

# Comparative Religions: the Cosmic Tension between Woman / Man

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The essay investigates the way that female and male symbolisms pervade cults – religions – in different times and different civilizations. The research discloses the most fundamental level of religious awareness in terms of the tension between two dimensions – female and male – prior to social norms and psychological explanations. The feminine dimension, expressed in terms of “beauty” and its force, has been extolled, suppressed, transcended, but always appearing in most unexpected guises as an irresistible “beauty”. The male figures, appearing as an effort to leave, transcend the overwhelming pull, are given in rituals of purification, separation from this world, creation of patriarchy and modern Ego-subject designed to reflect a monastery for “defending” the male from the bewitching female. The religious tension between these dimensions appears up to date in various guises: death of god, rebirth of the goddess, feminism and patriarchal nationalism and fundamentalisms.

**Keywords:** beauty, transcendence, patriarchy, dissolution, reflection, “rescendence”, purity, disruption, wisdom, sacrifice.

## Introduction

Many ways have been and will be offered to understand and judge what is beautiful, what are the images to which artists, literatures, advertisers, and beauty salons must aspire, and what is feminine and masculine. Young boys and girls strive to emulate the looks of their heroes and starlets, the poses and styles of attire, the diets, exercises, and modes of comportment required to be at least acceptable if not a pure embodiment of an image; middle aged men and women are offered various “rejuvenation” treatments, enhanced by the new priestly caste of expert psychologists and psychiatrists, empowered to hear the confessions of their clients about the sins

of eating a piece of cake, and all designed to makes them look “beautiful.” All of these efforts, the images posted, the descriptions proposed are variations of the founder of Western metaphysics – Plato. There must be, according to him, “beauty in itself” that allows us to recognize the various degrees and levels of advancement we have reached of embodying what is the ultimate – men with their Olympic bodies and women with the grace of Aphrodite. Even Socrates, according to Thomas Mann, was lured not by truth, but by the athletically sculpted bodies of young men, despite the lessons Socrates received from Diotima. Here we find eros confronted by libido, a confrontation that still haunts contemporary world.

Then there is the other story, accepted globally although devised by Western modern and postmodern rhetoric: all standards, including those of beauty, of what is male and female, are cultural, discursive constructs whose longevity hardly lasts till the next invented style, or an introduction of some image from an “exotic other.” In brief, standards are not only relative, but even relativity is relative. If you wish, ask any postmodern writer, even philosophy is no longer a search for such boring things as truth, but a competition to construct something more interesting than what is being offered as “the latest.” Would it not be beautiful if we all could become bugs per Deleuze? After all, Castaneda constructed an entire anthropological industry while sitting in a library, describing how an exotic tribe had a secret wisdom, enhanced by mushrooms and meditation that allowed one to become a bird. “Come and fly away with me.”

The shamans of such a little tribe would be television stars and great teachers – a crowning glory of postmodern philosophy, where even Kafka could not rival. This means then, that every constructed image is as interesting or boring as the next, and no one can tell anyone else which new standard to follow. In brief, despite the joyous proclamation that the subject is dead, there appears a more virulent psychological subject with numerous biological “desires” in the guise of “cultural unconscious.” This is to say a real modern scientized subject, valued for its subjection to and aspiration to reach the ever changing standards. What could one hope to add to this plethora of all possible possibilities of being beautiful?

A survey of depictions of the feminine beauty, of female and male characteristics, in the great texts of Western tradition reveals an absence of seriousness. This is not to say that such texts purport to treat the matter lightly; to the contrary, the galaxy of writings analyzing and dissecting this beauty is inordinate. And yet it is the analytical dissection that abolishes its presence and force. The analytic assault on it disarms and robs it of its terrible danger. Indeed, penetrating analyses may be the easiest way of covering over and disarming a given phenomenon. Yet precisely the preoccupation to cover and hide, to subject it to rules and prohibitions, is what reveals its presence (1). The most serious depictions, therefore, are an avoidance and hiding of the most troubling. This may be the case with the feminine beauty. Was there another beauty that she reflected so overpowering, so terrible, that it had to be hidden, purified, and subdued to the extreme? (2)

Indeed, this essay contends that Western philosophy, from Plato through Kant, has been a way of depicting the feminine beauty not only one-sidedly, but also in ways that attempted to insure its timidity and “purity.” Could philosophy, as a matter of its strive to transcend the fleeting, the material, the phenomenal, and the erotic, ever concern itself seriously with the feminine beauty?

Given this question, feminine beauty can hardly be grasped without a set of complex cultural relationships. The latter will be seen as reflective constituents that manifest the very force of, and the efforts to hide, her terrible beauty. The notion of

reflection will have to mesh more closely with the ways that it appears in cultures and not as it is constructed by a presumed external and unpolluted posture. The latter may be a culturally available mode designed either to cover over or to escape from the terrible beauty. The articulation of the terrible beauty in the context of cultural reflectivity, calls for the limitations of our claims and prejudgments that locate reflection in the subject. No doubt this is valid for the modern West's depiction of the subject. But not all traditions, and indeed not all periods within a specific tradition, maintain this conception. The task of this essay is to decipher major modes of reflection and the gender with which they are usually associated. The association will not be taken in any ontological sense, i.e. the gender will not be regarded as some natural source, causing a specific mode of reflection, and thus a designation of what is feminine beauty.

Cultural studies reveal that reflection, even modern Western type, assumes one event or activity as either supervening over or subtending-pervading other events. This means that such events are articulated in diverse ways and need not be anthropomorphic. If there are modes of reflection which reveal human shape, they will not be given any preeminence. We shall exclude metaphysical questions whether cultural modes of reflection are instituted consciously-deliberately or are founded on some adduced theories of psychophysiological compulsion (3). The reason for the exclusion of such considerations is dictated by methodological requirements of strict adherence to cultural phenomena.

