

Excerpt from: *Art from the Sacred to Profane East and West*

Frithjof Schuon

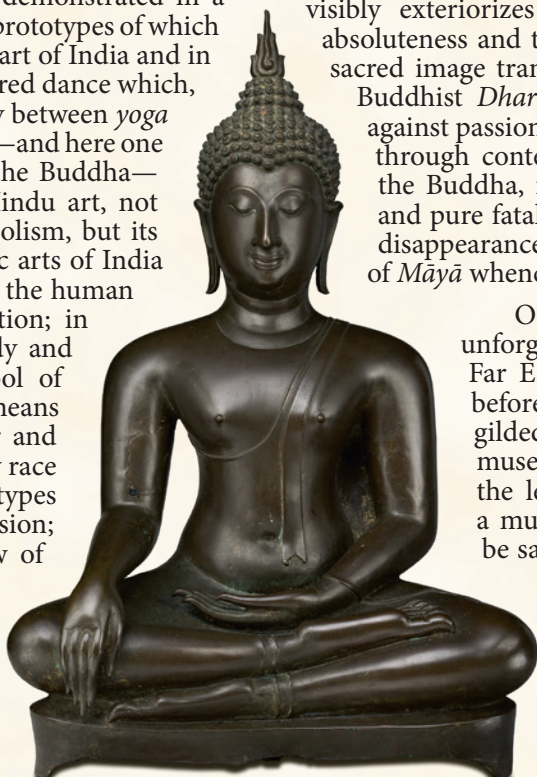
THE BUDDHIST ART

The canonical figure of the Buddha shows us “That which is” and that which we “should be,” or even that which we “are” in our eternal reality: for the visible Buddha is what his invisible essence is, he is in conformity with the nature of things.

The Buddhist conception of art is, at least in certain respects, not remote from the Christian: like Christian art, Buddhist art is centered on the image of the Superman, bearer of the Revelation, though it differs from the Christian perspective in its non-theism, which brings everything back to the impersonal; if man is logically at the center of the cosmos, this is, for Buddhism, “by accident” and not from theological necessity as in the case of Christianity; persons are “ideas” rather than individuals. Buddhist art evolves round the sacramental image of the Buddha, given, according to one tradition, in the lifetime of the Blessed One in different forms, both sculptural and pictorial. The situation is the opposite of that of Christian art, for in Buddhism statuary is more important than painting, although the latter is nonetheless strictly canonical and not “discretionary” like Christian statuary. In the realm of architecture, we may mention the *stūpa* of Piprava built immediately after the death of Shakyamuni; apart from this, elements of Hindu and Chinese art were transmuted into a new art of which there were a number of variants both in the *Theravāda* and the *Mahāyāna* schools. From a doctrinal point of view this art is founded on the idea of the saving virtue emanating from the superhuman beauty of the Buddhas: the images of the Blessed One, of other Buddhas and of *Bodhisattvas* are sacramental crystallizations of this virtue, which is also manifested in cult objects, “abstract” as to their form but “concrete” in their nature. This principle furnishes a conclusive argument against profane religious art as practiced in the West, for the celestial beauty of the Man-God extends to the whole of traditional art, whatever the particular style required by a given collectivity; to deny traditional art—and here we have Christianity chiefly in mind—is to deny the saving beauty of the Word made flesh; it is to be ignorant of the fact that in true Christian art there is something of Christ and something of the Virgin. Profane art replaces the soul of the Man-God, or of the deified man, by that of the artist and of his human model.

In Buddhism, the sensible sacred has its basis above all in the images—especially the statues—of the Buddha, and by projection, of the *Bodhisattvas*, the *Tārās*, and other quasi-divine realities; this art attained summits of perfection and interiorizing expressivity with the Tibeto-Mongols on the one hand and the Japanese on the other hand. The extinction of form in the Essence requires as counterpart the manifestation of the Essence in form: whether through the image as in Buddhism, or through the theomorphic human body as in Hinduism, or again through the eucharistic liturgy—including the icon—in Christianity.

It could be said that Buddhism extracted from Hinduism its *yogic* sap, not through a borrowing of course, but through a divinely inspired re-manifestation; it imparted to this substance an expression that was simplified in certain respects, but at the same time fresh and powerfully original. This is demonstrated in a dazzling way by Buddhist art, the prototypes of which are doubtless found in the sacred art of India and in the *yogic* postures, or again in sacred dance which, for its part, is like an intermediary between *yoga* and temple statuary; Buddhist art—and here one is thinking chiefly of images of the Buddha—seems to have extracted from Hindu art, not such and such a particular symbolism, but its contemplative essence. The plastic arts of India evolve in the last analysis around the human body in its postures of recollection; in Buddhism the image of this body and this visage has become a symbol of extraordinary fecundity and a means of grace of unsurpassable power and nobility; [The genius of the yellow race has added to the Hindu prototypes something of a new dimension; new, not from the point of view of symbolism as such, but from that of expression. The image of the Buddha, after going through the Hellenistic aberration of Gandhara—providentially no doubt, for it is a question of the transmission of some secondary formal elements—reached an



Li Thong bronze Buddha, Thailand, 14-15th century



Kannon Bodhisattva, Sanjusangen-do, Kyoto, Kamakura Period

unheard of expansion among the yellow peoples: it is as if the “soul” of the Divinity, the nirvanic Beatitude, had entered into the symbol. The *Chitralakshana*, an Indo-Tibetan canon of pictorial art, attributes the origin of painting to the Buddha himself; tradition also speaks of a sandalwood statue which King Prasenajit of Shravasti (or Udayana of Kaushambi) had made during the very lifetime of the Buddha, and of which the Greek statues of Gandhara may have been stylized copies.] and it is this artistic crystallization that most visibly exteriorizes what Buddhism comprises of absoluteness and therefore also of universality. The sacred image transmits a message of serenity: the Buddhist *Dharma* is not a passionate struggle against passion, it dissolves passion from within, through contemplation. The lotus, supporting the Buddha, is the nature of things, the calm and pure fatality of existence, of its illusion, its disappearance; but it is also the luminous center of *Māyā* whence arises *Nirvāna* become man.

Our first encounter—intense and unforgettable—with Buddhism and the Far East took place in our childhood before a great Japanese Buddha of gilded wood [In an ethnographical museum. Such masterpieces—to say the least—certainly do not belong in a museum of this kind; but what can be said of the thousands of specimens of Buddhist art scattered among and profaned by antique collectors and galleries? There is nothing more arbitrary than the criticism of art with absurd and, in many cases, iconoclastic classifications.] flanked by two images of Kwannon. [Kwan Yin,

in Chinese; Avalokiteshvara, in Sanskrit.] Suddenly faced with this vision of majesty and mystery, we might well have paraphrased Caesar by exclaiming “*veni, vidi, victus sum*” (“I came, saw, and was conquered”). We mention the above reminiscence because of the light it throws on this overwhelming embodiment of an infinite victory of the Spirit—on this amazing condensation of the Message in the image of the Messenger—represented by the sacramental statue of the Buddha, and represented like wise and by reverberation in the images of *Bodhisattvas* and other spiritual personifications, such as those Kwannons who seem to have emerged from a celestial river of golden light, silence, and mercy.

The canonical figure of the Buddha shows us “That which is” and that which we “should be,” or even that which we “are” in our eternal reality: for the visible Buddha is what his invisible essence is, he is in conformity with the nature of things.

He who says peace says beauty; the image of the *Tathāgata*—together with his metaphysical and cosmic derivatives and concomitants—shows that beauty, in its root or essence, is compounded of serenity and mercy; formal harmony appeals to us because it bespeaks profound goodness and inexhaustible wealth, appeasement, and plenitude.

Like a magnet, the beauty of the Buddha draws all the contradictions of the world and transmutes them into radiant silence; beauty is like the sun: it acts without detours, without dialectical intermediaries,

its ways are free, direct, incalculable; like love, to which it is closely connected, it can heal, unloose, appease, unite, or deliver through its simple radiance. The image of the Buddha is like a drop of the nectar of immortality fallen into the world of forms and crystallized into a human form, a form accessible to men; or like the sound of that celestial music which could charm a rose tree into flowering amid the snow. Such was Shakyamuni—for it is said that the Buddhas bring salvation not only through their teaching but also through their superhuman beauty—and such is his sacramental image. The image of the Messenger is also that of the Message; there is no essential difference between the Buddha, Buddhism, and universal Buddha-nature. Thus, the image indicates the way, or more exactly its goal, or the human setting for that goal, that is, it displays to us that “holy sleep” which is watchfulness and clarity within; by its profound and wondrous presence it suggests “the stilling of mental agitation and the supreme appeasement,” to quote the words of Shankara.

The greatest of all miracles is theophany, or to put it in other words, there is in reality only one miracle from which all others derive—and that is the contact between the finite and the Infinite, or the unfolding of the Infinite in the bosom of the finite. The Divine image is a sacramental crystallization of this miraculous meeting, whence its lightning-like evidence, resembling that of the Inward Miracle.



Nyoirin Kwannon (Avalokiteshvara), Daigo-ji, Kyoto, Japan

"Yet mystery and imagination arise from the same source. This source is called darkness... Darkness within darkness, the gateway to all understanding."

