

Poetry of the Spirit

There can be no poetry, or any other form of art, without inspiration, and most people would agree that you can tell the difference between work that is merely humdrum, even if technically apparently passing the mark, and that which is inspired, that which has that mysterious and true 'X-factor'.

But what is inspiration? Can we define it or understand it or quantify it in any meaningful way? I believe we can.

'Inspiration' literally means drawing in breath, and the creative force is often equated with wind, breath. The word we have translated from both Greek and Hebrew as meaning 'spirit' literally means breath: Gk 'pneuma', (as in a pneumatic, i.e. wind-filled, tyre) and Hebrew: RUaCh. Our well known phrase 'the Holy Spirit' in Hebrew is ELoHIM RUaCH, thus 'the breath of the ELoHIM'. ELoHIM is a male-female plural for 'light-beings' or gods, and ALL the creating acts in 'Genesis' (Hebrew BeRaShITH, 'Creation') are perpetrated not by a male-only singular God, but *the* ELoHIM, the Light Mothers and Fathers, plural.

To be a true poet or artist of any sort is a matter of getting the ego-self out of the way in order for this creative wind to come through, in the same way that meditation is a process of stilling or de-energising the ego-mind's restless scurrying activity, to attain a glimpse of the stillness of Consciousness itself as opposed to consciousness of any one or any number of things---of Awareness Itself rather than awareness of 'this' or 'that'.

This is all summarised for me perfectly by D.H. Lawrence, expressing his feeling of, and hope for, a perfect alignment with a Higher creative power in his poem 'The Song Of A Man Who Has Come Through':



*Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!
If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of the world
Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;
If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge
Driven by invisible blows,
The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find the Hesperides.*

*Oh for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,
Would blur no whisper, soil no expression.*

*What is the knocking?
What is the knocking at the door in the night?
It is somebody wants to do us harm.*

*No, no, it is the three strange angels.
Admit them, admit them.*

Surrender to a Higher Power, yielding oneself to That Which Is, and especially as here the animating wind that is the very creative essence itself, is the defining act of both the mystic and the true artist. It is the 'I' of ego that has to be bypassed both for a creative life and for a spiritual one— the two paths are perhaps inseparable.

Coleridge, in 'The Aeolian Harp' puts it like this:

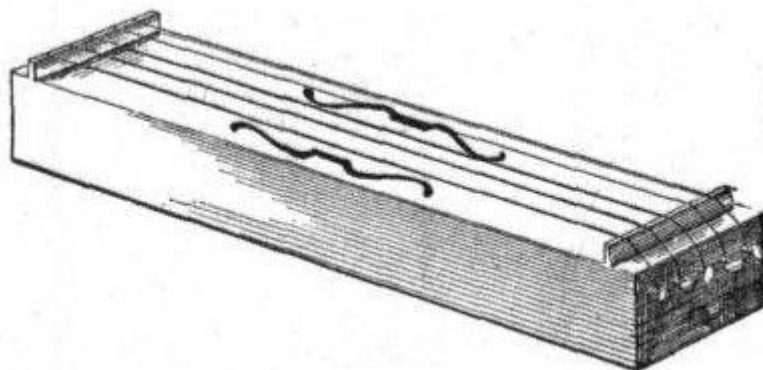


*And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze
At once the soul of each, and God of all?*

An Aeolian harp is a simple box harp, named after Aeolus the Greek god of the winds. Rarely seen these days, the harp is hung outdoors in exposed places and 'played' by the action of the wind on it, producing as Coleridge puts it in the poem

*...a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfin's make....*

It also sounds the overtones of the strings, that inherent scale whose intervals define all of music as well as the geometries underlying our universe.



Its lines thus inspired by the sound of natural harmonies underlying all of Nature, Coleridge's contemplations of these effects lead him to invoke, define and muse upon what Eckhart Tolle defines as God, or Being:

*O the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where...*

What is God? The eternal One Life underneath all the forms of life.

Being is the eternal ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death...Being is not only beyond, but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence.

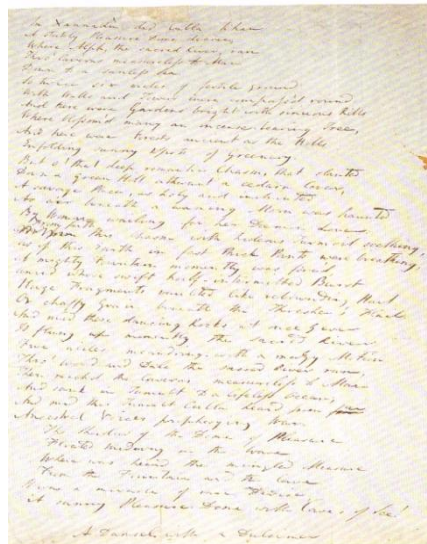
Eckhart Tolle: The Power of Now



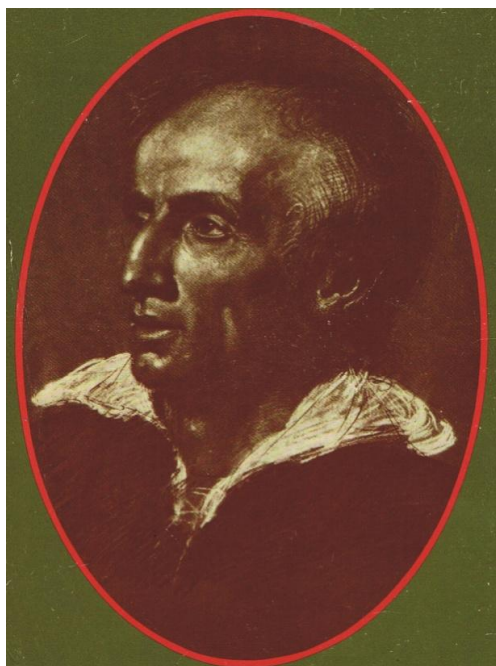
Tolle's use of the word Being for 'God' is quite correct. This is the name given to Moses by the Supreme Being from the burning bush, EHIeH, which means just that: 'being' 'existence', usually now translated as 'I AM'. The full phrase is EHIaH ASHeR EHIaH, I AM THAT I AM: or as I would translate it BEING —[THAT] WHICH IS—BEING.



Coleridge's most famous poem 'Kubla Khan' serves as an example of inspiration being interrupted. It remains unfinished due to the poet receiving a visitor knocking at his door and thus ending the 'poetic reverie' or download of inspired material, and the poem just then comes to an abrupt halt, there is no proper ending or concluding lines.



Wordsworth, his fellow poet of Nature and poetic partner (their celebrated *Lyrical Ballads* was a collaborative work), addressed his great poetic epic *The Prelude* to his friend Coleridge. Subtitled 'The Growth of a Poet's Mind' it is an autobiographical poem about exactly that, fully an internal epic rather than an external one.



The poem opens

*Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
And from the sky: ..
O welcome messenger! O welcome friend!*

....

*I...while the sweet breath of heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A corresponding mild creative breeze,
A vital breeze which travell'd gently on
Oe'r things which it had made, and is become
A tempest...*

*...to the open fields I told
A prophecy: poetic numbers came
Spontaneously.*

The insistence on poetry as also being a matter of 'prophecy' is very important to the interlinked themes of this study, as prophecy and inspiration seem to go together—he describes himself and Coleridge as both being 'Prophets of Nature' at various points in his writings. About a century later, Lawrence, by the by, was given the title of a '*Priest of Nature*'.