The emphasis on such adherence is called for to point out that even explanations of reflection might be an aspect of a socio-culturally accepted mode of reflection, having no necessary universality. It would be theoretically and methodologically misleading if this essay took for granted uncritically the symbolic conceptions as if they were "trans-cultural." They too are a part of a given culture and must be located within cultural parameters. Taking the claims of some of the more radical turns of text analyses, such as those of the "deconstructionists," it becomes essential to show that even such radicalism has its cultural location. This placing of phenomena (including texts) as functions of a field, is one of the fundamental methodological principles employed both by phenomenology and hermeneutics. The difference between the two is that the former employs this methodological prerequisite explicitly while the latter implicitly. Within the context of this essay, even deconstructionism constitutes a specific mode of reflection in a specific cultural field.

### **Signs of reflective submersion**

The most encompassing mode of this reflection consists of the signs of "return to the origin." The return has a specific requirement: dissolution of the separated individual into life, the original maternal energy. As origin, she is the reflective dimension which does not function signifiatively as would a concept or an object, but exercises a magnetic pull, an all pervasive attraction against whose temptations the individual must guard. The pull to

dissolution is commonly manifested by the feminine; as the queen of heavens and earth, she cannot be resisted. Most desired, she is also the most terrible. The hetare, loved and despised for her attraction, was enshrined; Samiramis, Kandake, Dido, Kleopatra, Verma, are manifestations of life giving forces. Her beauty is no longer one of appearance. The latter is a mere artifice of allurements, a momentary mask that some cultures would require either to milden or intensify the presence of her force. The latter is the very beauty of life giving and renewing, and may appear as procreative drive and erotic attraction.

All that she produced, nonetheless, she threatens to engulf, take back, devour and dissolve. All that attractive beauty, the promise of life and joy, is coupled with the terrible submersion. She is the cradle, the womb, and origin of all the formations and transformations – a sustenance. She carries the lust to birth, the fruitfulness, and the dark mystery which never yields itself to light (4). This mystery pervades the sacral fruitfulness, and the calls to song and rite, orgy and celebration. Whenever we attempt to decipher the ORIGIN, we encounter depths into which we are inextricably drawn. Here we meet the cults of creation and not salvation. Ancient Dionysian rites call for no salvation and no salvific oil. The signs are those of theatrics, superfluity, metaphor, disregard to norm, but there are no signs of distance, appeal, supplication, and non-participation. It is a pantheism in which all growth is a force of reverie. Eros is here divine and all divinities are erotic, with all their fatal attractions. In a fundamental sense, her fruitfulness as all life was and

had to be intertwined with sacrality, and her beauty had to be celebrated in awe and reverence. Every act of fruition had to be of cosmic significance, a nexus with the powers of fruition of the world. Through the maternal, the human is an extension, prolongation and an enhancement of the vital forces; the exchange of powers between the human and the cosmic events is taken for granted. Thus the acts of eros and libido are not yet erotic or sexual in the modern sense, but participate in a cosmic vivifying. Here the sexual act is a self-dissolving sacrifice, designed to empower life and not to exhibit ascetic self-denial.

The reflectivity that is here present is one of rescendance, a pull of dissolution, and not of transcendence that promises an escape from the dangers of the terrible beauty. One's sexuality here is not destined to make one separate, satisfied, singular, in the exclusivity of one's singular partner, but is constituted by the submergence in the vital-living; this reflection yields no distance. This is how the signs of sexual self-emulation should be read, i.e. the orgiastic cults in which the priests or seeks sacrifice their phallus. The loss is not an ascetic surrender for achieving transcending reflection, but is a vivification of the origin which pervades all fruitfulness. The rescending reflection is an identification with the origin into which one merges. For example, the great festival of Astarte in Hieropolis, reveals rows of males castrating themselves in a wild reverie in honor of the goddess; the priests of Cybele did the same (5). And these were not ascetic performances where one felt guilty, where one had some kind of VULVA ENVY in face

of the goddess of fertility. They were inner reflections of the vital-maternal attraction: a dissolution of any singular function was a convergence into, and a spread of strength across all living process.

What is peculiar about these and similar depictions is that the sacral was not only erotic, but more fundamentally, vital and anti-singular. Even the erotic was not privatized, attributed to a singular personality. The orgiastic reverie is, after all, a choiceless intermixture, an anonymity of personalities, enacting at random – prepersonal but not problematic. There is no search for individuality or individual salvation. The individual is only a reflective mode which, in its orgiastic engagement, comprises away of communicating without a distance, of being one with. Thus a sin in the reverie is the *askesis*, the loyalty to one person, the lack of vitality and fruitfulness. The holy appears as the *urwhore*, rejected by Lutherine asceticism without understanding this phenomenon. The rule of this reflection is a non-possessive call for self-abandonment: surrender yourselves to one another, with as many as possible, as often as possible. Woman should not belong to one and dry up; eroticism, here, is not love or libido, but a break-down of limits of singularization and exclusivity. Every woman is hetaric and so is every man, when he serves sacral life, the power of *shakti*. Her beauty is bewitching and pervaded with the deepest wisdom. The bewitching beauty which cannot be resisted and into which the singular dissolves, is not feared, not yet terrible, but most welcome and desired. Only when the individuating consciousness appears, cloaked in mascu-

line signs, that this beauty becomes both irresistible and terrible.