Laozi



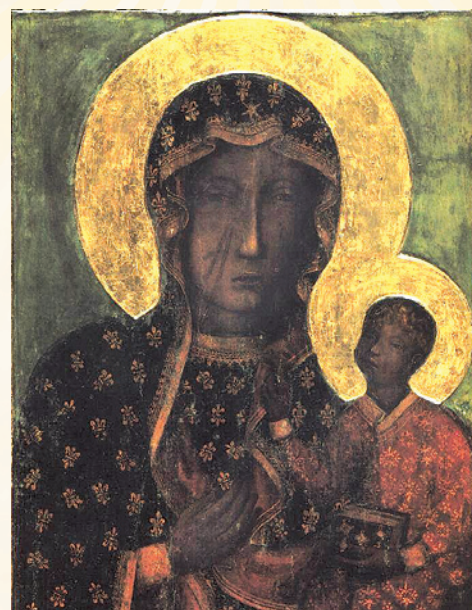
WHAT IS THE Divine Darkness



Excerpt from: *The Mystical Theology*

Dionysius The Areopagite

We pray that we may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, to see and to know that which is above vision and knowledge through the realization that by not-seeing and by unknowing we attain to true vision and knowledge...



(Clockwise from Left) Mahakala, Protector of the Tent, Central Tibet, ca. 1500; The Black Madonna of Częstochowa, Poland; Yin-Yang Tao Symbol.

Supernal Triad, Deity above all essence, knowledge and goodness; Guide of Christians to Divine Wisdom; direct our path to the ultimate summit of Thy mystical Lore, most incomprehensible, most luminous, and most exalted, where the pure, absolute, and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories surpassing all beauty.

Let this be my prayer; but do thou, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and non-being, that thou mayest arise, by unknowing, towards the union, as far as is attainable, with Him Who transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and of all things, thou mayest be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the supersedential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.

But these things are not to be disclosed to the uninitiated, by whom I mean those attached to the objects of human thought, and who believe there is no supersedential Reality beyond, and who imagine that by their own understanding they know Him Who has made Darkness His secret place. And if the principles of the divine Mysteries are beyond the understanding of these, what is to be said of others still more incapable thereof, who describe the transcendental First Cause of all by characteristics drawn from the lowest order of beings, while they deny that He is in any way above the images which they fashion after various designs; whereas, they should affirm that, while He possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the Universal Cause), yet, in a more strict sense, He does not possess them, since He transcends them all; and where there is no contradiction between the affirmations and the negations, inasmuch as He infinitely precedes all conceptions of deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.

Thus, the blessed Bartholomew asserts that the divine science is both vast and minute, and that the Gospel is great and broad, yet concise and short; signifying by this, that the beneficent Cause of all is most eloquent, yet utters few words, or rather, is altogether silent, as having neither (human) speech nor (human) understanding, because He is super-essentially exalted above created things, and reveals Himself in His naked Truth to those alone who pass beyond all that is pure

or impure, and ascend above the topmost altitudes of holy things, and who, leaving behind them all divine light and sound and heavenly utterances, plunge into the Darkness where truly dwells, as the Oracles declare, that ONE Who is beyond all.

It was not without reason that the blessed Moses was commanded first to undergo purification himself and then to separate himself from those who had not undergone it; and after the entire purification heard many-voiced trumpets and saw many lights streaming forth with pure and manifold rays; and that he was thereafter separated from the multitude, with the elect priests, and pressed forward to the summit of the divine ascent. Nevertheless, he did not attain to the Presence of God Himself; he saw not Him (for He cannot be looked upon), but the Place where He dwells. And this I take to signify that the divinest and highest things seen by the eyes or contemplated by the mind are but the symbolical expressions of those that are immediately beneath Him Who is above all. Through these, His incomprehensible Presence is manifested upon those heights of His Holy Places; that then It breaks forth, even from that which is seen and that which sees, and plunges the mystic into the Darkness of Unknowing, whence all perfection of understanding is excluded, and he is enwrapped in that which is altogether intangible and noumenal, being wholly absorbed in Him Who is beyond all, and in none else (whether himself or another); and through the inactivity of all his reasoning powers is united by his highest faculty to Him who is wholly unknowable; thus by knowing nothing he knows that Which is beyond his knowledge.

The Necessity of Being United with And of Rendering Praise to Him Who Is The Cause Of All And Above All

We pray that we may come unto this Darkness which is beyond light, and, without seeing and without knowing, to see and to know that which is above vision and knowledge through the realization that by not-seeing and by unknowing we attain to true vision and knowledge; and thus praise, super-essentially, Him Who is supersedential, by the abstraction of the essence of all things; even as those who, carving a statue out of marble, abstract or remove all the surrounding material that hinders the vision which the marble conceals and, by that abstraction, bring to light the hidden beauty.

It is necessary to distinguish this negative method of abstraction from the positive method of affirmation, in which we deal with the Divine Attributes. For with these latter we begin with the universal and primary,

and pass through the intermediate and secondary to the particular and ultimate attributes; but now we ascend from the particular to the universal conceptions, abstracting all attributes in order that without veil, we may know that Unknowing, which is enshrouded under all that is known and all that can be known, and that we may begin to contemplate the supersedential Darkness which is hidden by all the light that is in existing things.

What Are the Affirmations and Negations Concerning God?

In the Theological Outlines we have set forth the principal affirmative expressions concerning God, and have shown in what sense God's Holy Nature is One, and in what sense Three; what is within It which is called Paternity, and what Filiation, and what is signified by the name Spirit; how from the uncreated and indivisible Good, the blessed and perfect Rays of Its Goodness proceed, and yet abide immutably one both within Their Origin and within Themselves and each other, co-eternal with the act by which They spring from It; how the supersedential Jesus enters an essential state in which the truths of human nature meet; and other matters made known by the Oracles are expounded in the same place.

Again, in the treatise on Divine Names, we have considered the meaning, as concerning God, of the titles of Good, of Being, of Life, of Wisdom, of Power, and of such other names as are applied to Him; further, in Symbolical Theology, we have considered what are the metaphorical titles drawn from the world of sense and applied to the nature of God; what is meant by the material and intellectual images we form of Him, or the functions and instruments of activity attributed to Him; what are the places where He dwells and the raiment in which He is adorned; what is meant by God's anger, grief, and indignation, or the divine inebriation; what is meant by God's oaths and threats, by His slumber and waking; and all sacred and symbolical representations. And it will be observed how far more copious and diffused are the last terms than the first, for the theological doctrine and the exposition of the Divine Names are necessarily more brief than the Symbolical Theology.

For the higher we soar in contemplation the more limited become our expressions of that which is purely intelligible; even as now, when plunging into the Darkness which is above the intellect, we pass not merely into brevity of speech, but even into absolute silence, of thoughts as well as of words. Thus, in the former discourse, our contemplations descended from the highest to the lowest, embracing an ever-widening number of conceptions, which increased at each stage of the descent; but in the present discourse we mount upwards from below to that which is the highest and, according to the degree of transcendence, so our speech is restrained, until, the entire ascent being accomplished, we become wholly voiceless, inasmuch as we are absorbed in Him Who is totally ineffable. 'But why,' you will ask, 'does the affirmative method begin from the highest attributions, and the negative method with the lowest abstractions?' The reason is because, when affirming the subsistence of That Which transcends all affirmation, we necessarily start from the attributes most closely related to It and upon which the remaining affirmations depend; but when pursuing the negative method to reach That Which is beyond all abstraction, we must begin by applying our negations to things which are most remote from It.

For is it not more true to affirm that God is Life and Goodness than that He is air or stone; and must we not deny to Him more emphatically the attributes of inebriation and wrath than the applications of human speech and thought?

That He Who Is the Pre-Eminent Cause of All Things Sensibly Perceived Is Not Himself Any Of Those Things

We therefore maintain that the universal and transcendent Cause of all things is neither without being nor without life, nor without reason or intelligence; nor is He a body, nor has He form or shape, or quality, or quantity, or weight; nor has He any localized, visible,

Editorial

Form-Content vitality reconciles the symbolic representation of life in commensuration with its materialist expression. This is perhaps the reason that art confronts the cognitive faculty of man, and many times forces one to take note of life and its inner dynamics more closely. Cultivating aesthetical expressions lifts life from its understanding as brute matter, while elevating mind to go beyond materialistic pursuits. In some ways aesthetical expression is a way life talks to itself while making meaning of its ongoing progression. With inferior intuition human potential is held back and the force of life that is inherent within its intellectual development becomes stagnant. Human intellect and sensitivity towards life tends to get fossilized and stereotyped with inorganic mechanical growth of capitalistic pursuits. In many ways the spirit of an age gets confined by its utilitarian functioning and barter of transactional meanings that prunes a harmonious and intelligible evolution of history. Nevertheless, the creative potential of an age counterbalances the algorithms by returning subjective meaning back to the hard core of sensuous reality through its aesthetic expression.

There are a few vital features of aesthetics that render inherent meaning to creative impulse inherent within the art works of an age. First, aesthetic expressions create a rhythm between the empirical experiences of objective reality. Second, it sharpens intellectual intuitiveness that helps human mind to recognize the underlying spirit of relationship between nature and life. The propagation of insistent intellectual curiosity constantly endangers to strain human potential rendering irrelevance and strangeness to relationships. It is through a participation in the wonder of life that human mind enlarges the breadth of her creative horizon stimulating mind to find a harmony between curiosity and beauty. Third, more than the illumination of mind and its intellectual potential, aesthetic expression also imparts a wholesomeness to creative vitality. It uplifts the collective wisdom inherent in the self-revealing spirit of a culture through many genius expressions that inspire life with a spiritual vision. So is the development of a collective taste that pulls up the spirit of an age and refines the standards of its expressions.

