HEAVEN AND HELL

Aldous Huxley

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Foreword

This little book is a sequel to an essay on the mescalin experience, published two years ago under the title of The Doors of Perception. For a person in whom ‘the candle of vision’ never burns

spontaneously, the mescalin experience is doubly illuminating. It throws light on the hitherto unknown regions of his own mind; and at the same time it throws light, indirectly, on other minds, more richly gifted in respect to vision than his own. Reflecting on his experience, he comes to a new and better understanding of the ways in which those other minds perceive and feel and think, of the cosmological notions which seem to them self-evident, and of the works of art through which they feel impelled to express themselves. In what follows I have tried to set down, more or less systematically, the results of this new understanding.

A H.

Heaven and Hell

In the history of science the collector of specimens preceded the zoologist and followed the exponents of natural theology and magic. He had ceased to study animals in the spirit of the authors of the bestiaries, for whom the ant was incarnate industry, the panther an emblem, surprisingly enough, of Christ, the polecat a shocking example of uninhibited lasciviousness. But, except in a rudimentary way, he was not yet a physiologist, ecologist, or student of animal behaviour. His primary concern was to make a census, to catch, kill, stuff, and describe as many kinds of beasts as he could lay his hands on.

Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins. In relation to the fauna of these regions we are not yet zoologists, we are mere naturalists and collectors of specimens. The fact is unfortunate; but we have to accept it, we have to make the best of it. However lowly, the work of the collector must be done, before we can proceed to the higher scientific tasks of classification, analysis, experiment, and theory making.

Like the giraffe and the duck-billed platypus, the creatures inhabiting these remoter regions of the mind are exceedingly improbable. Nevertheless they exist, they are facts of observation; and as such, they cannot be ignored by anyone who is honestly trying to understand the world in which he lives.

It is difficult, it is all but impossible, to speak of mental events except in similes drawn from the more familiar universe of material things. If I have made use of

geographical and zoological metaphors, it is not wantonly, out of a mere addiction to picturesque language. It is because such metaphors express very forcibly the essential otherness of the mind's far continents, the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency of their inhabitants. A man consists of what I may call an Old World of personal consciousness and, beyond a dividing sea, a series of New Worlds—the not too distant Virginias and Carolinas of the personal subconscious and the vegetative soul; the Far West of the collective unconscious, with its flora of symbols, its tribes of aboriginal archetypes; and, across another, vaster ocean, at the antipodes of everyday consciousness, the world of Visionary Experience.

If you go to New South Wales, you will see marsupials hopping about the countryside. And if you go to the antipodes of the self-conscious mind, you will encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos. You do not invent these creatures any more than you invent marsupials. They live their own lives in complete independence. A man cannot control them. All he can do is to go to the mental equivalent of Australia and look around him.

Some people never consciously discover their antipodes. Others make an occasional landing. Yet others (but they are few) find it easy to go and come as they please. For the naturalist of the mind, the collector of psychological specimens, the primary need is some safe, easy, and reliable method of transporting himself and others from the Old World to the New, from the continent of familiar cows and horses to the continent of the wallaby and the platypus.

Two such methods exist. Neither of them is perfect; but both are sufficiently reliable, sufficiently easy, and sufficiently safe to justify their employment by those who know what they are doing. In the first case the soul is transported to its far-off destination by the aid of a chemical—either mescalin or lysergic acid. In the second case, the vehicle is psychological in nature, and the passage to the mind's antipodes is accomplished by hypnosis. The two vehicles carry the consciousness to the same region; but the drug has the longer range and takes its passengers further into the terra incognita.1

How and why does hypnosis produce its observed effects? We do not know. For our present purposes, however, we do not have to know. All that is necessary, in this context, is to record the fact that some hypnotic subjects are transported, in the trance state, to a region in the mind's antipodes, where they find the equivalent of marsupials—strange psychological creatures leading an autonomous existence according to the law of their own being.

About the physiological effects of mescalin we know a little. Probably (for we are not yet certain) it interferes with the enzyme system that regulates cerebral functioning. By doing so it lowers the efficiency of the brain as an

instrument for focusing mind on the problems of life on the surface of our planet. This lowering of what may be called the biological efficiency of the brain seems to permit the entry into consciousness of certain classes of mental events, which are normally excluded, because they possess no survival value. Similar intrusions of biologically useless, but aesthetically and sometimes spiritually valuable, material may occur as the result of illness or fatigue; or they may be induced by fasting, or a period of confinement in a place of darkness and complete silence.2

A person under the influence of mescalin or lysergic acid will stop seeing visions when given a large dose of nicotinic acid. This helps to explain the effectiveness of fasting as an inducer of visionary experience. By reducing the amount of available sugar, fasting lowers the brain's biological efficiency and so makes possible the entry into consciousness of material possessing no survival value. Moreover, by causing a vitamin deficiency, it removes from the blood that known inhibitor of visions, nicotinic acid. Another inhibitor of visionary experience is ordinary, everyday, perceptual experience. Experimental psychologists have found that, if you confine a man to a 'restricted environment,' where there is no light, no sound, nothing to smell, and, if you put him in a tepid bath with only one almost imperceptible thing to touch, the victim will very soon start 'seeing things,' 'hearing things,' and having strange bodily sensations.

Milarepa, in his Himalayan cavern, and the anchorites of the Thebaid followed essentially the same procedure and got essentially the same results. A thousand pictures of the Temptations of St. Anthony bear witness to the effectiveness of restricted diet and restricted environment. Asceticism, it is evident, has a double motivation. If men and women torment their bodies, it is not only because they hope in this way to atone for past sins and avoid future punishments; it is because they long to visit the mind's antipodes and do some visionary sightseeing. Empirically and from the reports of other ascetics, they know that fasting and a restricted environment will transport them where they long to go. Their self-inflicted punishment may be the door to paradise. (It may also—and this is a point which will be discussed in a later paragraph—be a door into the infernal regions.)

From the point of view of an inhabitant of the Old World, marsupials are exceedingly odd. But oddity is not the same as randomness. Kangaroos and wallabies may lack verisimilitude; but their improbability repeats itself and obeys recognizable laws. The same is true of the psychological creatures inhabiting the remoter regions of our minds. The experiences encountered under the influence of mescalin or deep hypnosis are certainly strange; but they are strange with a certain regularity, strange according to a pattern.

What are the common features which the pattern imposes upon our visionary experiences? First and most

important is the experience of light. Everything seen by those who visit the mind's antipodes is brilliantly illuminated and seems to shine from within. All colours are intensified to a pitch far beyond anything seen in the normal state, and at the same time the mind's capacity for recognizing fine distinctions of tone and hue is notably heightened.

In this respect there is a marked difference between these visionary experiences and ordinary dreams. Most dreams are without colour, or else are only partially or feebly coloured. On the other hand, the visions met with under the influence of mescalin or hypnosis are always intensely and, one might say, preternaturally brilliant in colour. Professor Calvin Hall, who has collected records of many thousands of dreams, tells us that about two-thirds of all dreams are in black and white. 'Only one dream in three is coloured, or has some colour in it.' A few people dream entirely in colour; a few never experience colour in their dreams; the majority sometimes dream in colour, but more often do not.

'We have come to the conclusion,' writes Dr. Hall, 'that colour in dreams yields no information about the personality of the dreamer.' I agree with this conclusion. Colour in dreams and visions tells us no more about the personality of the beholder than does colour in the external world. A garden in July is perceived as brightly coloured. The perception tells us something about sunshine, flowers, and butterflies, but little or nothing about our own selves. In the same way the fact that we see brilliant colours in our visions and in some of our dreams tells us something about the fauna of the mind's antipodes, but nothing whatever about the personality who inhabits what I have called the Old World of the mind.

Most dreams are concerned with the dreamer's private wishes and instinctive urges, and with the conflicts which arise when these wishes and urges are thwarted by a disapproving conscience or a fear of public opinion. The story of these drives and conflicts is told in terms of dramatic symbols, and in most dreams the symbols are uncoloured. Why should this be the case? The answer, I presume, is that, to be effective, symbols do not require to be coloured. The letters in which we write about roses need not be red, and we can describe the rainbow by means of ink marks on white paper. Textbooks are illustrated by line engravings and half-tone plates; and these uncoloured images and diagrams effectively convey information.

What is good enough for the waking consciousness is evidently good enough for the personal subconscious, which finds it possible to express its meanings through uncoloured symbols. Colour turns out to be a kind of touchstone of reality. That which is given is coloured; that which our symbol-creating intellect and fancy put together is uncoloured. Thus the external world is perceived as coloured. Dreams, which are not given but fabricated by the personal subconscious, are generally in black and white. (It is worth remarking that, in most people's

experience, the most brightly coloured dreams are those of landscapes, in which there is no drama, no symbolic reference to conflict, merely the presentation to consciousness of a given, non-human fact.)

The images of the archetypal world are symbolic; but since we, as individuals, do not fabricate them, but find them ‘out there’ in the collective unconscious, they exhibit some at least of the characteristics of given reality and are coloured. The non-symbolic inhabitants of the mind’s antipodes exist in their own right, and like the given facts of the external world are coloured. Indeed, they are far more intensely coloured than external data. This may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that our perceptions of the external world are habitually clouded by the verbal notions in terms of which we do our thinking. We are forever attempting to convert things into signs for the most intelligible abstractions of our own invention. But in doing so, we rob these things of a great deal of their native thinghood.

At the antipodes of the mind, we are more or less completely free of language, outside the system of conceptual thought. Consequently our perception of visionary objects possesses all the freshness, all the naked intensity, of experiences which have never been verbalized, never assimilated to lifeless abstractions. Their colour (that hallmark of given-ness) shines forth with a brilliance which seems to us preternatural, because it is in fact entirely natural—entirely natural in the sense of being entirely unsophisticated by language or the scientific, philosophical, and utilitarian notions, by means of which we ordinarily re-create the given world in our own drearily human image.

In his Candle of Vision, the Irish poet A. E. (George Russell) has analysed his visionary experiences with remarkable acuity. ‘When I meditate,’ he writes, ‘I feel in the thoughts and images that throng about me the reflections of personality; but there are also windows in the soul, through which can be seen images created not by human but by the divine imagination.’

Our linguistic habits lead us into error. For example, we are apt to say, ‘I imagine,’ when what we should have said is, ‘The curtain was lifted that I might see.’ Spontaneous or induced, visions are never our personal property. Memories belonging to the ordinary self have no place in them. The things seen are wholly unfamiliar. ‘There is no reference or resemblance,’ in Sir William Herschel’s phrase, ‘to any objects recently seen or even thought of.’ When faces appear, they are never the faces of friends or acquaintances. We are out of the Old World, and exploring the antipodes.

For most of us most of the time, the world of everyday experience seems rather dim and drab. But for a few people often, and for a fair number occasionally, some of the

brightness of visionary experience spills over, as it were, into common seeing, and the everyday universe is transfigured. Though still recognizably itself, the Old World takes on the quality of the mind's antipodes. Here is an entirely characteristic description of this transfiguration of the everyday world:

'I was sitting on the seashore, half listening to a friend arguing violently about something which merely bored me. Unconsciously to myself, I looked at a film, of sand I had picked up on my hand, when I suddenly saw the exquisite beauty of every little grain of it; instead of being dull, I saw that each particle was made up on a perfect geometrical pattern, with sharp angles, from each of which a brilliant shaft of light was reflected, while each tiny crystal shone like a rainbow. . . . The rays crossed and recrossed, making exquisite patterns of such beauty that they left me breathless. . . . Then, suddenly, my consciousness was lighted up from within and I saw in a vivid way how the whole universe was made up of particles of material which, no matter how dull and lifeless they might seem, were nevertheless filled with this intense and vital beauty. For a second or two the whole world appeared as a blaze of glory. When it died down, it left me with something I have never forgotten and which constantly reminds me of the beauty locked up in every minute speck of material around us.'

Similarly George Russell writes of seeing the world illumined by 'an intolerable lustre of light'; of finding himself looking at 'landscapes as lovely as a lost Eden'; of beholding a world where the 'colours were brighter and purer, and yet made a softer harmony.' Again, 'the winds were sparkling and diamond clear, and yet full of colour as an opal, as they glittered through the valley, and I knew the Golden Age was all about me, and it was we who had been blind to it, but that it had never passed away from the world.'

