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Orpheus was the first Poet and the first musician, and when Orpheus sang, all nature gathered round to hear, not only the animals but even the trees: even the trees and rocks moved themselves into circles around him. As a theme, it was particularly popular in the later Roman Empire for it represented a different sort of power to the brute force which made the Empire. Orpheus was the organising power of Nature, and in villas all over the Roman world, from North Africa up to Gloucestershire, we still unearth mosaic walls and pavements with Orpheus at the centre, playing his lyre, and all Nature gathered round to hear. But when he tried to get married there were problems.

Hymen, says Ovid, winged his way across the skies to attend this marriage, but the omens were bad.

His torch smoked and spluttered and brought tears to the eyes. And when the bride went walking in the fields with her maids, she encountered the shepherd, Aristaeus, much given in his lonely state to rape; and fleeing to avoid him, she trod on a snake, which bit her in the heel so that she died and went straight down to Hades. Orpheus picked up his lyre and followed her.

His singing opened all doors down there. Charon, the ferryman, rowed him across the gulf; Cerberus, the three-headed hound who guards the gates, fawned upon him; and as he passed between the ghosts of those imprisoned there, all of them engaged in the same empty and repetitive patterns in which they had wasted their lives, his singing brought them relief. It was as if he brought something they had wanted all along.

As he passed, says Ovid, the bloodless ghosts were in tears; Tantalus ceased to seek the waters in which he stood up to his chin, but was unable to drink, Ixion's fiery disk stood still, the vultures ceased to gnaw at Tityus's liver, Sysiphus sat idle on his rock and the daughters of Danaeus rested from their pitchers.

Ovid's readers knew Tityus, Tantalus, the Daughters of Danaeus and the rest, but for us, who are they? They were figures drawn from the very dawn of story-telling, when the human imagination was just beginning to separate itself off from Nature, and men were on such good terms with the gods that they dined in each other's houses. It was the stage of human life represented by Adam and Eve in the Hebrew myth; when they still 'walked with God in the Garden.' And something is moving in the tales of this time: a groping premonition of the huge task awaiting humanity, to grow up, to suffer the brightness of a separate consciousness, actually to be alone. This means an exit from the paradise of togetherness which the animals never have to leave.

It is the subject of The Flaying of Marsyas, a myth which had great significance for Titian because, I am sure, he thought he was Marsyas. Marsyas was a centaur, that is to say half-man and half-goat, as we all are, and he invented the Pan Pipes, which were the first and simplest musical instrument. He accepted a challenge from Apollo that he could not make so lovely a music with his Pan Pipes, as Apollo could with his lyre: a more advanced musical

instrument, perhaps because its strings are taken from the gut of animals, which in humans is where all feeling is gathered. Marsyas loses; and Apollo pronounces his forfeit. It is to be stripped of his shaggy goat-skin and exposed, wholly to the rough winds of Nature.

Titian paints himself in the picture, just watching. The executioners perform their task with a ritual detachment. There's something sacred happening here, and we know that the flesh and landscapes that Titian painted so incomparably are what Titian himself sees, but can never in any sense touch or own. It is an allegory of consciousness. He knows the water that Tantalus cannot drink, the fruit that he cannot reach. He knows the nectar of the gods that no man can steal, but can only stay, stretched on the rack of not having it.

At this point in myth, the metaphors for coming out of Nature multiply. One is the Hebrew myth of being cast out of the Garden. Another is to live in friendship with the gods, and then to commit some grave offence and be expelled. Three of the figures that Ovid mentions here, are in this category. Tantalus stole the nectar of the gods and gave it to men. It is like Eve stealing the apple, and Prometheus stealing the fire: his penalty was to be stretched naked on a mountain, his liver daily devoured by vultures, yet growing again so that the suffering can go on. Sisyphus and Ixion tried to make love to a goddess. (Have we not all tried to sleep with a goddess?) They were all trying to steal the nectar of the gods.

But the interesting thing is that if the nectar remains the exclusive preserve of the gods, it remains unconscious. For they can never lose it. Only humans, with their capacity for both joy and suffering, can bring it into consciousness. And from the point of view of consciousness, that is their role: to 'steal' wonderful things from the gods and give them to humans. But then they suffer for it; and the capacity to do that, to suffer, is what being human is about.

Nectar is sweetness, the sweetness, I think, simply of Being, and it is wasted on the gods, since they are eternal. But that means they can never have it either. And that is why Zeus comes perpetually to human maidens, and Aphrodite in the Homeric Hymns, comes to Anchises in the sheepfolds; and the angel came to Mary, carrying the seed of God.

The most interesting version, therefore of the sin of Tantalus is that he invites the gods to dine with him, and they all troop into his house and sit down and he serves his son, Pelops for them to eat.

