



THE GREEN
ONE

PAUL CUDENEC



Winter Oak

The Green One

Paul Cudenec

This book is dedicated to all those fighting against the
living death of industrial capitalism.

Many thanks to Julie OL for having shared a small
part of her extensive mythological understanding.



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It was the voice of the flowers on the West wind, the lovable, the old, the lazy West wind, blowing ceaselessly, blowing sleepily, going Greecewards.

“The woods have gone away, they have fallen and left us; men love us no longer, we are lonely by moonlight. Great engines rush over the beautiful fields, their ways lie hard and terrible up and down the land. The cancrous cities spread over the grass, they clatter in their lairs continually, they glitter about us blemishing the night. The woods are gone, O Pan, the woods, the woods. And thou art far, O Pan, and far away.”

I was standing by night between two railway embankments on the edge of a Midland city. On one of them I saw the trains go by, once in every two minutes, and on the other, the trains went by twice in every five. Quite close were the glaring factories, and the sky above them wore the fearful look that it wears in dreams of fever. The flowers were right in the stride of that advancing city, and thence I heard them sending up their cry.

And then I heard, beating musically up wind, the voice of Pan reproving them from Arcady – “Be patient a little, these things are not for long.”

Lord Dunsany, “The Prayer of the Flowers” from his 1915 book *Fifty-One Tales*

*I, who am the beauty of the green Earth
and the white Moon amongst the stars,
and the mystery of the waters,
and the desire of the heart of woman and of man,
call unto thy soul:
arise and come unto me;
for I am the Soul of Nature
who giveth life to the universe.
From me all things proceed,
and unto me all things must return.*

From the Wiccans' Great Mother Charge

A softest of soft breezes slips playfully through the branches of the lime tree in the city park, cascading sound-ripples across its leaves.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

A ball-chasing dog stops still in its tracks. Its ears stand to attention at the faint gurgling of pent-up spring water manoeuvring deep underneath the well-trod turf, looking for the ideal place to force its entry into the world above.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

Newspapers are lowered on the commuter trains and eyes stray up to the skies outside. TV viewers start to feel restless and can't sit there any longer. Students stop writing their essays and cannot remember what it was they wanted to say. Suddenly none of this is making any sense.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

Online viewing is buffering, internet connections faltering. Frowns and confusion, muttered cursing. Routine disrupted, schedules displaced. Something is interfering with the smooth running of the treadmill they call life.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

A rumbling under the concrete grows louder and louder. Windows rattle across the city. Mugs fall from tables and shatter. Somebody down there is waking up.

*“Truth is one, the sages call it by many names”.**

I am The Green One, although I would maybe better be named The Green Many. Green is the colour of eternal youth, of rebirth, of nature springing back into life after the death-sleep of winter. I renew my physical existence in all ages and places, in individuals or groups, and my timeless existence as an idea, a myth, an icon, is fluid as well. I constantly overlap and intermingle with forces, images and inspirations that are not entirely me and yet can never ultimately be separated from me.

Whenever you see my face or hear my voice you should know that this is merely a role I am playing. The same is true of these words you are reading. The “I” who types here can never actually *be* me, for I am not a *being* with fingers, arms or eyes. These pages have been written on my behalf, by way of a temporary human agent. I

* *Rig-Veda X*, 164.46

have infused a part of my abstract self into this channel for the duration of his gathering-transcribing task, and I have thus briefly expanded his limited individual perspective, but I myself remain elsewhere – in the non-physical realm to which I belong.

Because I am not human, I have no gender. This may be confusing for those who are familiar with me in my appearances as The Green Man, on the one hand, and as Mother Earth, on the other. But among the images of my familiar tree-face male image carved in churches and cathedrals in Britain and across Europe, you come across the odd female one too. And even as Lilith, of the Dark Goddess tradition, I can be traced back to the Sumerian *lilu* or *lilitu*, demons of wild places, who encompass both male and female attributes. Ultimately, all my masks and qualities are but aspects of my single idea-essence, which is far removed from the specificities and limitations of incarnation.

I express gender in my forms, while transcending it in my essence, and this is sometimes represented as a sacred androgyny. In Egypt the associations of the colour green were not confined to one gender and the ancients perceived my energy as a “subtle interaction between masculine and feminine, god and goddess, Green

Man and Green Woman”.*

As Cybele, Mother Goddess of Anatolia, I had a transgender priesthood of eunuchs. Known to the Romans as the Galli, they were regarded as belonging to a middle or third gender (*medium genus* or *tertium sexus*) and as having prophetic powers.

The Etruscans lived in 12 cities grouped around the grove of the deity Voltumna, in whom I was androgynous and thus free of the restrictive pairs of opposites through which rich complexity is so often denied.

When my Cybele was known as Agdistis, I had both male and female sexual organs. Stories said that the gods were afraid of my strangeness and that Dionysus drugged my water supply and tied my foot to my penis while I was asleep. When I awoke and stood up, the rope wrenched off my organ. My blood fertilised the soil and on the spot grew an almond tree. When some nuts were picked by Nana, daughter of the river-god Sangarius, she became pregnant with a child, Attis.

* John Matthews, *The Quest for the Green Man* (Newton Abbot: Godsfield Press, 2001), p. 29

Greek myth tells how I, as Gaia, persuaded my son Cronus to castrate his father, Uranus. Cronus ambushed him, doing the deed and casting his testicles into the sea. From the blood that spilled out from Uranus and fell upon the earth, races of giants, Furies and nymphs were produced. My fertility is both “male” and “female” and something much more fundamental. I am regeneration. After all, the child Attis, and the giants, Furies and nymphs, were all ultimately aspects of me.

Because I embrace male and female, I am not always easy to personify. Now and then I appear as a pair of deities, like the Nordic brother-sister pair Freyr and Freyja or the Romans’ Faunus and Fauna, who share the same attributes and are variously described as father-daughter, brother-sister or husband-wife.

At other times scholars are left scratching their heads. How is it, they ask, that the Germanic fertility goddess Nerthus, described by Tacitus as “Mother Earth”, seems to share the same origins as the Norse deity Njörðr, a male god? And how is it that the feminine Fjörgyn is described as the mother of the thunder god Thor, son of Odin, while the masculine Fjörgynn is described as the father of the goddess Frigg, wife of Odin? Simple: deities of one sex can have aspects of another

because they are not tied to the human realm of gender. They operate on another level.

The union of god and goddess, of Tammuz and Ishtar, of Osiris and Isis, is the union of sky and earth at the beginning of the world; the cosmic fertilisation from which springs forth the plenty of life.

As the gender-combining Hermaphroditus, I am the son of the god Hermes and the goddess Aphrodite. Like the pair of mating serpents on the caduceus, Hermes' symbolic staff, I am the underlying and uniting force that entwines all apparent opposites.

The Buddhists' understanding of non-duality means they have no trouble in seeing that as Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy, whose likeness is often carved in jade, the green rock, I am also the "lord" Avalokiteśvara, who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas.

My perceived gender often shifts to meet the needs of the times. I remember how the ancient Persians' love for me as the deity they called the "Son of the Waters" gradually turned into an appreciation of my form as Anāhitā, "Lady of the Waters". Even today, thousands of Zoroastrians from Iran, India and other countries make a

pilgrimage to Yazd in Iran to worship at a hillside grotto containing the sacred spring dedicated to me, where I am known both as Pir-e Sabz Banu, “the old woman in the mountain” and as Pir-e Sabz, “the green saint”. Visitors pray for the fertilising rain and celebrate the greening of nature and the renewal of life. Over time, and with the growing influence of Islam, my Anāhitā persona fused with that of Khizr, or Khidr, who we will meet again later, and several of her former sanctuaries in Iran were rededicated to him.

My essence flows through changes in name, gender and form like the water of a stream which twists and turns, narrows and broadens, adapts effortlessly to the terrain in which it finds itself and never loses the vitality and momentum within.



There is more than one possible way of accurately defining our world, the earth. You might, for instance, describe it as a near-spherical object orbiting the sun with a thin outer crust, an intermediate mantle, and a dense inner core, whose surface is largely covered in water and whose atmosphere consists principally of nitrogen, oxygen and some water vapour.

In the same way you might define a book as a number of printed or written pages bound together along one edge and usually protected by a thick paper or stiff pasteboard cover. What you would be missing, however, is any indication of the book's content. And even more distant is any consideration of the thought behind the content: the spirit in which it was conceived and written; the effect it is intended to convey; the ideas, impressions or emotions it is designed to communicate. You can no more discern these aspects of the book from a definition of its physical make-up than you can come to understand the plot of a TV series by dismantling your television set.

The same is true of the earth. The physical definition could easily be expanded to include the living content of its surface. But this could in no way convey the *sense* of that living, its spirit and direction, the inherent self-assertion of renewal, vitality and fecundity without which there would be nothing but sterility, flatness and defeat.

I am the earth as this animate, self-conscious and dynamic entity. I am often known as Gaia, the name the Greeks gave me, but I go back a lot further than that! If it's proof you're looking for, the next time you are in Vienna, pop into the Naturhistorisches Museum and you will see the

Venus of Willendorf, a statuette of my buxom self made in the Old Stone Age, some 30,000 years ago.

There are plenty more like that still to be unearthed, and countless others that have not survived the millennia. And there were plenty of people, before and since, who knew of me and yet did not feel compelled to represent me in a work of art. Why the need to represent something that is real and all around you?

Each human being is born of two mothers. The first of these is me, because every individual mother, her mother before her, and so on to the very beginning, is the fruit of my leafy loins.

I am the Great Goddess, the Mother Goddess, Mother Earth, the Earth Mother, known by humankind in many different forms and under many names, but always essentially the same. Everywhere I am respected as the agent by which life is created and nurtured.

I am “Earth, divine goddess, Mother Nature, who dost generate all things”, in the words of a twelfth-century English herbal.

I am Belili of the Sumerians, goddess of trees, the moon, the Underworld, wells and springs.

THE GREEN ONE

I am Mati Syra Zemlya of the Slavs, for whom I was not even expected to disguise myself in human form. They reached me by touching the earth and by whispering death-bed confessions into a hole in the ground. My name here means Damp Mother Earth, a title also bestowed upon Anāhitā, Lady of the Waters and Humid Mother of the Earth. Water is the agent of vitality.

I am Pachamama of the Andes, World Mother and sustainer of all life, and at the same time I am her *sumak kawsay*, the right way of living which keeps humanity in balance with birds, beasts, rivers, mountains and the cosmos.

I am Atabeyra of the Caribbean, goddess of the Taínos peoples, Mother of Creation, Goddess of the Waters, vital spirit of lakes, streams, the sea, the tides and all the life they bring.

I am Yer Tanrı of the Turkic peoples, goddess of Earth and force of nature. Every spring and every autumn they would offer me *kumis* (mare's milk) and tea, in appreciation and expectation of the fertility that is my energy.

I am Cel, the Etruscan goddess of the earth, who is portayed on a bronze mirror from the fifth century BCE with a lower body formed of greenery and vegetation.

I am Artemis, the Greek goddess depicted in my temple at Ephesus with a multitude of protruding breasts and with the heads of animals of many kinds springing from my body, decorated with bees, roses and butterflies.

I am Mae Thorani of South East Asia, Earth Goddess and beautiful Buddhist deity, just as I am Tuuwaqatsi, Earth Mother of the Native American Hopi.

I am Yemoja, river goddess and nature spirit of the Yoruba in West Africa, who also became an ocean goddess when her people were taken across the Atlantic as slaves.

I am Grandmother Spider of Turtle Island (sometimes known as North America), spinner of the Web of Life which connects everything in the Universe to the Great Mystery at its heart, just as I am Coatlicue of the Aztecs, primordial earth goddess, mother of the gods, the sun, the moon and the stars.

I am Danu, known in Ireland as the mother of the gods, and in Wales as the Mother Goddess Dôn, and at the same time I am also Brigid, goddess of poetry, arts and fertility, celebrated at Imbolc on February 1 to mark the impending renewal of spring.

I am powerful Papatūānuku of the Māori peoples. Any woman's womb, her *te whare tangata*, is the house of humanity, and from my womb I give birth to all living things and then nourish them, not just physically but emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. My placenta is *whenua*, the land, the source of all thought, values and principles.



“I am she that is the naturall mother of all things, mistresse and governess of all the Elements, the initiall progeny of worlds, chiefe of powers divine, Queene of heaven, the principall of the Gods celestiall, the light of the goddesses: at my will the planets of the ayre, the wholesome winds of the Seas, and the silences of hell be disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world in divers manners, in variable customes and in many names, for the Phrygians call me the mother of the Gods: the Athenians, Minerva: the Cyprians, Venus: the Candians, Diana: the Sicilians Proserpina: the Eleusians, Ceres: some Juno, other Bellona, other Hecate: and principally the æthiopians which dwell in the Orient, and the ægyptians which are excellent in all kind of ancient doctrine, and by their proper ceremonies accustome to worship mee, doe call mee Queene Isis...”

These were the words put into my mouth by the Roman writer Apuleius in his novel *Metamorphoses*, also known as *The Golden Ass*. He understood that the multiplicity of my names and faces is but the flowering of an essence which remains rooted in unity.

Isis has been one of my most significant manifestations, arising in Ancient Egypt and spreading across the Mediterranean to Greece, Rome and beyond.

I am often represented with ears of corn on my head or in my hand and am sometimes named *Sochit*, or *Sochet*, meaning corn field.

Inscriptions have been discovered which describe me as “Creatress of green things” and “Green goddess, whose green colour is like unto the greenness of the earth”.

I am indeed the goddess of nature, as you might expect from the daughter of Geb, god of the Earth, and Nut, goddess of the Sky.

But, as Apuleius knew, I go beyond that. Nature goes beyond that; beyond its visible physical presence. It is also the *sense* behind the physical, the underlying *order* which paves the way for all that *is*, the *possibilities* that are the future

waiting to be born. *Nature is the structure of all that is and all that can be.* It is the Web of Life that I spin when I am Grandmother Spider.



If you have understood that I have no gender and that my form is fluid, if you have understood that my pairings are unities, then you will have no difficulty in seeing that I am not only Isis but also her brother-husband Osiris. Some say that I am the son of the earth god Geb, though others insist my parents are the sun-god Ra and the sky goddess Nut.

The Ancient Egyptians knew who I was, my epithet in the 4,000-year-old Pyramid Texts being “The Great Green”. They depicted me with green skin and pharaoh’s beard, mummy-wrappings on my legs, my crown adorned with ostrich feathers.

I am holistic and embrace all parts of the life-death cycle. Although Lord of the Dead, I am also the bringer of life, the green and black vitality carried by the floodwaters of the River Nile.

Those who worshipped me believed I could help them reach an eternal paradise, similar to the everyday world but with no pain or suffering.

Some knew this place as the Field of Malachite after the green stone associated with spiritual growth and the stimulation of the vital spirit.

I am also Tammuz-Dumuzi of Babylonia, Sumeria, Akkad and Assyria, just as I am, of course, his consort Inanna-Ishtar. Like Osiris, his was the name given to the verdant energy behind plants and food and also to nature's timeless miracle of birth, death and rebirth.

My descent to the Underworld as Inanna, and indeed as Persephone, is well known, but as Tammuz, too, I was consigned to that dark wintry place for six months of the year in order to secure her freedom.

Although Rome's Christian imperialists brutally suppressed the old Egyptian beliefs, some of my Osiris-Tammuz waters had also trickled into the persona of Jesus Christ.

His is the story of a miraculous birth, a sacrificial death and an equally miraculous rebirth. His descent from the heavenly realm is said to have offered redemption for humankind, the chance to erase the evil of "the fall".

I am transition, resurrection, life eternal.

Jesus died on a wooden cross, while Osiris died trapped within an ornamental wooden pillar. While Christ bled from his wounds, Osiris's body was finally hacked into tiny pieces. The Christian Messiah came back to earth before retreating to heaven in bodily form, and Osiris was successfully put back together again by Isis. Unfortunately as he was slightly incomplete, with no penis, he was unfit for earthly rule and, although living, withdrew to the land of the dead.

Jesus is also said to have plunged deep into the Underworld, the realm of Osiris, between his death and his resurrection. In this Harrowing of Hell he is believed to have brought salvation to all of the righteous who had died since the beginning of the world.

I am the moon that sheds its shadow, the serpent that sheds its skin.

Not just once where the cross marks the spot, but again and again and everywhere I die and am born anew.

I am regenerative power.



*I call strong Pan, the substance of the whole,
Ethereal, marine, earthly, general soul,
Immortal fire; for all the world is thine,
And all are parts of thee, O pow'r divine.
Come, blessed Pan, whom rural haunts delight,
Come, leaping, agile, wand'ring, starry light;
The Hours and Seasons, wait thy high command,
And round thy throne in graceful order stand.
Goat-footed, horned, Bacchanalian Pan,
Fanatic pow'r, from whom the world began.**

I am Pan, Greek god of mountain forests and meadows. Half-human and half-goat, double-natured son of Hermes, I was known to the Romans as Faunus and also as Fauna, my womanly side.

I was never worshipped in stuffy temples or churches, like your stale modern deities, but out in the wilds of nature, in a grove or a cave.

Full of a lust for life, I like to chase after nymphs, lending my name to the “panic” that I provoke with my strange appearance. One such beauty called Syrinx sought refuge among her sisters, who transformed her into one reed in a watery bed. When the wind started blowing, the

* “To Pan”, from Thomas Taylor's translation of the 2,000-year-old *The Hymns of Orpheus*

reeds played a tune and in searching for Syrinx amongst them I invented what are now called the pan pipes.

On my pipes I play the sweet melody-memories of an untamed Arcadian existence now replaced by steel, concrete and ignorance.

To those “enlightened” apologists for modernity who smugly believe that “The Great Pan is dead” and nature vanquished, I refer them to Lord Dunsany’s account of “The Tomb of Pan” in his inspiring *Fifty-One Tales*:

And presently all the enlightened people came, and saw the tomb and remembered Pan who was dead, and all deplored him and his wicked age. But a few wept apart because of the death of Pan. But at evening as he stole out of the forest, and slipped like a shadow softly along the hills, Pan saw the tomb and laughed.



A painting from Pompei shows a woman in a green dress and a crown of vegetation. She is a priestess of the goddess Cybele taking part in a procession. In this image, the goddess herself is clothed in purple, on a green background. Where am I more present? In the deity, whom I have

already acknowledged to be one of my masks? Or in the green-clad human devotee of the principle represented by Cybele? I am never merely passive, never an image to be worshipped from afar. I am the *infusion* of my own principle into human affairs, the idea as act, as intervention. Even when I present myself in symbolic form, I am a symbol with energy and intent. I am not a sterile depiction of life, but *life itself*. And life is lived by human beings rather than goddesses.

My Cybele arose in the culture of the kingdom of Phrygia, in what is today Turkey, some 3,000 years ago. Some see a continuation from the statuette of an Anatolian Mother Goddess found at Çatalhöyük and dating back to the sixth millennium BCE. My Phrygian name was *Matar*: we see again the familiar and universal recognition of Nature as Mother. As the birth-giving One, I am the mediator between the worlds of the known and the unknown, the living and the dead. Unlike most human mothers, I will also be there to welcome each of you back to the primal state of absorption once your individual cameo performances on this worldly stage have come to an end.

As Cybele I am often flanked by lions and accompanied by a bird of prey. I am wild nature, life beyond human culture, and I am also the

principle by which this wild nature, and the *awareness* of this wild nature, are channelled and incorporated into human culture.

When I came to Greece I was sometimes regarded as a bit too wild for their stately ways. I was the exotic, the exuberant, the extravagant. Like Dionysus (god of wine and fertility – yes, he and his Roman counterpart Bacchus are me as well!), I was a deity from elsewhere, adored by immigrants and the lower orders. I arrived in a chariot pulled by wild cats, to the sound of ecstatic music. Trance-like torchlit dancing to the rhythms of foreign tympanon drums, castanets, cymbals and flutes – the bacchanalian rites of Cybele and Dionysus allowed a safe and contained occasional expression of the wild without challenging the solid order of Greek society, cradle of contemporary civilization and of all that it brought with it.

Those who trace the interweaving threads of my representation also see that my Cybele persona was in many ways Rhea and evolved into the Romans' Great Mother or Magna Mater. Here, sadly, my wildness and vitality was progressively stifled, my presence petered out. My eunuch beggar-priests (the Galli, with their androgynous *tertium sexus* status) managed to survive into the Christian era, outraging the likes of St

Augustine. But Magna Mater, as an official deity, gradually turned into a hollow symbol of imperial order and religious authority, reproduced by a later empire in the guise of Britannia, a pseudo-goddess often accompanied by a lion.

I am *not* Britannia!



I am the Harvest Queen – a figure dressed and crowned with flowers, a sheaf of corn and a scythe under my arms – who was once paraded and serenaded into the northern English fields of Northumberland on the last day of reaping, where I stood watch atop a pole.

I am the Oats-woman, and indeed the Oats-man, who danced together, swathed in straw, at the harvest feasts in the Harz district of Saxony, Germany.

I am the Corn-mother, believed to linger in the final piece of corn left standing in the field. In Westerhüsen, Saxony, the last corn cut was made into the shape of a woman, decked with ribbons and cloth, mounted on a pole and waved around, as if alive, on the last wagon back to the village.