By the end of this first part of the poem Wordsworth too describes God, Being, 'the One Life':

*I felt the sentiment of Being spread
Oe'r all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
Oe'r all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
Oe'r all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air, oe'r all that glides
Beneath the waves, yea, in the wave itself
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
If such my transports were; for in all things
I saw One Life, and felt that it was joy.
One song they sang, and it was audible;*

Wordsworth throughout the poem gives us many instances of his own interactions with the Natural world, and to that of a poet's mind, like that of a child, as

...an agent of the One Great Mind

which

*Creates, creator and receiver both
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.*

This active and creative aspect of mind is much more in common with the viewpoint of 'the Perennial Philosophy' than that of the mechanistic world-view: these insights have since become part of quantum physics also, and it has become something of a commonplace that the observer and the observed are interrelated, affect each other, although in applied and 'hard' mechanistic science this insight is entirely ignored.

Another important aspect/point is of the importance of childhood:

*Blest the Infant Babe...
...No outcast he, bewildered and depressed,
Along his infant veins are interfus'd
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of nature that connect him with the world.
Emphatically such a Being lives
An inmate of this active Universe;
From Nature largely he receives, nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again...*

Note the use of the capital 'B' here in 'Being': the child as not only a god, but God, the One Life!

This idea that in infancy we are at very least closer to the Divine is stated throughout not only *The Prelude* but in many of Wordsworth's major works, even to the extent that in 'My Heart Leaps Up' our 'usual' understanding of human development is inverted:

*My heart leaps up when I behold
A Rainbow in the sky:
So it was when my life began;
So it is now I am a man;*

*So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is Father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.*

The loss of this sense of wonder, and our becoming more and more ‘bewildered and depressed’, is the ‘lot’ of ‘normal’ development into adulthood—co-incidental with being predominantly in Beta-wave brain states from the age approximately of 7 onwards.

My own definition of art and poetry of the highest order would be: that which proceeds from the deeper brain-wave states of alpha, theta, and delta, that which is a matter, therefore, of ‘inspiration’, and that which consequently creates a similar brain-wave state or pattern in the beholder, listener, or reader.

Again, by definition this also then is a matter of that which connects us with the ‘One Life’, the ‘Higher Self’ or God. Remembering that the literal meaning of ‘inspiration’ is ‘a drawing in of breath’, and that the majority of meditative techniques involve working with the breath--the connection between meditation and inspiration, the domains of the mystic and the artist, must surely be obvious.

So a true poet, like a spiritual teacher or master, through his or her art, connects us with our Higher Self. Theologian Matthew Fox says that

Mystics are the poets of the soul and they write in images.

Can we even make a hard-and-fast distinction between the *true* poet and the mystic? Are not the teachings of the Christ and the Buddha in themselves poetic? Lewis Thompson, a writer otherwise unknown to the author, thinks so:

Christ, supreme poet, lived truth so passionately that every gesture of his, at once pure Act and perfect Symbol, embodies the transcendent.’

That the poet’s and the mystic’s roles are similar to an extent we might not have realised is an idea propounded by Nikolai Tolstoy in his *The Quest For Merlin*:

From classical times onwards the roles of poet and prophet have become increasingly distinct, but in an earlier period the distinction was entirely lacking. The ecstatic utterances of the shaman are chanted in verse, and poetry constituted the expression of prophecy. Thus for untold millennia poetry was

primarily the creation of shamanism. Gradually poetry became an autonomous art, but it was long before it shed its mantic associations.

Orpheus, for example, is the instance of the musician/poet whose attributes merge with those of a mystic, shaman or enlightened human being, as he charmed animals and could through his art even enter the abode of the dead, but lost Eurydice by 'looking back'.



Sacrificed to the Dionysian mysteries, (the very name DIONYZEUS being a clever pun meaning 'the mind of Zeus'), Orpheus actually became synonymous with them and they became 'Orphic' mysteries, thus the bard becoming in effect a god, with his lyre becoming along with so many other figures in Greek 'myth', a constellation, pointing to a human-stellar connection which again is a matter of the provenance of the spiritual and poetic world views but utterly alien to that of the mechanistic mind-set. But then even the astronomers in full sober and supposedly atheistic mode have to admit, along with Joni Mitchel, that physically

We are stardust, we are golden.



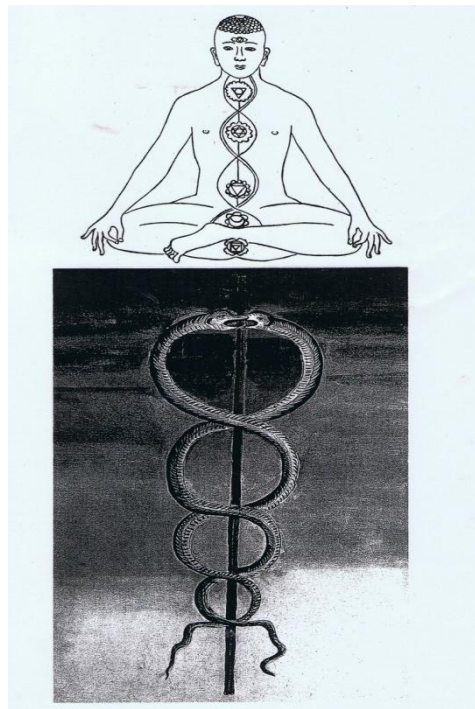
But what of our native tradition? The British tradition of the Bard perfectly fits the Orphic mantle, that of a poet/shaman. The British word for inspiration is *awen* and seers and prophets who when consulted would go into a trance-like state to give their answers and prophecies were called *awenyddion*, ‘inspired ones’.

Taliesin is the best known Bard in our tradition, and his name means ‘radiant brow’, which surely equates with an opened third eye. The knowledge of the human subtle energy body with its energy centres, the *cakras*, was a given across the cultures for the various types of shaman/magician/Initiate, to which we might give the title (according to the differing cultures) Brahmin, Magi, Kuldee, Druid, for example. The rising uraeus serpent depicted on Divinities and their representatives on Earth the Pharaohs seems to be an allusion to this same ‘radiant brow’ of one whose third eye is activated.



18 'In his upper member man has an image of God which shines there without pause' (Meister Eckhart). Increasingly since earlier periods in his evolution, man has lost the use, and consequent perception, of his supersensible organs—his force centres and energy currents. The vortical movement of this subtle energy was once familiar to him, however, as is demonstrated by its depiction in representations of countless heroes, gods and kings of early civilizations and tribal cultures. As well as by the serpent (pl. 8), worn here by King Senusret, the Egyptians showed the spiral of the third eye or radiant brow on the double crown of the Pharaohs. (King Senusret I and God Atum, relief, Egypt, 12th Dynasty.)

The very figure of the caduceus, the wand of Tehuty (Thoth) or Hermes, with which many a magician is represented, which is essentially a diagram of the subtle body, points to this knowledge and is symbolic of it.



Taliesin features in *The Mabinogion*, our great native repository of British Keltic myths, gods and goddesses, yet we with our reverence for every culture other than our own would be more at home with the Greek equivalents, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, although we might be unaware of the Bardic associations of these latter--it is well understood and established that these works, as with the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, were to be *sung*, by a Bard, in exactly the same sort of heroic hall context, and were only given written form later.

We learn of Taliesin's story from the Bard himself, and how he begins life as the boy Gwion (Goo-ee-on) and only becomes 'Taliesin', he-of-the-radiant-brow, through accidentally imbibing from the cauldron of *awen* (aah-oooh-ayn) under the instigation of Kerridwen, the hag aspect of the Triple Goddess. The brew having been intended for her son Afagddu ('darkness'--pronounced 'avagthee', the double d = voiced English 'th' as in 'the'), she is enraged and pursues the boy through a series of multiple beast transformations in land sea and air. Keltic scholar John Matthews argues successfully I think that the tale here disguises a rite or process of Initiation into bardic mysteries involving the elements: certainly the transitions into animals are very much part of shamanic culture/lore. Such states can be attested by modern shamanic workers and other explorers of transpersonal psychology, such as many recorded in studies by researcher Stanislav Grof.



