



# *The Eye*

Power and the Seen

Francis Huxley

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Thames and Hudson

*The doors of Heaven open at dawn when the sun is born, and close at night when it sets. On this sarcophagus they have shut upon the man who lies within; their two leaves are guarded by the eyes of Horus, he who is born out of death and makes the doors of Heaven re-open. Detail from the sarcophagus of Kawid, Egypt, 2050 BC.*

ART AND IMAGINATION

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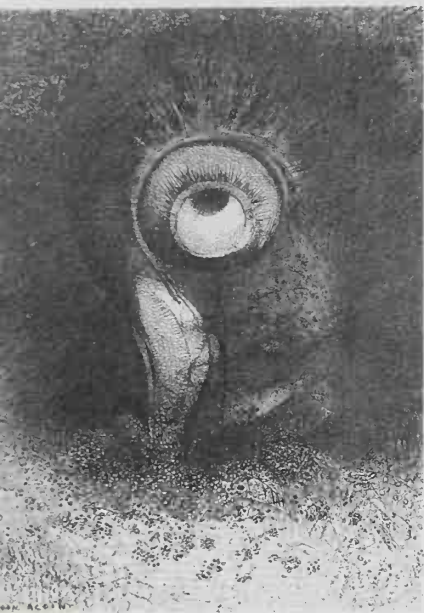
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*'The flower represents one of the first stages of evolution and the eye the last'. Lithograph by Odilon Redon, 1883.*

It is not so long ago that a man could remark in all seriousness that the ostrich and the spider hatched their eggs by looking at them, that the glance of the basilisk could kill, and that the snake could draw the nightingale to her death by the magnetism of its gaze. Leonardo da Vinci certainly thought as much, being well-read in the beliefs of antiquity; he was besides a consummate painter who well knew the spell that his own art could cast upon the beholder. A century later Sir Thomas Browne, doctor, humanist and exposé of *Vulgar Errors*, remained faithful to the notion that looks could kill while doubting that the basilisk, for instance, was much more than the *Uraeus* serpent, token of sovereignty which the Egyptian Pharaohs once bound upon their foreheads.

Sir Thomas was undoubtedly correct in his views about the basilisk, and many another superstition can likewise be traced back to some symbolic usage. Nor was he entirely off the mark in claiming that eyes can 'receive offensive impressions from their objects', as he put it. Students of behaviour have observed that an exchange of looks between animals is the usual prelude to all manner of social interactions, from casual acquaintance to fighting and sexual intercourse; animals are as well aware as we are of the difference between an indifferent look and the basilisk glance that is all power and intention.

Such a glance has all the makings of a symbol, in which an instinctual reaction is put into the service of social meaning as to the manner born. The very form of the eye lends itself to being the natural image of its own function and intentionality. Nature herself has made play with this fact, for animals such as dogs may sport a pair of spots upon their foreheads which intensify their gaze and the expression of their faces. The effect of this can be quite mythological: is not folk-lore full of ogres who are said to be awake when their eyes are closed, being safe to approach only when their eyes open and they must therefore be sound asleep?

## Eye and eye-spot

The power of eye-spots to draw the attention is used by the big cats as well as by dogs, by fish, birds, insects and even flowers. That a daisy is the day's eye is as much a tribute to the unfolding of its flower every dawn to greet the sun, as to the little yellow sun gleaming at the heart of its white petals; and if this be taken to be no more than a poetical turn of phrase, we must judge that the insects drawn to visit it are as much poets as we are. It seems, indeed, that the attention of the eye is drawn automatically to anything that looks like an eye, whether it be a spot of a single colour or one with a contrasting ring about it. Several kinds of coral fish have such an eye-spot, usually near their tails, no doubt as a ruse to attract a predator to the wrong end while the fish darts off in the opposite direction. Many butterflies likewise have one or more eye-spots on the edge of their wings, which must also be devices to misdirect attention from their bodies: for many specimens show beak-marks around these spots, and yet escaped with their lives.

But eye-spots can also be used to threaten with. The caterpillar of the *Troilus* butterfly has a pair of ringed spots on each of its segments, growing larger towards the head: there they blossom into regular eye spots, which are brought into

Opposite:

EYE TO EYE

*'When a man speaks,' said Mencius, 'watch the pupils of his eyes, for there what can be concealed?' Here Judas knows that his eyes betray him even as he offers Jesus the false kiss, and Achilles falls in love with Penthesileia the Amazon as he kills her. The Bull of Heaven is shown eye to eye with the water bird.*



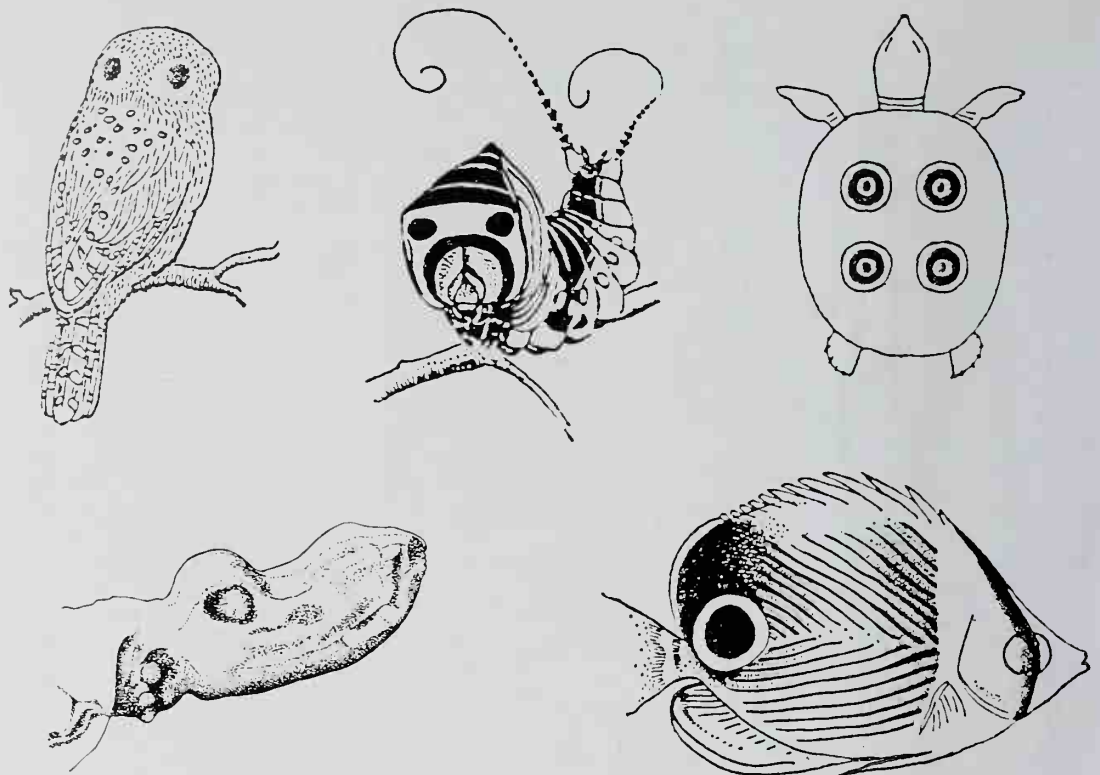
Top: *the Betrayal*, by Giotto. Arena Chapel, Padua.  
Right: *the slaying of Penthesileia*. Greek red-figure cup, about 460 BC.  
Above: Minoan krater from Heraklion, Crete.

## EYES FOR OTHERS

Nature is full of eyes, including some that are for appearance only. Some of these eyes reflect what must be a universal fear of bug-eyed monsters, as in the two caterpillars who hunch their painted eyes forward when alarmed; others deceive by being placed at the tail rather than the head or, even more effectively, on the back of the head.

Top row: eye spots on the back of the head of *Glaucidium perlatum*, an African owl; defensive posture of the caterpillar *Dicranura vinula*; marks on the Burmese turtle, *Trionyx hurum*.

Lower row: head of alligator bug, *Laternaria*; eye spot on *Chaetodon* sp., a fish of coral reefs.



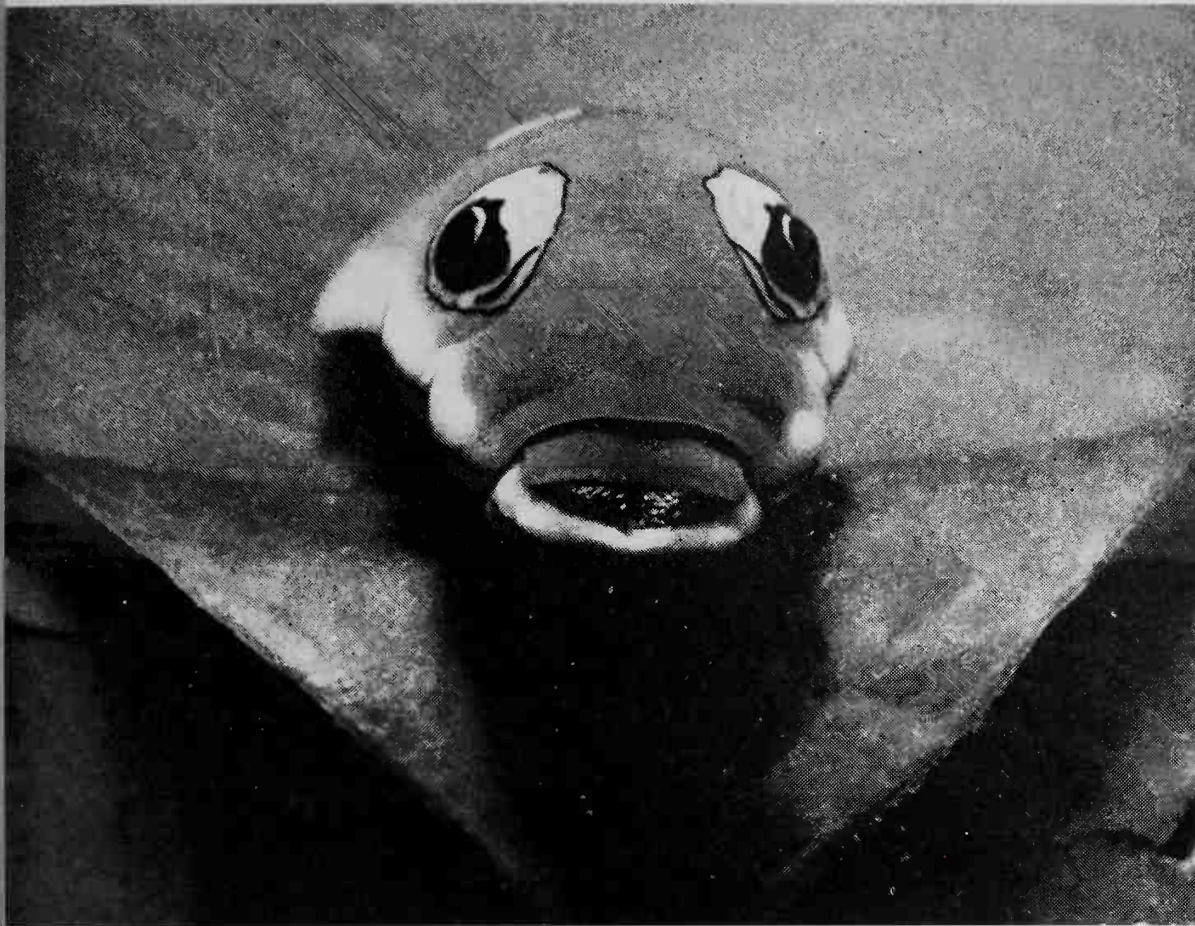
prominence by the grub suddenly hunching itself up when molested. The effect is as startling as that of a mantid which opens its wings with a flourish when disturbed, displaying eye-spots to enhance the effect; the sight certainly gives pause to the unwary, whether it be bird or human being, and must often succeed in making them decamp.

One of the strangest manifestations of this power to disturb by mere appearance is the South American lantern-bug *Laternaria phosphorea*. This is one of several with the same characteristic, namely a hollow carapace protruding in front of its head like a mask. The local Indians, who imagine that its bite is poisonous, call it the alligator-bug, and indeed the carapace is just like an alligator's head, complete with eyes, jaws and a row of teeth, and one must suppose that, though it is only two inches long, this disguise is sufficient to stop it being eaten by – birds? monkeys? tree-frogs? Whether it may correctly be said to mimic an alligator is, of course, a moot point: it might be better, as Roger Caillois made out, to suppose that it is doing its best to look like a quite imaginary monster, a dragon out of Nature's own mythology. The early French naturalists certainly treated it as such, for they described a small but brilliant light shining within its Hallowe'en lantern of a mask, which few observers have seen since; hence their names for it, 'fulgore' and 'porte-lanterne' – the flashing one, the lantern-bearer.

Such are the tricks that the imagination can play when faced by a mask complete with eyes and teeth. The human imagination is doubtless more active than the animal one, yet the lantern-bug, and the various creatures with eye-spots, must have assumed their present shapes long before human beings were around to have a say



Caterpillar of *Papilio troilus* in alarm.



in the matter. As far as eye-spots go, indeed, we may properly assume that they were manifested in response to an inbuilt function of seeing. We can make this function visible to ourselves easily enough, by pressing the shut eyes with a finger on each side of the nose: and what does one see then but a luminous eye-spot. Sufferers from migraine experience another form of such a function, a circular pattern of zigzags that goes by the name of castellation; while those whose heads have been knocked see stars. These patterns are called either phosphenes (from the Greek *phos*, light) or entoptics (from *en-*, within, and *opos*, eye), and their number can be increased to about twenty with the help of mild electrical stimulation. The similarity between these and children's drawings is quite plain, and it has been suggested that children – and adults – are actually drawing their phosphenes when they doodle. This may well be, but it is quite as likely that, just as vision is instrumented by certain patterns of neural function, so are the spontaneous motor habits that guide the pencil over the paper. Equally, there is no doubt that phosphenes themselves are often the subjects of art, as Reichel-Dolmatoff has shown for the Tukano Indians. Like many other peoples of South America, they compound a sacred medicine, called yagé, out of a variety of plants, and this brings them intense visions which they commemorate by painting them on their houses. Many of these designs are undoubtedly phosphene patterns for they are just the same as those which Western inquirers have witnessed, when taking a small dose of mescaline either by itself or together with electrical stimulation of the eyes. Lacking such mechanical aids, they can also be seen as a result of fasting, by meditating in the dark, in hypnogogic states, and during intense periods of stress and fatigue.