Corn dollies are fashioned either in my image or in symbolic shapes which are often peculiar to that locality. Suffolk has its horseshoe, Northamptonshire its horns, Yorkshire its spiral.

Across Ireland it used to be common to fashion my Brigid's Cross from rushes. In County Armagh these had to be brought into the house by a female, who knocked three times and cried: "Go on your knees, open the door and let Brigid in!"

In the spring, when the growing corn waved in the wind, German peasants used to say to each other: "There comes the Corn-mother!"

Elsewhere I am a Wheat-mother or a Barley-mother or the incarnation of whatever is being grown. Sometimes I take the form of a Rye-sow, an Oats-goat or a Barley-wolf; but such shape-shifting presents no problems for one such as me, whose essence lies well above the various specific forms that the life-force takes, either in nature or in the human imagination.

I am known in France, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and well beyond.

In Peru I am the Maize-mother Zaramama, the Quinoa-mother Quinoamama, the Coca-mother

Cocamama and the Potato-mother Axomama. Figures were made of me using the relevant plant, dressed in women's clothes and worshipped as the spirit behind the growth of the crop.

In Sumatra, a female spirit called Saning Sari was believed to guard over the rice and in some ways also *was* the rice, just as the Roman goddess Ceres was synonymous with grain and Isis was synonymous with the field of corn. Saning Sari was particularly represented by certain stalks or grains called *indoea padi*, the Mother of Rice.



“She of the Grain” hovers over the stony fields in the collective imagination of the farming communities of Ancient Greece. The Giver of Food, she holds in her arms a sheaf of barley, wears red poppies in her headband and is dressed in the green that speaks of life. Here I am Demeter, one of the most enduring of my countless crystallisations. You will have noticed that the “meter” in my name reveals a oneness with all the other “mother” figures that came before and after.

As ever, there is more to me than simply fertility.

I preside over the sacred law and over the cycle of life and death. And in taking on these apparently diverse functions, I take on the important role of uniting them in the minds of those who see me. There is no fertility without death: the rotting flesh of what was once alive feeds the soil with the power to bring forth new life. The sacred law is the understanding of this. It is the understanding that life is to death as light is to dark: the one owes the very possibility of its existence to the other. The sacred law is, in itself, the knowledge that the sacred law of humankind cannot be separated from the laws of nature. It is the knowledge that humankind is but a twig on the tree of nature. As the custodian of sacred law – the *sumak kawsay* which I protect as Pachamama – I am the memory of this connection, the appreciation of this human belonging and of the fact that it must remain the untouchable foundation of our being.

You see why it is that I take on the appearance of a human being, while being acknowledged to be something else? You see how I bridge the gap between flesh and principle, concrete and abstract? I am not human myself but I am a means by which humans can understand the living laws of the cosmos.

Every role I play has its own special attributes

and its own specific story to which human beings can relate. Every role I play is also shared to some extent by other actors who are not “me” in the sense in which I present myself here, but who are non-separate from that “me” in the “us” which is the All. Ideas and energies multiply, diversify, make themselves distinct from the unknowable Whole, only to merge and combine with each other in so many different ways once they have plunged into the seas of time and things.

As Demeter, I had a daughter by Zeus called Persephone, famously lured into the Underworld by Hades. My daughter was like a part of me. She was the Goddess of Vegetation, and, when I lost her, the earth fell barren and lifeless. My bid to rescue her was only semi-successful and, like Tammuz, Persephone spends half of each year in Hades, during which months the world above gives no fruit or crops. Winter and summer. Darkness and light. Death and life. Eternal laws of nature.

I had a mother, too, by the name of Rhea, sometimes termed Mother of the Gods. The stories say that my father was Cronus, Rhea’s brother, and that these same siblings also produced Zeus, meaning that the father of my daughter was my brother, in turn. But please do

not judge us in human terms, for that we are not and never have been. Our names, our personalities, are but labels like the x , y or z of a mathematical equation or the human names given to hurricanes. Remember, we exist purely in the magical world through the wardrobe, at the top of the beanstalk, in Dreamland. We are ideas, archetypes, concepts. We are real, very real – so much more real than all you vainglorious little egos of flesh and blood strutting your puny threescore years and ten upon this earth – but we are not real in a human sense or indeed in any physical sense that you have come to think of as the sole basis for your “reality”.

The father of Cronus and Rhea was said to be the unfortunate Uranus, castrated by his own son, and their mother was Gaia. You know that I am Gaia, the Earth Mother. And yet I am also Demeter. And Rhea, for that matter. Am I then my own grandmother? Yes, of course. And what is the meaning of any differences between “us”? Are they merely the reflections of the culture in which I was perceived in that form? Partly, yes, although these mythological family trees perhaps also point to the separation from the simplicity of the origin that lies behind all levels of being. In the beginning was the abstract “word” of possible existence and then, step by step, we extend into

all the diversity and detail of the physical world. Gaia is the earth, the primordial giver of life, while Demeter has taken on the specifics of a farming society, symbolised by the sheaf of cereal crop in her arms. It is not just the agricultural content that is important here, but the *specificity* involved. As Gaia, I brought life as a general idea, a global fecundity, while as Demeter I represent a particular means of life, even if that means is not only food but also a symbol for human vitality. Do we see in the movement from Gaia to Demeter a subtle shift in the requirements of human consciousness, a preference for a more functional, less abstract, and less *primal* imagining of life? That's not for me to judge!

The Romans took the Greeks' vision of me as Demeter and turned it into Ceres, goddess of agriculture and fertility. She even had a daughter, Proserpina, who took on the stories associated with Demeter's similarly-named daughter, Persephone. They knew my Gaia persona as Tellus Mater, who was often depicted reclining sensually with a cornucopia of flowers and fruit.

I was also sometimes termed Bona Dea (The Good Goddess), a generic title which hid the "true" name they gave to me. This name was only

revealed with membership of my cult, which was reserved for women only, and thus remained a mystery to the males who recorded patriarchal official Roman culture for posterity.



Without human intervention, a river will change course many times over the years. A fallen tree or slipped bank may attract more debris until the flow is blocked and the river will find another route towards the sea. What was once the proud main course is now a stagnant backwater.

I am a fluid being myself and this happens to me. An entity that was once very much infused with my presence becomes a dead-end, a blockage that does not allow me to fulfil my potential. You can still see my influence there and the entity is not entirely apart from me, but it is not there that you must seek me in my full glory.

The domination of Christianity forced a lot of my manifestations to change their form. Since the old “gods” and “goddesses” were now considered unacceptable, unholy, even evil, they had to adapt in order to survive and became saints instead. In many parts of the world I live on today in the barely-convincing guise of an historical Christian figure – I am honoured in

the shape of local “saints” deemed acceptable by Authority. They call this “mythological appropriation”.

But the identity of most of my goddess personae has of course poured into one Christian receptacle, namely the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, inheritor of all the many names and forms of the goddess. She is at once “Seat of Wisdom”, “Vessel of Honour”, “Mystical Rose”, “House of Gold”, “Gate of Heaven”, “Morning Star”, “Refuge of Sinners”, “Queen of Angels” and “Queen of Peace”.

It is difficult for those who believe in the unique truth of their Christian revelation to admit that their Virgin is clearly just another adaptation of a long tradition. But, if you are in any doubt, take a look at images of my Isis suckling her baby son Horus and, indeed, of her holding the dead body of her consort Osiris – they clearly inspired the familiar Mary-and-Jesus iconography.

In my multitudinous manifestations, I have been depicted as mother-bride of the dead and resurrected god since at least 5,500 BCE. And Greek images of the sorrowful goddess Aphrodite cradling her dying lover Adonis in her arms may well have been the direct inspiration behind the

Pietà subject in Christian art, where the Virgin nurses the dead body of her divine son.

Confusion even arises within the Christian church. Enna, in Sicily, was long renowned as a centre for the worship of Demeter, the Greek fertility goddess. Her grove there was known as the *umbilicus Siciliae*, the navel of Sicily. For many years, centre stage on the altar of the town's fourteenth-century cathedral was taken by a mother-and-baby statue that was in fact pagan and depicted Demeter with her daughter Kore-Persephone!

And in more than one chapel in Cyprus, the mother of Christ is known as *Panaghia Aphroditessa*, All-Holy Aphrodite.

“O woman full and overflowing with grace, plenty flows from you to make all creatures green again,” wrote Anselm of Canterbury a thousand years ago. It was no pagan English fertility goddess that he was addressing, but the Virgin Mary.

The same sentiment was apparent in the nineteenth-century poetry of the English Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins:

Question: What is spring? –

*Growth in every thing –
Flesh and fleece, fur and feather
Grass and greenworld altogether*

*All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathising
With that world of good,
Nature's motherhood...*

Wherever the Church ruled, it was the same story. The Romans' Magna Mater turned into the Holy Mother of the Roman Catholic Church. The annual Festival of Diana in August was renamed the Feast of the Assumption. Mati Syra Zemlya, or Damp Mother Earth, became the Virgin Mary when the Slavic lands were Christianised. Maîtresse Mambo Erzulie Fréda Dahomey, the Haitian-African *loa*, or deity, of love, beauty and dancing, found her identity confused with that of the Christian Virgin and even Pachamama of the Andes often merges with the Mother of Jesus.

So, if the Virgin Mary has absorbed all these aspects of me, if she sometimes appears to be the great goddess of all that is natural and alive, does this mean that I am also the Virgin Mary? Not really, for the aim of the Christian Church was not so much to adopt my essence, as to neutralise it. It could see that, in many places, belief in my ancient wisdom remained in the

blood of the people, and it could see that this was a threat to the monopoly of allegiance it has always demanded, as a centralised, imperialist, power-hungry institution. It wanted to recuperate goddess-energy, to use it for its own patriarchal ends.

The Virgin Mary is the image of woman used against woman. If the womb of woman is truly “the devil’s gateway”, as Tertullian insists, then there is no way that Mary can be seen to be an actual woman, with everything that this entails. The carnality of real birth, death, sexuality and bodily functions – the nature that is my very essence – has thus been clinically removed by an institution which, while exploiting my image for its own ends, ultimately knows that I am its enemy. How would the Church maintain its psychological power if its hapless followers, faced every day with the “evil” innate in their bodies and in their desires, were not forced to run guilt-stricken into its arms in order to receive the redemption that it alone can supposedly dispense?

My “virginity” has been wilfully misunderstood. The Greek word *parthenos*, often applied to me as Artemis, is commonly translated as “virgin” but simply meant unmarried woman, which was, and is, far from being the same thing. When I am

a Virgin in the heathen traditions, whether as Venus, Ishtar, Astarte or Anat, I am a goddess not of chastity but of love. My “virginity” means not modesty, shame and self-denial but freedom, self-confidence and autonomy. I am no man’s possession. The Virgin Mary, on the other hand, is not a real woman at all, but a projection of male fantasies of unworldly purity and innocence. She offers redemption from the sins of Eve, that wicked temptress and accomplice of Satan, and thus must be untainted by any association with the flesh that is regarded as Evil in the warped and misogynistic naturaphobia that has always been the shadow side of a Catholic dogma which so often holds up nature as sacred.

However, beneath the surface of official Church doctrine seethes an underground current of veneration for the real me, the real goddess.

Consider, for instance, the fact that from since the fifth century Mary has been known to many Christians as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, even though this makes no sense if your God is the eternal Creator of everything. Although no friend of mine, Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, was right to object that, within a Christian context, Mary could only be seen as the Mother of Christ, the means by which God took

on human form. And he was right to think that calling the Virgin the Mother of God transforms her into a pagan goddess, even if he did not understand that it was more a question of restoring the original status that had been stolen from me!

My aspect as Mater Dolorosa belongs to the tradition of Inanna, whose tears are for the sacrifice of her male counterpart Dumuzi-Tammuz. I am the *diacona sacrificii*, the deacon of the sacrifice, and I evoke the blood offering, the cycle of life and death, the sorrow of winter and the regeneration of the land with the coming of spring.

When I was Cybele, the centre of my cult was at Pessinus in what is now Turkey, where there stood a silver statue in which my face was represented by a black stone. The statue was taken to Rome, importing my power into the heart of the Empire.

Today, all across the Roman Catholic and Orthodox world – from Chartres to Częstochowa, from Tindari to Toledo – pilgrims flock to pay homage to my Black Madonnas, who reclaim the earthly, chthonic power which is so often denied by the Church patriarchs.

Like Persephone and Inanna, we Black Virgins all have one foot in the Underworld. We are Tiamat, “dragon mother of earth”, the Babylonian mother goddess of primordial creation, the deep ocean and thus the deep unconscious collective mind. We are The Lady of the Wild Things. We are Coatlicue of the Aztecs, with her skirt of writhing snakes and her necklace made of human hearts, hands and skulls. We are black Kali of the Hindus, with her skirt of human arms, garland of human heads and snake companions, the life and death of all beings, the womb and the tomb of the world. We are the goddess Holle of the pre-Christian Germans, also known as the Dunkle Großmutter or Dark Grandmother, who became fused with legends of witchcraft.

We are Oya of the Yoruba people, the Dark Mother Goddess of storms and destruction, the Wild Woman, the force of change; with her machete and her flywhisk she rips down the old in order to make way for the new. We are Hecate, Greek goddess of magic, herbs, sorcery and all that is liminal, on the boundaries, at the crossroads of light and dark, the conscious and the unconscious, and we are her lunar sisters Selene and Diana, the latter of whom is also goddess of woodlands and wild creatures. We are Cerridwen of the Welsh, mother goddess, crone

and keeper of the great cauldron of transformation. We are Morrigan of the Irish, goddess of fire, water, magic, death and the moon, weaver of the web of fate. We are Lilith of the Sumerians and of the Jews, the first mother, Adam's equal, the long-haired goddess of female sexuality and the dark moon. We are Isis.

We are not "evil" as the mythological defamation of the Christians would have it. Hecate, for one, was held in high esteem by the poet Hesiod, who repeatedly refers to her as "good". Kali is a frightening apparition with her raging red eyes, dishevelled hair and lolling tongue. However, her role as destroyer is predominantly as a destroyer of evil forces and thus as an agent of *goodness* – not the tamed, sanitised, repressed "goodness" of imposed Christian "morality" but the wild, vibrant, organic goodness that is nature itself and the blood-cycles by which it renews itself in its wholeness.

We are not the stultifying tedium of a church service but the invigorating ecstasy of the rites of Cybele and Dionysus. We are not prayers and pews but drumbeats and lively dancing in the night. At our cosmic communions we know no separation twixt ruled and ruler, flock and shepherd, servant and divinity: all are one and all are me.



Naked devotees circle the shrine to the goddess seven times. They are in what is now Saudi Arabia and they are worshipping me as Allat, the great goddess known to some as Aphrodite, Mithra or Ereshkigal, older “sister” of Inanna. One of my aspects is al-'Uzzā, a cousin of Isis, celebrated at the Lions Temple of Petra.

At the centre of the circling is a stone. This is the Black Stone, Al-Ḥajaru al-Aswad, which is today mounted on the eastern corner of the Kaaba at Mecca and is the central geographical focus of Islam. It is said that the stone, in its silver frame, resembles my vulva and is thus a reminder of the fertility it once symbolised.

I am often associated with black rock, the matter from which many a Black Virgin has been sculpted. Some talk of meteorites, but I say that I am not one who has come from afar, from beyond. My black flesh is the issue of fiery volcanoes, brought up from deep beneath the surface of the Earth – from the Underworld! I am chthonic, I am the *prima materia*, the primal stuff of the planet, the raw matter which alchemists would use to create their *Magnum Opus*, the transformation of their own souls and of the world around them.



Have you ever woken up the middle of the night and seen the trees heaving and sighing outside your bedroom window? Has it ever seemed to you that there were faces in that greenery, faces that were grinning, grimacing, mouthing words which were rushed away by the winds and lost to your ears?

That was me.

When people make a connection with a tree, or a stone for that matter, this involves more than merely the physical tree or stone. What is taking place is a *hierophany*, a manifestation of another dimension often termed “the sacred”. The tree is revealing something which would otherwise be hidden from us, something which is *ganz andere*, from another realm, and of a deeper reality than the ever-changing appearance of things. Our pragmatic focus on the immediate and the particular means that sometimes we can’t appreciate the whole picture because we are obsessed with certain details; we can’t grasp the depths because we remain doggedly and dogmatically on the surface; we can’t, in short, see the wood for the trees.

What was I revealing to you when you saw me

that night?

The Leshy is a tree spirit who lives in the birch forests of Russia and is described as having green bark-like skin and green hair. “He springs from tree to tree and rocks himself in the branches, screeching and laughing, neighing, lowing and barking”.*

That’s me up there.

The neighbouring Finns have their own tree spirit, Tapio, who is said to be very tall and slender with a long brown beard, a green coat of moss and a hat of fir leaves. His partner is Mielikki, the honey-rich mother of the woodland and the hostess of glen and forest.

The verdant couple are both me.

Swiss folkore tells of “green ladies” who sing and dance beneath the branches of oak trees. They are known for enticing men away and dragging them through the undergrowth to strip them of their possessions.

Watch out for me lurking within those beguiling

* Mrs J. H. Philpot, *The Sacred Tree in Religion and Myth* (New York: Dover, 2004. Originally 1897), p. 69

Alpine forests!

Have you heard of the oak-men of Germany, dwarves who guard the sacred oak groves? Or of the oak-men in the old forests of England? The latter are far from being dwarves: their body-trunks are lofty and solid, their feet firmly planted in the ground, but their spirits are free. They are no trouble to anyone. Unless, of course, you start chopping them down, at which point they become very dangerous indeed.

In either case, they are me.

Sometimes a spirit lives *in* a tree and sometimes it *is* the tree. The Ancient Greeks often spoke of dryads, oak nymphs who were closely related to Meliai (ash nymphs), Epimeliad (apple), and Caryatids (walnut). These were the spirits *of* the trees, but there were also nymphs called hamadryads, who *were* the physical trees themselves. These direct daughters of nature included Karya (hazelnut), Balanos (oak), Kraneia (dogwood), Morea (mulberry), Aigeiros (black poplar), Ptelea (elm), Ampelos (vines) and Syke (fig).

In African traditions, trees are usually regarded as merely *bintu* or “frozen” forces, but some are seen as exceptions. In these special trees the

water of the depths, the primal *nommo*, the world of the ancestors, rises up spontaneously; the trees are the road travelled by the spirits, the loas.

For North American Indians such as the Hidatsa tribe of North Dakota, every natural object, such as a tree, has its spirit or shade.

Spirit-tree and tree-spirit, all are me.

A tree resembles a human figure, with its upright posture and protruding arms. It also links the upper and lower worlds, with its roots drawing water from the earth below, its leaves drinking energy from the sun above and its branches and fruit providing shelter and sustenance for life on the surface. It is a vertical cosmic axis.

The idea of the Tree of Life, the Centre of the World, appears in human culture throughout the world, from the Gaokerena world tree of the Persians to the Egyptians' Holy Sycamore, which stands on the threshold of life and death, connecting the two realms. We meet it again as the Islamic Tree of Immortality and as the Christian version representing the immaculate state of humanity before the fall and then appearing again as the redeeming cross on which

Christ dies. It is the Bo tree, or Bodhi tree, under which the Buddha sits when he attains Enlightenment and it is the Hindus' Eternal Banyan Tree (*Akshaya Vata*) beside the Yamuna river. It is Grandmother Cedar, Nookomis Giizhig, of the Ojibwe of Turtle Island and Yggdrasil, the World Ash of the Nordic peoples.

“Their holy places are the woods and groves, and they call by name of god that hidden presence which is seen only by the eye of reverence”.

Tacitus was describing Germanic tribes 2,000 years ago, but those northern European peoples, inhabiting vast and unspoiled primaeval forests, were far from alone in their reverence of trees.

Back home in Rome, within the Forum which was the bustling heart of the city, stood the sacred fig-tree of Romulus, which was worshipped right through to the days of the Empire. And nearby on the slope of the Palatine hill grew a sacred dogwood tree. If it ever appeared to be drooping, the alarm was sounded and a crowd would rush to the spot with buckets of water to restore its health.

Even in the first century of our era, in the times of Pliny the Elder, a noble Roman was reported to worship a beech tree in a grove sacred to

Diana. He would embrace it, kiss it, lie under its shadow and pour wine onto its trunk, regarding it as a goddess.

In Ancient Greece, Dodona was one of the most revered sacred sites and second only to Delphi in significance. In the same way that Delphi was originally dedicated to Gaia and then later to Apollo, Dodona was sacred to the Mother Goddess Dione before it became focused on Zeus. It was renowned for its oak tree, whose leaf-rustlings were interpreted by priests and priestesses devoted to the oracle. The Sacred Oak of Dodona was described by Aeschylus as “a lofty and beautiful tree, an incredible wonder” and was regarded as the Tree of Life.

The Yaqui people of northern Mexico tell of a talking tree that once delivered an important prophecy to the *surem*, the Little People that then inhabited the land. It warned them of the arrival of white people, bringing with them weapons, railways and bloodshed. The *surem* took the hint and disappeared to live underground from that day on.