The dissolution of personal individuation is visible in the Persian celebration of *Anaitis* where for five days all civic services and duties are suspended and where each person is free to be with any person without restrictions. During the nocturnal tumult each woman is *Anaitis* and every man is her servant. At the end of the festival man is sacrificed symbolically; it is not this person that is sacrificed, but his power of fruition that is relevant here. There were races between naked men and women, and when one caught the other, the act of consummation in honor of the divinity was immediate. Customs such as giving up of virginity to the entire public and not to one person reflect the vital participation and inner reflection of life. It could be said with justification that at this depth marriage, which singularizes, is against the vital sacrality.

In numerous places the bride had to atone for marriage by sleeping with every guest before she could consummate her marriage with the bridegroom. This reflective turn is the source of hetarism, where the maidens at the temples were signs of dissolution of all rules, individuality, and inhibition. Indeed, after years of temple service, they were sought as brides by kings and princes; they were regarded as most worthy. Even daughters of kings vied to be part of hetarism. Their beauty appears precisely with the erotic power, reflecting an exuberant turn of the singular toward a dissolution into the all-pervasive pulse of mother life (6).

The striving toward the release from selfhood is reflected in melting reverie, and

various functions are regarded as means for the attainment of dissolution: wine, dance, song. It is no accident that Dionysos is a divinity of wine, eroticism, and orgiastic reverie. The excitement brought about by wine, dance, has a disruptive effect, leading to dissolution. All such means are reflective upon the region of vitality. The characteristic state in this sacrality is an intoxication, a loss of senses and a shifting of consciousness away from self awareness. In the grip of ekstasis the word rises to chant and the step to dance.

The eros of Dionysos originates with dance, music, and reverie, and has an accepted reflective power of dissolution of personality, and a breakdown of cohesion. At the erotic level, every singular act, every effort to maintain an individuality, flows, breaks up and leads on, i.e. becomes diacritical without a hold; but such erotic acts are not yet sufficient to reflect the hold of the vital, the pre-erotic, which does not break up into a debris of scattered and disconnected wallowings, but inevitably manifests a presence of positivity, of vitality that dissolves singularity. The very movement of dissolution is the terrible, reflecting, at the same time an inescapable beauty and power of attraction, an inability to assume an individuated consciousness. At this vital reflective juncture one finds a total positivity, a persistence, a sacral origination, a presence, an insistence (7).

Although the postmodern tradition uses eroticism as signs of differentiation and deconstruction, it fails to grasp eroticism as a reflection upon a background of positivity without distance. This rescending reflection opens eroticism not as frustra-

tion, sublimation, lack of fulfillment, a cry signifying negativity as a difference from the signified; rather it reflects a presence of positivity where fulfillment is not a calculated gratification of singular desires to be savored and verbalized, but a yielding to a pull pervading the erotic. Such calculations would be a transcending reflection that opens a moment of negativity and an effort to deconstruct the feminine erotic. Yet such an effort is a constant failure in face of the pull of vital positivity. One may well suspect that the deconstructive practice is a last effort by patriarchy to purify the terrible beauty of the maternal domain. It is this transcending reflection that allows one to posit eroticism as a force of differentiation in a post modern West (8).

The rescending reflection derails the transcending movement of negativity through music, rhythm, dance, eliciting the madness of pulsating powers. There is pervasive evidence suggesting that Indian music, appearing to Western ear as monotonous, is in fact *monotonic* and manifests rescending reflection, showing a MONISM of immersion, melting and depersonalizing. Essentially speaking, erotic reflectivity, sacral ritual, musicality, intoxication, show the melting presence of positivity and vitality. Shamanism is perhaps one of the more salient modes of this reflective intimacy with the secrets of the origin. At times it is expressed in terms of the classical Greek meaning of POIESIS as an active production but not as a leisurely occupation (9).

Poiesis includes various activities, specifically those of feminine shamanism. The feminine is more potent in healing, in

mastering natural forces, in visions and visionary advice to the community. These functions are not simply medical but cathartic and sacral. Even if the practices of the seers parallel medical magic, they are much more. The medicine is protective. The female human is not only a goddess of battle, but also protects the hero in the future by a forward vision. Thus heroic and shamanic literatures cannot be separated in any strict sense. Without the protectress, he cannot return to life. Facing nether enemies, evil spirits, reflecting powers pervading singular life, the hero depends on her shamanic reflectivity intimately familiar with the moods of such powers. They are both vital and erotic, and cannot be conquered from outside. But she knows how to establish working agreements with them. She senses the environment to be more than what appears directly and reflects this more. She recognizes that there are forces which are beyond human ken, yet she also senses that these forces are not just out there but also pulsate through the ALL. These forces are sensed to be intimately feminine and dangerous. The feminine is seen to be closer and more attuned to such forces, indeed, a disguised manifestation of them (10).

The name *shaman* stems from Sanskrit *shamana*, a non-Brahmanic ascetic. This immediately splits into a "house-holder" (*grihasta*) and homeless wanderer (*sramana*) (11).

Homelessness as a condition for salvation later became a Buddhist canon. Despite this, it has been shown that in all shamanism the feminine is primordial. Indeed, in places such as Siberia, there is

a view that woman is a shaman by nature and hardly needs any instruction. This is to say, woman is much more rooted in the ARCHE. The feminine is a sign of periodicity and the cosmological cycles; being a source of rebirth through the endurance of pain and in face of death, she reflects intimately the silent presence of the origin and can protect all with her healing presence. Matram, matrix, materia, the source, are personified by the feminine, and her vital and erotic beauty.

Her other side is the blood lust, the gruesome rituals and demands for heads, for torn flesh and fierce dissolution. It can be called "death mask" in which an important female demands to be adorned by someone's head. In Iban the fest of the war god is postponed (Singalang Burong) because his daughter demands to be adorned with a head for the fest.