Many similar descriptions are to be found in the poets and in the literature of religious mysticism. One thinks, for example, of Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Early Childhood; of certain lyrics by George Herbert and Henry Vaughan; of Traherne's Centuries of Meditations; of the passage in his autobiography, where Father Surin describes the miraculous transformation of an enclosed convent garden into a fragment of heaven.

Preternatural light and colour are common to all visionary experiences. And along with light and colour there goes, in every case, a recognition of heightened significance. The self-luminous objects which we see in the mind's antipodes possess a meaning, and this meaning is, in some sort, as intense as their colour. Significance here is identical with being; for, at the mind's antipodes, objects do not stand for anything but themselves. The images which appear in the nearer reaches of the collective subconscious have meaning in relation to the basic facts of human

experience; but here, at the limits of the visionary world, we are confronted by facts which, like the facts of external nature, are independent of man, both individually and collectively, and exist in their own right. And their meaning consists precisely in this, that they are intensely themselves and, being intensely themselves, are manifestations of the essential givenness, the non-human otherness of the universe.

Light, colour, and significance do not exist in isolation. They modify, or are manifested by, objects. Are there any special classes of objects common to most visionary experiences? The answer is: yes, there are. Under mescalin and hypnosis, as well as in spontaneous visions, certain classes of perceptual experiences turn up again and again.

The typical mescalin or lysergic acid experience begins with perceptions of coloured, moving, living geometrical forms. In time, pure geometry becomes concrete, and the visionary perceives, not patterns, but patterned things, such as carpets, carvings, mosaics. These give place to vast and complicated buildings, in the midst of landscapes, which change continuously, passing from richness to more intensely coloured richness, from grandeur to deepening grandeur. Heroic figures, of the kind that Blake called ‘The Seraphim,’ may make their appearance, alone or in multitudes. Fabulous animals move across the scene. Everything is novel and amazing. Almost never does the visionary see anything that reminds him of his own past. He is not remembering scenes, persons, or objects, and he is not inventing them; he is looking on at a new creation.

The raw material for this creation is provided by the visual experiences of ordinary life; but the moulding of this material into forms is the work of someone who is most certainly not the self, who originally had the experiences, or who later recalled and reflected upon them. They are (to quote the words used by Dr. J. R. Smythies in a recent paper in the American Journal of Psychiatry) ‘the work of a highly differentiated mental compartment, without any apparent connection, emotional or volitional, with the aims, interests, or feelings of the person concerned.’

Here, in quotation or condensed paraphrase, is Weir Mitchell’s account of the visionary world to which he was transported by peyote, the cactus which is the natural source of mescalin.

At his entry into that world he saw a host of ‘star points’ and what looked like ‘fragments of stained glass.’ Then came ‘delicate floating films of colour.’ These were displaced by an ‘abrupt rush of countless points of white light,’ sweeping across the field of vision. Next there were zigzag lines of very bright colours, which somehow turned into swelling clouds of still more brilliant hues. Buildings now made their appearance, and then landscapes. There was a Gothic tower of elaborate design with worn

statues in the doorways or on stone brackets. ‘As I gazed, every projecting angle, cornice and even the faces of the stones at their joinings were by degrees covered or hung with clusters of what seemed to be huge precious stones, but uncut stones, some being more like masses of transparent fruit. . . . All seemed to possess an interior light.’ The Gothic tower gave place to a mountain, a cliff of inconceivable height, a colossal bird claw carved in stone and projecting over the abyss, an endless unfurling of coloured draperies, and an efflorescence of more precious stones. Finally there was a view of green and purple waves breaking on a beach ‘with myriads of lights of the same tint as the waves.’

Every mescalin experience, every vision arising under hypnosis, is unique; but all recognizably belong to the same species. The landscapes, the architectures, the clustering gems, the brilliant and intricate patterns—these, in their atmosphere of preternatural light, preternatural colour, and preternatural significance, are the stuff of which the mind’s antipodes are made. Why this should be so, we have no idea. It is a brute fact of experience which, whether we like it or not, we have to accept—just as we have to accept the fact of kangaroos.

From these facts of visionary experience let us now pass to the accounts preserved in all the cultural traditions, of Other Worlds—the worlds inhabited by the gods, by the spirits of the dead, by man in his primal state of innocence.

Reading these accounts, we are immediately struck by the close similarity between induced or spontaneous visionary experience and the heavens and fairylands of folklore and religion. Preternatural light, preternatural intensity of colouring, preternatural significance—these are characteristic of all the Other Worlds and Golden Ages. And in virtually every case this preternaturally significant light shines on, or shines out of, a landscape of such surpassing beauty that words cannot express it.

Thus in the Greco-Roman tradition we find the lovely Garden of the Hesperides, the Elysian Plain, and the fair Island of Leuke, to which Achilles was translated. Memnon went to another luminous island, somewhere in the East. Odysseus and Penelope travelled in the opposite direction and enjoyed their immortality with Circe in Italy. Still further to the West were the Islands of the Blest, first mentioned by Hesiod and so firmly believed in that, as late as the first century B.C., Sertorius planned to send a squadron from Spain to discover them.

Magically lovely islands reappear in the folklore of the Celts and, at the opposite side of the world, in that of the Japanese. And between Avalon in the extreme West and Horaisan in the Far East, there is the land of Uttarakuru, the Other World of the Hindus. ‘The land,’ we read in the Ramayana, ‘is watered by lakes with golden lotuses. There are rivers by thousands, full of leaves of the colour of sapphire and lapis lazuli; and the lakes, resplendent like the morning sun, are adorned by golden beds

of red lotus. The country all around is covered by jewels and precious stones, with gay beds of blue lotus, golden-petalled. Instead of sand, pearls, gems, and gold form the banks of the rivers, which are overhung with trees of fire-bright gold. These trees perpetually bear flowers and fruit, give forth a sweet fragrance and abound with birds.'

Uttarakuru, we see, resembles the landscapes of the mescalin experience in being rich with precious stones. And this characteristic is common to virtually all the Other Worlds of religious tradition. Every paradise abounds in gems, or at least in gem-like objects resembling, as Weir Mitchell puts it, 'transparent fruit.' Here, for example, is Ezekiel's version of the Garden of Eden. 'Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald and the carbuncle, and gold. . . . Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth . . . thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.' The Buddhist paradises are adorned with similar 'stones of fire.' Thus, the Western Paradise of the Pure Land Sect is walled with silver, gold, and beryl; has lakes with jeweled banks and a profusion of glowing lotuses, within which the Bodhisattvas sit enthroned.

In describing their Other Worlds, the Celts and Teutons speak very little of precious stones, but have much to say of another and, for them, equally wonderful substance—glass. The Welsh had a blessed land called Ynisvitrin, the Isle of Glass; and one of the names of the Germanic kingdom of the dead was Glasberg. One is reminded of the Sea of Glass in the Apocalypse.

Most paradises are adorned with buildings, and, like the trees, the waters, the hills and fields, these buildings are bright with gems. We are all familiar with the New Jerusalem. 'And the building of the wall of it was of jasper, and the city was of pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.'

Similar descriptions are to be found in the eschatological literature of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Heaven is always a place of gems. Why should this be the case? Those who think of all human activities in terms of a social and economic frame of reference will give some such answer as this: Gems are very rare on earth. Few people possess them. To compensate themselves for these facts, the spokesmen for the poverty-stricken majority have filled their imaginary heavens with precious stones. This 'pie in the sky' hypothesis contains, no doubt, some element of truth; but it fails to explain why precious stones should have come to be regarded as precious in the first place.

Men have spent enormous amounts of time, energy, and money on the finding, mining, and cutting of coloured pebbles. Why? The utilitarian can offer no explanation for such

fantastic behaviour. But as soon as we take into account the facts of visionary experience, everything becomes clear. In vision, men perceive a profusion of what Ezekiel calls ‘stones of fire,’ of what Weir Mitchell describes as ‘transparent fruit.’ These things are self-luminous, exhibit a preternatural brilliance of colour and possess a preternatural significance. The material objects which most nearly resemble these sources of visionary illumination are gem stones. To acquire such a stone is to acquire something whose preciousness is guaranteed by the fact that it exists in the Other World.

Hence man’s otherwise inexplicable passion for gems and hence his attribution to precious stones of therapeutic and magical virtue. The causal chain, I am convinced, begins in the psychological Other World of visionary experience, descends to earth, and mounts again to the theological Other World of heaven. In this context the words of Socrates, in the Phaedo, take on a new significance. There exists, he tells us, an ideal world above and beyond the world of matter. ‘In this other earth the colours are much purer and much more brilliant than they are down here. . . . The very mountains, the very stones have a richer gloss, a lovelier transparency and intensity of hue. The precious stones of this lower world, our highly prized cornelians, jaspers, emeralds, and all the rest, are but the tiny fragments of these stones above. In the other earth there is no stone but is precious and exceeds in beauty every gem of ours.’

In other words, precious stones are precious because they bear a faint resemblance to the glowing marvels seen with the inner eye of the visionary. ‘The view of that world,’ says Plato, ‘is a vision of blessed beholders’; for to see things ‘as they are in themselves’ is bliss unalloyed and inexpressible.

Among people who have no knowledge of precious stones or of glass, heaven is adorned not with minerals, but flowers. Preternaturally brilliant flowers bloom in most of the Other Worlds described by primitive eschatologists, and even in the begemmed and glassy paradises of the more advanced religions they have their place. One remembers the lotus of Hindu and Buddhist tradition, the roses and lilies of the West.

‘God first planted a garden.’ The statement expresses a deep psychological truth. Horticulture has its source—or at any rate one of its sources—in the Other World of the mind’s antipodes. When worshippers offer flowers at the altar, they are returning to the gods things which they know, or (if they are not visionaries) obscurely feel, to be indigenous to heaven.

And this return to the source is not merely symbolical; it is also a matter of immediate experience. For the traffic between our Old World and its antipodes, between Here and Beyond, travels along a two-way street. Gems, for example, come from the soul’s visionary heaven; but they also lead the soul back to that heaven. Contemplating them, men find themselves (as the phrase

goes) transported—carried away towards that Other Earth of the Platonic dialogue, the magical place where every pebble is a precious stone. And the same effects may be produced by artifacts of glass and metal, by tapers burning in the dark, by brilliantly coloured images and ornaments, by flowers, shells, and feathers, by landscapes seen, as Shelley from the Euganean Hills saw Venice, in the transfiguring light of dawn or sunset.

Indeed, we may risk a generalization and say that whatever, in nature or in a work of art, resembles one of those intensely significant, inwardly glowing objects encountered at the mind's antipodes, is capable of inducing, if only in a partial and attenuated form, the visionary experience. At this point a hypnotist will remind us that, if he can be induced to stare intently at a shiny object, a patient may go into trance; and that if he goes into trance, or if he goes only into reverie, he may very well see visions within and a transfigured world without.

But how, precisely, and why does the view of a shiny object induce a trance or a state of reverie? Is it, as the Victorians maintained, a simple matter of eye strain resulting in general nervous exhaustion? Or shall we explain the phenomenon in purely psychological terms—as concentration pushed to the point of mono-ideism and leading to dissociation?

And there is a third possibility. Shiny objects may remind our unconscious of what it enjoys at the mind's antipodes, and these obscure intimations of life in the Other World are so fascinating that we pay less attention to this world and so become capable of experiencing consciously something of that which, unconsciously, is always with us.

We see then that there are in nature certain scenes, certain classes of objects, certain materials, possessed of the power to transport the beholder's mind in the direction of its antipodes, out of the everyday Here and towards the Other World of Vision. Similarly, in the realm of art, we find certain works, even certain classes of works, in which the same transporting power is manifest. These vision-inducing works may be executed in vision-inducing materials, such as glass, metal, gems, or gem-like pigments. In other cases their power is due to the fact that they render, in some peculiarly expressive way, some transporting scene or object.

The best vision-inducing art is produced by men and women who have themselves had the visionary experience; but it is also possible for any reasonably good artist, simply by following an approved recipe, to create works which shall have at least some transporting power.

