



JOSEPH CAMPBELL

THE
MASKS OF GOD:
CREATIVE
MYTHOLOGY



PENGUIN COMPASS

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to have been, if not common, at least not rare, in the days when knighthood was in flower. There were some who undertook the discipline called in India the "reversed seasons," where the penitent, as the year became warmer, piled on more and more clothing until by midsummer he was an Eskimo, and, as the season cooled, peeled away, until in midwinter he was, like Lancelot, in his shirt.¹ One is reminded of the childlike contemporary of these poets, Saint Francis (1182–1226), who, conceiving of himself as the troubadour of Dame Poverty, begged alms with the lepers, wandered in hair shirt through the winter woods, wrote poems to the elements, and preached sermons to the birds.

However, the first point to be remarked in connection with the Albigensian charge is that, whereas according to the Gnostic-Manichaeic view nature is corrupt and the lure of the senses to be repudiated, in the poetry of the troubadours, in the Tristan story, and in Gottfried's work above all, nature in its noblest moment—the realization of love—is an end and glory in itself; and the senses, ennobled and refined by courtesy and art, temperance, loyalty and courage, are the guides to this realization. Like a flower potential in its seed, the blossom of the realization of love is potential in every heart (or, at least, every noble heart) and requires only proper cultivation to be fostered to maturity. Hence, if the courtly cult of *amor* is to be catalogued according to its heresy, it should be indexed rather as Pelagian than as Gnostic or Manichaeic, for, as noticed in *Occidental Mythology*,⁵ Pelagius and his followers absolutely rejected the doctrine of our inheritance of the sin of Adam and Eve, and taught that we have finally no need of supernatural grace, since our nature itself is full of grace; no need of a miraculous redemption, but only of awakening and maturation; and that, though the Christian is advantaged by the model and teaching of Christ, every man is finally (and must be) the author and means of his own fulfillment. In the lyrics of the troubadours we hear little or nothing of the fall and corruption either of the senses or of the world.

Moreover, in contrast to the spirit of the indiscriminate Love Feast, whether of the orgiastic Phibionite variety or the charitable church-supper type, the address of *amor* is personal. It follows the lead and allure, as we have said, of the senses, and in particular of the noblest sense, that of sight; whereas the whole point of the

Love Feast, and the very virtue of communal love, is that its aim is indiscriminate. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." ⁶ Selectivity, the prime function of the eye and heart, is in the *agape* methodically abjured. The lights go out, so to say, and whatever is at hand, one loves—either in the angelic way of charity or in the orgiastic, demonic way of a Dionysian orgy; but in either case, religiously: in renunciation of ego, ego judgment, and ego choice.

It is amazing, but our theologians still are writing of *agape* and *eros* and their radical opposition, as though these two were the final terms of the principle of "love": the former, "charity," godly and spiritual, being "of men toward each other in a community," and the latter, "lust," natural and fleshly, being "the urge, desire and delight of sex." ⁷ Nobody in a pulpit seems ever to have heard of *amor* as a third, selective, discriminating principle in contrast to the other two. For *amor* is neither of the right-hand path (the sublimating spirit, the mind and the community of man), nor of the indiscriminate left (the spontaneity of nature, the mutual incitement of the phallus and the womb), but is the path directly before one, of the eyes and their message to the heart.

There is a poem to this point by a great troubadour (perhaps the greatest of all), Guiraut de Borneilh (c. 1138–1200?):

So, through the eyes love attains the heart:
 For the eyes are the scouts of the heart,
 And the eyes go reconnoitering
 For what it would please the heart to possess.
 And when they are in full accord
 And firm, all three, in the one resolve,
 At that time, perfect love is born
 From what the eyes have made welcome to the heart.
 Not otherwise can love either be born or have commencement
 Than by this birth and commencement moved by inclination.

By the grace and by command
 Of these three, and from their pleasure,
 Love is born, who with fair hope
 Goes comforting her friends.
 For as all true lovers
 Know, love is perfect kindness,
 Which is born—there is no doubt—from the heart and eyes.