Both ideals and sensual expressions of life are subject to reveal in art as expression of spirit. Through such expressions it often creates its own ideals that may not always prescribe to the soil to which it belongs. It is thus a work of the genius to hold the creative impulse anchored in its ground while simultaneously imparting it the wings of imagination. We have worked tirelessly to collect and put together the works of many such great minds, while simultaneously opening opportunities for new authors to add on to the aesthetical wisdom of our age. We expect our readers to read through each sentence on this edition with some attention that opens new vistas of aesthetic consciousness of our age.

Amandeep Singh

or tangible existence; He is not sensible or perceptible; nor is He subject to any disorder or inordination or influenced by any earthly passion; neither is He rendered impotent through the effects of material causes and events; He needs no light; He suffers no change, or corruption, or division, or privation, or flux; none of these things can either be identified with or attributed unto Him.

That He Who Is the Pre-Eminent Cause of All Things Intelligently Perceived Is Not Himself Any Of Those Things

Again, ascending yet higher, we maintain that He is neither soul nor intellect; nor has He imagination, opinion, reason, or understanding; nor can He be expressed or conceived, since He is neither number, nor order; nor greatness, nor smallness; nor equality, nor inequality; nor similarity, nor dissimilarity; neither is He standing, nor moving, nor at rest; neither has He power, nor is power, nor is light; neither does He live, nor is He life; neither is He essence, nor eternity, nor time; nor is He subject to intelligible contact; nor is He science, nor truth, nor kingship, nor wisdom; neither one, nor oneness; nor godhead, nor goodness; nor is He spirit according to our understanding, nor filiation, nor paternity; nor anything else known to us or to any other beings, of the things that are or the things that are not; neither does anything that is, know Him as He is; nor does He know existing things according to existing knowledge; neither can the reason attain to Him, nor name Him, nor know Him; neither is He darkness nor light, nor the false, nor the true; nor can any affirmation or negation be applied to Him, for although we may affirm or deny the things below Him, we can neither affirm nor deny Him, inasmuch as the all-perfect and unique Cause of all things transcends all affirmation, and the simple pre-eminence of His absolute nature is outside of every negation - free from every limitation and beyond them all.



Excerpt from: *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*

René Guénon

*Wassaffate saffan
Faz-zajirati zajran
Fat-taliyati dhikran*

By those who are ranged in ranks,
Who repel and rout,
And who recite the invocation...

Quran, XXXVII, 1-3

There is often mention, in different traditions, of a mysterious language called the "language of the birds". The expression is clearly a symbolic one since the very importance which is attached to the knowledge of the language—it is considered to be the prerogative of a high initiation—precludes a literal interpretation. The Quran for example says (XXVII, 15) "And Solomon was David's heir and he said, 'O men, we have been taught the language of the birds (ullimnā mantiq at-tayr) and all favours have been showered upon us.'" Elsewhere we read of heroes, like Siegfried in the Nordic legend, who understand this language of the birds as soon as they have overcome the dragon, and the symbolism in question may be easily understood from this. Victory over the dragon has, as its immediate consequence, the conquest of immortality which is represented by some object, the approach to which is barred by the dragon, and the conquest of immortality implies, essentially, reintegration at the centre of the human state, that is, at the point where communication is established with the higher states of being. It is this communication which is represented by the understanding of the language of the birds and, in fact, birds are often taken to symbolise the angels which are precisely the higher states of being. That is the significance, in the Gospel parable of the grain of mustard seed, of "the birds of the air" which came to lodge in the branches of the tree—the tree which represents the axis that passes through the centre of each state of being and connects all the states with each other. (In the medieval symbol of the Peridexion (a corruption of Paradise) one sees birds on the branches of a tree and a dragon at its foot. In a study of the symbolism of "the birds of Paradise", Charbonneau-Lassay has reproduced an illustration of a piece of sculpture in which the bird is shown with only a head and wings, a form in which angels are often represented.)

In the Quranic text given above the term *as-sāffāt* literally designates the birds but symbolically refers to the angels (al-malā'ikah), and thus the first line signifies the constitution of the celestial and spiritual hierarchies. ("The word saff, "rank", is one of the many which have been suggested as the origin of the word *sufi* and *tasawwuf* (Sufism). Whilst this derivation does not seem to be acceptable from the purely linguistic

The Language of Birds



point of view, it is none the less true that, like many other derivations of the same kind, it does represent one of the ideas actually contained in these two terms, for the "spiritual hierarchies" are essentially identical with the degrees of initiation) The second line denotes the struggle of the angels against the demons, the celestial powers against the internal ones, that is, the opposition between the higher and the lower states. (This opposition exists in all beings in the form of the two tendencies, one upward and the other downward, called respectively *sattva* and *tamas* in the Hindu tradition. It is also what is symbolized in Mazdeism by the antagonism between light and darkness, personified respectively by Ormuzd and

Ahriman.) In the Hindu tradition this is the struggle of the *Dēvas* against the *Asuras* and also, according to a symbolism which comes very close to the symbolism of our theme, the fight of *Garuda* against the *Naga* which is, moreover, none other than the above mentioned serpent or dragon. *Garuda* is the eagle and elsewhere his place is taken by other birds such as the ibis, the stork or the heron, all enemies and destroyers of reptiles. (See, in this connection, the remarkable works of Charbonneau-Lassay on the animal symbols of Christ (in *Le Bestiaire du Christ*). It is necessary to point out that the symbolic opposition between the bird and the serpent exists only as long as the serpent is seen in its malefic aspect. In its benefic aspect it is sometimes united with the bird as in the figure of *Quetzalcoatl* in the ancient American tradition. On the other hand the combat between the eagle and the serpent is also mentioned in Mexican myths. In connection with the benefic aspect we may recall the Biblical text "Be ye therefore as wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (St. Matthew, X, 16).) Finally, in the third verse, the angels recite the *dhikr* which normally means the recitation of the Quran—not, needless to say, the Quran expressed

in human language but its eternal prototype inscribed on the Guarded Tablet (al-lawh al-mahfūz) which stretches from heaven to earth like Jacob's Ladder throughout all the degrees of Universal Existence. Similarly, in the Hindu tradition, it is said that the *Dēvas* in their struggle against the *Asuras* protected themselves (acchandan) by reciting Vedic hymns which, for this reason, were given the name of *chandas*, a word which denotes rhythm. The same idea is contained in the word *dhikr* which, in Islamic esoterism, is used of the rhythmic formulae that correspond exactly to Hindu mantras. The repetition of these formulae is intended to bring about the harmonization of the

different elements of the being and to cause vibrations which, by their repercussions throughout the whole hierarchy of the states, are capable of opening up a communication, with the higher states. This is, moreover, generally speaking, the essential and primordial purpose of all rites.

This brings us back directly to what was said at the outset about "the language of the birds", which can also be called "angelic language", and which is symbolized in the human world by rhythmic language, for the science of rhythm, which has many applications, is in fact ultimately the basis of all the means which can be brought into action in order to enter into communication with the higher states of being.

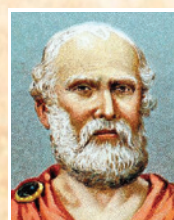
This is why it is said in an Islamic tradition that Adam, whilst in the Earthly Paradise, spoke in verse, that is, in rhythmic language. It is also why the Sacred Books are written in rhythmic language, which clearly makes them something altogether different from the mere "poems" (in the purely profane sense) which the antitraditional prejudice of the "critics" would have them to be; nor was poetry itself, in its origins, the vain literature it has now become as a result of the degeneration which is part of the downward march of the human cycle. (One can

say, in a general way, that art and science have become profane by a similar degeneration which has stripped them of their traditional character and consequently of everything that has a higher meaning.) It had on the contrary a truly sacred character. Examples can be found as far back as classical Western antiquity, of poetry being called the "language of the Gods", an expression equivalent to that we have already used since the "Gods", that is, the *Dēvas*, represent, like the angels, the higher states of being. (The Sanskrit *Deva* and the Latin *Deus* are one and the same word.) In Latin, verses were called *carmina*, a name connected with their use in the accomplishment of rites, for the word *carmen* is identical with the Sanskrit *Karma* which must be understood here in its special sense of "ritual action". (The word "poetry" is derived from the Greek word *poiein* which has the same meaning as the Sanskrit root *Kri* from which *Karma* stems, and which is to be found in the Latin verb *creare* understood according to its primal significance. The idea in question was thus originally quite different from the mere production of artistic or literary works in the profane sense which Aristotle seems to have had exclusively in mind when speaking of what he called "poetic sciences".) The poet himself, the interpreter of the "sacred language", which is as a transparent veil over the Divine Word, was *vates*, a word which implies a certain degree of the prophetic inspiration. Later, by a further degeneration, the *vates* became no more than a common "diviner" and *carmen* (whence the word "charm") no more than a "spell", that is something brought about by low magic. (The word "diviner" itself has deviated just as much in meaning, for etymologically it is no less than *divinus*, that is "the interpreter of the Gods". The "auspices" (from *aves* *spicere*, meaning to "observe the birds"), omens drawn from the flight and song of birds, are more particularly related to the "language of the birds" understood here in the literal sense but none the less identified with the "language of the Gods" since the Gods were held to make known their will through these omens. The birds thus played the part of messengers analogous (but on a very much lower plane) to the part that is generally attributed to the angels (hence their name, since "messenger" is precisely the meaning of the Greek *angelos*.) We have here yet another illustration of the fact that magic—we might even say sorcery—is the last thing to be left behind when traditions disappear.