Of all the vision-inducing arts that which depends most completely on its raw materials is, of course, the art of the goldsmith and jeweler. Polished metals and precious stones are so intrinsically transporting that even a Victorian, even an art

nouveau jewel is a thing of power. And when to this natural magic of glinting metal and self-luminous stone is added the other magic of noble forms and colours artfully blended, we find ourselves in the presence of a genuine talisman.

Religious art has always and everywhere made use of these vision-inducing materials. The shrine of gold, the chryselephantine statue, the jeweled symbol or image, the glittering furniture of the altar—we find these things in contemporary Europe as in ancient Egypt, in India and China as among the Greeks, the Incas, the Aztecs.

The products of the goldsmith's art are intrinsically numinous. They have their place at the very heart of every Mystery, in every holy of holies. This sacred jewelry has always been associated with the light of lamps and candles. For Ezekiel, a gem was a stone of fire. Conversely, a flame is a living gem, endowed with all the transporting power that belongs to the precious stone and, to a lesser degree, to polished metal. This transporting power of flame increases in proportion to the depth and extent of the surrounding darkness. The most impressively numinous temples are caverns of twilight, in which a few tapers give life to the transporting, other-worldly treasures on the altar.

Glass is hardly less effective as an inducer of visions than are the natural gems. In certain respects, indeed, it is more effective, for the simple reason that there is more of it. Thanks to glass, a whole building—the Sainte-Chapelle, for example, the cathedrals of Chartres and Sens—could be turned into something magical and transporting. Thanks to glass, Paolo Uccello could design a circular jewel thirteen feet in diameter—his great window of the Resurrection, perhaps the most extraordinary single work of vision-inducing art ever produced.

For the men of the Middle Ages, it is evident, visionary experience was supremely valuable. So valuable, indeed, that they were ready to pay for it in hard-earned cash. In the twelfth century collecting-boxes were placed in the churches for the upkeep and installation of stained-glass windows. Suger, the Abbot of St. Denis, tells us that they were always full

But self-respecting artists cannot be expected to go on doing what their fathers have already done supremely well. In the fourteenth century colour gave place to grisaille, and windows ceased to be vision-inducing. When, in the later fifteenth century, colour came into fashion again, the glass painters felt the desire, and found themselves, at the same time, technically equipped, to imitate Renaissance painting in transparency. The results were often interesting; but they were not transporting.

Then came the Reformation. The Protestants disapproved of visionary experience and attributed a magical virtue to the printed word. In a church with clear windows the worshippers

could read their Bibles and prayer books and were not tempted to escape from the sermon into the Other World. On the Catholic side the men of the Counter-Reformation found themselves in two minds. They thought visionary experience was a good thing, but they also believed in the supreme value of print.

In the new churches stained glass was rarely installed, and in many of the older churches it was wholly or partially replaced by clear glass. The unobscured light permitted the faithful to follow the service in their books, and at the same time to see the vision-inducing works created by the new generations' of baroque sculptors and architects. These transporting works were executed in metal and polished stone. Wherever the worshipper turned, he found the glint of bronze, the rich radiance of coloured marble, the unearthly whiteness of statuary.

On the rare occasions when the Counter-Reformers made use of glass, it was as a surrogate for diamonds, not for rubies or sapphires. Faceted prisms entered religious art in the seventeenth century, and in Catholic churches they dangle to this day from innumerable chandeliers. (These charming and slightly ridiculous ornaments are among the very few vision-inducing devices permitted in Islam. Mosques have no images or reliquaries; but in the Near East, at any rate, their austerity is sometimes mitigated by the transporting glitter of rococo crystal.)

From glass, stained or cut, we pass to marble and the other stones that take a high polish and can be used in mass. The fascination exercised by such stones may be gauged by the amount of time and trouble spent in obtaining them. At Baalbek, for example, and, two or three hundred miles further inland, at Palmyra, we find among the ruins columns of pink granite from Aswan. These great monoliths were quarried in Upper Egypt, were floated in barges down the Nile, were towed across the Mediterranean to Byblos or Tripolis, and from thence were hauled, by oxen, mules, and men, uphill to Homs, and from Homs southward to Baalbek or east, across the desert, to Palmyra.

What a labour of giants! And, from the utilitarian point of view, how marvelously pointless! But in fact, of course, there was a point—a point that existed in a region beyond mere utility. Polished to a visionary glow, the rosy shafts proclaimed their manifest kinship with the Other World. At the cost of enormous efforts men had transported these stones from their quarry on the Tropic of Cancer; and now, by way of recompense, the stones were transporting their transporters half-way to the mind's visionary antipodes.

The question of utility and of the motives that lie beyond utility arises once more in relation to ceramics. Few things are more useful, more absolutely indispensable, than pots and plates and jugs. But at the same time few human beings concern themselves less with utility than do the collectors of porcelain and glazed earthenware. To say that these people have an appetite for

beauty is not a sufficient explanation. The commonplace ugliness of the surroundings in which fine ceramics are so often displayed is proof enough that what their owners crave is not beauty in all its manifestations, but only a special kind of beauty—the beauty of curved reflections, of softly lustrous glazes, of sleek and smooth surfaces. In a word, the beauty that transports the beholder, because it reminds him, obscurely or explicitly, of the preternatural lights and colours of the Other World. In the main the art of the potter has been a secular art—but a secular art which its innumerable devotees have treated with an almost idolatrous reverence. From time to time, however, this secular art has been placed at the service of religion. Glazed tiles have found their way into mosques and, here and there, into Christian churches. From China come shining ceramic images of gods and saints. In Italy Luca della Robbia created a heaven of blue glaze, for his lustrous white madonnas and Christ children. Baked clay is cheaper than marble and, suitably treated, almost as transporting.

Plato and, during a later flowering of religious art, St. Thomas Aquinas maintained that pure, bright colours were of the very essence of artistic beauty. A Matisse, in that case, would be intrinsically superior to a Goya or a Rembrandt. One has only to translate the philosophers' abstractions into concrete terms to see that this equation of beauty in general with bright, pure colours is absurd. But though untenable as it stands, the venerable doctrine is not altogether devoid of truth.

Bright, pure colours are characteristic of the Other World. Consequently works of art painted in bright, pure colours are capable, in suitable circumstances, of transporting the beholder's mind in the direction of its antipodes. Bright pure colours are of the essence, not of beauty in general, but only of a special kind of beauty, the visionary. Gothic churches and Greek temples, the statues of the thirteenth century after Christ and of the fifth century before Christ—all were brilliantly coloured.

For the Greeks and the men of the Middle Ages, this art of the merry-go-round and the waxwork show was evidently transporting. To us it seems deplorable. We prefer our Praxiteleses plain, our marble and our limestone au naturel. Why should our modern taste be so different, in this respect, from that of our ancestors? The reason, I presume, is that we have become too familiar with bright pure pigments to be greatly moved by them. We admire them, of course, when we see them in some grand or subtle composition; but in themselves and as such, they leave us untransported.

Sentimental lovers of the past complain of the drabness of our age and contrast it unfavourably with the gay brilliance of earlier times. In actual fact, of course, there is a far greater profusion of colour in the modern than in the ancient world. Lapis lazuli and Tyrian purple were costly rarities; the rich velvets and brocades of princely wardrobes, the woven or painted hangings of medieval and early modern houses, were reserved for a

privileged minority.

Even the great ones of the earth possessed very few of these vision-inducing treasures. As late as the seventeenth century, monarchs owned so little furniture that they had to travel from palace to palace with wagon-loads of plate and bedspreads, of carpets and tapestries. For the great mass of the people there were only homespun and a few vegetable dyes; and, for interior decoration, there were at best the earth colours, at worst (and in most cases) ‘the floor of plaster and the walls of dung.’

At the antipodes of every mind lay the Other World of preternatural light and preternatural colour, of ideal gems and visionary gold. But before every pair of eyes was only the dark squalor of the family hovel, the dust or mud of the village street, the dirty whites, the duns and goose-turd greens of ragged clothing. Hence a passionate, an almost desperate, thirst for bright, pure colours; and hence the overpowering effect produced by such colours whenever, in church or at court, they were displayed. Today the chemical industry turns out paints, inks, and dyes in endless variety and enormous quantities. In our modern world there is enough bright colour to guarantee the production of billions of flags and comic strips, millions of stop signs and tail lights, fire engines and Coca-Cola containers by the hundred thousand, carpets, wallpapers, and non-representational art by the square mile.

Familiarity breeds indifference. We have seen too much pure, bright colour at Woolworth’s to find it intrinsically transporting. And here we may note that, by its amazing capacity to give us too much of the best things, modern technology has tended to devaluate the traditional vision-inducing materials. The illumination of a city, for example, was once a rare event, reserved for victories and national holidays, for the canonization of saints and the crowning of kings. Now it occurs nightly and celebrates the virtues of gin, cigarettes, and toothpaste.

In London, fifty years ago, electric sky signs were a novelty, and so rare that they shone out of the misty darkness ‘like captain jewels in the carcanet.’ Across the Thames, on the old Shot Tower, the gold and ruby letters were magically lovely—une féerie. Today the fairies are gone. Neon is everywhere and, being everywhere, has no effect upon us, except perhaps to make us pine nostalgically for primeval night.

Only in floodlighting do we recapture the unearthly significance which used, in the age of oil and wax, even in the age of gas and the carbon filament, to shine forth from practically any island of brightness in the boundless dark. Under the searchlights Notre Dame de Paris and the Roman Forum are visionary objects, having power to transport the beholder’s mind towards the Other World.3

Modern technology has had the same

devaluating effect on glass and polished metal as it has had on fairy lamps and pure, bright colours. By John of Patmos and his contemporaries walls of glass were conceivable only in the New Jerusalem. Today they are a feature of every up-to-date office building and bungalow. And this glut of glass has been paralleled by a glut of chrome and nickel, of stainless steel and aluminium and a host of alloys old and new. Metal surfaces wink at us in the bathroom, shine from the kitchen sink, go glittering across country in cars and trams.

Those rich convex reflections, which so fascinated Rembrandt that he never tired of rendering them in paint, are now the commonplaces of home and street and factory. The fine point of seldom pleasure has been blunted. What was once a needle of visionary delight has now become a piece of disregarded linoleum.

I have spoken so far only of vision-inducing materials and their psychological devaluation by modern technology. It is time now to consider the purely artistic devices, by means of which vision-inducing works have been created.

Light and colour tend to take on a preternatural quality when seen in the midst of environing darkness. Fra Angelico's 'Crucifixion' at the Louvre has a black background. So have the frescoes of the Passion painted by Andrea del Castagno for the nuns of Santa Appollonia at Florence. Hence the visionary intensity, the strange transporting power of these extraordinary works. In an entirely different artistic and psychological context the same device was often used by Goya in his etchings. Those flying men, that horse on a tightrope, the huge and ghastly incarnation of Fear—all of them stand out, as though floodlit, against a background of impenetrable night.

With the development of chiaroscuro, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, night came out of the background and installed itself within the picture, which became the scene of a kind of Manichean struggle between Light and Darkness. At the time they were painted these works must have possessed a real transporting power. To us, who have seen altogether too much of this kind of thing, most of them seem merely theatrical. But a few still retain their magic. There is Caravaggio's 'Entombment,' for example; there are a dozen magical paintings by Georges de Latour;4 there are all those visionary Rembrandts where the lights have the intensity and significance of light at the mind's antipodes, where the darks are full of rich potentialities waiting their turn to become actual, to make themselves glowingly present to our consciousness.

In most cases the ostensible subject matter of Rembrandt's pictures is taken from real life or the Bible—a boy at his lessons or Bathsheba bathing; a woman wading in a pond or Christ before His judges. Occasionally, however, these messages from the Other World are transmitted by means of a subject drawn, not from real life or history, but from the realm of archetypal symbols. There hangs in the Louvre a 'Méditation du philosophe,' whose

symbolical subject matter is nothing more nor less than the human mind, with its teeming darknesses, its moments of intellectual and visionary illumination, its mysterious stairways winding downwards and upwards into the unknown. The meditating philosopher sits there in his island of inner illumination; and at the opposite end of the symbolic chamber, in another, rosier island, an old woman crouches before the hearth. The firelight touches and transfigures her face, and we see, concretely illustrated, the impossible paradox and supreme truth—that perception is (or at least can be, ought to be) the same as Revelation, that Reality shines out of every appearance, that the One is totally, infinitely present in all particulars.