Eventually Kerridwen gobbles the boy up but cannot actually bring herself to destroy him, giving him a re-birth, an example of a divine child, and while still a babe his adventures begin. He meets his future lord, Elphin, rescuing him from his ‘misfortunes’ through bardic magic, and we must remember that it is while still a *baby* that he utters this recitation:

*Primary chief bard am I to Elphin
And my original country is the region of the summer stars;
Idno and Heinin called me Myrddin (Merlin)
At length every king will call me Taliesin (=radiant brow).*

*I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,
On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of Hell.
I have borne a banner before Alexander,
I know the names of the stars from North to South,
I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor,*

*...I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwdion,
I was instructor to Eli and Enoch,
I was winged by the genius of the splendid crozier,*

...I have been fostered in the land of the Deity,

*I have been teacher to all intelligences,
I am able to instruct the whole universe,
I shall be until the day of doom...*

*Then I was for nine months
In the womb of the hag Ceridwen,
I was originally little Gwion
And at length am Taliesin.*

The Mabinogion: Trans Lady Charlotte Guest.

Obviously this little child carries knowledge of many births and lives, both in Biblical narrative realms and those of Keltic myth, Don being the British Keltic Mother Goddess.

Our picture of British culture, after the conquest of the islands by Anglo-Saxons, is peculiarly distorted: the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' is a piece of political propaganda as 'Big Brother'-like as anything invented by Stalin or his successors at manipulating the media. The very word 'Welsh' and 'Wales' stem from the Anglo-Saxon for 'foreigner', *welas*. The conquerors of these islands dispossessed the natives and further undermined their right to the islands by these politically-motivated and undermining terms. Just as in the 'New World' the invading whites referred to the Native Americans as 'Indians'.

Far from being 'foreign', the earliest known name for these islands is in fact 'Merlin's Precinct'. Our text books of Kings and Queens of England are just that, Kings and Queens of *Angle-land*, England, the land claimed by the invading Angles and Saxons, rather than the whole of Britain, or *Prydein* as it should be called, another early name deriving from its then Keltic ruler, Pryderi. The fact that there were, obviously Kings, Queens, heroes, battles, politics before the Anglo-Saxon invasion becomes a matter of 'fiction': poor old King Cole and King Lear get relegated in this way.

That we have some of the poems ascribed to Merlin available would be a surprise to most people. He, like Arthur, is a purely 'mythical' figure, isn't he? Relegating the previous inhabitants of a country to myth, legend or fairytales is a well-established way of further disenfranchising a conquered native people...but Arthur and Merlin's earliest mentions are in 'Welsh' sources (and thus almost immediately looked-down upon by academic 'authorities' even today).

We notice, almost in passing, from this perhaps most famous of declarations of Taliesin, that 'Taliesin' is also 'Merlin', and thus the archetypal

magician, Merlin, is actually thus a Bard, a poet, as well as a magician. Perhaps this is a matter of reincarnation as with the other lives recounted, or perhaps both the names involved (as is the case in so many ancient 'names') is actually a title or epithet. Either way the parallel is made bluntly and inescapably.



The Quest for Merlin makes a good case for the existence of Merlin as an actual, historical figure which would again contradict our left-brain view of the world: if there is no such thing as 'magic', there can't be, or have been, any actual magicians, can there? However his story which is one actually very

different than the Merlin story or stories we have come to know (via Malory and Tennyson), is one of madness: after a horrible slaughter while in the service of a confirmed, actual historical Keltic king warring against the successfully invading Anglo-Saxons, (bringing the Romanised version of Christianity in their wake), he flees into the forest, thus undergoing a typically shamanic/prophetic ordeal of madness and deprivation. His songs are sometimes sung to animals and trees (another interesting parallel with Orpheus), and actually he becomes a ‘Lord of The Forest’, a Cernunnos-figure also, merging, like Orpheus, into a god.

Well, if Merlin didn’t exist, what are we to make of his poems? The poems are extant, dated to the 6th century by the events and people described, such as his enemy Rhydderch, and his fallen Lord Gwenddolau described—and ought to be known to us all: yet they remain exiled by prevailing Anglo-Saxon invader culture to the provenance of ‘Welsh’, i.e. ‘foreign’ to the invader. This is a poem by Merlin, or at least spoken by that persona, pointing to his shamanic/prophetic ‘madness’ in the forest, and giving prophetic utterance in verse, in poetic form:



Affalannau (Appletrees)

I

Sweet appletree, your branches delight me,
Luxuriantly budding, my pride and joy!
I will prophesy before the lord of Macreu,
That on Wednesday, in the valley of Machawy
Blood will flow.
Lloegyr's blades will shine.
But hear, O little pig! on Thursday
The Cymry will rejoice
In their defence of Cyminawd,
Furiously cutting and thrusting.
The Saesons will be slaughtered by our ashen spears,
And their heads used as footballs.
I prophesy the unvarnished truth –
The rising of a child in the secluded South.

II

Sweet and luxuriant appletree,
Great its branches, beautiful its form!
I predict a battle that fills me with fear.
At Pengwern, men drink mead,

But around Cyminawd is a deadly hewing
By a cheiftain from Eryri - til only hatred remains.

III

Sweet, yellow appletree,
Growing in Tal Ardd,
I predict a battle at Prydyn,
In defence of frontiers.
Seven ships will come
Across a wide lake,
Seven hundred men come to conquer.
Of those who come, only seven will return
According to my prophecy.

IV

Sweet appletree of luxuriant growth!
I used to find food at its foot,
When, because of a maid,
I slept alone in the woods of Celyddon,
Shield on shoulder, sword on thigh.
Hear, O little pig! listen to to my words,
As sweet as birds that sing on Monday –
When the sovereigns come across the sea,
Blessed be the Cymry, because of their strength.

V

Sweet appletree in the glade,
Trodden is the earth around its base.
The men of Rhydderch see me not.
Gwenddydd no longer loves nor greets me,
I am hated by Rhydderch's strongest scion.
I have despoiled both his son and daughter:
Death visits them all – why not me?
After Gwenddolau no-one will honour me,
No diversions attend me,
Nor fair women visit me.
Though at Arderydd I wore a golden torque
The swan-white woman despises me now.

VI

Sweet appletree, growing by the river,
Who will thrive on its wondrous fruit?
When my reason was intact
I used to lie at its foot

With a fair wanton maid, of slender form.
Fifty years the plaything of lawless men
I have wandered in gloom among spirits.
After great wealth, and gregarious minstrels,
I have been here so long not even sprites can lead me astray.
I never sleep, but tremble at the thought
Of my Lord Gwenddoleu, and my own native people.
Long have I suffered unease and longing –
May I be given freedom in the end.

VII

Sweet appletree, with delicate blossom,
Growing, concealed, in the wood!
At daybreak the tale was told me
That my words had offended the most powerful minister,
Not once, not twice, but thrice in a single day.
Christ! that my end had come
Before the killing of Gwenddydd's son
Was upon my hands!

VIII

Sweet appletree with your delicate blossom,
Growing amid the thickets of trees!
The Chwyfleian foretells,
A tale that will come to pass:
A staff of gold, signifying bravery
Will be given by the glorious Dragon Kings.
The graceful one will vanquish the profaner,
Before the child, bright and bold,
The Saesons shall fall, and bards will flourish.

IX

Sweet appletree of crimson colour,
Growing, concealed, in the wood of Celyddon;
Though men seek your fruit, their search is vain,
Until Cadwaladr comes from Cadfaon's meeting
To Teiwi river and Tywi's lands,
Till anger and anguish come from Aranwynion,
And the long-hairs are tamed.

This is just an extract of one of the ‘Merlin’ poems, (translation by John Matthews) and one need only observe the lines against the Anglo-Saxon invaders to see why they aren’t better known. While the actual poet might or might not be Merlin, clearly, the narrator, IS, and this shows that the poem is for an audience who already know and understand the story of this Merlin and his shamanic madness in the wilderness, through which he utters his prophecies in poetic form.