Asherah was a Semitic manifestation of the Great Goddess and closely identified with trees. She was known both as Queen of Heaven and as the Tree of Life. Her name is often translated as

“grove” or “groves” and she was represented in early Jewish temples by Asherim or Asherah poles, which were carved wooden pillars. She is thought to have been more important than her male aspect Yahweh until the patriarchal *coup d'état* which diverted the course of Jewish religion.

My Asherim may have been felled, but my roots still run deep within the universal psyche of humankind.

Paying due respects to trees is important, whether you install and decorate one in your home at midwinter or dance around one at May Day or Midsummer. Tree dressing is a tradition from Thailand to Ireland, from Finland to France, from Scotland to Sri Lanka, and if you participate in these customs you are worshipping the deep vital energies which are represented by trees.

And by me, in all my guises.

Whatever form I take, I am often hated and feared by Authority, particularly when Church combines with Empire to soul-stifling effect.

Tree worship was an important element of the people's worship of Osiris in Ancient Egypt, but was repressed by the aristocratic priests of the

Established Church who had begun to rewrite popular myth according to their own tastes as early as 2800 BCE. This nature-embracing aspect of Osirianism was only officially recognised under the Macedonian Ptolemies in around 300 BCE.

Patriarchal Jewish efforts to stamp out paganism specifically targeted the tree worship associated with Asherah. Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah and the Christian Old Testament, tells how God ordered the Israelites: “Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves [Asherah] with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place”.

When Julius Caesar destroyed the sacred grove of Marseilles during the Siege of Massalia in 49 BCE it may have served a military purpose, and reflected his contempt for the southern French city’s Greek culture, but he also systematically used the destruction of druidic groves as a weapon against Celtic resistance to Roman rule.

The word druid comes from *derwydd*, the Welsh

term for “oak-seer”, and their powerful culture and vision represented a serious challenge to the authority of Empire.

When the Romans became Christianised, they carried on hacking down the pagan groves with an additional religious pretext for their imperialism and this Good Fight was taken up enthusiastically by subsequent followers of Jesus.

The Five Sacred Trees of Ireland were cut down in 665 CE, in a war against the Old Ways which, 200 years previously, had already seen the Christian St Patrick destroy an important library of ancient books incised in the ogham tree-alphabet on bark or rods of hazel and aspen.

St Boniface, an Anglo-Saxon Christian missionary to Germany in the eighth century, had the tree-worshipping folk of Hesse meet him at the sacred oak of Thor at Geismar. As they watched, he struck at the tree with an axe and, apparently, the oak burst magically into the shape of a cross. The wood was used to build a chapel dedicated to a new religion based on dominating nature rather than loving it.

When Charlemagne defeated the Saxons in the same century he outlawed their offerings to

sacred trees. His successors were still at it 500 years later, with the Synod of Trier in 1227 decreeing that the worship of trees was forbidden. The fact that they had to keep passing these edicts tells you that they had previously met with little success. My *nemetons*, my sacred places, rise up again and again. All their efforts will never uproot my strength!

The Basques' sacred oak, the Gernikako Arbola, survived the fascist bombings of Guernica in 1937. When Francoist troops took the town, the fascistic and centralist Falangists wanted to fell the tree because it was a symbol of Basque nationalism, but their localist Basque Carlist allies put an armed guard around it to protect it. The Guernica oak of 1937 later died, fungus-struck, as did its replacement. But its real essence, and my animating spirit, is never confined to any one temporary shell. Acorns, physical and metaphorical, will always survive to ensure that the life force sprouts up again, refreshed and renewed, in generation after generation of humans and trees. The Gernikako Arbola lives on.

And so do I.

The centre of Paris is full of monuments to Christianity, the French Republic and the

modern cult of ostentatious consumption. But, not far from the Gothic splendour of Notre-Dame, the pomp of the Hôtel de Ville and the boutiques of le Marais, there is a reminder of a different history in the elm of Saint-Gervais, a sacred tree whose likeness is even carved on the inside of the adjacent church. Its original meaning forgotten over time, it came to be associated with the idea of feudal justice under the *Ancien Régime* and for that reason is believed to have been chopped down in the Revolution of 1789, though later replaced. There is said to have been some disagreement over whether the elm represented justice or freedom. An absurd quarrel, since the two ideas are inseparable from each other.

And from me.

In India, trees were once so sacred that there was even a custom of marrying men and women to them. In 1730 the Maharaja of Jodhpur sent his men into the forests near the Bishnoi village of Khejadali, to collect timber for his new palace. A local woman called Amrita Devi rushed to a tree to protect it, but was immediately axed to death. Many other villagers, mostly women and children, followed suit and by the end of the day more than 360 lay dead. When the Maharaja heard this news, he was horrified and called his men off. Many trees have, of course, been felled

there since then, but the Bishnoi forests remain a relative oasis of greenery in the denuded landscape of Rajasthan.

Some 240 years later, still in India, labourers arrived near the village of Reni in Uttarakhand, beside the Alaknanda river, with the task of felling 2,500 trees. A local girl saw them and rushed to tell Gaura Devi, who led 27 of the village women to the site and confronted the loggers. When the workmen refused to listen and started to insult them and threaten them with guns, the women resorted to hugging the trees to stop them from being felled. They kept an all-night vigil guarding their trees, the news of the movement spread to neighbouring villages, more people joined in and, after four days, the loggers left.

When you hug a tree, you embrace life itself.

Do you remember the battle to save the sweet chestnut tree that had flourished on George Green in Wanstead, London, for 250 years? It had the audacity to get in the way of the M11 Link Road, yet another extension of the infrastructure of global death. One day in 1993, many centuries after tree worship had been banned by those-who-know-best, a group of local parents and children led by the Pied Lollipop

Lady of Wanstead turned up to perform a tree dressing ceremony and were confronted by security fencing. Along with other protesters, they jubilantly pulled down the barriers to reach the tree. Have you seen the film footage of the day when the Forces of Imperial Order came in their hundreds to murder the tree? Did you see the hatred on their faces, did you witness the violence with which they carried out the commands of their death-cult masters? Did you hear the wail of despair that arose when the tree finally came down after a ten-hour struggle? Did you embrace the timeless pain felt centuries ago when the sacred groves were destroyed? Did you want to cry too? Do you still think your human bond with trees, with the spirit of the trees, with the spirit of nature, is a thing of the past?

I am here to tell you that it is a thing of the future. I am your future.



On his death, the Phrygian-Greek Attis was transformed into a pine tree, which was considered sacred to the Mother Goddess. The Norse god Odin sacrificed himself by hanging from a tree, which may well have been the World Ash, Yggdrasil.

The Greek god Dionysus is best known now for his love of the vine, but was once associated with vegetation and trees in general. He was often represented by an upright post, dressed in a cloak, topped by a bearded mask and with twigs and branches stuck into the head and body.

I am Dionysus of the Tree.



What greater folly has festered in your modern minds than the contempt you sneer at the old ways you are so proud to have left behind!

They were so simple-minded – those heathens, those savages, those barbarians – you like to tell yourselves. Their beliefs were so absurd, so childish, so ignorant, that they barely count as human beings at all, in comparison to the intellectual radiance of your towering capitalist civilization.

And yet are you even capable of grasping the wisdom that underlay the ancient cultures you steamrollered into the dirt with your imperial machineries, all in the name of modernising, of improving, of dragging these people out of the “darkness” of a world beyond your control?

Do you, for instance, understand what the people of West Africa, and their descendants in the New World, mean by the loas or *orisha* who sometimes choose a particular tree, plant or spring as their *repositor*?

They are also known as *saints* or *anges* but have little in common with the pasteurised saints and angels of today's shrink-wrapped Western culture.

In the *Santería* and Voodoo rituals, human beings take on the characteristics of a particular loa. But they are not acting. This is not a question of "make-believe". Everyone understands that they have *become* the loa in question.

Does it seem strange to you, an affront to your one-dimensional sense of reality, that loas *exist* without having a permanent physical presence? Does it seem laughable to imagine beings who are *forces* which can take temporary possession of an embodied human? Can you imagine how taking this force into yourself, during the ceremony, would intensify your own nature, intensify the power within?

Can you see how loas are not really apart from you anyway, as you share the same universal

energy? That there is ultimately no separation between sacred and profane, between spirit and flesh?

When the drums pound out their rhythmic labyrinths and the dancers weave their way between intermingled realities to a moment of mystical communion, you *become* the universal life force.

You become me.



My presence amongst you is broadly eternal and narrowly temporary. I am always somewhere, but I am in nobody all the time. Only I, myself, can be fully and always *me*.

Make no mistake, I need you. Being what I am, belonging to the domain to which I belong, I can become flesh and blood only when you allow me to be so, when the “you” becomes a “we”.

When you embrace the wildness within and without, we are we.

When you think yourself into the shape of other creatures, we are we.

When you put horns on your head, we are we.

When you drape yourselves in skins and circle chanting around a fire, we are we.

When you gather in your sacred groves, we are we.

When you touch the standing stones at sunrise, we are we.

When you dream of shaggy Basajaun, lord of the Basque forests, we are we.

When you think you have seen Äbädä of the Tatar woods, with his blue skin, green hair and beard, his shoes on back to front, then we are we.

When you tie Thai ribbons to the roots of the *Hopea odorata* in honour of beautiful Nang Takhian, the Lady of the Tree, we are we.

When you tremble at the haunting flute songs of the Patupaiarehe spirit-folk in the green mountains of Aotearoa, we are we.

When you raucously parade the May Day hobby horse through the streets of your English village, we are we.

When you herald the Scottish springtime by drinking and dancing to the spine-tingling sound of the pagan pipes, we are we.

When you don your Lincoln Green and take to the forest, we are we.

When you black your faces and join the righteous assaults on the satanic mills, we are we.

When you mask your egos and sip the fiery cocktails of liberating rage, we are we.

I need you, I need us. Without you, without us, I am nothing in this bodily place. You are my living.

But what are you without me?

When you wear your ties of submission, your uniforms of ignorance, your brandings of obedience, you are nothing.

When you choke your hearts with greed, when you cloak your souls with vanity, when you shade your shallow eyes with plastic indifference, you are nothing.

When you rush from one place to another in steel cages, poisoning the peace with your deranged

haste, you are nothing.

When you preen yourselves in your self-made mirrors and declare yourselves above and beyond all other living things, you are nothing.

You are shape without content, flesh without spirit. You are stagnant sterility, a facsimile of being. Without me, you are nothing but dead stuff.



I exist simultaneously in many modes and I know physical existence beyond the short-lived precarity of flesh and blood.

Think of all the carvings of fertility goddesses, the statuettes of Demeter and Artemis, the relabelled images of Isis and Horus and the shrines to the Black Virgin.

These figures may not seem to be direct manifestations of my essence – after all, they could have not existed without the craft of human beings within whom I was once present.

But the intent and inspiration behind them – *my* intent and inspiration! – means that they, too, are me.

Like all symbols they are rungs on the ladder which connects the worldly to the abstract. They are human interpretations of my essence and their role is to bring me to life within the human heart.

They connect me to you. They are my human face, they are my presence in the world of human thought and culture that lives on from one generation to the next. They are my reminder to you that I exist – a reminder which you certainly seem to need!

There is an image of me that has become known as The Green Man, although I never said that was my name: I am, after all, beyond gender!

Cernunnos, the Celtic god of the forest, was sometimes depicted with vegetation as his head, such as on the 2,500-year-old St Goar pillar from the Hunsrück in Germany and on the Gundestrup Cauldron, from first-century BCE Gaul. He, or rather I, can also be seen on the shaft of the North Cross of Clonmacnoise in County Offaly, Ireland, and among the interlace ornaments in the 1,200-year-old Book of Kells and the 1,300-year-old Book of Durrow.

In 400 BCE, I was appearing in Naples as Dionysus-Bacchus clad in leaves. Roman artists

carved ornate leaf masks, with intertwined vegetation, as part of their respect for the gods as whom they knew me.

Today, in England, you can see my face on the signs hanging outside many dozens of inns as well as in countless churches and cathedrals, where some regard my incongruous presence as a recuperation of the power of nature within a Christian context, equated with the ever-resurrecting vitality of Christ.

You can see me in the roof of Canterbury Cathedral in Kent, where my flesh turns into foliage and leaves spew from my mouth.

You can see me at Tewkesbury Abbey in Gloucestershire, adorned with the leaves and acorns of the oak, a sacred tree around which people have long danced on days of festivity.

You can see me at Much Marcle in Herefordshire, where around my neck I wear a sunwheel, the cross inside a circle which speaks of the enmeshing of time and space within the eternal cosmos.

You can see me at the Church of St Mary and St David in Kilpeck, Herefordshire, both as Green Man and as the fertile vulva-exposing figure

known as Sheela na gig.

You can see me at Sutton Benger in Wiltshire, where I have hawthorn – the witches' favourite – growing from my mouth and birds eating my berries.

You can see me on a fourteenth-century wooden beam in what is now Steyning Post Office but was once a West Sussex alehouse.

You can see more than 100 of me in Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh in Scotland. What does it tell us about the Knights Templar that their supposedly Christian place of worship contains only one image of Jesus Christ?

It's not just in Britain that I can be found. I am also in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and in a stained-glass window at the nearby Notre-Dame. I am all over that other great Gothic masterpiece at Chartres and in cathedrals from Poitiers to Saint-Pol de Léon in Brittany.

In the Musée archéologique of Dijon, in Burgundy, you can see me smiling out with an expression of calm intelligence from what used to be a roof boss of the thirteenth-century Chapelle de Bauffremont.

The only place where I am given an identity is on a fountain at St Denis, Paris, where beside my oak-leaf face is carved the name Silvanus, Roman god of the woods.

I have long been present on German soil. If you visit the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn, you can see me adorned with crowns of mistletoe leaves on the Pfalzfelder Flammensäule, a Celtic obelisk made nearly two and a half thousand years ago.

In Trier Cathedral, some of my faces were brought there from an old Roman temple, where I had also been held in high esteem.

I watch over the old Frankfurt streets around the Römer from many a vantage point and I help support the Rider of Bamberg Cathedral.

In the Magdeburger Dom there are 11 of me on one column alone and at the Stiftskirche in Aschaffenburg I am blowing into bugles filled with flowers.

At the Dom Sankt Maria in Augsburg, as at Kloster Walkenried in Lower Saxony, and the Stiftskirche at Kyllburg in Rhineland-Palatinate, I can be seen in both male and female guise.

I manifest threefold at the Liebfrauenmünster in Ingolstadt, lending my fertility power to the Brautportal or Bridal Entrance.

In one of my many appearances at the cathedral in Erfurt there is ivy coming from my mouth and creeping delicately around my chiselled features, while at the cathedral in Halle (Saale) the leaves on my face sometimes form my beard and in one instance become a rather splendid moustache.

Visitors to Istanbul in Turkey can encounter my leaf-mask face (are all faces not masks?) in the Archaeological Museum of the city that was once Constantinople and, before that, Byzantium.

At Mudanya, Turkey, I glare down from the top of a pillar, my burning eyes set with a leafy growth of hair and beard.

Beyond Europe, I am to be seen above the statue of the Buddha in the temple of Swayambhunath Gompa in Nepal, the Jain Temple at Ranakpur in Rajasthan, India, and all across the Apo Kayan region of Borneo.

With my beard of leaves, I looked down from a wall in the ruined desert city of Hatra in Iraq as a twenty-first-century army came to destroy the “heathen” images of a spiritual vitality their

hearts are too dead to dream.



An extraordinary image can be found carved in the choir stalls of the Cathedral of St Bertrand de Comminges in the French Pyrenees. A winged goddess figure, with leaves instead of arms at the ends of her shoulders and with frog feet, is giving birth to the smiling head of a Green Man.



If all those green faces are a manifestation of my essence, how is it that this essence makes itself known to human beings?

Am I an innate archetype, lodged deep within the human psyche, or am I a product of transmitted culture, an idea handed down from generation to generation?

The answer is that I am both, and yet more.

Yes, my images and my stories have been passed from parent to child, from shaman to novice, for many millennia. The intertwining of these rich traditions creates the fabric of what you might call my body, my existence as a real character in the human culture-story, even if on that dream-like level of reality I am forever shifting,

morphing, overlapping, fading and reappearing in new guise.

But before that, before even the mercurial reality of my cultural presence, I exist on the level of potential, possibility, capacity.

This is not “before” as in the dimension of time, which means nothing to me as I do not dwell on your linear plane. I mean “before” in a logical sense: if I can be recognised by the human mind in all my various cultural manifestations, then the human mind must necessarily have the capacity to recognise me.

The word “recognise” comes from the Latin *recognoscere*, to know again. Again! You see, you already knew me, even before you saw me carved into a church beam or heard about me in a song!

This knowledge, this *gnosis*, did not come to you in your past but is there in your present, in everyone’s present, in everyone’s future. It is a knowledge without form or name. It is a *waiting* knowledge that needs to be unlocked by a trigger from outside the mind.

If there were no more human culture, if every single image and story had been lost, a surviving human being would still have the capacity to

recognise me in a raw, unmediated form – I am that shiver in the spine, that tingling in the soul that can take hold of you when you look at a gnarl-spreading tree, a white-crested river, a salmon-leaping sunrise or a moon-drifting sea.

Afterwards, it would need the story-weaving of many people, many generations, to rebuild the lost understanding of all the complexities surrounding my identity and my relevance to humankind.

And when I say that I am more than these concepts, I mean that I am also your actual *belonging* to nature.

I am the living pelt of the Earth of which you are an organic extension. I am literally the stuff of which you are made, even if you are in absurd and arrogant denial of this.

I am your physical reality and, as such, I will always be with you.



So much confusion has been caused by dogmas that want to monopolise, that cannot accept the existence of any ideas or symbols beyond their control. When Christianity could not lure me into

its religion, as it did with my goddess form, it assigned me the role of a negative character, made me the personification of its interpretation of evil.

As I have been at pains to point out, I am the bringer of life and, even though I have my dark side, I am certainly not the force of obstruction and opposition implied in the original Hebrew word *sātan*. As Pan and Faunus/Fauna, I had horns because I was a god of nature, of the wild, of the vital energy that blossoms up from the earth. For an imperial religion of authority and control, there will always be something devilish in all that is untamed.

In England I am known as Puck or Robin Goodfellow. My name says it all and yet there have still been those who swallow the Church's lies and paint me as a fellow who is altogether bad. Perhaps this is only to be expected from a Christian-powered civilization that, deep down, regards the soil as unclean, flesh as wicked, nature as frightening. I was always a goat rather than a sheep, a shrewd and knavish sprite, a trickster and mischievous rule-breaker who refused to kneel before any self-appointed source of power.

Let me ask you who you would consider to be the

real devils. Those who burn heretics at the stake or those who leap over bonfires on Midsummer's Eve? Those who preach repression and obedience or those who incite jaunty defiance? Those who bow their heads in sinners' shame or those who raise their clear eyes to the stars, all strong and free?

Give me your hands, if we be friends.



We are The Good People, The Hidden People, The Fair Folk. We dress in green and live in hollow hills in Celtic lands, in an Otherworld where youth and summer never end.

Fairyland is a place of delights, where we feast and sing and dance in rings. We are as vibrant and numerous as the blades of grass on our fairy knolls. Although they sometimes call us The Little People, do not imagine that we are always small. Everything is capricious about us, even our stature. We take whatever size or shape pleases us.

You can't see us unless we want you to. Do you have the second sight? Did we give you some of our own eye ointment? Are you clasping a four-leafed clover? Did you bury three hazel wands

under some hill whereas you suppose fayries haunt? The best time to find us is twilight or midnight under a full moon or at Hallowe'en, May Day, Midsummer Day, Lady Day or Christmas Day.

If you leave out milk, water and food for us, we will be your friends and will steal from you neither supper nor children. We might even finish your spinning or your housework for you as you sleep. If we really like you, we might cast a spell that lets you voice your heart's inspiration through a musical mastery of the pipes or assume great skill in your chosen trade.

But, good as we are, we don't take kindly to being insulted, so be careful what you say. We are sharp of hearing, and no word that reaches the wind escapes us. If you throw dirty water out of doors after dark you would do well to shout out "*Hugga, hugga salach!*" as a warning to us not to get drenched. And if you hack away at our fairy-bushes to build a fire, for instance, you'll find straight away that the branches will not burn. Then within six months you'll be dead.

If you build a new house you might want to place inside it, the night before you aim to take up residence, a bed, some other furniture, and plenty of food. If, in the morning, the food is not

eaten and the crumbs all swept up by the door, you'd better not move in.

It may be that you've built the house across a fairy track, which you want to avoid at all costs, for then you will be right out of luck. Everything will go wrong. Your animals will die, your children will fall sick, and no end of trouble will come on you. You wouldn't ever be able to close the doors at the front and back, or the windows if they were in the line of the track, for at night we must march through.

You also need to know the *right way* to live and how to keep a secret. If we tell you the whereabouts of some hidden treasure and then you tell someone else, you may well die. Either that, or the treasure will turn into ivy leaves or furze blossom.

Most of us have no wings, and yet we can fly. We ride on ragwort stalks or on the backs of birds and sometimes we don magic caps to take flight as spirits of nature and of the air.