Along with the preternatural lights and colours, the gems and the ever-changing patterns, visitors to the mind's antipodes discover a world of sublimely beautiful landscapes, of living architecture, and of heroic figures. The transporting power of many works of art is attributable to the fact that their creators have painted scenes, persons, and objects which remind the beholder of what, consciously or unconsciously, he knows about the Other World at the back of his mind.

Let us begin with the human or, rather, the more than human inhabitants of these far-off regions. Blake called them the Cherubim. And in effect that is what, no doubt, they are—the psychological originals of those beings who, in the theology of every religion, serve as intermediaries between man and the Clear Light. The more than human personages of visionary experience never 'do anything.' (Similarly the blessed never 'do anything' in heaven.) They are content merely to exist.

Under many names and attired in an endless variety of costumes, these heroic figures of man's visionary experience have appeared in the religious art of every culture. Sometimes they are shown at rest, sometimes in historical or mythological action. But action, as we have seen, does not come naturally to the inhabitants of the mind's antipodes. To be busy is the law of our being. The law of theirs is to do nothing. When we force these serene strangers to play a part in one of our all too human dramas, we are being false to visionary truth. That is why the most transporting (though not necessarily the most beautiful) representation of 'the Cherubim' are those which show them as they are in their native habitat—doing nothing in particular.

And that accounts for the overwhelming, the more than merely aesthetic, impression made upon the beholder by the great masterpieces of religious art. The sculptured figures of Egyptian gods and god-kings, the Madonnas and Pantocrators of the Byzantine mosaics, the bodhisattvas and lohans of China, the seated Buddhas of Khmer, the steles and statues of Copan, the wooden idols of tropical Africa—these have one characteristic in common: a profound stillness. And it is precisely this which gives them their numinous quality, their power to transport the beholder out of the Old World of his everyday experience, far away, towards the visionary antipodes of the human psyche.

There is, of course, nothing intrinsically excellent about static art. Static or dynamic, a bad piece of work is always a bad piece of work. All I mean to imply is that, other things being equal, a heroic figure at rest has a greater transporting power than one which is shown in action. The Cherubim live in Paradise and the New Jerusalem—in other words, among prodigious buildings set in rich, bright gardens with distant prospects of plain and mountain, of rivers and the sea. This is a matter of immediate experience, a psychological fact which has been recorded in folklore and the religious literature of every age and country. It has not, however, been recorded in pictorial art.

Reviewing the succession of human cultures, we find that landscape painting is either non-existent, or rudimentary, or of very recent development. In Europe a full-blown art of landscape painting has existed for only four or five centuries, in China for not more than a thousand years, in India, for all practical purposes, never.

This is a curious fact that demands an explanation. Why should landscapes have found their way into the visionary literature of a given epoch and a given culture, but not into the painting? Posed in this way, the question provides its own best answer. People may be content with the merely verbal expression of this aspect of their visionary experience and feel no need for its translation into pictorial terms.

That this often happens in die case of individuals is certain. Blake, for example, saw visionary landscapes, ‘articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce’ and ‘infinitely more perfect and minutely organized than anything seen by the mortal eye.’ Here is the description of such a visionary landscape, which Blake gave at one of Mrs. Aders’ evening parties: ‘The other evening, taking a walk, I came to a meadow and at the further corner of it I saw a fold of lambs. Coming nearer, the ground blushed with flowers, and the wattled cote and its woolly tenants were of an exquisite pastoral beauty. But I looked again, and it proved to be no living flock, but beautiful sculpture.’

Rendered in pigments, this vision would look, I suppose, like some impossibly beautiful blending of one of Constable’s freshest oil sketches with an animal painting in the magically realistic style of Zurbaran’s haloed lamb now in the San Diego Museum. But Blake never produced anything remotely resembling such a picture. He was content to talk and write about his landscape visions, and to concentrate in his painting upon ‘the Cherubim.’

What is true of an individual artist may be true of a whole school. There are plenty of things which men experience, but do not choose to express; or they may try to express what they have experienced, but in only one of their arts. In yet other cases they will express themselves in ways having no

immediately recognizable affinity to the original experience. In this last context Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy has some interesting things to say about the mystical art of the Far East—the art where 'denotation and connotation cannot be divided' and 'no distinction is felt between what a thing "is" and what it "signifies."'

The supreme example of such mystical art is the Zen-inspired landscape painting, which arose in China during the Sung period and came to new birth in Japan four centuries later. India and the Near East have no mystical landscape painting; but they have its equivalents—'Vaisnava painting, poetry, and music in India, where the theme is sexual love; and Sufi poetry and music in Persia, devoted to praises of intoxication.'5

'Bed,' as the Italian proverb succinctly puts it, 'is the poor man's opera.' Analogously, sex is the Hindu's Sung; wine, the Persian's Impressionism. The reason being, of course, that the experiences of sexual union and intoxication partake of that essential otherness characteristic of all vision, including that of landscapes.

If, at any time, men have found satisfaction in a certain kind of activity, it is to be presumed that, at periods when this satisfying activity was not manifested, there must have been some kind of equivalent for it. In the Middle Ages, for example, men were preoccupied in an obsessive, an almost maniacal way with words and symbols. Everything in nature was instantly recognized as the concrete illustration of some notion formulated in one of the books or legends currently regarded as sacred.

And yet, at other periods of history men have found a deep satisfaction in recognizing the autonomous otherness of nature, including many aspects of human nature. The experience of this otherness was expressed in terms of art, religion, or science. What were the medieval equivalents of Constable and ecology, of bird watching and Eleusis, of microscopy and the rites of Dionysos and the Japanese Haiku? They were to be found, I suspect, in Saturnalian orgies at one end of the scale and in mystical experience at the other. Shrovetides, May Days, Carnivals—these permitted a direct experience of the animal otherness underlying personal and social identity. Infused contemplation revealed the yet otherer otherness of the divine Not-Self. And somewhere between the two extremes were the experiences of the visionaries and the vision-inducing arts, by means of which it was sought to recapture and re-create those experiences—the art of the jeweler, of the maker of stained glass, of the weaver of tapestries, of the painter, poet, and musician.

In spite of a natural history that was nothing but a set of drearily moralistic symbols, in the teeth of a theology which, instead of regarding words as the signs of things, treated things and events as the signs of biblical or Aristotelian words, our ancestors remained relatively sane. And they achieved this feat by periodically escaping from the stifling prison of their

bumptiously rationalistic philosophy, their anthropomorphic, authoritarian, and non-experimental science, their all too articulate religion, into non-verbal, other than human worlds inhabited by their instincts, by the visionary fauna of their mind's antipodes, and, beyond and yet within all the rest, by the indwelling Spirit.

From this wide-ranging but necessary digression, let us return to the particular case from which we set out. Landscapes, as we have seen, are a regular feature of the visionary experience. Descriptions of visionary landscapes occur in the ancient literature of folklore and religion; but paintings of landscapes do not make their appearance until comparatively recent times. To what has been said, by way of explanation about psychological equivalents, I will add a few brief notes on the nature of landscape paintings as a vision-inducing art. Let us begin by asking a question. What landscapes—or, more generally, what representations of natural objects—are most transporting, most intrinsically vision-inducing? In the light of my own experiences and of what I have heard other people say about their reactions to works of art, I will risk an answer. Other things being equal (for nothing can make up for lack of talent), the most transporting landscapes are, first, those which represent natural objects a very long way off, and, second, those which represent them at close range.

Distance lends enchantment to the view; but so does propinquity. A Sung painting of faraway mountains, clouds and torrents is transporting; but so are the close-ups of tropical leaves in the Douanier Rousseau's jungles. When I look at the Sung landscape, I am reminded (or one of my not-I's is reminded) of the crags, the boundless expanses of plain, the luminous skies and seas of the mind's antipodes. And those disappearances into mist and cloud, those sudden emergences of some strange, intensely definite form, a weathered rock, for example, an ancient pine tree twisted by years of struggle with the wind—these too, are transporting. For they remind me, consciously or unconsciously, of the Other World's essential alienness and unaccountability.

It is the same with the close-up. I look at those leaves with their architecture of veins, their stripes and mottlings, I peer into the depths of interlacing greenery, and something in me is reminded of those living patterns, so characteristic of the visionary world, of those endless births and proliferations of geometrical forms that turn into objects, of things that are forever being transmuted into other things.

This painted close-up of a jungle is what, on one of its aspects, the Other World is like, and so it transports me, it makes me see with eyes that transfigure a work of art into something else, something beyond art.

I remember—very vividly, though it took place many years ago—a conversation with Roger Fry. We were talking

about Monet's Water Lilies. They had no right, Roger kept insisting, to be so shockingly unorganized, so totally without a proper compositional skeleton. They were all wrong, artistically speaking. And yet, he had to admit, and yet. . . . And yet, as I should now say, they were transporting. An artist of astounding virtuosity had chosen to paint a close-up of natural objects seen in their own context and without reference to merely human notions of what's what, or what ought to be what. Man, we like to say, is the measure of all things. For Monet, on this occasion, water lilies were the measure of water lilies; and so he painted them.

The same non-human point of view must be adopted by any artist who tries to render the distant scene. How tiny, in the Chinese painting, are the travellers who make their way along the valley! How frail the bamboo hut on the slope above them! And all the rest of the vast landscape is emptiness and silence. This revelation of the wilderness, living its own life according to the laws of its own being, transports the mind towards its antipodes; for primeval Nature bears a strange resemblance to that inner world where no account is taken of our personal wishes or even of the enduring concerns of man in general.

Only the middle distance and what may be called the remoter foreground are strictly human. When we look very near or very far, man either vanishes altogether or loses his primacy. The astronomer looks even further afield than the Sung painter and sees even less of human life. At the other end of the scale the physicist, the chemist, the physiologist pursue the close-up—the cellular close-up, the molecular, the atomic, and sub-atomic. Of that which, at twenty feet, even at arm's length, looked and sounded like a human being no trace remains.

Something analogous happens to the myopic artist and the happy lover. In the nuptial embrace personality is melted down; the individual (it is the recurrent theme of Lawrence's poems and novels) ceases to be himself and becomes a part of the vast impersonal universe. And so it is with the artist who chooses to use his eyes at the near point. In his work humanity loses its importance, even disappears completely. Instead of men and women playing their fantastic tricks before high heaven, we are asked to consider the lilies, to meditate on the unearthly beauty of 'mere things,' when isolated from their utilitarian context and rendered as they are, in and for themselves. Alternatively (or, at an earlier stage of artistic development, exclusively), the non-human world of the near point is rendered in patterns. These patterns are abstracted for the most part from leaves and flowers—the rose, the lotus, the acanthus, palm, papyrus—and are elaborated, with recurrences and variations, into something transportingly reminiscent of the living geometries of the Other World.

Freer and more realistic treatments of Nature at the near point make their appearance at a relatively recent date—but far earlier than those treatments of the distant scene, to which alone (and mistakenly) we give the name of landscape

painting. Rome, for example, had its close-up landscapes. The fresco of a garden, which once adorned a room in Livia's villa, is a magnificent example of this form of art.

For theological reasons, Islam had to be content, for the most part, with 'arabesques'—luxuriant and (as in visions) continually varying patterns, based upon natural objects seen at the near point. But even in Islam the genuine close-up landscape was not unknown. Nothing can exceed in beauty and in vision-inducing power the mosaics of gardens and buildings in the great Omayyad mosque at Damascus.

In medieval Europe, despite the prevailing mania for turning every datum into a concept, every immediate experience into a mere symbol of something in a book, realistic close-ups of foliage and flowers were fairly common. We find them carved on the capitals of Gothic pillars, as in the Chapter House of Southwell Minster. We find them in paintings of the chase—paintings whose subject was that ever present fact of medieval life, the forest, seen as the hunter or the strayed traveler sees it, in all its bewildering intricacy of leafy detail.

The frescoes in the papal palace at Avignon are almost the sole survivors of what, even in the time of Chaucer, was a widely practiced form of secular art. A century later this art of the forest close-up came to its self-conscious perfection in such magnificent and magical works as Pisanello's 'St. Hubert' and Paolo Uccello's 'Hunt in a Wood', now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Closely related to the wall paintings of forest close-ups were the tapestries, with which the rich men of northern Europe adorned their houses. The best of these are vision-inducing works of the highest order. In their own way they are as heavenly, as powerfully reminiscent of what goes on at the mind's antipodes, as are the great masterpieces of landscape painting at the furthest point—Sung mountains in their enormous solitude, Ming rivers interminably lovely, the blue sub-Alpine world of Titian's distances, the England of Constable; the Italics of Turner and Corot; the Provences of Cézanne and Van Gogh; the Île de France of Sisley and the Île de France of Vuillard.