## THE CENTRE OF ORINATION

*The world is full of eyes. There is the eye of water, which is a spring, and the eye of land, which is an island. The wind's eye in a house is the window, and the bull's eye is the centre of a target. Potatoes have eyes, and so can flowers; bacon has eyes of lean in its fat, bread has eyes of air in its crumb. Needles and ropes have eyes, and so do ships; kneecaps also, together with the private parts of the anatomy. Peacocks have eyes upon their tails, and the owl moth on its wings.*

*The sight of a looking eye will always attract the gaze, from earliest childhood on; and it is by looking into each other's eyes that the bonds of love are tied, whether between mother and child or lover and lover. John Donne described this reciprocal joy in 'The Ecstasy':*

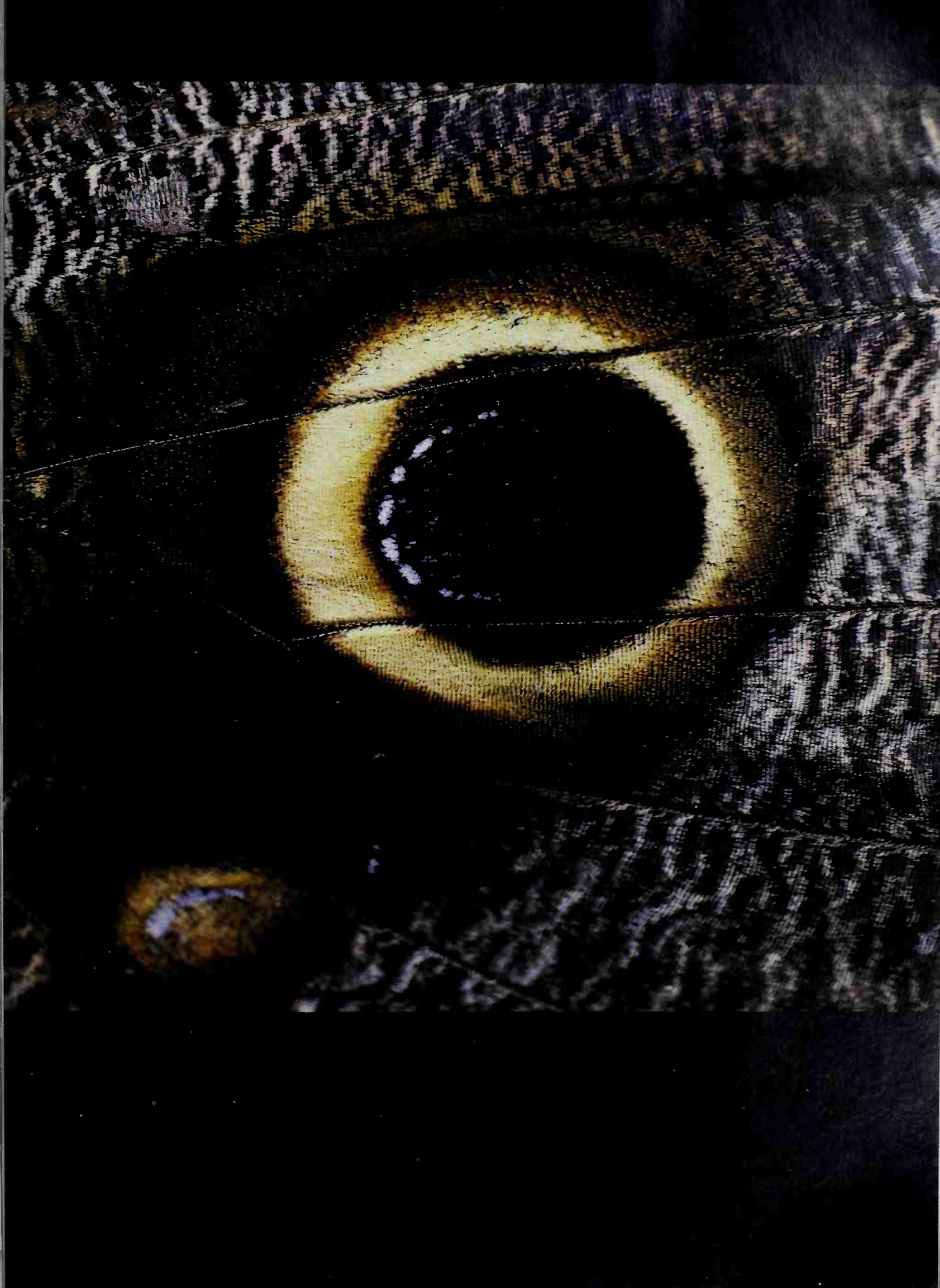
*Our hands were firmly cimented  
By a fast balm, which thence did spring—  
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes upon one double string . . .*

*Gazing thus, one sees in the black of the other's eye its pupil, a tiny doll that is the reflection of oneself. Rightly speaking, then, I see my pupil in your eye, and you see yours in mine. It is this simple fact which gives force to Meister Eckhart's pronouncement: 'The eye wherewith I see God, that is the same eye wherewith God sees in me; my eye and God's eye, that is one eye and one vision and one knowing and one love.'*

*An eye of this kind is, to quote another mystic, Boehme, a centre of nature and the similitude of the first principle. On earth, such a centre can be finely imagined as a spring or fountain of life, such a spring as is placed in every Garden of Life to water the four corners of the world from its single eye. To return to this Garden is to return to one's origins, as in the rapture that, according to Revelations, will bring this world to an end. For the divine eye will then look down upon its creation and burn it up in its seven-fold splendour of stars, spirits, angels and vials, while drawing the elect up through the eye in the dome of heaven where there appears a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet.*

*There are certain families of insects, fish and birds that have learnt the trick of painting themselves with eyes to mislead or alarm their enemies. They were a pain to Charles Darwin, when he tried to explain their evolution – indeed, he wrote to a friend that the eye on a peacock's tail*

*made him feel sick. The eye on the owl moth's wing is equally disturbing to those who must defend themselves from its look by reflecting on the activity of blind chance in its production. (Detail of the wing of an owl moth)*





*It was obvious to the ancients that love was an infection transmitted through the eyes. 'The birth of love by the eyes alone', said Heliodorus, 'finds a passage to the soul; for as, of all inlets to our senses, the sight is the most lively, and most various in its motions, this animated quality most easily receives the influences which surround it, and attracts to itself the emanations of love.'* (Krishna dancing with the Gopis; Indian cloth painting)

*This is especially true when the animation of the soul is expressed in a dance as well as through the eyes. But these may share, in all stillness, the secret of an animation of a different kind, as when Mary, pregnant with the Christ Child, greets Elisabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist. (The Meeting of Mary and Elisabeth; Catalan painting from Lluga, 13th c.)*



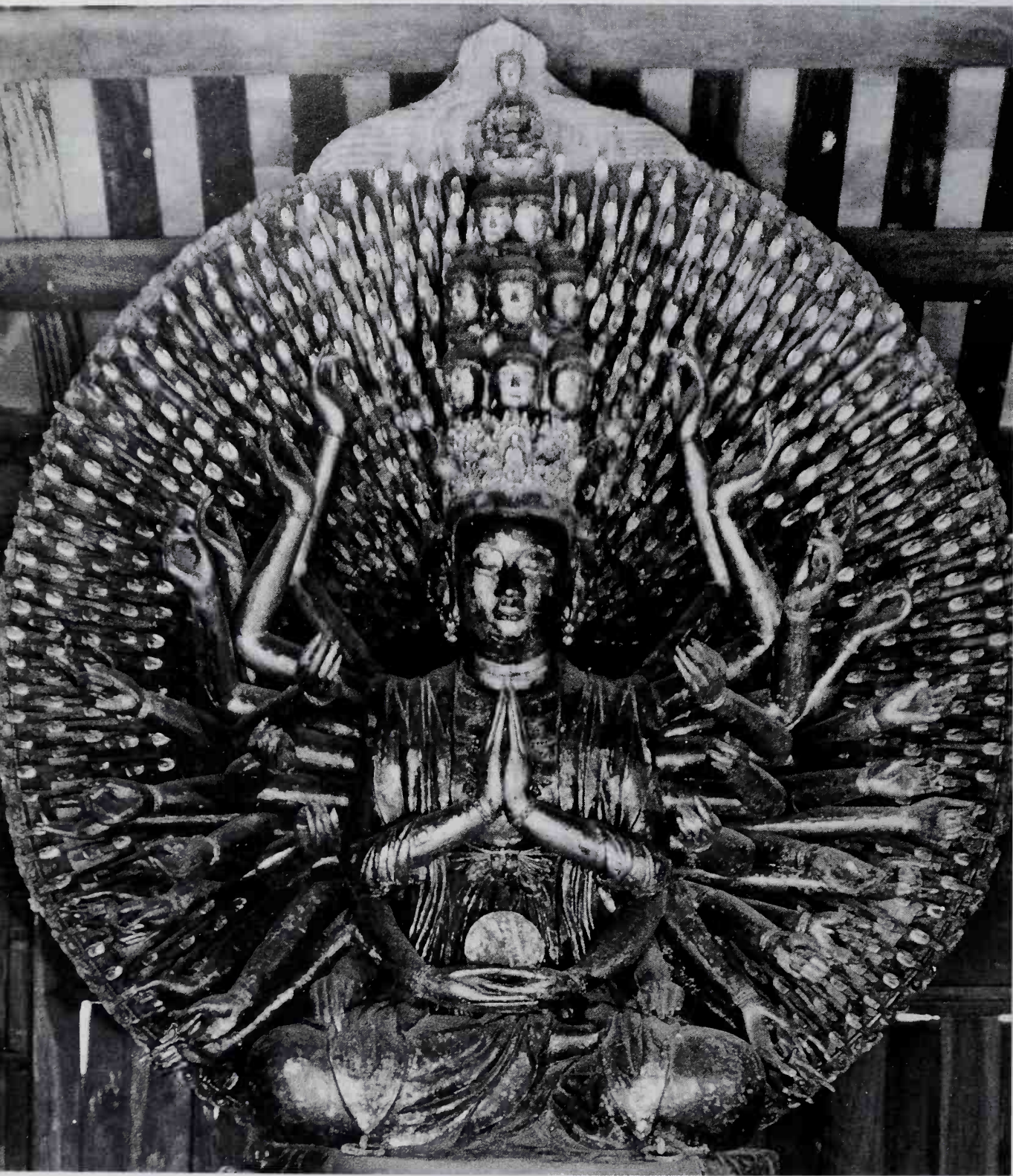




*The fountain of life, which sees the creation of Eve as it has seen that of Adam, stands upright and single-eyed in a basin. In the pupil of this eye there dances a little child, the proper issue of this generative moment. The fountain rises from the centre of a cave in a curious hill, the pillar below ground marked with three roundels, as belits a chthonian deity, that above ground in pairs of spouts generating the world of order and of choice.*

*The eye of this fountain may be termed its fontanelle. Anatomically, this is at the top of the head, and can be seen in children where the bones have not yet joined up; it is the spirit's true passage-way to the other world. Architecturally, it is figured as the eye of a dome, and in mythology it is called the Door of the Sun. (The Garden of Paradise; painting by imitator of Hieronymus Bosch)*

*The Lamb of God stands within such an eye, and as representative of the Light of Lights is shown with seven eyes, which go with the seven spirits of God, the seven churches, seven vials and seven seals, seven candlesticks, seven stars of fire. The Vedas speak from the same tradition when they speak of the seven rays of the sun, as we still do when making out the seven colours of the iris or rainbow. (Painting in the cupola of S. Clemente, Tahull, 13th c.)*

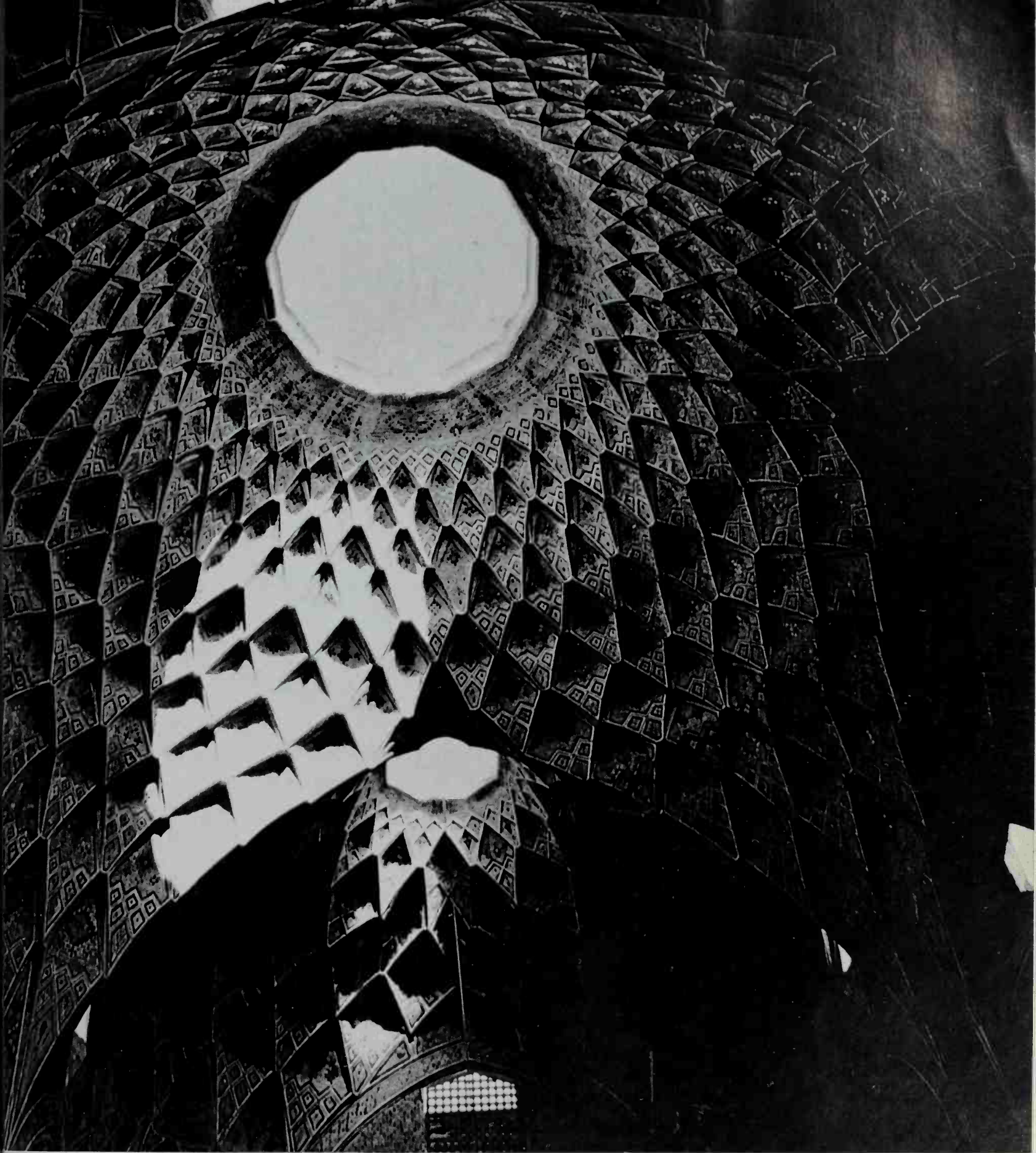


*According to tradition, the passage through the sun-door ensplendours all the powers of the Self. In the Buddhist rendition, the crown of the head flowers*

*into a tower of heads, an epiphany prepared for with praying hands and greeted with uplifted arms. At the same time the radiance of this moment is*

*refracted through the body a thousand-fold, with a myriad of eyes set in a myriad hands. (Figure of the Buddha, Vietnam, 15th c.)*





*The sun-door is wonderfully figured in the eye of the dome at Kashan, whose many facets give an idea of how the*

*superabundance of celestial light appears in the material world. Through it goes the path – in Italian, il camino, in*

*French, le chemin, in English, the chimney – which takes the aspiring soul on its journey sunwards. (Kashan, Persia)*



HEC EST ILLA DEOVA SACRA CANVNT EVLOGIA SOLE AMICTA  
LUNAM HABENS SVB PEDIBZ STELIS MERVIT CORONARI DVODENIS

## Entoptics

Yagé is taken at night, and its effects are much the same whether or not one is Tukano. A flashing of many lights is soon seen, phosphenes emerge in blue and orange, the field of vision is shaken by sideways vibrations, large felines and serpents make their appearance together with staring eyes, often with double or triple outlines. These are the guardians of the yagé universe, and the Tukano having long familiarity with these experiences assign definite meanings to the elements they are made of. Circles are yagé flowers or suns, and when concentric with a central spot are signs of impregnation or, combined with arcs, of women; zigzag lines are also flowers, besides being songs and the fertile power of the Sun Father, while patterns of lozenges signify snakes. There is in all quite a dictionary of patterns they know of, out of which a world of meaning is formed leading to further visionary experiences of more individual significance.

The reason that everyone sees staring eyes, large felines and serpents when taking yagé must be another organizational function of the imagination, that it makes images out of its own sensations. We can follow the logic of this by means of an old riddle:

Thirty white horses on a red hill,  
Now they champ, now they stamp, now they stand still.  
What are they?

