

Andrew Baker

The Ravello Dialogues

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The Ravello Dialogues...and various related documents.

This work was composed between 2002 and 2024. Many of the ideas, and the characters, go back much further. The various sections are intended to be read in the order that they appear here, which is not quite the order in which they were written.

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AT THE VILLA

"Etrange persistence d'un souvenir." (Berlioz - "Lelio")

And what kind of memory is this – this garden? There's a Mediterranean clarity to the light. If I were to climb those steps behind the kiosk (selling delicious ice creams and sorbets) I would find myself far above the sea itself – looking down as if from the clouds to that dangerously alluring blue!

The Belvedere of Infinity? This may be Ravello – though the planting is more ornate than my memory would lead me to expect. Surely the gardens of the Villa Cimbrone are too parched to produce such a variety of colours?

The heat and light have a threatening quality, as if the world and time were going to crack again, as they did a century or more ago at Versailles. Indeed, a migraine-like distortion of colour momentarily cuts through the air and the Countess is standing on the grass, with that smile which in itself is a crystalline crack in the world. She raises her rolled parasol and traces my outline with its point, as if confirming the image she sees of me.

She is coolly Edwardian today. The palest of blue silk, her fire-red hair pinned loosely with glittering jeweled stilettos.

She has persisted in my memories for a very long time indeed. Is she the Countess today? It hardly matters. She has worn an Elizabethan mask in the past. Her names change as much as her disguises. The smile is always the same. She is both a memory in the sense of a recollection, and as a form made of gathered fragments of experience and imagination. She is also, quite specifically, a Daughter of Memory.

THE HIDDEN MUSIC

A long time ago (in June 1972) while I was listening to something on the radio a very vivid image of a landscape came into my mind, an effect of the music. It's a common experience, but the idea that struck me was that, perhaps, the meaning of the music and the imagined scene was the same. Both were translations into sound or images of something else, a hidden language. This seemed to be a "visionary moment."

It might be fanciful to think that music can convey an actual image, a story or a landscape, but the effect of an experience, place, encounter, and the quality which we remember, could be due to this deeper language which has an existence quite apart from the music or the experience. This is natural, surely? We could all translate a symphony into a cake?

I have long realised that a few ideas, probably wrong, have driven everything I've done for over forty years. A moment such as this one, listening to the radio, can set us off on a long train of thought - exploring ideas of all kinds but always returning to the process of composing and how the music and, particularly, the form of the music, can convey ideas – not specific ideas but things that have a meaning in this hidden language.

There are all kinds of side-tracks, of course, all that late seventies New-Age stuff, the delights of the Renaissance magical tradition. And sometimes side-tracks which you dismiss for twenty years can suddenly return and have a new significance. Fortunately for me there has always been the sceptical voice – and a belief, from the very beginning, that the mystery of things can be found in the ordinary and modern, not just in the esoteric or ancient.

The “hidden music” is not the music, or the place with which it shares a meaning. It's something outside this, a language of the world of Ideas – whatever that is.

Our music, though, is a close approximation of this invisible language. In composing we learn how ideas are put together to give meaning and how forms can evolve which can have a quality of truth or beauty – or, in their own unfinishedness, imply that such a thing is possible somewhere.

But to what extent could music convey a specific meaning? It's clear, I think, that two people with shared experiences might have very similar reactions to the same piece. But this is not surely, universal – and it isn't as if that piece is “about” that night-time scene. The music and the image share the same hidden music.

But, as time goes by, I wonder if everything is this hidden music? A memory may be pure music, perhaps originally sounded in the mind by a place or experience, but it is only this music which is the thing itself. And this would explain, and justify, this apparition of the Countess. Memory provides images to make the hidden music visible.

THE COUNTESS

Am I merely a remembered song? Am I immaterial? If I, then you so also.

Very good – but can we “unpack” this concept. Can we explain it, or, at least, justify it by reference to higher authorities?

She seems to have been listening to my thoughts.

I

We can try. There is a Hidden Music in the world. This is an invisible language which conveys the quality or meaning of a thing and which can be translated into music, words or images by the artist.

The Hidden Music is the individual quality of a thing, simple or complex, and it is only through hearing this Hidden Music that we can be aware of the beauty and truth (the eternal forms) in the world, experienced in moments of vision or grace.

The vocation of the artist is inspired by the forms, which speak through the world, attracting the creation of new work just as they drive the evolution of nature.

The artist's duty is to reveal the Hidden Music to others, and, ultimately, to reveal the unity to which all things move.

COUNTESS

Enough! This begins as a simple creed, but within a few sentences it seems to raise all the great mysteries of existence! I cannot let such a statement pass without questioning almost every word. This is material for a week's amusement, but we must do what we can with the time we have. We can continue our pleasant stroll in these gardens while I gently interrogate you. They have the most refreshing limoncello ice at this kiosk. Allow me to present you with a carton.

The girl at the kiosk already has one ready to hand to the Countess who passes it to me. It is very intense. The lemons grow on the steep slopes below us. Old donkeys carry them down to the coast in metal panniers. Their juice is steeped in alcohol in small laboratories and the essence of citrus is sold in bottles of every size and shape – and here materialised as this piquant ice. The Spirit of Delight. For the moment, but possibly just for a moment, it clears the brain and the sight.

FORM AND UNITY

THE COUNTESS

For example, you throw in "forms" with no explanation. Why should anyone accept the existence of these intangible things – even if they knew what you were talking about? What you say sounds attractive, but it is built on air.

I

Our awareness of "Forms" comes with an awareness of unity.

COUNTESS

Unity sounds rather dull – I dislike monotony.

I

In this world we only know unity through variety, creativity, life.

COUNTESS

Do you suggest that our awareness of “Forms” is simply a step towards an awareness of unity?

I

Yes.

COUNTESS

What seems to be Beauty or Truth is an appearance or effect of unity? Perhaps in its quality of “rightness”, its “being just-so.”?

I

I think so. But isn't that the same thing? Beauty and Truth must be aspects of the Beauty and Truth of the whole.

COUNTESS

This depends on a belief that there is a Beauty and Truth in the whole – and in a cosmos which is a beautiful whole - which is, I believe, the proper meaning of the word “cosmos.”

I

Yes, but I do not begin with an assumption that there is a true and beautiful whole. I begin with the experience of truth or beauty in individual things, whether a person, or in music, or in a place or in a work of art. Experience of a sense of mystery or delight is the beginning of my interest in the higher truths, if I may use such a phrase.

COUNTESS

Of course, you may, and I would like to think that I had a small part to play in some of those moments of vision. But what are these Forms if not higher truths?

I

I may not have had such a great experience of divine Truth as Dante had with Beatrice but I have had many small experiences of the golden spark of truth. I can also understand Dante's account of his experience as true and beautiful in itself. And so, I ask myself what it is that makes the experience seem true.

COUNTESS

There are those who would say that this is purely subjective – that everyone has their own view of beauty.

I

I don't understand how that can be. We are all made of the same stuff, part of the same world, and formed of common experience of the same life. We all have individual qualities, but these are, you could say, superficial – though they are the windows through which the shared and common experiences are experienced or revealed.

COUNTESS

I agree, of course, and I see that this is another subject for another conversation. The point you are making, as I see it, through my individually formed eyes and mind, is that though every one thing has an individual nature and language its effect is to reveal the Forms as an appearance of unity. All the experiences we have of revelation glory or wonder are moments when something, by being completely itself, shows us the simple and brilliant light of unity.

I

A thing, when it reveals its own Form or Idea, by being true to itself, in showing its own "truth" reveals the ultimate Forms of Truth or Beauty – which are, perhaps, the same. Music, and Art, may be "True" without being apparently beautiful.

COUNTESS

You would say that the higher Forms, the abstract ideals of beauty harmony truth or justice, are all one. They are in themselves only particular aspects of unity.

I

I would.

COUNTESS

In this case you would say that the small glimmer of truth you may experience in a piece of music, or in a product of a very fine pasticceria, is a glimpse of the Unity.

I

I would – and I agree it might as well be provided by one of Andrea Pansa’s fine cakes in the square in Amalfi (flavoured with the quintessence of lemons) as in the development of one of Haydn’s quartets.

COUNTESS

In which case you are saying that all such moments of delight or grace are experiences of the Unity?

I

Indeed,

COUNTESS

And is the Unity God?

I

Ah, this is where words confuse us. Yes, the Unity is, I would say, by definition, God - but people obscure the word with their own complications.

COUNTESS

Ah yes, complications which flow from the Unity, but which are not the essential Unity. But is the Unity also the Good?

I

It has to be so. The Good is the same thing. What is Good (to us) is what reveals, or serves, the Unity.

COUNTESS

I agree, as I feel I have to as a student of Mr. Plato and his enlightened followers, but there are difficulties with this simple concept. People have an unfortunate habit of imposing their own ideas of unity on the world.

I

But are they, in fact, serving Unity? They are usually imposing a particular personal view of the world which creates division.

COUNTESS

Does the Good cause division?

I

It might appear so to us. Nature is always changing, creating and destroying. The Unity is unchanging. We only enjoy glimpses of Unity (or, I feel, a better phrase to use is "The One") because we are changeable. Variety reveals Unity. An aspect of The One is that its effect in nature is infinite fecundity and variety – so it is always the case that variety reveals Unity (in those flashes of delight) and human attempts to impose unity are always false and destructive.

We can never see the full picture. We never understand the effects of our actions. I would say that any movement towards Unity must never damage the individual. We only experience Unity when the individual is truly itself.

A person grows towards the true form of themselves (through vocation), as a piece of music grows to its unique but true form in the process of composition.

We cannot write music which simply *is* Beauty or Truth. We can only write as an individual, human and flawed a thing which may touch Truth by being itself. The flaws are essential too. In the natural, living, world decay and death are part of the process, part of the "work". A beautiful tree will have damaged branches. It will change with the seasons. A beautiful building may have crumbling plaster. It will not be beautiful if it pretends to be unchanging. A "restoration" can produce an appearance of death, or an embalmed corpse. A piece of music almost certainly will not be beautiful or true if it is "perfect". Beatrice was not the single face of beauty. She was an individual face who revealed God by being Beatrice. "I am, I am Beatrice" as she said in the Earthly Paradise, not "I am, I am the image of God".

COUNTESS

I am so pleased that you see the benefits of imperfection.

This seems to be an important aspect of this personal creed. It may seem to contradict Plato – though I may be wrong, but it may not contradict my dear Marsilio. In the simplest terms we can say that we only know God (if you will take the word in its simplest meaning) through being human - flawed and changeable and individual. We only know the Unity through the changes of Nature.

I

Yes. We have to contemplate the Forms through real experience. We have to contemplate Unity through the Forms. We sense the Forms as a mystery in the world or in our lives.

This is the Way of Affirmation. We may, if we wish, contemplate Unity itself by rejecting all earthly experience, but the Way of Negation is hard. Most people reject only what they want to reject and see only what they want to see.

COUNTESS

The same is true of the Way of Affirmation. People look for God in only what they want to see. To find God in the World you must see the whole, light and dark.

I

Yes. They are failing at the first stage. They fail to know themselves. They have to know themselves to be able to see the world as a whole. They have to know the world as a whole to know themselves. The visions of God are in the decay and ruin as much as in the living and perfect. Truth and Good and Beauty, as Forms, are not the same as our earthly images of Truth Good and Beauty.

COUNTESS

You are affirming the Platonic Forms, and, at the same time, you affirm the cracked and damaged nature in which we live. And you justify the creation of imperfect music!

But my friend Maude might question your simple view of God as Unity. She would declare that she can know God in a more human guise.

Are you making God a remote impersonal thing far away from experience? If God is Unity, can He be actively involved in our lives?

I

Of course. Completely and utterly! The Unity, the One, is the driving force in everything that we are, in everything around us and in everything we do. I can compose by serving God. Why else would I do it? How else would I have the desire for so much hard work? God is not remote. The Unity is intimately present in the world. Everything moves towards, or, perhaps, ebbs and flows, because of Unity, the First Cause. We all know Being and God is Being itself, but we understand God through being human. Our only way of understanding God is through our own language of humanity, through our senses, mind and reason.

COUNTESS

And so, my dear friend, you are affirming the Christian view that Christ is fully God and fully Man. I understand. Good heavens, you may one day make me a convert if you continue to harmonise our dear Plato with the gospel. Marsilio all but succeeded.

I

It would seem to be the Christian view. I couldn't say whether or not the same meaning might be expressed in different faiths. To me this is what Christianity means. Christ is the reason, logos, which is the Unity seen in changing Nature. We understand that through humanity, simply because we are human.

COUNTESS

There are some who say that their own religion is the only expression of one truth.

I

Of course. But when Christ says "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" it is a simple statement of fact. That's what Christ is, the Word made flesh. You only come to God through knowing the "logos" in Nature. If you know God in Nature it is because of this "reason" or "logos" in all things. If we use these terms it is purely logical that you can know and experience those traces of God without knowing anything of any particular religion. All religions can attempt to speak of absolute truth. They are alternative views of one Truth. To me the Christian view clearly explains this intimacy of God – unless you make nonsense of it by thinking too literally and trying to explain things in the wrong way. My purpose, my vocation, is to serve the One and to hope to reveal Unity through my imperfect work.

COUNTESS

In which case it is always better to live in Unity and attempt to demonstrate Truth in your own humble way than to try to explain it. Good advice for life, but we can still enjoy our friendly conversation, however pointless it might be. Another ice? A moment of refreshment would be a simple delight before we move on to the question of Vocation.

ON VOCATION

COUNTESS

So, this is your vocation – to reveal Unity in your imperfect works?

I

Yes. It's the irresistible lure of the Unity in the cosmos. It's the desire to have a relationship with that mystery.

COUNTESS

Does this lure, the vocation, lead you to serve in a particular way? Is it the same as a Priestly vocation?

I

I don't know if there are different vocations. I would say that vocation is the calling of the divine Unity to the individual to become what he or she should be. The Vocation is the desire created in the individual by the Idea of that individual, drawing the individual to become themselves. And we become aware of that Idea through the world, through mystery, things that speak to us from experience or are reflections of ourselves in the world. It may be that we become ourselves through Love – and know ourselves by finding Love in another.

COUNTESS

Ah, yes, Desire throbs through the cosmos and drives every nerve and muscle of Nature.

So, Vocation, appears to be a calling from God, or the One, to the individual to follow a particular path. Is this an individual voice that a person might hear in themselves or is it a something in the cosmos itself to which a person may respond if they wish? Are there many vocations or a single voice?

I

Either the vocation is a tendency in Nature from God or it is something outside Nature, a detached voice of God. I believe nothing that we have discussed requires a "supernatural" element – by which I mean a force or being that is detached from Nature.

COUNTESS

Is God detached from Nature or within Nature?

I

Ah, an old question – and possibly a matter of personal attitude. Some have always seen God as being outside Creation, others prefer to think of Nature emanating from

God. But I think it is misleading. When we talk of Forms or of the One we are not talking about something outside Nature, are we?

COUNTESS

Would they exist if Nature did not exist?

I

Is there an answer? Do Unity and the Forms need to exist before things come into being? It is the ultimate chicken and egg question. One might argue that once anything comes into existence so does its ideal Form. If I begin a piece of music its Form is there drawing the work on. Philosophically we can argue that the Form, and before its Unity, must exist before Nature, but in terms of the actual time or moment of their existence the question may be unanswerable – except that the Form and the One are, by definition, eternal and, philosophically, must pre-exist. The Ideal String Quartet does not exist in time. Forms can be thought of as Eternal.

COUNTESS

The Forms are the designs of all things, produced by the Unity in Nature. Is that so? Is there a design for Nature?

I

Another old one.

COUNTESS

As old as I.

I

An answer may be – eternal, not old. The Design is eternal. God is eternal. Philosophically, therefore, the Design exists before what we think of as Nature, or what we might think of as “Creation”, but this has nothing to do with time. The source of our desire may be thought of as being “outside Nature”, because eternal, but the process of Vocation is within Nature.

COUNTESS

And how does this Desire affect us? How does Vocation work on us?

I

We experience those moments of Delight or Truth – and these will create desire in us. We will experience a new kind of joy. The joy is something we can pursue by being true to ourselves – by knowing ourselves – which means the self we should be, not a selfish thing. It is not a personal desire because the Delight comes when we see something external to us as it really is, or to be more precise, when we see, as an individual, the beauty of unity of things in the individual quality of an external thing.

COUNTESS

In that case the vocation need not be outside us – but be in our own awakening – our own eyes opening to the world.

I

Yes, I would agree. It could be that the vocation is a force within ourselves – and yet it is part of the nature of all things.

COUNTESS

So, your God is not personally involved. He has merely set the machinery running.

I

Do you think so? That sounds like a cold and lifeless kind of Deism, and yet I would see the working of vocation as entirely spiritual.

COUNTESS

But where is the spirit if the working of vocation is entirely within the individual soul?

I

Perhaps “spirit” is not a helpful term at this stage.

COUNTESS

And perhaps neither is “Soul”.

I

No, I think we should avoid words which are heavy with aggregations of meaning. I think the mechanistic view is misleading. Vocation is not a material following of a simple desire within a person. It is concerned with the qualities and meanings of things. Mind and imagination are part of the same world, the same Nature. The process is personal, but as we experience the world it becomes personal to us, living

in our memories and imaginations, which are, themselves, formed from the same Nature.

COUNTESS

But is the process entirely in our minds or do things happen external to us to help us on our way?

I

Do you mean does God produce events external to ourselves, for our benefit? Is the process of vocation in the world and not just in ourselves? I think that may be an unnecessary complication. If an event occurs which inspires us, or reveals something to us, it has happened for our benefit. It hardly matters if the event occurred at the will of God for our benefit or whether we, by chance responded to it because we happened to observe it. Were we there for the event or was the event there for us? Is this a question that should be asked in a cosmos which is permeated by Unity? The object of our vocation is to remove such divisions between us and the world so that there is only the One and in that end everything happens for us because we exist for the One.

COUNTESS

To remove the division between us and the world is not to become part of the world but to reveal the One?

I

Yes. If we lose ourselves, some would say, in the world we are not doing that. Quite the reverse. If we follow purely physical instincts and enjoy purely physical pleasures we are not being fully human. If we lose ourselves we lose ourselves. The relationship which reveals the One is one in which we are fully ourselves – united with the World rather than absorbed in it. This is the way Love works. The Lovers remain themselves, united, they do not become lost in each other.

COUNTESS

It is also easy to follow the mental and deny the physical. Would that bring us closer to the One or further separate us?

I

A difficult question. I prefer not to talk in terms of Mind and body as being separate things. Our true selves are not purely spiritual. Our vocation may, for example, depend on physical skills.

COUNTESS

And where is the Soul?

I

Another word that it may be best to avoid. Is our mind separable from the body? Perhaps we should think of the Soul as the immortal part of us – the pattern to which vocation is drawing us.

COUNTESS

We accept that there is also a way of Negation in which we attempt to find pure Being by denying the flesh. It is valid way and can lead to holiness for some, but it is not a way either you or I are suited to.

So, to go back –

We hope to find moments when we and the world touch Unity – and we only do this when we are being fully human. And those moments are also things which help us pursue Unity. There is no meaning in saying whether they exist for our benefit or we exist for their benefit because we are part of one world. In this case is there in fact a single Mind or Soul in the Cosmos?

I

The Soul of the World? That may not be the right term. The Mind in the World may be simply a way of understanding, the way we can understand it. It is the meaning, reason, and feeling of the cosmos.

COUNTESS

I think we should say, we fanciful Neo-Platonists that there is simply Mind - one Mind in the cosmos - and our Souls participate in it. Do they swim about in Mind as fish in a bowl? Or are our souls reflections of that bowl?

Ah, this is exciting. I feel we are approaching the truly cosmic and, at length, we will justify our own existence. But we were talking about events in the world which inspire us. Perhaps we should talk about more concrete examples and, if you don't mind, bring in the question of what kind of events are significant and seem to be (without saying they actually are) the product of the cosmic Mind. I am referring to those meaningful events that seem to reveal truth to us – not quite what we think of as

coincidences. It is as if things occur or reveal themselves that seem to be for our own personal benefit, as if the cosmos is guiding us. How are such things generated?

I

I am not sure that “generated” is an appropriate word. All I can say is that nature, while being constantly changeable, occasionally reveals the unchanging reality beyond it and those moments are signs of Beauty, Truth and so on.

COUNTESS

Excuse me a moment. Why, in the infinite power of God, should the world not be perfect and whole from its beginning?

I

Another old question. It seems illogical to me. This World is a world of Nature and change. It might be a world which is growing towards perfection through a kind of cosmic evolution – or it might be a world that is moving from Unity towards infinite variety and collapse – but in which Unity is an occasionally potent memory.

Of course, there's no conflict between Creation and Evolution for most theologians. Creation means everything - and every event in time - not just the first things.

The Delight of creativity and love may be the tension between the move away from Unity in the physical cosmos and the eternal Idea of Unity. If the world was perfect we would not exist to be aware of it. We can only rejoice in imperfection. It is only because of change that we can be aware of the eternal. We certainly do not exist to reverse things and impose a material unity. The quest is to find a “spiritual” unity in a world of change.

COUNTESS

I rejoice in my imperfections, indeed, and even, the lady said many years ago, I find my sins are “behovely.” But these events in the world that seem to be part of our vocations, our guidings and moments of vision – what are they?

I

Moments of vision, or recognition – when we discover something of ourselves. Or they may be meetings with people that change our lives, or encounters with

mysterious or significant places, or with works of art – particularly those that make us feel a personal connection – which make us feel, at least, that the encounter happened for us.

COUNTESS

And these events give the impression that they have been pre-arranged?

I

Yes. But how can we know? They may be chance events. The only thing that matters is that they are significant. I strongly feel that these events are nothing to do with coincidences or synchronicity. Pure chance produces infinite coincidence. It is the meaning that matters in these events that guide us on our vocation.

COUNTESS

But if vocation is dependent on chance encounters, where is the vocation then?

I

It is in our own selves, waiting to be revealed.

COUNTESS

And it is revealed by events which show us our own mind reflected in Nature – or the Soul of the World. Our mind and the Mind of Nature are revealed as one. Perhaps this is a process of remembering what we already know.

I

And even so, if it reveals that our mind is one with the Mind of Nature (or should I say simply Mind) the question of whether the event is external or simply our way of seeing it becomes meaningless.

Perhaps I should add an editorial note. A word about Forms –

Confusingly “Forms” here usually mean the ultimate simple realities – Good, Truth, Beauty.

These are held to be the only “real” (i.e. eternal and unchanging) things.

Form is also used to mean a “work” in art or in nature. A simple tune has form – a group of phrases, like the parts of a sentence, assembled together to make a form, a thing made of smaller parts. A complete piece of music may be seen as a larger form made up of small forms, melodies,

rhythmic patterns, all brought together to make a larger object. On a still larger scale several pieces or movements may come together to form a symphony, or an opera etc.

Nature also assembles things into forms. Each individual thing has its own form - a tree, a stone, a creature – but many of these things may be drawn together to produce a larger form – a place, large or small. Similarly, a series of events may be drawn together to make a larger form – a life, a story.