Vuillard, incidentally, was a supreme master both of the transporting close-up and of the transporting distant view. His bourgeois interiors are masterpieces of vision-inducing art, compared with which the works of such conscious and so to say professional visionaries as Blake and Odilon Redon seem feeble in the extreme. In Vuillard's interiors every detail however trivial, however hideous even—the pattern of the late Victorian wallpaper, the art nouveau bibelot, the Brussels carpet—is seen and rendered as a living jewel; and all these jewels are harmoniously combined into a whole which is a jewel of a yet higher order of visionary intensity. And when the upper middle-class inhabitants of Vuillard's New Jerusalem go for a walk, they find themselves not, as they had supposed, in the department of Seine-et-Oise, but in the Garden of Eden, in an Other World which is yet essentially the same as this

world, but transfigured and therefore transporting.6

I have spoken so far only of the blissful visionary experience and of its interpretation in terms of theology, its translation into art. But visionary experience is not always blissful. It is sometimes terrible. There is hell as well as heaven.

Like heaven, the visionary hell has its preternatural light and its preternatural significance. But the significance is intrinsically appalling and the light is 'the smoky light' of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the 'darkness visible' of Milton. In the Journal d'une Schizophrène,7 the autobiographical record of a young girl's passage through madness, the world of the schizophrenic is called le Pays d'Éclairement—'the country of lit-upness.' It is a name which a mystic might have used to denote his heaven.

But for poor Renée, the schizophrenic, the illumination is infernal—an intense electric glare without a shadow, ubiquitous and implacable. Everything that, for healthy visionaries, is a source of bliss, brings to Renée only fear and a nightmarish sense of unreality. The summer sunshine is malignant; the gleam of polished surfaces is suggestive, not of gems, but of machinery and enameled tin; the intensity of existence which animates every object, when seen at close range and out of its utilitarian context, is felt as a menace.

And then there is the horror of infinity. For the healthy visionary, the perception of the infinite in a finite particular is a revelation of divine immanence; for Renée, it was a revelation of what she calls 'the System,' the vast cosmic mechanism which exists only to grind out guilt and punishment, solitude and unreality.8

Sanity is a matter of degree, and there are plenty of visionaries who see the world as Renée saw it, but contrive, none the less, to live outside the asylum. For them, as for the positive visionary, the universe is transfigured—but for the worse. Everything in it, from the stars in the sky to the dust under their feet, is unspeakably sinister or disgusting; every event is charged with a hateful significance; every object manifests the presence of an Indwelling Horror, infinite, all-powerful, eternal.

This negatively transfigured world has found its way, from time to time, into literature and the arts. It writhed and threatened in Van Gogh's later landscapes; it was the setting and the theme of all Kafka's stories; it was Géricault's spiritual home;9 it was inhabited by Goya during the years of his deafness and solitude; it was glimpsed by Browning when he wrote Childe Roland; it had its place, over against the theophanies, in the novels of Charles Williams.

The negative visionary experience is often accompanied by bodily sensations of a very special and

characteristic kind. Blissful visions are generally associated with a sense of separation from the body, a feeling of deindividualization. (It is, no doubt, this feeling of deindividualization which makes it possible for the Indians who practice the peyote cult to use the drug not merely as a short cut to the visionary world, but also as an instrument for creating a loving solidarity within the participating group.) When the visionary experience is terrible and the world is transfigured for the worse, individualization is intensified and the negative visionary finds himself associated with a body that seems to grow progressively more dense, more tightly packed, until he finds himself at last reduced to being the agonized consciousness of an inspissated lump of matter, no bigger than a stone that can be held between the hands.

It is worth remarking, that many of the punishments described in the various accounts of hell are punishments of pressure and constriction. Dante's sinners are buried in mud, shut up in the trunks of trees, frozen solid in blocks of ice, crushed beneath stones. The Inferno is psychologically true. Many of its pains are experienced by schizophrenics, and by those who have taken mescalin or lysergic acid under unfavourable conditions.10

What is the nature of these unfavourable conditions? How and why is heaven turned into hell? In certain cases the negative visionary experience is the result of predominantly physical causes. Mescalin tends, after ingestion, to accumulate in the liver. If the liver is diseased, the associated mind may find itself in hell. But what is more important for our present purposes is the fact that negative visionary experience may be induced by purely psychological means. Fear and anger bar the way to the heavenly Other World and plunge the mescalin taker into hell.

And what is true of the mescalin taker is also true of the person who sees visions spontaneously or under hypnosis. Upon this psychological foundation has been reared the theological doctrine of saving faith—a doctrine to be met with in all the great religious traditions of the world. Eschatologists have always found it difficult to reconcile their rationality and their morality with the brute facts of psychological experience. As rationalists and moralists, they feel that good behaviour should be rewarded and that the virtuous deserve to go to heaven. But as psychologists they know that virtue is not the sole or sufficient condition of blissful visionary experience. They know that works alone are powerless and that it is faith, or loving confidence, which guarantees that visionary experience shall be blissful.

Negative emotions—the fear which is the absence of confidence, the hatred, anger, or malice which exclude love—are the guarantee that visionary experience, if and when it comes, shall be appalling. The Pharisee is a virtuous man; but his virtue is of the kind which is compatible with negative emotion. His visionary experiences are therefore likely to be infernal rather

than blissful.

The nature of the mind is such that the sinner who repents and makes an act of faith in a higher power is more likely to have a blissful visionary experience than is the self-satisfied pillar of society with his righteous indignations, his anxiety about possessions and pretensions, his ingrained habits of blaming, despising, and condemning. Hence the enormous importance attached, in all the great religious traditions, to the state of mind at the moment of death.

Visionary experience is not the same as mystical experience. Mystical experience is beyond the realm of opposites. Visionary experience is still within that realm. Heaven entails hell, and 'going to heaven' is no more liberation than is the descent into horror. Heaven is merely a vantage point from which the divine Ground can be more clearly seen than on the level of ordinary individualized existence.

If consciousness survives bodily death, it survives, presumably, on every mental level—on the level of mystical experience, on the level of blissful visionary experience, on the level of infernal visionary experience, and on the level of everyday individual existence. In life, even the blissful visionary experience tends to change its sign if it persists too long.

Many schizophrenics have their times of heavenly happiness; but the fact that (unlike the mescalin taker) they do not know when, if ever, they will be permitted to return to the reassuring banality of everyday experience causes even heaven to seem appalling. But for those who, for whatever reason, are appalled, heaven turns into hell, bliss into horror, the Clear Light into the hateful glare of the land of lit-upness.

Something of the same kind may happen in the posthumous state. After having had a glimpse of the unbearable splendour of ultimate Reality, and after having shuttled back and forth between heaven and hell, most souls find it possible to retreat into that more reassuring region of the mind, where they can use their own and other people's wishes, memories, and fancies to construct a world very like that in which they lived on earth.

Of those who die an infinitesimal minority are capable of immediate union with the divine Ground, a few are capable of supporting the visionary bliss of heaven, a few find themselves in the visionary horrors of hell and are unable to escape; the great majority end up in the kind of world described by Swedenborg and the mediums. From this world it is doubtless possible to pass, when the necessary conditions have been fulfilled, to worlds of visionary bliss or the final enlightenment.

My own guess is that modern spiritualism and ancient tradition are both correct. There is a posthumous state of the kind described in Sir Oliver Lodge's book Raymond; but there is

also a heaven of blissful visionary experience; there is also a hell of the same kind of appalling visionary experience as is suffered here by schizophrenics and some of those who take mescalin; and there is also an experience, beyond time, of union with the divine Ground.

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1 See Appendix I

2 See Appendix II

3 See Appendix III

4 See Appendix IV

5 A. K. Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art, p. 40.

6 See Appendix V

7 M. A. Sechehaye. Paris, 1950.

8 See Appendix VI

9 See Appendix VII

10 See Appendix VIII

Appendix I

Two other, less effective aids to visionary experience deserve mention—carbon dioxide and the stroboscopic lamp. A mixture (completely non-toxic) of seven parts of oxygen and three of carbon dioxide produces, in those who inhale it, certain physical and psychological changes, which have been exhaustively described by Meduna. Among these changes the most important, in our present context, is a marked enhancement of the ability to ‘see things,’ when the eyes are closed. In some cases only swirls of patterned colour are seen. In others there may be vivid recalls of past experiences. (Hence the value of CO_2 as a therapeutic agent.) In yet other cases carbon dioxide transports the subject to the Other World at the antipodes of his everyday consciousness, and he enjoys very briefly visionary experiences entirely unconnected with his own personal history or with the problems of the human race in general.

In the light of these facts it becomes easy to understand the rationale of yogic breathing exercises. Practiced systematically, these exercises result, after a time, in prolonged suspensions of breath. Long suspensions of breath lead to a high concentration of carbon dioxide in the lungs and blood, and this increase in the concentration of CO_2 lowers the efficiency of the brain as a reducing valve and permits the entry into consciousness of experiences, visionary or mystical, from ‘out there.’

Prolonged and continuous shouting or singing may produce similar, but less strongly marked, results. Unless they are highly trained, singers tend to breathe out more than they breathe in. Consequently the concentration of carbon dioxide in the alveolar air and the blood is increased and, the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve being lowered, visionary experience becomes possible. Hence the interminable ‘vain repetitions’ of magic and religion. The chanting of the curandero, the medicine-man, the shaman; the endless psalm-singing and sutra-intoning of Christian and Buddhist monks; the shouting and howling, hour after hour, of revivalists—under all the diversities of theological belief and aesthetic convention, the psychochemico-physiological intention remains constant. To increase the concentration of CO_2 in the lungs and blood and so to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing

valve, until it will admit biologically useless material from Mind-at-Large—this, though the shouters, singers, and mutterers did not know it, has been at all times the real purpose and point of magic spells, of mantrams, litanies, psalms, and sutras. ‘The heart,’ said Pascal, ‘has its reasons.’ Still more cogent and much harder to unravel are the reasons of the lungs, the blood, and the enzymes, of neurons and synapses. The way to the super-conscious is through the subconscious, and the way, or at least one of the ways, to the subconscious is through the chemistry of individual cells.

With the stroboscopic lamp we descend from chemistry to the still more elementary realm of physics. Its rhythmically flashing light seems to act directly, through the optic nerves, on the electrical manifestations of the brain’s activity. (For this reason there is always a slight danger involved in the use of the stroboscopic lamp. Some persons suffer from petit mal without being made aware of the fact by any clear-cut and unmistakable symptoms. Exposed to a stroboscopic lamp, such persons may go into a full-blown epileptic fit. The risk is not very great; but it must always be recognized. One case in eighty may turn out badly.)

To sit, with eyes closed, in front of a stroboscopic lamp is a very curious and fascinating experience. No sooner is the lamp turned on than the most brilliantly coloured patterns make themselves visible. These patterns are not static, but change incessantly. Their prevailing colour is a function of the stroboscope’s rate of discharge. When the lamp is flashing at any speed between ten to fourteen or fifteen times a second, the patterns are prevailingly orange and red. Green and blue make their appearance when the rate exceeds fifteen flashes a second. After eighteen or nineteen, the patterns become white and grey. Precisely why we should see such patterns under the stroboscope is not known. The most obvious explanation would be in terms of the interference of two or more rhythms—the rhythm of the lamp and the various rhythms of the brain’s electrical activity. Such interferences may be translated by the visual centre and optic nerves into something, of which the mind becomes conscious as a coloured, moving pattern. Far more difficult to explain is the fact, independently observed by several experimenters, that the stroboscope tends to enrich and intensify the visions induced by mescalin or lysergic acid. Here, for example, is a case communicated to me by a medical friend. He had taken lysergic acid and was seeing, with his eyes shut, only coloured, moving patterns. Then he sat down in front of a stroboscope. The lamp was turned on and, immediately, abstract geometry was transformed into what my friend described as ‘Japanese landscapes’ of surpassing beauty. But how on earth can the interference of two rhythms produce an arrangement of electrical impulses interpretable as a living, self-modulating Japanese landscape unlike anything the subject has ever seen, suffused with preternatural light and colour, and charged with preternatural significance?