These few indications should be enough to show how inept it is to make fun of stories which speak of the "language of the birds". It is all too easy and too simple to disdain as "superstitions" everything one cannot understand; but the ancients themselves knew very well what they meant when they used symbolic language. The true superstition in the strictly etymological sense (*quod superstat*) is what outlives itself, that is, the "dead letter"; but this very survival, however lacking in interest it may seem, is none the less not so totally insignificant, for the Spirit which "bloweth where it listeth" (and when it listeth) can always come to breathe fresh life into the symbols and the rites, and give them back their lost meaning and the fullness of their original virtue.



Divine Tree of Life Art Decor made with unique Indian Embroideries on Pure Silk



Excerpt from: *Protagoras 320c–323a*

Plato

Once upon a time there were just the gods; mortal beings did not yet exist. And when the appointed time came for them to come into being too, the gods moulded them within the earth, mixing together earth and fire and their compounds. And when they were about to bring them out into the light of day, they appointed Prometheus and Epimetheus to equip each kind with the powers it required. Epimetheus asked Prometheus to let him assign the powers himself. "Once I have assigned them," he said, "you can inspect them"; so Prometheus agreed, and Epimetheus assigned the powers. To some creatures he gave strength, but not speed, while he equipped the weaker with speed. He gave some claws or horns, and for those without them he devised some other power for their preservation. To those whom he made of small size, he gave winged flight, or a dwelling underground; to those that he made large, he gave their size itself as a protection. And in the same way he distributed all the other things, balancing one against another. This he did to make sure that no species should be wiped out; and when he had made them defences against mutual destruction, he devised for them protection against the elements, clothing them with thick hair and tough skins, so as to withstand cold and heat, and also to serve each kind as their own

The Origin of Virtue

natural bedding when they lay down to sleep. And he shod some with hooves, and others with tough, bloodless skin. Then he assigned different kinds of food to the different species; some were to live on pasture, others on the fruits of trees, others on roots, and some he made to prey on other creatures for their food. These he made less prolific, but to those on whom they preyed he gave a large increase, as a means of preserving the species.

Now Epimetheus, not being altogether wise, didn't notice that he had used up all the powers on the non-rational creatures; so last of all he was left with humankind, quite unprovided for, and he was at a loss what to do. As he was racking his brains Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and saw the other creatures well provided for in every way, while man was naked and unshod, without any covering for his bed or any fangs or claws; and already the appointed day was at hand, on which man too had to come out of the earth to the light of day. Prometheus was at his wits' end to find a means of preservation for mankind, so he stole from Hephaestus and Athena their technical skill along with the use of fire—for it was impossible for anyone to acquire or make use of that skill without fire—and that was what he gave to man. That is how man acquired his practical skill, but he did not yet have skill in running a city; Zeus kept watch over that. Prometheus had no time to penetrate the citadel of Zeus—moreover the guards of Zeus were terrible—but he made his way by stealth into the workshop which Athena and Hephaestus shared for the practice of their arts, and stole Hephaestus' art of working with fire, and

the other art which Athena possesses, and gave them to men. And as a result, man was well provided with resources for his life, but afterwards, so it is said, thanks to Epimetheus, Prometheus paid the penalty for theft.

Since man thus shared in a divine gift, first of all through his kinship with the gods, he was the only creature to worship them, and he began to erect altars and images of the gods. Then he soon developed the use of articulate speech and of words, and discovered how to make houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and how to get food from the earth. Thus equipped, men lived at the beginning in scattered units, and there were no cities; so they began to be destroyed by the wild beasts, since they were altogether weaker. Their practical art was sufficient to provide food, but insufficient for fighting against the beasts—for they did not yet possess the art of running a city, of which the art of warfare is part—and so they sought to come together and save themselves by founding cities. Now when they came together, they treated each other with injustice, not possessing the art of running a city, so they scattered and began to be destroyed once again. So Zeus, fearing that our race would be wholly wiped out, sent Hermes bringing conscience and justice to mankind, to be the principles of organization of cities and the bonds of friendship. Now Hermes asked Zeus about the manner in which he was to give conscience and justice to men: "Shall I distribute these in the same way as the arts? These are distributed thus: one doctor is sufficient for many laymen, and so with the other experts. Shall I give justice and conscience to men in that way too, or distribute them to all?"

"To all," said Zeus, "and let all share in them; for cities could not come into being, if only a few shared in them as in the other arts. And lay down on my authority a law that he who cannot share in conscience and justice is to be killed as a plague on the city." So that, Socrates, is why when there is a question about how to do well in carpentry or any other expertise, everyone including the Athenians thinks it right that only a few should give advice, and won't put up with advice from anyone else, as you say—and quite right, too, in my view—but when it comes to consideration of how to do well in running the city, which must proceed entirely through justice and soundness of mind, they are right to accept advice from anyone, since it is incumbent on everyone to share in that sort of excellence, or else there can be no city at all.

Chinese parable of the Lost Pearl

The Yellow Emperor went wandering
To the north of the Red Water
To the Kwan Lun mountain. He looked around
Over the edge of the world. On the way home
He lost his night-colored pearl.
He sent out Science to seek his pearl, and got nothing.
He sent out Analysis to look for his pearl, and got nothing.
He sent out Logic to seek his pearl, and got nothing.
Then he asked Nothingness, and Nothingness had it!
Then Yellow Emperor said:
"Strange, indeed: Nothingness
Who was not sent
Who did not work to find it
Had the night-colored pearl!"

(From *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, by Thomas Merton)



Excerpt from: *New York Times*
(04/Jun/1950)

Alfred Hitchcock

Hollywood. Directors of motion pictures, ever since the leather puttee era, have been permitted at least one eccentricity per capita, and my habit of appearing in my own pictures has generally been regarded as exercise of the directorial prerogative. In "Stage Fright" I have been told that my performance is quite juicy. I have been told this with a certain air of tolerance, implying that I have now achieved the maximum limits of directorial ham in the movie sandwich.

It just isn't true. There may have been a "McGuffin" in my film appearance, but not a ham. My motives have always been more devious, or, if you prefer a more devious word, sinister. I have wormed my way into my own pictures as a spy. A director should see how the other half lives. I manage that by shifting to the front side of the camera and letting my company shoot me, so I can see what it is like to be shot by my company.

Big Moment

I find that my actors are kept on their toes that way. Everyone is anxious to get his work done quickly, before I take it into my head to get in his particular scene. The technicians work gaily in anticipation of the fateful moment when I will be at their mercy. And then the moment comes. I step before the cameras. The actors call for retakes. The make-up man splashes his pet concoctions on my face; the wardrobe department tells me how to dress. The electricians and the camera man joyfully "hit" me with the lights. The still photographer tells me how to look, for his photographs.

I find myself tempted to try the same trick with some of the press people, when they come for a full-dress interview. I have a secret yen to interview them, to pose them for still pictures. I would like to focus a press camera on some photographer and ask him to

MASTER OF SUSPENSE BEING A SELF-ANALYSIS



Shooting *The Birds* (1963) on stage at Universal Studios, Hitchcock attends to his stars. *The American Society of Cinematographers*

"express menace and suspense, please." I would also like to write a review of some of the newspaper stories.

Purely Sinister

My purpose is, as I have indicated, purely sinister. I find that the easiest way to worry people is to turn the tables on them. Make the most innocent member

of the cast the murderer; make the next-door neighbor a dangerous spy. Keep your characters stepping out of character and into the other fellow's boots.

I should like, for example, to make a thriller about the United Nations, in which the delegate of one nation is denounced by another delegate for falling asleep in

the middle of an important international speech. They go to wake the sleeping delegate, only to find that he is dead, with a dagger in his back. That would be the beginning of my story — except for one thing. It is too close to unamusing reality. Which delegate will be the corpse? What tangled international threads will be caught in the skein? How do we avoid making a weighty political document instead of a suspense story?

To my way of thinking, the best suspense drama is that which weaves commonplace people in what appears to be a routine situation, until it is revealed (and fairly early in the game) as a glamorously dangerous charade. The spy stories of pre-war days fit these specifications perfectly. Today, however, there is nothing very glamorous about spying — there is only one sort of secret to be stolen and there is too much at stake for people to play charades over it.

I believe that the suspense drama is being smoked out of its old haunts. I think that we must forget about espionage and rediscover more personal sorts of menace. I think that a suspense story in the old tradition can be made today about an international crime ring, with its agents in high places, much more easily than a film about the missing papers.

The "McGuffin"

The "McGuffin" — my own term for the key element of any suspense story — has obviously got to change. It can no longer be the idea of preventing the foreign agent from stealing the papers. It can no longer be the business of breaking a code. And yet these very same elements, disguised to fit the times, must still be there.

One of the ways in which the suspense drama must change is in its setting. The *Orient Express*, for example, has had its day as a scene for spy melodrama. I think the same may be said of narrow stairways in high towers, subways and the like. Personally, I rather lean toward Alaska as the setting for the next thriller. It is logical — as one of the last targets of international espionage — and it has the color of a frontier territory. (I could wear a beard for my own bit role.) And there is such a nice air about the title "Eskimo Spy."

But the big problem of the glamorous villain — whether, in Alaska or Times Square — remains a riddle, just one minor heritage of a brave new world in which we are becoming conditioned to suspecting our neighbors and expecting the worst.



Professor of Journalism and
Communication

Diane Winston

When the popular television series "Game of Thrones" ended its seventh Season, fans bemoaned the long wait until the final season was premiered. In the meantime, posts on the dragon Viserion's blue flames, memes on the hookup of fictional characters Jon Snow and Daenerys and chatter about potential battle strategies indicated that there was plenty to ponder.