Normally we are seen only in a passing glimpse, in a twinkling of your glance. But between one of your blinks and the next we can get up to much in the way of green-eyed magic and mischief! If you ever come to our land of Tír na nóg and are

away with the fairies for what seems like just a few hours or days, you may discover on your return that many years have passed in your world.

We *aos sí*, we Gentle Folk, we *Tylwyth Teg*, are not earthly people; we are not of your material realm, nor of your linear experience of time. We are a people with a nature of our own. We are The Silent Moving Folk: we inhabit a parallel level of reality made of a timeless intangible energy that ebbs and flows below, above, around and, for those brief spine-tingling moments, alongside and within your own reality.

You do not see us now, or hear our pisky songs, you people of the sterile age. First the bible-bashers tried to chase us away and then the very first screeching of the steam-whistles, the first hammerings of machineries, sent us fleeing underground and out of sight, just like our surem cousins in Mexico. Why would we linger too long in your filthy, stinking, noisy world of motorways, factories and airports?

*From haunted spring and grassy ring,
Troop goblin, elf, and fairy;
And the kelpie must flit from the black bog-pit,
And the brownie must not tarry;
To Limbo-lake,*

*Their way they take,
With scarce the pith to flee.
Sing hay trix, trim-go-trix,
Under the greenwood tree.**

But you also do not see or hear us because you do not look or listen. On Dalby Mountain on the Isle of Man, the old Manx people used to put their ears to the earth to hear the Sounds of Infinity, *Sheean-ny-Feaynid*. They knew that these murmurs were the voices of invisible beings that were all around them in a universe that is never empty, but spanned by the great cosmic web of life, the invisible structure of archetypes, ideas and possibilities which forms a deep and underlying reality on which our own shallow and ephemeral world depends.

If, one day, you manage to wrench yourselves away from your shopping, your social media and your stunt-souled cynicism, you will once again hear our music haunting the hawthorns and see our green shadows flitting around the menhirs on the moonlit moors.



“Love is the bridge between you and everything,”

* Sir Walter Scott, *The Abbot*

said the Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi and sometimes an encounter with me, with the me that is hidden inside you, can be coupled with the spiritual intensity of physical union.

In Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1597, a certain Andro Man confessed to carnal dealings with the Queen of Elphame. He said: "She is very pleasant and will be old and young when she pleases. She makes any King whom she pleases and lies with any she pleases".

Man was on trial for so-called "witchcraft", a name given by Christians to ways of seeing that escape their imperial monopoly of spiritual connection. Some say that the Queen of Elphame, the Queen of Elfland, is a goddess related to Holle, Hecate, Rhiannon and Freya, while others maintain that Man had been sleeping with the high priestess of a Scottish pagan cult.

In either case, it was me that he loved. And, while lust stops short at the body, love reaches out for the animating force within, the mysterious *I-ness* of the other with which we seek to infuse and inspire our own being.

This was the experience of Thomas Rymer when he was transported far, far away from his native

Scotland after meeting me.

*True Thomas lay oer yond grassy bank,
 And he beheld a ladie gay,
 A ladie that was brisk and bold,
 Come riding oer the fernie brae.
 Her skirt was of the grass-green silk,
 Her mantel of the velvet fine,
 At ilka tett of her horse's mane
 Hung fifty silver bells and nine.
 True Thomas he took off his hat,
 And bowed him low down till his knee:
 'All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!
 For your peer on earth I never did see.'
 'O no, O no, True Thomas,' she says,
 'That name does not belong to me;
 I am but the queen of fair Elfland,
 And I'm come here for to visit thee'.**

I took Thomas away with me and we rode for forty days and forty nights during which time he saw neither sun nor moon but heard the roaring of the sea. Then we came to an Otherworld, a green hill, and Thomas came to wear a pair of shoes of velvet green and to possess the poetic power of prophecy.

* Francis James Child, "Thomas Rymer", *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884) Part 2, pp. 317–329

He discovered a magical realm of unimagined possibilities by crossing the bridge that is my green love.

*Greensleeves was my delight,
Greensleeves my heart of gold
Greensleeves was my heart of joy
And who but my lady Greensleeves.**



The forest needs no path with which to explore itself. And so if I tell you that I am eternal, do not imagine me continuing forever to tread the highway of time, for I have no need of it. I *am* the forest. I *am* the desert. I am the outback and the songlines that cross them, the songlines through which I make myself readable to your path-needing brains.

My “now” is everywhen, a time out of time: not your one-thing-after-another time, but an all-at-once time.

Those of us who live in this eternal moment are sometimes called the Iruntarinia. We haunt stones and trees and can only be seen by certain amongst you: medicine-men, visionaries and

* Trad.

children who are born with their eyes open, *alkna buma*. We do not much like frivolous scoffers and chatterers, of whom there are so many in your world, and on no account will we show ourselves to them.

The Indigenous Australian peoples all have their own words to describe not just this elusive everywhen but also the whole manner of thinking to which it belongs. For the Warlpiri people of the Tanami Desert it is Jukurpa; for the Arrernte peoples it is Altyerrengge; for the Kija people it is Ngarrankarni; in the Martu Wangka language it is Manguny, while some North-East Arnhem Landers refer to it as Wongar.

If the colonialists choose to reduce all this to the term “The Dreaming” or “Dreamtime”, it is perhaps because, in their flattened-out squared-off civilization, an integrated natural way of life based on a profound and holistic metaphysics can never be anything more than a dream.



I am water, although water is not what I *am*. The wind is made of nothing but air, but you could not say that it is *only* air. Its essence depends on a quality that does not show up in a

snapshot or a chemical analysis. Its essence is movement, a movement that is visible only in terms of the effect it has on the world through which it passes. I am water in terms of its effect. I am water as the bringer of vitality. More than this, I am the awareness of this in the human heart. I am also the consciousness in the brain of this awareness in the heart. I am the treasuring of this awareness, the knowledge of this treasuring, the collective cultural confirmation of this knowledge. I am the *sacredness* of water.

I am Abzu, the Babylonian primal being made of fresh water and I am Wirnpa, the rain-making snake of Australia.

I am Mazu, Chinese sea goddess, powerful and benevolent Queen of Heaven, the Jade Woman of Marvellous Deeds.

I am Chalchiuhtlicue-Chalchiuhtlatonal, Aztec water goddess-god, she of the jade skirt, whose likeness is fashioned of green rock, as I am Tlaloc, green Aztec god of water and fertility who can take on the shape of herons, snails and shellfish.

I am the current that bears the Indo-Iranian water divinity and creator Apām Napāt, the Etruscan god of wells Nethuns and the Roman

deity Neptune, who began life as god of fresh water.

I am Sequana, water-goddess of the River Seine in France; Boann, goddess of the River Boyne in Ireland; Condatis, god of the River Wear in England; Yami, goddess of the Yamuna river in India and Durius, god of the river Douro in Portugal.

I am the Nyami Nyami, the Zambezi River God and snake spirit, who protected and sustained the Tonga people until the late 1950s, when colonial-capitalists dammed his river on the borders of what are now Zambia and Zimbabwe and the Nyami Nyami withdrew from this world in disgust.

I'll be back.



In the centre of the southern French city of Nîmes you can find *Les Jardins de la Fontaine*, one of the oldest public parks in Europe. Behind the elegance of the eighteenth-century gardens lies an older layer of history – a Gallo-Roman tower dating from the third century BCE and the 2,000-year-old Roman building known as *Le Temple de Diane*, although more of a monument

to Augustus and his cult of imperial power.

But behind this antiquity hides another layer, for the fountains were once a sacred spring devoted to the local Celtic water divinity Nemausus, after whom the city is named.

You can pave over my water-power, you can rename it, re-channel it and force it underground. But you will never stop it exuberantly gurgling up again from the depths of Mother Earth and of the human hearts that she nurtures. I will survive and defeat the dogma of domination that sees nothing sacred in nature and would pollute our springs and our souls in its corrupt craving for power.

Hear the words of Ogotomméli, sage of the Dogon people of Africa, when he tells us: “The vital force of the earth is water. God has solidified the earth with water. Again, he makes blood with water. Even in stone there is that force, for dampness is everywhere”. Or, as they say at Standing Rock in North Dakota: “*Mni Wiconi*. Water is life”.

It has always and everywhere been thus. The Book of Genesis tells us of a time “when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for Yahweh had not caused it to rain upon the earth”. Life came only

when “a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground”.

Just as Naiads presided over the Ancient Greeks’ fountains and streams, so were water nymphs honoured all across Britain, with springs and wells decorated with flowers and green boughs in annual summer rituals. In the Peak District of Derbyshire the art of well dressing still flourishes. Near a pool, spring or tap there might stand a colourful picture, up to ten foot high, made entirely from natural objects such as pebbles, petals, leaves, moss, wild fruit and pieces of crystalline rock.

Wherever you look, water symbolises the reservoir of all the potentialities of existence, preceding every form and sustaining every creation.

The tears of the Mater Dolorosa over Jesus Christ are distilled from a universal metaphysics of cleansing and rebirth. The tears of Inanna over Dumuzi revitalised the parched Sumerian soil and made it bloom. The tears of Isis over Osiris were the annual flooding of the Nile, bringing fertility to the land.

I am Isis and I am Osiris. I am a cyclical flow that is forever lost and resurrected like the

mighty Egyptian river.

I am the moon, too, who also dies and is reborn and was seen as the source of moisture, the “governess of floods”, the sweller of the tides and the bringer of fertility. The dew that appears overnight was “moonwater” to the Ancient Greeks.

Waters breaking, waters creating, and even the chaste and inviolate Mary has inherited my mantle as eternal mistress of the waters and patroness of women in childbirth, those who transform loving into living through the alchemy of their own moist flesh.

If you ever come across a Bride’s Well in Celtic lands then you should know that this is water sacred to me as the goddess also known as Brigid. Once, women would make offerings at my springs in the hope that they would bear children.

Oshún, of Africa and now Cuba, is a love goddess who rules over rivers and fresh waters. There was a time when she would dance naked, her incarnate body shining with honey:

“The first part is a dance of the springs. She stretches out as if she were lying in the dry bed of

*a river, and calls the springs to her. They entwine themselves in spiral movement around her. She rises, and with outstretched arms, jingles her bracelets, moves her hands down along her body as if water were flowing over her, skips about gaily, uninhibited and youthful, like bright waters leaping over rapids, or then again rows as in a boat... She is the feminine goddess, the divine spouse, who welcomes the feast of life. In the third part, she adorns herself coquettishly and, with sensual swaying movements stretches out her arms with their golden bracelets to the rain, the water of heaven, the source of all fresh water. 'Honey! Honey!' she calls for the symbolic essence of love, her body is doubled up with passion as she awaits the mystic drops of conception".**



A 94 year old man called John Campbell, from the Scottish island of Barra, told researchers about a friend who had been become thirsty while out walking and had stopped at a spring:

"After he had taken a drink, he looked about him

* Janheinz Jahn, *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*, trans. by Marjorie Grene, intr. by Calvin C. Hernton (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), p. 67

*and saw a woman clad in green, and imagined that no woman would be clad in such a colour except a fairy woman. He went on his way, and when he hadn't gone far, looked back, and, as he looked, saw the woman vanish out of his sight. He afterwards reported the incident at his father's house in Sgalary, and his father said he also had seen a woman clad in clothes of green at the same place some nights before". **

In the far north of England, on marshy ground near Carrawburgh in Northumberland, a small standing stone marks the source of a stream. The area was once a Roman fort and settlement on Hadrian's Wall, built to protect the Empire from the Scottish barbarians beyond. And the well was sacred to Coventina, an important water goddess depicted in triple form in a bas-relief discovered by nineteenth-century archaeologists.

They loved me and left me inscriptions and coins, but all of that came to a sudden end in around 390 CE, probably due to events far to the south. Theodosius the Great Wrecker had made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Temple of Apollo-Gaia in Delphi, Greece, and the magnificent Serapeum in

* *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, by W.Y. Evans-Wentz, (1911), p. 103

Alexandria, Egypt, were both destroyed; the ancient order of Vestal Virgins in Rome was dissolved and the pagan rituals of the Olympic games were banned as the state-backed zealots of the new imperial dogma sought to wipe out all ways of believing that were not their own.

Norse legend says that when Christianity triumphed over paganism, the old gods retreated to the rivers. I held my breath and disappeared deep into the underground springs, into the hidden holy wells, into the darkest and most mysterious waters of a creative and collective dreaming that would never be entirely eliminated by the shrill and hateful intolerance of the monopolising creed.

Sometimes I live in a lake. There I am known as Viviane or Elaine or Ninianne or Nivian or Nyneve or Evienne or, note well, Nimue – was it not also me who was worshipped at the ancient springs of Nîmes?

Sometimes I might present a sword to a king, a sword that rises from out the bosom of the lake, rich with jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt, bewildering heart and eye – the blade so bright that men are blinded by it.

I am the hand that passes the half-forgotten

power of the waters into the hands of humanity and the sword that lets you *become* that power for that short burst of worldly time in which you mortals can fulfil your destinies.

On one side of the blade is written “Take me!”, on the other “Cast me away!” But don’t be sad that your glory will not last, for a moment seized will never fade.

*Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far-off.**

Accept Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake!

Live!



A young woman in a skirt of fresh-green knitted vines and small branches sings and dances through the streets of the village, at the head of a noisy and gleeful musical parade. She stops at every house to be sprinkled with water by the occupants.

This is the pagan tradition of the Balkans known as Dodola, Doda, Paparuda or Perperuna.

* Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*

South Slavs believed that when the goddess Dodola milks her heavenly cows, the clouds, it rains on earth. Each spring Dodola is said to fly over woods and fields, spreading greenery and decorating the trees with blossom.

I am particularly sought-after during times of drought. Serb youngsters sing this ritual chant in the dry, summer months:

*Naša dodo Boga moli,
Da orosi sitna kiša,
Oj, dodo, oj dodole!
Mi idemo preko sela,
A kišica preko polja,
Oj, dodo, oj, dodole!*

*We pray to our god Dodo
To bring a touch of rain,
Oh, dodo, our dodo!
We go through the village,
A little rain across the field,
Oh, dodo, oh, dodo!*



Welsh folk have often seen us fairy women coming out of our lakes to dance in front of their young men. Our seductive looks and ways entice these fellows to follow us back into the water and

there to marry one of us. If our human husbands ever want to leave the lake, they have to go without us. As this kind of Tylwyth Teg we are as big as you people; and we like to ride horses.

Under the sea off the Isle of Ushant, in Brittany, we are known as Morgans, unworldly women who live in marvellous underwater palaces, where mortals whom we love and marry can magically breathe and survive. And we make an appearance in the Breton folk tale *Aotrou Nann hag ar Korrigan*, which relates how “the Korrigan was seated at the edge of her fountain, and she was combing her long fair hair”.

Do you recognise me? My skin is as clear and delicate as a rose-leaf, and my eyes as blue as the deepest sea; but I have no feet, and my body ends in a fish’s tail.

But there is more to me than Hans Christian Andersen’s Little Mermaid or John Milton’s Fair Ligea, sitting on diamond rocks and sleeking her soft alluring hair with her golden comb.

My origins are entangled in the mythic seaweed that sways deep below the surface of your modern human consciousness.

Three thousand years ago, in Assyria, I was the

goddess Atargatis, who loved a mortal shepherd and unintentionally killed him. Ashamed, I jumped into a lake and took the form of a fish, but the waters would not conceal my divine beauty and I became a mermaid – human above the waist, fish below.

I am Suvannamaccha, the golden mermaid, a popular figure of Thai folklore, and I am the Javanese mermaid queen Nyi Roro Kidul, draped in her *selendang*, silky sashes, of *gadhung m'lathi*, aqua green.

“A strange marvel” is how Lucian of Samosata described my likeness as the goddess Derketo following his visit to Phoenicia in the second century of the Christian era. “It is woman for half its length; but the other half, from thighs to feet, stretched out in a fish’s tail”.

My mermaid image was fashioned by eleventh-century English stonemasons at Durham Cathedral, by twelfth-century Portuguese craftsmen at the Igreja de São Cristóvão de Rio Mau and in the twentieth century by Danish sculptor Edvard Eriksen for Copenhagen harbour.

We are those “Muses of the lower world” known as the Sirens, daughters of the Greek river god

Achelous, who is himself also us. We are Undines, the water elementals mentioned by Paracelsus. We are the Slavic water nymphs called Rusalkas. We are Melusine, the feminine spirit of fresh water known in France and the Low Countries. We are Lorelei, the watery songstress of the River Rhine.

There have always been plenty of men who fear our seductive powers and, like William Shakespeare in *The Comedy of Errors*, beg “O, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note”. Foremost amongst these have been Christians. As early as the seventh century, Isidore of Seville declared that we were nothing but “prostitutes” who led travellers into ruin.

Fish, flesh and the fall!



Fish mean fertility, libido, the smell of sex, the vital bodily ingredient within the waters of life. If water cleanses and purifies, then fish are the consequent regeneration.

The vulva-shaped fish symbol, *vesica piscis*, later used by Christians, was known to pagans as the Great Mother or the Womb. The ancient Greek word *delphos* meant both fish and womb. A fish

was the symbol of Venus, goddess of love. A fish swallowed Osiris' penis and is often depicted on the head of his lover Isis, who was also called Abtu, the great fish of the Abyss, the "hole of the serpent".

I have mentioned before that the Yoruba people know me as Yemoja. I am a mother deity and patron spirit of women, especially pregnant ones. I am the mermaid-goddess of the Ògùn river in Nigeria and I am also worshipped at streams, springs and wells. My name comes from the phrase *Iye omo eja*, meaning "Mother whose children are like fish".

The Ancient Egyptians around the delta city of Per-banebdjedet, now Mendes, knew me as fish-goddess Hatmehit, depicted either as a fish or as a woman with a fish emblem or crown on her head. I represented life and protection.

The Ancient Greeks recognised me as, amongst others, foam-born love goddess Aphrodite with her conch shell and unquenchable lust for living.

The fishy fluids of vitality course through male and female alike, which is why I am not just water goddess and mermaid but also water god and merman.

I am Dagon, Levantine god of fertility, “upward man and downward fish” and Enki, Sumerian god of the waters sometimes depicted wearing the skin of a fish.

I am the Mesopotamian Ea, “God of the House of Water”, whose symbol is that of Capricorn, a goat with the tail of a fish.

I am the Babylonian Oannes, a man-fish-god who lived in the Persian Gulf and rose out of the waters in the daytime as the merman Odacon to teach humans writing, arts and science.

I am Triton, the only son of Neptune and Amphitrite, clasping his famous conch shell and described by the poet Apollonius Rhodius as having the upper parts of the body of a man, while the lower parts were those of a dolphin.

I am the *encantado* of the Amazon, a merman who seeks out human women to seduce and impregnate.

I am the Greek sea god Glaucus, rough and shaggy in appearance, my body covered with mussels and seaweed; my hair and beard luxurious and green.

I am the Irish merrow-man or macamore, an

ugly character with green hair and teeth, pig-like eyes, a red brandy-drinker's nose and a tail between my scaly legs.

I am the Scandinavian Havmand, a handsome merman with green or black hair and beard, a beneficent being who lives either in the bottom of the sea, or in the cliffs and hills near the sea shore.

I am also the Neck, the Nixe, the Nökke, the Knucker, the Kelpie, who lurks still within rivers, ponds and lochs across northern Europe, a memory of something long-half-forgotten that is always ready to rise up from the deep waters and reclaim this world as its own.



Ideas of cleansing and regeneration are never far apart, as the dross of the old has always to be swept aside to make way for the purity of the new. The spiritual power of water has been celebrated since at least the Sumerian days of the fish-draped Enki. The Ancient Egyptians wrote of baptising newborn children to purify them of the blemishes acquired in the womb. And the bath taken by those entering the cult of Isis was not just ritual purification, but symbolised the death and resurrection of Osiris and the

regenerating powers of the sacred Nile.

Muslims wash before prayer; Jews may plunge into a natural stream or a Mikvah filled with rain-water; Japanese Shinto purification, or *misogi*, involves natural running water, especially waterfalls; Indigenous Americans practise Going to Water, also performed only in bodies of water that move, while Hindus traditionally seek purity and regeneration in the River Ganges.

You will recall that as Babylonian man-fish-god I was known as Oannes. In Greek this name is Ioannes, in Latin Johannes, in Hebrew Yôhānān and in English it is John.

Am I then John the Baptist, the prophet and reformer who acted out the ancient rite of Oannes when he baptised Jesus Christ in the waters of the River Jordan?

Should historical figures be kept separate in our minds from gods and symbols? Does the attested individual existence of somebody mean that he cannot also, at the same time, be someone else, something else, the player of an archetypal role passed down and down throughout the millennia?

Throughout the stories of John the Baptist runs the unsettling impression that he is being confused with someone else, that his tale is a parallel tale, a forgotten version of something now lost to time.

Mark writes that he was “clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather girdle round his waist”. And yet in the Book of Kings we learn of another man who wore “a garment of haircloth, with a girdle of leather about his loins” and this man was Elijah.