These forms have a reflection (or vestige) of ultimate Forms in them. They seek Truth or Beauty in their formation. When a thing reveals its own Form or Idea it also reveals the higher Forms – by being “True” or “Beautiful”.

In other words “composition” is merely a small part of a natural process in all things - a tendency for things to come together to make forms and larger forms – and the structure or language that binds them together is the “hidden music” – all drawn by a desire to create a new unity (of infinite variety) out of the infinite fragments of the ever expanding world. So, this unity that is being sought is a quite different thing to the simple unity in which all things began.

It is important to think of “music” in terms of “pieces of music”, structures with form and meaning rather than “harmony” which is a static, vertical concept.

THE COMPOSER

The language of music itself (I seem to remember arguing, elsewhere in the garden) is a formal language translating a deeper level of meaning, the “hidden music”. The same deeper “hidden music” is the real work, the Ideal Form which the composer struggles to convert into sound, and it is the same deep language that we hear in all Nature – the language of meaning in everything, to which we can relate directly or attempt to translate into music or art.

As the musical work is NOT the notes but the underlying “hidden music” it would be possible to suggest that a work of music pre-existed, awaiting the composer to make it visible – or audible.

I

There may be cases in which the musical work is a direct “translation” of something else – but in the case of something original, the product of the composer’s mind, it is as if he is following an existing pattern or Form.

COUNTESS

The work may pre-exist? Do you mean that the “message” or the “hidden music” may pre-exist before you add the notes to it?

I

It may seem that way. The composer may have a complete message, or code, in his mind, and work to convey it in music. On the other hand, there could be another explanation for this apparent effect. He may create something without any pre-existent design but form it by judgment as he goes. He may follow innate, or acquired rules, for what is right in a piece following whatever seed or opening he has before him. In other words, the pattern may not pre-exist but the Rules for the creation of a work may pre-exist.

COUNTESS

So, you feel that a work could be pre-existent?

I

It can certainly seem so. There are cases when a composer has left a work unfinished. The listener, or another composer, can sense what the complete work should be. The music is projected into the gaps, or silence. But this may be innate judgment working on the material that it has before it.

COUNTESS

This may not argue for the pre-existence of the work but, instead, argue for the pre-existence of “innate judgment” or some pre-existent laws of order.

I

True.

COUNTESS

Is the same true of nature? Imagine a place, a hillside. Sometimes we feel it may be incomplete and that a shrine or temple will complete an inner message or meaning.

I

Yes. The hillside has reminded us of something else – or perhaps the natural desire to create and complete has inspired us to add a human touch.

COUNTESS

There is a natural desire to add something or complete the message. Yes. This suggests that art and creativity is inspired by an innate desire to complete what is imperfect – to fulfil an “absent good” as my friend Mr. Harris says, following Aristotle. But we can equally destroy the meaning or impose something inappropriate.

I

Yes, which is why we have to work hard to be true to ourselves – which depends on being part of the whole and not separate. This is always a fundamental law of the artist. Art is never self-serving. It is not self-expression, but a sharing in nature. If we build the temple on the hillside we must not be imposing ourselves but sharing our own nature with the nature of the hill.

COUNTESS

And the temple, being a complement and completion of the hill should not parody Nature. There is nothing more destructive than architecture which imitates organic nature. A simple geometric temple may complement nature, but an organic form can be a carbuncle or parody of nature.

But is the temple, if desired by the hillside, pre-existent?

I

Either it is, pre-existing externally, or our desire makes our mind part of the mind of nature and works in our imagination through innate judgement.

COUNTESS

Or the mind of God?

I

God is, by definition, all knowing and eternal. We may not be part of the Mind of God, but we may approach Truth through the Mind of Nature.

COUNTESS

To all extents and purposes the temple is pre-existent because the hillside is, at it were, an unfinished work of art.

I

Yes

COUNTESS

And so, we can say that our aim in creating any building should be that, to our best skill and judgment, it seems as if it were pre-existent?

I

Yes.

COUNTESS

And this is the same result of skill, memory and judgment as you would use in composing a piece of music?

I

Precisely the same.

COUNTESS

And so, the fundamental skill of any artist, in any medium, is the learning of judgment, the acquiring of an innate judgment – the rules of correct grammar in the universal language. We may call it taste.

I

Yes.

COUNTESS

And Taste is not a personal taste but a learnt skill?

I

Very much so.

COUNTESS

The language of which we learn the grammar is true of music, poetry, nature, behaviour, ethics?

I

Yes. We learn the grammar of the “hidden music” to be able to read it and work with it in the world. We learn by imitation and by being inspired by the flashes of knowledge and delight when we are aware of the Forms.

COUNTESS

I can see that in music, being a complex abstract construction of harmony, melody, form, expression, memory, is peculiarly close in nature to the “hidden music” or language in all things.

I

I feel music, understood in this way, is the clearest way we have of understanding the reality of the “hidden music”. If I may refer to a literary work from after your time. Herman Hesse’s “The Glass Bead Game” describes an abstract game which translates the universal hidden language – but, in fact, music is, in itself, this “Glass Bead Game”.

In theory any concepts might be attached to musical ideas (themes, harmonies) and their relationships explored through musical relationships. I refer to abstract, pure music, instrumental music.

COUNTESS

Good, as I am, as it were, a patroness of instrumental music, I am delighted that you have raised instrumental music to pre-eminence – though I may be deluded by vanity. Perhaps the purest music belongs to Urania, who rules over pure harmony.

I

Perhaps, but I am always your votary.

COUNTESS

I am delighted that you are.

What then is the vocation of the composer? It seems a burden – hard work and lack of recognition or understanding.

I

It may be a burden, but the vocation is irresistible. The moments of delight are rare but fill us with the desire for more. Moments of vision excite desire. The process is a process of love.

COUNTESS

Ah, love, which has had so small a part in our conversation...I would say that love is the medium as delight is the reward. But where is it that love leads you? Why create this music?

I

Music is, indeed, part of the service of love. It is writing, or simply contemplating, the music that matters. Composing is an exploration of the world, or of the possibilities of the hidden language – which is the meaning hidden in the world. Our music is a diary of the exploration. The imagination is the alembic of experience – purifying experience into a communicable language. (Imagination is never an “escape” from reality but our means of understanding.) It may not be necessary for the music to be performed or to have an audience. The work of composing is an end in itself. Our first desire is to explore. To convey what we discover is a secondary desire.

COUNTESS

Would you be content to compose purely as an act of contemplation?

I

Yes – and perhaps there is even the possibility of not composing at all. The vocation may simply to explore the possibilities. Perhaps my own desire is to follow the hidden music, to trace its roads through the world. Perhaps I will abandon public life and write purely for myself, to make that music audible for myself – until I can simply hear it as I travel. Hear, and contemplate.

COUNTESS

It may be satisfactory to some, this monastic way – but there is a need to pass love on. Desire burns from the world to the artist, from the artist to the audience. There are many levels of communication. The music must be composed. It must be brought to new life by performers. (As patroness of instrumental music I do not hold performing musicians in so low a regard as Mr. Boethius.) The listeners receive the hidden language and clothe it with their own memories and feelings so that the language becomes part of them. Desire drives these waves of communication, but I would suggest that the composer should never be driven by the need to be heard. The composer must serve music and, if the music desires to be heard he should follow that flame, but he himself should remain invisible. He is only a medium, as the performers are.

I

I agree. I, too, would not wish to denigrate performers, who deserve respect for their skills, but they are servants of music as much as the composer. They should also be invisible through humility.

COUNTESS

We suggested that musical works might be said to pre-exist and that the composer simply reveals them. Might such “works” exist in nature? Such “works” may be present both in space and time – as combinations of objects or in series of events.

There is, for example, our hillside which demands a temple. That hillside is a “work” to which we, as architect, may be a contributor. There may be a place which has a complete story to tell. There may be a series of events on that hill which are brought about by a hidden music which nature composes. There may be fundamental harmonies or themes which recur in different times and places, as different interpretations of one idea.

I

It is an attractive idea and one that seems to be supported by experience – the harmonious relationship of events which create a story with no material causal connection...

COUNTESS

The hidden music in all nature gives meaning to things and, in what we have called the Dance, forms distinct works. The One draws things towards each other to create larger forms, works, sonatas and symphonies.

I

If so the human mind, which has learned the workings of the hidden music, may be able to foresee the form of such works.

COUNTESS

Which is, of course, prophecy – not concerned with the future, of course, but with seeing the “truth” in things. So, a composer can be a prophet?

I

In that sense – as a listener to the hidden music.

COUNTESS

To go back to these “Works” in nature – these are the same as the “works” of a human life – the shaping of a person into a work, a dance, a symphony.

I

Indeed.

COUNTESS

In which case the same understanding of music – in the broader sense of form, works, structure, development, is the same understanding as is necessary to understand the vocation of a life, or the stories and works in nature.

I

It would seem so.

COUNTESS

I would say it was indeed so as the hidden language or meaning in nature whether in place, or space, or in time is the same language – which, in your case, is understood as a hidden music.

I

This is how it seems to me.

COUNTESS

And there is only one language of relationships and meaning which is the same meaning in any aspect of life or nature and is produced by the working of love, drawn by the One, to produce smaller and larger Forms or Works in all things. And the same process is shared by the artist, who is simply another creative facet of Nature.

I

Yes – and I would say that the study of music is the best way we have of understanding the workings of that language – and this is a new gift. In ancient times people studied harmony in all things – the vertical and timeless aspect as it were, but in recent times music has developed into a complex language of form which more closely reflects the language of Nature.

COUNTESS

Yes – an important point. This is a new knowledge. Not everything of value comes from Ancient Wisdom. Sometimes there are new discoveries – though they may be inspired by the Ancient world.

The new knowledge depends on the artificial creation of a musical technique which is complex enough to imitate nature, either in the contrasting tonalities and structures of our music or the elaborations of music based on expression and elaboration. Music has developed into such a language only since the rediscovery of the ancient world and of drama and, more importantly, comedy. The language of comedy brings surprise, contrast, and the bizarre juxtapositions of nature – and music learned comic form and timing with the Opera Buffo and such men as my delightful friend Galuppi. Perhaps these comic artists should be celebrated as much as the tragedians.

I

Thalia, the muse of the Earth and Comedy is held to be silent, but the earthly music is the mixed music which draws on all the heavenly modes. Her music is the Hidden music - and perhaps it is Comedy, rather than tragedy, however melancholy it might be at times.

COUNTESS

How curious, that the most worldly music, the cut and thrust of the comic muse, is closest to the subtleties of the hidden music of nature.

I

And that some mindless and featureless “mystical music” – intended for relaxation or trances – is the furthest from the workings of love. It is simply bland and lifeless music to induce sleep. Silence is the only true music of the Negative Way. The true mystic engages with silence – or engages with the full reality of the broken world.

COUNTESS

Would you say that the vocation of the composer is the same as that of the priest?

I

That is a question for your friend Miss Maude....

(We had been joined by a friend of the Countess - a darker figure, perhaps a member of a religious order.)

MAUDE

Thank you for drawing me into your conversation. The process of vocation is working in all souls. Love draws us to the pattern of what we should be. The composer’s vocation is to explore the hidden music, as you call it. One part of a priest’s vocation may be to study scripture which he reads as if it were music – attentive, understanding the stories, images and forms. Though scripture may be read in three ways, the literal and the allegoric and as music. To me it is always the story, or the poetry, that conveys meaning, not the literal meaning of the words – exactly as with liturgy. I would always say “pass on the story, never what you think it means.” The true meaning of scripture and liturgy (what we do in worship – action, gesture, words) may lie in small details of gesture or language which we do not understand if we interpret literally.

The priest may also use his understanding of the hidden music to examine the world, providence, and his own or other’s vocations – but the distinct feature of a priest’s

vocation must be a specific desire for God, or the one – which, in my tradition, would be above all a calling to meet God in the Eucharist.

Without this the vocation is the calling towards knowledge that everyone shares in different ways, even if it can so easily be turned in on itself.

COUNTESS

What kind of music, then, should a composer produce when he follows this vocation?

I

I see four different kinds of music which follow this working of love. I would say all are equally “religious” or “spiritual”, but none need be sacred or liturgical music. To me the comic muse may bring us closest to God. Sacred music, as generally understood, is music with a liturgical function, music to be used in church. It may be inspired but more often it is purely functional, setting words in a practical way. The music itself may have no deeper value.

I could divide music into four parts:

1 – Contemplative music – the composition of which contemplates the meanings of correspondences in the world, (contemplating experiences, memories) or as abstract ideas. This music may be purely theoretical or purely contemplative and never exist as a Sounding or “heard music.”

2 – Abstract music – Music which explores purely musical language with no background of other meanings – this would include exercises in fugue, counterpoint or any abstract structures. Though the composer may work in a purely abstract frame of mind the music is still an exploration of meaning and the hidden music. It is a study of language itself.

3 – Music about the world – Music which attempts to translate the hidden music into heard music. It may attempt to communicate a quality or meaning which the composer has experienced. It may be music exploring “The Spirit of Place”, a story, a relationship.

For example - a composer may explore the natural forms, stories and feelings of a place and attempt to translate them into music – to reveal their mystery to others, or to develop a relationship. This is a curious and rare role for a composer, but it may be part of a vocation.

4 – Music for the World – Music which has a complementary role. We might compose music to create a particular mood, or we may compose music for a place, or person, to give something, to create a counterpoint, or, in a way, as healing or a prayer.

COUNTESS

This classification of music is quite new to me. I wonder if every kind of music would fit these categories?

I

I think so. Most everyday music would be in the fourth category – it need not be deeply prayerful or seriously healing – it might simply be meant for amusement or delight – though what could be more healing than that? I suppose liturgical music would fit this area too, though I could add a fifth category for purely functional music, which may have no value or meaning in itself. It might include background music that fills silences in shops, music that is purely designed to set a rhythm but has no other musical content (capstan shanties, military drumming, rave music) Of course any of these functional kinds of music may also be high art.

MAUDE

I wonder if your concept of this hidden music as a deep language beneath all language, and beneath the forms of things may explain the ancient idea of speaking in tongues? Perhaps there are times when the pure meaning is so strong that we do not have any language to communicate it – and so the pure meaning (not merely pure emotion) is expressed in apparently meaningless sounds. It is as if someone is inspired to sing, or perhaps improvise at the organ, but has no skill or technique so the meaning (which, if this is true, is meaning and not simply nonsense or hysteria) pours out in whatever impression of a language we can produce.

I

If all such people had received a thorough training in extempore organ playing they would have become Bachs.

COUNTESS

Perhaps we simply need to sing. We can know music through singing. If we can sing we have, you would say, a purer language with which to express meaning.

MAUDE

We only know beauty through knowing the beautiful. We only know love through loving. Your Platonic Forms or Ideas may be real, but we know them through our experiences of our own world and our own life.

I

I like to think that all Nature is communicating, performing the hidden music. It is constantly changing and making new forms, new works, but it is always singing. In this way I can understand that the world is an emanation of God, to use a Platonic term, but I am unhappy with the Platonic idea of a series of emanations, of a chain of existence growing further and further from God. Surely the humblest thing is as close to its source as the most beautiful and perfect? The world may be, though, a constantly evolving thing, the creation of the Trinity, a God who is constantly dancing through nature. Our God is not a remote being divorced from creation but an eternal dance. The Trinity is the source of all Performance and Composition. Relationships and Performance are at the heart of all things in our tradition. The whole world is a performance, all parts of the world are singing, playing, listening, contemplating, communicating. The whole performance of many small works, songs, dances, sonatas, or larger structures – symphonies, operas, comedies and tragedies – is driven by love, the Trinity, in its continuous creation, and illuminated by those sparks of grace or knowledge of truth which are our treasures and rewards.

LOVE

It may have been the same day, it may have been another. It was late afternoon and there was a burnished evening light on the walnut trees. In the valleys lemons were radiantly yellow under their dark leaves. I had been surprised to find a group of entertainers in the garden. They had arrived to amuse the Countess. It might seem strange that such a woman would be amused by these brightly coloured tumblers and jugglers, but I suspect they were part of her retinue, or under her patronage. During our continuing walk I was occasionally distracted by flashes of red and gold between the trees and statuary.

COUNTESS

There was a phrase that struck me in our last conversation - "The workings of Love." It may be meaningless, but it seems to have meaning. Perhaps this afternoon should spend some time considering that neglected topic, Love.

I

A very difficult topic – and one that may lead to conjecture and fantasy.

COUNTESS

But we may, at least, discuss the old questions with different language and, perhaps, cast some new light.

I

Yes. Let us look at the world in terms of Love. It is such a central issue to the artist and also to the theologian and yet it is one that is rarely discussed logically.

COUNTESS

Can we discuss it logically?

I

Perhaps to a certain degree.

When I used the phrase “the workings of Love” (though was it your phrase?) I was imagining something close to my old idea of the Dance in the World. We have already talked about the hidden music in all things – as a language that can exist in many translations, of which music may be a more precise means of translation than any other. We also discussed the idea of vocation – a tendency for a person to be drawn to a particular end. In the case of vocation we could simply say that a person gradually discovers his own soul, or his own potential, and in following a course of discovery it appears that the world responds, or supports, or encourages, his journey.

The “Workings of Love” suggests that there is an active force in the world. We can imagine that there is a hidden music in things. Can we imagine that there is, also, a performance? An active process with audience, performer, working together?

Can we imagine that imagination itself works in all things, and that there is a desire in all things?

COUNTESS

Love being desire?

I

Love, in this case, is an attraction through imagination. I am not thinking about human love at this point. Perhaps Love is the same in all things, creative, physical – but let us start with a broader picture.

COUNTESS

Is it not sadly possible that people simply imagine that the desire produced by their own physical needs is a universal principle?

I

And we project a purely imaginary idea of love onto the cosmos? Well, if we do it may be all we can ever know. I do not separate mind from body. Are agape and eros ever really separate?

COUNTESS

Plato, and his commentator our beloved Marsilio Ficino, speak in terms of the two Venuses.

I

Are they not reflections of each other?

COUNTESS

Surely the physical may engender imagination? Sometimes, of course, it may produce grotesque imaginings.

I

If there is a distinction to be made it could be between love as a creative force and negative desires. The old-fashioned sins are a useful guide. Lust is misdirected love. Are not all sins misdirected loves? Misdirected usually towards the self.

Love, the love we are considering, is a regard for another object which generates a desire for that object.

COUNTESS

A desire that may or not be physical.

I

It may be either, or a mixture. The desire may be a recognition of something lacking in the soul of the lover, or it may be a recognition of a reflection of the lover – a reflection in the beloved object of what the lover should be. It may be part of the process of vocation.

COUNTESS

Ah – and that may be a process which is beyond ourselves. Love in the cosmos may provide that object through the steps of the Dance? Vocation, as a cosmic force, may provide a Lover?

I

It may seem that way – and certainly has seemed that way in my experience – but I am careful to appear, at least, sceptical. Your Ficino also says that loving an object creates love in an object. If someone loves another the other will respond.

COUNTESS

Would it were so!

I

I think this is more a philosophical concept than an observation from experience.

COUNTESS

I wonder. But you speak of objects. You are trying to avoid the specifically human experience.

I

Yes. I suppose I am trying to argue that love is a cosmic principal and not just a projection of our human needs. Love is a sharing of imagination which engenders desire. We have already allowed the concept of an Imagination in the world. (I still try to avoid the word "Soul.")

COUNTESS

The sharing is not always reciprocated.

I

If we believe that there is an "imagination" in the cosmos, a capability of things to make forms and have meaning, can we say that love is a general principle which engenders desire, movement, in all things?

COUNTESS

We can say it. We know what we mean by it. Others may not. But let's call that principle, or energy, Love – for the moment.

I

We might say that Love is the essential force of existence. Would our friend Maude find this language acceptable? Let us say –

God regards his creation. God simultaneously draws creation into imagination and draws creation from imagination. The energy, Love, is produced from the relationship of a created thing and its idea or form in the divine imagination.

COUNTESS

I feel Maude would be generally pleased with this image of God creating through love – a continuous process – a circular process. God's desire creates the Forms to which creation flows. But there are dangers in using the word "Creation".

I

It is a misused word. We are not thinking of any act of manufacture at a specific time – but the more I think of it the more appropriate the word seems. The energy of love between object and Idea is an eternal process of creation. The thing is constantly becoming a reflection of the Idea. "Works" are continually being formed as well as individual things.

COUNTESS

Very good. And the thing regards its Idea. I like this concept of gazing, regarding, admiring.

I

And so, the existence, or being, of anything is a working of Love.

COUNTESS

It may be so. It may be there is only one Love.

(Maude had joined us.)

MAUDE

If I may put what I understand you have been discussing in my own words –

“Love draws all things towards their Idea in the Mind of God.”

I might dare to suggest that your Platonic idea that our Form or Idea existed in the Mind of God is to be found even in the Psalmist:

*“My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,*

*your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.”*

COUNTESS

Ah yes - as a very elegant poetic lady once translated the same verse:

*Nay fashionless, ere form I took,
Thy all and more beholding eye
My shapeless shape
Could not escape:
All these time framed successively
Ere one had being, in the book
Of thy foresight enrolled did lie.*

MAUDE

The desire that draws us, or a work, or nature is produced by the Idea or Form of what we, or the work, should be, and eternally is in the World of Forms. The energy that draws us, or it, is Love.

Is this not the working of the Holy Trinity? God the Father is the source of Being. The Word is the Form and the Spirit is the Love that draws us toward our vocation.

I

Thank you. Somehow all the vaguenesses of our Platonic conversation are resolved when you use your Christian terminology.

MAUDE

My faith is entirely concerned with the workings of Love.

I

Our difficulty is in using these words with common understanding. It is almost impossible to talk in Christian language as everyone means completely different things by the same words – they are divided by a common language. Not least the word "God" which, to some, means something in which it is easy to disbelieve and to others means a simple and necessary One or Being.

“Love draws all things towards their Idea (or Form) in the mind of God.”

This is, if understood in the way you intend, exactly how I feel about my own vocation as a composer and about the music itself. The music follows its own vocation. It desires to be composed. Both the music and I follow this desire purely to reveal the Unity.

MAUDE

Which is, to me, simply God, revealed through the working of Love.

COUNTESS

Maude has the benefit of a simple faith. She feels no need to question words. And she feels very little need to use words at all. I, like you, am a sadly confused being. I enjoy my struggles to find glimpses of Truth in a walk in the garden or in a fine lemon ice. Maude is capable of love. It's not the way of negation she follows. She affirms all because she is simply herself.

MAUDE

Madame, I am nothing.

I

In our discussions of music we agreed that individual things are part of greater works. A tree is part of a landscape. A harmony is part of a sonata.

COUNTESS

Indeed. There are larger forms made of many individual objects.

I

So – these larger forms are also produced by the creative tension of Love between Nature and Form.

COUNTESS

Yes – if we accept that there is an imagination in the cosmos.

MAUDE

Which is not the One, or God, but the regard of God in Nature. God remains simple and unknowable.

I

Yes. Some say “Jesus the Imagination” of “The Divine Imagination”.

COUNTESS

Or call this world of ideas “The Virgin Sophia” – though it cannot, we feel, be a mere collection of patterns but a constantly creating imagination.