The same conundrum was presented in a dream reported by the German psychologist Scherner, in which two rows of boys entirely dressed in white advanced towards each other over a bridge and then retreated, the dreamer then awakening to find that he was grinding his teeth. In like manner, yagé takers are made aware of powerful stimulation of their eyes, their jaws and their bodily musculature, both voluntary and involuntary, which form themselves into images of large cats and snakes. This happens even amongst those who have no first hand experience of either, which makes us suspect that the imagination is organized through yet more complicated entoptics, those that Jung named archetypes, which yagé can sometimes activate with miraculous quiet precision.

The Tukano are not alone in using entoptic forms in their art. Amongst the wonderful paintings of animals in Paleolithic caves we find many lozenges and almond shapes, which archeologists regularly interpret as vulvas; grids, some small and others covering great stretches of cave floors; fronds, circles, arrays of dots and, from the earliest times, writhing lines drawn by the fingers on clay-covered walls which now go by the name of 'spaghetti'. Since entoptics can appear during meditation in complete darkness, it is more than likely that these diagrams record a sojourn in the caves undertaken to gain visions. We have large support for this idea from the Bushmen, whose masterly paintings of animals are also accompanied by entoptic forms. These paintings are records made by shamans of visions seen during their entranced journeys to the land of the Master of Animals responsible for the spiritual order and the abundance of Nature. Paleolithic art resembles these paintings in so many ways that a similar shamanic impulse behind them is very likely.

*We know this Virgin and Child to be that wonder of heaven, the Woman clothed with the Sun, for her feet are upon the moon and she is crowned with twelve stars. The sun looks from behind her, its radiance forming an iris of colour; and she is thus in the way of being the sun's pupil, besides reflecting those who look into it. (Virgin and Child, by the Maître des Moulins, end of 15th c.)*

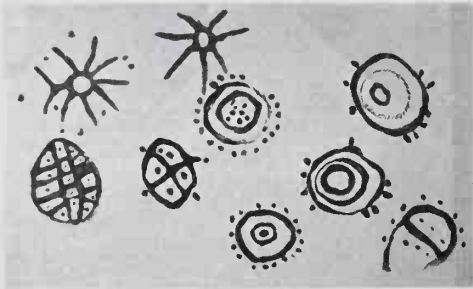
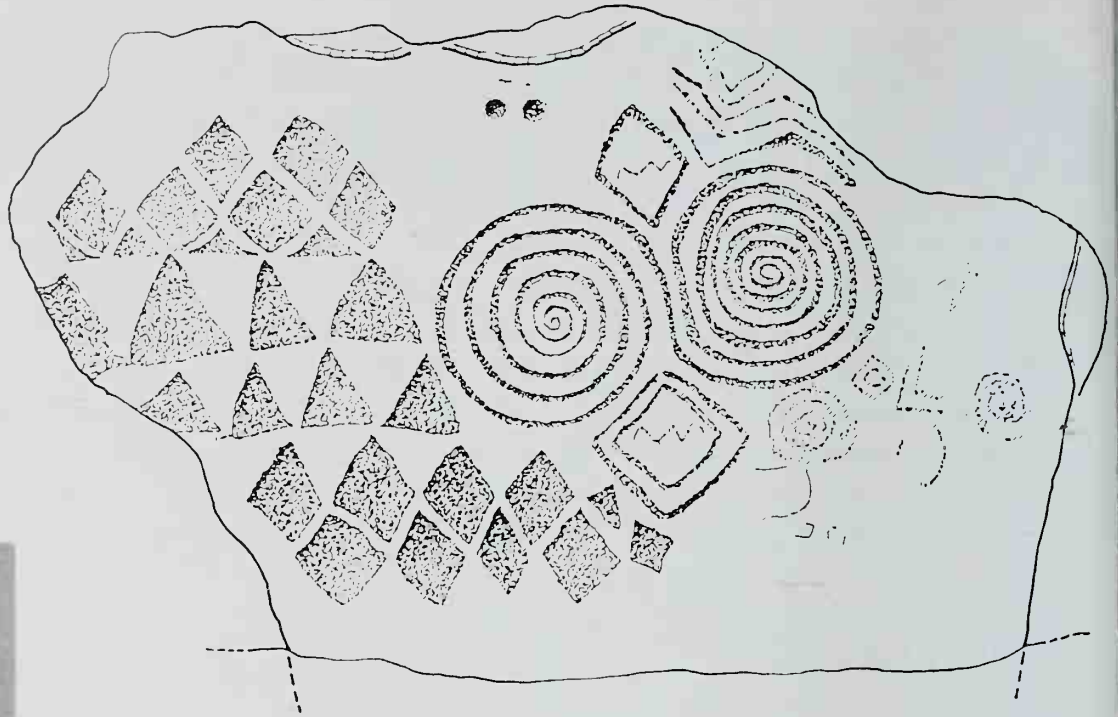
PATTERNS OF THE INNER EYE

Sacred symbols look much the same the world over, no doubt because they have an intimate connection with phosphene patterns.

Below: rock painting from Eritrea, third millennium BC.

Right: kerb-stone at New Grange, Ireland, about 2,500 BC.

Bottom: Barasana Indian drawing visionary patterns, Vaupés Territory, Colombia.



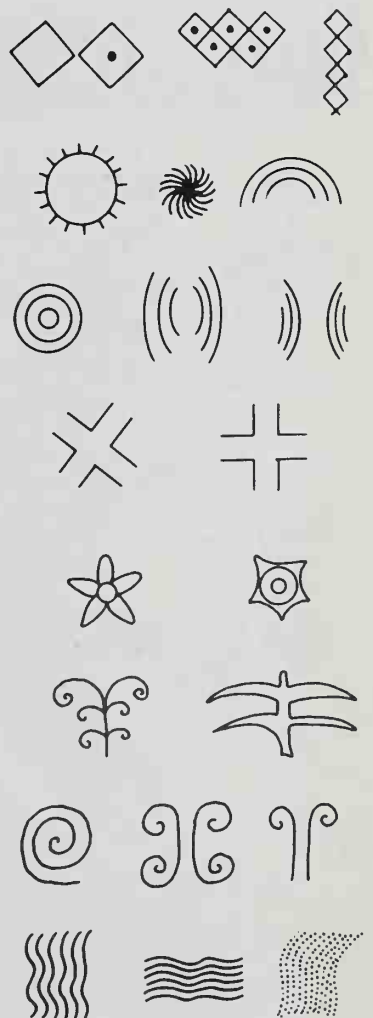
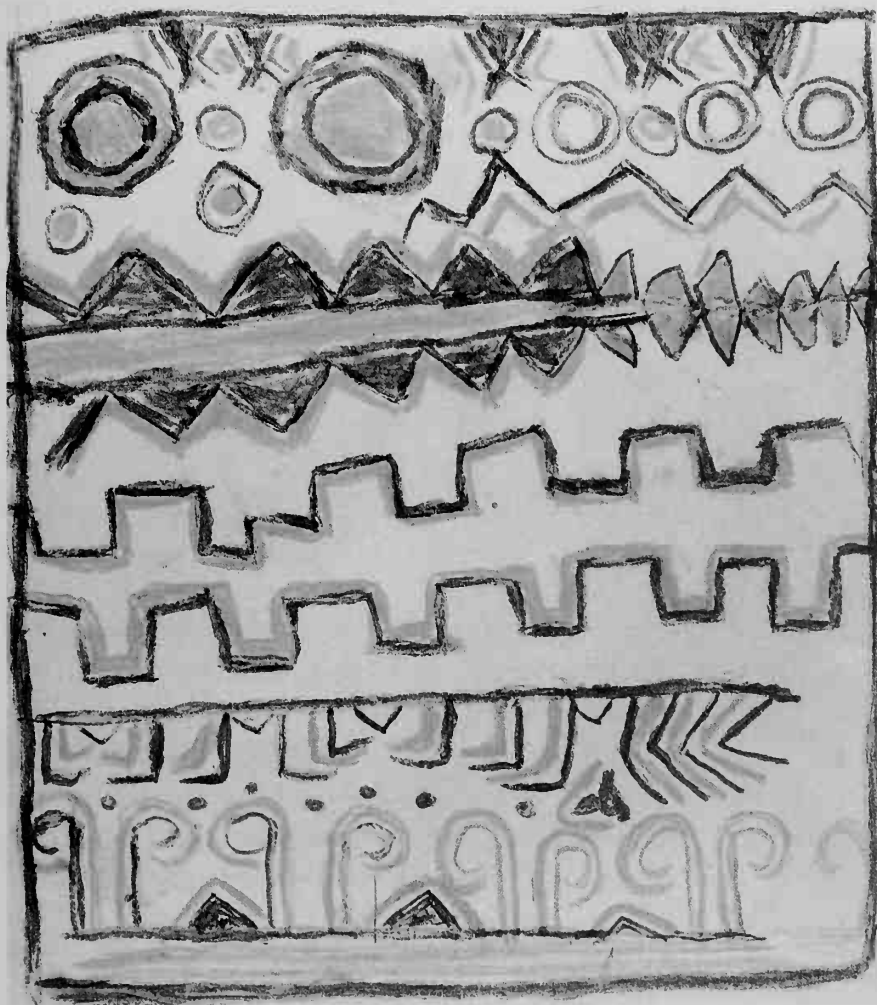
What any of these entoptic forms may actually mean must always be in doubt, since they are capable of many interpretations. The Australian aborigines, for instance, make much play with concentric circles and rows of dots on those sacred boards named churingas: these designs refer to places of origin, camping grounds, nests, watering places and so on, the dots representing individuals of different species or clans. But all churingas look very much the same, and without their owners it is impossible to tell just what story is being told.

The circle, single or concentric, is found again in Megalithic art together with its cousin the spiral, and it is possible to read these, aborigine-wise, as places of origin, as signs of the Great Mother and of coming into existence and returning to the source, whether it be for individual souls, for the moon, the sun, or the year itself. This primal design loses such large meanings in Iron Age times, when it rather designates the sun, as we may also discern in American Indian pictographs from both continents. The entoptic form is universal, its interpretation according to context.

### The sun-like eye

The way that visionary images and entoptics cohere with meaning and become symbolic forms is of the highest interest. Consider, for instance, those circles, single

Below left: *painting of a yagé vision, Tukano, Brazil. Above are suns, and below them two snakes, the lower one with its castellations – also a phosphene pattern – being the Snake-Canoe that brings life to the earth. The scrolls and triangles at bottom signify sexual union. Below: phosphene patterns.*



or concentric, that are interpreted as yagé flowers, suns, or signs of impregnation – that is, as centres of origination. If we were to see these on the wings of butterflies or the plumage of birds, we would call them ocelli or eye-spots, and their presence in the organization of vision would account for their success in attracting the attention. As it is, the yagé taker sees these entoptic ocelli together with visions of staring eyes, those images of his own enlarged seeing, in such a way that eye and eye-spot reflect upon each other. The consequence of this is that the eye as well as the entoptic eye-spot must be thought of as a yagé flower, a sun, a sign of impregnation.

'If the eye were not sun-like,' said Goethe – he was paraphrasing Plotinus – 'how could we ever see light? And if God's own power did not dwell within us, how could we delight in things divine?' The Tukano would be in full agreement with this great aphorism, as we may see from their account of the origin of yagé. The story is set in the House of Waters on the lower Vaupés river. There men were drinking cashiri, a beer made from palm fruit, waiting for the Sun Father to give them that supreme drink he had promised would link heaven and earth. Sun Father meanwhile had impregnated his daughter with his brilliance, and she gave birth to the child in a flash of light. Bearing this blood-red child, yagé itself, she entered the House of Waters, which caused all the men to become dizzy. 'Who is the father of this child?' she then called out. 'I am,' said one of the men, and taking the child he cut off its umbilical cord with half a copper ear-ring. The others then tore off the child's limbs, and all these pieces then grew into different kinds of narcotic vine.

Copper is the metal of the Sun, and the man who claimed to be the father of the yagé child is also the shaman officiating at the yagé ceremony. As the child of the Sun, yagé bursts into consciousness with such powerful visions – of staring eyes, signs of impregnation, jaguars and snakes – as to suffocate the taker. This suffocation is likened to drowning, which in turn is a Tukano metaphor for orgasm.

We shall find that the traditions of the Old World make the same connections between the eye and the sun, water, sexual union, visionary experience and intoxicants. These indicate the general process that makes the eye sunlike, and point to the manner in which God's power – that is, the power of the Sun Father – dwells within. As far as the Tukano are concerned, however, we can enlarge upon this process by looking at what the jaguar means to them.