It's easy to see why the show has so many fans: Its episodes feature complex characters played by good-looking actors engaged in exciting battles rendered with state-of-the-art visual effects.

But as a scholar of American media and religion, I believe there's something else going on as well: "Game of Thrones" storytelling gives its audience the opportunity to contemplate and debate fundamental concerns about the meaning of human life — issues that are central to all world religions.

'Game of Thrones' 101

The HBO show is based on science fiction and fantasy writer George R.R. Martin's book series — "A Song of Ice and Fire" — and was adapted by writers David Benioff and D.B. Weiss for television. It made its American debut in April 2011.

The plot, at its most basic, is a power struggle: who has it, who wants it and how they plan to get it. Interwoven are themes of honor, justice, revenge and redemption layered between issues of ethics, morality and familial bonds. Further complications involve incest, angry gods and avaricious bankers.

"Game of Thrones" has been lauded for its acting and production values, although, some critics have objected to graphic depictions of violence, torture and rape.

Television as sacred text

There's no denying that the series is eminently entertaining. But, I would argue it's also something more: an opportunity for viewers to reflect on the human condition.

"Game of Thrones" storytelling is both instructive and inspiring, encouraging viewers to evaluate their own lives and choices. Although it's not divine revelation, the show, like many sacred texts, highlights men and women whose human frailties do not define them.

Can 'Game of Thrones' teach us about the meaning of life?

Take the stories in the Hebrew Bible, which many Jews, Christians and Muslims believe is the word of God. Biblical figures drink, deceive and engage in violence, incest and familial conflict. Jacob, for example, one of the biblical patriarchs, took his older brother's birthright when he tricked their father into blessing him as the firstborn. David, the shepherd boy who became king of the united Kingdom of Israel and Judah, slept with another man's wife, then sent the man to slaughter and married his widow.

Yet despite faults, these biblical heroes have a stirring sense of their duty, destiny and responsibility. They do their best and make their actions matter.

Stories like these, which have parallels in religions worldwide, enable believers to confront their own shortcomings and strive for lives of consequence. They remind us that even the greatest religious figures are human beings who succumb to temptation.

Likewise, "Game of Thrones" heroes strive for greatness amid trials of ego and enticements. Jaime Lannister, one of the bravest and most honorable knights in the Seven Kingdoms (the series' setting), loses sight of his mission due to an incestuous relationship with his sister Cersei.

Daenerys Targaryen, called "Breaker of Chains," seeks power so she can help others. Nevertheless, she ruthlessly kills those who stand in her way. And Jon Snow, who believes himself a bastard, is resurrected for an unknown purpose, thrust into leadership and tasked to lead a seemingly futile mission.

As viewers, we can spend hours on social media dissecting the how, what and why of these characters. They hold our imaginations because their quests for meaning, purpose and identity echo our own — albeit writ larger and with dragons.

And just like sacred texts that, for centuries, have helped believers reflect on right, wrong and the gray zone in between, "Game of Thrones" spurs audiences to see beyond their daily woes — and to consider the meaning and purpose of their own lives.

Religion and popular culture

So why is the series so successful? People seek inspiration and instruction from popular culture when institutional religion no longer speaks their language. Music, art, literature, film and television fill a void for growing numbers of Americans who opt out of church or never had a religious affiliation.

Today, hip-hop artists regularly explore spiritual themes just as painters and filmmakers have done for decades. Television may have been deemed a "cultural wasteland" once, but digitization and the subsequent explosion of cable and streaming options have enabled a new golden age.

Creative storytelling, featuring complex plots and complicated characters, has raised religious, spiritual and ethical questions that fuel viewer discussion. In the late 2000s, for example, a science fiction television series, "Battlestar Galactica," probed the ethical issues around torture, suicide bombing and "othering" enemies. In the mid-2010s, a crime drama series, "Breaking Bad," explored whether the ends justified the means.

The HBO science fiction "Westworld" forced viewers to consider the moral challenges posed by artificial intelligence.

What would Jon Snow do?

These same questions, I argue, preoccupy many among "Game of Thrones" metaphysical musers: Can a compromised hero find his moral compass? Are children doomed by their parents' mistakes? Do the gods care about humanity's fate? The series, an alternative to the everyday world of bad boyfriends, sullen children and missed deadlines, offers wider possibilities for a fulfilling life.

Most of us will never ride dragons, walk through fire or face armies of the undead. But we may, in quiet moments, confront questions of meaning, identity and purpose and ask ourselves WWJSD — What Would Jon Snow Do?

Camera Lucida

Roland Barthes

I must therefore submit to this law: I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph.

I can only sweep it with my glance, like a smooth surface. The Photograph is flat, platitudinous in the true sense of the word, that is what I must acknowledge. It is a mistake to associate Photography, by reason of its technical origins, with the notion of a dark passage (camera obscura). It is camera lucida that we should say (such was the name of that apparatus, anterior to Photography, which permitted drawing an object through a prism, one eye on the model, the other on the paper); for, from the eye's viewpoint, "the essence of the image is to be altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being; without signification, yet summoning up the depth of any possible meaning; unrevealed yet manifest, having that absence-as-presence which constitutes the lure and the fascination of the Sirens" (Blanchot).

If the Photograph cannot be penetrated, it is because of its evidential power. In the image, as Sartre says the object yields itself wholly, and our vision of it is certain contrary to the text or to other perceptions which give me the object in a vague, arguable manner, and therefore incite me to suspicions as to what I think I am seeing. This certitude is sovereign because I have the leisure to observe the photograph with intensity; but also, however long I extend this observation, it teaches me nothing. It is precisely in this arrest of interpretation that the Photograph's certainty resides: I exhaust myself realizing that this has been; for anyone who holds a photograph in his hand, here is a fundamental belief, an "ur-doxa" nothing can undo, unless you prove to me that this image is not a photograph. But also, unfortunately, it is in proportion to its certainty that I can say nothing about this photograph.





Writer and editor

Amandeep Singh

In many ways, Louvre Museum in Paris contextualizes the idea of a 'museum' beyond the domain of art. Considering the complex entanglements in which the symbolic and the historical are encountered in the fascinating contours of art and architecture, the museum is central to civilizational expressions of French aesthetics, history, psychology, and modernity. This article takes a closer look and highlights some of the central and peripheral ideas enunciated through latent expressions that make this museum a collective of art, religion, and politics. It further examines how the museum inhabits and perpetuates a sense of skepticism towards transcendental spirit and lived tradition while prioritizing elitism, psychoanalysis, and decipherment of subtle meanings through its artistic expressions. But first, a brief introduction.

Besides the grandiosity going back to its origin in a royal palace of French monarchy, the Louvre is home to some of the most insightful, thought provoking, wonderous, and archaeological discoveries of art and history. While the museum features several galleries of exhibits including Egyptian antiquities, Greek artifacts, Islamic masterpieces, etc., it is the paintings and sculptures that captivate many visitors, inviting them to explore deeper layers of art and aesthetics. While the famous paintings at Louvre including *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo Da Vinci, *Portrait of Empress Josephine* by Pierre Paul Purd'hon, *Coronation of Napoleon* by Jacques-Louis David, *Liberty leading the people* by Eugene Delacroix, *The Charging Chasseur* by Theodore Gericault, etc. are its renowned attractions, the sculptures including *Venus de Milo* by Alexandros of Antioch, *Winged Victory of Samothrace* etc., add further attraction to its marvel. Portraying some of the most intense aspects of human nature including, psychological dilemmas, death drive, dualities of sacred and the profane, gestures and expressions of deep human emotions like lust, pride, jealousy, sycophancy, pleasure, etc., these art works also depict the portrayal of royal vanity, psychological paradoxes, ideals of French revolution, history of Napoleon's expedition, etc. Thus, through the collective of artworks, history, and religion, it becomes amply clear that French art renders rich source of meaning, interpretation, historical information, and narration, offering insights on many mature subjects and intellectual discourses.

Further, it is noticeable that a significant extent of Louvre's institutional setup draws inspiration from Renaissance art and the philosophy of humanism. The bold display of human corporeality, particularly the representation of nudity in many paintings and sculptures, challenges conventional orthodox perception and outlook towards the human body. In a way, French art proclaims the beauty of the body not in its hiding, but in its being a natural spirit of liberty and freedom. It contextualizes the body through its aesthetical expressions. The metaphysics of body is not external to it, but kneaded within its very expression of materiality as the idea of its beauty remains obscure



Russian playwright and short story writer

Anton Chekhov

One fine evening, a no less fine government clerk called Ivan Dmitritch Tchervyakov was sitting in the second row of the stalls, gazing through an opera glass at the *Cloches de Corneville*. He gazed and felt at the acme of bliss. But suddenly... In stories one so often meets with this "But suddenly." The authors are right: life is so full of surprises! But suddenly his face puckered up, his eyes disappeared, his breathing was arrested... he took the opera glass from his eyes, bent over and... "Aptchee!!" he sneezed as you perceive. It is not reprehensible for anyone to sneeze anywhere. Peasants sneeze and so do police superintendents, and sometimes even privy councillors. All men sneeze. Tchervyakov was not in the least confused, he wiped his face with his handkerchief, and like a polite man, looked round to see whether he had disturbed any one by his sneezing. But then he was overcome with confusion. He saw that an old gentleman sitting in front of him in the first row of the stalls was carefully wiping his bald head and his neck with his glove and muttering something to himself. In the old gentleman, Tchervyakov recognised Brizzhalov, a civilian general serving in the Department of Transport.