The eyes make it blossom; the heart matures it:
Love, which is the fruit of their very seed.⁸

We have here attained, I would say, new ground: such ground as in the whole course of our long survey of the world's primitive, Oriental, and Occidental traditions has not been encountered before. It is the ground, unique and new, on which stands the modern self-reliant individual—in so far, at least, as he has yet been able to mature, to show himself, and to hold his gained ground against the panic weight in opposition of the old and new mass and tribal thinkers. In the nineteen lines of this troubadour poem, in fact, there already comes to view a prospect of that world of Renaissance man which in art was presently to be typified in the rules, the objectively discovered principles, of Renaissance (linear) perspective: the organization of a selected or imagined field from an individual point of view, along lines going out toward a vanishing point from the locus of a living pair of eyes—according to the impulse, moreover, of the individual's private heart. The world is now showing itself in its own sweet light and form, at last, to men and women of sense, who are daring to look, to see, and to respond. The system of problems of the controlling religious tradition is in principle disregarded, and the individual standpoint becomes decisive. And so, although it is true that in the century of the troubadours there was rampant throughout Europe a general Manichaeian heresy, and that many of the ladies celebrated in the poems are known to have been heretics—just as others were practicing Christians, and the poets themselves communicants of one tradition or the other—in their character as artists and in their poetry and song the troubadours stood apart from both traditions. The whole meaning of their stanzas lay in the celebration of a love the aim of which was neither marriage nor the dissolution of the world. Nor was it even carnal intercourse; nor, again—as among the Sufis—the enjoyment, by analogy, of the “wine” of a divine love and the quenching of the soul in God. The aim, rather, was life directly in the experience of love as a refining, sublimating, mystagogic force, of itself opening the pierced heart to the sad, sweet, bittersweet, poignant melody of being, through love's own anguish and love's joy.

One thinks here of the Japanese courtly gallants and their loves in Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*, and there is indeed a common

sentiment in the Mahayana Buddhist "awareness of the pity of things" (Japanese: *mono no aware wo shiru*);⁹ however, as remarked in *Oriental Mythology*, the ambience of religion hangs there over all, whereas in the love lyrics of the troubadours, even where analogies to certain religious motifs would seem to be obvious, mythological references are ignored and the poem remains frankly and wholly secular, with the poet as the devotee of his lady, who is radiant and potent not by analogy, but with a brilliance and grace of her own that is sufficient for life in this world.

Let me cite, for example, three stanzas from a celebrated poem known as "The Joy of Being in Love," by another of the greatest of the Provençal masters of this art, Bernart de Ventadorn (fl. c. 1150–1200?):

It is no marvel, that I should sing
 Better than any other singer;
 For my heart more draws me toward Love,
 And I am likelier made to her command.
 Heart and body, wisdom and wits,
 Strength and power, have I wagered:
 The bridle so draws me toward Love
 That I attend to nothing else.

* * *

This love smites me so gently
 At heart and with such sweet savor!
 Of grief do I die one hundred times a day,
 And of joy revive, again a hundred.
 My malady, indeed, is of excellent kind;
 More worth, this malady, than any other good:
 And since my malady is so good for me,
 Good, after the malady, will be its cure.

* * *

Noble Lady, nothing do I ask of thee
 But that thou shouldst take me for thy servant.
 I would serve as one serves a good lord,
 Whatever reward I might gain.
 Behold, I am at thy command:
 Sincere and humble, gay and courteous.
 Neither bear nor lion art thou,
 To kill me, as I here to thee surrender.¹⁰

From the courts of Provence this poetry passed to Germany, where it was reattuned to the language and spirit of the Minnesingers, the singers of *minne* (*amor*); and among these the leading master, wandering from court to court, was Walther von der Vogelweide (c. 1170–c. 1230), who brought to his lyrics a typically German tone of moral depth and fervor, threaded with a new strain of sympathy for the rustic and the natural against the artificialities of fashion. The morality of this Christian poet was of a type, however, not preached in church; for, as Henry Osborn Taylor has remarked of his blithe little “Under the Linden”: “Marvelously, it gives the mood of love’s joy remembered—and anticipated too. The immorality is complete . . . and rendered most alluring by the utter gladness of the girl’s song—no repentance, no regret; only joy and roguish laughter.”¹¹