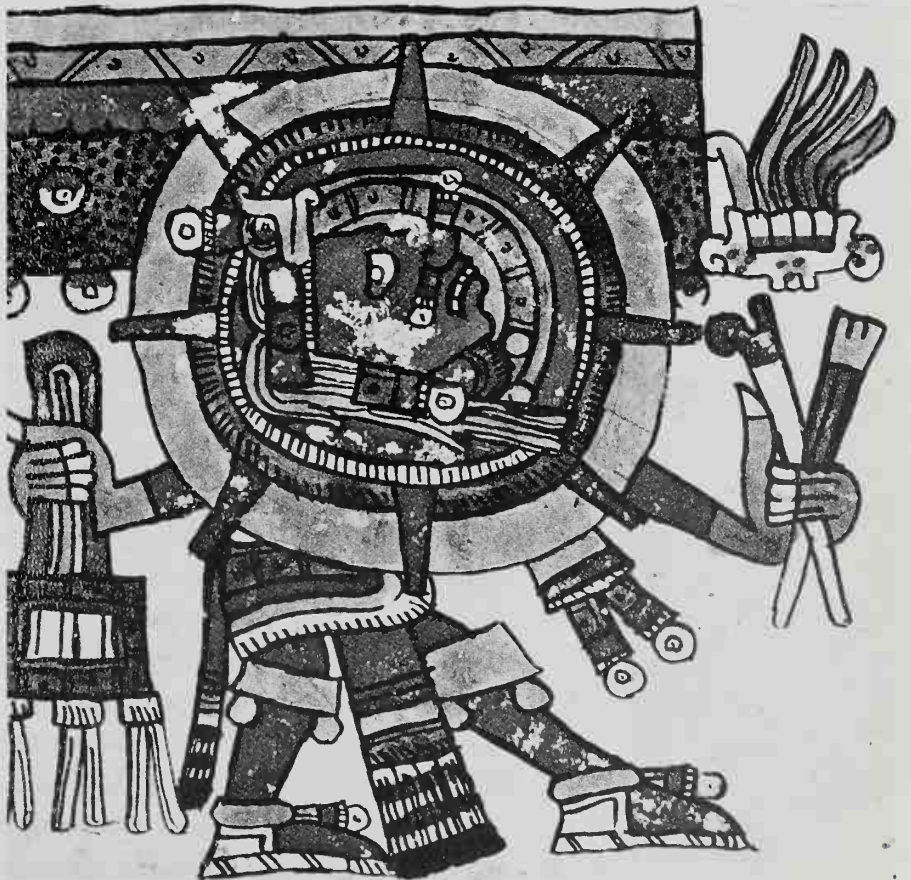
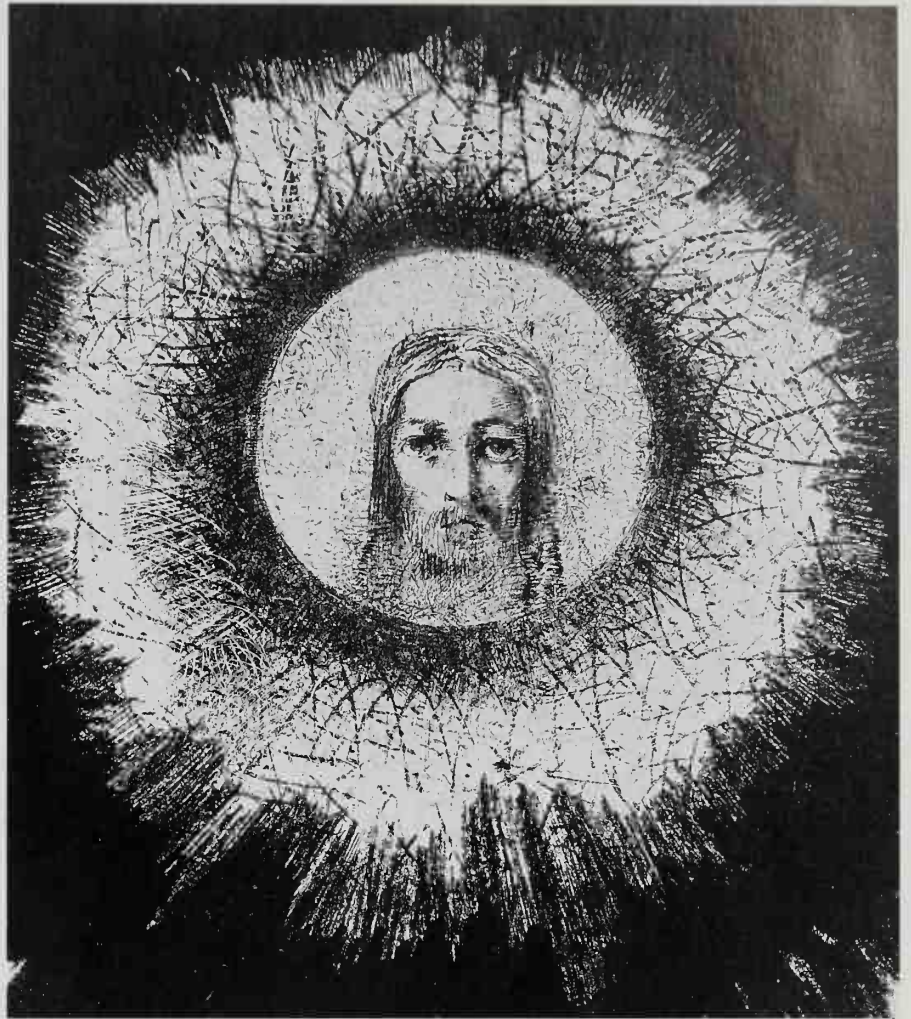
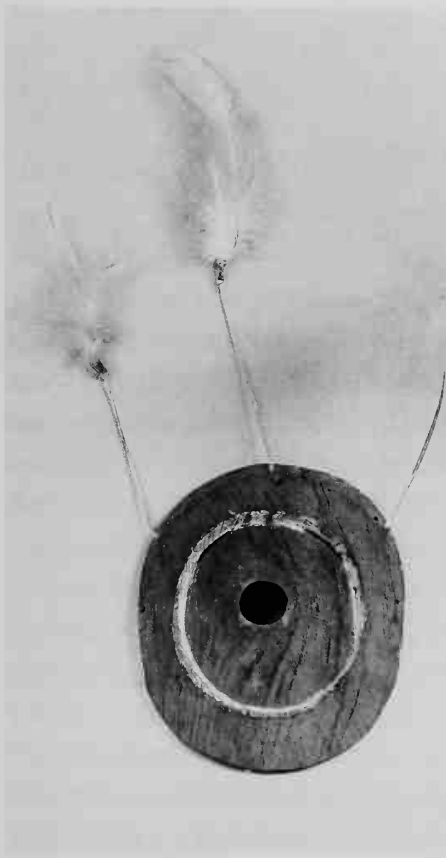
## The eye-juggler

The jaguar is a mythological figure of great importance throughout South and Central America. It is, like man himself, a hunter, and is regarded as man's rival in the jungle where it has dominion. In the mountains of Colombia the Kogi Indians give it a special place in their cosmology, as being the eldest born of the Universal Mother from whom descend the Jaguar people and the Kogi themselves. Nearby, in San Agustín, similarly-minded peoples once carved large monoliths bearing the features of the Jaguar people, or of men with jaguar monsters couched on their backs. Amongst the Tukanoan and Witotoan peoples the same word, *ye'é*, is used to name both jaguars, regarded as progenitors and as the guardians of the womb and of the clan house, and shamans, one of whose talismans is a quartz cylinder called the sun's

THE SOLAR EYE

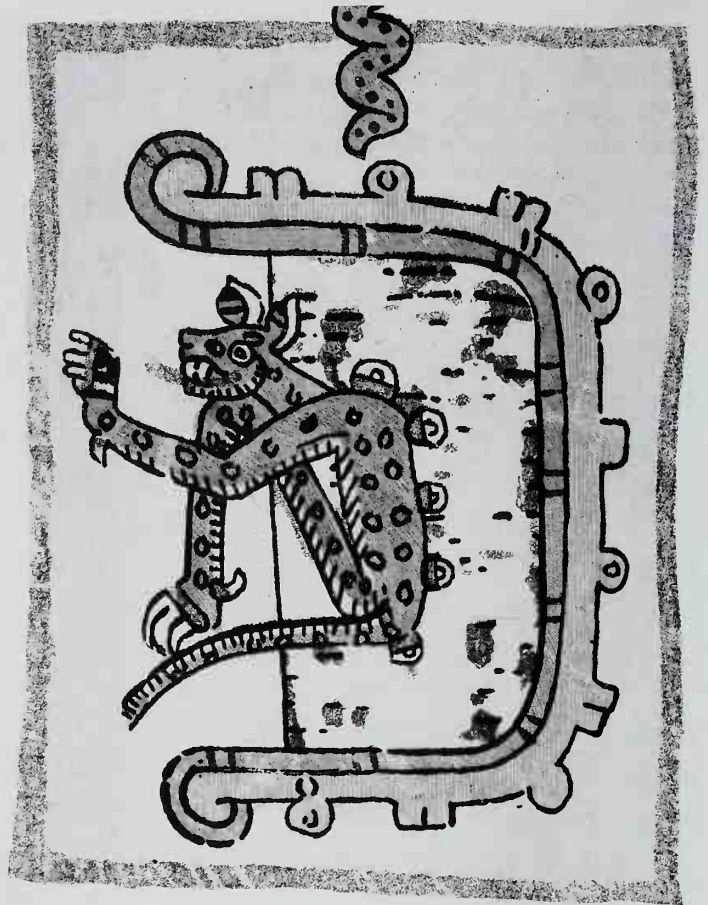
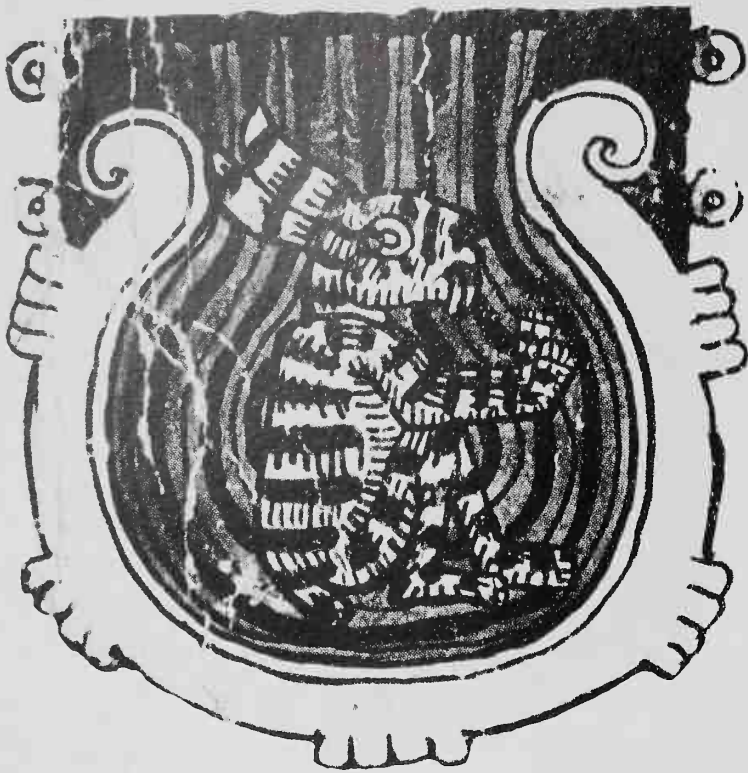
The Aztec sun is a many-eyed being who carries a human thigh bone in token of his victories over death. The Eskimo mask represents the sun-door that aspirants to immortality must go through rather than the sun itself, which for Redon is an eye, Jesus being its pupil. A fitting text would be Matthew, ii 22: 'If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light'.

Right: Christ in the sun disk, by Odilon Redon.



Above: Eskimo mask, Alaska.

Right: The god of the sun, Aztec, Codex Borgia.



penis. Elsewhere shamans have a reputation of being able to turn into jaguars, and a novice amongst the Paez is initiated near a lagoon where he receives his office from the Thunder beings. These Thunder children, who are born from the union of Jaguar and a human woman, always appear with erect phalluses and are reputed to steal women and take them to the Water-House in the depths of the lagoon, where they feed on their blood and on their milk.

Elsewhere in South America the Jaguar is the original owner of fire, and as such refused to share it with others. The Kayua recount that one day, when he was hunting, he was told by Grasshopper that Toad and Rabbit had stolen his fire and taken it to the other side of the river. Tears came into Jaguar's eye at the news, and he was further humiliated by Anteater who then came by. Anteater claimed that it was he who ate raw flesh while Jaguar was the eater of ants, as he would prove if they both defecated with closed eyes. It was thus a simple matter for him to swap the piles of their dung without being seen, and having proved his point they agreed to a further test to see who could take out their eyes and juggle with them. Anteater managed the trick very well, for his eyes fell right back into their orbits when he had done, but Jaguar's eyes caught on a branch above him. Anteater then completed Jaguar's humiliation by asking the macuco bird, a myopic ground-dweller, to make Jaguar new eyes out of water. With them Jaguar could see in the dark, which is why he now only hunts at night and eats his meat raw, for he has lost his fire. Some say that you can still see its reflection shining in his eyes when he prowls about your camp after sundown, and others that this is no reflection but an inner fire: which is why the Kayapo have given the name of 'jaguar eyes' to electric flashlights.



## JAGUAR SHAMAN

The jaguar is the shaman's familiar spirit or alter ego, into which he can turn at will. As the genius of procreative and destructive power, the jaguar is a solar being and has its coat marked with eye spots, and stands opposite to the lunar rabbit, who is striped.

Far left: the Moon Rabbit, Aztec, Codex Borgia.

Left: the Jaguar Sun, Aztec, Codex Borgia.

Right: Jaguar man, Aztec, Codex Borgia

Far right: Jaguar hero, San Agustín, Colombia.



It is as well that Jaguar lost his fire, say the Kayua, because if he had got his fire back he would certainly have burnt up the earth. Indeed, the Guarani further to the south say that the Blue Celestial Jaguar will do just this at the end of time, when he will regain his fire and stalk the land by day as well as by night. But in Amazonas, Jaguar's acquisition of eyes made of water (together with his roar) allows him to become a thunder being, flashing his fire as lightning amidst the torrential rains.

'Just as the Sun, with his power, procreated the earth, so the jaguar is procreating, clad in his yellow coat,' say the Tukano. 'Like a man dominating a woman.' Or, indeed, like the shaman dominating what Reichel-Dolmatoff calls 'that wild untrammelled energy, all-devouring in its impulses', which the Indians hold to be the fiery part of man's essence, his inner sun. It is therefore no accident that the Ge Indians speak of Moon playing the same trick on Sun as Anteater does on Jaguar. For that matter, these two mythological animals also have their place in the sky: they are the two dark patches in the stream of the Milky Way just south of Scorpio and Lupus. In the evening, Jaguar is lying above Anteater, as though winning the contest: but by dawn the stars have wheeled round and now Anteater is above Jaguar, as Day is about to have it over Night.

This is one aspect of the eye-juggling act, and another may be seen every month as Moon goes from ruling the night with full eye to being blinded when he rises together with his brother Sun. Why it should be Anteater who is set against Jaguar is a long story that would also have to deal with the nature of ants, with Toad and Rabbit, with the turn of the seasons and the fires of sexuality, hunger, cooking and digestion, all of which reflect upon each other; indeed with the nature of mythology



*The fight between the jaguar and the ant-eater as seen in the night sky, where they appear as two dark patches in the Milky Way.*

itself which, as Levi-Strauss has shown in his great works on American myth, juggles with the elements of the cosmos so that they fall into their proper order. Amongst these elements is the human body, whose various parts learn their proper relation to each other in terms of the natural world, a double concern well seen in Trickster stories from North America.

## The Trickster

The Trickster is variously called Coyote, Hare and Raven, and he gets up to all manner of pranks which range from the grotesque to the sublime. Like Jaguar in South America, he also gets involved with a fellow who can take out his eyes and juggle with them. The Sahaptin tell how Coyote eagerly exchanged these for his own eyes, threw them up in the air only to have Turkey Buzzard swoop down and carry them off. So Coyote had to find himself new ones – first making a pair out of flowers, which were good enough until they faded, and then by exchanging them again, either with a snail or with a ground-living bird.

The bird in question is short-sighted, like the macuco who made new eyes for Jaguar, and so is the snail: but other stories tell that they both once upon a time had the keenest of vision. Turkey Buzzard has excellent vision also, and he comes in as a carrion eater, which Coyote is also in part. We are thus dealing with a game of General Post, a set of exchanges between the myopic and the far-sighted, between the carrion-eater and the hunter, after which Coyote comes off very well. Such behaviour is to be expected of tricksters, who are continually exchanging things – that is, taking or mistaking one thing for another until they fall into their proper place.



*'Tears', photomontage by Man Ray.*



But Coyote has more obvious things he must learn, such as the difference between top and bottom. The story goes that he caught some ducks and set about grilling them on a fire. Feeling sleepy, he then set his anus to warn him if anyone came around. Some foxes duly came, and though Coyote's anus spoke as loudly as it could, Coyote went on sleeping and the foxes managed to eat every morsel. Coyote was very angry with his anus when he woke, and punished it with a burning stick; and after further grotesqueries, he came to appreciate the difference between the two ends of his body, and to learn the proper use of his anatomy.

The connection between seeing and defecation is not something that Freud ever suspected, and while Levi-Strauss gives a detailed structuralist account of it in his great work, we need not follow it here. It is enough to say that these two activities reflect each other via a common internal experience, just as the eye itself is the mirror of external fire. It is, after all, a truism that whatever the eye sees is reflected in it, a state of affairs brought about by Raven, the Tlingit trickster, who one day thought to invite the tribes of the Little People to a feast. He welcomed them properly, and had mats ready for them to sit down on. Then he took hold of the mats and shook them hard, so that all the Little People flew off into the air and fell into people's eyes. This is why, when you look into someone's eyes, you see a Little Person in their pupils.

## The pupil

The pupil gets its name from the Latin *pupilla*, a little girl, a doll, a puppet. The figure of speech is widespread: in Spanish the pupil is called *el nina del ojo*, the young girl of the eye, in German *des Mannlein*, the little man, and in Greek *kore*, the maiden. Lovers know it well:

### THE EYE AS FACE

*The face that is put as the pupil of an eye tells one that an eye is short-hand for a face. Eye or face, both animate whatever they are part of, and the various faces on the Marquesan club are those of the war spirit and of the many heads it has cracked open.*

*Above left: detail of carved box, Haida, British Columbia.*

*Above: head of war-club from the Marquesas Islands.*

I fix mine eye on thine, and there  
Pity my picture burning in thine eye:  
My picture drowned in a transparent tear,  
When I look lower I espy;  
Hadst thou the wicked skill  
By pictures made and marr'd, to kill,  
How many ways mightst thou perform thy will?