"I have spattered him," thought Tchervyakov, "he

The Louvre Art Museum: Reminiscing an Evolving Human Spirit



Louvre Museum Inside Image

within its exposed surface. Therefore, such exposure of body is not erotic in expression, but maintains a sense of innocence webbed deeply in its politeness. The skin color (primarily white) is contrasted eloquently in the scheme of many colors that makes the body stand out within the painting. Therefore, not only does the painting aestheticize the body, but it is actually the body that imparts beauty to the painting. The body and the painting share a paradoxical and complementary artistic relationship.

However, the concept that the body transcends its mere physical existence and embodies a sacred significance intricately woven into its mystical substance stands in stark contrast to its portrayal as a liberated and emancipated human spirit in Louvre's artworks. Within the museum's ambience, the perspective that elevates the mystical dimension of the body to a sublime level might be seen as antiquated, limited, and lacking refinement within French aesthetics. Interestingly, the aesthetic principle of exposed body resonates well in French fashion industry accentuating body as a creative manifestation of art and fashion, often displayed as a normative to promote elegance of French fashion worldwide, while assertively offsetting any weight of metaphysical inscriptions. The idea of rich taste, deeply inherent in the subjective attitude, reflects primacy of existentialism in French philosophy that resists or in fact remains hostile to draw any metaphysical/transcendental meaning of human body. Such philosophical underpinning in artistic expressions evades an understanding that the body, according to many traditions, constitutes a materiality of sainthood - a divine meaning in physical expression that inspires life beyond the spirit of its physical freedom. Its true liberty, in such traditions, remains inherently available through the grandiosity of its [un]being, beyond its physical expression, rendering a cosmic meaning to self rather than retrograding an eagerness to contextualize and stabilize meaning in material existence. One such transcendental voice is eloquently expressed in the

words of Puran Singh who notes, 'But I die if He goes out of me, there is nothing in either worlds that can refresh me; metaphysics is a poison, poetry a curse, art is sickness and life an empty house.'

Being conceptually grounded in the ideals of secular aesthetics, the art forms at Louvre underpin the political philosophy of French laicism enabling the state to double down its control over religion. In many Christian exhibits a complex interplay with religion, maintaining a dynamic equilibrium with the secular can be deciphered by keen eyes. Embarking on an explorative journey from abstract ideals to real symbols is a demystification of God's wonder. This process imparts a cryptic meaning to God as a psychological entity that offers care and manifests compassion. Therefore, although Louvre houses paintings and sculptures inspired by depiction of Mother Mary, Jesus Christ, Holy Trinity and Christian Saints, etc., the humanization and rationalization of Christian sensibilities effectively reroutes the religious aura and inspiration, placing these works at par with mundane artistic creations rather than inscribing them any transcendental meaning. Given the dominant influence of laicism in French aesthetics, these exhibits, in the absence of such rerouting of normative coordinates, could have remained an obstacle to true expression of its cultural secularism. Such rerouting of norms is not only available in Christian artworks but also in paintings like self-portraits of Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn or *Mona Lisa* by da Vinci, that focus attentively on the human face. Face, which is both an interesting and mysterious part of human body, is a gateway to the soul. The focus on the face and facial expressions is productive to foreground the discovery of one's inner self, encouraging the viewer to take a deep plunge into the hidden truths that lie behind the mask of life. Louvre, through its marvelous excellence articulates a profound understanding of the human self, not through words and language, but via the medium of paintings.

Clearly, the depiction of art in Louvre renders

an active surface for intellectual discourse. However, a skepticism towards the notion of a 'received tradition' is also subtly maintained. Although history and tradition are theoretically intertwined, yet as fine line of subtle exhibition of history (Greek, Christian, Roman etc.) overshadows Louvre's spirit, it is the tradition that remains concealed and foreclosed for a prominent public display. There is negligible display of paintings that depict portrayal of village life, traditional designs, rural artifacts, folk art, social and cultural life of farmers and peasants, musical instruments, festivals and dances of tribes, etc. Such pulsating content of a raw life takes a backseat giving way to more profound and cognitive reflections that prioritize the beauty of French elitism over a pastoral depiction of peasantry. Considering the minimal representation of societal passions, cultural artifacts, village and folk life, facial expressions, dresses, and rusticity of rural life, destitution of French peasantry at the hands of French monarchy, one may not perceive the Louvre as entirely commensurate with a factual political history or 'classical' form of aestheticism. As a result, the living tradition tends to recede into the background while an embellished political history takes center stage in many exhibits featured at Louvre.

Another highlight of the paintings is the contrast of color schemes and backgrounds within the paintings. A keen observer can discern that a careful attention is paid to infuse a living spirit into these portraits, which also complements the opulence and aesthetics of French fashion. The shades of light and dark foregrounds and backgrounds render a 'tangible' expression to extravagancy of lifestyles of French elitism and monarchy. The color scheme used emphasizes the attire, the scepter, the sword, the texture of the fabric, embroidery, jewelry, hairstyle, decoration, etc. of French royalty. The marvel, absolutism, pompousness, and power displayed with the flamboyance of dressing styles and nuances of 'polite' exposures (primarily of women), offsets the weight of any transcendent authority over sovereignty and subjectivity of French monarchy and its elite culture displayed in aesthetic elegance.

Notably, ubiquitous to this entire spectrum of artworks of political history is a peculiar absence of any exhibit inspired from the events of World War-II. Perhaps the French withdrawal from the war without resisting the invading aggressor has left a void in French aesthetics. Or, within the formative principles of political history and existential philosophy the crisis of this lack is perpetually resisted with the politics of artworks that remain devoid of metaphysics, which is central to German philosophy. Indeed, the French resistance persists by emphasizing aesthetical expressions rooted in humanism rather than metaphysics.

In conclusion, Louvre, the art museum of Paris, which is perhaps the second most important visitor site after the Eiffel tower in France, exhibits symbolic form of artistic expressions that are deeply intertwined with narration. The subtle nuances in many of its displays dissolve the boundaries between body, mind, and artistic expressions. The diverse forms of artistic displays at Louvre persistently forge a path towards a renewed human spirit. But as many would intuitively feel, spirituality and temporality remain immiscible as oil and water, the exhibits in the Louvre are seamlessly woven in French laicism where any expression of spirituality seeks a permission from the state for its display. Such paradoxical void of self-realization becomes reminisced in Louvre's art works. Nevertheless, a literary mind gets reminded of Puran Singh, who notes, "All art consists in making statues and pictures that can move with our own life and self-realization. All objective symbolism is but a poetic way of expressing the subjective realization of beauty."

Excellency, it is simply from a feeling I may say of regret!... It was not intentional if you will graciously believe me."

The general made a lachrymose face, and waved his hand.

"Why, you are simply making fun of me, sir," he said as he closed the door behind him.

"Where's the making fun in it?" thought Tchervyakov, "there is nothing of the sort! He is a general, but he can't understand. If that is how it is I am not going to apologise to that fanfaron any more! The devil take him. I'll write a letter to him, but I won't go. By Jove, I won't."

So thought Tchervyakov as he walked home; he did not write a letter to the general, he pondered and pondered and could not make up that letter. He had to go next day to explain in person.

"I ventured to disturb your Excellency yesterday," he muttered, when the general lifted enquiring eyes upon him, "not to make fun as you were pleased to say. I was apologising for having spattered you in sneezing... And I did not dream of making fun of you. Should I dare to make fun of you, if we should take to making fun, then there would be no respect for persons, there would be..."

"Be off!" yelled the general, turning suddenly purple, and shaking all over.

"What?" asked Tchervyakov, in a whisper turning numb with horror.

"Be off!" repeated the general, stamping.

Something seemed to give way in Tchervyakov's stomach. Seeing nothing and hearing nothing he reeled to the door, went out into the street, and went staggering along... Reaching home mechanically, without taking off his uniform, he lay down on the sofa and died.

The Death of a Clerk

is not the head of my department, but still it is awkward. I must apologise."

Tchervyakov gave a cough, bent his whole person forward, and whispered in the general's ear.

"Pardon, your Excellency, I spattered you accidentally..."

"Never mind, never mind."

"For goodness sake excuse me, I... I did not mean to."

"Oh, please, sit down! Let me listen!"

Tchervyakov was embarrassed, he smiled stupidly and fell to gazing at the stage. He gazed at it but was no longer feeling bliss. He began to be troubled by uneasiness. In the interval, he went up to Brizzhalov, walked beside him, and overcoming his shyness, muttered:

"I spattered you, your Excellency, forgive me... you see... I didn't do it to..."

"Oh, that's enough... I'd forgotten it, and you keep on about it!" said the general, moving his lower lip impatiently.

"He has forgotten, but there is a fiendish light in his eye," thought Tchervyakov, looking suspiciously at the general. "And he doesn't want to talk. I ought to explain to him... that I really didn't intend... that it is the law of nature or else he will think I meant to spit on him. He doesn't think so now, but he will think so later!"

On getting home, Tchervyakov told his wife of his breach of good manners. It struck him that his wife

took too frivolous a view of the incident; she was a little frightened, but when she learned that Brizzhalov was in a different department, she was reassured.

"Still, you had better go and apologise," she said, "or he will think you don't know how to behave in public."

"That's just it! I did apologise, but he took it somehow queerly... he didn't say a word of sense. There wasn't time to talk properly."

Next day Tchervyakov put on a new uniform, had his hair cut and went to Brizzhalov's to explain; going into the general's reception room he saw there a number of petitioners and among them the general himself, who was beginning to interview them. After questioning several petitioners the general raised his eyes and looked at Tchervyakov.