The pretty runs of rhyme and the charming sense of innocence of the medieval language I find impossible to re-render, but the sense of fresh young delight, I think, comes through:

Under the linden,
On the heath,
There was our bed for two;
There you will find,
Gently arranged,
Broken flowers and grass.
Beside the woods in a dale,
Tandaraday!
Gently sang the nightingale.

I came a-walking
Toward the stream,
My lover had come before.
There was I greeted:
“My lady fair!”
So am happy now for evermore.
Did he kiss me? Full a thousand clips.
Tandaraday!
See how red now are my lips.

There he’d prepared,
Luxuriously,
A bedding place of flowers:
It would still bring a smile

Inwardly,
 If one chanced along that way.
 For by the roses one can see,
 Tandaraday!
 The pillow where my head would be.

That he lay beside me,
 If anyone knew
 (God forbid!), I'd be mortified.
 But whatever he did with me,
 No one ever shall
 Know anything of that: only he and I
 And a tiny little bird,
 Tandaraday!
 Who will never let fall a word.¹²

The morality here is of Heloise in the first fair days of her love, and her courageous gospel can be heard again through many of Walther's lines:

Whoever says that love is sin,
 Let him consider first and well:
 Right many virtues lodge therein
 With which we all, by rights, should dwell.¹³

"Woman will be ever woman's noblest name, greater in worth than Lady!" Walther wrote.¹⁴ "It took a German," states Professor Taylor, "to say this."¹⁵ And again, it took a German to recognize in the world-transfiguring sentiment of love as *minne*, *amor*, an experience of that same transcendent, immanent ground of being, beyond duality, which Schopenhauer six centuries later was to celebrate in his philosophy. We have already taken note of Gottfried of Strassburg's celebration of this mystery in his symbology of the love grotto with its crystalline bed in the place of the altar of the sacrament. A number of Walther's poems, also, extend the revelation of the goddess Minne to a metaphysical depth beyond anything suggested either in the Provençal or in the Old French love poetry of his day:

Minne is neither male nor female,
 She has neither a soul nor a body,
 She resembles nothing imaginable.
 Her name is known; her self, however, ungrasped.

Yet nobody from her apart
 Merits the blessing of God's grace.

She comes never to a false heart.¹⁶

Now it is a matter of no small moment that in the period of this idyllic poetry the world of harsh reality should have been about as dangerous and unlikely a domicile for *amor* as the nightmare of history has ever produced. We have mentioned the devastation of southern France. The whole of Central Europe likewise was in a state of hideous turmoil. For with the death in the year 1197 of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Henry VI, surnamed the Cruel, the crown of the Holy Roman Empire had fallen to the ground and was rolling like a fumbled football for anyone to retrieve. And the armies battling to possess it—on one hand, of the allied English, papal, and Guelph contenders, and, on the other, of the German princes and incumbent Philip of Swabia—were everywhere pillaging towns and villages, devastating whole provinces, perpetrating the most brutal and revolting crimes;¹⁷ which wanton work continued until about 1220, when the brilliant young nephew of the murdered Philip, Frederick II (1194–1250), was finally crowned Emperor in Saint Peter's by a reluctant and uneasy Pope. Walther had been a witness to these horrors, and he wrote of them with unmitigated scorn:

I saw with my own eyes hidden things about men and women, heard and saw all they did and said. How Rome lied and betrayed two kings, I heard. And when the popes and laity had formed their contending parties, there took place the most terrible war that ever was or will ever be: the worst, because both the body and the soul were thereby slain. . . .¹⁸