This mystery is merely a particular case of a larger, more comprehensive mystery—the nature of the relations

between visionary experience and events on the cellular, chemical, and electrical levels. By touching certain areas of the brain with a very fine electrode, Penfield has been able to induce the recall of a long chain of memories relating to some past experience. This recall is not merely accurate on every perceptual detail; it is also accompanied by all the emotions which were aroused by the events when they originally occurred. The patient, who is under a local anesthetic, finds himself simultaneously in two times and places—in the operating room, now, and in his childhood home, hundreds of miles away and thousands of days in the past. Is there, one wonders, some area in the brain from which the probing electrode could elicit Blake's Cherubim, or Weir Mitchell's self-transforming Gothic tower encrusted with living gems, or my friend's unspeakably lovely Japanese landscapes? And if, as I myself believe, visionary experiences enter our consciousness from somewhere 'out there' in the infinity of Mind-at-Large, what sort of an ad hoc neurological pattern is created for them by the receiving and transmitting brain? And what happens to this ad hoc pattern, when the vision is over? Why do all visionaries insist on the impossibility of recalling, in anything even faintly resembling its original form and intensity, their transfiguring experiences? How many questions—and, as yet, how few answers!

Appendix II

In the Western world visionaries and mystics are a good deal less common than they used to be. There are two principal reasons for this state of affairs—a philosophical reason and a chemical reason. In the currently fashionable picture of the universe there is no place for valid transcendental experience. Consequently those who have had what they regard as valid transcendental experiences are looked upon with suspicion, as being either lunatics or swindlers. To be a mystic or a visionary is no longer creditable.

But it is not only our mental climate that is unfavourable to the visionary and the mystic; it is also our chemical environment—an environment profoundly different from that in which our forefathers passed their lives.

The brain is chemically controlled, and experience has shown that it can be made permeable to the (biologically speaking) superfluous aspects of Mind-at-Large by modifying the (biologically speaking) normal chemistry of the body.

For almost half of every year our ancestors ate no fruit, no green vegetables, and (since it was impossible for them to feed more than a few oxen, cows, swine, and poultry during

the winter months) very little butter or fresh meat, and very few eggs. By the beginning of each successive spring, most of them were suffering, mildly or acutely, from scurvy, due to lack of vitamin C, and pellagra, caused by a shortage in their diet of the B complex. The distressing physical symptoms of these diseases are associated with no less distressing psychological symptoms.11 The nervous system is more vulnerable than the other tissues of the body; consequently vitamin deficiencies tend to affect the state of mind before they affect, at least in any very obvious way, the skin, bones, mucous membranes, muscles, and viscera. The first result of an inadequate diet is a lowering of the efficiency of the brain as an instrument for biological survival. The undernourished person tends to be afflicted by anxiety, depression, hypochondria, and feelings of anxiety. He is also liable to see visions; for when the cerebral reducing valve has its efficiency reduced, much (biologically speaking) useless material flows into consciousness from 'out there,' in Mind-at-Large.

Much of what the earlier visionaries experienced was terrifying. To use the language of Christian theology, the Devil revealed himself in their visions and ecstasies a good deal more frequently than did God. In an age when vitamins were deficient and a belief in Satan universal, this was not surprising. The mental distress, associated with even mild cases of pellagra and scurvy, was deepened by fears of damnation and a conviction that the powers of evil were omnipresent. This distress was apt to tinge with its own dark colouring the visionary material, admitted to consciousness through a cerebral valve whose efficiency had been impaired by underfeeding. But in spite of their preoccupations with eternal punishment and in spite of their deficiency disease, spiritually minded ascetics often saw heaven and might even be aware, occasionally, of that divinely impartial One, in which the polar opposites are reconciled. For a glimpse of beatitude, for a foretaste of unitive knowledge, no price seemed too high. Mortification of the body may produce a host of undesirable mental symptoms; but it may also open a door into a transcendental world of Being, Knowledge, and Bliss. That is why, in spite of its obvious disadvantages, almost all aspirants to the spiritual life have, in the past, undertaken regular courses of bodily mortification.

So far as vitamins were concerned, every medieval winter was a long involuntary fast, and this involuntary fast was followed, during Lent, by forty days of voluntary abstinence. Holy Week found the faithful marvelously well prepared, so far as their body chemistry was concerned, for its tremendous incitements to grief and joy, for seasonable remorse of conscience and a self-transcending identification with the risen Christ. At this season of the highest religious excitement and the lowest vitamin intake, ecstasies and visions were almost a commonplace. It was only to be expected.

For cloistered contemplatives, there were several Lents in every year. And even between fasts their diet was

meager in the extreme. Hence those agonies of depression and scrupulosity described by so many spiritual writers; hence their frightful temptations to despair and self-slaughter. But hence too those ‘gratuitous graces,’ in the forms of heavenly visions and locutions, of prophetic insights, of telepathic ‘discernments of spirits.’ And hence, finally, their ‘infused contemplation,’ their ‘obscure knowledge’ of the One in all.

Fasting was not the only form of physical mortification resorted to by the earlier aspirants to spirituality. Most of them regularly used upon themselves the whip of knotted leather or even of iron wire. These beatings were the equivalent of fairly extensive surgery without anesthetics, and their effects on the body chemistry of the penitent were considerable. Large quantities of histamine and adrenalin were released while the whip was actually being plied; and when the resulting wounds began to fester (as wounds practically always did before the age of soap), various toxic substances, produced by the decomposition of protein, found their way into the bloodstream. But histamine produces shock, and shock affects the mind no less profoundly than the body. Moreover, large quantities of adrenalin may cause hallucinations, and some of the products of its decomposition are known to induce symptoms resembling those of schizophrenia. As for toxins from wounds—these upset the enzyme systems regulating the brain, and lower its efficiency as an instrument for getting on in a world where the biologically fittest survive. This may explain why the Curé d’Ars used to say that, in the days when he was free to flagellate himself without mercy, God would refuse him nothing. In other words, when remorse, self-loathing, and the fear of hell release adrenalin, when self-inflicted surgery releases adrenalin and histamine, and when infected wounds release decomposed protein into the blood, the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve is lowered and unfamiliar aspects of Mind-at-Large (including psi phenomena, visions, and, if he is philosophically and ethically prepared for it, mystical experiences) will flow into the ascetic’s consciousness.

Lent, as we have seen, followed a long period of involuntary fasting. Analogously, the effects of self-flagellation were supplemented, in earlier times, by much involuntary absorption of decomposed protein. Dentistry was non-existent, surgeons were executioners, and there were no safe antiseptics. Most people, therefore, must have lived out their lives with focal infections; and focal infections, though out of fashion as the cause of all the ills that flesh is heir to, can certainly lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve.

And the moral of all this is—what? Exponents of a Nothing-But philosophy will answer that, since changes in body chemistry can create the conditions favourable to visionary and mystical experience, visionary and mystical experience cannot be what they claim to be, what, for those who have had them, they self-evidently are. But this, of course, is a non sequitur.

A similar conclusion will be reached by those whose philosophy is unduly ‘spiritual.’ God, they will insist, is a spirit and is to be worshipped in spirit. Therefore an experience which is chemically conditioned cannot be an experience of the divine. But, in one way or another, all our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely ‘spiritual,’ purely ‘intellectual,’ purely ‘aesthetic,’ it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence. Furthermore, it is a matter of historical record that most contemplatives worked systematically to modify their body chemistry, with a view to creating the internal conditions favourable to spiritual insight. When they were not starving themselves into low blood sugar and a vitamin deficiency, or beating themselves into intoxication by histamine, adrenalin, and decomposed protein, they were cultivating insomnia and praying for long periods in uncomfortable positions, in order to create the psycho-physical symptoms of stress. In the intervals they sang interminable psalms, thus increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the lungs and the blood stream, or, if they were Orientals, they did breathing exercises to accomplish the same purpose. Today we know how to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve by direct chemical action, and without die risk of inflicting serious damage on the psycho-physical organism. For an aspiring mystic to revert, in the present state of knowledge, to prolonged fasting and violent self-flagellation would be as senseless as it would be for an aspiring cook to behave like Charles Lamb’s Chinaman, who burned down the house in order to roast a pig. Knowing as he does (or at least as he can know, if he so desires) what are the chemical conditions of transcendental experience, the aspiring mystic should turn for technical help to the specialists—in pharmacology, in biochemistry, in physiology and neurology, in psychology and psychiatry and parapsychology. And on their part, of course, the specialists (if any of them aspire to be genuine men of science and complete human beings) should turn, out of their respective pigeonholes, to the artist, the sibyl, the visionary, the mystic—all those, in a word, who have had experience of the Other World and who know, in their different ways, what to do with that experience.

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11 See The Biology of Human Starvation, by A. Keys (University of Minnesota Press 1950); also the recent (1955) reports of the work on the role of vitamin deficiencies in mental disease carried out by Dr. George Watson and his associates in Southern California.

Appendix III

Vision-like effects and vision-inducing devices have played a greater part in popular entertainment than in the fine arts. Fireworks, pageantry, theatrical spectacle—these are essentially visionary arts. Unfortunately they are also ephemeral arts, whose earlier masterpieces are known to us only by report. Nothing remains of all the Roman triumphs, the medieval tournaments, the Jacobean masques, the long succession of state entries and coronations, of royal marriages and solemn decapitations, of canonizations and the funerals of Popes. The best that can be hoped for such magnificences is that they may 'live in Settle's numbers one day more.'

An interesting feature of these popular visionary arts is their close dependence upon contemporary technology. Fireworks, for example, were once no more than bonfires (and to this day, I may add, a good bonfire on a dark night remains one of the most magical and transporting of spectacles. Looking at it, one can understand the mentality of the Mexican peasant, who sets out to burn an acre of woodland in order to plant his maize, but is delighted when, by a happy accident, a square mile or two goes up in bright, apocalyptic flame). True pyrotechny began (in Europe at least, if not in China) with the use of combustibles in sieges and naval battles. From war it passed, in due course, to entertainment. Imperial Rome had its firework displays, some of which, even in its decline, were elaborate in the extreme. Here is Claudian's description of the show put on by Manlius Theodoras in A.D. 399.

Mobile ponderibus descendat pegma reductis inque chori speciem spargentes ardua flammas scaena rotet varios, et fingat Mulciber orbis per tabulas impune vagos pictaeque citato ludent igne trabes, et non permissa morari fida per innocuas errent incendia turres.

'Let the counterweights be removed,' Mr. Platnauer translates with a straightforwardness of language that does less than justice to the syntactical extravagances of the original, 'and let the mobile crane descend, lowering on to the lofty stage men who, wheeling chorus-wise, scatter flames. Let Vulcan forge balls of fire to roll innocuously across the boards. Let the flames appear to play about the sham beams of the scenery and a tame conflagration, never allowed to rest, wander among the untouched towers.'

After the fall of Rome, pyrotechny became, once more, exclusively a military art. Its greatest triumph was the invention by Callinicus, about A.D. 650, of the famous Greek Fire—

the secret weapon which enabled a dwindling Byzantine Empire to hold out for so long against its enemies.

With the Renaissance fireworks re-entered the world of popular entertainment. With every advance in the science of chemistry, they became more and more brilliant. By the middle of the nineteenth century pyrotechny had reached a peak of technical perfection and was capable of transporting vast multitudes of spectators towards the visionary antipodes of minds which, consciously, were respectable Methodist, Puseyites, Utilitarians, disciples of Mill or Marx, of Newman, or Bradlaugh, or Samuel Smiles. In the Piazza del Popolo, at Ranelagh and the Crystal Palace, on every Fourth and Fourteenth of July, the popular subconscious was reminded by the crimson glare of strontium, by copper blue and barium green and sodium yellow, of that Other World, down under, in the psychological equivalent of Australia.