Shall we say –

There is a Working of Love in the greater forms moulding the material world to the Idea or pattern. Oh, how fanciful we Platonists can be.

MAUDE

This is the Spirit processing from the One and the Word. The dance of creation is the reflection of the Trinity. Though God is simple, love, One, Good, he works through all creation in the relationship of the Trinity, the constant interchange of love, infinitely creative.

COUNTESS

Are we thinking of two forces or one?

Firstly – the desire that draws an object to the imagination or soul of the lover.

Secondly – the force that draws an object towards its Idea, or draws things to create larger forms which also are drawn to their Ideas in the Divine Imagination.

I

These are, surely, the same. Love draws lovers together to create larger forms just as love draws natural things to make a beautiful landscape, or musical ideas together to form a work. It is one process and these three things often serve each other. Human love affects the world in which lives. A musical world may depend on the personal experience and vocation of its composer.

MAUDE

This is a way of understanding the Trinity, working through love. I would suggest that your ideas, sir, are closer to the theology of the Trinity than they are to Platonic thought. Plato's Ideas could be understood as a rather naive way of understanding how a horse is born a horse, due to a pre-existing Idea of "horse", in the absence of an understanding of genetics. The process you describe is far closer to the working of the Trinity, constantly drawing individual things to form new expressions of unity while retaining their individual qualities. The "Ideas in the Mind of God" are fragments of the idea of Unity, new compositions of sounds, nature, life, rather than the simple "ideas" of Plato. Perhaps you would find a friend in St Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor, who absorbed your Plato into a purely Christian vision in which Christ was central.

In Christ we have the glory and the wounds, the joy and pain, the harmony and creative discord.

COUNTESS

Ah, the Dance takes shape!

And, at that moment, it was embodied by the dancers who emerged from a gazebo. As two red and gold figures tumbled another sang to a hurdy gurdy. In the same colourful spangled costume it was difficult at first to know whether it was a boy or a girl, but her voice was that of a girl. There was a certain familiarity in her appearance. Someone I had met before? Or passed on the road? Which road might it have been? A road through western forests or a road that led to these southern climes, the lemon tree country?

(Notes 6/06 - 12/06)

PILGRIMAGE - THE MUSIC OF THE SOUL

Sometime later the Countess and the quietly mysterious Maude and I continued our conversations. This episode seems to have a nocturnal quality, perhaps simply because it turns more on Maude's theological views than the earlier conversations. I myself, as well as my music, moved from the one to other, to and fro, from the Platonic delights of the Countess to the more melancholy spirituality of the other lady.

The conversation grew from a curious piece of text which I had stumbled upon, from a letter by Peter Sterry to his son.

"Let us ever remember that we are here in our pilgrimage and Disguise. Let us have our own country and the way to it ever in our hearts..."

...Musick made by the heavenly spheres of the divine beings themselves in us, by the Charms of which even our house, our Pilgrimage, and all things in it are turned into heavenly dances and delights."

(Peter Sterry - Selected Writings ed. N I Matar, University of Kansas 1994)

MAUDE

We are always travelling. We are drawn by faith in another country, somewhere peaceful, complete and beautiful. However much we love the world through which we pass it is only ever a byway on our journey.

I

There are so many ideas in this one fragment of Sterry. He is a forgotten man but in a mysterious way he brings together all the themes that matter to me. He touches for a few moments an ideal balance of Platonism and Christianity. He knows his Ficino and understands the hidden music in the world.

COUNTESS

This short letter unites us all. Here is the idea of Pilgrimage, and the Music of the Spheres sounding in the Soul which seems to echo Marsilio's "De Amore".

MAUDE

His sacred references are to Psalm 119 and the Letter to the Hebrews, speaking of our pilgrimage to the Holy City.

I

There are questions here for which I would like to find an answer.

How do I find a balance between the love of this world, knowing it is ever changeable, and a desire for another world which I sense in the pursuit of music?

What songs do I sing when I know the Music of the Spheres in my soul?

MAUDE

There are those who would reject this world and those who see it as the Book of Nature, a way of knowing God. I would ask whether we can ever know the eternal world in this life without loving the temporal world? We may only know truth through our experience of transitory things. We must value the world, and at the same time become aware that there is another world, shining beyond the veil.

COUNTESS

Some would say that we should look no further than this world. Love the veil of nature.

MAUDE

Is the value of nature only in the way it reveals higher things? We have already considered the view that we know ideal reality through loving individual things. We love people through loving a person. We love nature through loving a garden or a simple plant. Unity is known through variety. The love of an individual thing shows us beauty, form, life. We must be detached enough to love, through the appearance or the image. If we love a flower and fancy it will last forever, we are clearly fooling ourselves. We can love it for its transitoriness and learn to love beauty from it. We can only learn that love by loving the temporal world as it is, changeable, growing and decaying.

COUNTESS

Do we need anything more? Why do we desire the other world?

MAUDE

We desire it because we know it. We know beauty. We know that the form and meaning of nature is not in the natural changeable features it presents. A beautiful

place may remain beautiful if all its parts change. Its beauty still remains as an Idea when everything temporal is gone. We still remember the song when the singers have departed.

I

Or the nightingales?

COUNTESS

We remember it. Others do not. I have heard some who deny God speak of wonder and delight in Nature. Wonder and Delight are our images of God and the eternal. Do such people forget the song?

I

And are they fit only for treasons, stratagems and spoils?

You both love the world as it is, frail and mutable. You both have a desire for that world beyond the veil - and so do I. The source of my music is not in the changeable world of nature, though nature may sing the songs and provide the language. Is there any difference between your views of that world? Maude may think of the Heavenly City. The Countess thinks of the Realm of Ideas, or Venus' house of fair aspect, as Spenser calls it. Are they the same?

MAUDE

There is only one truth – or it is not Truth. We may use different languages. We may argue about our language, but we cannot argue about what is true. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews may have known his Plato – or his associates may have passed on a Platonic feeling through the Jewish philosopher Philo.

COUNTESS

And I wonder if the writer of the Gospel of John knew the Symposium. What other dialogue about Love could he have used as a model for his dinner party conversation? Or we for ours, indeed.

MAUDE

He may simply have been inspired – but there is a parallel if there is truth in both traditions.

I

We agree that we are on a pilgrimage to another world. We are citizens of that city?

COUNTESS

Oh, yes.

MAUDE

My heart is there.

I

Is everyone, can everyone be?

MAUDE

At heart, but it is a blessing or curse to some of us to be aware of its calling. Many may happily live a simpler life; many may live the life of that City within this temporal world, simply loving. An artist, or a person of prayer, both, perhaps, flawed people who are unable to live a simple, single, life, may know themselves to be strangers and pilgrims.

I

As pilgrims what should our relationship with this earthly world be? Do we care for it? Do we observe it and pass on? Do we have a responsibility to make it like that other world through our art or our ethical and social life?

MAUDE

Is it possible? Some try to impose unity – a parody of the simplicity of the City - onto a very different reality. To impose unity is to go against nature. As we have previously considered only the infinite variety of nature can find Unity.

I

I agree. It's always a disaster if we try to impose a political order inspired by unworldly images of Unity. We have two choices - to remove ourselves from the world and follow the negative way, or to try to live through love and justice. We can never impose our own dreams of unity on others.

MAUDE

No, or we damage divine variety - the fecundity and creativity of nature. The constantly creative nature finds unity through Forms rather than any imposed order that tries to recreate a primal state.

Let us all, if we are composers like you, write beautiful and true string quartets. Let us not try to write one monstrous work in which everyone has an inhuman part.

I

Would you not wish for religious unity?

MAUDE

The Church is both a spiritual and a social or political body. It is the earthly part of the Heavenly Kingdom. In what way it should achieve earthly unity I could not say. Perhaps it is meant to be an unanswered question, but it is never true to say that the Church is only a spiritual unity. It struggles to be incarnate. Churches are not temples but images of the Temple. The church is the Eucharist. It is a shared community of not only earthly, living, people, but also the saints and all others past and present. The Communion of Saints. There are those who have found their true selves in the Kingdom and those of us who celebrate imperfect and broken life "below". There is one Temple and many imperfect and broken temples. I am not sure I would have it any other way. It expresses Unity in its brokenness.

COUNTESS

Is this Heavenly Kingdom the same as the Platonic World of Ideas?

I

I would say so. The Ideas and the Soul are eternal. We have previously considered that this World of Ideas is not an abstract, static thing but the cause of all creation.

I would accept that the immortal Soul (whether one or many) is eternally existent. I would not accept the existence of people living in another world after death and yet somehow as they are now. That seems to be a fairly recent misconception.

MAUDE

"Eternal soul" is misleading, perhaps. Platonists may believe that souls are pre-existent, but the Christian tradition is that souls are created individually but are immortal.

Do you feel you are a member of community with these eternal or immortal souls?

I

Yes. When a loved one dies we may suddenly be aware of the reality or wholeness of that person, even if we may feel, in our earthly way, that the life has been cut short before its time. The Soul, the true nature, of the person may suddenly become known. I remember the dead child in the poem Pearl appears as a beautiful maiden. She never lived to adulthood, but her Soul appears as the true Pearl maiden. Both Soul and Eternal City are the thing the earthly world aspires to but it may never materially become that Ideal. It doesn't need to. How awful it would be if I wrote a perfect piece of music! It would be unnatural and destroy desire.

COUNTESS

We, living now, may become aware of our own Souls as they are in that place and should be on earth – reflected in the eyes of a beloved or in the image of a guardian angel. There is a tradition that guardian angels are the reflections of our Souls, our Ideas.

MAUDE

We, our souls, are eternally present in that world and we have glimpses of it as we walk here. We are drawn through the Workings of Love to become ourselves and, by walking in two worlds, to reveal the eternal through our footsteps.

I

Yes, indeed. It is more those glimpses which inspire us and drive us. I know this from experience and I gradually come to understand it.

I may be a Citizen of an Eternal Kingdom but the wonder is that those glimpses inspire us to love the temporal world. We do not reject it. We live in the Eternal Kingdom when we listen to the hidden music in this world, just as we find truth in music however tragic and broken.

MAUDE

Perhaps the answer is to say that there are not two worlds but one. The division is in us. This world takes its form from the eternal – more than that – it is a partial view of the eternal. In a Glass, Darkly, as St Paul said. We do not live in a separated creation but always in the Mind of God.

I

Yes, I feel the truth of what you say. It is a treasure that has often been lost. We are within an emanation of God, not a creation which is separated from God. The two alternative views are views of one reality and both as old as each other. Our arrogance can make us wish to be separated and independent.

I am gathering my treasures.

Love as the energy which draws things to their Forms in the Mind of God.

The Unity of Temporal and Eternal Worlds.

We are Citizens of both Worlds.

The Soul is Eternal, our Idea or Form.

We are inspired by signs in the world to reveal the True Kingdom to others – not to make this world like the eternal (because there is only one world) – but by love, creativity, variety revealing Truth.

So far this seems to accord with both the Countess's Platonism (or is it Ficino?) and Maude's Christian vision.

MAUDE

Mr. Ficino is more in accord with Christ than he is with Mr Plato.

COUNTESS

I do not follow any philosopher. I am what I am.

MAUDE

Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor, whom you would find very congenial, calls the signs of God in the world "Vestiges".

I

I am beginning to understand my relationship with the world through which I make my pilgrimage. Not to escape it, but to love it, to reveal the eternal through love and work – and in doing so to affirm the value and meaning of the world.

More and more I realise that my life has been shaped by this. The experiences and mysteries of it may take 30 years to resolve, but they follow one journey, one story, one vocation. I am thankful that I myself have never felt "complete" but always feel the need to travel.

MAUDE

The need to travel is the desire to discover the new world. The ancient pilgrimage was always to a place on this earth where heaven and earth were linked, not to a “world to come.” The tradition, perhaps a Protestant one, of which Sterry speaks of may seem a denial of this world – hoping to leave it. A pilgrimage to an earthly place may become idolatry. We should not travel to a delusion or an idol which takes the place of God, but we should travel to see, or meet, God in the world and in doing so become Citizens of the True Kingdom. Holy places to which we travel may be holy in themselves or memorials of holy lives or events, but they are never an end in themselves.

I

The Puritan pilgrimage of “The Pilgrim’s Progress” is an escape from this world, and yet to me it had the opposite effect and one that was enormously important to my journey. I imagined Bunyan’s pilgrimage in real earthly landscapes and it became a story of a journey of discovery through real places. It gave me the desire to travel and the travelling is my work – whether on real or imaginary roads.

COUNTESS

Imagination is always “real”. The imagination is our means of understanding the world, sensing, arranging, judging, remembering. Our imagination is the laboratory of the senses, the gallery of memory, and through it we discover truth. Art, the work of imagination, is never an escape.

As a classicist I would say that I favour works that are purely themselves, abstract forms rather than representative, but these pure forms are the distillation of meaning, the concentration from nature and experience. Pure art, pure music, is natural in itself.

I

True. There is a tendency to use music or the other arts as fantasy, creating an alternative world, which can be an escape.

COUNTESS

A fantasy may be true. It can only be distilled from nature – but it can be unsatisfying and unnecessary.

True music does not imitate. By being true to itself it inspires the listener to open their eyes and ears to truth in the world.

I

What would Maude see as the truest music?

MAUDE

Music may be praise and worship – but the music our friend speaks of is worship and praise in its purity, by being music. It need not be “about” praise or worship. All music is a reflection of the music of the Holy Trinity, God eternally loving, creating.

MAUDE and the COUNTESS

Music should be valued as a divine gift with its own truth, as the essence of nature’s language, and not made a servant or imitator.

I

I agree that this is an ideal to work to, but I may find it hard to achieve with my melancholy side and the need to use music as a comfort or meditation.

COUNTESS

If we may go back to Mr. Sterry’s text...

He speaks of the “musick made by the spheres of the divine beings themselves in us.”

This is a charming proof that Mr. Sterry knew his Ficino intimately. Our souls are composed of the same harmonies as the planets and they sing their own part in the same symphony.

I

What can this mean to our modern scientific world? The ancient belief was that the universe reflected the same harmonies as music. The ancient solar system was a gigantic musical scale. The planets sang their notes and guided a particular mode, a mood or emotion or archetypal quality. These same harmonies are in our own Souls, which, after all, a part or reflection of the Soul of the World.

Even if we know that the universe is not a simple harmonious sphere, or series of spheres, we do know that music is true. Harmony is real. The fundamental harmonies may be true in all levels and kinds of existence. It may not be possible to analyse this in detail, but we could say that the meaning of Sterry’s words still has value. The Soul is made up of the same harmonies as the cosmos. We might equally say that the archetypal qualities in the Soul are also true in the whole of Nature.

We are made of the stuff of Nature, so our Souls must be also a reflection of the Mind of Nature.

COUNTESS

In 20th century terms we might put it that the psychological archetypes, the underlining qualities of the mind, are also true in all Nature. And they sing together.

I

Yes, the meaning is clear. Ficino can be read as a picturesque language of psychology. The ancient view of the planets is still true as a diagram or graph of archetypal meaning.

MAUDE

In your melancholy moments, Sir, you may use music as a comfort and a meditation. Even if you imagine you are creating an alternative world, or an escape, you are, in the process of composing, meditating on the language of all Nature. If you meditate on experience or a beloved place in your music you are also meditating on the language of nature itself, and this can only lead to God if the artist works in humility and does not attempt to reflect himself. All people in themselves are images of God but that image becomes distorted if it reflects itself. Our true nature should be to reflect others, or the world – passing on the “regard” of God for creation.

I

The artist should always be humble. His only delight is in revealing something to others. If he achieves a work of any quality it is as much a surprise to him as to anyone. Ideally all artist should be invisible.

MAUDE

We are part of one music. We do not deny this world in our pilgrimage. We reveal the True Kingdom in our songs, which become Dances and Delights.

I

This must be my vocation.

(Notes July- August 2007)

MAUDE ON THE TRINITY – THE WAY OF NEGATION

(This seems to have taken place later that evening. The sun was setting. We walked close to the house. Someone was playing the guitar in one of the cloister rooms – if this is still Ravello. Was it the girl whom I had noticed amongst the tumblers in an earlier afternoon?)

MAUDE

The process of composition is a means of meditating on the creative spirit in the world. It makes no difference whether the music is attempting to convey an experience or describe an object, or whether the music is purely music, following its own nature. Music is part of the same world, and it is drawn towards its form in the same way as natural things or lives are drawn to their forms.

Music is an exemplar of the creative process in nature. Though the artist is seemingly the creator he can only follow the same creative spirit which works in everything.

I

I certainly feel that anything good that I do is not my own work. I could even say that that's a way I can judge whether the thing was worth doing. If it doesn't feel like my own work it probably has value. So, I have no qualms about ascribing anything of value to an outside agent.

MAUDE

I am very pleased to hear it. All artistic creation should come from a state of humility. Even if it is not a completely sincere one.

I

Well, I can easily feel humble at the same time as enjoying a little pride in my work sometimes. I'm no saint. If I were I might be humble enough to do nothing. Perhaps all art comes from our itching at flaws, like the pearl in the oyster shell.

MAUDE

The process of composition is a meditation on the nature of the process and a participation in the work of the creative spirit. It can also, of course, be a meditation on the experiences which may have "inspired" the work. Perhaps that isn't an appropriate word. I should say "the experiences which suggest the work."

I

Do you allow inspiration in this working of the creative spirit?

MAUDE

Indeed, but I reserve the term to mean those moments of knowledge or energy when the spirit works at its clearest or most open in the soul.

I

When it all seems to come naturally.

MAUDE

Yes, exactly – meaning the moments when the artist is most aware that he is acting with the spirit. Could this inspiration be the real reason why people are driven by a desire to work so hard? These moments of delight in the work itself, or found in the subject on which the artist is meditating in his work?

I

Yes, I think so. The desire to do all this painful and exhausting work (which it certainly is) must be driven by something very powerful – these sparks of delight when the thing comes together, when there is a touch of inspiration, in the genuine sense.

MAUDE

Is this delight found in the work the same as the mystery you sense in the world – that sparks the desire to work?

I

You can sense mystery in beauty, or in a sense of hidden meaning in the world. Yes. It's the sense of that creative spirit at work, or of a form or meaning in things.

MAUDE

The same mystery, the source of delight, is in the spirit, the active working energy, and in the form, or meaning?

I

Yes.

MAUDE

This is your experience?

I

A very real experience.

MAUDE

I am very pleased to hear it. Could this be, then, an experience of what I would call the Word in nature and the Spirit working towards form?

I

I see, you are thinking of the Holy Trinity – or two of its three "persons". Not an easy idea to grasp.

MAUDE

But you have grasped it – and everything you do is driven by it.

I

The Word being?

MAUDE

What you think of as the form or meaning in things. You have already said that all the infinite forms seem to work towards unity. They are parts of one unity. This form or meaning is, to me, the Word that was made flesh in Jesus Christ. Whether you accept our gospel literally or not the meaning can be understood. This Word is in the world, as the form and meaning.

I

I tend to think of the second person of the trinity as the Son, as the man Jesus.

MAUDE

Perhaps it is more helpful to think of it as "Word", which may mean God's law or meaning. Jesus is that Word made Flesh. The Trinity existed before Jesus was born of Mary and the Holy Spirit on earth. He is the Word, and the Word is Jesus Christ.

I

I find the Word easier to believe in than the man.

MAUDE

I can understand that – but you have no problem believing in, and experiencing, the Trinity?

I

No. Strange. What of God?

MAUDE

God is Being, the source of everything. God is the easiest to believe in. If things have being, then being must exist. If things are good, then Good exists.

I

That's a very abstract kind of God.

MAUDE

Are the trees, your landscapes, your symphonies, your loves abstract?

I

No.

MAUDE

Yet you experience God in those things. Is Jesus Christ abstract?

I

I am not sure whether I think of Jesus Christ as a historical person. My rational mind asks too many questions. Is our image of Jesus Christ simply a way of thinking of God in human terms?

MAUDE

Simply? Perhaps Jesus Christ is simply God being in human terms.

I We have arrived at a point at which I can see that the Platonic view of creativity has actually been refined by the Christian. A possibly naïve theory in Plato, of ideas, a way of explaining why things have form, has been developed by later Platonists and

perfected by theologians. This idea of the Trinity seems to be far closer to actual experience.

MAUDE

I am not against your Platonic ideas. The Countess's dear friend Marsilio worked hard to show that they were consistent with his Dominican theology. The Ideas seem to be a way of understanding this sense that everything grows towards a preconceived design – a design in the Mind of God. That's how experience presents the process.

Dionysius, Pseudo-Dionysius, in the 5th century suggested that all Ideas, all the infinite variety of possibilities, grow from one source, the Word.

I

That seems like a very good way of understanding it. Everything is unique and varied, and yet shares a common origin. All meanings hold one meaning in their core. Yes, I think that idea is very good.

MAUDE

Not all Dionysius's ideas (whoever he was) are quite as helpful. He defines the simplicity of God, in the Divine Names, but is unnecessarily baroque in his hierarchies of angels. These things are ways of understanding. Always provisional. I know of a Jewish scholar who wisely said that "God is amorphous". We can never define God, only attempt to find words that help us understand him.

I

Or she? Or it, or them?

MAUDE

Always one, Sir! We may amuse ourselves with personifications of aspects of God, or of natural qualities but there is, surely, by definition, only one Unity. Anthropomorphic terms for God are purely a way of understanding - and are often the cause of confusion. As you can clearly understand the persons of the Trinity are ways in which we experience one God who is ultimately simple, but infinitely creative. God's love is also God, and the Word is God's image that love flows too, but infinite diffusive love must also flow generously outward, and that is the cause of Creation. Fundamentally we, as Christians, think of God as infinitely diffusive and creative, not a static "Good" as the Platonists may see the "One".

I

Yes, I understand. I am very impressed by the concept that all Forms or Ideas are infinitely varied forms of one Idea, which you call the Word. I can look through the music to its individual form and sense that one Form beyond it, as its source – and the thing that drives variety to create infinite expressions of Unity.

MAUDE

Each individual thing, when it is truly itself, participates in Unity. Each individual thing is a reflection of that one Word, as each individual person is a reflection, or perhaps a projection, of Christ. You see we know God as human when we are truly human ourselves. We are not remote creations but part of this wonderful working and showing of God through love.

I

I think we used the phrase –

(It was actually Maude's phrase)

- "Love draws all things to their form in the mind of God." Ultimately, they are drawn to be images of God, through the Word. The Spirit draws them. Love draws them.

It seems a pity to abandon the idea that the ideas or forms of everything exist in God's Mind. We seem to be saying that it's not as if the form of individual things somehow pre-exist but more the general principles of how things should grow towards unity, or truth.

MAUDE

All these ideas are merely ways of looking at it. To Bonaventure the vestiges of God in things are reflections of God's Goodness, Beauty, or Truth - but things only have Goodness or Beauty or Truth when they have become something which is true to itself. By becoming an individual thing, or work, things reflect God's qualities. So, all things, by being drawn to become themselves, are drawn to these divine Ideas.

I

And yet, in a way, when an individual thing becomes what it should be it feels as if it has always existed in God's Mind.