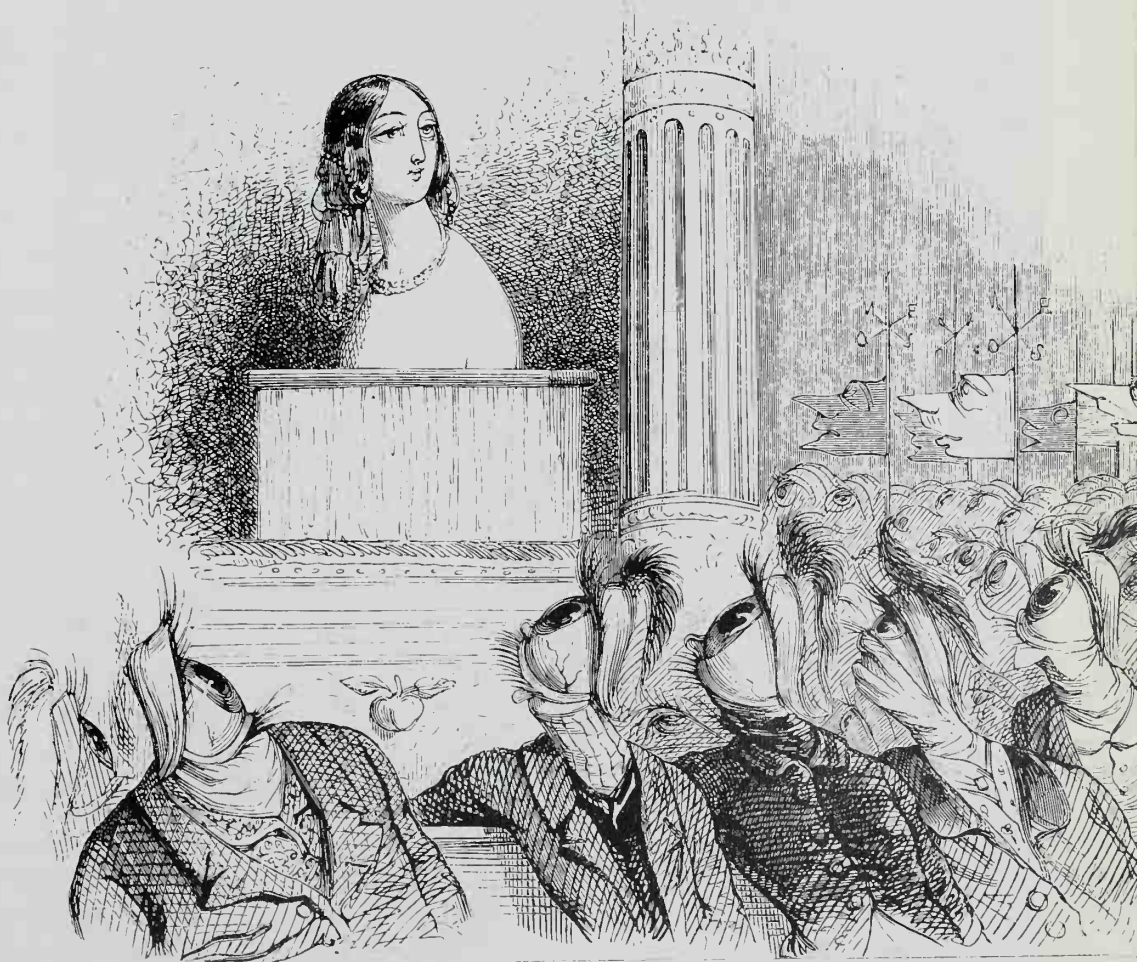
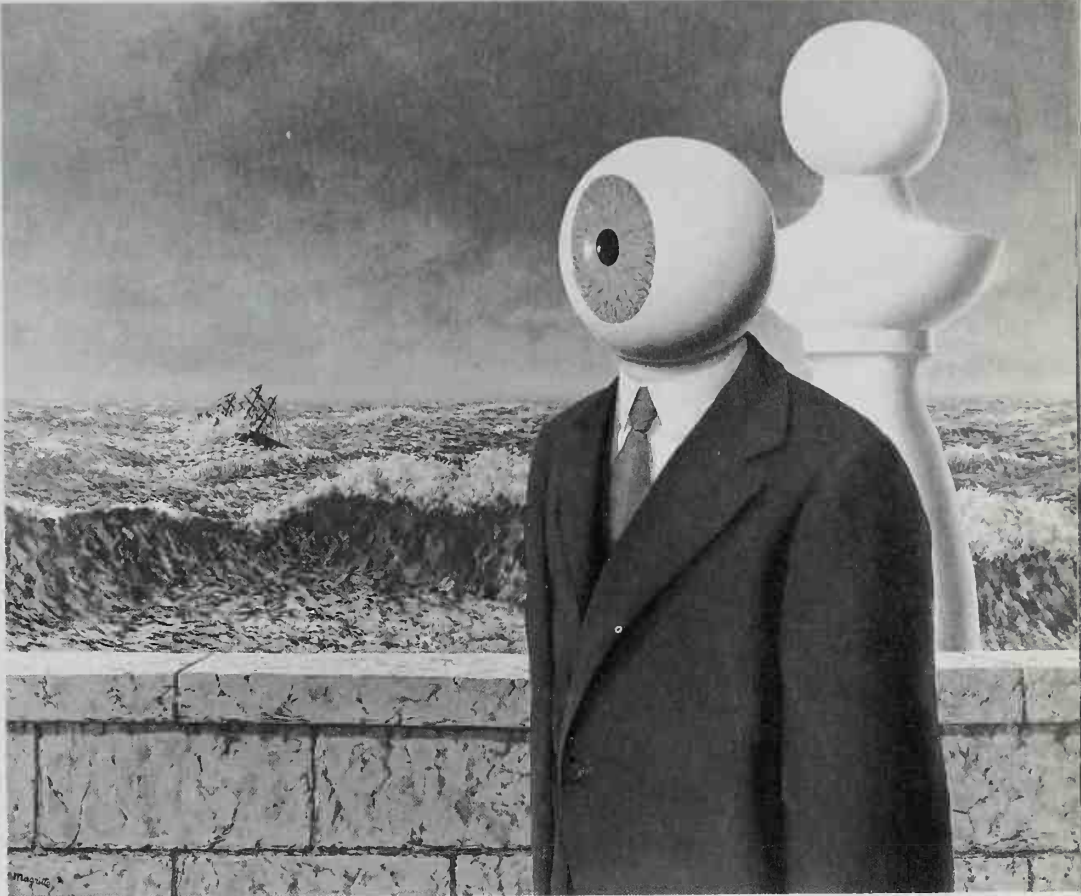
These lines come from the poem Donne aptly titled 'Witchcraft in a Picture', for this picturing of one self in the eyes of another is the demonstration of what bewitchment comes down to, whether for good or ill.

There is little that one can say about this bewitchment that is not a cliché or has not been better said by the poets – by Shakespeare, for example. His *Berowne* cries, 'Behold the window of my heart, my eye', while *Romeo* is advised to 'Take some new infection to thine eye' when his beloved is unkind. *Pandarus* tells *Cressida* that he could live and die in the eyes of *Troilus*, hoping that she too will do so; *Oberon* has *Puck* squeeze the juice of a magic flower into *Titania's* eyes to make her enamoured of *Bottom*, and *Prospero* remarks approvingly that *Ferdinand* and *Miranda* have changed eyes when they first meet. This manner of falling in love, which the French call 'le coup de foudre', the thunder-bolt, is summed up in that exquisitely double edged song from *The Merchant of Venice*:

Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart or in the head,  
How begot, how nourished?  
Reply, reply.  
It is engendered in the eyes,  
With gazing fed, and fancy dies  
In the cradle where it lies. . . .

Considering the temptations the eye constantly faces, it is no wonder that true love is accounted a miracle. This word comes from the Latin for a prodigy, something that you wonder at and admire, and its root also appears in 'mirror' and 'smile'. Indeed, the reflective power of the eye is by no means confined to the pupil, for an eye without a face can hardly be thought of as having any particular expression. The fact is enshrined in such words as our 'visage', which comes from the Latin *videre*, to see, as well as in the Greek *ops* and the Mende *ngame*, both of which mean at once 'eye' and 'face'.

S.A. Boone reports that the Mende, who live in Liberia, find their principal relaxation in looking. So when a man visits his brother they sit quietly without speaking, just looking at each other, and then 'their eyes walk around', as they say. In public, the favourite sport is to watch others, with all manner of dodges to do so without staring. They like best to see a beautiful eye, which should be large and round; to them it is more enticing than any other part of the body. Women must be especially careful to appear modest and innocent, as though 'not being able to read what is going on' around them. To look directly into a man's eyes is thought to be either cheeky or belligerent, and so they half-shut their eyes in that dreamy look which is at once the mark of a chaste woman and of an alluring siren.



THE FACE AS EYE

The sun is an eye by whose light we see, while a woman's beauty may be such an eyeful that all the senses are drawn into one when looking at her. Magritte's personage is a well-buttoned comment on such a theme.

Above: Sun figure, Algonquian rock carving, Ontario.

Above right: Magritte, *The difficult crossing*, 1963.

Right: engraving by Grandville from *Un Autre Monde*, 1835.



LE COUP DE Foudre

Left: First Class – The Meeting. 'And at first meeting loved'. Painting by Abraham Solomon, (1824–1862).

Below left: 'I saw her with a bizarre plumage on her head, having a supernatural colour and eyes more flaming than I can tell of, from which came a flame from Hell.' Engraving by Gustave Doré for 'The Succubus', in Balzac's Les Contes Drolatiques.



MODESTIES AND INVITATIONS

Modesty and flirtatiousness are siamese twins, and the one can invite the other as easily as stop it in its tracks. Modesty is alluring in itself, as the Mende well know; their ideal of the perfect woman is sketched out in the figure opposite, whose closed mouth and nearly closed eyes give promise to her lover of sumptuous joys to come. The Wodaabe of West Africa are more open about such matters, and youths court their girls by making themselves delightful to look at, especially when they roll the right eye in and out, and in and out again.

Opposite above: Desire and Fulfilment (detail), by J. Toorop, 1893.

Right: Woman of Lima, anonymous photograph, 19th century.

Centre right: Wodaabe youth in the throes of courtship.

Far right: Sowo figure, Mende, Liberia.



## EYES OF WATER

Thoreau's lake at Walden is enclosed by trees to its very rim, and looking into this secluded mirror he sounded the depths of his own nature. The moving spirit in the depths of such an eye of water is hali woman and hali fish, who reflects a man's dreams back to himself; and should he do violence to her image in this mirror she blinds herself in protest, as the legend of St Lucy recounts.

Right: Walden Pond, Concord, Massachusetts.

Opposite

Left: *Saint Lucy*, by Francesco del Cossa.

Right: *Mermaid*, capital of a column from the cloisters of Gerona 13th century.



## The mermaid's mirror

Of all women, say the Mende, there is none more beautiful than Tingoi the mermaid. She lives in the sea, in rivers and ponds, and has long black shining hair, a fair complexion, a pointed nose, small sharply outlined lips, large, round and glistening eyes, a glowing forehead and succulent breasts; her body is that of a fish or large snake. She likes to play with a child or with snakes and, as is the way with mermaids, she has a mirror and a comb. If she sees a man look at her she at once drops her comb, and he should ask for a large ransom as the price of giving it back. If he is wise he should never give it back at all, for she will then continue to shower gifts upon him, and play with him in his dreams.

Every Mende woman lives like a mermaid from time to time, for as a girl she is inducted into the initiation grove, and as a woman she visits this simulacrum of heaven continually. This grove is held to be under the water, the element which not only washes away moral and physiological impurities but is a living image of fertility. During their ceremonies masks are worn, the most powerful of which have come up from below the waters and have been found floating in streams or ponds; they are the epitome of women's beauty, with eyes carved as slits in honour of those modest seductions which women cultivate as part of their mystery.

The place of the eye in this mystery is plain enough: the mermaid's mirror is a woman's eye into which a man may look only as a prelude to making love, and perhaps also as an accompaniment. As the phrase goes, lovers will then drown in each other's eyes, a moment which the Tukano would understand as orgasmic and illustrate with a dot within concentric circles, symbolizing the liquid drop of conception.

Mermaids have long had an ambiguous reputation for, surpassingly lovely as they





are, they find it as easy to drown a man literally as metaphorically. It is not always safe to see the freshwater nymphs, either, especially when they are bathing: in ancient Greece, Hylas took his death when he surprised them at their pool, and so did Acteon, turned into a stag by the angry Artemis and torn to pieces by his own hounds. Compared to them, Tiresias was fortunate in that, while he lost his eye-sight on seeing the naked Athena, she gave him the power of inner sight in recompense.

The Greeks still have their mermaids, once called the Nereids, though in fresh water these are known as naiads; and the idea still is that before a girl goes to her nuptials, she has the status of a nymph. All these words beginning with n- come from the same root, *\*neu*, variant *sneu*, which also produces such Latin words as *natare*, to swim, and *nutrire*, to suckle or nourish, hence our 'nurse'; which all add up to the fact that nubile women embody the liquid flow of life. As Zorba the Greek said, 'Woman is a fresh spring. You lean over her, you see your reflection and you drink; you drink until your bones crack . . . A fresh spring, that's what she is, and she's a woman too . . .'

## The eye of water

A fresh spring is an eye of water. 'A lake is the first and most expressive feature of a landscape,' said Thoreau. 'It is the eye of the earth, where the spectator, looking at it with his own, sounds the depths of his own nature.' The figure of speech is enshrined in language – in Welsh, for instance, where *llygad* means both eye and spring; also in the Irish *faochog*, which can mean an eye, a small whirlpool and the periwinkle with its whorled shell. And so well do springs mirror the depths of our own nature that many of them are holy places, to be visited both out of reverence, and in the hope of being healed.