One of the other ‘Merlin’ poems is a dialogue between Taliesin and Merlin, which points to them being separate entities, but both functioning on the same level. The *Welsh Triads*, mnemonic triplet lines for Bardic training, in fact lists as the

Three skilful Bards of Arthur’s court:

*Myrddin son of Morfren,
Myrddin Emrys,
And Taliesin.*

So, the plot thickens: a Merlin, and another Merlin, and Taliesin. And here all linked to Arthur’s court. Note the original pronunciation (‘Merlinus’ is Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Latinisation of the Welsh/British name): Myrddin should sound ‘meertheen’ with a voiced ‘th’.

Meanwhile, in the Tolstoy book we learn that a ‘late medieval manuscript source’ solves the mystery thus, this time, reinforcing the idea that Taliesin is Merlin:

Merlin was a spirit in human form who was in that shape from the time of Vortigern until the beginning of King Arthur, when he disappeared. After that his spirit came again in the time of Maelgwn Gwynnedd, at which time he was called Taliesin...Then he appeared a third time...in this period he was called Merlin the mad.

Druidic lore is usually separated out into the provenance of ‘Bards, Ovates (Prophets) and Druids’ each seen as separate roles, but as we all more or less instinctively know ‘Merlin’ to be a Druid, that he might also be a Bard, a prophet, a poet, an effecter of his magic through word and sound, and that word and sound is actually, when used with intention, a form of magic—this is perhaps the main argument of this piece. The Merlin poems represent him and Taliesin as such, uttering prophecies in the poems, such as one in which he has a long exchange with his *twin sister* (now there’s a dimension we don’t know

about Merlin from the ‘usual’ story!) about the rulership of the Cymru (pron Koomree, the ‘oo’ as in English ‘book’).

Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* ‘Life of Merlin’ develops the ‘Merlin poems’ version of his story and the other characters into a further narrative, and, once again, links him with Taliesin. Geoffrey’s ‘Life of the Kings of Britain’ was the medieval best-seller that basically gave us the beginnings of the whole Arthur-Merlin saga, then expanded unto the Grail myths of the later Middle Ages, Malory, Tennyson, etc. His ‘History’ is often at variance with later accepted ‘History’, but he claims always to be drawing on a specific *British* book. The very existence of such a book, as well as Geoffrey’s historical veracity, has been consistently denied by modern historians, but we can see that with his ‘Life of Merlin’ the historical sources actually exist, so why should they not also exist for the earlier work?

Hopefully after encountering this essay the reader will be able to see Merlin in a different light, possibly having an actual historical existence, and certainly being not only a magician, but a bard/poet as well. Indeed there is a sense in which I believe that a true poet is all three.

Tolstoy:

Wordsworth saw himself like Merlin as one who ‘looks before and after’ and shaman like used his ecstatic vision, [awen] to transcend ‘the limiting constrictions of the human condition, the limits of time, place, and corporeal reality’. He also knew the dangers. Just as the materialist anthropologist explains the shaman as ‘suffering from a psychosis..’, and as Merlin became known in medieval tradition as ‘wyllt’ wild and insanus, so Wordsworth was condemned by prosaic contemporaries:

*Some call’d it madness: such indeed it was,
...If prophecy be madness: if things view’d by poets in old time, and higher up
By the first men, earth’s first inhabitants,*

From *The Prelude*

A further link between Merlin and Taliesin is the episode (again given in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s ‘Life’) where Merlin gives his prophecy regarding the red and white dragons to Vortigern: he makes this prophecy again as a *child*.

As in Taliesin’s story and poems, the dual aspects of the wise child and reincarnation are recalled in Wordsworth’s ‘Immortality Ode’: (published in 1807) a poem in which also the journey into adulthood is depicted as a journey

deeper and deeper into illusion and away from the essence. Its full title: ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality *From Recollections of Early Childhood*’ (my italics).

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the common light of day.¹*

The Divine Child and his/her creativity is examined at length with a portrait of a child at play in another passage, and while drawing attention to the fact that this is on one level merely a child at play, Wordsworth does not balk at addressing the Divine Child in these reverent terms:

*‘Thou whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul’s immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, Thou Eye among the blind
That, deaf and silent, read’st the eternal deep,
Haunted forever by the eternal mind,--
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find.*

This cosmic unitary vision of the wise child, closer to God, is what we lose as we grow up--‘Shades of the prison house begin to close/Upon the growing Boy’. This, in our ‘fallen’ world of sin and duality, is the ‘normal’, or

¹ Wordsworth was later to write an apologetic prose gloss to explain his very obvious references in this poem to reincarnation, which flew in the face of orthodox ‘Church-council’ Christianity.

what we have come to accept as normal, Human Situation. This loss of visionary power is actually mourned in the opening of the poem:

*There was a time when meadow grove and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it has been of yore...
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.*

Wordsworth's 'The Tables Turned', is another pithy summarisation of the wonders of the revelation of Spirit through Nature, and the repudiation on the other hand of the 'mind-forg'd manacles' (in Blake's phrase) of the overly dominant left-brain—even to the extent of rejecting what might be considered the most important things of all to a poet, literature itself, books!

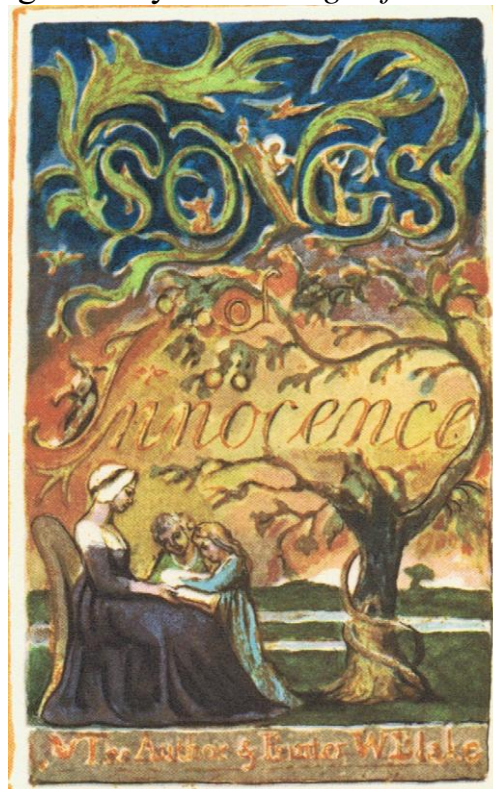
*Up up my friend and quit your books!
Or surely you'll grow double.
Up up my friend and clear your looks.
Why all this toil and trouble?
The sun above the mountain's head
A fresh'ning lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread
His first sweet evening yellow.
Books? 'Tis a dull and endless strife!
Come hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music. On my life
There's more of Wisdom on it?
And hark how blithe the throstle [thrush] sings
He too is no mean preacher.
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.
She has a world of ready wealth
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.
One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man;
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.
Sweet is the lore that nature brings;
Our meddling intellect*

*Mis-shapes the beautiful forms of things;
--We murder to dissect.*

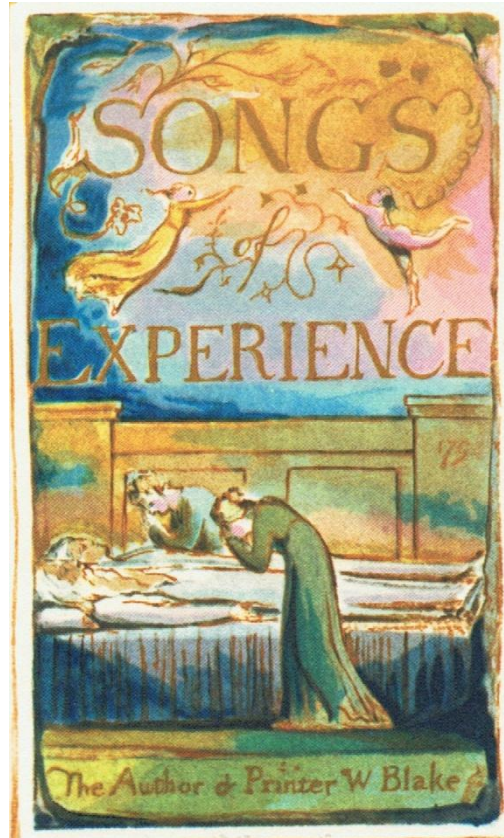
*Enough of science and of art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.*

Wordsworth has bodied forth in his poem here not only that which overrides the imbalance of the left-brain, 'Our meddling intellect/Misshapes the beautiful forms of things/We murder to dissect', but also the false and dogmatic exterior aspects of religions. Even a sage's viewpoint is of less value than your own, actual, experiential perception of the One Life as it may be encountered through and in Nature.