MAUDE

This is merely playing with words. If you like to think of the forms of all things existing, you can. But we mustn't think that everything we do is pre-ordained. We have the freedom to work towards these forms if we wish - and though all forms which reflect God are alive with the desire for unity there is an infinite variety of possibilities.

I

We are all driven by this powerful desire to create, or live, which may be the same thing, but we can very easily fail.

MAUDE

But how often is that failure, which I would call Sin, the cause of a greater good? Without the freedom and variety there would be no life. Can you imagine any world which was free of all darkness? Surely there would be no life or creativity. It would be a monstrous and dead image of the Word, whereas we know that the Word involves death and pain in its wonderful creativity. I would say that complete freedom is an essential part of the working of the Trinity. Things have freedom to evolve.

I

Indeed?

MAUDE

Surely creation is continuous. If you can follow a vocation, so may a species. Your symphony may grow to a seemingly pre-existent Idea in the Mind of God and yet be constantly revised. So may all things. God is eternal, so all beginnings and endings are eternally present to him. And with what joy and love He must watch his garden grow! Everything is constantly forming new works with new expressions of unity in infinite diversity. Or so it should be if we are not too destructive. Ultimately God's Judgment, which may be an artistic judgment, may produce a new world where everything is at unity in itself.

I

I understand. I like the idea that the Last Judgment may be a matter of artistic selection! But even now, when we walk in this world and hear that hidden music, the meaning in the world, we find we are walking in paradise here on earth. I am not sure whether we have rediscovered Eden, in which we know the true names of things (all derived from the one Name) or whether we are living already in the New Jerusalem, heavenly kingdom. These are the delights that keep us travelling and fire our desire. Sterry's pilgrim was travelling too.

MAUDE

That hidden music is delight?

I

It carries those sparks of delight that illuminate the world in a new way.

MAUDE

These sparks may create in you a desire to compose, but they are also treasures that you can dwell on in prayer. To me they are more precious than the world. These intimations of God can be remembered and meditated upon. This is the first stage of Bonaventure's Journey of the Soul into God. This is the start of the negative way of prayer. We meditate on those signs or vestiges of God. We find those same signs, that same music is in our soul. We try to bring our whole mind into the pure love that those glimmers remind us of – and we peel away everything from our memories and souls that is not that simple love until all we know is God and meditation becomes silent contemplation.

This is a hard way, but wonderful. We are inspired by experience of God in the world to reach to nothing but God. Some touch that simplicity of pure love for a moment, some touch eternity.

I

I can appreciate that, but I worry that it's abandoning the world, or devaluing the world, and the world needs us.

MAUDE

How can it be when it is dwelling on the very essence of the world?

I

This can sound very, if you don't mind me saying so, airy-fairy.

MAUDE

I apologise. This ascent, the negative way affirms the reality of the world because we can only climb the ladder by being what we are. Also, this enlightenment, or joy, that we touch is something we bring back with us.

I

Oh, I don't like the idea of people going around enraptured and wearing inane grins.

MAUDE

If they do it is because they are deluded. It's one of the sure tests of the truly spiritual. The truly spiritual person descends to the world with absolutely clear love, seeing all clearly – and one can always know that it is genuine enlightenment because it is open to everyone, it's an infectious joy.

You should read the Cloud of Unknowing. All the dangers of delusion are there. The worst danger of the negative way is that they peel away only the things they don't like dwell on the God they want to see rather than strip away everything. In the same way the followers of the Affirmative way think God is only in the easy things, the superficially beautiful when they should see the whole.

I

Light and shadow, concord and discord. Yes. I feel the Affirmative way is for me, at the moment at least, though there are times when I feel that truth or rightness in what I've done or in life and that perhaps nothing else is necessary.

WALKING – THE WAY OF AFFIRMATION

Some years later – in another country -

A little way from the village I found an extraordinary cottage. It was almost as if it had been a cottage once but had fallen into the earth. I had caught a glimpse of someone living in this earthy and overgrown place. It was a young woman. I quite expected it to be an old hag or village witch.

A few days ago, taking that track out of curiosity, I found met her coming out of the hovel. She was dressed in a mad mixture of old clothes, with an indescribable hat of blue felt. She was no old witch. She was young, perhaps in her twenties, with untidy light brown hair beneath the hat, a quizzical kind of face and astonishingly clear eyes – not blue but a colourless silver grey.

She knew who I was, perhaps from village gossip.

“You’re a musician of some kind?”

“Yes, a composer.”

“There’s music in these woods. Do you want to come and listen? Let’s take a walk.”

So, we did, a walk from her cottage through the woods nearby and up to a ridge a mile or more away, and the whole walk was bathed in some kind of clear light from this stranger’s own enjoyment, as if the walk was a sonata, she the performer on her spiritual violin, and I the audience.

I can see that it was her own enjoyment of the things we were seeing that was so enjoyable in itself. I mean that it was a communicable sense of enjoyment. Isn’t that how it should be? True happiness should be something open and communicable, or infectious, not something contained, that cuts us from the world. You know the difference between people who have a silly grin and just irritate and those who transfer their own happiness to others by being more open and alive because of their

joy. In the first case it's not enjoyment at all but more like the effect of a mind-numbing drug.

So, in the case of Thalia, she made you see the world as she saw it by communicating her joy. It was a partly the expression, or the openness of her eyes, and partly something invisible and spiritual. Perhaps spiritual.

She never told me her name. I call by the name of the muse of the earth and of comedy. It seems appropriate - and there was a familiarity in her way of walking, her quirks and turns as she spoke, that reminded me of one of the tumblers I had seen in the gardens at Ravello.

"I love my old trees!" she said.

"Your trees?"

"And yours too. What's yours is mine and mine is yours. The woods, their music - and our souls."

"Goodness. Do you think so? Are you a philosopher then? I keep meeting philosophers."

"I don't know about that. Nothing so heavy! But we have souls, don't we? And they contain all this. And everything."

"It depends on what you think of as your soul."

"Well, simply what you are I would think. Wouldn't you? What you really are."

She said that each soul is infinite and must contain each other infinite soul. We are each ourselves but in joy and love we contain the other. Yes, that's true enough in its way.

But how did she find this simple attitude of joy in all things?

By complete humility and simplicity, and by believing that everything was hers.

This isn't a possessive feeling because she believed that everyone was equally the possessor of everything if they could see the world that way.

"It's hard to do that, "I said, "when you know that these woods are someone's property. There are even signs warning us to keep out. Would you take no notice of the signs and wander into them because you own them all?"

“Not at all,” she said. “Why should I? Wouldn’t that be a kind of arrogance, imposing myself on someone else’s property?”

“But you believe it’s your property.”

“No, no. It’s not property at all. That’s something quite different. I might disapprove of the idea of property, but that’s a very worldly idea, an idea belonging to the world I have no time for. I’d rather let people own it in their worldly way and simply care nothing for it. If I invaded their property I would be mixed up in their worldly attitudes. I can see what I can do of these enclosed woods, and I can care about them, but I don’t need to invade them. Besides it would not be a wise idea as they are the property of the Army. There may be serious dangers, armed guards, explosives, poisons. No, the spiritual ownership is also a belonging to all, and a responsibility to all.”

“So, you love and enjoy everything that we see on this walk. Even the explosives and poisons that may be in that wood?”

“You are being difficult! I think I would not enjoy the explosives and poisons as they are the product of man’s own evils. I can love and pity the woods where they are hidden and the people who make them. I could, do you suppose, fight them? Or protest? Better, surely, to love and laugh.”

“What of these trees here – these seem to be diseased. This walk isn’t all through a paradise by any means.”

“How can you enjoy anything without enjoying what it is? You said you were a musician. Do you only enjoy happy music? That would be very boring. Enjoyment comes from being part of something as it really is. The greatest part of enjoyment is simply being, being itself. These diseased trees may not be alive anymore, but they are there. If you try not to see them you are denying being, imposing what you want to see. Enjoyment can be sad too.”

(I remember Peter Sterry, who I so often find strikes a chord with me writes: “Divine love (which transcends all human wisdom) knows how to joint even hell into its work, with such surprising skill, that even hell be beautiful in its place, and add a grandeur, a symmetry, yea, a loveliness to the whole ”)

“I see what you mean – so enjoyment is really a matter of seeing things as they are.”

“Yes. Things as they are, all of them.”

"Can't that be a bit mindless? Do you switch off your own thoughts?" "No, of course not. I'm real too. My thoughts are real. What do you think I meant by "things as they are?" Just these lovely trees (and the sad ones)? Nature?"

"I suppose I was thinking about the natural world, rather than the "products of man's evil."

"So, do human things not exist? Do thoughts not exist?"

"I suppose I tend to think thoughts were as real as anything. They're made out of experiences of real things."

"Seeing things as they are means everything. You know this really, don't you? This wood isn't just trees, it's us seeing it. It's our own thoughts about it. It might be stories about it. You know, they say there are still wild men living here. On certain days you hear them moving between the trees, hiding from our eyes, but if the wind is in the right direction their scurrying is carried to even our deaf old ears. Now that might not be true, but can you look into the depth of these trees and forget it now I've told you? The invisible shadows behind the deeper trees have an extra mystery, don't they? Some stories are good, some are bad. A house isn't just a lump of stone or brick. It's a home. A church, too. What's a church, really?"

"So, to enjoy things as they are we have to be ourselves too. "

"Yes, and it's so hard, because we keep trying to shut ourselves away, switch off our own feelings, or trying not see things we don't like." "Why do we try to shut ourselves way, do you think?"

"We shut ourselves away by our own selfishness. We want to drag things out of the world into ourselves. We want to own things. We want them to be like us. But we can't know what we like unless we walk in the world with open eyes and let the world explore our own souls and discover what's in our own nooks and crannies."

"Like a light shining into a cave, gradually exploring the secret openings, rocks, stalactites?"

"Yes. Enjoyment is that light."

"I will do my best to see all of this as mine - and yours - but it's very hard. It brings responsibility too."

"Oh yes."

"And I feel it might mean that I try to love everything and end up loving nothing well. Isn't it as good to love just part of the world and love it well? Just as a more earthly person may love one person."

"I don't see why not. You're right about the risk of loving nothing well. It's no good being false. If you love one small bit of the world and love it well that means that it isn't a selfish love. You don't try to drag that little world into you anymore than you should a person. And you know you can see it all in one little place. In one little thing. The world in a grain of sand...that sort of stuff."

"Good. I'm relieved to hear. Dante saw it all in Beatrice. I may not meet a Beatrice but I might find one small place that I can get to love really well. Somewhere I can listen to properly."

"Great."

I might have let this girl go as a rather fey traveller with innocent fancies, but I don't think she was remotely innocent. She knew the world. Perhaps she had recovered innocence, or found a quite different and wise form of innocence.

She was nothing like a witch. She might like stories, but she never spoke of anything supernatural. Of course, I know now that you don't need spirits and the supernatural to make a place sacred. Those things are distractions. They may exist, they may not, but they are just part of the scene, like the badgers and toadstools. The real meaning and mystery is in the things themselves, and the Spirit in our relationship with them.

When I thought of our walk and what she had said in the light of Maude's conversation I realised that it could be that simply walking was a form of prayer. By walking we are engaging with the world, if we go with the clear mind and this spiritual enjoyment. Simply in our relationship with the world we are allowing the Spirit to work in us, and in going with a clear mind we are listening to the hidden music, the meaning, the Word. I might have thought that this was all too simple – but why not? We can find this sacred thing in ourselves and our experience, or in Maude's negative way - our real experience not in any fantasy or false mysticism.

We walked through the woods, beyond the fenced area that she had said was used for military purposes with its dark secrets and the dark place of the Wild Men. The track turned and climbed and through the trees I became aware of descending ground as if we were now the ridge of a valley. She accelerated her pace. She was far fitter than I. She was eager to reach the summit, which we presently did, and we looked down on a river below. The sweep of the river (perhaps it was the Severn, or a tributary) flowing through the wooded slopes was exhilarating – the view accompanied by a breeze of fresh pine scented air. The girl gave a kind of skip and twirl of her skirt and she raised

a hand as if to present the river – as if to say, here, this is mine – you are welcome to it. She made a few turns, a dancing gesture.

“It’s not just pictures, you know. It’s all alive and we’re part of it. Better see the world as a Dance. Sometimes we know we’re dancing, touching the magic, sometimes we might just have a passing shiver – someone else’s dance has passed through us. We might have caught just a beat of it. Why do people see things flat all the time?”

Perhaps I could translate this scene into music – the landscape of forest and river – and that dance that passed through everything...

Thomas Traherne wrote:

“Angels ears hear the melodie, which Gods Goodness Wisdom and Power maketh in the visible and created world, which is the organ of all Eternity.” (Select Meditations)

THE CONSOLATIONS OF MUSIC – An Interlude

I had followed the track on foot. You know my interest in follies. I have often made long diversions in search of a ruined tower. I seemed to remember the name of the village I had passed through and that there was something of interest nearby, even if it would mean an alarming adventure, climbing over a fallen estate wall or being tangled in ivy.

The track was long unused. The deep ruts must have been made by wagons that had rotted long ago. I passed moulding mossy woodpiles and found the path leading deeper into the trees. The light and shadow were intense. It was beautiful but confusing to the sight. It became a changing abstract pattern as if seen through a green glass kaleidoscope. I was dazzled. I may have left the path.

The brilliance of the flickering light dimmed. Had I lost all sense of time and entered the wood just before night fell with unnatural speed?

The atmosphere was warm, humid – which confused my senses even more, as if I were in a moist cloud of damp green air with no tangible shape. If I were to turn back I would, I felt, still face the same direction. Or as good as.

I felt strangeness rather than fear. There was a sense of detachment. I have been lost in woods before but there was none of that panic that comes with scratched legs, stumbles over fallen trees and bind stems.

What shall I do now?

There was nothing I could contemplate doing, and, so I sensed, quite literally nowhere to go. I was held immobile. A muffled and directionless sound of wind in the formless trees was a cocoon more unbreakable than silence.

I have lived, as you know, on the move. Stasis was a new sensation, as if produced by an anaesthetic draught. Perhaps I would never move again.

Held in this web I found myself, quite calmly, thinking about the travelling that had brought me here. I have always followed irregular and indirect paths. I am a person of changeable and indecisive moods. As a “composing mortal” I have wavered between the varying attractions of several muses. Yes, “muses” is the word, however fanciful some may think this is. I can picture them in human terms, but they are, (aren’t they?), the embodiments of the conflicting calls of different creative spirits.

There is the fantastic light-hearted muse with the quizzical smile, who brings the desire to play with forms, explore fantastic stories and games. There is the more sober and melancholy muse who makes me want to dwell on the sacred, to contemplate in the shadows. There is the muse of the fields, wood and roads who draws me to the changing music of nature - which we may never be able to imitate but to which we may add a single voice.

Each has brought me pleasure and, as you know, has given me the energy to compose a few small things in each of their qualities - in their honour, if you like. But has this service of multiple mistresses caused me to take too irregular a track? Is it simply indecisiveness that has brought me to this impasse? Should I turn my full devotion to one - at my advanced age, perhaps, to the contemplative, to the shadowy study or solitary tower?

“Where I may oft out-watch the Bear,

With thrice great Hermes...”

“What place is this? Where have you led me?”

Having formed the images of my three guides in this way and having asked them this question I became aware that the deep greyness had risen as mist does to reveal the path again - and I moved forward.

I saw that the path had become artificial. It was a lightly gravelled track, edged with rough dark stones that sparkled in places with quartz. The ground beyond, such as I could see it, was a confused mass of low-lying greenery, scattered with cold blue flowers. I seemed to be moving into a garden, or what had once been a garden.

Here, eerily appearing above me, was an archway. It was a roughcast arch, of flints and crumbling cement. Above the arch a block of stained marble had been set with the inscription:

TUGATON

The word was as crude as the stonework. What language was it? Was it a name - or a warning?

I passed through the arch and entered what must have been the garden proper. The mist was brightening. At the sides of the path now were well cut shrubs, not formally placed but irregular, with patches of red and yellow flowers between them. I looked upwards, aware of a further brightening. I saw something which made me almost

stumble with giddiness. The mist had opened a window and through this opening I could see what at first seemed to be a white moon, high above and far way. As my reason adjusted my vision I could see that I was looking at a dome, circled by a stone parapet, a small dome as might crown an observatory, designed to iris open to allow the use of a telescope – though I could see no sign of an opening.

Yes, I remembered. This was the folly I had originally been looking for. The Observatory.

I was now close to the modest building. A plain portico stood at the end of the path – and an open door. I walked forward as the last wraiths of mist scurried into the shrubbery.

The door opened into a modest sized room, not a hall, but a study or library. There were fine classical book cabinets on both sides set between tall and narrow windows. I am always drawn, on entering any room, to look at the titles of the books. Most of those that caught my eye as I moved towards one of the cabinets were old bindings and the names were hard to read – perhaps 17th and 18th century tracts and poetry – but I could make out “Siris”, “The Principles and Power of Harmony”, “Poems for Several Occasions”, “A Discourse on the Freedom of the Will”, “Hermes”, “The Vanity of Dogmatizing.”

A clavichord rested to one side, a long box like instrument. I touched a key and it made a toneless rattle. Carl Philip Emanuel would be horrified. Its open cover was decorated with a familiar motto:

MUSICA LAETITIAE COMES MEDICINA DOLORUM

Before I could look more closely at the bookshelves, or at the pages of music heaped on the instrument, I saw that a lady had appeared in the room.

At first I felt a certain chill. She was a slightly forbidding figure - very tall, elegant, silver haired, and dressed in a simple black velvet dress ornamented by a bright jewelled brooch. There were, held in some way I could not quite make out, a few smaller jewels in her hair, bright against the silver. In the same moment as I saw her she spoke, as if continuing the conversation I had been having with in my thoughts.

THE LADY

If we follow three guides is it surprising that we may find ourselves in a fog?

I

I'm sorry. I am indecisive by nature.

THE LADY

Or fickle to your muses?

I

You know them?

THE LADY

Of course. They each speak of you when we meet. We have our occasional convocations.

I

You do?

THE LADY

When the stations of the stars and days allow.

I

I hope not fickle. I have long found myself wandering from one to the other. I feel I should be settled, decide to serve a single muse. Shouldn't I devote myself to the sacred and turn away from the Countess's temptations, her games, her formal gardens, her pagan stories? I feel Maude has been looking at me critically, hoping I would turn to more sober explorations – and then there is the music of Nature, the wish to sing the songs of the trees,

THE LADY

And what do they say, these muses? Has Maude expressed this criticism? Has she expressed sorrow that you play the Countess's delightful games? Has the Countess mocked Maude's vocation?

I

No, never. They always speak to each other respect, and they enjoy the company of that young earthy friend, that female clown.

THE LADY

That is how it should be. You know the truth of it, but it falls to me to remind you. This is the essential truth.

You cannot think of one as sacred, one as profane, one as earthy or pagan. They are all servants of harmony. All harmony is sacred. There is only one harmony. Harmony is in itself an expression of unity as all tones are derived from a single sound.

I

I understand harmony, but as something intangible. Music is something other.

THE LADY

What is music?

I

Music is made of many harmonies, many changes of tone, concord and discord. It has forms in time. It can express feeling, suggest meanings.

THE LADY

Music is harmony expressed in Nature. Harmony is unchanging, The Music of the Spheres, which is a dim echo of the song of the Angels, is unchanging and inaudible to Nature. This unchanging Harmony sounds through changing Nature as Music, giving form and meaning to everything. Nature can only know the unchanging harmony through the experience of Music. This living experience of mutable song is the way we know the source of harmony.

It is quite useless to attempt to imitate the Harmony of the Spheres or the Songs of the Angels. The mystic has only one way to escape earthly music and that is in SILENCE. Only SILENCE can lead us directly to the source of harmony.

But the musician who knows that all music is one music and that all music takes its meaning from Harmony, that all music is an infinite expression of the One can help reveal the song in the world and can fill his heart with the desire for the One so that, one day, or just for a moment, the SILENCE beyond music can fill his soul.

I

But can all music be equally sacred? Some believe no music can be sacred as it is purely earthly, sensual.

THE LADY

As with love human music can be misdirected. It can be selfish, it can be dominating. Of course, your own music, instrumental music, has taken hundreds of years to learn its language. In its simplest state it could be crudely physical, but even in its most subtle art it could be used to impose feelings or enforce ideas. Your music, to be part of the universal music, should come from humility and love, be always something shared between performers and listeners. But can we ever say that even the roughest music is not part of a larger music and has its place? You know that in Nature all our fragmentary works are parts of one whole.

I

I see that. Everything we do, either in its imperfection or in its own unity, reveals the greater unity.

THE LADY

Your sacred music, then, what is it?

I

I suppose, then, it is no more sacred in itself than any other music, but it can be music, or the writing of it, that helps us worship or meditate on sacred things.

THE LADY

And the end of such meditation?

I

Should be to make us better listeners – to help us hear the music in everything or to inspire us to seek SILENCE.

THE LADY

Yes. If a composer believes that his sacred music, as music, has more value than his secular music he is denying the music in Creation. He is following a false God, a partial God.

I can see that you have a vocation. Your friendly muses have guided you carefully. Everyone may follow different muses, have a soul that responds to one as leader and others as echoes or subsidiary guides. We all have the

music of the heavenly spheres within us – and these muses are echoes of that intangible celestial harmony. Their purpose, our purpose, is always the same – to help one hear more clearly and feel more clearly. Your vocation must be to serve the music, all music, and in your very limited and humble way, using your very limited resources, to learn the workings of harmony and form in nature and to reveal the music to others.

Of course, some serve in other ways. To some Harmony is experienced in words, in poetry, tragedy or comedy. Some have muses that guide them to work physical Form. Some serve simply by living. To live fully these must never be exclusive. However one devotes oneself to the tragic, the sacred or the comic one must never deny or denigrate the other expressions – or one is denying Harmony itself by denying Unity. We all need to know our harmonies, the modes of the spheres within us, in a healthy balance, like planetary bodies held in the play of their gravities, but in combinations unique to each.

The architect of this temple understood this.

She led me through a door into another room. It was a blaze of colour, and circular, with doors at the cardinal points. The walls were painted with vivid and exquisite murals. I could hardly make out any detail, just a fantastical sweep of landscapes, curious buildings, forests, rivers, lakes and seas, figures riding, embracing, encountering monsters, following paths. Perhaps because of my own interests I did, I think, recognise Orpheus, walking forward with Euridice following, resting her hand on his shoulder. Would he resist the temptation to look back? Or had he turned - was she, or her soul, vanishing into Hades?

I have been here before. Thirty years ago I wrote:

*The sky's horizon spreads on all four walls,
Reaching a few feet down from the ceiling
To a stylised range of white-capped mountains,
Sharply piercing the blue, softening as they fall
To smooth green foothills, bursting with flowers.
Twining tendrils follow no perspective,
Trailing to coloured blooms, wild roses
Intricately painted, exact and alive;
And amongst the flowers are goddesses and gods:
Delicate eyes, filaments of golden hair
In the imitated style of Botticelli.*

*The painted gods relax with unicorns, flee
The pursuit of bulls to craggy caves,
And burgeon into butterflies.
The seasons
Rule each wall. The north (I take it)
Has the cold rock of winter to the floor.
Spring's born in the east and the Graces dance.
Flora hardly draws a breath, and she springs
Into flower, sighs as petals fall a mantle on her.
Summer has the south – the grass is gold.
And sun's delighting lovers lie asleep.
The west, of course, is autumn. Here the hills
Rise from the wealth of wine-press, harvest store
And roses overblown amongst the vines,
To a colder, better, height – the rocks like glass
Beyond the death of winter, that achieve
The startling shine and glamour of the stars*

THE LADY

Our friend who made this room was a classicist – and so it was painted – but I wonder if all visitors would see the same scenes and the same stories?