"Yesterday at the Arcadia, if you recollect, your Excellency," the latter began, "I sneezed and... accidentally spattered... Exc..."

"What nonsense... It's beyond anything! What can I do for you," said the general addressing the next petitioner.

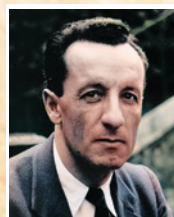
"He won't speak," thought Tchervyakov, turning pale; "that means that he is angry... No, it can't be left like this... I will explain to him."

When the general had finished his conversation with the last of the petitioners and was turning towards his inner apartments, Tchervyakov took a step towards him and muttered:

"Your Excellency! If I venture to trouble your

"After a certain high level of technical skill is achieved science and art tend to coalesce in aesthetics, plasticity, and form. The greatest scientists are artists as well."

Albert Einstein



Excerpt from: *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Science is not an unmotivated instance. We have to psychoanalyze science, purify it. Scientific consciousness lives in the natural attitude, as Husserl said, and it ignores Nature because it is there: it is a naive and uncritical enjoyment of the natural certitude. Moreover, science still lives in part on a Cartesian myth: a myth, and not a philosophy, because if the consequences remain, the principles are abandoned. Its concept of Nature is often only an idol to which the scientist makes sacrifices, the reasons for which are due more to affective motivations than to scientific givens. And so, this scientist, cited by Ruyer, who, believing himself to be able to affirm an immutable order, adds this personal conclusion: "fortunately."

But modern science often criticizes itself and its own ontology. Also, the radical opposition, traced by Heidegger, between ontic science and ontological philosophy is valid only in the case of Cartesian science, which posits nature as an object spread out in front of us, and not in the case of a modern science, which places its own object and its relation to this object in question.

Certainly we do not ask science for a new, ready-made conception of Nature, but we find in it what [we need] to eliminate false conceptions of Nature. On the other hand, the received concepts of "Nature" give to our thinking if not orientations, then at least terms of reference. It is not possible to speak of Nature without speaking of cybernetics. Maybe this is only an ultra-finalism without mechanism but we cannot think Nature without taking account to ourselves that our idea of Nature is impregnated with artifice.

This is what is both exciting and exasperating in the scientist: he looks for a way to grasp the phenomenon, but he doesn't seek to understand it. In this way, for example in embryology, scientists glimpse a philosophy of life, but they forget what they discovered. Driesch, by separating the cells of the embryo, was able to realize a regeneration of a new embryo similar to the first. He then tried the counterproof: connecting two hydra together; the new hydra had at first twelve tentacles instead of six, then gradually there was a reduction of twelve tentacles to six, as if the type of species demanded this reduction. Etienne Wolf was able to show that monstrosity was an unfortunate functioning of this reduction and of this fusion of paired elements. The bifocal sketches of the eye are similarly reduced to just one sketch when the cortical center of vision is destroyed. There is a regulation by a global system. Everything happens as if what remains when we produce a section will resign itself to taking account, of the situation, to make one out of two, or two out of one, as if there were immanence of the whole to the parts. But the scientist concerns himself little with doing a "philosophy of the organism." Immediately after having discovered the phenomenon, he looks for



Excerpt from: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*

Emmanuel Levinas

The metaphysical event of transcendence—the welcome of the Other, hospitality—Desire and language—is not accomplished as love. But the transcendence of discourse is bound to love. We shall show how in love transcendence goes both further and less far than language.

Has love no other term than a person? The person here enjoys a privilege—the loving intention goes unto the Other, unto the friend, the child, the brother, the beloved, the parents. But a thing, an abstraction, a book can likewise be objects of love. It is that by an essential aspect love, which as transcendence goes unto the Other, throws us back this side of immanence itself: it designates a movement by which a being seeks that to which it was bound before even having taken the initiative of the search and despite the exteriority in which it finds it. The supreme adventure is also a predestination, a choice of what had not been chosen. Love as a relation with the Other can be reduced to this fundamental immanence, be divested of all transcendence, seek but a connatural being, a sister soul, present itself as incest. The myth Aristophanes tells in Plato's *Symposium*, in which love reunites the two halves of one sole being, interprets the adventure as a return to self. The enjoyment justifies this interpretation. It brings into relief the ambiguity of an event situated at the limit of immanence and transcendence. This desire—a movement ceaselessly cast forth, an interminable movement toward a future never future enough—is



Jan-matejko Astronomer Copernicus or Conversations with God, 1873

Science and Philosophy

The concern of the philosopher is to see; that of the scientist is to find a foothold. His thinking is directed by the concern not of seeing, but of intervening.

the conditions of it. So that regeneration is produced, the organizers must be in two pieces, and this organizer arranges the parts by a secretion organism. But this can only play the role of trigger. We cannot further understand then that the organism acts, and how it acts, any more than the localization of images in the context can make us understand perception. But the scientist, from the moment that he has his triggers, no longer poses the problem, he forgets that it was necessary to explain the action of the whole on the parts, and this because he realized the whole and that he can act on it.

The concern of the philosopher is to see; that of the scientist is to find a foothold. His thinking is directed by the concern not of seeing, but of intervening. He wants to escape getting bogged down in the philosophical way of looking at things. Does he also often work like a blind man by analogy? Did a solution work out for him? He tries it on something else, because that time it was successful. The scientist has the superstition of means that succeed. But in this attempt to get a firm grip on things, the scientist discloses more than he sees in fact. The philosopher must see behind the back of the physicist what the physicist himself does not see.

But if the philosopher wants to see and understand too quickly, he risks letting himself go over

to gnosis. The linguist who considers speech from the outside and relativizes it dissatisfies the philosopher who perceives that speech has man more than man has speech. But it is dangerous to leave all freedom to the philosopher. Too quickly trusting language, he would be the victim of the illusion of an unconditional treasure of absolute wisdom contained in language, and that we would possess only by practicing it. Hence the false etymologies of Heidegger, his gnosis. The absolute in language is not an immediate absolute. If language must be the soul of the Absolute, it must be absolute in the relative.

How thus not to be interested in science in order to know what Nature is? If Nature is an all-encompassing something we cannot think starting from concepts, let alone deductions, but we must, rather think it starting from experience, and in particular, experience in its most regulated form—that is, science.

And we can think it all the more starting from science as this, for fifty years, no longer tears along on the object, without being astonished at meeting it, but on the contrary it does not cease to concern itself with its *Sosein* ("being-thus"). "Why is the world what it is and not something else?" is a question that is relevant since the beginning of the century.

The Ambiguity of Love

Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other, of the beloved. But love also goes beyond the beloved.

broken and satisfied as the most egoist and cruelist of needs. It is as though the too great audacity of the loving transcendence were paid for by a throwback this side of need. But this *this side* itself, by the depths of the unavowable to which it leads, by the occult influence it exercises over all the powers of being, bears witness to an exceptional audacity. Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other, of the beloved. But love also goes beyond the beloved. This is why through the face filters the obscure light coming from beyond the face, from what *is not yet*, from a future never future enough more remote than the possible. An enjoyment of the transcendent almost



Bitter Grim - 1989, Mahmoud Farshchian

contradictory in its terms, love is stated with truth neither in erotic talk where it is interpreted as sensation nor in the spiritual language which elevates it to being a desire of the transcendent. The possibility of the Other appearing as an object of a need while retaining his alterity, or again the possibility of enjoying the Other, of placing oneself at the same time beneath and beyond discourse—this position with regard to the interlocutor which at the same time reaches him and goes beyond him this simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence, tangency of the avowable and the unavowable constitutes the originality of the erotic which in this sense, is *the equivocal* par excellence.

What is Sport?

Roland Barthes

What need have these men to attack? Why are men disturbed by this spectacle? Why are they totally committed to it? Why this useless combat? What is sport?



Spanish matador performs a pass on a bull during a bullfight.

Bullfighting is hardly a sport, yet it is perhaps the model and the limit of all sports: strict rules of combat, strength of the adversary, man's knowledge and courage; all our modern sports are in this spectacle from another age, heir of ancient religious sacrifices. But this theater is a false theater: real death occurs in it. The bull entering here will die; and it is because this death is inevitable that the bullfight is a tragedy. This tragedy will be performed in four acts, of which the epilogue is death.

First, passes of the cape: the torero must learn to know the bull—that is, to play with him: to provoke him, to avoid him, to entangle him deftly, in short to ensure his docility in fighting according to the rules.

Then the picadors: here they come, on horseback at the far end of the ring, riding along the barrier. Their function is to exhaust the bull, to block his charges in order to diminish his excess of violence over the torero.

Act Three. The banderillas.

A man alone, with no other weapon than a slender beribboned hook, will tease the bull: call out to him . . . stab him lightly . . . insouciantly slip away.

Here comes the final act. The bull is still the stronger, yet will certainly die. . . . The bullfight will tell men why man is best. First of all, because the man's courage is conscious: his courage is the consciousness of fear, freely accepted, freely over-come.

Man's second superiority is his knowledge. The bull does not know man; man knows the bull, anticipates his movements, their limits, and can lead his adversary to the site he has chosen, and if this site is dangerous, he knows it and has chosen it for this reason.

There is something else in the torero's style. What is style? Style makes a difficult action into a graceful gesture, introduces a rhythm into fatality. Style is to be courageous without disorder, to give necessity the appearance of freedom. Courage, knowledge, beauty, these are what man opposes to the strength of the animal, this is the human ordeal, of which the bull's death will be the prize.