Returning to the 'Immortality Ode', we can say that the 'spiritual path' opens up for most people after wandering exactly in the wrong direction in the fallen world of sin and duality with its 'earthly freight' of 'custom', away from The East (symbolising the rising sun and all hope and new beginning) into that world of 'the common light of day'. *Our Songs of Innocence*



turn into *Songs of Experience*



until a crisis is reached, perhaps a physical illness, a death or bereavement, or some other form of complete personal breakdown, which usually forces the wandering soul back towards the light. This parallels the ‘shamanic illness’ which first sends the shaman out into the wild, as in the case of the Merlin poems; such a crisis and process is thus vastly, almost inconceivable ancient, shamanism being the Ur-religion, the Ur-spirituality, of the race we call Human.

The word for this moment and turning about in Greek is *μετανοια metanoia*, weakly and inaccurately translated for us in the King James Bible as ‘repentance’, whereas it means essentially to change one’s mind or perception: *μετα meta* = ‘beyond’, *νοος nous* = ‘mind’. The equivalent term in Hebrew is *TeShUVaH*, meaning ‘return’; in Sanskrit it is *paravṛtti*, meaning literally ‘beyond thought-activity’. In all three cases the suggestion is a matter of movement beyond thought, the normal mental processes of the little ego-mind, into that Higher Reality of not only sub-, but super-conscious Big Mind.

ΜΕΤΑΝΟΙΑ

beyond ego-mind

תשובה

return

परव्रत्ती

beyond ego-mind

This moment can be likened to a sort of death also, as after it the previous ego-bound life is no longer tenable, nothing is ever the same. It was at just such a personal moment of ‘turning about’ that I recalled these lines from Coleridge, from ‘The Dungeon’ in *Lyrical Ballads*:

*With other ministrations thou, O Nature!
Healest thy wandering and distempered child:
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
Thy sunny hues, fair forms and breathing sweets,
Thy melodies of woods, and winds, and waters,
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing,
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit healed and harmonised
By the benignant touch of Love and Beauty.*

Keats’

*Beauty is Truth, truth Beauty,
That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.* (‘Ode On A Grecian Urn’)

is a poeticised thought, almost a poetic credo or manifesto, of the same ilk: implying that there is an implicate cosmic order, manifested in Nature, which

can be aligned with, and that all that is negative is a matter of mis-alignment, lack of harmony, with this. For the philosophers Beauty, Truth and Goodness were linked, ‘beauty’ not being merely a superficial prettiness, but a manifestation of Eternal Mind and Intelligence. The fact that in all of Nature certain numerical patterns are encoded which underlie all form, such as the Fibonacci sequence, and the ratios of the overtone scale or harmonic series present in every note played or sung on a string or wind instrument, are such manifestations of cosmic order and intelligence...all conveniently ignored by the materialist mind-set, which is characterised by its lack of observation.

Our personal wanderings from the light are largely reinforced by that collective mindset of a humanity that is sunk in the dreadful egoic mistake of materialism, itself the by-product of a distorted non-spiritual religiosity divorced from experiential spiritual truth, and bound up in power games, dogmas, and general dominator-culture tactics to procure obedience to its own (temporal and worldly rather than spiritual) power.

This gives us ‘The Waste Land’ of modern life thought, and culture as depicted by T.S. Eliot, of course, his depiction being all-too-successful, taking his title from the depiction of the aridity and ‘waste land’ of a world separated from the Divine in Arthurian Grail literature.

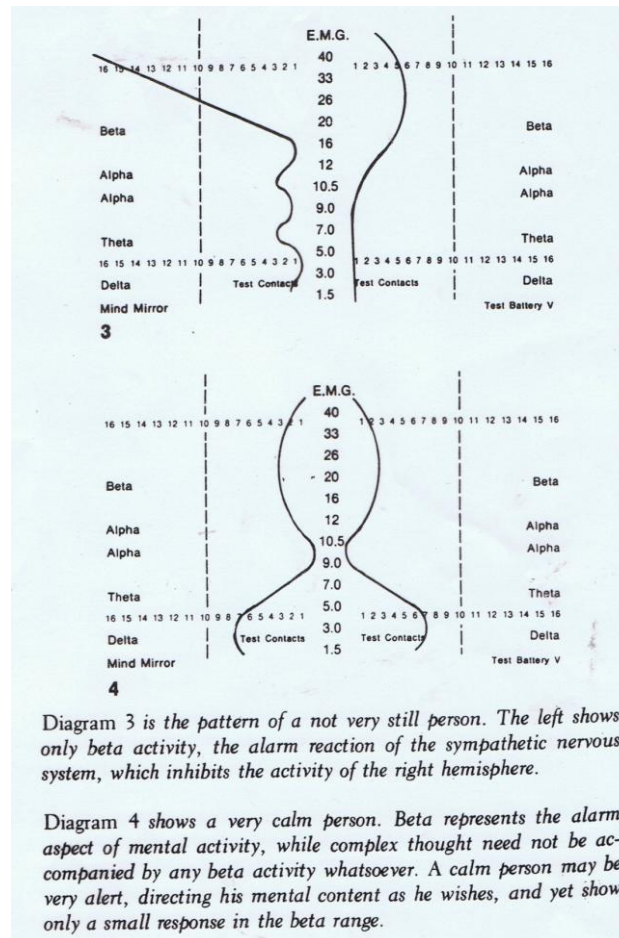
As Eliot’s contemporary D.H. Lawrence wrote

*I am not a mechanism, an assembly of various sections,
And it is not because the mechanism is working wrongly that I am ill...
I am ill because of deep wounds to the soul, to the deep emotional self...
Only time can help, and patience...
...and the freeing oneself
From the endless repetition of the mistake
Which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.*

The Waste Land and the reasons for it are encapsulated by Eckhart Tolle in *The Power of Now*:

Because we live in such a mind-dominated culture, most modern art, architecture, music, and literature are devoid of beauty, of inner essence, with very few exceptions. The reason is that people who create those things cannot—even for a moment—free themselves from their mind. So they are never in touch with that place within where true creativity and beauty arise. The mind left to itself creates monstrosities, and not only in art galleries. Look at our urban landscapes and industrial wastelands. No civilisation has ever produced so much ugliness.

The ‘mind forg’d manacles’ which Blake attacked famously in his poem ‘London’ is a matter of the left-brain dominated imbalanced use of mental functioning, BINaH on the Tree of Life, without its feminine intuitive equivalent, ChokHMaH, Wisdom. We can even see this is the form of a graph from the Maxwell Cade Foundation of our ‘normal’ domination by beta-wave mental functioning, and then one of balanced functioning, via a meditative mind-state, or an *inspired* one:



This first graph is then is depiction of Blake’s ‘mind forg’d manacles’ and reduced perception, a graph of the ‘mind dominated culture’ Tolle refers to. ‘London’ examines just some of the moral and social evils such an imbalance of perception brings about:



Blake's personification of the over-dominant and domineering left-brain, identifiable with the oppressive and destructive 'jealous god' Yahweh of the Old Testament, is Urizen, i.e. 'Your Reason'. In 'London' he is depicted as an old cripple, having to be led by a child...if only, Wordsworth would say!