Here we see through one of Nature's veils. These images may tell of the deeper workings of our souls and of the world but all this is still Nature.

Shall we climb to the Observatory? A spiral staircase, set off centre in the circular room, led upwards. She followed as I climbed to enter the domed Observatory that I had seen through the window in the cloud. There was no telescope here, but the mechanism of a Camera Obscura, lenses and brasswork and controlling chains hanging from the ceiling. Beneath this was the vividly white disc of the table, the screen. Around the perimeter of the table was an inscription in brass letters:

MUSICA NIHIL ALIUD EST QUAM OMNIUM ORDINEM SCIRE

She turned a handle on the wall and the shutters closed on the windows. There was darkness for only a moment as she reached to one of the controlling chains and light flooded the table. First I saw lines radiating from the centre like a compass, but these were marked with the signs of the zodiac.

THE LADY

For our philosopher this place was at the centre of everywhere. These “region rhombs” (as he calls them) mark out the world beyond.

An image began to form beneath the overlying compass which gradually resolved itself into an aerial view, seen from too great a height to be identified – but a further adjustment of the controls revealed enough, through parts of coastline at certain points, to show that this was a view of this island.

THE LADY

This is England, simply because we are in England. I can widen the field if you wish, or view the world from another focus. Delphi, perhaps? Some other omphalos? Shall we stay with this small island? Look, you can see roads and rivers. For some mysterious reason, due to the peculiarities of the mechanism, you can see the feint green lines of the ancient tracks more clearly than the modern roads. Some of these you may have followed.

Yes indeed. As she drew the operating chains to and fro the image seemed to focus more closely on ways I had known. Or was it simply a green blur that could at any moment turn into a shapeless fog like the wood I had passed through? As the green image moved I could hear the music that I had tried to compose, not my own but my attempt to record in music what I had seen and felt on my journey.

But there were other musics overlapping, music like the unfolding hills, voices singing – and I could see the singers – dim figures against ploughed fields, singing as they worked, singing as the chopped turnips in a freezing shed, singing on narrow boats passing between fields, singing in vast factories resounding with machinery, singing as they danced outside inns, in school playgrounds, singing and dancing in a frenzy of coloured light, in complex choirs which weaved sounds over sound which seemed to weave stones, vaults, windows from itself and landscapes beyond the windows – and there were images too where no one was singing, but merely walking paved or cobbled streets, remembering over a mangle, kneading dough, laughing at a nine inch television, dodging the cars at a crossing, lying alone in darkness – but all had their unheard music.

As she drew the lens away further I could see and hear larger works, the sense of movement of people - entering unknown forests, abandoning fields for cities, armies tracing the greater forms of gloomy symphonies, branch trains tracing string quartets through hills and villages, pendolinos sketching a swift melodic line with the sweep of a draughtsman’s stylus.

THE LADY

Some say the Earth has no music – but this is your music, the infinitely varied and ever-growing web of music that makes harmony audible. You hear the music, which is Harmony in Time, and you see Nature dancing to the music. Dance is music in Space and Time.

She reached for a higher chain and as she pulled it the confused colours were replaced by darkness – and then brilliant sparks of light. Stars and galaxies, moving, dancing, sometimes changing in colour and size, forming and dissolving.

This was the material universe – not the archetypal cosmos of Harmony. And in the dark blue inner dome above us, from which the apparatus of the camera obscura hung, I could see another universe, in painted gold, of the circling spheres of the planets around the small green globe of earth, and beyond them, at the outer limits, the celestial sphere of the stars. Around the outer circumference, set in silver letters, was this verse:

O QUI PERPETUA MUNDUM RATIONE GUBERNAS, TERRARUM CAELIQUE SATOR

This was the representation of harmony, rather than the observed universe. This Music of the Spheres lived in all these worlds – exploding suns, demi-gods, singers in the field.

THE LADY

The same music, the same dance. You see, our philosopher has allowed us to observe a wider Nature than many see. Do you remember now? I have shown you these things before. Do you remember, now, after years of distraction, how I spoke to you then? How this search for music, to join the dance, is our vocation, which we must all follow in the way the music in our individual soul guides us?

“If we live in ourselves we’re lifeless, meaningless, destructive, but once we find the flow of love, the swing of the music, we come to life. To join the dance is a strange delight. We find true joy, and, if it suits us, inspiration, only in the dance. It’s not just people. It’s everything. Every part of Nature follows the dance. Rocks and hills can arrange themselves, the stars themselves dance. We may not see the movement but we can feel the tremor of joy when we join. When we give ourselves to the dance we find it is all ours, and, more than that, it is all each and every dancer’s. The patterns the dance weaves wind sideways through time and space. We may not see them, but we can sense the moments of grace when we pass through those mysterious interstices. Love is never static, but active, and often difficult - sometimes a light pleasure, sometimes intense, the old white spiritual flame, agonising but always rewarding with joy. The dance moves towards the

establishment of peace - but it will never end. When the work of this dance of Creation is complete we will see the pattern of the dance, as visionaries may see it now, but we will dance on to preserve the peace and imitate eternity. The dance matters. Love matters. Nothing else."

This Observatory, then, was a place for the study of the celestial music in all of nature, from the dance of the stars to the sculptures moss shapes on the face of a fallen statue. Music, the study of music, is, indeed, the study of the order of things, the understanding of forms in the whole of nature, whether of the conjunctions of stars, the silent wave of the moss on the stone, of the changing balance of the planetary modes in our souls, of a life, of a conversation. To compose music, which is only one aspect of performance, and no more important than the sources of ideas, the performers or the listeners who share the creation of the work, is also to share in the dance of creation itself. This Lady of the Observatory explained that the knowledge of harmony can lead to the knowledge of the source of harmony - but I know, from my conversations with the other muses that our work is also participation in the endless creativity of the world. Nothing is static, everything evolves, new works are formed, small works become parts of larger – and that our own works, however trivial and imperfect are our own experiences of meaning and form – our humble creations (our creations?) can find a unity and truth which is shared with the source of things and with the one great dance, the “establishment of peace.”

Yes, she was right to say that I should not reject any one of the muses. We all too easily fall into the trap of seeing the divine in only one part of our lives. God is in all music or in SILENCE. We can easily create our own limited gods who rule over the segments of the world our narrow minds select, even if those self-made compartments of the world are church or temple.

I can also feel confident now, dear friend, that even my most light-hearted game is part of my service and study. I may be limited in my language, but I can use what I have in this playful research. “Simply the thing I am shall make me live.”

We returned to the library. The Lady of the Observatory took a tray from an elegant table and joined her several companions, moving between the other guests, serving neat sandwiches with surprising contents, curiously coloured cakes, meringues. Ah yes, even this quiet tea party was a dance. They moved between us, appearing at each guest’s side to offer their savouries and sweets according to the individual’s taste.

I shouldn’t mention who the other guests were. I am sure you would have known a few. There were four or five I knew myself, friends and colleagues in the way that you would understand, attending this reception exempt from time. By no means all

musicians. I may mention, if I am allowed a cryptic reference, our witty poetess of the puddings, the seraphic philosopher, our musical Master (oh, if only I could have more time for conversation), the visionary of rural Kent – and even, yes, in the shadow by the clavichord, the tragic singer of Atlantis....

After a few delicious nibbles the purpose of the evening revealed itself. The ladies' serving trays were replaced by salvers, each with coloured envelopes. They circled amongst us again, offering us, on the salvers, envelopes with our own names, presented variously by those of the ladies who had taken a peculiar interest in each of us. This was done in silence, or it was supposed to be a silent ritual. I was pleased to see that earthy comedian again and she couldn't resist saying as she offered me my envelope:

Even the Lady of the Observatory, who seems to stand a little apart from the others, offered silver envelopes to a couple of figures who were strangers to me.

These, I understood as I took three envelopes, were our commissions.

These commissions were, as you will appreciate, also obligations. When I read the few words on each card I saw that I had been given work that would take a large amount of time and send me on further travels. But what welcome work and what a happy obligation.

I am not to limit myself to one particular music. I know now that our vocations do not tend to monomania, but we have to know all the muses who hold our soul in balance. There is only one world and only one Harmony. To serve Harmony and its Divine Source we must allow all these muses to speak through us – or, as the Countess's dear Marsilio would say, all our planets.

What is my work?

I can see that the muses can commission a variety of kinds of music:

There is music that delights purely in form and in exploring its own language - "Abstract music."

There is music that is composed as a meditation on a divine subject – in which the ideas or subjects on which we meditate guide the form of the music.

In the same way music may follow a story such as illuminates the walls of the lower chamber of this observatory. The music takes its form from the story and shows that story and music are both translations of one hidden language.

There is music which guides our imagination. The music finds images from our memory and experience, and leads us through the infinite world of fantasy.

There is music that reflects the world, Nature in its larger forms (our travels, landscapes) or in its smaller forms. The form of the music follows the form of Nature as we experience it, perhaps a landscape or place, as we see it on a particular occasion. It can never be the absolute essence of the place – only one facet, our response at one moment. We are all share in the performance of Nature's music. I have to be an audience to the music of certain small aspects of the world, perhaps neglected path, forgotten shrines or habitations. This vocation is not by any means a solitary one or to be confined to a dark study.

The muses' commissions are by no means exclusive. Some works please one, some please several. Furthermore, I can imagine that if I found myself here at one of these elegant receptions another year there may be envelopes of other colours placed in my hands from salvers held by muses I have not previously acknowledged.

So much work to do and so much travelling to do – as all this work is a travelling, whether through forests or towns, through the scenes of sacred or fantastic story, or through the worlds of pure music, which, however abstract, cannot fail to illuminate other images and landscapes in our souls.

I know now, however, that all these works that I am called to compose are fragments of one work, are volumes of one Book and that all the sonatas, fantasias, prayers ayres and dances are expressions of one Word just as all Harmony is an expression of one tone, indeed, simply of One.

But more than this –

That Book is the world I saw projected in the Camera Obscura screen, a world that contained all times and stories, whose centre could be anywhere.

How do we step from this narrow world into that True Kingdom?¹

4th July 2012

¹ Are we already there?

BY THE STREAM

Long ago I realised that the sense of meaning, or mystery, could be conveyed by anything – an ancient sacred place may have less of a visionary glow than the most mundane domestic object seen at the right time or in a particular light. This is how it should be if we believe all things come from God (if we use such a word). The mystery shines through a shop window, a routine experience, not only through “nature”, flowers and trees and the like.

All the infinite objects of the world come together in ever new ways, simple and complicated. Meaning or mystery is conveyed through a language of things, like words, in relationship.

I preferred to think of this language as a hidden music. Music is more than a symbol of this hidden language. It is an aspect of this language, the purest form of it that we can understand. In this case I don't mean Harmony – the fixed laws that music hangs on – but music, made of many elements, concord and discord, light and shade, whether a simple melody or a symphony.

Just as we have to learn to work with the language of music, whether as performer, composer or audience, we have to learn the hidden music in the world, which we do by learning to become ourselves.

Or something like that.

There's a fascination in the fundamental harmonies. I believe there are fundamental qualities in nature (or it as if there are) which are like the colours of the rainbow, or the supposed qualities of the planets. Understanding these helps to draw us to a knowledge of the unity of everything, as the notes of a harmonic series derive from a fundamental. These modes may be muses, each guiding us to a different quality in our own souls. We are made of the same harmonies as the cosmos. I spent some time in the College of the Muses, learning the modes of melancholy and delight, the patterns of the dance and the gestures of the heroic song.

Yes.

But the music of the world is mixed. Thalia is the muse of Earth and the muse of Comedy. Learning the fundamentals of Harmony take us into abstract, lifeless regions. We need to learn Music.

Two years ago I was exploring places which seemed to reflect particular qualities, places where one of the muses or the modes was dominant. I am sure there are such places. They are not necessarily more sacred or magical than any other place, but it is as if not only do they have one dominant quality but that they attract things, events, thoughts, as if by a kind of gravity. Perhaps all places have an attraction of things that harmonise with their individual theme....

Here's an example of this hidden music – something seen which demonstrates that we do not see the meaning in separate things, or only in what we tend to think of too narrowly as “nature”.

A village shop window, somewhere near the Welsh border, perhaps even in Wales. A display of a Heinz bean can, soup, a jar of beetroot, and a scattering of autumn leaves. This was a thing with all the beauty and sadness of autumn, something which could be called an epiphany.



Yes, the window was a thing in itself.

The leaves were the products of particular trees. The influences of the environment had made them what they were, the climate had made them fall, someone had walked that way and picked them up, selected them and placed them here. The bean can was like a million other bean cans, made in a factory somewhere, its contents invisible, but the metal formed in the earth, mined and processed. The label designed, the peculiar

turquoise of the label chosen as a result of who knows what formative experience, marketing theories and artistic judgement.

The objects had been placed in the window and I had come to look. This event, my experience of the window, was a Work of God, thrown up by all these many elements in their dance. To some extent random, to some extent consciously formed. A revelation of the divine.

Here in another autumn. I sit with a sausage roll and a cup of tea in the abbey ruins. Stone walls rise amongst rabbits and cats in amusing topiary. More than four years ago I sat here planning a course of work, an attempt to learn enough of the workings of harmony to enable me to explore the music of the world. I might not have achieved what I planned to do but I did what I could.

I have always been susceptible to the autumn mood. The first of these dialogues was vivid with the delights of a Mediterranean Spring. Here is the inspiring melancholy which reminds me of the seasons when I felt a desire to travel, to be a wayfarer to the mystic west, in search of the mystery of the forests at sunset.

Always a fantasy, I have to say. I tended to find these experiences in music rather than actually travelling in pursuit of the Scholar Gypsy.

But the Autumn mood is welcome. There is still a sense of wanting to explore deeper into the mystery, a need to leave the College of the Muses. One can approach the pure Unity through abstract thought in the academy or laboratory, or search for its vestiges in the shadowy vale.

How can I do this?

A long time ago a fellow traveller (somewhere in the heights of Hampstead) told me that it was useless to try to explain these things. All you can do is raise your hand to the view and say "Lo!". Perhaps the gesture will open some eyes. My way is to use music as a complement to images in the hope that the effect will be to help people look in a different way. I don't aim to show the essence of the thing, just one facet, as I might have seen it on that occasion.

It's about Reading the World. There's a lot of the World to read. I should be, I suppose, a rather pointless exercise, but I do find that people, especially religious people, don't see. It's so easy to look for God in only the things we want to see. In doing so we see a limited God of our own invention.

It's a good idea, in this autumnal mood, in this ruin-enhanced garden, to attempt to define the key points of my philosophy, or point of view, whether valid in anyone else's eyes or not. I think there are five themes which have gradually emerged which justify, in my imagination, my work.

I note them, having finished the sausage roll.

1

All things are drawn by love towards their Idea in the Mind of God.

But the only Idea is the Word, the Image of God, of the One. All things are drawn to be an Image of God by having a Unity in themselves. All things express God by Being.

2

These "things" are infinitely varied. Nothing is single and separate. Everything exists in relationship with other things. Everything is formed from many other things and anything may be a part of a larger thing. A flower is a thing, a life is a thing, a glance at the window of a village shop is a thing – a Work.

3

Nature is continuously creative. Creation is a Performance. New Works are continuously formed and changed in the Great Experiment. God is infinitely creative, and His works are infinitely free.

4

Nature is not a Chaos. Harmony (or Number) is the first created thing, the inherent law in all things, guiding formation.

5

Our own souls (or minds) have the same Harmony as all things. We learn how to enjoy the Hidden Music by becoming ourselves and knowing the "Harmony of the Spheres" in ourselves.

But learning to be part of the performance is long and difficult.

This stream, though there may be fragments of old monastic walls close by, is, surely, somewhere else? It flows in a deep channel through the grass, only a few feet wide, almost narrow enough to jump, if jumping were not too violent an action to make in this misty silence. The light comes from below the mist which is draped over the trees like low cloud.

On the other side of the stream she walks slowly, her feet in the golden, yellow and red leaves. If this had been another season she would have walked through flowers like Proserpine in her last hour on earth before she was lost and we lost the Eternal Spring. This low gleam beneath an indistinct ceiling of vapour hints we may be in an underworld. The sound of the water, though it flows over rocks, is muted.

Those ladies in that bright garden which I cannot bring myself to name are far away. I could not say that she had been there, but there is a familiarity in the way she looks downward at the treasury of leaves. Her costume may or may not be the habit of an Order.

I have paused. She walks nearer, only a few feet or yards away, divided by the steam. When she comes to a closer point, opposite me, she makes a turn, one foot not leaving the earth, the other tracing a graceful arc like a dancer.

M

If you walk in step with me, we will soon come to the bridge. We can converse as we go.

In this quiet we can talk almost in whispers, the almost imperceptible sound of the stream seeming to bring our voices together as a gentle accompaniment supports two solo instruments.

M

You see God as the source of all being, but is your God too remote, or abstract, or simple, to know and love?

I

Simple, yes. I can't think of God in human terms, or thinking like us, watching, controlling, judging. God is the source, the ultimate Unity, from which everything flows. I'm sorry to sound so Platonic.

M

No apologies are necessary here.

I

Thank you. This God might seem abstract but we can only see God through our human eyes and minds. God, as known through Nature, can be imagined in human terms, as long as we are always aware that this is our way of understanding and we don't mistake our own reflection for God.

M

There are, surely, two ways in which we seek to know God, in negative and in affirmative prayer. (And all life can be a prayer.) God can be sought as the source of all being beyond the Cloud of Unknowing, if we lift our souls above ourselves and all created things. This is the goal of contemplation.

I

And if we attempt this contemplation we have to leave behind our own ideas of God and seek out ultimate simplicity.

M

Yes, or we meet only the God we want to see – as we are inclined to do equally in our search for God in Nature, unless we see God in all and not only in what we want to see,

I

This is one of my concerns, and why I like to think that music is a way of understanding God in All, in the concord and discord, in forms and in the relationship of things.

M

This is good Trinitarian theology.

I

And learned from experience rather than abstract theory. I have always been led by the sense of meaning in things, music, stories, places, and the sense that all these things were part of one world, one language. The sense of mystery has always come first and all this interest in religious ideas, and sometimes esoteric ideas, has always been a search for a way of understanding something. It's always led me back to music, but this Trinitarian theology seems a way of understanding how this world of meaning

works. It's just one way, I'm sure, and just my personal view of it. I'm not pretending to say anything is "true", just establishing a starting point for my own explorations.

M

I am aware of that, and I see that everything comes from experience. We see reflected in the world in human terms because we are human. The more we are able to be human the better we are able to see God in Nature. Is this human image Christ in All?

I

It must be. I have to confess that I find it almost impossible to visualise Jesus as a person. There are so many unsatisfactory images around. I used to think this was a failing but I'm not sure now. Maybe having a strong image of Jesus gets in the way of knowing the risen Christ? Christ is imaginable because he is known in everyone, and everything, as the living Word. Even in the gospels his appearance seems to change. He is not always recognised. Mary Magdalen thinks he is the gardener and only knows him when he speaks to her. I'm not sure what happened with Thomas, but in some way his recognition of his Lord and God is tied up with the community in the locked room. Perhaps the more we concern ourselves with images of Jesus more difficult it becomes to see Christ in All.

M

They are the same. The risen Christ shows his wounds. Christ in All is Christ in these fallen leaves and the ploughed field.

We all have different ways of understanding. Some find the stories of the teacher easier to grasp. Some prefer to focus on the contemplative ascent.

The affirmative and negative ways are two sides of one coin. The contemplative may touch the vision of unity for a moment and then return to see the whole of Nature shines with one being. The wanderer in the forest, or the city, may be lifted to the vision of Unity by the sight of a tree, or a shop window display.

I

I hope so.

M

In your view God is simple and free, and we and Nature are free. There is no plan in God's Mind, or providence, or predestination.

I

I don't know about predestination. I'll let others worry about that. No, but I think this is a completely orthodox attitude. It's all a matter of what we think of as a plan. God's plan can be as simple as God.

God creates freely. Everything is free. Surely this is a key Christian idea? There is no destiny of fate – only possibilities. Potential. We are free to grow. Free to go wrong and free to change. People can be put off by the idea of Sin. The important thing is that we can escape. Be forgiven. We aren't weighed down by penalties but free to turn round and dance in a different direction.

But freedom doesn't mean chaos. There is an inherent law in Nature – Harmony – or, I should say, of which Harmony is one facet. We don't need to follow individual plans. We can dance however we like, with Harmony as a guide. It's as if Harmony is the first created thing. It's not a structure of what the world should be, more a law within things and within us. The only plan in God's mind is Unity. Everything is drawn to express Unity by being itself. The only way Nature can search for Unity is in the Freedom to experiment.

M

The works of God are infinite, yet we see so little.

I

Works are forming, coming to be, on every level. A Work of God is something seeking Unity. The thing it can be hard to grasp is that these Works are never single, separate things. Even a flower has many parts and is the product of many influences. Works are made of things in relationship. Simply by being in relationship things reflect the nature of God. God, the Trinity, is about relationships. Things being multiple and being One.

A Work of God is not just a forest but our walk through the forest. Not just a person but a life. "Creation is Performance."

Sometimes these Works are things we can relate to as they pass by. We experience their Unity. Sometimes we sense the mystery of a larger work – our steps follow a different music for a while.

I would like to think of stories as works – not just our own stories, or ones we might put in writing, but stories which weave through the whole cosmos. Sometimes we

become part of such a story. Sometimes they pass us by. I feel there are particular themes, in the musical sense, which sing through the whole, occasionally being audible. These may echo with certain fundamental modes from the inner harmony itself. We recognise an unfolding text through its quality of mystery.

It's not simple. It's a lifetime's work to learn to be a listener, let alone to be able to dance or to share in the work of composition.

It's a human temptation to look at the world analytically. This is like counting the bars of a quartet but never listening to the music. The language of relationships is poetic, musical. Even the language of mathematics is poetic. It's best not to define or analyse too much. I know I do it myself. I have to keep reminding myself that we can only touch these absolute truths lightly, as poetry.

So, there is Harmony, an inherent law, and there is the Dance. Love draws us into the Dance.

M

And Harmony is the first created thing, the only pattern of everything. Is Harmony, then, Wisdom, as spoken of in the Old Testament?

I

I don't know what those ancient people thought, or how they viewed the world, but in some way it might be that Wisdom is Harmony.

M

Wisdom was called the first created thing. There is a sense in which the ancient texts are speaking of a law which was within creation.

I

It's an ancient poetic idea, or an ancient understanding.

It was the awareness of Harmony which inspired the whole vision of the cosmos as harmonious. The Music of the Spheres is an echo of Harmony as a hidden principle in everything. It's an idea that Nature is inherently good, that it has a law within it that guides it towards good. It isn't always remembered. Sometimes people have preferred to think of Nature, and of matter, as being bad, evil, with only the things of the spirit being good.