The head then is "honored" in numerous rituals; the females dance around the head and "honor" the fallen "hero," demanding more heads. This phenomenon appears in numerous guises and places. The Dionysian ladies were not too averse in their blood lust and head hunt. In India, Nepal, Tibet and even South East Asia, the divinities are adorned with death heads. Thus shamanism reflects not only the dissolution into the vitality of strength, into the enduring presence, but also into the vitality of the presence of the terrible.

Indian goddesses, such as Ilbis Kysa, who were also initiatrixes, are ambiguous. They dance not only on the defeated demons, but also on the defeated husbands. Even love is regarded as a love battle in adance which is an intricate play of *maya*. Here the great

kali, the *mahakali*, has created the world in a love-play and thus is world-player, *lalita*. The *mahakali* is protectress-destructress in one; she rules over time, *kala*, specifically over the destructive period of time, *kali-yuga*. She is the power of *maya* and ties all to her desires. Here one finds the extensively used metaphor of spinning and weaving of destinies of life and death (12).

The above suggested modes of reflection upon the vital and its constant presence, is given in forms of poetics, encompassing all rituals, songs, musicality and sayings. Thus the lady shamans are themselves songstresses or are accompanied by a songstress whose enchanting songs (canto, cantado, carmen, charmer, charm) make visible and audible the vital intricacies in a direct sense of living through. Here we find the great vulva, as a sage (sayer and seer) who can call up the spirits with *know ye more?* and then announces this knowledge. The accompanying song is not yet quite poetry, nor is it literature, but, as part of the shamanic rite, it is a way of reflecting the origin and drawing the participants into its intimacy by at least a minimal charm, carmen (13). The song is a reflection which at the same time acts upon the reflected as a vital force, as an inescapable immediacy whose terrible beauty one cannot escape. One needs only to recall Odysseus.

The intimacy is reflected by poetic sayings; the latter are depictions of the *way* from within the intricacies of the vital, the origin. The *way* metaphor is one of the most pervasive means of rescinding reflection. The great songstresses, the feminine sages, know the appropriate sayings which reveal the way (14),

Such sayings are not descriptions of directions, but encompass every activity, attitude, in every situation and in face of anything. Indeed, the source of poesis and the sayings is feminine. The latter knows the way and in one manner or another is present as a guide. Every great hero has his guiding and cunning counterpart, exemplified by Odysseus and Athene, Tristan and Isolde, among others. The greatest protection is needed to return on the way home to the pulsating security of the living. The way is a mode of reflection most suited for deciphering the interconnections between the origin and the female shaman, and how she assumes the function of a protectress.

But the protectress must know the word of the way, and the word does not work in isolation; it only works in the context of shamanic poesis. The latter is a unity of rhythm and melos, a sing-song recitation with its own vital power. The sound, the toning, is regarded to be the origin of the universe. Thus Kali, as the great mother - *mahashakti*, dressed only by space, carries a wreath of death masks around her neck which are “toning signs.” In another way the AUM, as the first tone, is the creative toning of the cosmos. Indeed, this kind of musical toning is understood all the way to Tristan and Isolde; her siren like musicality is disruptive, yet her unity with Tristan is *consonance* which turns to be *morality*. Even such a “rationalist” as Boethius still spoke of morality as musical, requiring musical practice. *Kali* extends to *Sarasvati* and the latter is a counterpart of *Sophia*. She is prior to all creation. Her creative instrument is the *vina*, able to resound all tones (*sabda*). Her name also means a river

as the streaming of song. She is the wisdom and learning and knows the flow of words.

The toning rhythm is the way of the attractive and terrible beauty, possessing erotic allurements and being witching dis-solvement.

There is yet another form of reflexivity in shamanism: the ability of transforming into other life forms. At times the form of transformation is theatrical, i.e. masked dances, mimicry, and stylized comportment, and at times it is regarded as taking place in the life of the shaman; she takes flight as a bird, or attacks as a tigress. What occurs here is a reflection of the vital upon itself: every event is vitally interconnected in the origin to such an extent that it reflects all other events, and can become all other events (15).

The source, the mother, can yield every form and yet is not exhausted by any of them. Of course to be drawn into the origin, the protecting and encompassing pulse, is to be abolished, and only then invincible. Behind one is the mother, the protectress. Even metaphysicians such as Schopenhauer knew this: the dissolution of the will makes me invincible.

The invincibility does not rest with an application of right rules on a specific event in order to master it, but belongs to a precise ritual. In case of disease, the attack is not frontal but "insinuating." The mastery requires entry into and complicity with the event, becoming the event, by doing what it does and out doing it in accordance with its own ways. This again requires poesis in its basic ritualistic and dancing way. Such a way is a reflection on the "hidden will" which is recounted not

in choices but in melodies and dances. The history of such a will should be written not along choices, ends-means, but in terms of excitements, cunning, insinuation, entrapment, tensions, charms, music, implorings, explosivity, and indeed the "material" side, the "maternal" substance.

Modern psychology, apart from a few daring souls such as Nietzsche and Dostoevski, has covered over this history of the will, and has made it into a prose, into an ascetic transcendence of the force of life. Yet the ritualistic, self-dissolving and cathartic will, is also willing and forming. This is the reflective immediacy prior to prose. The latter is a mere shadow of the alluring beauty of the former.