Most of them know at once what it is, and refuse in disgust. They have no wish to be stretched out on the rack of being human. In the Christian myth, it is the other way round. God serves his son to humans to eat, so that they should become a little bit god-like. And the Son accepts, but very few of us in any real sense, partake—for it means suffering. Both Tantalus, in this very ancient myth and Christianity, in its far more recent myth, are attempting the same thing: to bring spirit and matter together, as intimately together as we are with what we eat. The gods refuse in disgust—except for Demeter. Why Demeter? She has lost her daughter to the Underworld, stolen by Hades, and gone through the world, the upper world, howling her grief; until Zeus, forced by her threats to make all nature sterile, makes a compromise: that she should have her daughter back for some of the year, but she must always go back, for she ate some seeds of the pomegranate down there. Five months for five seeds of the pomegranate. That daughter is human in a new way. She is a figure of what consciousness has to be. That is the huge importance of the Kore, the Maiden, who spans the two sides: the upper side of life and colour, and the lower side of the darkness from which

things grow. And that is the importance of the Mysteries of Eleusis; and their secrecy, and the fact that relatively few people dare to be initiated into them, for people don't feel they are ready.

Tantalus and Ixion are variations on the same theme. Both try to make love to a goddess. Ixion is bound on a fiery wheel, which spins forever through space—never coming to earth. Tantalus, who tries it on with Hera herself, is permitted to make love to a cloud which Zeus forms in her shape. His seed falls to earth and engenders there Centaurus and all the race of the centaurs—who are fiery, sexual creatures, suitable metaphors for that sexual fantasy that slumbers perpetually in humans, glows, flickers into life and dies down again, is never entirely quiet, drawing its power from its nature as an echo, floating perpetually through the world, of the original energy of creation.

And one of that race is Chiron, the old centaur with the wounded foot, which never heals, and who taught Asklepios all he knew of the healing arts. Chiron is the archetype of the Wounded Healer.

The sin of Sisyphus was that he refused to die. He is the great Trickster figure of early myth, and the tricksters get out of anything. The stories told of Sisyphus are very like those told of other trickster figures—such as Brer Rabbit, who is, I think, a form of the African trickster god, the Hare, taking this homely form in the slave colonies of the New World. For Brer Rabbit, death comes in the form of Brer Fox and Brer Wolf, and Brer Fox catches him one day. So he cries out

Oh kill me, skin me alive, boil me in oil, do anything, anything, but don't throw me into that
bramble patch!

And Brer Fox gives a wicked laugh and throws him into the bramble patch; and, of course,
Brer Rabbit scampers off, crying,

Born and bred in a bramble patch!

That is typical of trickster stories in early myth, and people love them, for there is a Trickster
in all of us, especially in our youth.

Sisyphus's style is the same. When his time comes to die, he asks Hades to explain to him the
working of a pair of handcuffs.

Just show me, he says, how they work!

Hades shows him, and Sisyphus clicks the hand-cuffs shut, so that Hades is a prisoner.

Now a terrible situation develops. No-one in the whole world can die, even if they are cut up
into small pieces. Ultimately Zeus has to set Hades free, and order is restored—it being still
the time of Sisyphus to die. So he instructs his wife not to bury him, and when he arrives in
the underworld, explains to Persephone that he has neglected to see to his burial rites, and
asks for permission to return to deal with this important matter. He promises to return, but of
course he breaks his promise to do so, and so on.

Yet the early trickster figures are in a sense, the path-finders. They lead the way out of a total

subjection to Nature, which in order to be human, one has to do. When, however, they have done that, they have to take on the responsibility of being human, and that is a big deal, and they often can't do it. It is the problem of the Puer Aeternus, the successful trickster who cannot grow up.

That is treated in another tale of Sisyphus: which is that his fate is to endlessly roll a rock to the top of a hill and the moment he gets there, to have it have roll back down again to the bottom. When the music of Orpheus comes, Sisyphus sits idle on his rock. The pushing the rock uphill seems like that early struggle in life, which is to find out who one is, get established in the world, know what one can do and what one can't, and so on. After which the rock can roll down gently into the afternoon and the evening. But Sisyphus stays eternally in the first stage. He is once more that familiar, the Puer Aeternus.

Then we have the six daughters of Danaeus, who are eternally going to the river and filling their jars with water—but never manage to get them home, for the jars are cracked and they leak. At Danaeus' behest, his daughters married the six sons of a rival chieftain, who hoped in this way to make peace with Danaeus; but the daughters didn't want marriage and leaving Daddy. They went to their weddings with long spikes hidden in their lovely hair, and on the wedding night they killed their husbands, every one.