## THE WATCHFUL EYE

*In Plato's Alcibiades, Socrates is pondering the meaning of the Delphic inscription 'Know thyself.' It is, he says, as though someone were to say to the eye, 'See thyself,' which it should do in a mirror, especially in the mirror of another eye. 'If the eye is to see itself, therefore, it must look at the eye, and at that part of the eye – the pupil – where sight which is the virtue of the eye resides.' It is then a small step to be talking about the soul, which should look at that part of the soul in which wisdom resides, and looking at wisdom we may arrive at God, and thus come to know ourselves.*

*This is sound doctrine, supported by similar reflections the world over, as in the Vedas, which give the name of Brahma to the Person in the Eye, and say of him: 'The eyes opened, from them a luminous ray, from it the sun was made – the sun, becoming seen, penetrated the eyes . . .'*

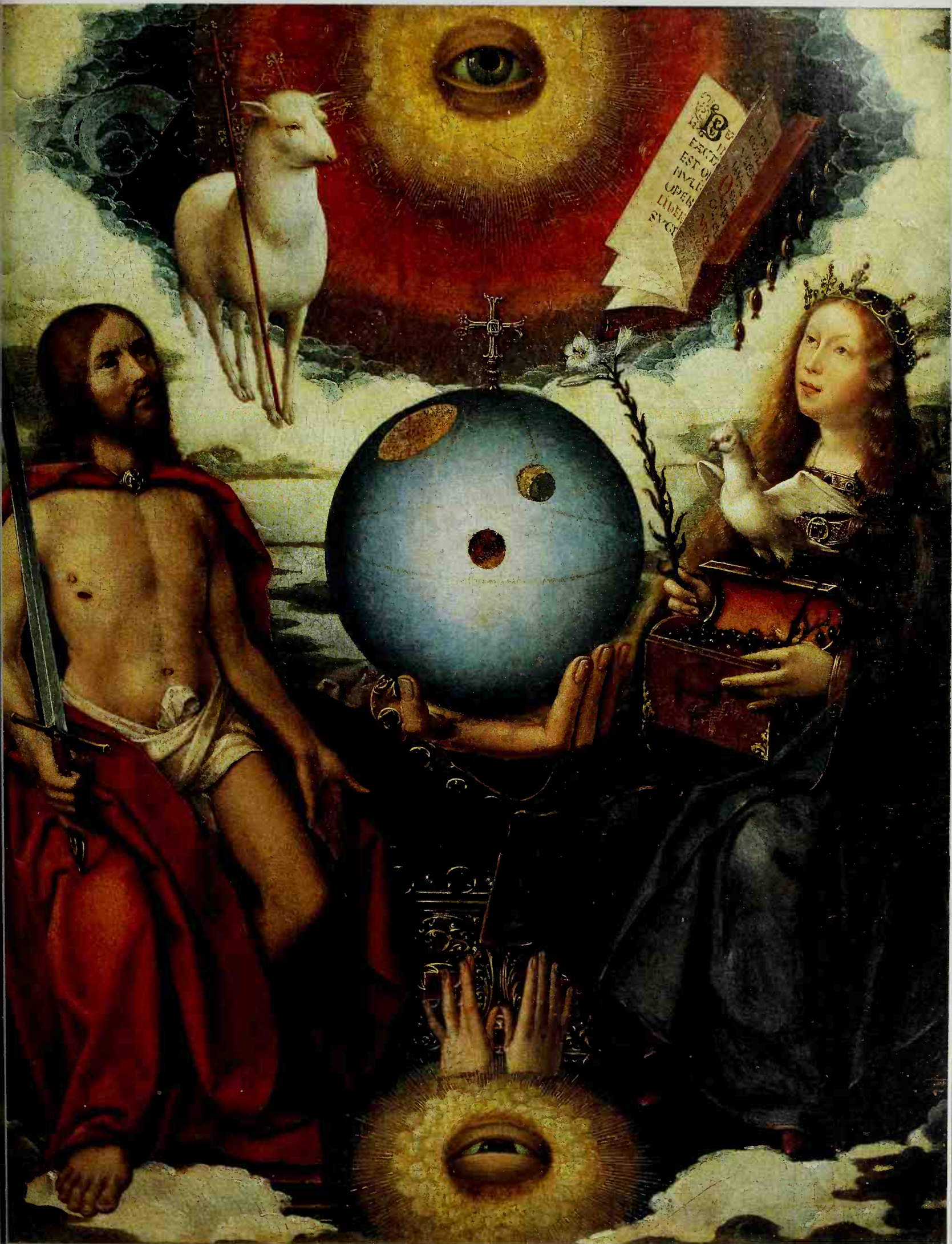
*The exposition of symbols was once an art whose basic principles were known as much in tribal Brazil and Africa as in scholastic Europe. The spoken symbol, for instance, is no more to begin with than what everyone knows. It is possible, however, to interpret it in three successive stages; first in its metaphorical application, then in its moral one, finally in its anagogic sense by which one experiences the truth of what one knows.*

*There are many devices to help this process: the use of masks, for example, which are themselves but metaphors for the mystery rites in which they are employed. Such rites are acted out in an amphitheatre, a double theatre in which, as Donne put it, 'all men may sit and see themselves acted'. The eyes of the Pantocrator watch over this act of self-recollection in Byzantine religious painting, as do those of the Buddha that adorn the outside walls of temples in Tibet and northern India.*

*The sun-disk as emblem of the eye is an ancient device, and it is from Egypt that we receive that of the eye at the apex of the solar pyramid. This was taken up at the beginning of the Enlightenment by freemasonry as well as the Church to signify the all-seeing nature of the Trinity, while the eye itself came at the time of the French Revolution to signify the morality of Reason and the power of authority.*

*The unwinking Eye of God looks at the spectator, itself the pupil of an eye whose lids are the clouds. Below, His enormous hand holds the cosmos, showing sun, moon and earth; and below that, the eye of the human soul gazes upwards to its prototype, the thumbs of its spread hands enclosing a yoni-shaped*

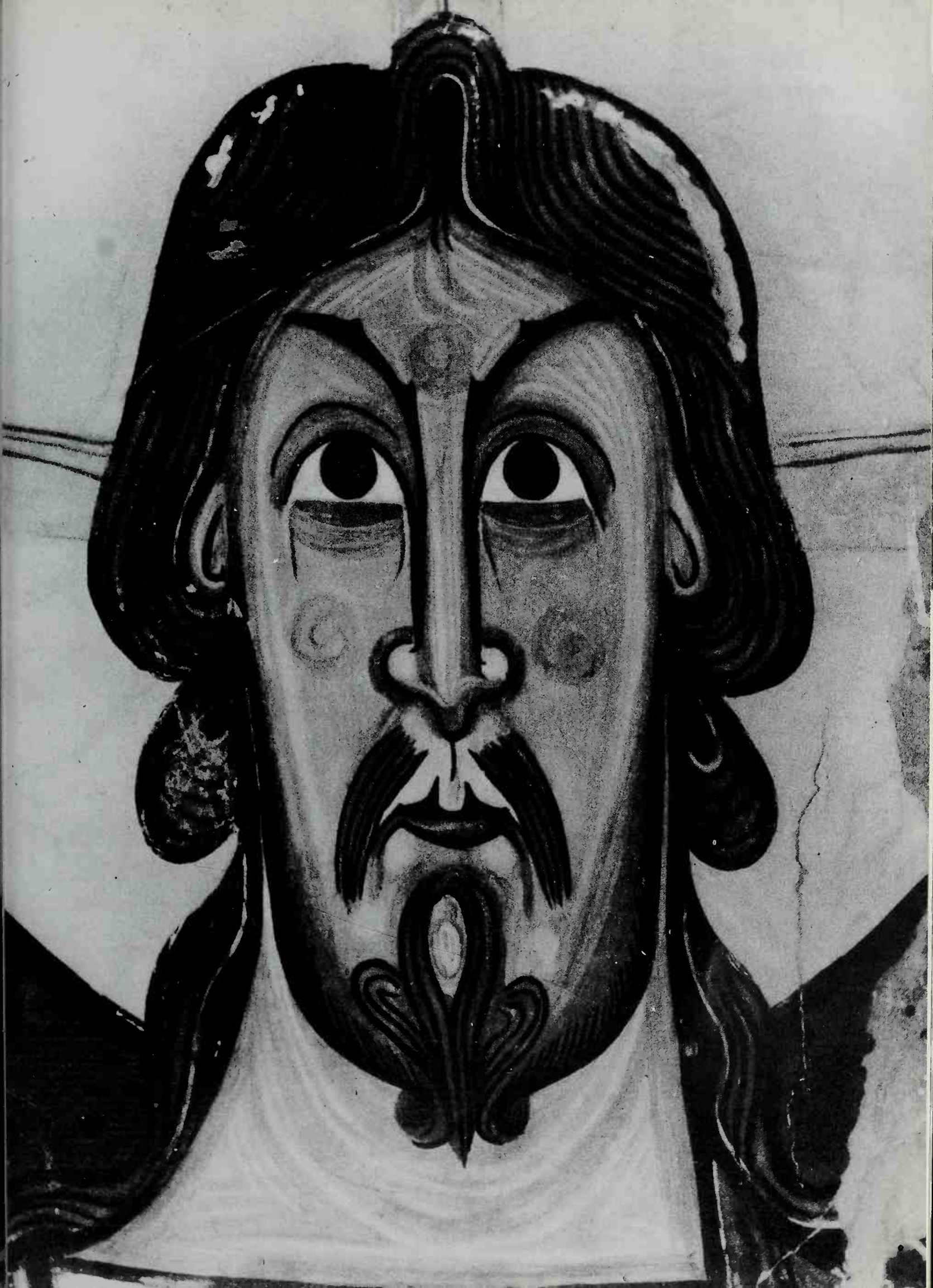
*space. On either side are the Lamb of the Apocalypse and the book of Revelation, the risen Christ with the two-edged sword of the Word and his spouse, who bears the lily of mercy and frees the dove of the Holy Ghost. (Sacred Allegory, by J. Provost)*





*Dzonokwa is a half-blind ogress or Fate who appears during the Winter Ceremonies when inlaws exchange goods in settlement of a marriage contract. She eats children, and causes nightmares, but can be forced to disburse wealth. (Kwakiutl mask, American Indian)*

*The minatory eyes of the Pantocrator are painted so as to follow the spectator about wherever he goes. The same effect in Buddhist art persuades the onlooker that 'The Teacher is looking at me alone, is preaching the Way to me alone.' (Wall painting from the apse of S. Clemente, Tahull, 13th c.)*



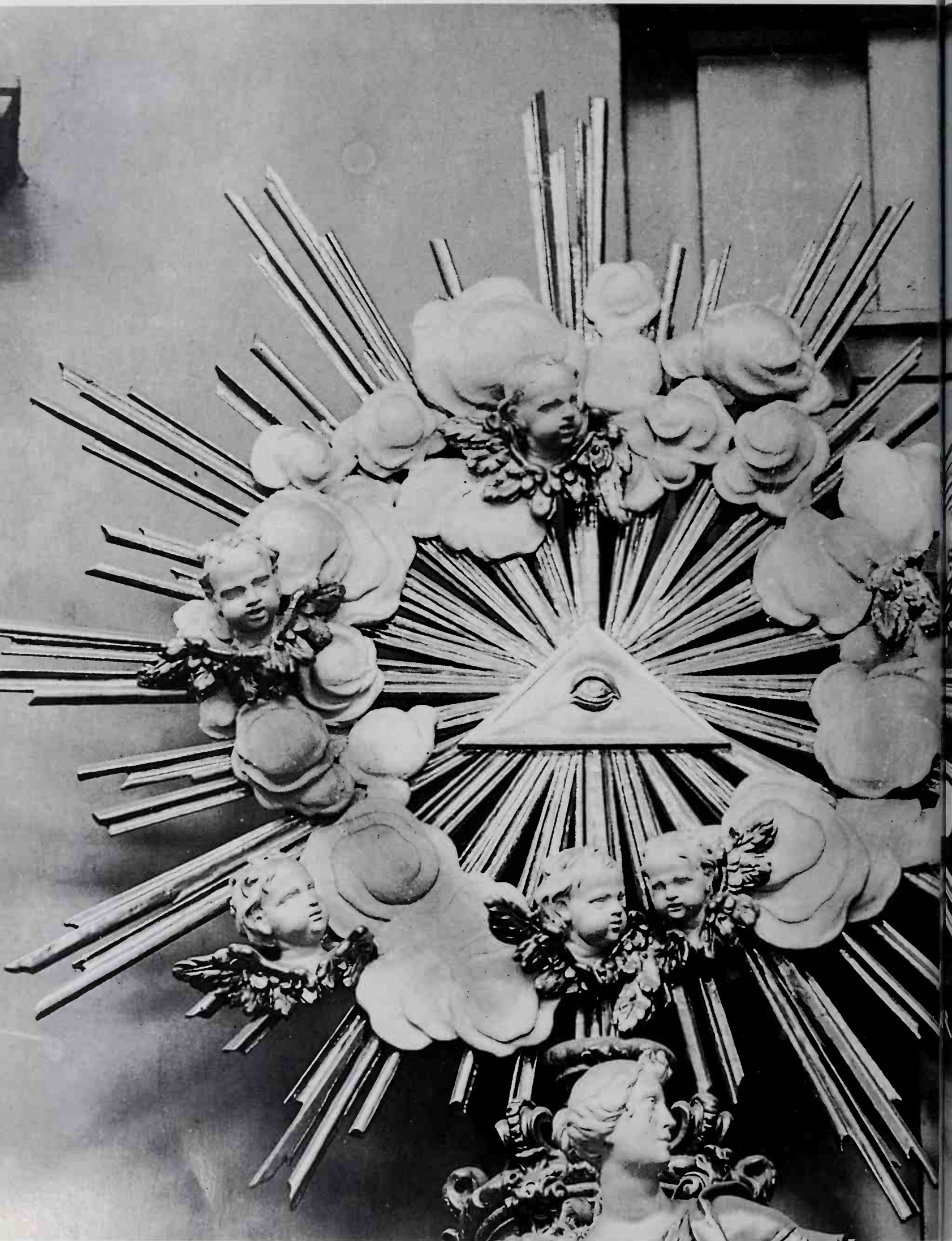


*This scheme has an astronomical sense based on the solar cycle, a tradition going back beyond the dawn of civilization in Egypt. There the Eye of Divinity is also that of the rising sun, of the winged wedjat serpent and of Horus in his hawk form, when it is called 'a word heard by God and the dead, which they take in'. (Vignette from The Book of the Dead, funerary papyrus, 300 BC)*

*'Buddha' means 'awake', to be on the watch. In recognition of this, the Awakened One is commemorated in the form of a stupa, from which he looks out at the four directions as both seer and overseer. (Stupa in Bodnath, Kathmandu Valley)*











Among the many triumphs of the Enlightenment was Newton's study of Optics and, somewhat later, Young's Theory of Colour. Light could now be anatomized and its vicissitudes mathematically described, though what was gained by seeing it as subject to reason and natural law was counterbalanced by the loss of participation and of poetic feeling.

At the same time, Baroque art made its own use of the effects of light, as when it took up the emblem of the eye

within the triune sunburst to designate the authority of the creative Logos. (Detail from the pulpit decoration of the Servitenkirche, Vienna, 18th c.)

With the French Revolution, the eye became the emblem of reason, control and order, and could be fitly depicted shining out of the breast of Reason, now suitably decorated with a collar of numbers, standing for mathematics, an exercise in pure reasoning. ('La Raison', engraving by Darcis)



The wells in Britain are reputed to cure some seventy-five disorders, of which the commonest ones affect the eyes. These are called Eye Wells, and a good story about such a one was told by Lady Gregory: 'There was Leary's son in Gort had bad eyes and no doctor could cure him. And one night his mother had a dream that she got up and took a half-blanket with her to a blessed well a little outside Gort, and there she saw a woman dressed all in white, and she gave her some of the water, and when she brought it to her son he got well. So the next day she went there and got the water, and after putting it three times on his eyes, he was as well as ever.' Some of these wells had fish in them, which visitors made a point of feeding, for the water would not effect a cure unless the fish came out of hiding into full view. The well at Tubbernault in Sligo was one such, and a blind man who regained his sight there cried out: 'O look on me; I was blind from my birth, and saw no light till I came to the blessed well; now I see the water and the speckled trout down at the bottom, with the white cross on his back.'

Also in Ireland is the eye well in Kilkeeren parish, Roscommon. At this place St Caolainn was surprised by an ardent and unwanted suitor, and to discourage him she pulled out her eyes and threw them at his feet. That done, she plucked two rushes from the ground, which caused a spring to flow in which she bathed her eye sockets and so regained her vision. The same story is told of St Brigit in several places and, without the well, of St Lucy of Syracuse. From the date of St Lucy's feast we may guess part of its meaning: now held on December 13th, it used to fall on the winter solstice, whence the old rhyme, 'Lucy-light, the shortest day and the longest night'. For 'Lucy' comes from the Latin for light, and on the day when the sun is to lose its eye she is, as it were, juggling with her own eyes. It is left to St Caolinn to have new ones made of water.

Much the same story is told of St Frideswide at Binsey, just outside Oxford. Her well was immortalized by Lewis Carroll when, rowing past Binsey with Alice Liddell and her two sisters on a famous afternoon, he had the Dormouse tell how three little girls lived in a treacle-well. Despite Alice's cry, 'There's no such thing!' the well of St Frideswide is indeed a treacle-well, that is, a well of healing: for treacle is the old word for a particular kind of medicine. It derives from the Latin 'therion', a wild beast, and meant an antidote against, firstly, snake-venom, and then against any kind of disease. In addition, the healing power of these treacle-wells is homeopathic, as the legends show: for the cure is explained in terms of an act which brought about the disease. When you drink their waters for a cure, therefore, the truth is that you are but taking the hair of the dog that bit you.