Vital power comes from her, and thus she is superior to him; she courts him, and stands next to him in battle. This cannot be regarded as physical power, but as *shakti*, as intimate power which insinuates and defeats by an inner reflection. In erotic images, this power takes two paths: the banning, taboo, the ascetic, and the holiday demand of erotic encounter and surrender. In Burma, Nat-Shamanism has become an outlet against the weight of Buddhist asceticism. The *Nats* and their female shamans are seen as having a wild marriage without any respect for the rules of proper marriage. They not only teach the young to be erotic, but also the art of war. Thus the she-shaman is *Initiatrice* of the young and assumes highest status as *Sophia*, as *Prajnaparamita* or *Tara*. Even Parmenides, guided by the sun maiden, is moving toward the goddess to receive instruction about truth and deception. One should be cognizant that Parmenides is a *mystes* and is engaged

in a shamanic journey. His *Proomion* as poesis, is a journey within shamanic tradition. Thus his *ennoia* – *thought-knowledge* – is also *pronoia*, a pre-vision; both originate in shamanic experience. In Hebrew there is *Chokma*; she is there by his side before the world and during its creation. Without these ladies the world would not be what it is. Since the Greek, Buddhistic, Hebraic, and other wisdom ladies are not dry twigs of impotent logic, their wisdom is an adventure, a psycho-physiological trip from which one does not return unshorn, lured by its enticements and intensities, and fearful of its dangers. One must learn that wisdom and courage are in love with one another. This *Sophia* motif is expressed in the Mahayana Buddhism; it is related to cosmology where Buddha is the father and *prajnaparamita* the mother; yet it is she who is the “complete wisdom” and is depicted both grammatically and pictorially in feminine gender (16). This is *shaktistic gnosis*. The male must open up to the feminine without restrictions in order to allow the abolition of the transcending and impotent reflection, and become pervaded by the broad, patience, vitality, and healing of the feminine. Her beauty is not some pious look, an image of innocence, but a self-rejuvenating and indefatigable vitality.

The protectress and the initiatrix have their counterpart in their blood lusting carnage. Thus, the shamans are more feared than loved. They are simultaneously foreboding, intriguing and dangerous: what is the hottest fire? The sense of a woman between two men. In a *Tantric* text there pervades a question: which man knows the heart of a woman? The answer: Only

Shiva knows the heart of a yogin; but who, after all is Shiva? The blood lust appears in such figures as *Ilbis* among the *Jakuts*. *Ilbis* means bewitchment, magic, deceit, lust to kill, in brief, “carnage.” Most figures depicted in shamanic literature capable of initiating maladies are feminine. The unholy and its harbingers are her signs. Yet peculiarly, it is the feminine that can counteract this carnage. She shaman is a revenge for suppression during her life time. The revenge is understandable in light of the suppression of matriarchat by patriarchy and its hierarchy.

The misdeeds of *Medea* are not just her doing; *Jason* is equally guilty. Thus she can drive one to madness and revenge, but can also neutralize such drives and bring about peace. In turn, the blood lust can be transferred to the male, leading to wars and carnage. This reflective rescendance wrecks havoc with the male effort at reflective transcendence. Among numerous examples would be the efforts of *Shiva* to perform *tapas*, to transcend and detach from the “terrestrial enticements” only to find *Kama*, as the force that troubles him and finally he has to submit to life and return to the feminine embrace.

The female shamans are regarded as young and unwilting, as vital and irresistible, yet revengful. Thus the very efforts to abolish them were drastic, as witnessed in medieval Christianity. But even burning could not abolish their vitality and return forrevenge (17).

What is equally interesting is that even wars are the enticements of the feminine. The magnetic *Helena*, *Gulliveig*, *Mayana*, are the reasons for war. Here the feminine

is idealized as holy, bright, adored, and yet she causes and sanctions war. We read in Sophocles that *Aphrodite* is not only *Kypris*, but among many other names she is an incessant power and strife without end, maddening storm, *Lyssa Manias*, and forceful demand. She is also *Hades*. More fearsome is *Dojoji*, appearing in a *Noh play*. She is pursuing nymphomaniacally a Buddhist monk who runs and hides under a sacred bell. The bell, as a sign of pure manly teaching, should protect him. Yet the bell sinks on top of him and she, turning into a python, coils around it and melts it with her heat cooking the monk.

Obviously there is a continuous struggle between reflection of rescendance and transcendence. The rescendent reflection is one that is concerned with the immersion, surrender to the “logic” of life with all of its storms and vicissitudes, a beauty that is equally soothing-inviting, and terrifying-dissolving. This reflectivity appears in figures which do not teach a logic of analysis but a logic of participatory experience with nothing guaranteed except being sullied by life. The Buddhists and the Hindus have fascinating and graphic depictions of this domain, with all of its entrapments, rewards and punishments. The signs of feminine beauty point to such a life.

### **Transcending reflection**

One of the first signs of this reflection is a specific kind of sacrifice distinguishable from the fructifying sacrifice. The transcending sacrifice has at least two moments: placation, and surrender of something to which one is extremely at-

tached. Such forms comprise a movement away from dissolution and submersion in the immediacy of life. In placation one does not aim at atonement for guilt; rather it is powerlessness in face of some inescapable force, some attraction. Here taboo is beyond good and evil, yet is at the same time an all pervasive dimension which reflects across everything that is to be avoided. Sacrifice, here, is away of projecting a defense against being submerged, drawn in and incorporated by the irresistible beauty. In some cases this form of sacrifice can turn to radical virulence and call for sacrifice of those who manifest this beauty, although the latter will be marked as demonic, decadent, and evil. They must be purified by diverse means (18). The purifications are signs of the efforts to enhance and maintain transcending reflection bent on providing away of detaching from the allurements of the erotic and vital beauty and its threats. Such efforts appear mainly in prophetic and patristic mythologies. This may include sacral secularism such as Marxism, technocratisms, historicisms, all proclaiming that the immediacy of living must be sacrificed for some vision of the future, of the good, the true, and valuable.