Ironic, is it not? In the name of love and of peace on earth to men of good will, treachery, arson, pillage, and massacre everywhere; and in such an age the elevation of the most glorious visions in radiant glass and carved stone of that peace and love fulfilled! Fulfilled, however, not on earth, but in a realm away from this vale of tears, to which the most blessed opener of the gate is that woman shining as the sun, to whom the cathedral itself is dedicate, earthly, yet the Mother of God—the Virgin Mary, Notre Dame. In the words of the long-cherished hymn "*Salve Regina*," composed by Abelard's elder contemporary Adhemar de Monteil,

Bishop of Le Puy (d. 1098), which is to this day engraved, with love, in the heart of every kneeling Catholic:

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
 Our life, our sweetness, and our hope,
 All hail!
 To thee we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
 To thee we sigh, weeping and mourning in this vale of tears.
 Therefore, O our Advocate,
 Turn thou on us those merciful eyes of thine;
 And after this our exile,
 Show unto us Jesus, the blessed fruit of thy womb.
 O merciful, O kind, O sweet Virgin Mary! ¹⁹

The last three aspirations, "O merciful, O kind, O sweet Virgin Mary!" were added by Abelard's exact contemporary and dangerous challenger in debate, the mighty Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153), to whom Dante, in the *Commedia*, assigns the loftiest possible station, at the very feet of God. Throughout his lifetime this passionate preacher of transcendental euphoria strained every metaphor in the book of love to elevate the eyes of men from the visible women of this earth to the glorified form of that crowned Virgin Mother above, who is the Queen of Angels and of Saints—and Dante, in due time, followed suit. However, the troubadours, minnesingers, and epic poets of the century, in their celebration of *amor*, remained in Nietzsche's sense "true to this earth," this vale of tears where the devil roams for the ruin of souls. For in their view, not heaven but this blossoming earth was to be recognized as the true domain of love, as it is of life, and the corruption ruinous of love was not of nature (of which love is the very heart) but of society, both lay and ecclesiastical: the public order and, most immediately, its sacramentalized loveless marriages.

Among the verse forms of the troubadours, the song of the parting of lovers at dawn, at the warning of the watchman (the *Alba*, "Dawn Song," or *Aubade*, which became the *Tagelied* of the minnesingers) rendered simply yet dramatically the sense of discontinuity between the two worlds, on one hand of love's rapture, and on the other of the social order epitomized in the lady's dangerous spouse, "the jealous one," *lo gilos*. Here is a frequently quoted anonymous example:

In an orchard, under a hawthorn tree,
 By her side the Lady clasps her lover,
 Till the watchman calls that dawn has appeared.
 O God! O God! this dawn! how quickly it comes!

"Would to God the night never had ended,
 That my love might never depart from me,
 Nor ever the watchman sight day or dawn.
 O God! O God! this dawn! how quickly it comes!

"Sweet love, let us start anew our dear game
 In the garden where the birds are warbling,
 Till the watch sounds again his flageolet."
 O God! O God! this dawn! how quickly it comes!²⁰

In the Tristan romance King Mark is of course in the role of the jealous spouse; and his royal estate, Tintagel, with its elegant princely court, stands for the values of the day world—history, society, knightly honor, deeds, career and fame, chivalry and friendship—in absolute opposition to the grotto of the timeless goddess Minne, which is of the order of enduring nature, in the forest where the birds still sing. Set apart from all spheres of historic change, the Venus Mountain with its crystalline bed has been entered by lovers through all ages, from every order of life. Its seat is in the heart of nature—nature without and within—which two are the same. And its virtue, so, is of the species, not of this particular culture, nor of that: Veda, Bible, or Koran; but of man pristine in the universe—which is something, however, that in this vale of tears is never to be seen, since we are each brought up (are we not?) in the ethnic sphere of this or that particular culture.