Here 'Your Reason' is depicted 'drowning in the waters of materialism'.



The answer, the solution, to this Waste Land and its ‘mind forg’d manacles’ of the over-dominant left-brain (the analogy with the over dominance of male energy of the last 5000 years of *history* is glaringly apparent), is mystical oneness with God/Spirit/Higher Self, and the drawing of energy power and inspiration from it as expressed in the Cosmic Order and Evolutionary Blueprints obviously (to the observant) encapsulated in the world of Nature.

Perhaps the best-known encapsulation of contemplation of Nature leading to an expanded awareness is Blake’s famous and oft-quoted lines from ‘Auguries Of Innocence’: note the ‘Innocence’ of the title, it is the creative, poetic, child-like, infinite cosmic consciousness:

*To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,*

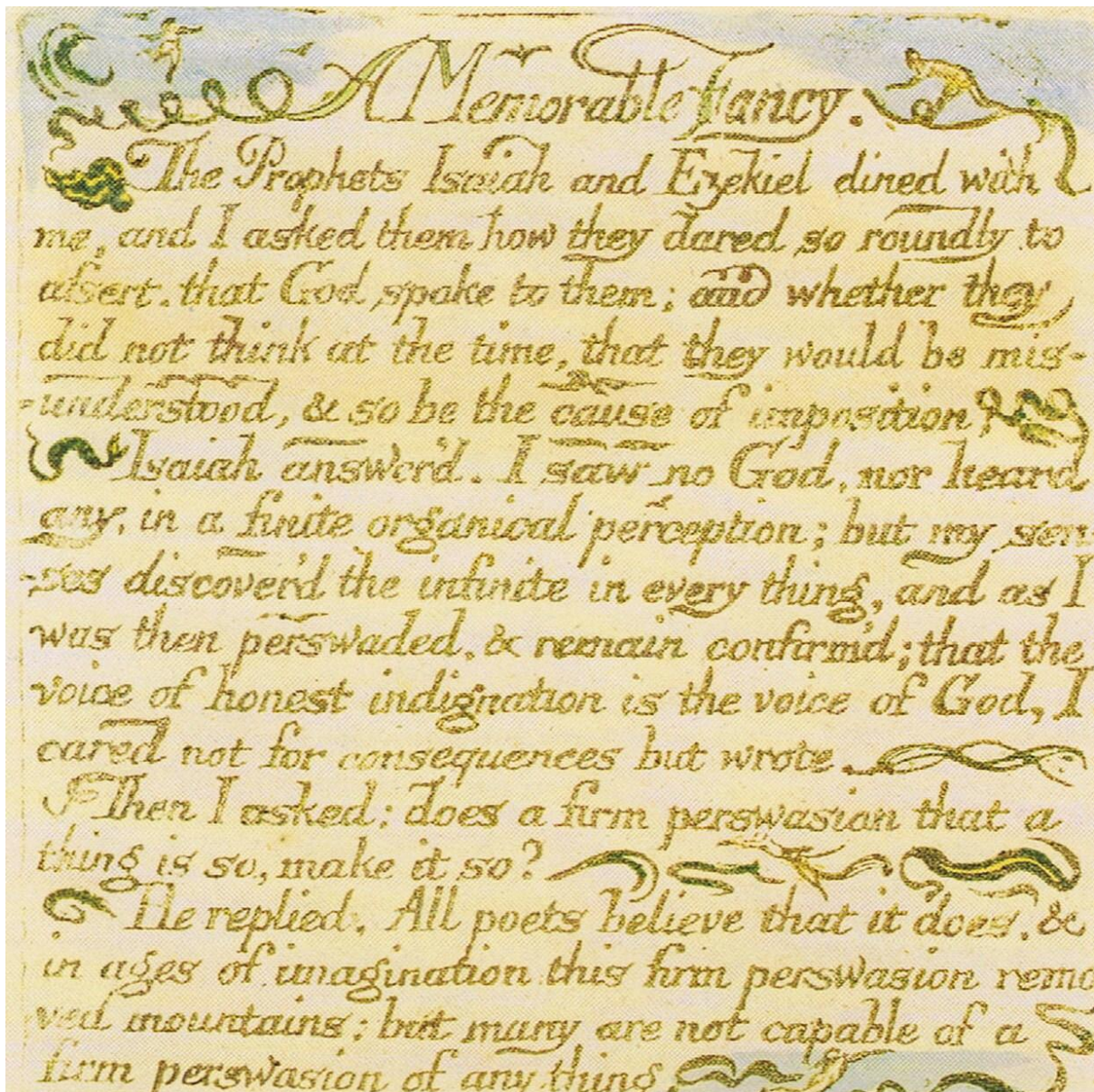
*Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.*



The expansion of consciousness beyond that of the five senses is essential for poetic and spiritual vision...it is the same thing as the opening of the third eye, to become, like Taliesin, the possessor of a 'radiant brow' and like Merlin, or Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, a prophet and a priest of Nature.

*How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?²*

Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, from which the above couplet originates, is a consummately masterful reversal of 'normal' moral perspectives which reads like a tantric treatise; its 'Proverbs' read like a series of Zen koans, and one of its 'memorable fancies' further pursues this our theme:



The poet/prophet's conversation with his fellow prophet/poets, (a minor veil such as death being no impediment to converse between freed minds), echoing as it does the words of the Christ (Matthew 17:20), concludes with some of Blake's most celebrated lines:

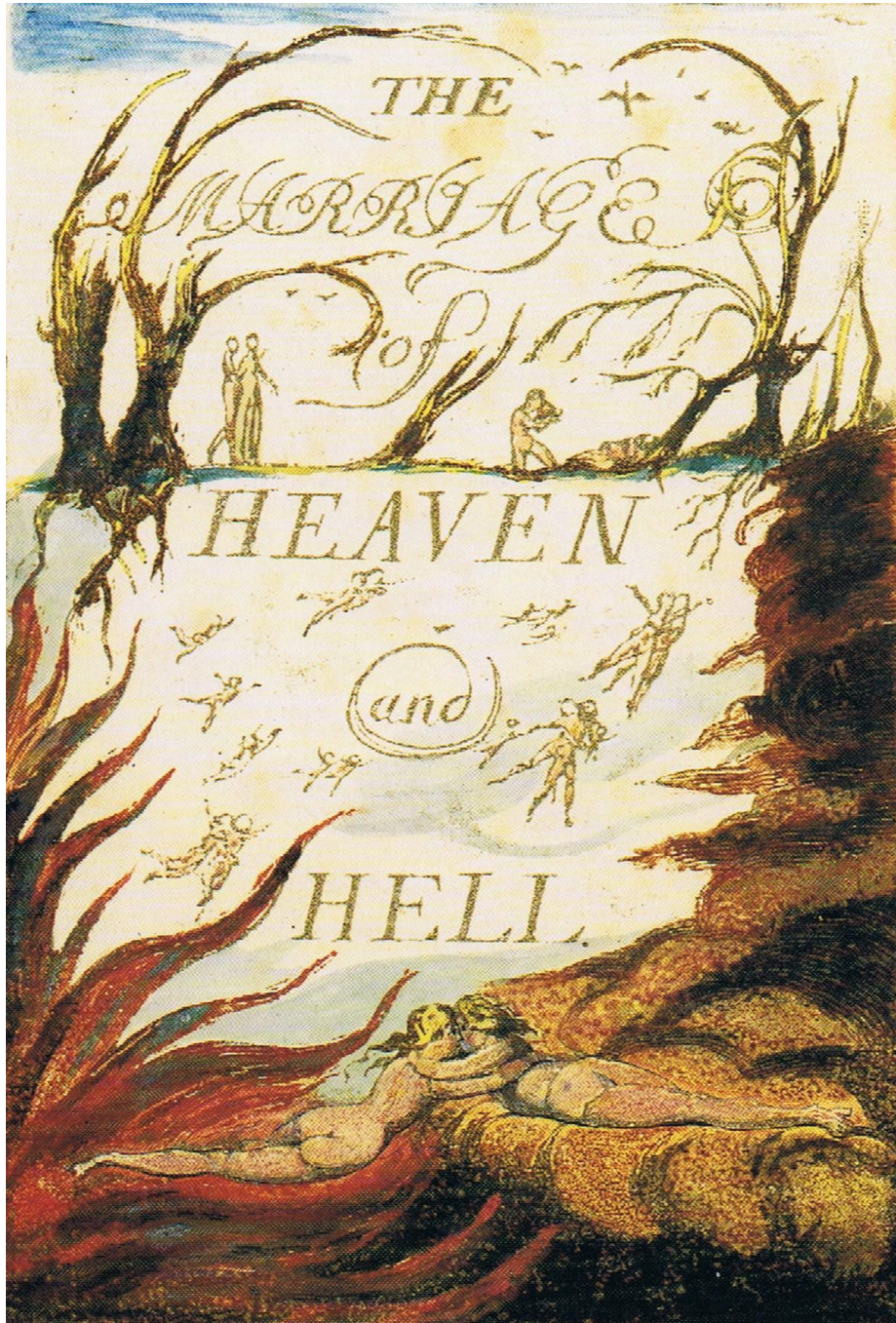
*If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to us as it is:
infinite.*