We had, in our very slow steps, approached the ancient stone bridge which crossed the stream. We paused a few paces from the place where it joined the bank on which I stood to the bank from which she faced me.

M

This is something which has divided people through time. Is Nature good? Or do we hope for the intervention of God into a world of evil? Do we require laws, a code of law, to live by to escape the snares of the world, or is there a law within Nature and within ourselves which we can live by if we are fully human?

I

If we learn to be listeners and performers, with humility.

M

And love.

Is the Blessed Virgin Harmony?

I

I think that's not a question I am qualified to answer.

M

Our Lady is a woman, a human being, not a goddess. We may not know her as she was, as an individual, the shape of her face or the tone of her voice, but we know she was an individual, a person.

The incarnation of Christ is not an intrusion of a supernatural being into a world of evil. It is a birth within the world of Nature, the Cosmos, a world in which we had brought darkness on ourselves but which had Good within it, the patterns of Divine Harmony.

Our Lady gave Our Lord Nature. In bearing Jesus she was Nature. As Wisdom, or Harmony, existed before Creation and guided the birth of Nature, so Our Lady was the Wisdom and Harmony which formed her Son.

We can know Harmony in Our Blessed Lady.

If we do not hold the Blessed Virgin in the highest regard we may forget that there is a goodness within Nature and that Nature, and our humanity, has this Harmony, this inherent law, within it. Through love we open ourselves to this secret guidance. If we

forget Our Lady we may forget that we have this Harmony in own souls, a law in our hearts, and demand stated laws, words, rules. Alas, so often, we impose our own imagined Law on others.

God is Love. Love draws Nature, in freedom, to express God's simplicity, Unity, Truth and Goodness in ever changing, ever new, ways.

Did we ever reach that stone bridge? Did we meet? Or was I still on the bench with my paper cup from the drinks machine provided by English Heritage?

So many possibilities for exploration and research, interesting and possibly inspiring in themselves – but, again, I warn myself not to be dogmatic or analytical. All I can do is say “Lo!”. I have my own, rather simple, way of doing that, with music and images, exploring places, just showing what I happened to see on a particular day, just one point of view. I hope I can continue to explore in that way, and to continue to explore music itself, pure music, to learn more of the hidden music or language, about the way things form and find meaning.

These conversations are just ways of making sense of what I do. None of these words matter. The Hidden Music is too deep, one might say, for words.

22/10/2016

IN THE MIST

Driving into the village was a descent into the mist. The narrow road passed through the warmly coloured ironstone cottages, past a curious inn with a sign showing a dancing witch, or something resembling a dancing witch. Further on and the turn off the road would take me deeper into the valley and, just as I approached the turning I was looking for, a glimpse of the lake. It was, in fact, an artificial reservoir, but the water had long since bedded in to this place and it contributed to the mist as if it had always been there and as if these mists were ancient miasmas that were exhaled and inhaled by the folded hills over years and centuries.

The house I was looking for was set behind the lane, very close to the water's edge. It was of a darker stone than some. It might have been, in its core, sixteenth century or older, one of those granges or farmhouses which had grown and receded organically over the years as it settled into the land.

As I feared the drive was very rough, pitted, and roughly filled with black bricks, and the yard showed signs of abandonment – weeds, rusting agricultural devices. stone urns and one or two broken pieces of statuary from a failed attempt at establishing an elegant garden in a more comfortable time.

Partly hidden by a wall I thought I could see an old caravan, perhaps a Romany vardo, but with no traces of bright colour remaining, if it had ever had any external cheeriness. It was misty enough not to be certain what lay more than a few yards from the door – which did, I was pleased to see, have a dim electric light above it.

It had always been a mystery, as I have written elsewhere, whether the traveller had actually wandered the countryside in a horse drawn vehicle, or whether his journeys had been entirely imaginary. Had he travelled wherever the horse had led him on the old green roads, composing music which followed the story of his journey, or had he made the journeys entirely within his imagination, following the paths the music took him?

If it had been the same traveller.

The idea of the romantic wanderer had been attractive all those years ago, but I had been aware that Mordant, who may or may not have been my traveller, had become lost in his own entangled mazes as age overcame him.

In more recent years he had, I believed, left the hedgerows and fields, real or imaginary, for the labyrinths of esoteric conjecture. The journey had been abandoned and the mechanism of the mind had become dominant. The music that escaped this unkempt house became abstract, conjuring with formulae, and, ultimately, obsessive.

But there seemed to have been a change. I had received a page of score posted in a several-times-re-used envelope. It was quite unlike the intense constructions of his obsession. It was, indeed, very simple. It could almost have been a child's piece by Schumann. On the top of the page Mordant had written:

"Something remembered? What does it say? Is this A Work?"

It was a very pleasant miniature. At the foot of the page he had scrawled:

"What can we really know!?"

I was certainly nervous about meeting Mordant again, but he was welcoming, though diffident. His hair was grey and straggly, but his tweed suit was smart, though possibly nearly a century old.

His first gesture of welcome was to offer me a small glass of cider vinegar, sweetened with honey.

"It is the cure for all ills," he insisted.

We sat in his study, which was also a crowded library. A dusty cello stood next to a travel clavichord which was littered with pencil manuscripts.

Conversation was difficult. He was quietly excited.

"I have been pondering the Great Question," he said.

He handed me a small oil portrait. I recognised the pale face of Maude, her hair fading into shadow, or was it that her hair was covered in the habit of a religious?

"What was it that the lady was fond of quoting?" he asked in a breathless whisper. "The words were from Bonaventure perhaps? Or was it Thomas Gallus, or even Pseudo-Dionysius?"

I knew what he was thinking of. It was something I have long associated with Maude. It was a theme that had haunted these conversations.

LOVE DRAWS ALL THINGS TO THEIR IMAGE IN THE MIND OF GOD.

(I find I first noted this sentence down in the notebook in which I wrote the first of these conversations, in Amalfi in summer 2006. I have an idea it literally came to me in a dream. It might have been a memory. In fact, the original note had "Love draws all things to their FORM in the Mind of God." It became a theme for the conversations with Maude. I have always felt it was related to the thoughts of Bonaventure, who has become my ideal theologian. As I learned more about Bonaventure I discovered that he had developed the idea that everything had its patterns in the Mind of God but, in his view, that pattern was the Word. Everything was a reflection of one source, the Word. Now, December 9th 2016, I find that Joseph Milne in "Metaphysics and the Cosmic Order" (Temenos Academy, 2006) writes of Bonaventure's understanding of Divine Love "as the power that draws all things to unity in the Mind of God." (p.26) This is substantially the same meaning, as the Image which all things are drawn to reveal is Unity, which they reveal in their own individual Unity.)

"A motto," he went on, "I should always have had before me in my travels. Wherever I may have journeyed - what was it that drew me? But Love we understand, do we not?"

"The love that moves the sun and the stars?"

"Ah, Dante. And yes, the sun still dances for us in the Theatre of the World. But the Great Question is not 'What is this Love?' but 'What are these Things?' We can understand Love, I think we can begin to, at least, as the cause of movement, but what is it that love causes to move? What are these Things? What are these Works? And can we know them? And in knowing them, what is that we KNOW?"

"An epistemological question?" I said, to myself, not a term I would use, but I was remembering an impenetrable discussion I had had with a curious philosopher many years ago.

"We can analyse the Music of the Spheres," he continued, "and know the fundamentals of music, the threads that hold the universe together, but that is just one step in the Mind's Journey Into God. It may lead us to an awareness of the Divine Unity in the Cosmos as a whole. But to learn MUSIC is another matter. A work of MUSIC is a THING which Love has drawn to its Image in the Mind of God. So many of our efforts never achieve this sense of being a Work, but they are still drawn, however they resist, towards becoming what they should be. Our failures shout from their incompleteness of their desire to become Works! You see my point?"

"Yes. That's my experience. It's a mystery. The whole business of composing is a mystery. Love draws us however much we might stumble in the undergrowth, yes."

“I have prepared an experiment. I think you will find it both enlightening and amusing. This is simply a demonstration of the first step – in appreciating what constitutes a WORK, something which is drawn to its Image in the Mind of God. It is not for me to attempt to lead you to any actual knowledge of those Works. That is a matter between you, the WORK and God. If you have time I would like you to consider five works. I have prepared five Works in five rooms - the rooms which lead off the passageway linking this study to the kitchen. There, in the kitchen, Mrs Spratton has provided tea, a rich fruit cake and anchovy toast. This may prove a pleasant recompense for your time.”

THE FIVE WORKS

1 - GOLD

The room was shuttered and in darkness. The only point of light at first appeared to be a small sun in a black void. As my eyes adjusted I saw that it was a roughly shaped nugget of gold. It was hard to see how it was suspended in the illusion of space. I think it was simply supported by a black stand of some kind, a camera tripod, or convenient piece of furniture, a side table or an adapted cake stand. None of that mattered. All I was meant to see, and all I could see in this theatrical setting, was the piece of gold which was shining brightly. (Again, it doesn't matter, but I imagine it was illuminated by source of light, hidden somewhere in the room and focussed on this single object.)

This, then, was the Work.

What could be said about it?

As far as I could tell it was pure gold,

“It is pure Gold.” I heard Mordant's voice behind me. “From the earth? Or could it be a rare product of the alchemist's art? If so it has no supernatural powers. It is simply Gold, not the Elixir or the Stone.”

Nothing but Gold...the same atoms as all other Gold. This nugget had a certain weight and size but within it was nothing but Gold. Neither useful, nor, in itself, beautiful.

The spotlight switched off with a loud click.

2 – THE BLUE FLOWER

Again, a room in complete darkness apart from a single object in light. Under a glass dome, borrowed, perhaps from a piece of taxidermy, was a flower, a blue gentian. Extraordinarily blue, the essence of blue.

I knew, though it might have been whispered in my ear, that this was not just an example but a particular flower. Of course, this is inexplicable, but this was this one flower and one refreshing burst of blue, the specific flower that someone had picked (not thing I would do) on a foothill of the Pyrenees, over thirty-five years ago.

The blue had been formed by that fresh Spring air. I am sure that the air and the light from the distant snow-capped mountains and the delightful tintinnabulation of far-away sheep (or cow?) bells, had infused this flower and this colour with their virtues, and the flower now radiated its life-giving freshness to the room, even to me. It was a joyful hillside (at the foot waited cheese, bread and wine) yet the castle above us, a gaping decayed tooth, had been a place of terrible death.

The flower had been given to the beautiful, smiling, shepherdess, as I like to call her. I feel she disapproved of its plucking from the vivid grass, but she held it in her palm and smiled with it.

I remember saying:

“I wish I could think more clearly!”

She (and the flower) replied:

“Perhaps you should wish to *feel* more clearly.”

Or words to that effect.

The bells and the air were an echo of the moments of peace in Mahler’s Sixth Symphony.

The Shepherdess handed the flower to an old lady who had talked of Chakras and her home in Wales which was a retreat of an Eastern kind.

The blue flower immediately withered in her hand, the petals falling limp. Of course, it would have withered within moments of being picked. It was not meant to be removed from the soil. But the Shepherdess’s hands had preserved it while she held it in their own light.

And though the Shepherdess is no longer with us, the flower, this particular flower, and its blue like the translucent blue of Chartres, is here still, suspended, I think, in this glass dome.

3 – THE FANCY

The third room was a compact cabinet. There were two or three Jacobean chairs with embroidered seats, and an ancient window of imperfect glass in diamond panes through which I could see the garden declining towards a backcloth of shrub and tree, hazily blended with the mist.

On a stand beside me was a wind-up gramophone with gigantic papier-mache horn. (Not necessarily very old - a product of E.M.G. Handmade gramophones.) Mordant placed the pickup on the record.

The music that emerged from that immense horn was strangely soft and mellow. It was a fantasy for viols, I am not sure whether there were four or five instruments, their voices intertwined. Shadowy melodies were announced, imitated, passed from one to another in a "divine conversation", as the 17th century musician Thomas Mace called it. I did not recognise the music. Gibbons or Lawes but perhaps by a minor master? It may have been a piece Mordant had found and had had recorded by a friendly consort, or it might have been his own pastiche – but whether this was the truth or not the impression which grew on me was that this was music composed in this house and reflected the philosophical conversations which had taken place in this room.

Yes, I could see (in my mind's eye, whatever that might mean) the figures, not of musicians of the period but gentlemen in dark clothing, three or four of them, seated on these oak and embroidery chairs, all with clay pipes which brought a thicker cousin of the garden mist into the room.

I understood the interlacing of meaning which linked them, but not the words. As they spoke they occasionally turned to the window and the dim impression of the garden. Grey shapes suggested the statuary, then standing but now discarded. Their thoughts carried the music, or the music carried their thoughts, to the woods beyond the garden, into the valley, which was damp, and the source of the mist, but not yet flooded by the reservoir and the need to provide water for the population of towns which would not grow for several generations.

The music passed through fields of aching discord, shafts of light pierced the shadow, then a suggestion of dance was accepted by the consort. There may have been smiles and long drawings of tobacco smoke. In spite of the calm of the last moments, as the music faded into the repetitive hiss of the end of the disc, what remained was the memory of the wood beyond the garden, and some sense of tragedy in the trees.

4 – THE WOODS

The fourth room was as kind of vestibule, some old boots and sticks, and an open door, I found myself on the slope of grass which had once been the garden, and, with the echo of the close of the viol fancy in my mind, I found myself walking downwards.

I passed through an opening in the shrubbery into the trees. The mist did not seem to penetrate this wood, even though I was, surely, close to the water of the lake. The path, such as it was, went on further than I expected and there was no sign of an end of the wood.

Fragments of the fancy's counterpoint were threaded through the trees, memories of the more intense contemplations of the Jacobean philosophers.

There was water here, but not the expanse of the reservoir. This was a pool of black water, perhaps deep. At its far bank I could just see something which might have been a structure, though it merged with the colour of the trees and might have been no more than a heap of fallen boughs and branches.

My eyes were fixed on this indistinct object when a hand gripped my arm.

“The hag's lair.”

The rasping voice was shockingly close to my ear and distorted by my partial deafness.

“They call her Black Annis. She keeps to her side of the pool. The local boys come this far and no further and perform their torments. But they won't go closer. They make their cries and sometimes set their dogs loose to harry the witch. At times they set off firecrackers or shoot their guns over the water. She keeps her distance then, they make sure of that, or else she'll creep this way and take the children. She has teeth like saws and takes bites out of children's limbs.”

“She lives across the pool?”

But before I could turn my eyes from the lair or forest hut whoever had spoken had vanished. There was near silence, but for the odd shuffling of a creature, the cackle of a pheasant.

The contemplative philosophers, whose instrumental voices still hung in the silent trees, as far as my memory allowed, would not have spoken like this. Their gaze had

been towards this woodland, through the trees and across the water. Their music had a quality close to pity.

I followed the narrow path, such as it was, around the margin of the pool. Yes, I could see the shape was a kind of chaotic shelter formed from fallings retrieved from the wood's floor.

There was no sense of the sinister in this hovel. No scattered bones of village children.

Was the fancy which still drifted in my thoughts an "in nomine"? Something searching for the sacred – even here.

From a distance I saw a figure, a heavily cloaked and shrouded figure of a woman. She stood by the low black opening of the shelter. Her stoop suggested old age, though I suspect she was not particularly aged. Her one exposed hand held a string of beads. She was an anchoress, a solitary hermit. Not a Black Annis, but an Agnes.

The music was more audible here, in the bindings of the undergrowth, the ripples of the black water. Music from several centuries after her time, but woven around a simple chant she would have recognised, as the music reached back towards her.

In nomine deo....

5 – THE BOOK

The fifth room, though I suspect it was the same room as the first and my sense of the geography of the house had been confused by my apparent wanderings by the pool.

Whether or not it was the same room it was illumined by a weary 40-watt bulb in a table lamp. The side table on which it stood, a few chairs and the floor were strewn with book, photographs and loose pages, some of almost illegible handwriting and some of typescript.

Moving closer to the litter I recognised the writing was my own. Amongst the material were several white notebooks which I knew were mine. I picked one up. On the page at it which it had been lying open was the scribbled sentence:

"All things are drawn by love to their form in the Mind of God."

It was the notebook in which I had written the first notes for what became the first Ravello Dialogue, sitting on a balcony at the Hotel Marina Riviera in Amalfi. These were, I realised, all sketches, print outs and completed versions of the various fragments of this book. And amongst the pages were photographs, my own and pictures from other sources, of the gardens at Ravello, and of portraits of certain people whose features were reflected in the faces of the Countess, Maude and the others. Here were other books, open at pages which had affected these conversations, drawings and even maps. I daresay there were even CDs or other media for music storage.

The material covered more than ten years, as many as thirteen, I think, to the notes made in Mustard Pot Cottage.

So, this was the Book, this Book, in, as they rather annoyingly say these days, deconstructed form. Yet linking all his, constructing itself with golden wires, was the Book itself. And some of the pages here were as yet unwritten

Work in progress.

The tea, especially Mrs Spratton's cake, was excellent.

Mordant had only this to say in explanation:

"Even understanding what kind of thing a WORK is is only the first step. I see now that beyond this is the deeper knowledge. Once we recognise that something is a WORK we can begin to *know* what that Work IS and what it tells us by being what it IS. If we don't even recognise what a WORK is we have no hope of reaching this knowledge. If we live as if we were not ourselves a part of the WORKS, or as if we were detached and that these Works were objects, or as if we had any meaning apart from the Works – and vice versa – we have no hope of finding TRUTH."

I fear Mordant drifted back to his old ways. If we are part of this constant forming, this Dance of the Making of Works, are we not also formers, makers, ourselves? If we are drawn into a WORK, a story in the world, can we not draw things in the world into our own stories?

This is the working of Magic, of course, and Plotinus, as Mordant knew, suggests that we can create a desire to which other things are drawn.

There is a certain sense in this, and it does seem that this is what sometimes happens. Things seem to come our way because of our desire. But our perception can be distorted by our own self-centredness and our own self-love. We are all co-creators, but our freedom to create comes from humility and openness to the “love that moves the sun and the stars.”

12th December 2016

THE HOUSE ON THE BORDER

The house is, indeed, on the border – though which border is perhaps best left unsaid. It is as old as a house could be, in its heart – part local stone, part wooden framed – cradled by the irregular ground at the foot of the hills, shaded by ancient trees. There were broad yews in the garden.

It is a place to meet, and a place from which to depart, on whatever journeys to which we find ourselves drawn.

There is music in the house. Several of the visitors put on small concerts, intimate sonatas for recorder, the fine 17th century harpsichord, cello or viol. Occasionally a passing flurry of musicians play dark fantasias by Lawes or Gibbons – those fancies by Gibbons seem to me like records of journeys, a diary of the kind of wanderings I long to make, along, across, or through, this border.

All the people who have appeared in these dialogues were there: the Countess, who found books to delight her in the library (a *Splendor Solis* in living colour); Maude, silent and invisible for much of the time; the dancing one, and the cold and intellectual Lady who I had met at the Observatory. I found Mordant, grizzled old traveller, who had been so wise about the meaning of “Works”, lost in himself, alas, with a hand-drawn map spread out on the great oak table. Could these diagrams, lines and rings, have any meaning when laid across the geography of this island? The Lady of the Observatory occasionally glanced at him sceptically as she glided through the hall.

What journey do I make? What could guide my steps? What thoughts do I take with me?

At different times I follow each of these teachers, sometimes still the crabbed view of old Mordant. Recently I have come to understand more of Maude’s way of seeing. It’s only one way of looking at the world and travellers who pass through this house come from many traditions – but, while keeping in mind the Countess’s love for the laws of the cosmos and soul, I find myself remembering the need to love things as they are, even the occasional failings and uncertainty of matter. Truth may be immaterial, but it can be known in the dancing of “*silva*”, the Latin term for unformed matter, as it seeks to embody all those potential forms of beauty.

For someone not from a catholic background the role of Mary can seem alien, but to an outsider there is the attraction here of mystery, secrets hidden in plain sight.

I was, at first, surprised, that the oldest, stone, part of the house, held a small chapel – room enough for benches for no more than twelve – with a statue of Our Lady.

Inscribed on the wall beside this shrine was a prayer to Our Lady. The wording seemed obscure at first, but I could see that this was perfectly orthodox. It had to be the case, in this place, that the prayer would emphasise the belief that Nature, the Cosmos, was inherently good, was founded on Harmony, and we, our Souls, have it within them to reflect this Harmony. (How you take this is up to you. You may think, literally, of Harmony, or simply of the Laws of Nature, which undoubtedly guide all things, and which make unnecessary the idea of an all-controlling God.)

Lady –

- at the birth of whose Son the new light spread through darkness -
help us to see the world in the light of the New Creation.
- in whose Nature is the perfect expression of Harmony -
teach us the wisdom to find Harmony in all Creation.
- who shared God's creative Love -
help us be drawn by Love in our lives and works.
- mother of the Word made flesh -
help us to know the Word in every face of Nature.

Of course, this can be said in other ways. Some wanderers may be seeking the city of Hurkalya. The dancer liked to keep it simple.

THALIA

'Who sees all beings in his own Self and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear', as it says in my tatty old copy of the Upanishads. That's dancing.

I

True, but it's all too easy to get that wrong – and just see yourself in everything. That way you never become your Self.

THALIA

Best not to worry who you are. Just get on with it.

I

That's what I want to do. Just get out there and look. It's hard to know where to start. I like the random thing – follow the spinning top on the map. Or be spun round at the crossroads and follow the direction you fall. That's not so easy in a car.

THALIA

True, but there are ways of doing it. And you don't have to do too much. You can't go everywhere.

I

There's a lot of world to see.

THALIA

But we're just small people. Let's just see our bit of the world.

I

I'm not sure what my bit of the world is.

MAUDE (who could occasionally sound severe)

Some of our journeys may be for our learning and delight. Some might be as prayers. We may need to give love to the places of our pilgrimage. Sometimes just being there is a form of healing.

I

The temptation, to me, is to keep trying to avoid the truth that we should see all places, and people, with the same open eyes. How easily we find ourselves wanting to impose a meaning on the world, or impose patterns on our explorations which narrow our vision. I used to like the idea of looking for patterns in the landscape, or in life, but I realised it was an illusion. It's so easy to impose patterns. It's too easy to see things which seem to fit a meaning. We might not see something that just doesn't fit,

or needs our prayers. Everywhere, everything, and every person, contains all these aspects, and has a centre.

URANIA (of the Observatory)

The images of our Camera Obscura may be measured with geometry on the map, but the centre can be anywhere. All foci contain all things within them. Everywhere can be an omphalos.

THE COUNTESS

We carry the universe within us. I delight in studying the stations of the stars and days within the cosmos and within myself. I might construct a pleasure garden in which we can stroll about taking in the floral and decorative amusements which teach us the workings of the stars within us. But my garden is a book of emblems, a place of learning. Just as is this House on the Border, my garden is a place from which we depart to enter the world.