What lives at the bottom of a well has various names. Truth, for one, in whose nakedness all is revealed; and Desire for another, who on the island of Andros will put on the face of a girl's destined lover if, using a mirror, she peers into a well. The Welsh go further: 'You must not look into running water (that is, a spring), because you will look into God's eye,' they say, a sentiment echoed by the Tibetan Lama Yongden: 'Lakes are eyes by which the beings of the underworld espy what happens in this one.'

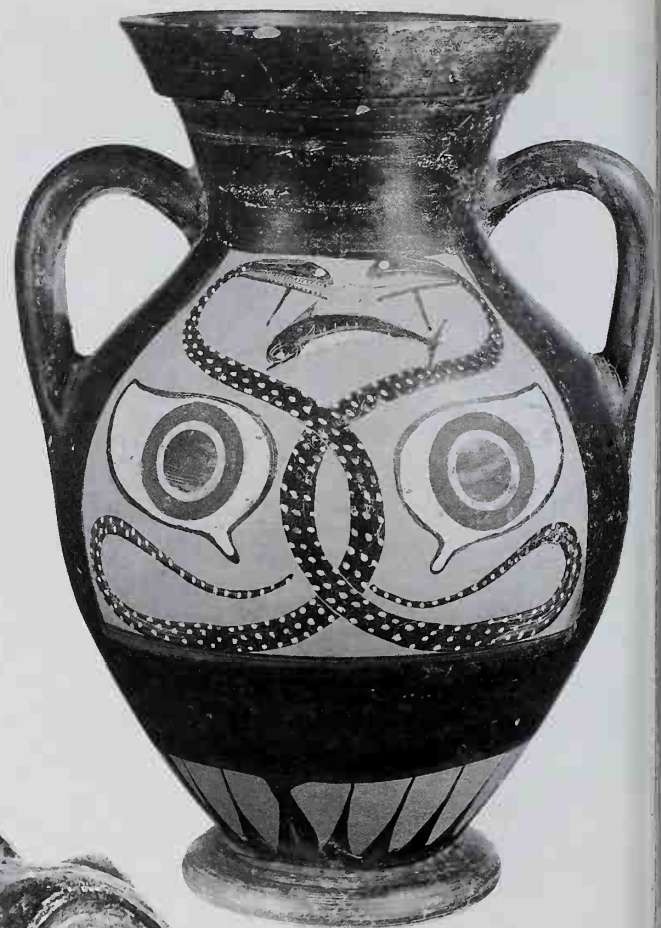
*Argus, a mythical being in the service of Argive Hera, was surnamed 'the many-eyed' and set to watch over the moon-cow Io. From early times he has been pictured as a man, though his occupation reminds one that 'cowherd' is a common epithet in India for Indra and the Sun as the all-seer. (Wall painting by Pinturicchio)*

*The sumptuous robe of Elizabeth I is embroidered with a remarkable serpent upon the sleeve, and a delit scattering of eyes and ears elsewhere, no doubt to signify that nothing escaped the attention of the Virgin Queen, our English Diana. (The so-called Rainbow portrait, by Marcus Cheeraerts)*

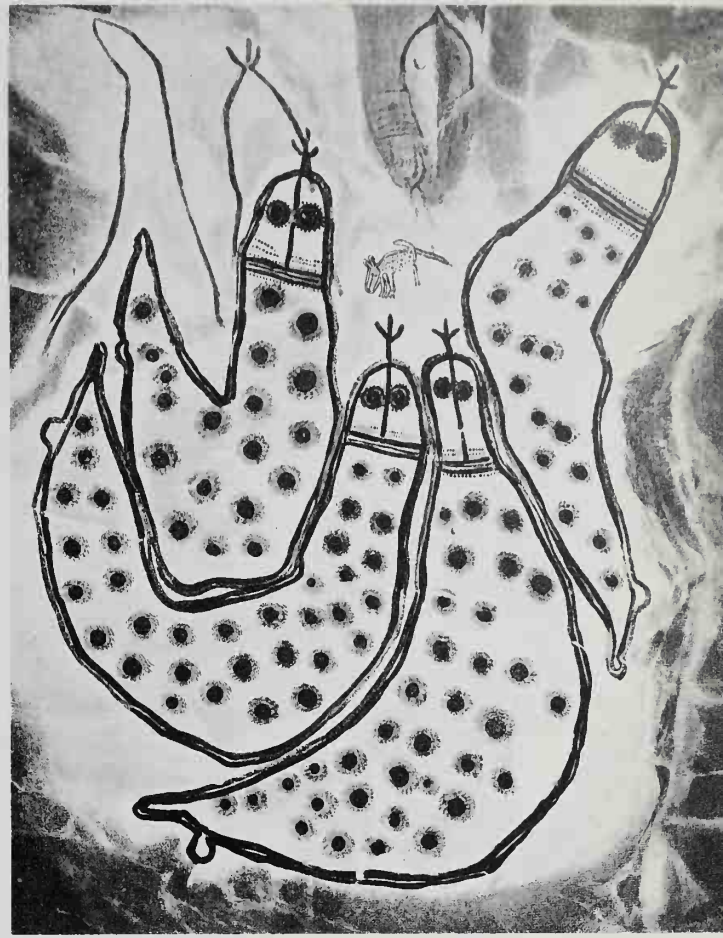
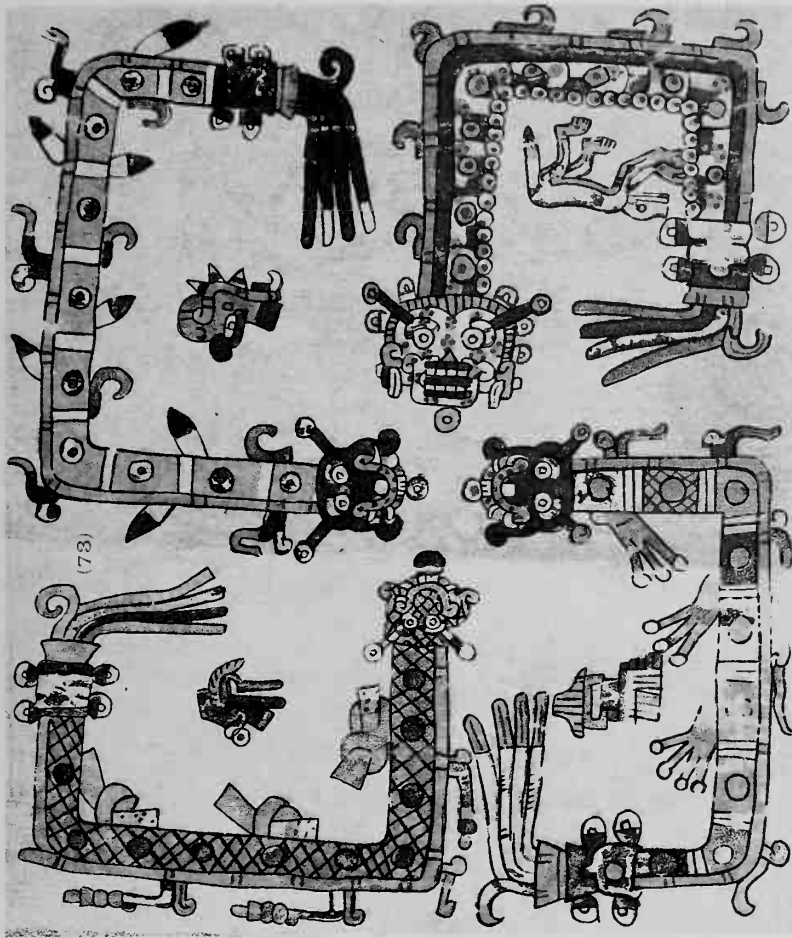
THE DRAGON'S STARE

Dragons in the Old World are noted for their glaring eyes and for their beards, by which one may tell these generative spirits from ordinary reptiles. The Aztec dragons rule the four quarter of earth and heaven, and are plentifully studded with eye-spots, or little suns; and so are their Australian cousins, whose more sexual nature is easy to guess at.

Right: Greek black figure vase, 2nd half of 6th century BC.



Head of a ritual staff, China, about 1800.



## The dragon's eye

One of the commonest forms taken by underworld beings is the snake with its sinuous motion and lidless, unwinking eyes. To see snakes coupling was, in ancient Greece, as bad an omen as seeing the virgin Goddess take her bath, and here Tiresias is again our guide. For there is another version to explain how he came by his powers: it tells that he came across two snakes coupling, killed the male, and immediately turned into a woman. After seven years he saw another pair coupling, killed the female and this time turned back into a man. He lost his sight later, when called in to judge a dispute between Zeus and Hera as to which of the sexes enjoyed intercourse the most; he, having had experience of both, immediately declared that women had nine tenths of the pleasure and men but one. Hera struck him blind out of pique, but Zeus rewarded his truth by giving him second sight.

These two forbidden spectacles, both producing blindness, have deep connections, which we may approach by referring back to the nymphs, nereids and nurses. The root of these words, which expresses the idea of a liquid flow, appears again in our 'snake', that which creeps with a flowing motion. The snake is, of course, one of the great emblems of generative power, and when it expands into the mythological dimension it is called a dragon. A dragon, indeed, is the nymph's counterpart in being the very spirit of water, the river god itself, and Trojan girls, bathing naked in the Scamander, would call upon it to take their virginity.

Above left: *Dragons of the four quarters, Aztec, Codex Borgia.*  
 Above: *aboriginal rock painting, N.W. Australia.*

The owner of the House under the Waters, whether found in Europe, Africa or the Americas, is indeed no other than the dragon in one of its many guises, and like the mermaid it possesses a compelling eye which, once fixed upon you, renders you helpless. We know this from the Greek verb that gives it its name, *derkesthai*, to look dartingly, as well as from its jealous habit of sleeplessly guarding the treasure it has accumulated. Like its cousin the Jaguar in its Water House, the European dragon has a great partiality for young girls, and is aroused by the smell of their blood and their milk.

In Australia this character is called the Rainbow Serpent, whose story unfolds when two women, one menstruating and the other suckling a child, come past its pool. Enraged by their smell, it towers up out of the water into a vast erection of storm clouds, and after swallowing the two women and discharging its rain, its thunder and lightning, it turns into its spectral phantom the rainbow at whose feet the two women will later be found alive, like the pots of gold they are.

The Rainbow Serpent is jealous of its privacy, and should it be disturbed by men, it takes its revenge by drying up the streams and pools for miles around. However, its anger must be dared by those who wish to become shamans. Suitably prepared, they make a vigil by the side of its pool, which is filled with spirit children, until it appears in all its awful majesty with gaping jaws and enormous blazing eyes: it devours them with a glance, dismembers them and puts rock-crystals into the joints of what now becomes their shaman body. With these crystals they can then heal disease, know the future and compel the rain.

Dragons have similar habits the world over. In France they are called 'dracs', a kind of nixie or water-horse, and in the 12th century one was known to live in a river-cave at Beaucaire. It had an appetite for women and young children, and to entice them into the water it would launch cups and rings upon the stream. Once they had swum out after this bait, there was no escape: the dragon would pull them to the bottom and devour them bodily or, if they were nursing mothers, take them into his cave and set them to nurse baby dragons. There they were fed on eel-paste, and only set free with a reward after seven years, when they had weaned their charges.

This dragon, like the Jaguar shaman, was a shape-changer, and was recognized by one of his erstwhile captives when he came into the town in human form. She saluted him respectfully and asked after his wife and children. However, the dragon was much displeased at having his disguise seen through and therefore asked with which eye she had seen him. 'This one,' she said. It was the eye on which she had once accidentally smeared some of the eel-paste that served her for food in Dragon-cave, and he immediately tore it out.

A cruel end to what amounts to a shamanic initiation. Or was it in fact the initiatory moment itself? It would have been so amongst the Aztecs where the novice seer – the *tlamatque* – was left scarred and even blinded after his initiation, or in Lithuania where a one-eyed god called Velinas was the patron of seers. He had a special spring called Golbe, near Insterburg, to which men once came 'to become one-eyed', a great honour. You could otherwise become clairvoyant by moistening one eye with Velinas's water, and even without that help you might take part in his feasts and dances were you so unlucky as to venture out at night into the swamps where the will o' the wisp flickers.



*Odin the one-eyed, on a bronze door of the State Historical Museum, Stockholm, 1960.*

## The eye of the seer

Velinas is no doubt related to the Slav goddesses the Vilas, who also frequent springs: they blind those who hear their songs, trouble their waters or see them bathe. They remind one of the members of the Mende women's initiation lodge, whose priestesses deal severely with any men caught peering at them while bathing or during their secret rites. Amongst the Mende, however, a diviner is said to be, not one-eyed like the followers of Velinas, but double-eyed – that is, having two pairs of eyes rather than one, as though the diviner were looking through the eyes of a sacred mask and adding supernatural to human vision.

But in Europe the old tradition is that diviners must lose one or both eyes if they are to gain second sight and see behind appearances. The god who most clearly embodied this necessity was Odin, whose nature was tersely summed up by Adam of Bremen in the words: 'Id est furor', it is frenzy. For Odin is a god of storm, a storm which can easily be mental as meteorological: his name is in fact related to the old English word *wood*, meaning mad, to the old Norse *oþr*, which meant divinely inspired poetry and the state of being possessed by the god, and to the Latin *vates*, a prophet, one through whom Fate speaks.

Like Velinas, Odin has but one eye. He gave the other during his exemplary initiation into shamanic divination, on visiting the Mimir's Well, the well of memory, after which he hung from the gibbet tree for three days and three nights and shrieked the magic runes into existence from the depths of his agony. His fury inspired battle-frenzy in warriors as much as it did poetic prophecy in seers, which at one time may have been the attribute of women specialists rather than of men. This is so in Ireland, where the daughters of Queen Medb had their right eyes taken out to turn them into sorcerers – her sons had their right arms cut off for the same reason – and a similar fate occurred to the goddess Boand. She, the wife of Nechtan the Irish Neptune, gave birth to Aengus Og the youthful Sun himself, after committing adultery with the Dagda. Wishing to purify herself she went to the well in Nechtan's garden, which no one might approach on pain of being blinded, save Nechtan himself and his three cup-bearers. Three times Boand walked widdershins about this well towards its waters, and three times a wave came out of the well, depriving her of a thigh, a hand and an eye before it carried her bodily to the sea.

Boand gave her name to the river, now called the Boyne; it and the Shannon are reputed to flow from this Well of Nechtan and to return there after circling the entire world. The well is also known as the spring Segais that rises in the Land of Promise: around its brim grow hazel trees, whose nuts fall into the water and are eaten by the Salmon of Wisdom. It is this fish that is the initiatory dragon of the Boyne; the novice is set to catch and cook it over a fire on the understanding that the first mouthful, in which its wisdom resides, is destined for another. On turning it over, however, he burns his fingers; these he puts into his mouth to cool, and on them he tastes the juice of *imbas forosna*, the wisdom that kindles and illuminates. By virtue of this he at once becomes aware of the Three Wisdoms, and is granted the gift of poetic inspiration.

Three is also the number of the Fates, as we are told in a Norwegian story about a young man who stole the eyes from each of three one-eyed hags, returning them only when they gave him the secret of a magic brew which killed trolls. This is the northern equivalent of Perseus's adventures amongst the Graiai – goddesses with the form of cranes or perhaps swans – said to be the warders of the dreadful Gorgon Medusa at the edge of Ocean; they had but one eye apiece, which Perseus stole and threw into the Tritonian marsh before he could take the Gorgon's head.