Is John also Elijah, a much earlier harbinger of the Messiah, regarded by Jewish mystics as an angel in human form? In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus himself claims that John is a contemporary manifestation of “the Elijah who was to come”. But in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist explicitly denies this.

In the account of Luke, the Angel Gabriel announces to Zacharius, a priest, that a son will be born to his wife Elizabeth. It turns out that Elizabeth is a cousin of Mary, mother of Jesus. When the two women meet, the embryonic John the Baptist leaps for joy in the womb.

John is born before Jesus and is thus a sort of prototype version of him. Luke writes of John:

“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel”. And he writes of Jesus: “The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him”.

Apparently John was not only an inspired prophet and a recruiter of Fishers of Men but, like Jesus, a miracle-worker. The gospels relate that because of his healing wonders Jesus was thought by some to be John the Baptist returned from the dead. Both were accused of being possessed by demons.

The story of how John is arrested, executed, and buried in a tomb is seen by some as a conscious foreshadowing of the fate of Jesus. And the Eastern Christian Church says that after John died, he went down into the Underworld to spread the news that Jesus the Messiah would be dropping in soon for his Harrowing of Hell. In death, as in life, John was the Forerunner of Christ as well as the co-descendant of Osiris-Tammuz-Dumuzi and Inanna-Ishtar-Persephone.

John’s day is Midsummer, June 24, on exactly the other side of the year-wheel to Jesus Christ’s December 25 feast. Winter and summer, the underworld-surface seasonal rotation, the six-

month spells spent in barren darkness and in verdant sunlight. Are John and Jesus gods of the waxing and waning year, one the perpetual shadow of the other, both aspects of the one cyclical life-death-rebirth concept?

Are they both connected to Attis, Phrygian god of vegetation, who in his self-mutilation, death, and resurrection represents the fruits of the earth, which die in winter only to rise again in the spring?

The serving-up of John's head on a plate after Salome's seductive dance has echoes of poor chopped-up Osiris and also of the archaic Greek rites in which the Old Year was beheaded by the New, who apparently went on to eat the head of his predecessor in the annual cycle.

The sixth-century Welsh elegy to the god Hercules, *Marwnad Ercwlf*, asks:

*The earth turns,
So night follows day.
When lived the renowned
Ercwlf, chief of baptism?*

As Robert Graves point out in *The White Goddess*, Ercwlf, or Hercules, is here being clearly identified with John the Baptist.

Adopted as patron saint of Armenian poets, John has also been linked to Vahagn, the dragon-slaying Armenian god of war, fire and the sun. It is claimed by some that, in the early fourth century, Gregory the Illuminator placed John's remains at the Surb Karapet Monastery in Western Armenia, today part of Turkey.

The name of the place relates directly to John – he is sometimes addressed as Surb Karapet, the Holy Precursor, Sultan of Mush. The now-obliterated monastery went on to become a stronghold of the Mamikonians, a dynasty with somewhat mysterious Eastern, possibly even Chinese, origins. They regarded themselves as holy warriors of St Hovhannes Karapet, John the Baptist.

Johannites stretched at one time from Asia Minor to Alexandria. A Samaritan called Dositheos is said to have originally been the Standing One, or leader, of the John the Baptist sect, but stood aside in favour of Simon Magus. Dositheans and Simonians eventually all disappeared and the Johannite cult was largely absorbed into Christianity.

Some of it continued underground, though, and the veneration of John can still be seen today in the Gnostic faith of the Semitic Mandaean, who

call him Yōhānā or Yahya ibn Zakariyya. The Mandaeans are also known in the Middle East as the Sabians or the Subba, from an Aramaic word related to baptism.

One of the main Mandaean holy texts is the *Draša D-Iahia* “The Book of John the Baptist”, which presents a serious challenge to the Christian story of Jesus. For instance, one prophetic passage declares: “The star, that came and stood over Enishbai: A child will be planted out of the height from above; he comes and will be given unto Enishbai. The fire, that burned in Old Father Zakhriā: Yōhānā will be born in Jerusalem”.

The Holy Land, the star, the miraculous birth – but it’s John, not Jesus, that they’re writing about. Indeed, for the Mandaeans, Jesus was nothing but a *mšiha kdaba*, a false messiah, who perverted the teachings entrusted to him by Yōhānā.

From this unusual perspective, Jesus is close to al-Masih ad-Dajjal, “the false messiah”, or “the deceiver” of Islamic lore, a figure like the Christian Antichrist, the medieval Jewish Armilus and the Zoroastrians’ evil principle, Angra Mainyu.

John/Yōhānā confirms his own affinity to the water-god Oannes when he declares:

“A fisher am I, a Fisher who elect is among fishers. A Fisher am I who among the fishers is chosen, the Head of all catchers of fish... I come to the net-grounds, to the shallows and all fishing-spots, and search the marsh in the dark all over. The fisher-trident which I have in my hand, is instead a margnā select, a staff of pure water, at whose sight tremble the fishers”.



The real “truth” of any faith lies not in the stories that it embroiders around its past but in the kernel of the *gnosis* that it wishes to impart to humankind.

When ideas are unable to surface in the collective consciousness through the obvious cultural channels, perhaps because of a ferocious religious monopoly which allows them no space to do so, then they will find other passageways in the human mind through which to make themselves known to us.

The creativity of a novelist, a poet, an artist, a moulder of myth, a plumber of the psychic depths, may more accurately represent this inner

truth than the carefully-researched factual lists and catalogues of an historian of the mere surface.

For one such as I, whose “reality” is in any case too fluid and intangible to be approved by your men of science, there are many questions to be asked regarding their notions of “fact”.

When does an historical figure become so shaped by the retelling of their deeds that they become a largely fictional character? When does a fictional character become so well known in the public mind that they are almost regarded as historical? What is the difference between a text dictated by “God” and the words that pour uninvited into the pen of a lonely loft-scribbler in the middle of the night?

Is a dusty religious relic more “real” than a living archetype? Is memory more “real” than prophecy? Is a two-thousand-year-old myth more “real” than one that is yet shaping itself in our minds today?



When I am Adonis-Tammuz I am a god of fertility and new life in nature.

As Adonis of Greece I inspired “gardens” in my name, which were baskets filled with earth in which wheat, barley, lettuce, fennel and flowers were sown and tended by women for eight days. They shot up rapidly in the heat of the sun, but then withered just as fast through lack of roots and were carried out with images of my dead self, to be flung with them into the sea or into springs.

As Tammuz of Sumeria and Babylon, I am son of water-god Enki-Ea, and am thus my own son-father. I am consort of Inanna-Ishtar and am thus my own consort-sister.

I share the year-cycle with my female counterpart, condemned to the Underworld for six months at a time. I have lent my name to the midsummer month in the Babylonian, Hebrew, Arabic and Turkic calendars.

My death in June – the month of Juno-Dione-Diana – is mourned as the death of the waxing year, where the natural world flourishes, and the beginning of a six-month descent away from greenness.

How long shall the springing of verdure be restrained?

How long shall the putting forth of leaves be held

back?

– so went the traditional Babylonian wail at the annual demise of Tammuz.

An account written a thousand years ago says the Sabians – the Mandaeans – then still mourned my loss in summer but that the origin of the worship had been lost.

These are the same Mandaeans known for their dedication to John the Baptist, whose feast of St John's Day likewise falls in June, at Midsummer, as we have seen. This date is significant in the folk calendar of Europe, where ancient feast-days and their Christian substitutes have long since become enmeshed.

*Then doth the joyfull feast of John the Baptist
take his turne,
When bonfiers great with loftie flame, in every
town doe burne;
And young men round about with maides, doe
dance in every street,
With garlands wrought of Motherwort, or else
with Vervain sweet.**

* Thomas Kirchmeyer, *The Popish Kingdome or Reigne of Antichrist*, 1570

A writer from the first half of the sixteenth century says that, in almost every village and town in Germany, public bonfires were kindled on the Eve of St John, and young and old gathered about them and passed the time in dancing and singing.

At Wolfeck, in Austria, on Midsummer Day, a boy aged around twelve and dressed in green fir branches would go from house to house, with a noisy team, collecting wood for the bonfire and declaring:

*Waldbäume will ich
Trink 'ne saure Milich
Bier und Wein
Da kann der Waldman schön brav lustig sein**

*Forest trees I want,
I'll drink no sour milk,
But beer and wine,
So the wood-man can be well and truly merry*

It is said that the custom of lighting bonfires at Midsummer was so prevalent in France that until the nineteenth century there was hardly a

* Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Der Baumkultus der Germanen und ihrer Nachbarstämme; mythologische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Borntraeger, 1875), p. 524

town or a village where they were not kindled and *la fête de la Saint-Jean d'été*, with its great *feux de joie*, fires of joy, has not yet been extinguished.

The need-fire – or the St John's fire, as it was called in England – was kindled at midnight and the young people danced round it and, especially, leaped over it, or rushed through it, which was looked upon not only as a purification, but as a protection against evil influences.

As with Tammuz in Bablyon, this is the night of the sacrifice of the oak-king, the waxing year, who must make way for his tanist or replacement. His death, the death of the happy days of green growth, is mourned in summer wakes. The wood used in St John's fire, like that burned in the sacred fire tended by the Vestal Virgins, is always oak.

At the start of the twenty-first century, people were still gathering in West Sussex, England, on the evening of June 23 to dance around the Midsummer Oak at Broadwater Green in Worthing. Legend has it that every year, on the stroke of midnight, a number of skeletons rise up from its roots, and, joining hands, dance round it till cock-crow, and then as suddenly sink down again.

In his *Tableau de l'Inconstance des mauvais Anges*, published in 1613, Pierre De Lancre says that the southern French witches of the Basses-Pyrénées went to their assemblies at various special points of the year and that their chief night was that of St John the Baptist.

I am John the Baptist when he inspires. I am John the Baptist when he is Oannes, when he is the Sultan of Mush, when he is Yōhānā of the Mandaeans, when he is Tammuz. I am John the Baptist when he is the fire of joy and the water of life, when he is perpetual regeneration.

I am John the Baptist when he is the voice of the *Draša D-Iahia*, which does not urge us to worship The-One-Up-There but The-One-Within-and-Around-Us.

In the Old Testament, the Great Separate One, Jehovah, shows the prophet Ezekiel a series of “wicked abominations” happening right under his nose. Ezekiel relates that he was first taken to a place with “every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about”. And “then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz”.

Veneration for living creatures and a deep spiritual connection to the cycles of nature may be abominations for the patriarch-god of Judaism and Christianity, but others find there a celebration of all that is pleasing and vital.

“May Life be our pledge, and Life is victorious,”
exhorts the sacred book of the Mandaean.

“In the Name of Great Life may hallowed Light be glorified”.

“And praised be Life”.



I am one of the oldest mythological characters of the Middle East. Pre-Muslim, pre-Christian, pre-Roman, pre-Greek, I am a vegetation spirit, a water deity and a protector of travellers. I am Khidr, also known as al-Khidr or as al Khadir, Khader, Khadr, Khizr, Khyzer, Kwāja Khizr, Rāja Kidār, Pir Badar, Qeezr, Qhezr, Qhizyer, Qhezar, Khizar, XIZIR or HIZIR.

In this form, more than most others, my essence is the most concentrated. Whereas other incarnations are but lightly flavoured by the influx of my presence, Khidr is the river into which many of my streams have flowed. His

name, after all, does mean The Green One.

You have already heard that as Khidr I am also Pir-e Sabz, “the green saint”, who gives his name to a sacred spring at Yazd in Iran still revered by Zoroastrian pilgrims today, who come to pray for fertilising rain and to celebrate the greening of nature and the renewal of life.

In certain areas of India, I am known as Kwāja Khizr, a river spirit of wells and streams. I am revered by both Hindus and Muslims, with my principal shrine on an island in the Indus near Bakhar in Pakistani Punjab. A little boat bearing a lighted lamp is set afloat, in my honour, upon a pond or river.

As a patron saint of sailors, in parts of the Middle East and Northern India my name is still invoked every time a boat is launched. Pictured as an old and bearded fakir dressed in a green coat, I am believed to ride upon a fish. In some places I am regarded as the tenth avatar of the god Vishnu.

I am known to Muslims as the Green Angel Guide of Moses and of Alexander the Great, as a *wali* or saint and as a prophet. I ride sometimes upon a grey horse and my abode is said to be upon an island or a green carpet in the middle of

the sea, or I am said to rule over the Men of the Unseen (*rijalul-ghayb*) in the land of Yuh, in the far North, an earthly paradise where humans remain untainted by the fall of Adam.

It has been said that “there exists no deep struggle between Nature and Order in the Islamic worldview”^{*} and in my Muslim manifestation, as in others, I have a close relationship with the living earth. I am the Verdant One, “dressed in green, like April’s season”, who makes vegetation grow. The land bursts into life as I pass over it. You can find me at the joining of waters, whether seas, rivers or lakes and, always, around the springs from which vitality gushes forth.

I am Hayath Nabi, the Eternal Life Prophet. I am ever-lasting spiritual vim, my greenness symbolising a knowledge “drawn out of the living sources of life”. My colour is the colour of Islam and symbolizes the presence of the divine wisdom as imparted to Khidr and to Prophet Muhammad. The first revelation was the Book of Nature and this primal green wisdom still radiates.

^{*} Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam*, 1993, via khidr.org

I am alluded to in the Quran and, although not named, universally acknowledged to be the Servant of Allah whose activities are described in Chapter XVIII. I am regarded as having a special wisdom, *hikmah*, and esoteric knowledge, *ilm al-ladun*. Indeed, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community regards me as the symbolic representation of Muhammad himself.

The *hadith*, Muslim narratives, tell of a character destined to expose the Dajjal, the false Messiah. Despite being cut into pieces, he will succeed in challenging and humiliating the Antichrist. Commentators maintain that this worthy person is me.

One famous story concerns that role of mine as guide and servant to Alexander the Great, who is recalled in Islamic tradition as a saintly leader or “two-horned” prophet named Dhul-Qarnayn and sometimes regarded as the reincarnation of Moses. I lead the way, “moving with greenness”, as the pair of us cross the far-northern Land of Darkness to find the Water of Life, the *Abu-Hayat*. And while Alexander/Dhul-Qarnayn gets lost looking for the spring, I find it and gain the elixir and, thus, immortality.

In another story, told by ninth-century Persian scholar Abū Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-

Tabarī, Moses claims to be the most knowledgeable man on earth, and God corrects him by telling him to seek me out. Moses is told to bring a salted fish. Once the fish goes missing, you will find al-Khidr, God explains to him. Moses sets out with a travel companion, and once they reach a certain rock, the fish comes to life, jumps into the water, and swims away. And then I appear.

The motif of “encountering Khidr”, *al-ijtimā’ bi-l-Khidr*, has been appearing in Islamic literature since the ninth century. I have been spotted in Mecca and Medina themselves and contemporary sightings continue to flood in, from as far afield as Western China, Egypt, Java and Nigeria. A video posted on the internet is even claimed to show me, as a shadowy green figure on horseback, amongst the crowds in Egypt during the 2011 uprising.

People do not usually meet me in dreams, but in a physical way in the real world; albeit often in a surprising way. Some say that all of you will come across me at least once in your lifetime and that you will recognize me when you shake hands with a white-bearded man with no bone in his thumb.

Free from space and time, I can cross great

distances in a flash, moving through the air or speeding across land thanks to a miraculous “contraction of the earth” (*tayy al-ard*).

I appear as a supernatural helper in times of need, a bringer of good luck, a magic healer and rescuer of heroes, a comforter and, in more recent centuries, a symbol of poetic inspiration.

I play an important role in the story of the Jamkaran Mosque near Qom in Iran. In 984 CE Sheikh Hassan ibn Muthlih Jamkarani is reported to have met me at the spot where the mosque now stands, in the company of the Shia Messiah figure Muhammad al-Mahdi, also known as Wali al-Asr. The Sheikh’s account declares:

A young man of approximately thirty years with grandeur and special dignity was sitting on that couch resting his back against those pillows and besides him an old man was holding a book in his hand reading for the young man.

There were more than sixty people, some of them dressed in white, while others dressed in green who had surrounded the couch, and were busy in offering prayers and praises of God Almighty. Suddenly it occurred to me that this young man is the Lord and Master of the age, Wali al-Asr

(may our soul be sacrificed for him) and the old man with beautiful features sitting beside him was Prophet Khizr.

Today, at night, the exquisite domes and minarets of Jamkaran Mosque are lit up in vibrant green, just as I dreamed a thousand years ago.

In Istanbul, Turkey, I intervened three times in the construction and naming of the Hagia Sophia. I am known in many legends as the protector of this Byzantine wonder and am still said to bless the sacred building with my presence. I have also appeared at the city's Atik Valide Mosque, there is a "station" of Khidr in the mosque of Aatik All Pasha and I am said to be invisibly present daily at one of the five prayers in the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, the Blue Mosque of Istanbul.

Legend has it that I was seen praying at the Great Mosque of Damascus in Syria, now known as Umayyad Mosque, where today there is an Arab inscription on one of the walls marking my shrine, the *maqam-al-Khidr*.

And I am closely linked to the Temple Mount in Al-Quds, or Jerusalem, where I am supposed to have once lived. I have been spotted in the area,

which boasts a *Bab al-Khidr*, a *maqam-al-Khidr* and a small *qubba*, or tomb, consecrated to me.

I am particularly loved by the Alevis, Alawis, Yazidis, Druze and Qizilbash. Shrines are dedicated to me at Bosra in Syria, Samarkand in Uzbekistan, Abadan Island in the Persian Gulf, Failaka Island off Kuwait and Bhakkar Island off Pakistan. In Albania, near Elbasan, a hot spring bears my name.

In Jordan there is a mausoleum dedicated to me in the middle of the historical city of Al Karak. It is known as the “Rock” or the “Desert Rock” and is said to stand on the very spot where I appeared to Moses in the dried-fish story.

I have three other Jordanian mausoleums, all in close proximity to each other. One is set in a beautiful garden at Mahes and consists of a single room, above which is a small dome topped with a proudly-flying green banner. The others, at Aglon and Beit Ras, are now in ruins.

Further north, along the Eastern Mediterranean coast from Lebanon and Syria into Anatolia, stretches a long line of shrines to my presence; whitewashed stone structures, the larger ones domed and encircled with high steel fencing, which punctuate the shoreline like a system of

miniature lighthouses. The one at Samandag, Turkey, near the Syrian border, is particularly renowned. There is a steady flow of pilgrims to these shrines throughout the year, with the heaviest attendance on July 1, the day on which farmers bring their flocks to be baptised in the sea.

But what's this? Armed guards keeping outsiders at bay? Orthodox Islam is strongly opposed to the elevation of my Hızır from the role of a saint to that of a god and much of the ritual of my cult has been driven underground, open only to initiates. Sayyid Qutb, the leading twentieth-century thinker of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, said that I should be regarded as nothing but a chimera, "to be consigned to the realm of superstition". I am fresh and unpredictable, spurning linear hierarchies to branch out in multiple directions. My manifestations are always feared by those for whom belief is all about obedience.

I am, however, treasured by Sufis everywhere. The medieval Andalusian mystic philosopher Ibn 'Arabī, the "the greatest master", claimed to have received from me the *Khirqā*, the initiatory cloak of the Sufi chain of spirituality. Contemporary Sufi master Sherif Baba describes Moses' journey with Khidr as our own journey. Our unconscious,

symbolized by the salted fish, awakens through the revivifying waters of spiritual love and is transformed into a higher consciousness.

One of my most celebrated homes is in Sri Lanka, in the Kataragamam temple complex, a holy site on the island which, unusually, is venerated equally by the Sinhala Buddhists, Hindu Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Moors and the Vedda people. My shrine is known as the Khizr Maqām or Khidr’s Sanctuary. People say that I actually live there and they are not entirely wrong. M.H. Abdul Gaffar, a shrine trustee who imbibed his Sufi lore from his master Zuhrudin Alim, rightly explained: “Khidr is like air. When one thinks of him, he is there”. The Kataragama Devotees Trust add: “Al-Khidr will live until the end of the world and whatever place he visits remains fresh and green”.

*Nord und West und Süd zersplittern,
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern,
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten
Patriarchenluft zu kosten,
Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen
Soll dich Chidhrs Quell verjüngen.**

North and west and south are breaking,

* Johann Wolfgang Goethe, “Hegire”, *West-Östlicher Divan*

*Thrones are bursting, kingdoms shaking:
Flee, then, to the essential East,
Where on the patriarch's air you'll feast!
There to love and drink and sing,
Drawing youth from Khizr's spring*



Is it just coincidence that in some parts of the Middle East people leave food out for my green-clad Khidr, just as in Celtic lands they leave out food for the green-clad Fairy Folk? Is it just coincidence that in the former guise I rule over the Men of the Unseen and in the latter I am one of the Hidden People?

Is it just coincidence that in both shapes I dwell in a parallel world, a sacred realm beyond time and distance, and can transport myself and others to the end of the earth in the twinkling of a mischievous eye?

The Tolcarne Troll in Newquay, Cornwall, is a mythical figure said to date back to the time of the Phoenicians. He is described as a little old pleasant-faced man dressed in a tight-fitting leather jerkin, with a hood on his head, who lives invisibly in a rock. Whenever he chooses to do so he can make himself visible and thus encounter a human being.

