieve for those who have gone into them. They do not rejoice when a new star is born. They are unconscious. For us there is no avoiding those twins, the horror of life and the joy. There is no minute of the day when we are not aware of death, and it is that which makes us conscious.

Perhaps the most complete expression of this was in the early myths of the son-lover of the Goddess. The beautiful young man who is perpetually born from the Mother represents all that nature makes and takes back into herself. Always his birth is a cause of great joy and his death of a bottomless grief—and it is in both that the limitless value of Being is felt, known, taken into consciousness. At the Festival of Adonis in Phoenicia, the death was given the utmost possible reality (as we do in active imagination.)



*Nothing was lacking which normally took place at funerals: neither the oiling and toilet of the dead, nor the exhibition of the body, the funeral offerings and the communal repasts. Images of Adonis in wax and terracotta were placed before the entrance and on the terraces of houses. Women crowded round them or carried them through the town, wailing and beating their breasts with every sign of the deepest grief. They danced and chanted dirges to the strident noise of the short flutes, called gigras, which the Egyptians used for their funeral rites. (Salio: quoted Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology p91)*

The Holy Week ceremonies in Southern Italy and Sicily are the continuation of this ancient festival—even to the images of the youth in wax and terracotta carried through the town (in something very like Snow White’s glass coffin) with all signs of the deepest grief. In this way the phenomenon that things are is made conscious. We know the Black Holes in the tearing separation from those whom we lose in death. We know the new star in every new-born infant. In this way we know the eternally creative energy which we call ‘God’.

We meet it also within ourselves, in our depressions and our moments of coming through; also in our inborn love of natural things which is like the animal’s care for its young but universal. Something in us talks back to them, is moved by them. When we tend the trees and the birds and the billion forms that psyche takes in the world; when we talk back to them, recognise them, are moved by them: it is then too that the great, cosmic creative energy which made them comes a little bit into consciousness.

*‘As far as we can discern, says Jung, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being. (MDR Fontana p358)*

*So whence comes this purpose?* It is the same question as what is psyche? Psyche is the presence in the world of an eternal meaning, and we see how multiple it is, how legion, as one of the spirits says to Jesus in the Gospel: ‘My name is legion.’ The Nothing before the Big Bang had everything already in it.. Its emptiness was already its fullness. It lacked only consciousness .The long aeons of time and space would be its coming into that. We could conceive the creation story as it as happening in each one of us as the unknown psyche

comes slowly outwards in the course of a life-time. We call that unknown psyche by many names, soul, spirit, or genius as the Romans called it. We know that it is not in time and space; and yet, by that founding paradox that we started with, moves always within it, guiding it, loosening up the rigidities into which it sets, moving it on. Its best portrait in literature is Ariel. Shakespeare knew Ariel well. He (or she) was his genius.

‘All hail great master, grave sir, hail’, he says to Prospero who, like a wizard has in some past time brought him into his power:

*I come  
To answer thy great pleasure, be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On the curled clouds*

Later he tells of how, in obedience to Prospero, he persecuted the mariners and brought their ship to wreck:

*I boarded the king's ship, now on the beak  
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin  
I flamed amazement. Sometimes I'd divide  
And burn in many places. On the topmast,  
The yards, and bowsprit would I flame distinctly  
Then meet and join.*

Prospero is, we feel, Shakespeare himself; Ariel is that tremendous genius which fired him and fired the language for five hundred years. Does he have Shakespeare or does Shakespeare have him? It is Shakespeare, but only by the skin of his teeth, only by his art. Without that, it would be the other way round: he would have Shakespeare. The art is to bring the infinity of psyche into the limit of words, or paint or music or stone, pottery—some matter-based substance, for even the sounds in music are vibrations in a solid medium, the air. And, on the other side, to free up the deadness of matter without it—so time and the eternal can become for one moment joined. The art is to animate matter and to earth the eternal.

The Duke in *Midsummer Nights Dream* states the great problem.

*The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact.*

(Imagination is another word for psyche or soul, as in William Blake and also, I believe, Jung). These folk have got too much of it.

*One sees more devils than vast hell can hold.  
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes  
And gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.*

The poet is the only one of the three who can cope. There is no more wonderful statement in the whole of our culture of the need to work. For what is not made flesh will destroy us.

The great danger for humans is to be affluent and not need to work (and not be able to cope with the madness either.) Jung could easily have been mad, he had so much psyche to deal with. His active imagination, as he called it, saved him. In it he took on figures in the psyche, talked to them, listened to them—in order to have a relationship with them, to establish an equal back and forth—and not be controlled by them. For then he would be taken over and end up as a patient in the asylum and not the doctor. Psyche is powerful; psyche is as ruthless as a storm in nature and as unconscious. Only we have the power to contain its opposites, and it is not a matter of controlling it for it is unconquerable. It can be related to. Like the Great Goddess and her Son, it made us so that it could relate. The fear of it can then turn into the energy for a life. So *Midsummer Nights Dream* ends with a double marriage, the most powerful symbol there is of that meeting of all opposites.

Because the psyche is independent of space it penetrates everywhere, It is what joins us. It is within people and also between them. When it is between them it breeds, it breeds more of itself. It is in all animals,

all trees. It makes the herd and flock phenomena when a group of animals behaves like one animal, a great flock of birds turn in the sky like one bird, or a herd panics. (Or people panic.) It is also the individual spirits of trees, plants, a stream, a corner of a field that makes the forest and countryside so inhabited, so alive—until layers of accepted ideas hide it from us. Psyche is ‘the force that through the green fuse drives the flower’, and drives, says Dylan Thomas, the poet’s life too. It ‘blasts the roots of trees’, he says, and blasted his life too, in the alcoholism which killed him. Psyche is eros, emotion, music, creation—and always beautiful like the trees and water nymphs of the ancient world, even when it is hard, strong and wholly unwelcome. We cannot conquer it, and neither should we kneel to it in the undignified attitudes of patriarchal religion. What it wants (unless we who have learnt from Jung are entirely wrong) is to make a two with us, an erotic, creative relation in which it, the eternal, can use our time span (which is what it cannot have itself) to come a little bit into consciousness.