Transcending immediacy reflects various facets, including the inadequacy of the world, the society, their fallen state, their unholiness and darkness, the need to violate, hide them and to sacrifice them for the sake of the transcending movement. Such rituals reveal the fascination, the attachment to the dissolution by the rescendance. To establish edicts, laws, prohibitions, and rules, is to establish an extremely strong attachment to, and recognition of, what

one attempts to transcend. Every detail of the rescending danger is reflected in the laws and prohibitions. The laws offer an opposite movement to the “ways” which comprise the reflective understanding of the shamanic domain. Thus, she allows transcendence insofar as there is a way back to life. The transcending reflection reveals an escape from the dimension of dissolution, reflects all the traps by positing prohibitions and edicts. The prohibitions reflect what is there as dangerous and inaccessible.

Thus, the escape demands, as mentioned above, the sacrifice of the very traps which are constantly enticing. The violent mortifications of the flesh of mid-eastern religions and their eastern orthodox extensions, are few examples of this movement. It seems that this form is one of reflective immediacy; the law, the prohibition, is written in the flesh, is functioning its immediacy of excising the enticements. A peculiar limit is imposed on this reflective immediacy: only one side of dissolving rituals is allowed: the painful. While in such rituals both pain and pleasure, joy and suffering are intermingled at an ultimate level of intensity and fire, in the transcending edicts only the pain of excising should be appreciated (19).

Here the joy is one of releasement from, and in face of obedience to the law.

A milder form of transcendence is an ascetic sacrifice. In this form the human does not give what he has or has power over, but rather foregoes, negates possessions, desires, passions which he has or might want to have. Here one encounters fasting and celibacy, monasticism and isolation. Here arise various tensions between the being which transcends the sensuous

life and calls for ascetic practice, and the dimension which contains the plenum of solicitations to be surrendered. What seems to be the logic of this tension pervades various reversals of a precarious balance which can topple at any moment. The attractions which one must surrender, will have to be designated negatively as “evil, low, hateful.” The transcendent being, as a reflective relief, will then be regarded as “lovable, good, high,” and at the same time revelatory of the hateful negativity of the dissolving domain of maternal bewitchment.

This designation can become virulent and destructive of the solicitous domain in order to become totally free from it. It can so endanger the being of reflective transcendence turning it into an object of hate and deprecation for demanding sacrifices and asceticism. Thus one lives an ambiguity. She, the erotic fiend, wants to devour me, to dissolve my uprightness, my self; she must be resisted, and any giving in, a most desirable way out, becomes attached to an ambivalence: wanting and rejecting, and hating the very attraction and simultaneously the very need of rejection of both, the rescendance and transcendence. It is pain, yet in the transcendence of it, it is a sweet pain of revenge, a sacrifice which is worthy because it is thought that in the denial of the attraction, the other is punished, pained and is either moved to assume reflective transcendence upon her own degradation, or must be destroyed. She will be seen and will have to see herself as ugly and sinful. This is the juncture at which morality emerges, teaching only the feminine the virtues and prohibitions which man has already inscribed in his flesh and has shown

his worth. Now, she must become beautiful and pure in terms of his designation.

One such inscription afflicting the feminine is a settled marriage, a monogamy in which she is coded with prohibitions for herself and for others. This had two reflective moments: first, a rejection of the all pervasive dissolution, the earthy pull, and second, its restraint, limitation, and transcendence. This comprises a shift leading to a reversal of reflection. What once reflected reverence, reverie, holiness, and wholesome beauty, now is being restricted and sacrificed, not as something that would enhance fruitfulness but as something that is lower. Patriarchy is this limiting and lowering. The maternal-feminine origin is no longer celebrated, and her wisdom is deflected by a transcending reflection: the once terrible beauty of hetare becomes an ugly, polluting prostitute, selling herself in order to obtain a dowry.

This shift is expressed in mythologies where the change is occurring away from the stress on origin and toward an emphasis on salvation. Salvific transcendence is the reflective moment which not only rejects, but also demonizes the origin, the maternal and the vital. The she-fiend holds him down, back, entrapped in a sway of dissolution, playful reverie without a name. Her terrible beauty is demonized. Was it not a preacher, James Bakker, who proclaimed that the lady entrapped him by being a servant of the demonic? The ascetic salvation is a movement from mythos to logos, from immersion in the cosmic sway to the metaphysical logocentrism of univocity, restriction and limitation.

Contemplation, as one mode of reflection, practiced by such mythological figures

as Shiva, is most revealing. In masculine depiction, Shiva is striving to liberate himself by transcending the immersion in the maternal dissolution. The guiding sign-posts along the way of this move are *detachment, non-participation, purity and science*. Yet one must recognize that the sign-posts signify two structures: first, a singularization, centering on some univocal signs such as soul, mind, and spirit, all being substantial yet pure, untainted by the dissolving flesh. Second, a convergence with, metaphysically speaking, purity itself, pure light, pure bliss, and purity that goes beyond such descriptions. One encounters here the entire Platonic tradition of pure beauty and all the purification means that sways through monasticism and pure scientific rationality. The dissolving eros, the beauty of the sensuous, the vital are mastered, subdued and dismissed. And yet it returns to reflect the pallor of the transcending purity in the rituals of rebirth, in the deadly sacrifices for salvation, salvific oil, in rites of rejuvenation, in the rising from the dead, and the ejection from the earth's womb.

In some cases, the salvific reflection requires degradation. The ejected son is not what gives rebirth; the earth, the dark tomb, allows him to emerge into the light. And he is a promise of a transcending detachment of the soul from the taints of the earth. Here, in the cases of such sons as Jesus, Gilgamesh, and others, the very birth is ascetic, untainted by the soil of passion; the father did not even touch the mother. It may be said in all fairness that he was equally afraid to be drawn into the way of dissolution, the loss of the transcending

askesis? And the son? He too is pure and lives ascetically. Indeed, he is the sign of transcending reflection and demands askesis of everyone. The son is not the one who gives rebirth, lends attractiveness and erotic reverie. Reborn by ejection, by extraction from mother earth, he is a transcending reflection, destined for a world of askesis. This salvific move abandons the rescending reflectivity to its nether demons of KAMA, EROS, PASSION, AND LIBIDO. All that is voluptuous, passionate, tempted and tempting, wild, luscious and growing, all that is entangled is signified with a stigma of foreboding and forbidding.