Local legend said that the old fellow used to spend his time among the sailors voyaging from Cornwall to the ancient Phoenician city of Tyre, now in southern Lebanon, on the galleys which exported Cornish tin. He is also said to have assisted in the building of Solomon's Temple on Temple Mount in Al-Quds, or Jerusalem. Sometimes he has been called "the Wandering One", or "Odin the Wanderer".

Is it just coincidence that Khidr is known for his unexpected manifestations and is linked to the Temple Mount? Is it just coincidence that the Troll is thought to live in a rock and that the Desert Rock is so central to the story of Khidr and Moses? Is it just coincidence that Tyre, whose name actually means "rock", is closely linked to the history of Alexander the Great, Khidr's other legendary companion and that Abū Ishāq Ibrahîm bin Mufarrij al-Sūrî, author of a lengthy account of Alexander and Khidr's adventures, came from Tyre?

Am I thus, at the same time, the Tolcarne Troll and Khidr and Odin the Wanderer?

Odin-Woden of the North, known for his eight-legged grey horse Sleipnir, is a teacher of runes and poetry. The Romans identified him with their own god Mercury and in Latin-derived

languages Woden's sacred day of Wednesday is dedicated to his southern alter ego as *mercredi*, *mercoledì*, *miércoles*, *dimecres* or *miercuri*.

Am I thus Mercury, son of Maia and Jupiter, god of communication, who also guides souls to the Underworld?

Am I thus also Hermes, the Greek equivalent of Mercury, Aphrodite's other half and bearer of the caduceus, the twin-serpented staff of intertwined polarities?

Hermes is a messenger, a go-between, a dynamic intermediary moving freely between the realms of the visible and the invisible. He is the herald Gabriel. He is, like Khidr, a protector of travellers and poets, fellow pioneers of border-crossing and liminality.

If I am Woden-Mercury-Hermes, am I thus the source of the great Hermetic tradition which has inspired everyone from Giordano Bruno to Robert Fludd, from Isaac Newton to Carl Jung, from William Butler Yeats to Ralph Waldo Emerson?

Am I the Hermes Trismegistus whose esoteric writings were mentioned by Plutarch in the first century, lost to Christendom for hundreds of

years and only resurfaced in Renaissance Florence in the fifteenth century?

Am I the teacher of alchemy and astrology, of microcosm and macrocosm, of correspondences and the interconnected unity of all things in all dimensions, above and below?

Am I the author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, of the *Discourses of Isis to Horus*, of the *Emerald Tablet* and the eternal green wisdom it imparts?

As Khidr as with Hermes, my secret is immortality. I was always here and I will always be here, whether or not you can see me. I am waiting deep in the rock, beneath the surface of mere time and place, waiting to surprise you with an encounter just when you are least expecting it. On the darkest day of winter, the spring is reborn and I am nature's transforming agent, the bringer of the ever-repeating miracle of resurrection.

I am a spiritual guide, a *murshid*, inspired in the Mercurial arts. I am a magician and an alchemist. Is my *Magnum Opus* to brew the metaphysical elixir, the universal Water of Life, the *Abu-Hayat*, which will transmute the barren blackness, the *nigredo*, of the Dark Wastelands of Modernity into the green fertility of renewal

and hope?



My mysterious wanderer, Khidr, sometimes appears as The Wandering Jew, eternally exiled by the cold arrogance of an Empire which knows no place for the Other.

They call me Matathias, Buttadeus, Paul Marrane, Isaac Laquedemand and *Juan [el que] Espera a Dios*, John who waits for God.

I am John the Baptist wandering the desert in his shirt of camel's hair and I am a Sufi traveller in his humble woollen garb.

I am a medieval troubadour, spreading music and poetry across the south of Europe and I am a travelling preacher of the Free Spirit, frightening Rome with the Hermetic heresy of a divine force that is within and around us.

I am the *eardstapa* of the thousand-year-old Anglo-Saxon poem *The Wanderer*. Condemned to roam the cold seas and paths of exile, he declares:

*Eall is earfoðlic
eorþan rice*

*All is troublesome
in this earthly kingdom*

I am Odin the Wanderer, in his cloak and broad hat, as he strides across Midgard to Jötunheim, where he would give his right eye to drink from the Well of Wisdom at the root of the world tree Ygdrassil.

*Odin took the horn in both his hands and drank and drank. And as he drank all the future became clear to him. He saw all the sorrows and troubles that would fall upon Men and Gods. But he saw, too, why the sorrows and troubles had to fall, and he saw how they might be borne so that Gods and Men, by being noble in the days of sorrow and trouble, would leave in the world a force that one day, a day that was far off indeed, would destroy the evil that brought terror and sorrow and despair into the world.**



The arrival of spring, the awakening of nature, is celebrated in rural Turkey on May 6 at the traditional festival of Hidirellez.

Houses and gardens are cleaned in advance, food

* Padraic Colum, *The Children of Odin* (1920) via sacred-texts.com

prepared, costumes donned, horns sounded, drums played, processions held, fires jumped, wishes made, hopes fostered among young men and women that this will be the day they meet their true love.

This is the day of HIZIR, of Khidr, symbol of the new life which emerges at this time of year. More specifically it celebrates the day on which he met, on earth, with the Prophet Ilyas, or Elijah, the two names being fused in Hidirellez.

The festival marks a border-crossing moment between winter and summer. In the regional folk calendar, the year used to be divided into two. The period between November 8 and May 6 was winter, the Days of Kasım, and that between May 6 and November 8 was summer, called the Days of HIZIR.

HIZIR and Ilyas met on the seashore between dry land and water – this is often said to be along the Shatul Arap, a stretch of water on the Iraq-Iran border between the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the open sea. So the fusion of seasons is also the fusion between land and water, represented by HIZIR and Ilyas respectively. Fusion and yet confusion, for where does one end and the other begin? Are not the two characters simply the one, divided into two?

Islamic tradition tells of Khidr-like “encounters” with Elijah, who is capable of covering great distances in a short time and, also like Khidr, of appearing and disappearing at will. They are both associated with water. Khidr’s shrines are usually found beside springs and amidst rich vegetation, while Elijah wields power over rainfall.

So on what basis is there this land-water division between the twin prophets? Is Ilyas/Elijah not close to John the Baptist/Oannes, water-fish-god? Is John the Baptist, watery miracle worker, also Hızır/Khidr, bringer of the miraculous Water of Life?

The picture becomes even more complicated when you consider that in the old Julian calendar Hidirellez falls on April 23, St George’s Day.

Who is St George? He is certainly something a lot more complex and interesting than the patriotic Christian warrior-knight packaged as the patron saint of England. And, of course, he’s not even English.

The historical person known as St George is thought to have originated in Palestine and it is there that the merging of his identity with other

figures is perhaps most apparent. Deir al-Balah in the Gaza Strip boasts a tomb on the site of the Byzantine monastery which is claimed to be that of St George. It is located in The Mosque of al-Khidr. Meanwhile a shrine in the West Bank village of Beit Jala, near Bethlehem, was said at one time to have been frequented both by Christians who regarded it as the birthplace of St George and by Jews who regarded it as the burial place of Elijah.

The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints, first published in the fifteenth century, says of the origins of St George's name: "George is said of geos, which is as much to say as earth, and orge that is tilling. So George is to say as tilling the earth, that is his flesh". It expands on this link to fertility by declaring that "the blessed George was high in despising low things, and therefore he had verdure in himself" – the fresh greenness for which Khidr is known.

The account also connects St George to water and baptism, relating that as a result of the Christian saint's slaying of the dragon, fifteen thousand men were baptised into his faith, not counting women and children.

"And the king did do make a church there of our Lady and of S. George, in the which yet souldeth

a fountain of living water, which healeth sick people that drink thereof”.

From John’s baptisms to Khidr’s fountain of the water of life, we then go back to a John connection with the detail of St George’s demise: “His head was smitten off”.

The sixth-century *Life of St Theodore of Sykeon* mentions a monastery dedicated to St George called “the Monastery of the Fountains”, a place in which Khidr would have felt very much at home.

The Passion of St George, from the fifth century, includes a rather confusing message delivered by “the Lord” when he appeared to St George, and said to him:

“Be strong and of good cheer, beloved George, for I will strengthen thee to bear all these sufferings which they have brought upon thee. And I swear by Myself, and by the holy angels, that among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, and that after thee there shall arise none like unto thee”.

The Lord seems to have somewhat lost track of whom he was addressing!

Later in the same account the vegetation-fertility theme emerges again, when George shows off the powerful magic available by prayer to his Christian God:

“And it came to pass that when he had finished his prayer and said ‘Amen’, and was rising up, there was a great trembling and shaking, for the Spirit of God came upon the thrones, and they budded and the legs put forth roots and blossomed: those that were of fruit-bearing trees put forth fruit, and those that were not put forth leaves only”.

St George is credited in the *Passion* with a whole series of miracles and even manages to rise from the dead like his saviour Jesus Christ. All this so impresses some Persians that they build a St George’s Church in their own land:

“And a multitude of Persians received holy baptism on that day, men, women, and children. When many of them that were sick saw the young man that had been healed of his leprosy in the shrine of Saint George, they believed, and went into the shrine, and were healed straightway”.

Like Khidr, the *Passion*’s St George was always ready to intervene on behalf of sailors caught in storms who “cried out to God and Saint George”

for help and he would ensure their ship safely reached harbour.

A figure of Khidr, protector of travellers, appears in a thirteenth-century carved relief over the gateway of a caravanserai on the road between Sinjar and Mosul in Iraq. He has a halo and is thrusting a lance into the mouth of a scaly dragon.

One authority on Khidr explains how he has “taken on diverse Judaeo-Christian forms, and in particular that of the prophet Elijah and that of St George, the two saints most venerated in Palestine and in the neighbouring lands from ancient times. This association has gone to the point of complete fusion so that today one cannot be distinguished from the other”.*

In Syria, St George, or Mar Georgeos, is regarded as the Christian version of Khidr and the feast day is celebrated by both Muslims and Christians. People picnic in the countryside and mark the occasion with folk music, singing and dancing.

* A. Augustinovic (O.F.M.) trad. by E. Hoade, *El-Khadr and the Prophet Elijah* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972) p.10

In Zabadani people used to gather around an 800-year-old tree which symbolised the ever-returning green saint Khidr.

In Bulgaria the same day is known as Gergiovdan and traditionally people begin on a baptismal note with some early-morning bathing in the healing sacred waters of the dew or of a natural spring.

On the way back they gather fresh green plants, which they use to decorate the doors of their houses, themselves and even their cattle. Herbs gathered that morning are believed to have powerful curing qualities.

In Albania, on Dita e Shëngjergjit or St George's Day, on May 6, people gather and wash green willow branches and hang them around all the doors of the house.

The Romani version of Hidirellez is Ederlezi, marking the end of the long, cold winter and the reinvigorating time of year when the Roma could start travelling again.

They throw flowers into the rivers and seas in celebration, reflecting the traditions of their once-native India. They also decorate their homes with flowers and sprigs of blossom. Some

wash their hands and homes in sacred water from church wells.

Other Roma celebrate May 6 as Kakava and there is a big annual festival in Edirne, Turkey, which features music, river-bathing and fire-jumping.

Orthodox Christian Serbians celebrate St George's Day on May 6 as Đurđevdan, while for Macedonians it is Gjurgjuvden.

Roman Catholics in Croatia and Slovenia mark St George's Day on April 23 as Jurjevo. For Croats the saint is venerated as Jura Zeleni, or Green George, and many *Jurjevske* customs involve vegetation and fertility.

In the Turopolje region of Croatia, the five most beautiful maidens of a village are traditionally picked to dress up in green leaf-dresses and sing to the goddess Dodola, with her rain-bringing gift of spreading greenery.

Similar rituals are held in Russia and Romania and in the Alpine regions of Austria and Germany. A man, or effigy, covered in greenery, heads a procession through the village, musicians following on behind. They stop to perform folk songs and in response residents

sometimes pour water on them. Green George may end up being thrown into some water, to ensure good rainfall. Or white-robed celebrants may circle hand-in-hand around a bonfire, with Green George in the middle.

Always, beneath the surface of the official religious dogmas, there are other stories simmering in the collective unconscious.

Do we see here the ghost of the agricultural aspect of the Greek god Hercules, in which he was known as the “green Zeus” and sacrificed within a stone circle dedicated to the Barley Mother?

It certainly seems likely that behind the Christian George/Jura in Slavic lands lies a pagan god, Jarilo, who lives on in common first names like Jaromir and Jaroslav.

The Proto-Slavic adjective *jarъ*, related to the words for rage, bright and passion, implies a powerful vital energy, the regenerative power of nature.

Jarilo is a god of fertility, vegetation and springtime. He grew up in the Slavs’ land of the dead, an ever-green world of eternal spring and wet, grassy plains. At the end of winter he

returns from that distant Otherworld, bringing renewed spring and fertility to the land.

“*Gdje Jarilo hodit, tam vam polje rodit*” goes the folk song. “Wherever Jarilo walks, there your field gives birth” – and it could just as well be describing Khidr.

Jarilo is a mischievous god, with shape-shifting powers. Like Khidr, and Odin for that matter, he is known as a wanderer but also famed for his horse.

If you were asked to write a list of all the facets of your own personality, carefully and clearly distinguished one from the other, would you be able to do so? No, neither can I and nor do I need to.

I do not just entangle but enchant, and I am also the understanding that entanglement and enchantment mean enrichment. Entwined within me like Hermetic snakes are the microcosm of my multifaceted identity, the mesocosm of multiformed nature and the macrocosm of the multidimensional *spiritus mundi*.



Up until the first half of the nineteenth century,

the people of Jumièges in Normandy, France, marked the midsummer festival of John the Baptist by appointing someone to the ceremonial post of the Green Wolf. He would lead a procession headed by a crucifix and holy banner, chanting the hymn of St John. And he wore a long green mantle and a tall green conical, brimless, hat.

In the Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste at Sceaux, in the southern suburbs of Paris, there is still today a prominent icon of John the Baptist clothed in a splendid cloak of green.

In fifteenth-century England, great pains were taken to dress representations of St George in mantles of green silk, as recorded in Norwich in 1492.

In Denmark, the leader of the spectral Wild Hunt, identified elsewhere as Odin, was called the Groenjaette, or Green Giant.



The Welsh poet Ruth Bidgood wrote the following lines in *Symbols of Plenty*, which are inspired by a legend surrounding the Christian St Brigid:

*Power sprang in you
like flame, unwilled.
The wooden altar-pillar
you touched in kneeling
grew green, took root, lived for ever,
sustained by your invisible
and unconsuming fire*

This echoes the fifth-century account in *The Passion of St George* of how George sat down by the foot of the wooden pillar in a poor widow's house "and it straightway took root, and put forth leaves and became a large tree".

I am Brigid and Bride and Brigantia and Minerva and Athena.

I am George and Khidr and John the Baptist and Elijah and Oannes.

I am the alchemical fire-water of nature that turns dead matter into verdant life.

I am St Catalyst.



Many Crusaders returned to Europe in the twelfth century inspired by the spiritual traditions they had encountered during their

time in the Middle East.

The Order of Knights of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem, also known as the Knights Hospitaller, were founded at a hospital in Jerusalem which cared for Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land. This was built on the site of the monastery of St John the Baptist where, according to the Greek Orthodox tradition, John's head was buried.

The other big military order in the region, the Knights Templar, who were based at the Temple Mount, also adopted me as their own, flying the flag of St George and venerating John the Baptist.

They were accused of worshipping a severed head, which clearly chimes with the tragic demise of John the Baptist, as does one possible source of this head's alleged name, Baphomet, in the Greek term *baphe metous*, meaning "Baptism of Wisdom".

Since I am The Green One, this perhaps explains why Templar-linked Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland contains, as you have heard, more than 100 images of the Green Man and only one of Jesus Christ. Several of these Green Men are in the elaborately-decorated Lady Chapel. The Lady in

question may well have been Mary Magdalene, the earthly impure version of the Virgin Mary who was an important reference for the Templars. Rumours say that the fifteenth-century Rosslyn Chapel is incomplete and was originally designed with a labyrinth covering its floor and, as its centrepiece, a Black Madonna.

For their part, the Knights Hospitallers boast twin patrons – John the Baptist and Our Lady of Philermos, a Byzantine icon once venerated at her sanctuary in Rhodes as The Mother of God.



In the Other we find Ourselves. What is anything without relationship? What is Isis without Osiris, Yin without Yang, summer without winter?

But don't mistake relationship for polarity.

The Green Man is the son and consort of the Black Goddess. But the distinction between the two roles is no deeper than the distinction between the various guises of Khidr, the various names of the Great Mother.

I smile in one hundred thousand different ways.



The Palestinian story of Mar Jiryis and the Dragon relates:

There was once a great city that depended for its water supply upon a fountain without the walls. A great dragon, possessed and moved by Satan himself, took possession of the fountain and refused to allow water to be taken unless, whenever people came to the spring, a youth or maiden was given to him to devour.

The people tried again and again to destroy the monster; but though the flower of the city cheerfully went forth against it, its breath was so pestilential that they used to drop down dead before they came within bow-shot.

The terrorized inhabitants were thus obliged to sacrifice their offspring, or die of thirst; till at last all the youth of the place had perished except the king's daughter. So great was the distress of their subjects for want of water that her heart-broken parents could no longer withhold her, and amid the tears of the populace she went out towards the spring, where the dragon lay awaiting her.

But just as the noisome monster was going to leap on her, Mar Jiryis appeared, in golden panoply,

*upon a fine white steed, and spear in hand. Riding full tilt at the dragon, he struck it fair between the eyes and laid it dead”.**

The monster that denies us fresh water, that chokes the air with its pestilential breath, that devours the flesh of our young people, is with us still in the terrifying military-industrialism of the modern age. But do not despair for I, Mar Jiryis, have my spear in my hand and am ready to destroy the death-dragon in the name of all that is green and all that is life.



A story has been told for the past seven centuries that describes how one New Year’s Day a Green Knight appears at the court of King Arthur at Camelot.

Entirely green, he rides into the banqueting hall on a green horse, bearing an axe in one hand and a holly bough in the other. He says he has come for a “Christmas Game” and issues a challenge to the assembled knights: one of them may strike him once with his axe, on condition that he, the

* J. E. Hanauer, *Folk-Lore of the Holy Land: Moslem, Christian, and Jewish* (London: Duckworth and Company, 1907), pp. 56-57

Green Knight, can return the blow a year and a day later.

Young Sir Gawain steps forward and chops off the Green Knight's head with one mighty blow. To everyone's astonishment, however, the stranger calmly picks up his head and leaves, reminding Gawain to fulfil his side of the bargain a year and a day later at the Green Chapel.

For those of you who self-define to a fixed, if sadly temporary, bodily existence, it is easy enough to know what is you and what isn't. If someone invents a story about you, it is clear that no matter how closely this fictional character resembles you, it is not actually *you* but merely a representation. It's not so clear-cut for me, as you will already have noticed. I shift from one form to another, twist and turn along the borderlines of myth and memory, lurk eternally in regions of reality not recognised as such by much of your human world.

And yet I can still feel the distinction between degrees of manifestation. Sometimes I feel clear, present, sharply defined in a certain cultural form. On other occasions I feel vapish, translucent, semi-absent, like a barely-perceptible ghost drifting greyly through a twilight reverie.

I have to say that I don't fully feel myself in the tale of *Gawain and the Green Knight*, no matter how beautifully it is told. I distance myself from the conclusion, in which it is revealed that I was, all along, a certain Lord Bertilak in disguise, who was submitting Gawain to a test of moral fibre which I am still unclear as to whether he passed or not.

But still, I catch glimpses of my own incarnation reflected in this Green Knight.

The miraculous severed head reminds me of John the Baptist; of Baphomet, the alleged idol of the Knights Templar; of dismembered Osiris and his resurrection.

After all, my Green Men are generally seen in the form of a disembodied head and the cult of the head lies at the centre of our myth, alongside the sacred tree and the healing spring.

And, speaking of healing springs, one of the few place names mentioned in the original medieval tale of Gawain is St Winefride's Well in Holywell, often known as the Lourdes of Wales.

Legend tells how, in the seventh century, Caradoc, the son of a local prince, cut off the head of young Winifred after she spurned his

advances. A spring rose from the ground at the spot where her head fell and she was later restored to life by her uncle, St Beuno.

I see myself also in the decapitated and resurrected Winifred, a bringer of miraculous waters like Brigid, Anāhitā, or Khidr, the Green Knight of the Orient.



In his celebrated book *Le Morte d'Arthur*, first published in 1485 by William Caxton, Sir Arthur Malory describes “how Queen Guenever rode a-Maying with certain knights of the Round Table and clad all in green”.

May is the month of greenery, of that vibrant shade that tells of the rebirth of nature, the return of the spirit of life. I am Maia, mother of Hermes and goddess of natural growth. May is my month.

I am also Flora, the Roman goddess of the mayflower, whose festival, the Floralia, was held between April 28 and May 3 each year to celebrate the seasonal renewal with a heady mix of drinking and flowers.