Water is symbolically feminine. The full water-jar, I think, would be a woman full of it and holding it. She is then psychologically free to leave home and found another one. These girls have not constructed their containers and Daddy has not helped them. They have never escaped from him, never lived their own lives. They are still dependent on the father; they are not psychologically separate. They have not even got to the top of the hill—like Sisyphus.

If we come last of all to Tityus, we must imagine a great giant, tied down over ten acres of land, his liver devoured by the same birds that devour the liver of Prometheus, the vultures. (It is a wonderful image of much human suffering.) The sin of Tityus was an attempted rape on Leto, a lover of Zeus himself, and the mother of the twins, Apollo and Artemis. It is in sex that people come closest to the mystery of Being, which is the nectar. Even the turn of an arm or a breast is charged with that energy. She can hardly blame him. But Apollo and Artemis shoot the offending Tityus full of arrows, the same arrows of desire, maybe, of which Blake speaks, and by which he had been amply pierced himself. Giants in folk-tales are huge, clumsy, infantile passions, but disposing of the power of the volcano or earthquake. Tityus stretched on his ten acres of soil is like Christ on the cross and Wotan on the World Tree—but he is also like Caliban, who lusts dumbly after Miranda in *The Tempest*, and carries as a result, the curse of the father. For what can brute matter do, but lust after the delicate forms of psyche? And how can it possess them, except in imagination? It is there that Tityus has Leto, and Tantalus has the fruit. In the end, there is no other way.

The strongest of all these images is Tantalus, who gives his name to being tantalised. He can see what, to the bottom of his soul, he wants, and all the world is showing it to him, everything in Nature says it; but it is ungraspable. He can't possess it. Jung says in *The Red Book*:

If I could touch my desire and not the object of my desire, I could put my hand on my soul.

He is speaking here of this other dimension, the Soul, which the ancient story tellers knew, maybe better than we do. Tantalus is up to his neck in water, but unable to drink. I think that

Titian experienced that: the almost unbearably beautiful world, with its landscapes and its human flesh. But it was this, Tantalus tried to trick the gods into eating some of it. We say ‘How disgusting!’ But it’s exactly what the great God does in the Christian myth, with his son. There is this clumsy but indestructible desire in the human psyche to bring the mortal and immortal together—which means suffering, for unless it can become intimately involved with the human, the Spirit can never know the great secrets of matter. Tantalus and Prometheus are the true heroes in the human story. They led us out of that time when the fire was still un-stolen, Eve’s apple still uneaten, when Plato’s Androgyne, the first man, had not split into the two halves that eternally search for each other—and men dined with the gods, and were as unconscious as they are.

Ovid says, however, that when Orpheus sang, they were all at peace. Ovid was a poet. He knew that in his poetry, he sometimes reached that point at which he knew the nectar. Another poet, Rilke, writing about Orpheus wrote the line Being is Song—*Sein ist gesang*. When the song of Orpheus is heard, the longing of Tantalus and the rest is stilled because they are transported, if only briefly, into that other dimension, in which matter and spirit have come together and we are for a moment, in a full sense, conscious. The gods (like humans) are perpetually drawn to the lodestar of that whole consciousness. That is why Zeus comes to human maidens, for it is only in an incarnation that the great mystery of Being can burst upon him.

Meanwhile, it seems to me that a great deal of the energy of mankind is devoted to giving them what we have to give. This is what sacrifice is all about—the sheer experience of reality. Thus the Elgoni, whom Jung met at the foot of Mount Kenya, have a strange custom. Every morning, as the sun rises, they spit on their hands and hold them up to the sun. They don’t know why they do it, they just do. But in this small ritual, the saliva, which is the essence of a man’s life, is given to the gods—as if those small sparks of conscious living are what they have to give. In Christianity too, Christ offers his suffering to the Father, and the Christian is encouraged to add his own, as part of that gift.

In the myth of Venus and Adonis, Venus knows what Demeter knew, for her son-lover, addicted to the hunt, is killed by a wild boar and she is at once the mother, eternally in grief. It is a late form of a much older myth, and a much newer one too, for it is still repeated in the rites of Holy Week, when they all stand with God’s mother beside the cross.

Stabat mater dolorosa
iuxta crucem lacrimosa
dum pendebat filius

Nature’s beloved child is always stretched on the bed of full consciousness, nailed on a cross or hung on the World Tree—and then gone into the cyclical rhythm of life and death. The gods neither rejoice nor grieve, for they are eternal. The humans do all that for them: that is what we’re for.