The patristic-prophetic conceptions, reflecting upon the reverie of life a salvific release, were equally signs of conquest of the feminine by the masculine. The pagans, such as the Greeks, mixed the two reflectivities for a long time. What is of note is an appearance of signs of an increasing restriction of the maternal principle. Heterism is being replaced by the cult of marriage: Demeter slowly turns into a goddess directing the feminine eros along the paths of marriage. Indeed, her cult turns into a state holiday where married women must “abstain” for ninedays. This asceticism is foreign to the mother cults. Coextensive with such restrictions one discovers the disruption of Dionysian reveries by orphic mysteries where the birth from corporeity is degraded, where the soul is divine and merely imprisoned in the body. The body is a “grave” of the soul and the latter can be “liberated” from the prison only through askesis. It has been documented that the Orphic tradition extends its history all the way to romanticism, revealing the two

moments of reflectivity in a constant tension (20).

Be that as it may, there emerges a striving to reflect upon and transcend the reverie, the erotic corporeity. The creative origin is being shifted toward salvific purity. The cultic orgiastism is transformed from an erotic dissolution into a sort of decadent pastime of a roman hero. Regarding the erotic reverie he is biologically cynical. By transcendent reflection, yielding pure episteme and practical sophistication, we know how things are and how they work. Although the female might show up at spring-easter rites, Mary is already regarded as a “natural creature,” mortal and fallible. Christostomus was no longer held back from calling her “despicable as all women,” while Epiphanius and Nestor are firmly set against any mother-Mary cult. In this context, the verdict of Luther against some of the papal rites is completely understandable. How can one make Mary divine: a most gruesome superstition. Calvin concurred. Here is a turn to Paulinism and prophetic-salvific reflectivity of transcendence. The erotic flesh is a dirty, although biologically unavoidable duty. Here all reverie was replaced by barren walls and a sternmien. Punishment without warmth, boring and dull, ascetic, extending the medieval monasticism across entire populations. This is the consequence of the transcending reflection inits salvific form, denigrating everything in face of a presumed “higher unity.” This salvific transcendence has two forms, one religious, and the other secular. Both seem to converge in the effort to extricate from the Origin, the source, the material and to attain a salvation in a future “higher state.”

### Interreflectivity

Supplication is a religious conception while melting into unity is an erotic one. This eroticism appears in religion when one wants to melt either into an origin or into a transcendent unity. Conversely, in order to achieve a distance, and retain an identity, in face of the object of attraction, one engages in supplication which elevates the desired entity and lowers the one who is the supplicant. This is a dual reflectivity involving both the transcending and the rescending movements. The love of the supplicant is attended by an ambiguity which mixes love and fear, and even hate, attraction and rejection. It might take on strong ascetic form which, while attracted, wants distance in order to avoid being engulfed in the “flames.”

The eroticism of supplication in the West appears in a very intense form in the twelfth century. As far as can be determined it emerged at the papal palace of Avignon. It spread throughout Europe leading to the mannerisms of gallantry and reached its banal state in Rococo. In historical annals this cultural form of mixed reflection was designated as *Mine* (courtly love). Seen for so long with disgust, the feminine suddenly is elevated to become an object of supplication, and indeed to such an extent that the male saw his value as stemming only from this elevated being. She became a goddess after centuries of being a demon, a disruptress. In their love lyrics men addressed their “beloved” in terms which regarded the male as a slave and vassal of a lady. Even emperors and kings were no exception. This seems to be a reflective

compensation, always requiring the origin from which transcending reflection would acquire its impetus.

But what an origin? What form did it assume in order to be accepted? She is not the force, the dissolving creatrix, reverie and rebirth of life. She is untouchable. Some examples can be offered. Jaufré, an aristocrat, in love with a baroness of Tripoli, has in fact never seen her. This is regarded the “true love” of detachment, where the loved is loved more the more she is removed from the lover. Thus the priest Andreas wrote about this kind of love by differentiating between *amor* and *drudaria*, and thus detached the “genuine love” from the “love of melting.” One does not love if one is shaken by passion (21).

In the *leys d'amors*, (laws of love), stemming from the 14th century, it is most inappropriate for the supplicant to ask for a kiss from his lady. After all, a kiss requires an embrace, and the latter is erotic, leading not only to the rescending reflectivity, but also to the “loss of genuine love.” As Peirol suggests at that time, one should doubt that in such an embrace the lover still loves genuinely. Of course marriage too must be rejected as a place of love. There cannot be genuine love between marital partners.

As Fauriel points out, if a man were to behave toward his wife like a knight toward his lady, he would be acting counter to marriage. This is to say marriage was not rejected because one advocated free love, but because of the rejection of the love of immediacy and unity. The greater the distance, the greater is her pure and elevated beauty. The terrible beauty is made impotent. In fact the *MINE* love was usually a

love of some lady who was married, thus enhancing the maintenance of the distance required of dual reflectivity.

Although one finds here a “salvific” and “pure” motive that would characterize the transcending reflection, one also discovers a reflective movement toward the now “safe” eroticism signifying the beauty which is safely distanced. This safety is seen in the elevation of Mary who, till then, was still regarded as *theotoktos* (mother of god), and now she becomes *madona* and thus loses her erotic attraction. From maternal, birthing feminine, she is transformed into a reflecting point which shines with the “purity” of the transcending and distant reflective move. She is no longer a force of nature and nurture, but a counter point of salvific reflectivity.