For the Celts, May the First is Beltane, the

festival marking the beginning of summer, when cattle were driven out to the summer pastures. Bonfires were lit and leapt over, to protect the cattle, crops and people, and to encourage fertility.

As in other spring festivals, like the Bulgarian Gergiovdan, doors and windows would be decorated with flowers, and holy wells would be visited, with Beltane dew thought to bestow beauty and maintain youthfulness. The same is said to be true of May Day dew in England.

Some Irish folk would make a May Bush: a thorn bush decorated with flowers, ribbons and bright shells. Food and drink from the feasting would be left out for the fairy folk.

Following its usual approach, the Roman Catholic Church has done its best to recuperate the energy of May and in eighteenth-century Naples it began dedicating the month to the Virgin Mary. From there, encouraged mainly by the Jesuits, this association spread all across the Catholic world, including Ireland.

The Church has even tried to take over the magic of the hawthorn, the tree given the name May and closely associated with its festivities. The white blossom is said by Catholics in Ireland to

be a symbol of the Virgin Mary, and of chastity, and hawthorn is said to be the material of which Jesus's crown of thorns was fashioned.

But in England, May Day, or Garland Day, is the only big pagan feast day that remains totally untainted by Christianity and is still inspired by the scent of sexuality released into the fresh spring air by the hawthorn. This is the *arbor cupidatis*, the tree of desire, and its boughs were collected during the night of April 30 – May Eve, also known as Roodmas in Britain and Walpurgisnacht in Germany – when young men and women went off to the woods to sing and make love.

They would return on May morning with the maypole, around which they danced in the presence of the May King and Queen. All day long, they played merry May Day Games, celebrating the very fact that they were alive.

Unsurprisingly then, May Day has always been loathed by those Christians who are seemingly motivated by a psychotic hatred for all that is living, organic, of the earth and of the flesh. In his 1583 pamphlet *The Anatomie of Abuses*, the Puritan Philip Stubbes wrote of the English May Day tradition:

Their chieftest jewel they bring from thence is the Maie-poale, which they bring home with great veneration, as thus: twentie, or fourtie yoake of Oxen, euery Oxe hauing a sweete Nosegaie of flowers tyed on the tip of his hornes, and these Oxen drawe home this Maie-poale (this stinking Idoll rather) which is covered all over with Flowers and Hearbes, bound round about with strings from the top to the bottome, and sometimes painted with variable collours, with two or three hundred men, women and children following it, with great devotion.

One person's stinking Idoll is another's Tree of Life.



All across England on the First of May, or on the first weekend of May, a character sometimes described as “a walking, talking bush” sets off to lead a procession through the streets.

It is Jack in the Green – the English version of the Slavic Jura Zeleni or of the Pfingstl, the leafy character who still parades through villages in Bavaria, Germany.

In England, as elsewhere, I am a vegetation-clad symbol of natural rebirth.

The mysterious green head from the local church has come to life and leads the local people back into a pre-Christian world – or forward into a post-Christian one!

In Rochester, Kent, I am awoken at dawn on May 1 on Bluebell Hill and taken through the streets as part of the three-day Sweeps Festival, attended by hundreds of “sides” or groups of Morris dancers, the revived folk music tradition that is always at the centre of my celebrations in England.

In Bristol I am nine feet tall, covered in greenery and flowers, and accompanied by attendants, who are also completely disguised in green rags and vegetation. The attendants play music, dance and sing as they guide me through the streets on a six-hour procession from the Harbourside to Horfield Common, where I am slain and ripped apart by onlookers to “release the Spirit of Summer”.

In Hastings, East Sussex, I am at the centre of a big four-day Jack in the Green Festival involving a wild costumed parade through the streets of the old seaside town, featuring leafy “Bogies” or Green Men, and again culminating in my annual sacrificial death.

In Whitstable, Kent, I was joined a few years ago in my annual May Day madness by the musician Suggs, who later travelled to Tuscany and heard the very same folk melody being performed. With his friend Jools Holland, he turned it into a ska song in my honour, *Jack O' The Green*.

In Guildford and Deptford I go out, in Oxford, Hammersmith, Bovey Tracey, Ilfracombe, Knutsford, Brentham and the City of London.

All over the country, I am followed in my parade by a host of strange characters, such as the Lord and Lady, the Fool, men dressed as women, blind fiddlers, dragons, hobby horses, fairies on stilts, Black Sal, Dusty Bob, May Day Moll, Grand Serag, Jim Crow and Master Merryman.

The May King and Queen are part of my tradition, of course, along with Robin Hood and Maid Marian and, you may not be entirely surprised to hear, St George.



*You must wake and call me early, call me early,
mother dear;*

*To-morrow'll be the happiest time of all the glad
New-year;*

Of all the glad New-year, the maddest, merriest

day;

*For I'm to be the Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to
be Queen o' the May.*

*I sleep so sound all night, mother, that I shall
never a-wake,*

*If you do not call me loud when the day begins to
break:*

*But I must gather knots of flowers, and buds and
garlands gay,*

*For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be
Queen o' the May.**

“Through the ages it has been many a young girl’s dream to be chosen as queen of the May and crowned with a garland of flowers at the Maypole”,** writes a chronicler of the May Day celebrations in Knutsford, Cheshire, which is well known for its enthusiastic embrace of the tradition.

Early in the morning the streets are covered with brown and white sand in preparation for the mile-long procession from the Town Hall, at the tail of which comes the yet-uncrowned Queen.

After the crowning on the Heath, there are May Day games, Morris dancing and other festivities,

* Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The May Queen*

** virtual-knutsford.co.uk

all performed in front of the May Queen's throne. Like all good May Queens, she is dressed in white, the colour of the flowers of the may-tree.

The central role played by the May Queen is significant. May Day remains Maia's Day and the annual rebirth of Jack, of vital energy, is from the womb of the Great Mother Earth without whom there could be no life for us to celebrate.

For one brief and heady moment in their young lives, the white-clad maidens become May Queene Isis, *the naturall mother of all things*.



We are Calliope, Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia and Urania.

We are Melete, Mneme and Aoide.

We are the Muses.

Once we were water nymphs and we lived on Mount Parnassus, sacred to Dionysus. While you may now catch sight of us in a modern Home of the Muses, do not imagine that we could ever stay confined within the stone walls of these so-

called museums.

We are everywhere and everywhen, otherwise
and otherworldly.

We are the tree-fairies who whisper inspiration
in the poet's ear as he wanders through the wild
breezing woodlands.

We are the story that narrates itself to the
writer's imagination, the vision that paints itself
in the artist's inner eye, the melody that drifts
unbidden into the musician's dreams.

We are Brigid, described by tenth-century
Christian monks as "the goddess whom poets
adored" and who brought healing by means of
poetry recited out loud beside sacred wells.

We are Khidr, the Green Angel Guide and Muse
to the Sufi saints, who comes to you as white
light or the gleam on a blade of green grass and
brings with him a tireless enthusiasm that
pushes you beyond your usual all-too-human
capacities.

We are inspiration.



I am *mana*, the sacred universal force that Melanesians see bringing vitality to people, animals, plants and objects. On Turtle Island I am the *Wakan tanka* of the peoples of Dakota, *orenda* of the Iroquois, *manitou* of the Algonquian people.

I am also the *viriditas* described by the twelfth-century German philosopher Hildegard von Bingen, a concept of the creative power of life drawn from the Latin words for “green” and “truth”.

I am her vision of freshness, vitality, fertility, fecundity, fruitfulness, verdure and growth, of nature-given spiritual and physical health.

I am her “most honoured Greening Force”, who “lights up, in shining serenity, within a wheel that earthly excellence fails to comprehend”.*

I am *nommo*, the magical and spiritual energy that West Africans traditionally understand to animate human beings and which finds its expression through your spoken word, the sound of your drums, the laughter of your throat, your poems and your songs.

* Hildegard von Bingen, *Causae et Curae*

I am the living spirit of nature *as it emerges in you*, filtered by the collective mind of the human species. I am the collective realisation by humankind of the fact that you belong to nature, that nature manifests itself within you, and I am the collective understanding of humankind that this belonging to a wider web of organic being is of great importance.

I am also the human grasping of the multi-dimensional interconnectedness of this organic web of life and of the fact that, despite a bewildering complexity that is well nigh impossible for the human brain to chart and comprehend, this interconnectedness represents harmony.

I am therefore the human understanding that you are manifestations of an intrinsically harmonious cosmic nature. From the mightiest macrocosm to the most humble microcosm, our universe is structured with pattern. The relationship between the diameter of a circle and its circumference remains the same, whether the circle is a billion miles wide or too small to be registered by the human eye. Cells divide, crystals form, fractals spiral and repeat with expanding or evolving symmetry.

There is a *rightness* here, a rightness which

underlies the structure of every galaxy, the shaping of every cloud, which is present within every leaf of every plant, every cell of every animal, every electric pulse within the human brain.

I am a sense of that rightness. Furthermore, this ability of the human mind to sense rightness *is itself part of the rightness*.

It is important to understand that although this *sense* of rightness is a human quality, the *rightness* itself does not originate in the human mind or in human culture. And anything which is created by humanity without drawing on this sense of rightness is liable to act as an impediment to rightness, whatever claims are made to the contrary.

As Mercury and Hermes I am direct communication with rightness, a conduit, a direct path. I am that *unmediated* understanding of right and wrong which is independent of all law and dogma laid down by human beings. I am your sense of natural justice and of natural harmony. I am the *gnosis* in your heart.

I am the sense of connection that completely bypasses organised religion and all the cumbersome rules and rituals it serves up to the

uninspired. I am the inner shining of universal truth rather than the outer light-show of particular convention.

I am the human inebriation with the poetry of the harmonious living cosmos.

When I am Khidr, in the Muslim world, I stand in contrast to Moses, with whom I embarked on that famous journey to the rock. Moses is a prophet charged with revealing a *shari'a* or religious law. But, as Khidr, I discover a secret mystic truth, a *haqiqa*, which is superior to *shari'a*. I am Moses' spiritual guide and I represent the esoteric, which is freed from the deadening exoteric superficiality of literal religion.

Among Sufis, an *Uwaisi* is one who takes "the third path" to spiritual knowledge which provides direct access to *ghayb*, the mysterious unseen. Like the great medieval Andalusian master Ibn 'Arabī, such a person has not been initiated by humans but by the mantle of Khidr. An *Uwaisi* has received direct illumination.

When you allow this illumination to shine right through you, it scorches away the shadows not just of the inferior laws imposed on you from external human society, but also the unlit parts

of your own character.

With all my talk of fertility and life energy, you might imagine that the raw, vital, instinctive force of human physical existence naturally manifests the essence of humanity. From this perspective, anything you feel the urge to do, any behaviour which appeals to you on an unthinking level, would be acceptable.

And yet, that is clearly no way for a human being to live! Without the magical rightness of nommo, you are little more than a zombie.

Just as I am your consciousness of human belonging to organic nature, so I am also your consciousness of the nature of humanity and your consciousness that the nature of humanity embraces consciousness.

Although human beings are animals, they have, like all animals, their own characteristics. And a main characteristic of human beings is that you do not behave merely according to instinct – or maybe, perhaps, that your instinct is not to behave merely in a biologically pre-determined fashion.

To try and embrace nature within yourselves while ignoring the element of consciousness is in

fact to wilfully deny your own nature. An innate sense of rightness forms part of human nature and must be fully expressed and acted upon by anyone who would fulfil their whole human potential.

The Ancient Hebrews made an important distinction between legitimate and illegitimate prophecy. They took no notice of any “prophet” who went into a trance and could not afterwards remember what he had said while in that state, as to them he had made himself absent from his own body and allowed any kind of vileness and untruth to emerge. They only took seriously a prophet who remained in control of his own mind throughout the process, who consciously used his full humanity and did not sink down to a level that was less than that.

The Indigenous Australian everywhen, which as we have seen is known as *Jukurrpa* by the Warlpiri people, is an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment.

This is the universal sacred law, natural law, the *sumak kawsay*, the *right way to live* that is whispered to us at twilight by the green-clad Fair Folk and which maintains the harmony of

humanity with birds, beasts, rivers, mountains and the fabric of being.

Yes, we must always remember that we are part of nature. But we must also always remember that we are human and we must participate in nature with the consciousness that is proper to our humanity.

So it is that when I ride out as St George, I slay the dragon.

For Christians, the image represents the victory of their religion over pagan ways, but as ever they have wilfully misunderstood.

*“Yes, I am St George, and I’m the Green Man
And I will fight evil wherever I can.”*

These lines from the Northamptonshire Mummers Play, collected by the poet John Clare, sum it up nicely.

For the Ancient Egyptians, “to do green things” meant doing good, while “to do red things” meant doing evil. I do not represent nature “red in tooth and claw”, the mere physicality of life, but nature as greenness, as *viriditas*, as a physicality inspired by principle, by structure, by symbiosis, by harmony, by rightness.

Mercurial gods are known for fighting dragons and evil spirits, often using their staff as a weapon. Even as Khidr I am known to fight dragons or help others to do so. And don't forget the Armenian connection between John the Baptist, or Surb Karapet, and dragon-slaying Vahagn.

The dragon is your fear, your insecurity, your jealousy, your self-importance, your weakness, your selfishness, your confinement within a purely individual reality.

I bring you the inspiration to slay that dragon and discover the freedom and empowerment of participating in the natural rightness of the universe.



When the human world goes wrong, the expression of natural human rightness is forced to take on new forms.

Instead of basking in the harmony of life, it has to struggle against the prevailing disharmony and try to restore the organic balance. And often you will see glimpses of my familiar green features behind the war-waging armour of the dragon-slaying combatants.

Take, for instance, that familiar English folk hero Robin Hood who battled against the social injustice imposed on the English people by the Norman-French ruling classes who occupied the country from 1066.

Ever since he first appeared in medieval ballads, this outlaw has proved an immensely popular figure in poetry, book and film, and his desire to steal from the rich to give to the poor has given him a radical edge that still has not been smoothed away by the conveyor-belt processing of the capitalist culture-factories.

You will have noticed, of course, that Robin Hood and his Merry Men live in the forest and dress in my colour, the colour of the Fair Folk and the green sleeves of the wise women.

Robin itself is a name of the Old Religion, from which comes my Robin Goodfellow. Some say "Robin Hood" was once *Rof Breoht Woden*, "Bright Strength of Woden". His partner Maid Marian is called after the Great Mother. That eternal couple of the woods, Robin and Marian, were once celebrated across the rural north of England on May Day, Midsummer Day and Lammas.

Robin's popularity did not go down well with

those Christians who forever sought to confine the dreaming of the people to the demands of their Authority.

Hugh Latimer, sixteenth-century Bishop of Worcester, was most put out when he turned up to preach at a local church on a day sacred to Robin:

*“And one of the parish comes to me and says: ‘Sir, this is a busy day with us; we cannot hear you. It is Robin Hood’s Day. The Parish are gone abroad for Robin Hood, I pray you hinder them not.’ I was fain there to give place to Robin Hood. It is no laughing matter, my friends, it is a weeping matter, a heavy matter under the pretence for gathering for Robin Hood, a traitor and a thief, to put out a preacher, to prefer Robin Hood before the ministrations of God’s word”.**

If there was a real historical rebel called Robert Hood who hid out in Sherwood Forest and dressed in Lincoln Green, then he may well have deliberately identified himself with an old pre-Christian archetype, may well have opened himself up to my energy and become a physical manifestation of my spirit.

* cit. Robert Graves, *English and Scottish Ballads* (London: Heinemann, 1963), pp. xvii-xviii

Without human flesh and mind to welcome me, I have no possibility of existence.



In fifteenth-century Europe, the political boot was on the other foot and it was the people of France who were occupied by the armies of England.

In truth, this detail is irrelevant. Justice or injustice are never incorporated into the colours of any particular flag or into the fake “nationality” cloaking any power elite. Rightness is when the shoots of life grow unhindered from the natural soil of individual and collective freedom and its enemy is any power-heavy dragon which tramples on its vitality.

Joan of Arc is remembered now as a nationalist symbol and as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. But when she was burned at the stake in Rouen in 1431, it was as a heretic and witch.

Some say that she and her associates were not Christians at all, but followers of the Old Religion, a faith which then still permeated the rural France from which she emerged.

She was certainly regarded by much of the

French population as an incarnate deity rather than a religious leader, a mystical entity who sacrificed herself for the good of the people and whose ashes were collected and thrown into running water in the way of ancient pre-Christian rites.

The issue of paganism was central to her trial and the fourth article of accusation against her was that she had been imbued by certain old women in the use of witchcraft, divination, and other superstitious works or magic arts.

Of particular interest is a tree near her home at Domrémy which was known as the Fairies' Tree and stood beside a sacred spring which was said to cure fevers. It was said that Joan "received her mission at the tree of the fairy-ladies" and that it was here that "St Katharine" and "St Margaret" came and spoke to her.

One of the first questions asked by Joan's inquisitors was "if she had any knowledge of those who went to the Sabbath with the fairies? or if she had not assisted at the assemblies held at the fountain of the fairies, around which dance malignant spirits?".

Another exchange was recorded exactly as: *"Interrogée s'elle croiet point au devant de*

aujourd'uy, que les fées feussent mauvais esperis: respond qu'elle n'en sçavoit rien”.

In other words, Joan insisted that up until that very moment she had not “realised” that the fairy voices were the evil spirits that her Christian prosecutors made them out to be.

There is also the intriguing matter of the male clothing worn by Joan as a matter of defiant principle, and the hair that she kept short. As she was me, she was above gender and was so much more than the individual biological body through which she was present in your world. She was not only a woman, but a force of nature.



The Haitian Revolution was the most successful revolt against slavery and Empire known to history. Inspired by the example of the 1789 French Revolution, in 1791 Haitian slaves kicked off their own revolt. By 1803 they had succeeded in ending not just slavery but French control over the colony, notching up the first-ever defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte.

The roots of the revolt lie in the large numbers of runaway slaves who, like the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest, lived in the woods away from

official control and often launched raids on the imperial sugar and coffee plantations. François Mackandal, a Haitian Vodou/Voodoo priest, earlier managed to unite these maroons, inspiring them by drawing on African traditions and spirituality, before being captured by the French and burned at the stake in 1758.

A key figure at the start of the later and successful uprising was Dutty Boukman, an African man first enslaved in Jamaica and then sold on to a plantation in North Haiti. He was also a *houngan*, a Vodou holy man, and in his role as an overseer and coachman managed to contact and recruit a large number of slaves. He swore them in and, at a Vodou ceremony at the Bois Caïman in the night of 14 August 1791, gave the signal to rebel.

Alongside Boukman at the Bois Caïman that night was Cécile Fatiman, a Vodou priestess. The daughter of an African slave woman and a white Corsican man, she is described as having long silky hair and green eyes and during the ceremony acted as a manifestation of the loa-goddess Erzulie.

My life-affirming power has always, and will always, frighten the Empire and, true to form, Christians later condemned the Bois Caïman

ceremony of resistance as a “pact with the devil”.

The loas of Haiti are the vital energies of a nature which includes each and every human being. Where human beings are chained, enslaved and oppressed, so is nature itself and it will surge forth through whatever forms are available, using whatever means necessary, in order to restore the free flow of life.

Sometimes I am revolution.



In 1811, during the Napoleonic wars, revolt broke out in the English north and midlands.

Bands of furious workers started smashing up the new machineries that were being introduced in the cradle of industrial capitalism. They recognised these automated systems as an assault on their livelihood, craftsmanship and autonomy; as the creeping cancerous growth of what contemporary radical William Cobbett termed “The Thing”.

The disturbances went on for five years as handloom weavers burned mills and machines. In Yorkshire, the Luddite bands used mighty sledgehammers nicknamed “Great Enoch” to

attack the hated technologies of servitude. The rebellion notched up at least £100,000 of damage, which would be more like £100 million today.

The government and ruling classes reacted with panic at the sight of such an efficient and highly organised uprising, which they feared could develop into full-scale insurrection or even a revolution of the kind that had gripped France or Haiti. The *Annual Register* wrote of its horror at this movement “of a character of daring and ferocity unprecedented among the lower classes in this country”.

The British state unleashed its full force against the Luddites, starting with bribes and threats, midnight raids and interrogations, and then involving hosts of special constables, volunteer militias, posses and spies. It also deployed the military violence of its army, sending thousands of soldiers into the troubled areas. At one time there were more British soldiers fighting the English Luddites than there were fighting Napoleon on the Iberian Peninsula. And it passed a draconian new law, the Frame Breaking Act of 1812, by which industrial sabotage became a crime punishable by death. The following year 17 men were executed.

The Luddites’ enduring fame is mainly down to

the success of their operations. Although some of their biggest actions involved as many as a hundred people, arrests were far and few between thanks to the protective support of their tightly-knit local communities.

The uprising was said to have been named after one Ned Ludd, a real-life apprentice who smashed two stocking frames in 1779. But later this real Ned, if he ever existed, had been absorbed by a mythological figure of inspiration, termed General Ludd or King Ludd.

It was Robin Hood all over again.