Pageantry is a visionary art which has been used, from time immemorial, as a political instrument. The gorgeous fancy dress worn by Kings, Popes, and their respective retainers, military and ecclesiastical, has a very practical purpose—to impress the lower classes with a lively sense of their masters' superhuman greatness. By means of fine clothes and solemn ceremonies, de facto domination is transformed into a rule not merely de jure, but positively, de jure divino. The crowns and tiaras, the assorted jewelry, the satins, silks, and velvets, the gaudy uniforms and vestments, the crosses and medals, the sword hilts and the croziers, the plumes in the cocked hats and their clerical equivalents, those huge feather fans which make every papal function look like a tableau from Aïda—all these are vision-inducing properties, designed to make all too human gentlemen and ladies look like heroes, demigoddesses, and seraphs, and giving, in the process, a great deal of innocent pleasure to all concerned, actors and spectators alike.

In the course of the last two hundred years the technology of artificial lighting has made enormous progress, and this progress has contributed very greatly to the effectiveness of pageantry and the closely related art of theatrical spectacle. The first notable advance was made in the eighteenth century, with the introduction of moulded spermaceti candles in place of the older tallow dip and poured wax taper. Next came the invention of Argand's tubular wick, with an air supply on the inner as well as the outer surface of the flame. Glass chimneys speedily followed, and it became possible, for the first time in history, to burn oil with a bright and completely smokeless light. Coal gas was first employed as an illuminant in the early years of the nineteenth century, and in 1825 Thomas Drummond found a practical way of heating lime to incandescence by means of an oxygen-hydrogen or oxygen-coal gas flame. Meanwhile parabolic reflectors for concentrating light into a narrow beam had come into use. (The first English lighthouse equipped with such a reflector was built in 1790.)

The influence on pageantry and theatrical spectacle of these inventions was profound. In earlier times civic

and religious ceremonies could only take place during the day (and days were as often cloudy as fine), or by the light, after sunset, of smoky lamps and torches or the feeble twinkling of candles. Argand and Drummond, gas, limelight, and, forty years later, electricity made it possible to evoke, from the boundless chaos of night, rich island universes, in which the glitter of metal and gems, the sumptuous glow of velvets and brocades were intensified to the highest pitch of what may be called intrinsic significance. A recent example of ancient pageantry, raised by twentieth-century lighting to a higher magical power, was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In the motion picture of the event, a ritual of transporting splendour was saved from the oblivion which, up till now, has always been the fate of such solemnities, and preserved it, blazing preternaturally under the floodlights, for the delight of a vast contemporary and future audience.

Two distinct and separate arts are practiced in the theatre—the human art of the drama, and the visionary, other-world art of spectacle. Elements of the two arts may be combined in a single evening's entertainment—the drama being interrupted (as so often happens in elaborate productions of Shakespeare) to permit the audience to enjoy a tableau vivant, in which the actors either remain still or, if they move, move only in a non-dramatic way, ceremonially, processionally or in a formal dance. Our concern here is not with drama; it is with theatrical spectacle, which is simply pageantry without its political or religious overtones.

In the minor visionary arts of the costumier and the designer of stage jewelry our ancestors were consummate masters. Nor, for all their dependence on unassisted muscle power, were they far behind us in the building and working of stage machinery, the contrivance of 'special effects.' In the masques of Elizabethan and early Stuart times, divine descents and irruptions of demons from the cellarage were a commonplace; so were apocalypses, so were the most amazing metamorphoses. Enormous sums of money were lavished on these spectacles. The Inns of Court, for example, put on a show for Charles I which cost more than twenty thousand pounds—at a date when the purchasing power of the pound was six or seven times what it is today.

'Carpentry,' said Ben Jonson sarcastically, 'is the soul of masque.' His contempt was motivated by resentment. Inigo Jones was paid as much for designing the scenery as was Ben for writing the libretto. The outraged laureate had evidently failed to grasp the fact that masque is a visionary art, and that visionary experience is beyond words (at any rate beyond all but the most Shakespearean words) and is to be evoked by direct, unmediated perceptions of things that remind the beholder of what is going on at the unexplored antipodes of his own personal consciousness. The soul of masque could never, in the very nature of things, be a Jonsonian libretto; it had to be carpentry. But even carpentry could not be the masque's whole soul. When it comes to us from within, visionary experience is always preternaturally brilliant. But the early set designers possessed no manageable illuminant brighter than

a candle. At close range a candle can create the most magical lights and contrasting shadows. The visionary paintings of Rembrandt and Georges de Latour are of things and persons seen by candlelight. Unfortunately light obeys the law of the inverse squares. At a safe distance from an actor in inflammable fancy dress, candles are hopelessly inadequate. At ten feet, for example, it would take one hundred of the best wax tapers to produce an effective illumination of one foot-candle. With such miserable lighting only a fraction of the masque's visionary potentialities could be made actual. Indeed, its visionary potentialities were not fully realized until long after it had ceased, in its original form, to exist. It was only in the nineteenth century, when advancing technology had equipped the theatre with limelight and parabolic reflectors, that the masque came fully into its own. Victoria's reign was the heroic age of the so-called Christmas pantomime and the fantastic spectacle. 'Ali Baba,' 'The King of the Peacocks,' 'The Golden Branch,' 'The Island of Jewels'—their very names are magical. The soul of that theatrical magic was carpentry and dressmaking; its indwelling spirit, its scintilla animae, was gas and limelight and, after the eighties, electricity. For the first time in the history of the stage, beams of brightest incandescence transfigured the painted backdrops, the costumes, the glass and pinchbeck of jewelry, so that they became capable of transporting the spectators towards that Other World which lies at the back of every mind, however perfect its adaptation to the exigencies of social life—even the social life of Mid-Victorian England. Today we are in the fortunate position of being able to squander half a million horsepower on the nightly illumination of a metropolis. And yet, in spite of this devaluation of artificial light, theatrical spectacle still retains its old compelling magic. Embodied in ballets, revues, and musical comedies, the soul of masque goes marching along. Thousand-watt lamps and parabolic reflectors project beams of preternatural light, and preternatural light evokes, in everything it touches, preternatural colour and preternatural significance. Even the silliest spectacle can be rather wonderful. It is a case of a New World having been called in to redress the balance of the Old—of visionary art making up for the deficiencies of all-too-human drama.

Athanasius Kircher's invention—if his, indeed, it was—was christened from the first Lanterna Magica. The name was everywhere adopted as perfectly appropriate to a machine, whose raw material was light, and whose finished product was a coloured image emerging from the darkness. To make the original magic lantern show yet more magical, Kircher's successors devised a number of methods for imparting life and movement to the projected image. There were 'chrometropic' slides, in which two painted glass discs could be made to revolve in opposite directions, producing a crude but still effective imitation of those perpetually changing three-dimensional patterns, which have been seen by virtually everyone who has had a vision, whether spontaneous or induced by drugs, fasting, or the stroboscopic lamp. Then there were those 'dissolving views,' which reminded the spectator of the metamorphoses going on incessantly at the antipodes of his everyday consciousness. To make one scene turn imperceptibly into another,

two magic lanterns were used, projecting coincident images on the screen. Each lantern was fitted with a shutter, so arranged that the light of one could be progressively dimmed, while the light of the other (originally completely obscured) was progressively brightened. In this way the view projected by the first lantern was insensibly replaced by the view by the second—to the delight and astonishment of all beholders. Another device was the mobile magic lantern, projecting its image on a semi-transparent screen, on the further side of which sat the audience. When the lantern was wheeled close to the screen, the projected image was very small. As it was withdrawn, the image became progressively larger. An automatic focusing device kept the changing images sharp and unblurred at all distances. The word ‘phantasmagoria’ was coined in 1802 by the inventors of this new kind of peepshow.

All these improvements in the technology of magic lanterns were contemporary with the poets and painters of the Romantic revival, and may perhaps have exercised a certain influence on their choice of subject-matter and their methods of treating it. Queen Mab and The Revolt of Islam, for example, are full of dissolving views and phantasmagorias. Keats’ descriptions of scenes and persons, of interiors and furniture and effects of light, have the intense beamy quality of coloured images on a white sheet in a darkened room. John Martin’s representations of Satan and Belshazzar, of Hell and Babylon and the Deluge, are manifestly inspired by lantern slides and tableaux vivants dramatically illuminated by limelight.

The twentieth-century equivalent of the magic lantern show is the coloured movie. In the huge, expensive ‘spectaculars,’ the soul of masque goes marching along—with a vengeance sometimes, but sometimes also with taste and a real feeling for vision-inducing fantasy. Moreover, thanks to advancing technology, the coloured documentary has proved itself, in skillful hands, a notable new form of popular visionary art. The immensely magnified cactus blossoms, into which, at the end of Disney’s The Living Desert, the spectator finds himself sinking, come straight from the Other World. And then what transporting visions, in the best of the nature films, of foliage in the wind, of the textures of rock and sand, of the shadows and emerald lights in grass or among the reeds, of birds and insects and four-footed creatures going about their business in the underbrush or among the branches of forest trees! Here are the magical close-up landscapes which fascinated the makers of mille-feuille tapestries, the medieval painters of gardens and hunting scenes. Here are the enlarged and isolated details of living nature out of which the artists of the Far East made some of the most beautiful of their paintings.

And then there is what may be called the Distorted Documentary—a strange new form of visionary art, admirably exemplified by Mr. Francis Thompson’s film, NY, NY. In this very strange and beautiful picture we see the city of New York as it appears when photographed through multiplying prisms, or reflected in the backs of spoons, polished hub caps, spherical and parabolic

mirrors. We still recognize houses, people, shop fronts, taxi cabs, but recognize them as elements in one of those living geometries which are so characteristic of the visionary experience. The invention of this new cinematographic art seems to presage (thank heaven!) the supersession and early demise of non-representational painting. It used to be said by the non-representationalists that coloured photography had reduced the old-fashioned portrait and the old-fashioned landscape to the rank of otiose absurdities. This, of course, is completely untrue. Coloured photography merely records and preserves, in an easily reproducible form, the raw materials with which portraitists and landscape painters work. Used as Mr. Thompson has used it, coloured cinematography does much more than merely record and preserve the raw materials of non-representational art; it actually turns out the finished product. Looking at NY, NY, I was amazed to see that virtually every pictorial device invented by the Old Masters of non-representational art and reproduced ad nauseam by the academicians and mannerists of the school, for the last forty years or more, makes its appearance, alive, glowing, intensely significant, in the sequences of Mr. Thompson's film.

Our ability to project a powerful beam of light has not only enabled us to create new forms of visionary art; it has also endowed one of the most ancient arts, the art of sculpture, with a new visionary quality which it did not previously possess. I have spoken in an earlier paragraph of the magical effects produced by the floodlighting of ancient monuments and natural objects. Analogous effects are seen when we turn the spotlights on to sculptured stone. Fuseli got the inspiration for some of his best and wildest pictorial ideas by studying the statues on Monte Cavallo by the light of the setting sun, or, better still, when illuminated by lightning flashes at midnight. Today we dispose of artificial sunsets and synthetic lightning. We can illuminate our statues from whatever angle we choose, and with practically any desired degree of intensity. Sculpture, in consequence, has revealed fresh meanings and unsuspected beauties. Visit the Louvre one night, when the Greek and Egyptian antiquities are floodlit. You will meet with new gods, nymphs, and Pharaohs, you will make the acquaintance, as one spotlight goes out and another, in a different quarter of space, is lit up, of a whole family of unfamiliar Victories of Samothrace.

The past is not something fixed and unalterable. Its facts are rediscovered by every succeeding generation, its values reassessed, its meanings redefined in the context of present tastes and preoccupations. Out of the same documents and monuments and works of art, every epoch invents its own Middle Ages, its private China, its patented and copyrighted Hellas. Today, thanks to recent advances in the technology of lighting, we can go one further than our predecessors. Not only have we reinterpreted the great works of sculpture bequeathed to us by the past; we have actually succeeded in altering the physical appearance of these works. Greek statues, as we see them illuminated by a light that never was on land or sea, and then photographed in a series of fragmentary close-ups from the oddest angles, bear almost

no resemblance to the Greek statues seen by art critics and the general public in the dim galleries and decorous engravings of the past. The aim of the classical artist, in whatever period he may happen to live, is to impart order to the chaos of experience, to present a comprehensible, rational picture of reality in which all the parts are clearly seen and coherently related, so that the beholder knows (or, to be more accurate, imagines that he knows) precisely what's what. To us this ideal of rational orderliness makes no appeal. Consequently, when we are confronted by works of classical art, we use all the means in our power to make them look like something which they are not, and were never meant to be. From a work, whose whole point is its unity of conception, we select a single feature, focus our searchlights upon it, and so force it, out of all context, upon the observer's consciousness. Where a contour seems to us too continuous, too obviously comprehensible, we break it up by alternating impenetrable shadows with patches of glaring brightness. When we photograph a sculptured figure or group, we use the camera to isolate a part which we then exhibit in enigmatic independence from the whole. By such means we can de-classicize the severest classic. Subjected to the light treatment and photographed by an expert camera man, a Pheidias becomes a piece of Gothic expressionism, a Praxiteles is turned into a fascinating surrealist object dredged up from the ooziest depths of the subconscious. This may be bad art history, but it is certainly enormous fun.