MAUDE

Though I am, as you know, a votaress of St Clare, and I have a language by which I hope to understand the working of God, I am always aware that my language can be misunderstood. I know how difficult it is to comprehend, and that the misunderstandings can be most misleading when speaking to Christians of other traditions, who may use the same words in different ways. To me, the meanings are precise. The words are difficult because they are about the difficulty of understanding the intimate relationships of God, Nature, and ourselves. Our dancer friend has simple words, but I prefer to be reminded that the world is not only in the Mind. We only know Nature in our Minds, but what we know is Truth within material Nature. It's dangerous to disparage material things. Our Lady wasn't just an abstract idea of Harmony. She was Harmony in Nature. She was, and is, all Nature. Creation is in her. Christ is in all Creation.

We need to see the world in the new light – which is the old light of Creation made visible for us again. It's too easy to forget that our vision is clouded by what I might call sin.

But our hope is to reveal this light, and words misunderstood can cast a net of darkness.

I

But how do we clear our eyes and minds so that we can just see? There are always distractions, however vividly the place speaks to us. Where can I find a sausage roll?

A toilet? I wish I was somewhere else. I wish I was with someone else. I don't think there's any end to the learning – the preparation. There will always be new distractions. We are always needing to renew our language, so we don't just see what we want to see.

THE COUNTESS – as EUTERPE

We have to clear the dust of earth from our souls so we can hear the heavenly music. We can ascend through the spheres learning the music and mode of each sphere in ourselves so that our soul can resonate wholly with the Music of the Spheres and hear the whole world as a song.

THE DANCER – as THALIA

As poor Tom said: "You cannot enjoy the world aright till the sea itself flows in your veins." Just be the trees, the hills, the seas. It's easy if you can forget all your own rubbish.

THE LADY OF THE OBSERVATORY – as URANIA

This is the human disease – our detachment from the world. Empiricism led to detachment, an analytical outlook, and we lost the sense of participation in the universe. It can be recovered. We can happily examine the workings of nature, the mathematics of the stars, but we can know all these things and still recover our enjoyment – and just see what there is.

MAUDE – as POLYHYMNIA

Pray to be Christ-like. Find Christ in your soul and you can find the Word in all things.

The fact is at different times all these words mean something to me. Perhaps our souls are constellations. No one has one single point of view. No-one has a single vocation. One "self" might dominate from time to time, but we can never forget the other planets or modes which lie in the shadows. I might find some new sphere moves into the light, something I have neglected. It might be the tragic muse, or even the muse of love poetry.

It's time to be going. I have a device, a method of looking under the surface of things, with images and music. All I need is a means of random travel. There are places I might want to visit, there is an attraction in the mysterious, and in lost shrines – but these are only ever one person's fancies. I am not recording the world, or even a part

if it – just one small person’s glimpses of one small bit of the world. Everyone can explore – just by looking. By being there.

When I am not exploring the world there is music to write, music which explores music itself, the language of music, which is also the language which lives in everything – and explores the parts of the soul, and the world, I have neglected, or from which I have tended to turn my eyes.

(6/11/2017)

SEARCHING FOR THE CITY

You may remember me talking about Mordant, the often-deluded composer, who vanished from the haunts of men, to travel, it is said, the old green roads in a Romany vardo. He heard music in the world. Every day's journey was a symphony, which he would transcribe at his clavichord as twilight fell. So the story goes. Did he travel in reality (whatever that is) or did he travel only in his music? There are pages of incoherent pencil sketches which record his travels, or the music of the earth. If we could hear clearly, with our listening minds properly attuned, we could share the journey.

I always assumed his wanderings were at random. There is a story that he threw away maps and disregarded finger posts and used a deck of cards as a guide, in some way which I do not pretend to understand.

But I see now that, though his journeys might have been guided by chance, they did have an object. He was searching for The City – The Heavenly City on Earth. That labyrinth of green ways would lead him deeper and deeper into border countries, and, at that unexpected moment, he would find himself entering a place which was both here, on Earth, in this multi-layered terrestrial geography, and was also the City where all music sounded together, day and night, as one harmonious and unified song of praise!

"Isn't that a bit over the top?" I asked.

"Not at all. I am adopting a poetic mode to convey a story which belongs to the realm of poetry, rather than sterile fact."

"OK. I don't mind a bit of romantic excess. But I haven't come across this idea before, this searching for The City. I thought it was all random wandering. Isn't there a touch of madness...?"

"As if it wasn't all quite mad already!"

"...in this pursuit of a delusion. An idee fixe?"

"Not at all. Isn't this City something which we might all be seeking? Our true home, which is not of this World? The Celestial City?"

"Yes, it's a conventional myth – but you say he was searching for this City on Earth, however well-hidden it might be in the labyrinth of "old green tracks" – though when I say that I'm not thinking of ley lines, with their unpleasant and rather inhuman

straightness. I'm sure Mordant wouldn't go for them. Mora a man for the Celtic-revival swirl or arabesque."

"No, his ways were never straight, though they were frequently narrow."

It's an interesting idea, to which I feel strangely drawn. I like to look for mystery in the landscape. Where did you hear this?!

"From the man himself!"

"Really? I'm astonished. I know he is said to be still wandering like the Scholar Gypsy. Did you pass him on sunny day at Bablock Hythe?"

"No, not a personal encounter. I've his own account. It's just a scribble, but I think it makes sense of the whole idea. I don't think he was deluded – not, at least, when he wrote this down. Perhaps he had emerged from a time of delusion."

"You actually have this writing?"

"I can show it to you. Let's go to my rooms. You can read it while I smoke one of my final cigars. My only weakness – but a weakness I aim to abandon. Though abstinence, to me, might be as much an ignis fatuis as Mordant's City."

This document, a few pages of scrawl, had been found in a drawer, I was told, in a small hotel on the Welsh Border. It was unsigned, but, by a remarkable coincidence, the proprietor of the hotel, who had found it while Spring cleaning, had mentioned it to my acquaintance when a conversation had been struck up about one of those Victorian prints which show the journey of Bunyan's Pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the Heavenly City.

Here is my transcription – which is partly based on my hurriedly made notes and partly from my not particularly reliable memory.

MODES OF PLACE

I have an obsession with the Music of the Spheres – the ancient image of the cosmos as a series of spheres, on which the planets turn, surrounding the Earth. The whole is

tuned to sound a musical scale, rather like Benjamin Franklin's glass harmonica, of bowls within bowls, spinning in water and singing when touched. A cause of madness for the young lady musician, due to the poisonous lead in the glass. Perhaps the spheres are the source of my madness.

But there is a truth in this image. For the Earth, think of the entire material universe. The spheres show that musical harmony rules everything in Nature. The planets pass on the influence of the source of all being, the Unity, or God, to the world below. The same harmonies which sound in the cosmos are present in everything in the sublunary world, Earth.

Each sphere is a heaven. Dante leaves the Earth and ascends towards the Empyrean, beyond the stars, in his Paradiso. Each planet has a particular quality – with which we are familiar today, the martial, lunar, venereal... These qualities are also present in the musical modes which are founded on the various tones each planet sounds.

Indeed. I believe this to be true. The image of the cosmos is true. These spheres also sound in our souls, which are an image of the cosmos. And why not? We are made of the stuff of the stars. Or something like that. Ask Plato.

When I was still young, before my travels, I sought Wisdom, and, as with all young souls, I was easily deluded. I might have encountered Wisdom at the Temple steps, but I did not listen to her words.

There is a temptation to see the order of the heavens as a map which might be projected on earth. Could there be places which reflect each of the planetary heavens on earth? Could we follow a road on earth through these stations of the stars, and ascend to heaven, or knowledge?

At one time I admit I saw the diagram of the cabalistic Tree of Life as a map, rather too much like the map of the London Underground, and I imagined I might find this map laid over the landscape I loved to explore.

Others, I know, look for the plan of the heavens, the zodiac, layed out on earth like starry wheel.

It's a nice idea. What's wrong with it?

If only I had listened to Wisdom.

We imagine that each planet rules things in nature which reflect that planet's quality. Each planet has a metal. For Venus, copper, for Mars, iron, for the Sun, Gold. Gold is

Gold, a thing of the simplest form. A work in itself. Gold, an element, is one thing, whatever form that Gold might take. We can imagine Gold is ruled by the Sun, solely.

We imagine the planets have lordship over simple minerals, crystals, and living things. Jupiter may rule over citrus fruit. The refreshing oranges, beneath their dark leaves, are Jupiter's, or the gifts of the delightful muse, Euterpe. I can send my memory to orange groves and Euterpe's delightful presence...

Ah, yes...

And so, I would say to myself, when I was young, before my travels, there can be places on this Earth which belong to one planet, or mode, or muse.

I could enumerate them. My far-off orange grove sings with Euterpe in the Lydian mode. The sea wood belongs to the changing moon. Liminal border regions lie under the unpredictable governance of Mercury. How many Saturnine wastelands have I crossed, hearing in my mind Mr Holst's plodding music?

There is a meaning in this, and a value. We are microcosms. We contain reflections of all the heavens within our souls. There are times when we long for the wasteland to balance an excess of merriment. I know I do.

We have the same music of the spheres in us. The music rarely sounds with the unified harmony of the cosmos. We suffer from imbalances. Learning to know all these different qualities within us is a hard task, the work of a lifetime. Our diseases of the soul may be cured by music. The music of a therapeutic planet may help redress the balance, reveal an undiscovered harmony in our soul, or act as a mirror to draw out an excess of melancholy. I know the efficacy of this medicine.

I have travelled across this island in search of places which have one dominating mode, as a study of the nature of Harmony - and as a way of exploring my own soul - or of refreshing the harmonies within me which I have allowed to fall into disuse. There is a truth in this. It is the same process as the healing Marsilio spoke of, and practiced with his lyre

But I should listen to Wisdom.

These are Harmonies, not Music. Though each planet may seem to have a kind of music of its own this music has a monotony, it is the expression of a single note of a scale. The music of our Souls and of this Earth, contains all these Harmonies, not as separately sounding spheres, but as Music, in which all tones are working together to make the individual symphony.

Why is this so little understood? The difference between Music and Harmony?

Harmony is a sign of the divine Unity from which all things spring. Music is the divine alive in Nature.

The heavens have Harmony. The Earth has Music. This is the work of Creation.

Can we imagine a human being who is all solar, all martial, all venereal?

Perhaps for a moment – but this is not to be human.

We can imagine a God, or a muse, who is the personification of one mode – but even they would not appear to us in any guise that we would recognise as human if they were not also of a mixed music as we are, albeit with one dominant harmony. To be human is to have the entire cosmos reflected in the soul, the microcosm. The solar human has an access of sun, but still contains all other harmonies.

There are places, yes, which have one dominant mode, but this does not make them sacred. The study, or the experience of these places, might guide us to the knowledge of the full gamut of music in ourselves, and to an awareness of the Unity of the cosmos, yes. I can imagine a world which does resemble the underground map of cabala, in which we learn the structure of the whole. I can imagine that a person of incalculable wealth could lay out a philosophic garden in which these separate qualities could be experienced through his orangeries, rosaries, temples and contemplative groves.

I have known gardens like this, but I have not known such initiatory landscapes or paths laid out by nature.

Do you follow me so far?

Wisdom turns to me. I have been dazed by the colours of these individual jewels,

“Remember the Tree, “she says. “Remember the Garden.”

The dazzling colours recede in its shade and I can see, yes, I can see the Garden, trees, a carpet of Spring flowers, the pure glitter of the gentle river.

She turns to face me, moving one foot gracefully, as if taking the first step of a dance....

(You see the literary allusion.)

Yes, I should have remembered the Garden, and the quiet and sobre Matelda, who is so patient with me, as she was with the Florentine poet.

“This is sacred ground,” she says. “We are free from enchantment. We step on Earth. The heavens are above us.”

Yes, I see. I have travelled through the forest of error – though, I must say, I have enjoyed its mysteries and pleasures to a considerable degree. But this is a case of not seeing the wood for the trees – or, indeed the Tree for the trees.

This Earthly Paradise, which might, or might not have been, pure Eden in some lost era before time, is, as its familiar name reminds me, earthly. Of all the places of my imagination, this is the most precious, because it is both earthly and sacred. It is something like Paradise.

And, yes, it is both earthly and under the heavens.

This is the simple lesson of her glance, and it should have been obvious to me from those days before my travels.

What makes this place holy is that it lies under the heavens, the whole resounding firmament. It is holy because, while being on Earth, it reflects to the cosmos as a whole. This is her message, this quiet lady who, today, is speaking for Wisdom.

As she knows –

The CITY, the TEMPLE, and the GARDEN are all one. They are different ways of imagining the true Pattern of Creation which, in itself, can do nothing but reveal the Unity of the Source of all Being – whether you prefer to think of this in abstract terms or through a more personal image.

These Places are all ways of seeing the idea form of the Cosmos.

And, of course, we know that the cosmos imagined isn't true. So I tell myself that these three images, and the image of the cosmos, are all images of Harmony. Which is True.

(Or so I will hold to be true for my personal convenience. All this can only be a way of thinking that works to my personal convenience. I claim no more.)

(For more on the symbolism of these see A FRUIT FOR EACH MOON)

THE CITY

There are earthly cities which, for a moment, touch The City. (I do not say they “become” The City, or they “reflect” The City. That’s not how it works. They touch the City and ARE The City, in their inevitably imperfect way.

This might be the case with Venice, Constantinople, London – or the cities we would like to imagine they were or are. These cities touch The City when they are cosmopolitan, full of life and variety, a meeting place or melting pot of cultures. Yes, I know this is a dream. They may never really be like that – but in spite of their failings, their governments, they may occasionally touch The City in spite of themselves.

I cannot imagine a city which its founders, the makers of so-called “civilisation”, have built to be ordered and unified, with an imposed unity, can ever be The City. Can any idea of worldly order achieve this? Such cities, surely, are dead parodies of The City,

This must be true, must it not? What can we say of The City? It is a model of the Cosmos. It must contain all things. We may associate human visions of The City with religions which like the idea of imposing unity on the world, but this can never be true. This can never work!

The material world is evolving, yes evolving, into an Image of the City, of a quite different kind. This world could only evolve into the ordered unity of a totalitarian city through death, through the pruning away of variety and difference. Freedom must be (and I am sure philosophers have argued this) an essential condition of the City. Yes, indeed. What I mean by Freedom should, I am sure, be called

PEACE.

This is what PEACE is. The freedom of things to be what they are in harmony with all.

And that reminds us of other worldly cities which have never achieved this moment of touching, when the city greets its cosmic pattern.

Yes, this is how it is. The Image of The City is an image of the Cosmos, which is the ideal pattern of Creation in the Mind of God (if you will pardon the expression.) This world does not evolve towards becoming a literal reflection of that pattern. That pattern is the template of inherent harmonies which allows the world to evolve as a Dance, yes as a Dance, in which each dancer (by which I mean everything that has unity in itself) can dance in PEACE, exchanging hands, avoiding treading on toes, but graciously combining or separating into new things, new works, as the music inspires.

Thus PEACE achieves DELIGHT. To find ourselves joining that Dance is a Strange Delight.

The Orchestra is The City.

And I can imagine other kinds of City. There might be Cities which, rather than being purely mercurial, are subject to mercurial change, in place and time. They would be dangerous and unpredictable places, but they would show what PEACE might be in their lack of it. Mr. Blake's Golgonooza, is a city of creativity. I have walked through London, at a certain angle to normality, and seen Golgonooza.

But neither this, nor any earthly city of PEACE, is The City. The City can never be just a small part of the world, or a passing moment. The City is the pattern of the whole. And yet, any thing can contain this unity by being free to be what it is.

Yes.

THE TEMPLE

And is there a Temple within the City, or is the City also the Temple? The Apocalypse makes it clear. There is no Temple, for the City is the Temple. The Temple is the pattern of the cosmos, perhaps the diagram, a motionless key to a cosmos which is dancing. The Temple contains within itself the absolute Unity from which Harmony sounds. This is what the Temple of Jerusalem represented – or was. The pattern of Creation, and the place where Unity was reflected on Earth. This is the pattern of the City.

Every temple we build aims to be a model of the cosmos, perhaps with a different form in different places, but always reflecting the Harmony of Creation and the point of Unity. Of course we can fail in our attempts to represent the Temple, but there are

times when we succeed and the Temple becomes what it represents, not a model of heaven on earth, but a drawing of earth into heaven.

THE GARDEN

And the Garden is also the Pattern of the Cosmos. Eden was Creation in perfection, the pure pattern. The Temple is also the Garden, and the Tree of Knowledge was in the Temple – and the Tree was the pattern of Harmony, the miracle in Nature which shows that everything, every colour, derives from the pure Unity of light.

It is as if The City is something which humanity creates from its nature. It only comes alive if it is the product of a dance and not the forced construction of one mind. Where would the PEACE be if the city were an imposition of order? The Temple is a human work to reflect the cosmos, which can succeed if it celebrates, praises, rather than imposes. The Garden, then, is that place where Nature, of her own accord, finds Peace and becomes a temporal expression of the eternal Garden, the pattern of the Cosmos.

These three are, shall I say, modes of the same thing, Nature becoming at one with Unity. These are places of vision, of temporal repose. I seek all these on my wanderings – and I find them – but my mind beats on. I have no repose within me. I touch the Peace but travel on.

Is not this how it is always for us?

There are those whose own souls are still and who have the Peace within them, of course there are. I do not see my restlessness as a disease. I travel, I compose, to explore, to show that there is heaven within the world. All I can hope to do is to show these things to others who may be more restless and have not noticed the wonder. All I can do is say “Lo!”

These, as I say, are the three modes in which the vision of unity is revealed to us in Nature, but the whole world is a revelation. There are those forests which, by being what they are, open into Forest of Adventure, or woods, which are The Magic Wood. There are mountains and rivers which are the mountains and rivers of scripture. The vision is always forming. A hill might demand a tower, or a valley, a story.

And, please remember, we only experience this when our eyes and imaginations are open. We do not see the forest through a veil of fantasy, we see the magic when we see the forest as it is.

And there is also another quest – to see again that Lady, who is herself the pattern of Harmony, and to apologise for ignoring her guidance.

If the GARDEN, CITY and TEMPLE are images of Harmony, then our MUSIC is, in fact, not merely as a metaphor, the MUSIC of the TEMPLE. The gifts the divine pattern passes to earth, the FRUIT and LEAVES of the TREE are, indeed, MUSIC!! If I place myself, in my imagination, in the TEMPLE, I become a musician, singer, or dancer, before God, and I am drawn to pass those LEAVES and FRUIT of MUSIC to the world, in my own, imperfect, voice.

Indeed.

And so, yes, The City is my true home, because I have the Music of the Spheres in my soul. I am seeking The City as itself, a distant view even from the bourne's head to which the Pearl poet was led – but I am also seeking The City on Earth, because it can be touched by the earthly City, or the Garden touched by those rare happy places, or touched in our memory by the Temples, which are images of The Temple. And in my travels, which must be free, random, drawn by PEACE, I hope to learn Harmony, to be a performer who knows life, death, and resurrection in the heights and depths of nature. In my travels I have no choice but to join my songs to the whole world, in its most humble places, as it seeks to become a new Creation.

22/04/2018

WHAT COMES FIRST?

'Old Mordant, they say, was once a traveller, wandering the old green lanes in a romany vardo and recording his journeys in music, as endless symphonies whose form was provided by the roads he followed. Others suggest that the travels were imaginary, experienced solely in the composition of the music.

Some years ago, he was to be found at the House on the Border, keeping to his study, deeply immersed in the mathematical and geometrical study of harmony. This was followed by a period equally deeply submerged in the study of kabbalah. Both areas of study can be productive. I am not decrying either harmonics or kabbalah. Both are aspects of the wider world of Music. In Mordant's case, as a musician of uncertain age, and after a disturbed and frustrated career, any such study might acerbate existing proclivities to...madness? Mild headaches? Bowel trouble...?'

MORDANT

Are you attempting to imitate my manner?

I

I seem to have fallen into it. It's just an introduction. I was going to say how, more recently, when I previously visited you here, you were incredibly helpful. You demonstrated the different kinds of "work". It was revelatory.

MORDANT

That was a few years ago. I am glad you have returned to what I like to call "the Northamptonshire lakes." They may be artificial, but the effect is romantic.

I

This house certainly is. I'm sorry about my opening. I know that you have studied Harmony in many ways, and I wanted to ask you about the relationship between Music and Harmony. To put it simply, do we come closer to what we might call God through studying Harmony itself or through Music itself. I'm sure you'll say Music now, but I know some people who see Harmony, the Music of the Spheres, as a ladder leading from this corruptible world of confusion and discord towards the heavens. If that's not the true way such a focus might lead to uncomfortable tensions. And then

there's the idea of the Music of the Angels, something far higher and closer to God. Don't we sometimes hear that music, or remember it – and try to recapture it?

MORDANT

An important question at this stage in your journey. There was something Ficino said, in one of his letters – that were two kinds of sacred music - that of the spheres and that of the angels. The Florentine philosopher may have used celestial music to balance the spirits, accompanied by jovial oranges or solar gold, but this music, a medical device, can only be far lower than that of the angels. And our own music echoes the music we once heard the angels play and try to recall, is that not far higher and closer to God?

I

That must be so.

MORDANT

I like to think that, over the centuries, there have been devotees of the true magic, who have listened to, or performed, their *sonatae in stilo fantastico*, or consort music, and communed with the angels, and listened to the distant echo of the sounding Word, in their oak-panelled garrets. They have, surely, been raised far beyond the farthest star.

Imagine a group of musicians playing together in, shall we say, a private upper room – not a public performance on this occasion. There might be one or two listeners. Players and listeners come here in a quiet and reverential frame of mind. To them all music is sacred. This could be at any time, in any place.

What are they playing?

I

Perhaps the music of Gibbons or Lawes...

MORDANT

They might be playing music of more recent composition. For example?

I

Schubert quartets - romantic piano trios...

MORDANT

Even your own attempts...But they play, and they listen...

What do they hear?

I

The music...the instruments...

MORDANT

They hear the music itself, interpreted by the musicians, yes, but what do they hear beyond the music...communicated by the music...

I

They hear the language of Creation – the music which draws things, sounds, instruments together within the whole physical world to form new works...

MORDANT

Yes – in the music which they play they are also hearing that Hidden Music, that divine language. We have established that this must be so?

I

I think so – it's a thought, an idea, at least...

MORDANT

A conjecture which, for the present moment, is worthy to be entertained?

I

Yes, even if it be no more than a pleasing fancy. Not to be defined.

MORDANT

Indeed. Best not to. We just listen. And so, if the music follows the same laws of harmony and formation, and the search for Unity, or Truth, as Creation, what is it that we are hearing beyond the music?

I

We are hearing the Formation and Harmony of Creation.

MORDANT

We are. Are we hearing the Harmony of the Spheres?

I

No – not as such – not those individual harmonies. We are hearing music woven from those harmonies, as coloured threads are woven in the intricate form of a carpet. We aren't hearing the Harmony of the Spheres, or Harmony in the abstract sense, we are hearing Music, which is woven from Harmony and whose formation is guided by Harmony. We might say we are not hearing Harmony in itself but the result of Harmony at work, within the Music.

MORDANT

Is this music we hear now, then, something of a lower order, or less sacred than the Harmony of the Spheres?