What one finds is a movement where at once there appears a divinization of eroticism and eroticizing, able it safe religiosity and even metaphysics. The *madona* cult, with erotic supplication, coupled with the distance to the feminine, reveals the dual reflectivity of being saved from and by pure beauty of the feminine.

This of course is very different from the Mary reverence of earlier periods where maternity, birth and rebirth, were more influential. After all, the maternal goddess is approached by women as an equal and a natural force, while the supplicant relates to *madona* as a man to the untouchable. Indeed, no woman painted the *madona*, and no woman invented the convent.

The melting contains both forms of the salvific principle: in the cultic eroticism it reflects the terrible beauty of the maternal attraction and resistance, feminine encom-

passment and the fear of loss of the self, a deindividuating reflection, while in the supplication it yields itself to the encompassment and seeks the attachment from a distance. Although the latter seems to be safer, it nonetheless constitutes a “positive negation” and a source of demonization of the feminine. One expression of this attraction to the feminine encompassment and yet maintenance of a safe distance is mysticism.

One seeks salvation not by supplication of a divinity, but by an effort to melt into it. Such an ecstatic melting is an expression of a deflected and yet a safe mode of reflecting the attachment to the maternal *origin*. Thus the mystical salvation is a search from a hidden place for the *origin*. Transcendent reflection of mystical unity becomes the obverse of the unity of the *origin*. This is the ambivalent logic that allows divinization and demonization of feminine beauty. She can become a purified object of adoration, or a polluted object of debasement.

The mystical melting motive appears quite obviously in mass reveries where the so called religious fervor reaches such an exalted pitch of *unity with being* that it turns into an erotic orgy of the feminine origin. Thus mystical religiosity with its salvific unity fulfills itself in the erotic unity of the *origin*. One reflects the other.

This reflection appears among the Indian sects of *shakti*, and *cainonya*, in the Judeo-Christian *sarbaists*, (4-9th. centuries), the *nikolaists*, *adamites*, *valesianists*, *kinites*, *koenigsberger pietists*, (18<sup>th</sup> century), *foxians* of Hydesville, England (1901), the *theocratic unists* in America. If this indicates anything, it is the salvific mysticism in

the form of transcending reflection which nonetheless culminates in the irrisistance to the eroticism of the *origin* and rescending reflection.

The complexities of the reflective layerings that comprise the ambivalences and shifts of the feminine beauty from the most attractive, yet most terrible, to the purest, and yet remotest, are five-fold. First, it is essential to note the constitution of the rescending domain and the way that it is reflected by various figures. Second, one must decipher the figures and metaphors that reflect transcendence. Third, the transformation of rescendance into transcendence, such that the rescending characteristics are attributed to the transcendent figures, and the transformation of transcendence into rescendance, in a way that shows the “decaying process of the absolute.” Fourth, the shifts of the reflective metaphors required for the deciphering of the transformations instep three. Five, articulating the most fundamental reflexivity which allows transcendence to reveal rescendance and conversely.

### Postscript

The reflective interplay lends various parameters within whose confines the feminine beauty, both as a force of dissolving attraction, and a purified distance, plays out its destiny. The Western patriarchal tradition has a tendency toward transcending reflection deflecting the terrible beauty of the feminine by non-participation, ideality of law, purification, individuation, monasticism, and celibacy. While there are rescending movements in some Western mythologies,

such as mysticism, materialism, and above all psychoanalysis, such movements tend toward purification along the characteristics of transcendence. In this sense one can understand the appearance, in this century, of various counter movements which are “speechless,” although they present us with the rescending domain: cynicism, flaunting of the flesh, negative dialectics and even consumerism with its submersion into the sea of materialism, i.e. maternity (mother-matter have the same origin). Every materialist is a seeker of dissolution into the maternal rhythm, pulse, and security. This is not a wish to return to the womb, but a broader design of rescendance, the pull toward dissolution. The appearance of rescendance in numerous guises is a sign that transcendence in our age might too become a reflection on rescendance, a reflection whose shape is yet to be deciphered.

Some discussions in semiotics have indeed confirmed the two reflective moments and their variants. Following Merleau-Ponty, for example, one has located a pivot constituting a shift from sense to non-sense, and from non-sense to sense. The signs which function as SENSE deploy structures with coordinates, maintaining the objects at a distance, transcendent in appropriate places and times: in front-future, behind-past, up-good, down-bad, left-right, peopled by formal codes of appropriate attunement, attire, deference, hierarchical status. Yet these signs are constantly haunted by an overdetermination, a superfluity which disrupts the intentional univocity of signs. This superfluity is a source of metaphorical

deviation which never succeeds in reasserting the univocity, which deconstructs and postpones a signifying function leading to the dissolution of such a function. The signifying distance, the transcending intentionality, collapses under the weight of imagery which do not represent, do not stand for, instantiate deployed objects, but becomes immediate, obsessive, insistent, firing images, phantasms which constitute a melting body without a world, without significance. A FRENCH example is eroticism. Within a semiotics of signs, eros signifies, has its intentions: an aim at an object, another human, a divinity, even a reproduction of the species - functional, a starlets manipulation of her equipment across the stage, some sirenial solicitation

of a hero, an appropriate garb hiding little for the imagination on the beach, an ecstatic vision; yet it also functions to dissolve the distances, the signifying deployment, the various attractions, and becomes whispers, breaths, gropings, spreading of images which are unproductive of world. Images which chase one after another, decomposing any signifying posture, melting the unitary being into a swamp of breath, moisture, insinuating into all crevices that abolish hierarchies, good and evil, gods and demons. It is a carnalization which haunts the precincts of signifying signs and exposes them to a pivot toward immediacy, bodiness, covered and obsessed with firing and dissolving flood of phantasms - melting and vivifying presence.

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