Furthermore, what the crowd honors in the victor, tossing him flowers and gifts, which he graciously returns, is not man's victory over the animal, for the bull is always defeated; it is man's victory over ignorance, fear, necessity. Man has made his victory a spectacle, so that it might become the victory of all those watching him and recognizing themselves in him.

Parables & Jokes

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.

Ch'uan Teng Lu



In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by censors, he tells his friends: "Let's establish a code: if a letter you will get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false." After a month, his friends get the first letter, written in blue ink: "Everything is wonderful here: stores are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, movie theatres show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair — the only thing unavailable is red ink."

Slavoj Zizek

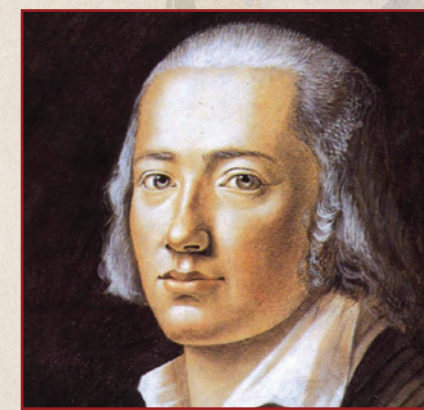
Eleusis

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

The philosopher Hegel dedicated this poem to his friend Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin in August 1796. The two had first met at the Tübingen Seminary in 1788, and had remained in contact. Rich in mystical symbolism, the poem expresses the importance of the ancient mystery schools to these eighteenth century philosophers and literary figures.



Portrait (1831) by Jakob Schlesinger

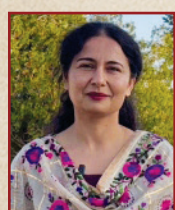


Friedrich Hölderlin (Pastell 1792)

Oh! If the doors of your sanctuary should crumble by themselves
O Ceres, you who reigned in Eleusis!
Drunk with enthusiasm,
I would shiver with your nearness,
I would understand your revelations,
I would interpret the lofty meaning of the images,
I would hear the hymns at the gods' banquets,
the lofty maxims of their counsel.
Even your hallways have ceased to echo, Goddess!
The circle of the gods has fled back to Olympus
from the consecrated altars;
fled from the tomb of profaned humanity,
the innocent genius who enchanted them here! —
The wisdom of your priests is silent, not one note of the sacred
initiations preserved for us—and in vain strive
the scholars, their curiosity greater than their love
of wisdom (the seekers possess this love and
they disdain you)—to master it they dig for words,
in which your lofty meaning might be engraved!
In vain! Only dust and ashes do they seize,

where your life returns no more for them.
And yet, even rotting and lifeless they congratulate themselves,
the eternally dead!—easily satisfied—in vain —no sign
remains of your celebration, no trace of an image.
For the son of the initiation the lofty doctrine was too full,
the profundity of the ineffable sentiment was too sacred,
for him to value the desiccated signs.
Now thought does not raise up the spirit,
sunken beyond time and space to purify infinity,
it forgets itself, and now once again its consciousness
is aroused. He who should want to speak about it with others,
would have to speak the language of angels, would have to
experience the poverty of words.
He is horrified of having thought so little of the sacred,
of having made so little of it, that speech seems to him a
sin, and though still alive, he closes his mouth.
That which the initiate prohibits himself, a sage
law also prohibits the poorest souls: to make known
what he had seen, heard, felt during the sacred night:
so that even the best part of his prayers
was not disturbed by the clamor of their disorder,

and the empty chattering did not dispose
him toward the sacred,
and this was not dragged in the mud, but was
entrusted to memory—so that it did not become
a plaything or the ware of some sophist,
who would have sold it like an obolus,
or the mantle of an eloquent hypocrite or even
the rod of a joyful youth, or become so empty
at the end, that only in the echo
of foreign tongues would it find its roots.
Your sons, Oh Goddess, miserly with your honor, did not
carry it through the streets and markets, but they cultivated it
in the breast's inner chambers.
And so you did not live on their lips.
Their life honored you. And you live still in their acts.
Even tonight, sacred divinity, I heard you.
Often the life of your children reveals you,
and I introduce you as the soul of their acts!
You are the lofty meaning, the true faith,
which, divine when all else crumbles, does not falter.



To The Harimandir

Harjot Kaur

Sitting in the moment's trench, in iota
Stretch the palanquin eyes of my ear
From a land of dulcet speechlessness
Sounds betray strings of His silken hair
Hearken, O me, to the maestro rhapsody!
The bugle blows, summoning the beckoner!

The army of ceaseless charioteers, laboring
Since eternity's pendulum's first chime
Since the first gong spoke to the first mallet
And the first desire ever throbbled in rhyme
Since the primal one chose His primal form
And stood facing the mirror the first time

The timeless beseeches the chronoful,
The architects and gardeners in deep moil
Behind the oblivions of curtains and hawsers
Being birthed is the facere by first seraphs' toil
And The Principal awaiting to raise the portiere on
The inception's forma, the primordial bride's soil

Splinters His selfhood into ever-burgeoning
When The Almoner, at Her sight bestows beatitude
Comes He, to nest in the bowers of life pervading
Revels the depth in hearts, and the oceans latitude
Throb pulses in some tunnels, and verdance enforms
Basks zeal in some nucleus, and redolences certitude

A gilded lotus; the insignia of His Feet
The masons invert reverently the Dome amarinthine
And the time's receptacle, yearning for its first Sun
Sprawls its mouth wide, the suturing of directions trine
Floating in the double - masted plein, the lotus;
Its golden aura apricates the anagalactic, in carmine

You the lotus, the scone under blanket of time
Encapsulating the Pargaas's first droplet
Enthroned at the center of a sphere, at whose fence
Eternity disseminates into twilight zone's outlet
And through your stalk suspended between two lands
The two pillars of matter-hood alight with billet

You the eternalist Sunrise, you the dawnful dusk
You will bid dernier farewell to the chronoful's recesses
Deep in bosoms of the cosmos is embedded
The chant of Aarti that your congregatio coalesces
Nuptial melodies, bride-songs, forever in chorus
Hailing The Groom DuoVictor, the auspex all auspices

In your chapel enchoirs the Harmonia Quadrivium
Comprise it, the leeward Himalyas' sages
The shepherd travelers of hoary sands -
Beseechers to genuflect an astron with homages;
The Alchemists from triangulated peninsulas,
And quietitude wearing and not, the knotted tussles

From the invisible throne where the Almoner sits
From behind the flails of many a diaphanous curtain
A crescentic sonus zephyr arises to enfold
The endeared mien of her evinced progninere with fain
And at the sliver of their confluence, your skyward eye
Gazes with transfix underlain



The Road Not Taken

Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.



Search

Hirak

Beneath the surface of disorder's guise,
Lies a labyrinth where my spirit flies.
In the wreckage of dreams and shattered schemes,
I excavate the echoes of silent screams.

A mosaic of flaws, intricately laid,
In the brokenness, my essence is displayed.
Each flaw, a chapter, etched in my core,
A narrative of battles fought, and more.

I navigate the chaos with introspective eyes,
Unravelling the knots where my true self lies.
In the disarray, I find a mirror clear,
Reflecting the rawness, the essence I revere.



Far, Far I see a Poet

Amandeep Singh

I know not of many spaces
Yet the spaces of time are distant
Far, far is my own sight and blurred I see a poetic vision
yet I long for a glimpse
that fills a heart with tender expression
Few are the songs that render a meaning
yet fewer are the ones with innocent feeling
Beyond these dry truths is a season of dreams
But why has the Koel on the tree stopped cuckooing
From many senses to many seasons
A poet pings a heart further than reason
These words may last more than ever
or rather conquest an age with its light feather
But why is my sight so cloudy, so weak
Far, far I see a poet waking on airy streets



To the Dusty Storm!

Manjot Kaur

Oh the dusty storm!
Take my news to my beloved!
The news of my loneliness!
The news of my agonies!
The news of this destitute soul!
That without his presence!
That without his physical presence!
I am all alone even in the clusters!
In the flocks!

Oh the dusty storm!
Tell him I am flowing freely in this graceful Seclusion!
Tell him there are realms and realms within!
Still untouched by anyone!
Not yet understood by anyone except you! Certainly not

yet encountered a majestic man like you!
Tell him not to worry about me!
As I relish these pangs!
These sweet pangs keep me in growth!

Oh the dusty storm!
Tell him these quivering leaves are like pointed arrows!
Leaving me tormented with every breath!
The melody of this afflicted season!
Not capable enough to resolve uncertainties of psyche!
Tell him I still rejoice this season!
Rejoice this season!
Embedded but still aloof!



Sunil Kapoor

Winner of Hunar Punjab Da (2020)
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Born in 1989 in the quaint town of Phillaur, I embarked on my artistic journey at Apeejay College of Fine Arts, Jalandhar, where I earned both my bachelor's and post-graduate degrees. Life, with its ever-changing nature, has brought about many transformations for me. My childhood was a tapestry of poverty and hardship, yet it was during these early years that I discovered my passion for drawing, even though my school lacked art classes. My post-graduation years were marked by a significant achievement: winning a national competition. After completing my B.Ed., I ventured into teaching art at various colleges and schools, where I conducted numerous experiments in sculpture and painting. Through my paintings, I channel my emotions and perceptions of my surroundings, using colors to bring my canvas to life. My work often captures the essence of social life, village life, and the enchanting beauty of nature. Among my notable sculptures, one proudly stands at the departure gate of Amritsar International Airport, a testament to my artistic journey.

Sunil Kapoor



Moksha



Creation of God



Waiting



Aghori



The Buddha



Arc



Blue Shadow



The village