As pointers to any after-life, Ovid’s underworld is irrelevant, for it speaks too clearly of the condition of humans in this world. The myths of the Underworld are gropings after

psychological truth. Ovid knew that they spoke of what underlies the conscious life, that they spoke of the unconscious, in the only language in which it can be spoken of, which is image. In his Underworld, there are those who have blundered too big-heartedly after the light, stolen fire or nectar, made injudicious approaches to god or goddess. And there are those, more numerous, who are tormented by Eros, tricked, humiliated, lost in a bog, caught in split off patterns of energy and who don't change, don't develop, don't go anywhere. From these last, comes the principal metaphor of the *Metamorphoses*, which is the transformation into a more simple organism, an animal or, like Daphne fleeing from Apollo, a tree. The danger zone is always love.

Jung tells of a very old woman in the Burgholzli Clinic, when he arrived there as a young doctor. She had been there since before any of the staff could remember, and had one incomprehensible symptom—to move her hands perpetually in a certain circling movement. The hand-movements seemed to remind Jung of ones he had seen in the old town of Zurich in cobbler's shops, where the cobbler would hold the shoe between his knees and thread, in just that way, the leather. When she died, her brother came to the hospital and the story came out. She had been disappointed in love with a shoe-maker, who possibly realised what he was taking on and withdrew from their engagement. At which point, she had become fully psychotic and been admitted. The repetitive movements, thought Jung, were her way of keeping in touch with her lost love, not losing it. It is fully as terrible an image as any in the underworld of Ovid—an experience of loss buried so deep that she did not know it was there herself, but which expressed itself in those endless movements of the hands

People don't become psychotic for a failed love affair unless there is already some great failed love—a wound too great for the ego to absorb, to tolerate and adapt to it. There is always too, a genetic element—in the limit to what any particular psyche can process. We never know the relative importance of these elements in any particular case; but what we do know is that it is the human condition to feel those wounds that the animal is protected from. And it is from the human world that there occurs that withdrawal into simpler modes of being, that of a plant or an animal. And that is the theme of the *Metamorphoses*

The more robust suffer with Tantalus, up to his neck in water, but unable to drink. Jesus spoke of a spring of water that can rise inside a person. The woman he says it to jokes that she would like him to give her some, for then she wouldn't have to come to the well every day. Jesus doesn't explain. It is no good telling people about metaphor. The understanding can be evoked, called out, but its origin is always within. Yet that in itself, is itself the spring of water. To Nicodemus (the Pharisee who comes to him by night, because he doesn't want people to know he's doing it), Jesus speaks of rebirth by water, and Nicodemus doesn't understand either. How can a grown man go back into his mother's womb? And Jesus doesn't explain either. There is no point. Better to leave the image there, until it speaks of itself. The miracles themselves, are ways of speaking. The first was to turn water into wine. He did it at a marriage, itself an act of transformation. Always Christ uses the language of metaphor without saying he's using it, so that the concrete world and the metaphoric flow into each other and are one world—a world with meaning. To see it like that is itself, the water; to speak that language is itself to be transformed; to go down into that water and then come back to dry land is itself to be reborn. And that multiplicity of metaphor too: that many different metaphors are needed to get a grasp on what happens when psyche comes into matter—and both are changed.

One metaphor for psyche is water. Another is fire. A third is food. It may be the body of

Christ, or the Sacred Serpent; or the table that will always serve a meal, as in many folk tales; or the Cornucopia, the Horn of Plenty of Greek myth, a symbol always of the bottomless strength of instinct—taken from the giant goat that suckled Zeus, or the bull that Heracles wrestled with, and then took its horn and fashioned it into the Horn of Plenty, an inexhaustible source of good things, which he put into the safe-keeping of the nymphs. In Zulu myth, the same symbol of the horn appears, protector of a young man to whom it unfailingly supplies a meal. In Celtic myth there is the Graal, a dish which is never empty however much one feeds from it. In the Christian myth, it becomes the cup which nourishes to eternal life. Another symbol of psyche is beauty—almost indistinguishable from instinct. In Aschenputtel (the real Cinderella), there is the tree grown on the mother's grave which throws down to her child all that she needs, including, at the right time, beauty.

Orpheus brings his music. The hunger pangs are stilled. The tortured circling ceases. It must be some form of the fruit for which Tantalus strains, the water which the daughters of Danaeus lose from their pots, the lost love of the old lady in the Burgholzli Clinic, the longed-for embrace of Leto for Tityus, and Hera for Ixion. It must be some evocation of the whole, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—the mystery that anything exists at all, let alone this world that hangs, as we see it now in the satellite eye, like a jewel in the blackness of space, wreathed in its veils of gold, green and azure, waiting like the bride in the Song of Songs for us to say the great words of the lover, which are the great words of full consciousness:

Behold, thou art fair, my love, behold, thou art fair.