*For man has closed himself up till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his
cavern.*

Blake's poems were often actually called 'prophecies'; and he points out that 'the enjoyments of Genius...look like torment and insanity' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Here it is also pointed out that the poet/prophet's

path, like that of Merlin freezing and effectively exiled in the forest, is a hard one:

...is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?



While comparing notes with his fellow prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, Blake remarks that their sensory-deprivation practices are similar to those of ‘the North American tribes’: shamanism again!

This meanwhile is Blake’s Introduction to his *Songs of Experience*

*Hear the Voice of the Bard!
Who Present Past and Future sees
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient trees.*

*Calling the lapsed soul
And weeping in the evening dew:
That might control
The starry pole
And fallen fallen light renew.*

*O earth O earth return!
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.*

*Turn away no more:
Why wilt thou turn away
The starry floor
The watry shore
Is giv’n thee till the break of day.*

Introduction.

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees
Whose ears have heard,
The Holy Word,
That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew:
That might controll
The starry pole;
And fallen fallen light renew!

O Earth O Earth return!
Arise from out the dazy gulf;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous Gulf.

Turn away no more:
Why wilt thou turn away
The starry floor
The nutty shore
Is giv'n thee till the break of day.



It is little known perhaps but evident from biographical references that Blake *sang* and performed his poems out loud, liberating them from mere text sonically as well as visually. Poetry in the Bardic tradition is parallel with an incantation, a casting of a *spell*...in my definition of a true work of art, that is exactly what happens, from an altered state of consciousness on the part of the artist, by casting his spell or incantation, in which we are then captured, we too are taken into this altered form of awareness and share the vision or insight. We might take this further and observe that conversely 'bad art' is a form of casting of a black magical spell. One only has to think of what the video collections of Prozac-addicted mass killers have been proved to consist.

It is time to turn to the example of Shelley as one of our great native Bard/magician/poets. His 'Ode To The West Wind' covers many of the aspects and images we have been looking at in this short study, and in it he exhorts, specifically, the West Win, even if it is a harbinger of Winter and thus Death— (West being where the sun sets has a long tradition of being the 'direction' of Death, since at least Ancient Egyptian times)

*Make me thy lyre...be thou
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth;
And, by the incantation of this verse
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
A prophecy! O wind
Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?*



Perhaps with Coleridge's lines in 'the Aeolian Harp' at the back of his mind, Shelley's poem contains the imagery of surrender to both the winds of inspiration and the cyclic round of life and death, with a hope for reincarnation/resurrection in the last line. We have prophecy and a specific intent voiced in the poem, that through its magical incantation, his influence, his spell, should actually be cast through humanity: a spell that worked, despite the fact that Shelley's own death came tragically early, (again, as prophetically realised in the Ode) not long after he wrote the following poem 'Adonais', which was itself written in mourning for Keats:

*Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life...
He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny and hate and pain
And that unrest which men miscall delight
Can touch him not and torture not again;
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure...
He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself wherever that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath it and kindles it above.*



The dead poet is celebrated as now being part of the 'One', a separate form no more, and like the Gnostics, like many a passage in the *Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad Gita*, Shelley inverts the usual ideas of life and death--it is we living who are to be pitied, not the departed, and this life is a sort of death, a

dream, a night—‘Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting’ as Wordsworth puts it in his ‘Ode’. The One Life which sustains all life is invoked, and in a later passage Shelley pointedly contrasts the One as that which underlies all form with the passing and ephemeral-ness of forms:

*The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven’s light forever shines,
Earth’s shadows fly,
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.*

A sense of his own end is very much present in the poem’s final verse, which also once again refers to spirit as breath: and Shelley is conscious of having invoked spirit through his work:

*The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit’s bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and spheréd skies are riven.
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of heaven
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.*

Surrender to the oncoming storm, like surrender to any other form of the Immanent Will, is what marks out an Initiate, a true poet, a true Master, a true Artist, a Magician, one of the Eternals, from ‘the trembling throng/Whose sails were never to the tempest given’. Shelley is truly functioning as a poetic prophet with this work: he did indeed meet his mortal end by drowning in a storm, absolutely moving toward that beacon star of the soul of his fellow poet beyond the veil in the abode of the Eternal, becoming in the process one of their number.

For those with some level of esoteric/spiritual knowledge ‘The End’ is a new beginning into other levels of existence, then perhaps back to earth for the next stage again in the soul’s learning journey. A journey requires, if there is one, a map, and maps of the universe which include these other levels of existence are prevalent in other cultures where esoteric knowledge is still upheld, such as this Buddhist maṇḍala of the Bardos of the after-death states:



But, again, what of our native tradition? This is a druidic mandala of the various levels and layers of the universe, including those as Wordsworth puts it