The immanent yet lost—but not forgotten—realm within us all is in Celtic mythology and folklore allegorized variously as the Land below Waves, the Land of Youth, the Fairy Hills, and, in Arthurian romance, that Never Never Land of the Lady of the Lake where Lancelot du Lac was fostered and from which Arthur received his sword Excalibur. In the earliest of the old chronicles of King Arthur—the Welsh monk Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (A.D. 1136)—it is told that at the time of his great last battle with his traitorous son Mordred, "Arthur himself was wounded mortally and borne away, for the healing of his wounds, to the island Avalon."²¹ And in a later work, the *Vita Merlini* (c. 1145?), the same chronicler adds that the boat was

steered by an old Irish abbot, Barinthus, and that in Avalon the wounded king was tended by Morgan la Féc and her sisters. The next we hear is from an old French verse chronicle by a Norman poet named Wace, the *Roman de Brut* (A.D. 1155), where it is added that "Arthur is still in Avalon and awaited by the Britons; for, as they say and believe, he will return from that place to which he passed and will again be alive."²² And then finally (c. 1200), an English country priest named Layamon not only transformed the old Irish abbot into something more romantic but let the wounded king himself announce the prophecy of his second coming. Arthur, we here read, had been wounded with no less than fifteen dreadful wounds, into the least of which one might have thrust two gloves, and to a young kinsman, dear to him, who stood by where he lay on the ground, he said these words with sorrowful heart:

"Constantine, thou wert Cador's son: I here give to thee my kingdom. Defend my Britons ever in thy life; maintain for them all the laws of my days and all the good laws of the days of Uther. And I myself will go to Avalon, to the most beauteous of all women, to the queen Argante, an elf marvelously fair, and she will make my wounds all sound, make me whole with a healing drink. And anon I shall come again to my kingdom and dwell among the Britons in great joy."

And even while he was speaking thus there approached from the sea a little boat, borne by the waves. There were therein two women of marvelous form, and they took Arthur and bore him quickly and laid him softly in the boat and sailed away.²³

We recall the telling line from Tennyson's "Passing of Arthur," in his *Idylls of the King*:

From the great deep to the great deep he goes,
when the wounded king in a dusky barge, wherein were three dark queens, passed to Avalon, "to be king among the dead."

The name, Avalon, of that timeless land beyond the setting sun,

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly,

is cognate with the Welsh *afallen*, "apple tree" (from *afal*, "apple"), and so reveals the affinity of this Celtic Land below Waves with the Isle of the Golden Apples of the classical Hesperides²⁴—and thereby with the entire complex of that garden of immortality of the Great Goddess of the two worlds of death and life to which so many pages of this study of the mythologies of mankind have been devoted. An echo of the same theme of the paradisial garden of the goddess, with its tree of immortal life, is to be recognized even in the first stanza of the *alba* quoted earlier, where the lady, under a hawthorn tree, clasps her lover to her side. The Christian figure of the *pietà*, the dead Savior on his mother's knees, who will presently return alive, is also of this complex. Can it be accidental, then, that the king had fifteen wounds—the fifteenth day of the moon being that of the culmination of its waxing and beginning of its waning, toward death and, after three days' dark, rebirth? Moreover, the mortally wounded Tristan's first melancholy voyage to Isolt's Dublin Bay, in a self-propelled coracle that bore him infallibly to her castle, is certainly but another variant and example of this same Land-below-Waves motif: so that Isolt, the Lady of the Lake, and the Goddess Mother of the *pietà* in their final sense are at one: opposed in every measure to the judgments of this day world of ours, of the Sons of Light.

II. The Noble Heart

As in the poetry of the troubadours, so in Gottfried's *Tristan*, love is born of the eyes, in the world of day, in a moment of aesthetic arrest, but opens within to a mystery of night. The point is first made in his version of the love tale of Tristan's parents, Blanche-flor and Rivalin. For there was in their case no potion at work, inspiring magically a premonition *a priori* of the course along which they were to be drawn through sensuous allure, from love's meeting of the eyes, to love's pain, love's rapture, and on to death.

Beautiful, innocent Blanche-flor, the sister of King Mark, was simply sitting among the ladies, watching the sort of tournament called a *bohort*, in which knights, jousting without armor, contend with only shields and blunt lances, when she began to hear those around her murmuring: "Look! What a heavenly man. How he rides!" And her eyes, searching, discovered Rivalin. "How well he handles that shield and lance!" they were all saying.