The rebels themselves understood the connection, signing some of their letters from “Robin Hood’s Cave” and “Ned Ludd’s office, Sherwood Forest”. And one of the Luddite songs declared:

*Chant no more your old rhymes about bold Robin Hood,
His feats I but little admire,
I will sing the Achievements of General Ludd
Now the Hero of Nottinghamshire.*

In Staffordshire, some of the Luddites hid from the authorities in a deep Peak District chasm known as Lud’s Church.

Do you think it is by chance that this matches their name so nicely?

Do you imagine it is mere coincidence that this gorge is also reputed to have sheltered Robin Hood and his companion Friar Tuck?

Do you see no particular significance in the fact that Lud's Church has been identified as the Green Chapel in the story of Gawain and the Green Knight?

Lud, according to some medieval sources, was a pre-Roman king of Britain who founded London and was buried at Ludgate.

But this apparently historical figure seems more likely to be a version of the mythological Celtic character Llud, known in Wales as Lludd Llaw Eraint and in Ireland as Nuada Airgetlám.

Llud was once the ancient British god Nodens, known for sure to have been worshipped at the Lydney Park temple complex overlooking the Severn Estuary in Gloucestershire. Among the Roman gods with whom he was equated were Silvanus, god of the forests, Neptune, god of water and Mercury, who is also my Hermes, my Odin and my Khidr.

I am the energy behind the sledgehammers that smash the life-denying machineries of Empire.



“Mayday has been a celebration of life, renewal and pleasure since ancient times,” declared the anarchist website ourmayday.org.uk at the start of the twenty-first century. “More recently it was declared International Workers’ Day to commemorate the execution of four anarchists in Chicago for their part in the struggle for an eight-hour working day. Both these aspects of Mayday were intertwined – a festival against work, want and denial and a vision of freedom and plenty throughout the world”.

I have perhaps already tested your patience by explaining how I can be male, female or both; how I can be historically real, mythological or both; how I can be present in one particular cultural icon and yet also absent; how I can be anything from a sacred tree to a human work of art; how I can be not just the human belonging to nature, but the human consciousness of that belonging.

Now I have to tell you that I can also be a day!

Nowhere else, perhaps, do I express so clearly

the perfect coherence in my step from celebration to contestation.

As May Day I focus the vitality, and the awareness of vitality, that must reassert itself with ever greater determination against The Thing which stifles it.

I cannot be seen in the dull crowds that trudge along in the sterile political masquerades that sometimes borrow my date.

I am only myself, only the *real* May Day, when something living, something free, something ancient and renewed, bursts out of the greyness of the workaday calendar and takes to the festive streets with colourful shrieks of rage and joy.

I was there in Vienne, Isère, France, on May 1, 1890, when people revolted in response to calls from anarchists Louise Michel, Eugène Thennevin and Pierre Martin. The rebels urged those still at work to drop tools. Their procession of flags, both red and black, clashed with police. Barricades went up, a textile factory was wrecked and spontaneous wildcat strikes lasted all week.

I was there in Paris, on May 1, 1968, when the communists tried and failed to keep the

anarchist black flags out of the workers' parade and I was there again on May 1, 1990, when Stalingrad metro station in Paris was renamed "Commune de Kronstadt" by the wit of freedom-loving radicals.

I was in Cleveland, Ohio, for the May Day riots in 1894 and 1919; I was in Washington, DC for the May Day protests against the Vietnam War in 1971; I fought the police at the MacArthur Park rallies in Los Angeles in 2007 and again in Seattle in 2016.

I often come to life in Berlin, Milan, Istanbul and Athens.

And those who know me well understand that I will never lose the essence of my Beltane identity, even if desperate circumstances have forced me to extend into new May Day forms.

In Minneapolis, USA, 50,000 people flock every year to a May Day celebration that combines a parade inspired by political satire with a ceremony in Powderhorn Park where, to the steady beating of drums, a flotilla paddles the Sun across a lake to the shore where the Tree of Life sleeps, waiting to be reawakened.

There are times when my original May Day

celebrations are themselves regarded as subversive. The Puritan authoritarians who hijacked the seventeenth-century English Revolution tried to wipe out all forms of “heathen” practice, including May Day and that “stinking Idoll”, the maypole. The permanent maypoles that used to grace towns and villages across England and Wales were physically destroyed by Oliver Cromwell’s Christian Soldiers.

And the intermingling of my two May Day aspects can still prove confusing for the authorities, not least when among the traditional parade characters are those dangerous hard-left outlaws, Robin Hood and Maid Marian. On April 30, 1981, the organisers of the annual Jack in the Green parade in Brentham Garden Suburb, London, received a surprise letter from the Metropolitan Police, instructing them to observe a 28-day ban on marches in London. It seems that the term “May Day procession” had rung alarm bells at Scotland Yard and only after a High Court hearing, where the judge concluded that the children in the parade “did not look like a very subversive lot”, were the following day’s festivities able to go ahead.

At other times my enemies are not so much confused by my two sides, as outraged. There

was massive media hysteria in 2000 when the statue of Winston Churchill in London's Parliament Square was decorated with a strip of turf from the adjacent lawn being cultivated by May Day guerrilla gardeners, transforming him for a few magical hours into a punk Green Man.



So what of anarchism, the philosophy that fuels the modern form of my May Day incarnation?

Is this also me, coming amongst you in ideological rather than mythological clothing?

When nineteenth-century anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon described the principle of a morality superior to the individual, a principle that "is secreted within him... immanent" and which constitutes the "true form of the human spirit", then that principle was me.

When Errico Malatesta defined anarchy in 1891 as "natural order, harmony of needs and interests of all, complete liberty with complete solidarity," he was defining me.

When Emile Henry declared, in 1894, that anarchy could never be destroyed, because "its roots are too deep. It is born in the heart of a

society that is rotting and falling apart,” then I was that anarchy.

When Gustav Landauer wrote in 1895 that “anarchy is life; the life that awaits us after we have freed ourselves from the yoke”, or when Mikael Bakunin called for a “revolt of life”, they both meant me.

When Emma Goldman described anarchism as “the mental and spiritual regenerator” embracing “the eternal struggle of man”, it was me she was talking about.

When anarchists understand, like George Woodcock, that the difference between a governmental society and an anarchic society is “the difference between a structure and an organism”, then they are speaking in my name.

When Herbert Read wrote of the need to combine “faith in the fundamental goodness of man; humility in the presence of natural laws; reason and mutual aid” with “insurrectionary passion”, then he was describing exactly how I came into being.

I am both anarchy as the condition of co-operative harmony in which you are meant to live and anarchy as the force of rightness

required to restore this harmony to a society fractured by greed, exploitation and violence.



*“When will the fields come back and the grass for my children?”**

Every time somebody tries to stop a copse being hacked down or a meadow being concreted over, they are me.

Whenever people come together to protect a river, and those beings that live in and around it, from the callous brutality of a dam, they are me.

Each and every person who says “no” to fracking, to pipelines, to power lines, to coal mines, to waste tips, to GM crops or to arms factories is saying “yes” to me and to my presence within them.

When “something” stirs deep within you and sends you out to fight against a new road, a new shopping mall, a new airport or a new power station, then that “something” is me.

If you ever have the feeling that the world you

* Lord Dunsany, “Nature and Time”, *Fifty-One Tales*

know is insane and risks destroying everything that you value, then you should know that this feeling is me.

And when that feeling becomes an opinion, an argument, a theory or a philosophy, it is me in yet another guise.

Sometimes that feeling takes a secondary form. It might be a theoretical hunch, an ideological sensitivity to the way that even philosophies of resistance can be recuperated by that which they supposedly oppose.

But that energy is still me, only now I am obliged to go to work on the thankless task of clearing all the philosophical tangle and debris that has been blocking your path.

I blossom in the human heart but the human heart needs to let me in. I have to become the opening-up before I can become the filling-in and the acting-out.

To lose something precious is bad enough, but what if you have forgotten that it was precious? Or that you ever had it in the first place? Why would you search for something you do not value? How will you find something that you do not believe was ever there?

Your fields and your green grass will not come back until your love calls out to them.



A thousand years before the birth of Christ, a great prophet emerged in Persia by the name of Zoroaster, or Zarathustra.

He declared that the world of his time was corrupt – not by nature but by accident – and had to be rescued by human action. Wisdom, virtue, and truth were to be found not in disengagement from the world, but in engagement.

This was a dynamic conception of rightness. The harmonious state of the universe was threatened by darkness, deception and lies. Humanity had a duty to take positive action to restore the proper state of things.

This rightness was not something that could be expressed by blindly following the laws or dogma laid down by Empire and its priests. Of high importance throughout was the idea of individual free will and decision, of acting not like a sheep but as a human being, with the consciousness appropriate to humanity.

This was the sense of rightness that inspired George to slay the dragon, Robin Hood to become an outlaw, Luddites to smash machinery, anarchists to take up their struggle to free humankind from the yoke.

For Zoroastrians, the purpose of human life is to be among those who renew the world. Life is a temporary state in which a mortal is expected to actively participate in the continuing battle between truth and falsehood.

As a branch of the Proto-Indo-Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism shares its roots with both Hinduism and Buddhism. Central to its teachings are the ideas of *Humata*, *Hukhta*, *Huwarshata*, or Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds; the conviction that you should do the right thing just because it is the right thing to do.

Zoroastrian scripture calls for the protection of water, earth, fire and air, as one of its strongest precepts. It has sometimes been described as an ecological religion.

In contrast to the *druj*, the falsehood and disorder, which chokes the world that we know, Zoroastrianism presents the idea of *asha*, the primordial truth and order that needs to be restored.

Like the Indian Vedic idea of *rta*, *asha* is the principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it, from the motion of the planets and astral bodies to the progression of the seasons and the patterns of daily rural life, which are governed by regular metronomic events such as sunrise and sunset.

Asha is closely related to the idea of *dharma* which was already in use in the historical Vedic religion of northern India from 1750 to 500 BCE and has come down in slightly different forms to Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

For Hindus, *dharma* is the “right way of living” in accord with *rta*, the order that makes life and the universe possible. For Buddhists it has been defined as “cosmic law and order”, while for Sikhs the word *dharm* means the path of righteousness.

The same concept appears in classical European thought as *Dikaiosune*, the Greek goddess who incarnates rightness. She is praised in one of the Orphic Hymns from more than 2,000 years ago:

*O Blessed Dikaiosune, mankind's delight, th'
eternal friend of conduct just and right:
Abundant, venerable, honor'd maid, to judgments*

*pure, dispensing constant aid,
 A stable conscience, and an upright mind; for
 men unjust, by thee are undermin'd,
 Whose souls perverse thy bondage ne'er desire,
 but more untam'd decline thy scourges dire:
 Harmonious, friendly power, averse to strife, in
 peace rejoicing, and a stable life;
 Lovely, loquacious, of a gentle mind, hating
 excess, to equal deeds inclin'd:
 Wisdom, and virtue of whate'er degree, receive
 their proper bound alone in thee.**

Derived from the Greek *diké*, meaning rightness or justice, the associated term *dikaios* is used to describe someone “righteous, observing divine and human laws; one who is such as he ought to be”,** echoing closely the Indian ideas around dharma.

Indeed, Indo-Greek silver coins from the first and second centuries BCE, in what is now Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, show that several kings, including Zoilos, Strato I, Theophilos and Archebius Dikaios Nikephoros, used the combined titles of *Dikaios*, “The Just”,

* As translated by Thomas Taylor, 1792

** Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* via biblehub.com

and *Dhramikasa*, “Follower of the Dharma”. The two terms are thus linked historically as well as conceptually.

Dikaios also gave its name to the religious office of *diakonos*, or deacon. In Scots English, the title deacon is used for a head-workman, a master or chairman of a trade guild, or someone who is adept, expert and proficient. In contemporary Freemasonry, the Senior Deacon and the Junior Deacon perform messenger roles and both carry long staffs or rods to symbolise the caduceus carried by the messenger and intermediary Mercury-Hermes.

The core meaning of the word *asha*, the Persian version of *dharma* and *diké*, is “truth” and it is related to the Sanskrit verbal root *as*, meaning “to be” and to the Sanskrit *asu*, “vital breath”.

The word came into northern Europe as *óss* or *ás*, indicating a member of the principal group of gods, the *Æsir*, of whom the leading figure is Odin, that Nordic cousin of Mercury, Hermes and Khidr.

But it also has a more fundamental meaning. It is at the root of the word *esse*, the Latin for “to be” and lies behind the English words “is”, “essence” and “possibility”.

I am life. I am the vital force that emerges from the void, the water from the spring, the green shoot from the bare earth. But I am more than that! I am the *essence* of life, the *possibility* of existence appearing from the void. *I am the very breath of being.*



And yet still we have not reached the root of matters and there are more questions that must be answered.

What is the force behind the green shoot that springs from the earth? From what mouth comes the breath of being? In which realm does a possibility take shape? What provides you with the sense of rightness that allows you to take an active role in the shaping of our world?

My fecundity, which allows this world to blossom and thrive, extends far beyond the purely physical realm and embraces the principles that underlie it.

You know well, by now, that your human labels of gender neither define nor limit me and have merely been pinned onto me by your culture in an attempt to understand the various aspects in which I become present in your minds and in

your culture.

In societies where social power is monopolised by men, there is a tendency to imagine the source of all things as male. Such is the separation from nature, in thought as in living, that there seems nothing absurd in projecting a masculine identity onto the metaphorical power of giving birth.

This fallacy emerged gradually. The spirit of God, the *shekinah*, was feminine in Hebrew and neuter in the Greek *pneuma*, but for the imperial patriarchs of Rome it had become very much masculine, as the Latin *spiritus sanctus*.

The old sense of the term was not entirely lost, however, and in Eastern Christianity the gender of the Holy Spirit long remained unclear.

The mystical Essene Ebionites of the first century CE believed in a female Holy Spirit; and for those of them who went on to embrace Christianity and develop into the second-century Clementine Gnostics, the Virgin Mary was regarded as the vessel of this spirit.

In the apocryphal *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, Jesus calls the Holy Ghost his mother and in the third-century *Acts of Thomas*, Jesus declares: “Come, she that manifesteth the hidden

things and maketh the unspeakable things plain, the holy dove that beareth the twin young, Come, the hidden mother”.

I am that hidden mother. I am the lung behind the breath, the soil beneath the plant, the matrix from which all life comes forth.

I am the prerequisite, the prior condition without which nothing could exist.

And just as I am Theotokos, the Mother of God, so am I the invisible latency that gives birth to all ideas.

Where else do you source your sense of rightness, of dharma, if not from that intangible and universal sense of collective human wisdom?

It is true that sometimes I am wisdom as the Egyptian god Thoth, the Greek Hermes, the Middle Eastern Khidr or the Nordic Odin, all in an imaginary male form.

But I am also Sophia, whether regarded as the Wisdom of God or as the Goddess of Wisdom, and I am Sapienta, the universal knowledge that binds the cosmos together.

I am Chokhmah, wisdom as seen by the Hebrew

Kabbalah tradition. My name here means “potential to be” and it is recognised that there is no beginning but wisdom. In the Zohar texts, Chokhmah is the primordial point which shines forth from the will of God and is therefore the starting point of Creation.

I am Maya in its original Vedic sense not of “illusion” but of the wisdom and power that enables people to create, to devise and to do. I am also the “female” concept of *Natura naturans*, the wisdom of the living world to follow its own inner sense and organic rules.

You can no more completely separate and classify the symbolic forms by which I am known than you can separate and classify the rippled reflections of the sun in a stream.

Thus it is not surprising to recall, for instance, that as the wise green “man” Khidr I am closely associated with the Hagia Sophia, the former church in Istanbul named after wisdom in its female guise.

When Plutarch is describing me as Isis, he writes that I am “a goddess exceptionally wise and a lover of wisdom”.

Take a closer look at the words chosen by this

renowned Greek writer, who for many years served as one of the two priests at the temple of the Delphic Oracle.

The second half of the sentence does not repeat the first half, but takes it a step further: not only am I wise but I *value* wisdom. The true wisdom that I represent is one that embraces an understanding of the *importance* of wisdom.

This love of wisdom gave rise to the term *philosophia*, although unfortunately the modern concept of philosophy has strayed very far from its origins.

Any true lover of Sophia understands that she is the beginning, the foundation, the source of experience, the self-knowing and self-creating of *Natura naturans* channelled by human beings who have grasped their own role and reality within that larger world.

I am the love of wisdom as a dynamic force. Whether I am Isis or Papatūānuku, I nourish humankind intellectually, emotionally and spiritually not just with wisdom, nor just with the love of wisdom, but with a *dedication* to the love of wisdom, with the *understanding* that love of wisdom is a value that should be at the centre of human life.

And here, yet again, I have been forced to take on a pro-active form in the face of a society which is out of kilter and spiralling towards disaster.

In the physical dimension, the violent destructivity of industrialism has forced me to become a vital force which rises up to protect all that is living.

In the political dimension, the lack of awareness of what is happening has led me to become ideas which can inspire the defence of dharma, of organic harmony, freedom and rightness.

In the ideological dimension, the contemporary drift away from all understanding of reality, of human belonging to nature, has obliged me to become arguments that attack the falsity and superficiality of modern thought and the self-referential assumptions through which it seeks a monopoly on definitions of reality.

In the philosophical dimension, the loss of any authentic notion of wisdom, the hubris of a technological age which considers itself in all ways superior to all that has come before, means that, here too, I need to respond accordingly.

In the face of the folly of the modern age, I can no longer merely remain the age-old wisdom of

philosophy but have to become *philosophy-as-struggle*, an active reassertion of what should be transmitted from generation to generation by the human culture that is part of the nature of your species.

In reasserting myself, I take on a different character. I can no longer drift along in a sense of sleepy contentment that all is more or less well in your world, regardless of the imperfection, suffering and death which will always form part of physical existence.

I can no longer just smile out at you as Isis, with my exceptional wisdom and love of wisdom, or simply whisper my timeless presence in the leafy rustling of the ancient oaks.

I have been called to action. I have taken up St George's spear and the mighty sledgehammers of the Luddites. My bow of burning gold unleashes molotov-arrows at the Sheriff of Rome's riot police, whose imperial dragon-machines would lay waste to the sacred groves of Fairyland.

I have been called to action and will not cease from mental fight. I ride into battle as Tammuz and Pachamama, as Great Pan and Grandmother Spider, as Brigid and Jack in the Green, as Diana and Dikaiosune, as Joan of Arc

and the Queen of Elphame, as Cybele and Dionysus, as Oshún and Oannes, as Dodola and Jarilo, as viriditas and asha.

And I ride into battle as much more than these. I am not just the sum of their parts, but the understanding of how they all represent the same vital force emerging through the human mind, the understanding, too, that this understanding is important and that it is itself part of the eternal wisdom of humanity, the *Sophia Perennis*.

I am Sophia Perennis in active mode, in revolutionary mode, in the mode of destroying all that stands in the way of my reinstatement as the foundation of your thinking and your living.

I am your *determination* to ditch the dead-souled industrial mindset that blocks your future.

I am the angry flood of destruction which brings joyful renewal.

*“Now do I see the earth anew
Rise all green from the waters again”.**



* From the *Icelandic Poetic Edda*

The drains have backed up at the Houses of Parliament. The lifts aren't working at MI5. The phones are all down at the BBC.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

All flights have been cancelled. No trains are running. The petrol pumps have run dry.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

The schools are closed. Workers have been sent home. The shopping malls are empty.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

The Virgins are escaping from the churches and heading for the woods. The May Queens are running riot in the streets. Joan of Arc is burning patriarchy at the stake.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

The pylons are tumbling. The motorways are crumbling. The pipelines are fracturing.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

Ivy is choking up the phone masts, vines are climbing over the rooftops, brambles are reclaiming the golf courses.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

No electricity and no internet. No street lights and the stars shine bright.

The Green One is coming! The Green One is coming!

Dogma is dead. Cages have sprung open. Borders have disappeared. Empires have disintegrated. Certainties have ruptured. Authority has dissolved.

*The Green One is us!
The Green One is you!
The Green One is here!*

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So is the writer Richard Jefferies (1848-1887) described by Henry S. Salt in this study first published in 1894. The book sparked controversy at the time, as Salt – a campaigner for animal rights, vegetarianism and socialism – used it to claim Jefferies for one of his own, highlighting the social radicalism and nature-based spirituality in his subject’s later writing. He demolishes the conservative presentation of Jefferies as a mere chronicler of country life and reveals him as a flawed yet inspirational figure whose best works were “unsurpassed as prose poems by anything which the English language contains”. With a preface by Paul Cudenec.

Also from Winter Oak

THE STORY OF MY HEART

RICHARD JEFFERIES

“Having drunk deeply of the heaven above and felt the most glorious beauty of the day, and remembering the old, old, sea, which (as it seemed to me) was but just yonder at the edge, I now became lost, and absorbed into the being or existence of the universe. I felt down deep into the earth under, and high above into the sky, and farther still to the sun and stars. Still farther beyond the stars into the hollow of space, and losing thus my separateness of being came to seem like a part of the whole”.

Richard Jefferies’ masterpiece of prose-poetry expresses his sublime yearning not just for connection with nature but for spiritual transcendence. This new Winter Oak edition includes a preface by writer Paul Cudenec exploring the significance of Jefferies’ work against a backdrop of disillusionment with industrial civilization and a cultural urge for the regeneration of human society.

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