I

Ah, I see. That's the question.

MORDANT

It's a very important question. Would you like another drop of this excellent apple brandy?

I

No, thank you.

I feel this Music, this fantasy that our imaginary consort plays, is closer to God, we might say, than the Celestial Spheres, or the Harmony which that image represents.

MORDANT

How can this be? This scraping of gut, this resonating wood, these all-too human musicians, with their occasional lapses, imperfectly cleaned fingernails?

I

Because, yes, because in this music (I think this is Lawes) we hear the Music of the Angels...just for moment – a memory – a suggestion. The music we hear becomes an echo of the Angelic Music. If it does so for only a moment it must be far above the Celestial Spheres, far closer to God. Even an imperfect piece, and an imperfect person, can also touch that divine music, or even reflect the Source of All Being, by being itself.

MORDANT

This must be so - or, rather – we may, if we wish, entertain this fancy...

And as the music plays, we hear the Work in Formation – just as the composer experienced its formation as he scrawled the notes on the mottled page. What is Formation?

I

Things drawn by Love, or the Spirit, to become what they might be, whether by Nature, or the composer's hand.

MORDANT

Indeed – and so, as we listen, we are hearing the working of Love, which is far closer to the Source of All Being than the Celestial Spheres. Our image of the Cosmos is misleading. The worlds of Physical Creation, Harmony and the Angels, are not a hierarchy reaching towards God, because God is an intelligible sphere whose centre is everywhere. God and the Celestial Harmonies are present everywhere, in everything. We can enjoy images, but we must always remember they are only images.

I

Very true. It's easy to forget and be limited by the image. We should see through the image. We know that old image of the cosmic spheres is not physically true, but we struggle to find a new image.

MORDANT

Yet music tells us what the Cosmos is truly like.

In Formation, then, Love draws things to their Form - to form Works?

I

Yes, but guided by Harmony. Harmony is the law which allows things to come together, in divine freedom, be they musical tones, molecules or lovers.

MORDANT

So, what is Harmony?

I

Musical Harmony is derived from Number. Everything is Number.

MORDANT

Is Harmony, then, something that only exists in the physical world? Sound can only exist in the physical world. Does number only exist in this world? How can there be number in the Angelic World where there is no time and space? Do we need such a world? Is a higher world an illusion? A pointless philosophical construction? Isn't Harmony, and everything that comes from it, including our souls, simply a necessary factor in the working of the physical world, as it follows its own laws of Formation, with us swimming along within it towards entropy? It can still be beautiful at times, but, surely, it is what it is. It unfolds from its unimaginable starting point.

I

Oh yes, I suppose so...But I like the other point of view...and sometimes *it's as if* the music already existed, out there, in the depths of memory, something heard by the river, whether played by fairies, or an echo of angels...

MORDANT-

It really is worth savouring the brandy. It is the apotheosis of Shropshire apples. It is what they were born for.

And listen. This is something new – this melancholy passage in the Fantasia. It reminds me of Maude, one of the Ladies of the House, her gentle tread, her sympathetic glances...

I

Our imaginary friends.

MORDANT

Imaginary, as we all are. You sometimes caught her character in music. Yes, you have. What does she – and they - mean to you?

I

I suppose I think of them as moods, aspects of imagination - the intellectual, delightful, the melancholy, the comic. I have always been able to place myself, as it were, under their influence. Less so, the one we know as Urania, I tend to avoid the abstract or intellectual aspects of harmony.

MORDANT

You understand each of the ladies as a particular musical mood?

I

Yes, the character, or quality, of Maude, brings the melancholy that we hear in this fantasia. Is it by Lawes or Gibbons? I feel these modes of feeling relate to musical modes. Maude is the essence of the Mixolydian – or the Mixolydian is the essence of Maude – saturnine - inspiring melancholy – Polyhymnia - sacred song.

MORDANT

The modes are derived from number. Are these muses personified numbers?

I

They are not numbers. They are free ladies.

MORDANT

Let us accept the idea that the musical modes, which derive from number, have individual *affects*, or emotional qualities, which some might associate with the planets - though we can, if we wish, forget the old celestial spheres. The affects of the modes still hold true in purely harmonic terms. Modes, then, are both number and feeling.

I

Yes, the musical modes, and the Muses, are derived from the diatonic scale, from fundamental harmonies, from number, and they are also archetypal qualities in the imagination.

MORDANT

The association with the planets is pure accident, perhaps. Without mentioning the planets the church theorists were able to describe the affect of each mode. The modes were more than abstract number. They were of divine origin. The affect, or emotional quality, of the modes is a sign of their divine origin.

If we reduce these modes to number do we lose their meaning, their life?

I

Can we reduce the muses to number? They are personalities. We would recognise them if they passed us in the street. And yet - could it be that number affects the brain and causes these archetypal qualities in us? Are our feelings, imagination, an accident of the effect of number on the brain?

MORDANT

Some would claim this to be true, and suggest that all music can be reduced to number. These external themes and counterpoints of this fantasia are nothing – its only truth lies in the fundamental ratios of musical harmony, as I am simply carbon and water and certain other elements. But this would be looking through the wrong end of the telescope. We can look through the music to pure number and be deaf to the sounds that weave a meaning in our senses and memory – or we could look outward from Harmony, through the music, and see that music, the music that is being played in our imaginary room, not too perfectly, not quite in tune, sparks with *grazia*, and reveals Truth, Unity, the Word, and the working of Love.

Which end of the telescope draws our eye to the higher truth? Is the Music the cause for which number is born?

But, as we have touched on, the Work, by being itself, is more True than all Number. Let's say, if only as a pleasant fancy, the MUSIC, a work such as the fantasia, by being what it is, with all its complexities and imperfections, can echo the Music of the Angels and reveal the Word - and Love - which are the Source of All Being. Let MUSIC, and the FORMATION or COMPOSITION of Music be our study, and we will also be studying the HIDDEN MUSIC of Creation.

And more than this – this Work, even if imperfect, as our own works, and ourselves, all are, is a Unity. It has what old Duns Scotus called haeccity, thisness. It is in its thisness, uniqueness, that it reveals God. We need not look through out telescope to the turning spheres, we can look with human eyes, or hear with human ears, and through our human souls, our microcosms, know God.

This fantasy (yes, by dear Lawes, a victim of man's desire for war) is the final cause, what harmony was born for. Number, wherever its origin, is merely a medium of translation from the Divine Idea to the music which we hear – and which, as I think of our lost friends, makes me weep.

I

Very fine! Hurrah!

We can, if we wish, search deep into infinite complexities of mathematics in search of the principals of harmony, like Tartini –

MORDANT

And I in my days of distraction...

I

We can also be inspired by Urania (as muse of astronomy) to search through telescopes (literally rather than metaphorically) for the far away beginning of this world – I think it's called singularity – but we penetrate far deeper into the causes of things when we remember fragments of the music of the angels as we compose, and when we bring all our senses and imagination to Music. We experience the working of Love and touch Unity.

But I have have been thinking of Harmony as the same thing as Number. Harmony, in musical terms, derives from Number, but it it, in some way, an echo of a higher, *uncreated* Harmony, beyond the Created world?

I am sure others would argue with me, but isn't it true to say that Harmony, in the sense of harmonious sounds, and even as pure number, can only exist in the physical world? I accept that it is reasonable to suggest that our souls, imaginations, creativity, all come from number (though we have already agreed that we should look through the right end of the telescope) but can we be permitted to imagine, just as a way of thinking about this, and of relating to something beyond our understanding, that there is source, or cause, or pattern, of Harmony outside the physical creation?

MORDANT

Timaeus would say so, though we have to remember that his theory is only 'a likely story'. Socrates might not have agreed with him. We never hear what the author, Plato, thinks. In the story the demiurge, the creator god, makes the Soul of the World, who is the pattern that will bring order to Creation – through number. Number is created before the world can be brought to order. I don't know where matter came from. Nobody does. But that creator beyond Creation made the Soul of the World, or Number, and so Matter becomes the four elements and all things are formed by Harmony.

I

And so, Number only exists in this world. The higher world of God and the Angels has no number or time.

Nicholas Brady's poem for the divine Henry Purcell's ode of 1692 clearly differentiates between the power of the Soul of the World and the power of Music:

Soul of the World! Inspired by thee,
The jarring Seeds of Matter did agree.
Thou did'st the scatter'd Atoms bind,
Which, by thy Laws of true proportion join'd,
Made up of various Parts one perfect Harmony.

The Soul of the World is above 'the scatter'd atoms.' Nature, formed by the Soul of the World, has its Hidden Music:

'Tis Nature's voice; thro' all the moving Wood
Of creatures understood:
The Universal Tongue to none
Of all her num'rous Race unknown.
From her it learnt the mighty Art
To court the Ear or strike the Heart:
At once the Passions to express and move;
We hear, and straight we grieve or hate, rejoice or love;
In unseen Chains it does the Fancy bind;
At once it charms the Sense and captivates the Mind.

MORDANT

This is a sacred work indeed!

I

The Soul of the World, then, is the source of Harmony, Urania in her highest aspect. She can also be imagined as Aphrodite Ourania. And sometimes as the true Isis, beneath her veil. Venus, her planet, is her symbol in this world, and the lower Venus is her dim reflection. She is far beyond the physical creation, above the planetary spheres. She is the pattern of the spheres, their cause, and she, in turn, is made by the Creator.

MORDANT

Spenser writes about Venus in his *Four Hymns*, but in his *Hymn to Heavenly Beauty* he sees her godly image as Sapience, or Wisdom, as close to God as she can be:

There in his bosom Sapience doth sit,
The sovereign darling of the Deity,
Clad like a queen in royal robes, most fit
For so great power and peerless majesty,
And all with gems and jewels gorgeously

Adorn'd, that brighter than the stars appear,
And make her native brightness seem more clear.

And on her head a crown of purest gold
Is set, in sign of highest sovereignty;
And in her hand a sceptre she doth hold,
With which she rules the house of God on high,
And manageth the ever-moving sky,
And in the same these lower creatures all
Subjected to her power imperial.!

Here Sapience 'managed the ever-moving sky' - she is God's first made thing, the *cause* of Harmony - and she sits in God's bosom.

I

If so, and I know this only imagery, we can say that Wisdom is not number but the cause of Number.

But what of our souls? If they are microcosms, having the same form as the cosmos, are they simply made of number, a product of Nature, or can we say that they share an origin and cause above Number? Is Number one aspect of a higher reality, a Harmony above Number?

MORDANT

Don't be confused by Plato! His story is unnecessarily complicated and, perhaps, puts too much emphasis on number. It might be better simply to think that our soul as the same harmony as the universe as a whole.

We cannot say that our inner harmonies derive from number, but that the soul, the archetypes of imagination, musical harmony and number are all facets of a one law which originates beyond the physical world.

I

This is how it seems to be to me. But, of course, this is simply a way of looking at it. The image of the Soul of the World, or Sophia, Wisdom, or Urania, is a way of thinking about a divine law of Harmony that is the source of both physical and spiritual worlds, in which both aspects have value. It saves us from the danger of reducing everything to number in this world.

MORDANT

I am sure we are struggling to find ways of thinking about something beyond our understanding, perhaps because it is too simple. Perhaps beyond this harmonious world, of soul and body, there is *only* Unity – God – the Word – and in Creation Unity becomes the Harmony that guides everything in formation *and* the Word which is the Unity in our imperfect fantasy *and* the love which draws it towards its Form in the Mind of God.

It is as if this rainbow-hued Harmony is God's first-created thing, the pattern of our souls, of Number. Gaze through its myriad colours and we see only pure light. We imagine the Music of the Angels, but the Angels have no time or number. Listen through their music, which is as it is all the music there ever was and ever could be, and there is only eternal silence.

I

And yet – listen to this fantasia, look into the face of a friend, sip this apple brandy (thank you, yes, I think now is the time for another taste) and through our own imperfect senses and the inner harmony of our souls, we touch God.

MORDANT

Whose circumference is beyond our imaginary spheres and our infinite universe and whose centre is everywhere – in our music, in this antique glass...

I

Indeed.

MORDANT

All these things are *as if*, a way of thinking - but, as musicians, we should always maintain that Creation depends on Harmony.

I like to imagine musicians over centuries listening to music as a form of theurgy – not a magic by which the will attempts to affect other things, but a magic that draws down Love, Unity, Grace, and affirms the working of Harmony. If we can learn to be good listeners, by whatever spiritual means we prefer, we can experience the highest Truth in our imperfect, even discordant, music, and then go out of our place of study or performance and see these truths in every aspect of Creation.

Our task, then, is to create music, using all our resources, however limited, of technique, feeling, memory and imagination. We both have studied the mysteries of harmony and the *affects* of the modes, but we are not here to imitate the Celestial

Spheres, unless it be for specific healing effect, but to work with Hidden Music of Nature – by which we mean the whole of the physical world.

What have we been doing in our conversation but declaring how it can be that the closest we come to God is through the most earthly, and most human, things, including our poor music?

Mrs Spratton will bring anchovy toast as our evening comes to an end. Now, perhaps, you will take a drop more of this apple delight? We need no more words. I could, if you wish, play you my third piano sonata – though I warn you, it lasts approximately three hours and 23 minutes.

Kreisler invited his student to enter the Temple of Isis, the image of the secret Harmony within Nature. A good way, of course, but we have deeper mysteries through which we may hope to become better composers and better listeners.

This is the end of our Journeyman Years.

The Hermitage, Cowan Towers, May 11th 2024

THE HEART OF IT

Last evening (or was it long ago, even – yes, I can be sure – 1981?) there was music playing in the hall. A Purcell Chacony, moving on an endlessly repeated bass. As I wrote all those years ago -

And the maidens of the house were dancing, the four, to the music of time, hands passing over hands, but somehow merging one with another each in their own time, seasons moving, but all having existence at once. When the stations of the year join hands in the dance we watch from beyond. They move almost transparent in their individual colours passing through the silent but life-full world of the tapestries.

“One our dreams skilled Weaver is

Scarlet dressed quick-tongued and lithe”

moving through folds of rose leaves, artful forest growth and resting unicorns - a scarlet pattern. luxuriant Auburn hair and a sudden flash of a sharp smile burning eyes. Scarlet passing by pale blue winter becoming spring –

...a younger face uncertain and watching her own hands in the air dappled with changing colour lightly touching hands of the other dancers, finding a pattern in spite of her own fear and with eyes on the floor –

(Ah, she has learned her comic craft in more recent years).

The dark (perhaps melancholy) one seems to belong with the music, more with the deep swell of the bass in a long dark dress. She moves as much as the dance allows in the shadows.

The fourth is a crystalline form like flashes of silver and shattered diamond - the hand with which she touches the air in the centre is a flurry of white sparks. She wears a veil.

This is no ritual. The dance is itself. The dance was always here when the house was a ghost, waiting to be given form on the hillside. They were dancing when the druids were throwing blood on their arms, or engaging in pythagorean charms (depending on your attitude). The dancers were here, and the same music was playing. The hall is, in the simplest imaginable way, dimensionally transcendental. It exists in all times and places, and this building here is an image only.

This is the most beautiful of their houses – red brick, Elizabethan – and of their gardens – the late summer yellows, reds and blues along the walled walks. I daresay there is a bowling green.

It was warm, mid-August – in fact, the Feast of the Assumption. There had been a simple liturgy in the chapel, a small brick structure attached to the eastern side of the house.

I watched as they left, walking back to the principal entrance. I saw Maude, Thalia and Urania, but there were several unfamiliar figures, perhaps followers who had motored here on this special day.

The Countess, somehow still resembling an Elizabethan lady without wearing historical costume, noticed me and waved me towards the chapel.

Have you visited us here before? I think not. It's a simple place but the windows are delightful."

It was a plain place of worship with a series of small coloured windows, three on each side. They were painted rather than stained glass. Arts and Crafts? I recognised a few of the scenes.

"Significant moments in the story."

This one was the child Mary dancing on the steps of the Temple – here was the Annunciation – the Nativity – the Crucifixion (above the altar) – and the Assumption of Mary into heaven -and, I think, Our Lady clothed with the sun, the Immaculate Conception.

But what did these mean to my sparkling guide? I always took her for a Platonist.

"I think we can say, now, that we follow the same creed."

But what was it, exactly, if these were also its significant moments?

We walked in the garden, along the sun-catching walled walk of fire-reds, yellows, blue delphiniums. (I am not very good at the names of flowers.)

It was like being in E Nesbit's *The Wonderful Garden*.

"What can we say is true? What is the story?"

The Ladies, when we met in the drawing room over tea and tasty things. explained it like this – or something like this:

URANIA

We have a habit of fixing ourselves on one particular story, or one set of images as if that has authority, or because it gives us a sense of authority, but all we can say is True is that there is the One.

MAUDE

Certain things can be said of that Unity. Dionysus and others mention hem. The One is Good, Truth, and other words. But how is there anything else? Why does all this exist, or seem to exist? We can only say that the One is the Source of All Being. There is the One but, in its goodness, it pours forth light and love and what has being reflects that Source of All Being as an object of Love.

COUNTESS

That Source of All Being is Truth. It's eternal. Everything in this world is mutable (as my friend Spenser would say) and passing. And yet – and this is why we are here – and this is the other truth to which we are all devoted.

In this world there is also Harmony. Just as in musical harmony this Harmony cannot be separated from Unity – it can be found in the overtones of any single tone, and in the harmonies we discover when we divide a single sounding string in simple ratios.

This is the inherent law which allows everything to form. The Laws of Harmony are the Rules of the Game by which everything can seek form, and in seeking to be what it might be everything also seeks Unity in itself.

URANIA

We can say that from that Unity comes number.

THALIA

And it's all a Dance. Harmony is not just a rule of number. It's life. Chaos seeks Harmony. Matter, they used to call it *sylva*, seeks beauty. There's life moving in everything because everything flows from that Unity through Love - and Harmony can't be separated from Unity. Harmony inspires love and movement in this world.

URANIA

Beyond all images there is the crystalline dance of number.

COUNTESS

But we can't reduce things to Number as if only Number is real. Here's a mystery. Everything that exists is formed through Harmony – Nature, thought, dreams – and though everything is mutable everything is REAL because everything shares in that Harmony and Unity.

We know the Source of All Being in the world, in ourselves, body and soul.

MAUDE

This is the centre of our devotion. Unity and Harmony. If we forget Harmony we no longer know that the Unity works in all things. We no longer see the freedom of the Dance, or the reality and Truth in all things. We invent false ideas of God.

COUNTESS

We become attached to particular images rather than see Truth shining in all Images.

I can see that these simple ideas are the only things I should hold onto. Unity and Harmony. I can't say that I "believe" in anything beyond this. I find that I enjoy religious imagery which expresses these truths but I would not cling to any images and say they are the only valid images.

I may be wrong, but I think there's a history behind this.

URANIA

At a time, perhaps over three thousand years ago, someone discovered that the sounds that were perfectly harmonious and beautiful to the ear were related by simple ratios, perhaps of the lengths of a string.

Immediately they knew that there was a law within Nature – Harmony – a law which derived from Unity. This law guided not only physical nature but what was beautiful.

Music was a divine sign of that law.

By chance it appeared that the movements of the planets seemed to match this law. The planets appeared to be placed according to a diatonic scale, A to G. (This was understood consistently throughout the cultures of the middle-east, but not in Greece,)

Though we would say this was not literally true the idea of planetary harmony seemed to confirm that this law was true in all things.

From a very early time this discovery of Harmony became the basis of mythology. There was the Unity, which might become associated with an existing deity or with a newly invented deity – perhaps one attached to a people or a place. The Law of Harmony might be seen as the sign of a Nature deity, usually feminine.

THALIA

In this world – which might seem a bit of a mess – all this change and jumble – there were kings.

Music was divine so the King might be a divine musician – he might even be, in some way, the sacred lyre. His music was divine. We all danced.

URANIA

The King was the son of the Source of All Being and the image of Harmony.

COUNTESS

This pattern seems to have been common for many cultures. The images might change. They might confuse what should be a universal truth.

In the Temple of which we read in certain holy books, there might have been complicated myths and images about the deity who represented Harmony which changed over time, and eventually this deity, which, at its heart represented an inherent law, was abandoned in favour of rigid laws of society.

I

Ah yes, the inherent law. I've been searching for that a very long time. The Dance in the World.

THALIA

Yes, it doesn't stand still. Harmony's always movement. Can you feel it here? Look, I can touch it with my fingers, dancing in the dust specks.

URANIA

The image of the turning spheres – everything moves – and yet we know this image of the cosmos was unscientific – and yet it was true in its way.

And yet, even in those holy books, the abstract idea of wisdom seems to represent the same ideas of an inherent law in Nature.

THALIA

There's the Source of All Being. There's Harmony – and the Dance of Love. It's everywhere – not pinned down in a Temple. We can all Dance like the King – but if you start thinking you are a king you might tread on our toes.

MAUDE

I hold these things to be true – but knowing these things is not to live them. How do we become dancers, singers, musicians, composers? How do we become lyres of God?

I understand that some consider the images of medieval religion a fantasy. Some take offence at the image of Mary. Please bear in mind those original truths. It seems to me that the founders of my order rediscovered the original meaning. Though some might see Mary as a fiction she is a person who gives birth to God – she contains God in a little space.

I

Then Mary is taken into Heaven. Of course this is a matter of images. Heaven is beyond matter so cannot contain bodies. It's a story – it's *as if* – but is a way of imagining the way in which this world is inseparable from God in an intimate way - which we can easily lose sight of.

MAUDE

Perhaps. And Mary takes the place of an abstract Wisdom. Harmony is rediscovered as a living thing.

Mary is not Harmony, she is enthroned in the place of Wisdom, the source of Harmony in Creation. She is “the woman clothed with the Sun”, she is above the celestial spheres, with the changeable Moon under her feet.

From Bonaventure's sixth sermon on the Assumption (a woman clothed with the sun):

“In proof of this everything written about wisdom in Ecclesiasticus is to be read and expounded of our lady. The Lord wanted to express this in a prefiguring when the book and the manna were put in the ark as if to say whatever knowledge is pleasant

or savoury is preserved in my mother who kept all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

What does this mean? We aren't concerned with history but with the nature of things. This image tells us that we can know the source of Harmony is human terms, by being human.

Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor, adds:

“So this excellence is threefold: she is the mother of all who are spiritual, the mother of the fabric of the world, and the mother of angelic reparation.”

How can this be? In the 13th-century Mary has become the Lady of the ancient Hebrews – “the mother of the fabric of the world” – while still being intimately related to all of us – not the Mother of the Lord but the mother of everything in the New Creation.

I

This is why I find the Franciscan tradition so exciting – but it is radically different from much Western Christianity – even more from Reformation traditions which lost sight of Harmony. (Not all did.)

COUNTESS

But, always remember, all this is Images. These images are like transparencies or coloured glass. We can see through the image to deeper images – to the simple reality at the heart – and yet we cannot reduce these images to number. The images possess Harmony. They possess reality. As we do. There is Truth in this, but we miss the Truth if we forget that this is Story.

FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION 2024

1)

¹ Edmund Spenser, 'An Hymn of Heavenly Beauty' from *Four Hymnes*. London, printed for William

Ponsonby, 1596.

<https://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/hymnes.html>