*to the human eye
Invisible... yet [which] liveth to the heart,*



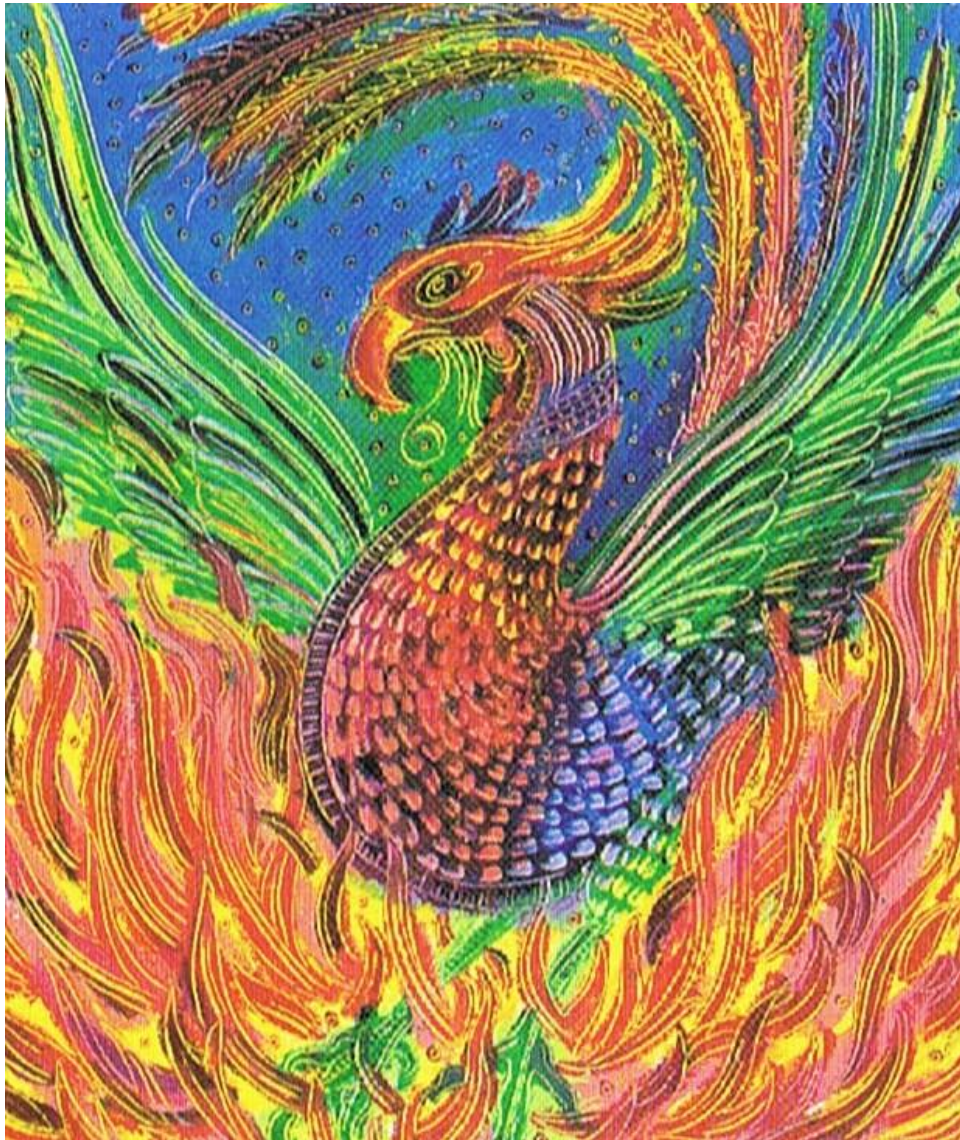
This Druidic manadala/map would have been familiar to Taliesin/Merlin, whose dialogue about these levels of existence can clearly be followed in the *Life of Merlin*.

It was on his death-bed, awaiting this last inevitable and most mysterious journey, that DH Lawrence wrote 'Phoenix', which confronts, exhorts, the reader thus:

*Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled,
Made nothing?*

Are you willing to be made nothing?

If not, you will never really change.



In the QaBaLaH the highest mystical name for the Ultimate, The Beyond, God, higher even than I AM THAT I AM, is AIN SOPHAUR: The Limitless Light of No Thing Ness. A phrase which seems very similar to the Tibetan Buddhist ‘Clear Light of The Limitless Void’ which can be experienced at death, and recognising a glimpse of which is the whole point of the death process, and is what the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is all about.

אין

No Thing/The Negative

סוף

Limitless

אור

Light

It is this willingness to surrender to that which is apparently No-thingness, whether in life or death, that marks someone as being an Initiate, bard, poet, magician—in the sense in which we have been using these terms: one who ultimately seeks the ultimate, rather than any earthly wealth or power: for, after all, it will all be dissolved and destroyed.

It is probably with the last stanza of ‘Adonais’ as its starting point that Lawrence wrote also on his death-bed the moving ‘Ship of Death’, in which that whole journey into the beyond, the unknown (or perhaps if one has had some spiritual training or knowledge and even a map vouchsafed to one, the ‘not-in-entire-forgetfulness’), is recounted. A master, however, might say that any moment of our lives might be such a radical moment of turning-about,

metanoia, TeShuVaH, *paravṛtti*, not just the moment to which all must come, the end of a particular incarnation. It is interesting that the 20th century bard nearing his journey into oblivion uses the image of *apples* for the material world, as did his 6th century counterpart, Myrddin.

*Have you built your ship of death, O have you?
O build your ship of death, for you will need it.*

*The grim frost is at hand when the apples will fall,
Thick, almost thunderous on the hardened earth.*

*And death is on the air like a smell of ashes!
Ah, can't you smell it?*

*And in the bruised body the frightened soul
Finds itself shrinking, wincing from the cold
That blows upon it through the orifices...*

*Build then the ship of death, for you must take
The longest journey, to oblivion.
And die the death, the long and painful death
That lies between the old self and the new.*

*Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly bruised,
Already our souls are oozing through the exit
Of the cruel bruise.*

*Already the dark and endless ocean of the end
Is washing in through the breaches of our wounds,
Already the flood is upon us.*

*O build your ship of death, your little ark,
And furnish it with food, and little cakes, and wine
For the dark flight down oblivion...*

*We are dying, we are dying, so all we can do
Is now to be willing to die, and to build the ship
Of death to carry the soul on the longest journey.*

*A little ship, with oars and food
And little dishes, and all accoutrements
Fitting and ready for the departing soul.
Now launch the small ship, now as the body dies*

*And life departs, launch out, the fragile soul
In the fragile ship of courage, the ark of faith
With its store of food and little cooking pans,
And change of clothes,
Upon the flood's black waste
Upon the waters of the end
Upon the sea of death, where still we sail
Darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port.*

*There is no port, there is nowhere to go
Only the deepening black darkening still
Blacker upon the soundless ungurgling flood
Darkness at one with darkness, up and down
And sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction any more...*

*And everything is gone, the body is gone
Completely under, gone, entirely gone.
The upper darkness is heavy upon the lower,
Between them the little ship is gone
She is gone.*

It is the end, it is oblivion.

*And yet out of eternity a thread
Separates itself upon the blackness,
A horizontal thread
That fumes a little with pallor upon the dark.*

*Is it illusion? Or does the pallor fume
A little higher?
Ah wait, wait, for there's the dawn
The cruel dawn of coming back to life
Out of oblivion...*

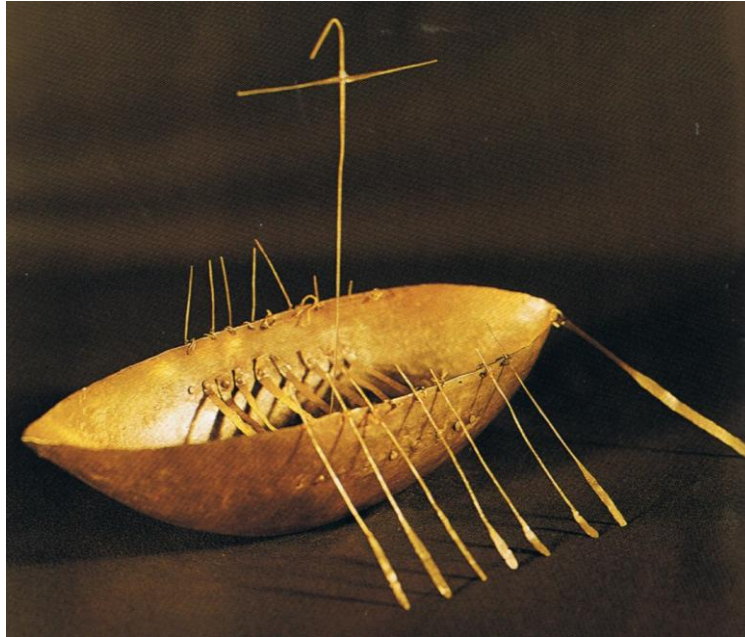
*Wait, wait! Even so a flush of yellow
And strangely, O chilled wan soul, a flush of rose.*

A flush of rose, and the whole thing starts again.

*The flood subsides, and the body, like a worn sea-shell
Emerges strange and lovely.
And the little ship wings home, faltering and lapsing
On the pink flood,*

*And the frail soul steps out, into her house again,
filling the heart with peace.*

*O build your ship of death, O build it!
For you will need it.
For the voyage of oblivion awaits you.*





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2015/2020

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