Appendix IV

Painter in ordinary first to the Duke of his native Lorraine and later to the King of France, Georges de Latour was treated, during his lifetime, as the great artist he so manifestly was. With the accession of Louis XIV and the rise, the deliberate cultivation, of a new art of Versailles, aristocratic in subject matter and lucidly classical in style, the reputation of this once famous man suffered an eclipse so complete that, within a couple of generations, his very name had been forgotten, and his surviving paintings came to be attributed to the Le Nains, to Honthorst, to Zurbarán, to Murillo, even to Velásquez. The rediscovery of Latour began in 1915 and was virtually complete by 1934, when the Louvre organized a notable exhibition of 'The Painters of Reality.' Ignored for nearly three hundred years, one of the greatest of French painters had come back to claim his rights.

Georges de Latour was one of those extroverted visionaries, whose art faithfully reflects certain aspects of the outer world, but reflects them in a state of transfigurement, so that every meanest particular becomes intrinsically significant, a manifestation of the absolute. Most of

his compositions are of figures seen by the light of a single candle. A single candle, as Caravaggio and the Spaniards had shown, can give rise to the most enormous theatrical effects. But Latour took no interest in theatrical effects. There is nothing dramatic in his pictures, nothing tragic or pathetic or grotesque, no representation of action, no appeal to the sort of emotions which people go to the theatre to have excited and then appeased. His personages are essentially static. They never do anything; they are simply there in the same way in which a granite Pharaoh is there, or a Bodhisattva from Khmer, or one of Piero's flat-footed angels. And the single candle is used, in every case, to stress this intense but unexcited, impersonal thereness. By exhibiting common things in an uncommon light, its flame makes manifest the living mystery and inexplicable marvel of mere existence. There is so little religiosity in the paintings that in many cases it is impossible to decide whether we are confronted by an illustration to the Bible or a study of models by candlelight. Is the 'Nativity' at Rennes the nativity, or merely a nativity? Is the picture of an old man asleep under the eyes of a young girl merely that? Or is it of St Peter in prison being visited by the delivering angel? There is no way of telling. But though Latour's art is wholly without religiosity, it remains profoundly religious, in the sense that it reveals, with unexampled intensity, the divine omnipresence.

It must be added that, as a man, this great painter of God's immanence seems to have been proud, hard, intolerably overbearing, and avaricious. Which goes to show, yet once more, that there is never a one-to-one correspondence between an artist's work and his character.

Appendix V

At the near point Vuillard painted interiors for the most part, but sometimes also gardens. In a few compositions he managed to combine the magic of propinquity with the magic of remoteness by representing a corner of a room, in which there stands or hangs one of his own, or someone else's, representation of a distant view of trees, hills, and sky. It is an invitation to make the best of both worlds, the telescopic and the microscopic, at a single glance.

For the rest, I can think of only a very few close-up landscapes by modern European artists. There is a strange 'Thicket' by Van Gogh at the Metropolitan. There is Constable's wonderful 'Dell in Helmington Park' at the Tate. There is a bad picture, Millais's 'Ophelia,' made magical, in spite of everything, by its intricacies of summer greenery seen from the point of view, very nearly, of a water rat. And I remember a Delacroix, glimpsed

long ago at some loan exhibition, of bark and leaves and blossom at the closest range. There must, of course, be others; but either I have forgotten, or have never seen them. In any case there is nothing in the West comparable to the Chinese and Japanese renderings of nature at the near point. A spray of blossoming plum, eighteen inches of a bamboo stem with its leaves, tits or finches seen at hardly more than arm's length among the bushes, all kinds of flowers and foliage, of birds and fish and small mammals. Each small life is represented as the centre of its own universe, the purpose, in its own estimation, for which this world and all that is in it were created; each issues its own specific and individual declaration of independence from human imperialism; each, by ironic implication, derides our absurd pretensions to lay down merely human rules for the conduct of the cosmic game; each mutely repeats the divine tautology: I am that I am.

Nature at the middle distance is familiar—so familiar that we are deluded into believing that we really know what it is all about. Seen very close at hand, or at a great distance, or from an odd angle, it seems disquietingly strange, wonderful beyond all comprehension. The close-up landscapes of China and Japan are so many illustrations of the theme that Samsara and Nirvana are one, that the Absolute is manifest in every appearance. These great metaphysical, and yet pragmatic, truths were rendered by the Zen-inspired artists of the Far East in yet another way. All the objects of their near-point scrutiny were represented in a state of unrelatedness, against a blank of virgin silk or paper. Thus isolated, these transient appearances take on a kind of absolute Thing-in-Itselfhood. Western artists have used this device when painting sacred figures, portraits, and, sometimes, natural objects at a distance. Rembrandt's 'Mill' and Van Gogh's 'Cypresses' are examples of long-range landscapes, in which a single feature has been absolutized by isolation. The magical power of many of Goya's etchings, drawings, and paintings can be accounted for by the fact that his compositions almost always take the form of a few silhouettes, or even a single silhouette, seen against a blank. These silhouetted shapes possess the visionary quality of intrinsic significance, heightened by isolation and unrelatedness to preternatural intensity. In nature, as hi a work of art, the isolation of an object tends to invest it with absoluteness, to endow it with that more-than-symbolic meaning which is identical with being.

—But there's a tree—of many, one,

A single Field which I have looked upon,

Both of them speak of something that is gone.

The something which Wordsworth could no longer see was 'the visionary gleam.' That gleam, I remember, and that intrinsic significance were the

properties of a solitary oak that could be seen from the train, between Reading and Oxford, growing from the summit of a little knoll in a wide expanse of plowland, and silhouetted against the pale northern sky.

The effects of isolation combined with proximity may be studied, in all their magical strangeness, in an extraordinary painting by a seventeenth-century Japanese artist, who was also a famous swordsman and a student of Zen. It represents a butcher bird, perched on the very tip of a naked branch, ‘waiting without purpose, but in the state of highest tension.’ Beneath, above, and all around is nothing. The bird emerges from the Void, from that eternal namelessness and formlessness, which is yet the very substance of the manifold, concrete, and transient universe. That shrike on its bare branch is first cousin to Hardy’s wintry thrush. But whereas the Victorian thrush insists on teaching us some kind of a lesson, the Far Eastern butcher bird is content simply to exist, to be intensely and absolutely there.

Appendix VI

Many schizophrenics pass most of their time neither on earth, nor in heaven, nor even in hell, but in a gray, shadowy world of phantoms and unrealities. What is true of these psychotics is true, to a lesser extent, of certain neurotics afflicted by a milder form of mental illness. Recently it has been found possible to induce this state of ghostly existence by administering a small quantity of one of the derivatives of adrenalin. For the living, the doors of heaven, hell, and limbo are opened, not by ‘massy keys of metals twain,’ but by the presence in the blood of one set of chemical compounds and the absence of another set. The shadow world inhabited by some schizophrenics and neurotics closely resembles the world of the dead, as described in some of the earlier religious traditions. Like the wraiths in Sheol and in Homer’s Hades, these mentally disturbed persons have lost touch with matter, language, and their fellow beings. They have no purchase on life and are condemned to ineffectiveness, solitude, and a silence broken only by the senseless squeak and gibber of ghosts.

The history of eschatological ideas marks a genuine progress—a progress which can be described in theological terms as the passage from Hades to Heaven, in chemical terms as the substitution of mescalin and lysergic acid for adrenolutin, and in psychological terms as the advance from catatonia and feelings of unreality to a sense of heightened reality in vision and, finally, in mystical experience.

Appendix VII

Géricault was a negative visionary; for though his art was almost obsessively true to nature, it was true to a nature that had been magically transfigured, in his perceiving and rendering of it, for the worse. ‘I start to paint a woman,’ he once said, ‘but it always ends up as a lion.’ More often, indeed it ended up as something a good deal less amiable than a lion—as a corpse, for example, or as a demon. His masterpiece, the prodigious ‘Raft of the Medusa,’ was painted not from life but from dissolution and decay—from bits of cadavers supplied by medical students, from the emaciated torso and jaundiced face of a friend who was suffering from a disease of the liver. Even the waves on which the raft is floating, even the overarching sky are corpse-coloured. It is as though the entire universe had become a dissecting room.

And then there are his demonic pictures. ‘The Derby,’ it is obvious, is being run in hell, against a background fairly blazing with darkness visible. ‘The Horse Startled by Lightning,’ in the National Gallery, is the revelation, in a single frozen instant, of the strangeness, the sinister, and even infernal otherness that hides in familiar things. In the Metropolitan Museum there is a portrait of a child. And what a child! In his luridly brilliant jacket the little darling is what Baudelaire liked to call ‘a budding Satan,’ un Satan en herbe. And the study of a naked man, also in the Metropolitan, is none other than the budding Satan grown up.

From the accounts which his friends have left of him it is evident that Géricault habitually saw the world about him as a succession of visionary apocalypses. The prancing horse of his early ‘Officier de Chasseurs’ was seen one morning, on the road to Saint-Cloud, in a dusty glare of summer sunshine, rearing and plunging between the shafts of an omnibus. The personages in the ‘Raft of the Medusa’ were painted in finished detail, one by one, on the virgin canvas. There was no outline drawing of the whole composition, no gradual building up of an overall harmony of tones and hues. Each particular revelation—of a body in decay, of a sick man in the ghastly extremity of hepatitis—was fully rendered as it was seen and artistically realized. By a miracle of genius, every successive apocalypse was made to fit, prophetically, into a harmonious composition which existed, when the first of the appalling visions was transferred to canvas, only in the artist’s imagination.

Appendix VIII

In Sartor Resartus Carlyle has left what (in Mr. Carlyle, my Patient) his psychosomatic biographer, Dr. James Halliday, calls ‘an amazing description of a psychotic state of mind, largely depressive, but partly schizophrenic.’

‘The men and women around me,’ writes Carlyle, ‘even speaking with me, were but Figures; I had practically forgotten that they were alive, that they were not merely automata. Friendship was but an incredible tradition. In the midst of their crowded streets and assemblages I walked solitary; and (except that it was my own heart, not another’s, that I kept devouring) savage also as the tiger in the jungle. . . . To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility; it was one huge, dead immeasurable Steam-Engine, rolling on in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb. . . . Having no hope, neither had I any definite fear, were it of Man or of Devil. And yet, strangely enough, I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear, tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what; it seemed as if all things in the Heavens above and the Earth beneath, would hurt me; as if the Heavens and the Earth were but the boundless jaws of a devouring Monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured.’ Renée and the idolater of heroes are evidently describing the same experience. Infinity is apprehended by both, but in the form of ‘the System,’ the ‘immeasurable Steam-Engine.’ To both, again, all is significant, but negatively significant, so that every event is utterly pointless, every object intensely unreal, every self-styled human being a clockwork dummy, grotesquely going through the motions of work and play, of loving, hating, thinking, of being eloquent, heroic, saintly, what you will—the robots are nothing if not versatile.

About the Author

Aldous Huxley was an English writer and editor who is best known for his dystopian novel Brave New World and its utopian counterpart, Island, his satiric work Crome Yellow, and his essays on a wide range of topics. A humanist, Huxley was recognized during his life as a leading intellectual and researcher into visual communication. In addition to his literary work, Huxley was a credited Hollywood screenwriter for such films as Pride and Prejudice (1940) and Jane Eyre (1944.) Huxley died on November 22, 1963, several hours after the assassination of John F. Kennedy and

the death of fellow author C. S. Lewis.

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