We are dealing here with relics of a large initiatory drama, and it is as well to flesh the picture out before dealing with the Gorgon and her petrifying eyes, together with the troll-killing beer. We can make a start with the initiatory rites of Haitian voodoo that allow the novice to be possessed by the *loa*, who are the gods, and by the ancestral spirits, who live in the Great Country below the waters. It is not everyone who does become so initiated, for the process is both arduous and





*Perseus averts his gaze as he cuts the head from the Gorgon Medusa, lest he be turned to stone. She is shown as a centaur, reminding us that Medusa was raped by the horse-god Poseidon and that her Gorgon face is that of the Nightmare herself. Perseus and Medusa, detail from Greek pithos of the 7th century BC.*

expensive; most people, indeed, put it off until the death of a parent, whose spirit becomes vengeful if not drawn up out of the waters of death, or until they need a remedy for the various mental disorders that come from leading an unprincipled life.

## Dreams, revelation and nightmare

The main difficulty that novices experience is to allow themselves to be possessed at all. There are all manner of preparations to make this easier, such as living in seclusion in a dark hut for a week, during which the loa will come to them in dreams. But the possession itself is brought about through dancing to drums, whose beat now encourages a steady rhythm, now interrupts it brutally to shock the dancer into a state of dissociation. The anthropologist Maya Deren, who once experienced this state despite herself when tape-recording a ceremony, described its start as the welling-up of a whole darkness from her feet, which to her seemed to be stuck into the ground. The sensation rose to her head and in a final bout of nauseated horror she lost consciousness, awaking exhausted and with no memory of what she had done. She had in fact been possessed by the love-goddess Erzulie, who had been invoked to consecrate a new drum; and though she had never witnessed this ceremony before, the Erzulie in her had performed the rites without mistake.

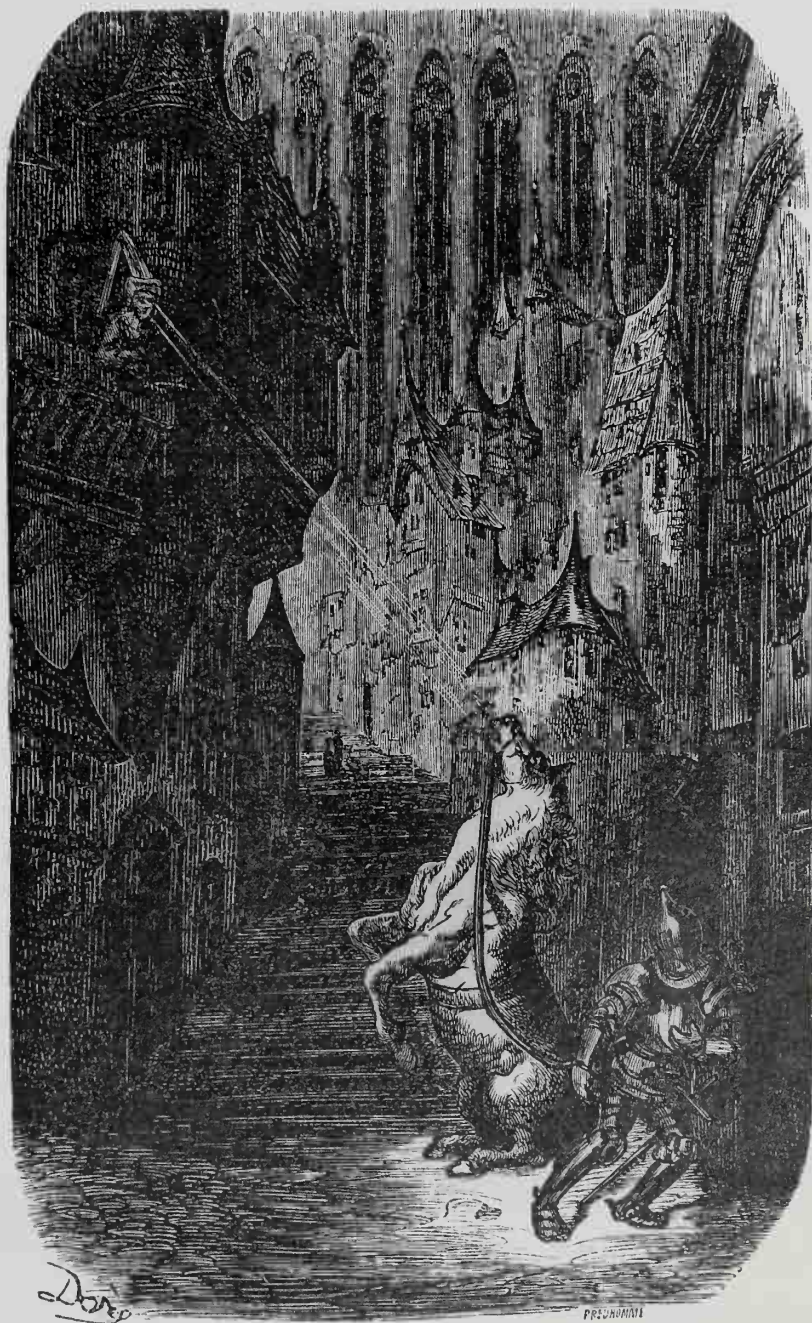
It is easy enough to see the approach of possession: the dancer loses the thread of the drum measure and begins to totter, the eyes look glazed and the head is thrown back in the typical posture taken by maenads in Greek sculpture. In this, the dissociative phase, the central postural reflex of the body begins to break down. This reflex allows us to maintain our balance while keeping an upright posture, and itself balances several different sensory systems: the semi-circular canals of the ear, the internal monitors of movement and balance; the eyes and the muscles of the eye-balls, which compare inner and outer systems of reference; and the skeletal musculature, which balances eyes in head, head on body, and body in the world around.

The main sensation that accompanies this breakdown of the reflex is giddiness, as one might expect: and as things proceed there are changes not only in the tonus of the striped skeletal muscles but in the unstriped ones of the alimentary canal, which bring on feelings of nausea. Simultaneously there are large changes in blood pressure, heart-beat and breathing, until there is no holding one's habitual consciousness together any more. The sense of self faints into unconsciousness, and out of those dark waters emerges a new centre of awareness to possess the now empty house of being as a loa, an oracular spirit.

Shamanic initiations also deal with this central process in one way or another, which makes for a counterplay between the eyes and the instinctual life of the body, between normal and visionary sight. We know it in a small way whenever we fall asleep – the metaphor of falling is here quite exact – and begin to dream, especially if that dream is a nightmare: for the physical symptoms of nightmare parallel those of possession closely enough. Terminology also tells us that possession is indeed a development of the nightmare state. For instance, a servitor when possessed is said to be the horse of the loa concerned, and to be mounted by it; as if, on another level, the pounding of the blood in the ears merge with the pounding of the drums to create the sound of galloping hooves. In the same way the mare of the nightmare has from early times been regarded as a horse, though it is more immediately related to a root meaning to oppress, crush, harm, that gives us the verb 'to mar' and the name of the Morrigan, Queen of the Elves. Both these basic references can be seen in Fuseli's painting of the Nightmare, as famous in its time as the Mona Lisa in ours. The victim lies with her head dangling off the end of the bed with a squat elvish monster sitting on her to oppress her breathing and paralyse her body, while through the curtains at the end of the room is thrust the terrible pale head of the Mare herself, with snorting nostrils and fiery eyeballs.

In Indo-European mythology, the mare typifies an unbridled form of feminine sexuality, which is also that of the nightmare: for an ancient piece of advice to sufferers from the nightmare is either to utter its true name or to seize hold of its toe, whereupon it will turn into a figure of ravishing beauty and drown you in bliss. To this we can add the frequent association of horses with dragons and both with springs of water, summed up in the name and nature of Pegasus, whose hoof struck the spring of Helicon into existence; and we can then see the lore accumulated around wells, eyes, naked women, water spirits and divination reflected in the facts of psycho-physiology.

With this symbolic equation we can understand why lakes are said to be the eyes of the underworld beings, and in what sense the Rainbow Serpent and the Nymphs are to be taken as patrons of shamanic vision. These last are also known in Haiti as the water goddess Simbi, the mermaid-like patroness of springs and running water whose ritual diagram is a snake in a field of crosses. Amongst her many gifts are those of healing, of the diagnosis of disease and of the use of medicinal plants, and as such she is often invoked by herbalists. One such, initiated as a voodoo priest in his forties, would sometimes see her bathing in his ritual basin. He had been cured of a long illness after which, in his words, the dead gave him eyes; they also taught him the songs he would sing whenever engaged on his craft. 'Leaves-o, snake snake leaves- he would sing, and again:



#### LOVE, NIGHTMARE AND ECSTASY

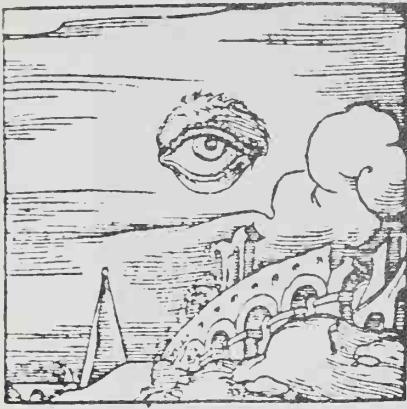
The relation between nightmare and the thwarting of sexual passion has long been known, and in Doré's engraving we see how the succubus, the demon of sexuality, attacks not only the mind, rider of the body's horse, but the horse itself, who is now riderless. The dancing maenad's thrown-back head tells of a similar dissociation through which Dionysos, the god of ecstasy, comes into his own.

Above: dancing maenad, from a Greek water jar, studio of the Meidias Painter.

Above right: Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, 1781.

Right: the lord of Amboise who with his horse is struck by the gaze of the Succubus.

Engraving by Gustave Doré for Balzac's *Les Contes Drolatiques*.



Quo modo Deum.



Quo modo Manes.

Top: *the Eye of God.*  
 Above: *the eyes of the ancestral shades.*  
 From Horapollon's *Hieroglyphica*, 1551.

Opposite:  
 'Divine Omniscience'. Lithograph  
 by Odilon Redon, from *Dans le r ve*, 1879.

Two leaves, two roots-o,  
 Eyes forgot you, picked you dreaming.  
 I have two leaves which fell into the basin.  
 Some days are better than others.

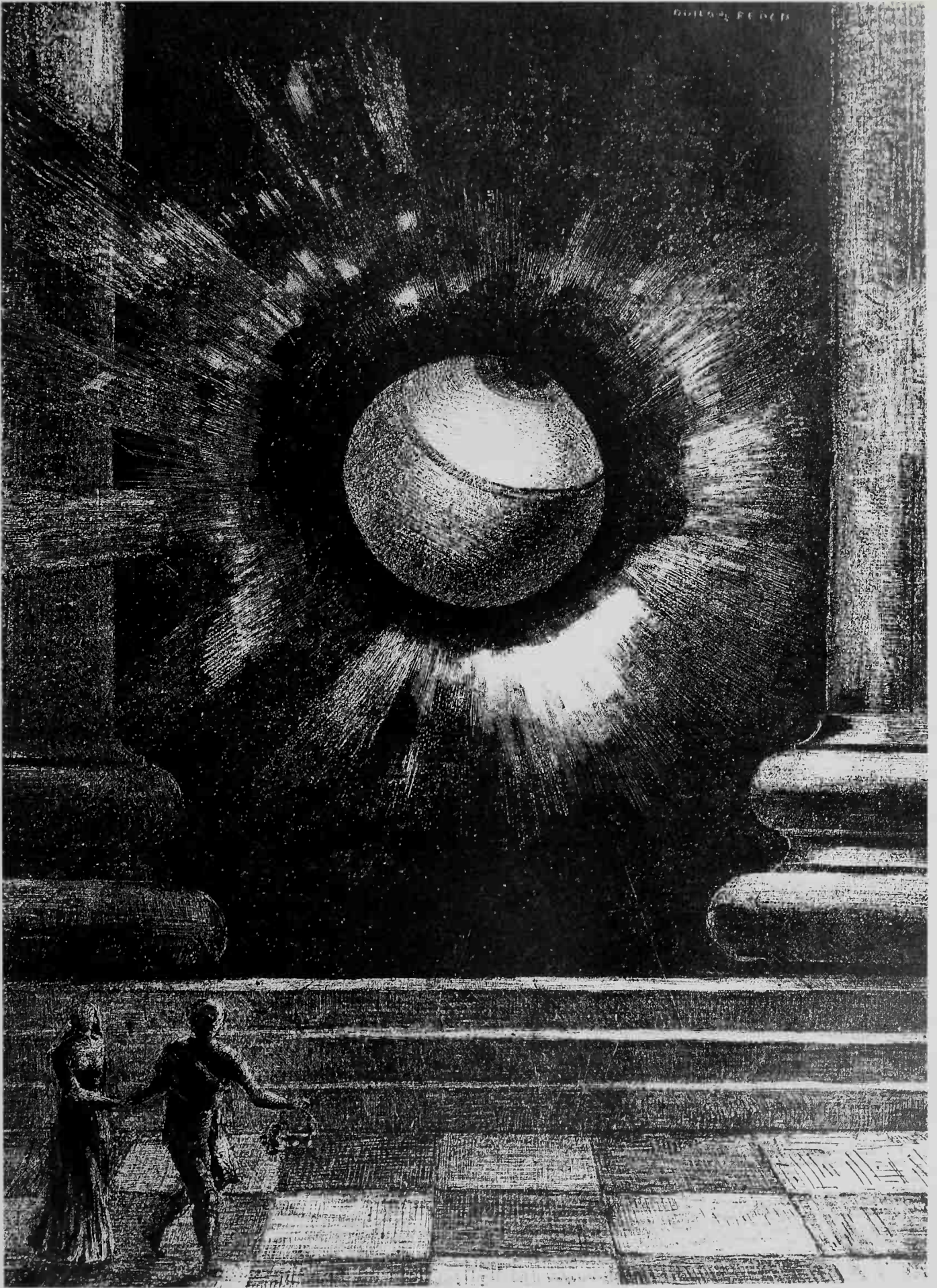
By which one may conclude that Simbi and her snakes, the diagnostic eyes she gives her servitor in place of his own and the leaves he picks when possessed, all bathe interchangeably in the same pool of wisdom – they are, we could say, the different forms that the eyes take on as they are juggled.

### The eye of the great being

The being whose life shines out of these eyes is of course the dragon, the untamed energy of our life which knows itself by reflection in the life of the world around us. We can see him plainly in a Chinese story as the dragon-god of Mount Chung, who is called Enlightener of the Darkness. 'By looking he creates daylight, by closing his eyes he creates night. By blowing he makes winter, by exhaling he makes summer. He neither eats nor drinks nor does he rest. His breath causes wind. His length is a thousand miles. As a living being he has a human face, the body of a snake and a red colour . . .' And we could easily extend the list of what he does from what we already know: he guards treasure, lusts after young women, and turns into the rainbow after his passion has been spent in rain, thunder and lightning.

In India he takes the form of the horse, and as the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* tells us, 'Dawn verily is the head of the sacrificial horse. The sun is his eye; the wind, his breath; the universal fire, his open mouth; the year, his body . . .' He is, in fact, the Great Being itself who, lonely in the abyss of the uncreated world, threw images of desire upon the darkness. There they took life, he coupled with them, and they conceived everything that is. In some versions of this great cosmogony he is designated as the world tree or prime matter, and here we are well advised to question its sex. For if *matter* comes from the same root as *madeira*, the Portuguese for wood, the immediate meaning of this root is found in *mater*, the Latin for mother.

Our best way into this meaning is by way of Egyptian cosmogony according to the Heliopolitan myth. This starts with the primal divinity Atum who, like his Indian compeer, rests in the waters of the abyss. Atum, 'he who came into being by himself', is figured as a man although embodying both the sexes: he is thus said to couple with himself by putting his hand, sign of his female half, upon his phallus. Spurting out of himself there emerges Shu, lord of air and space, and Tefnut, lady of moisture, of life and the world order, closely followed by the most powerful of divinities, the Eye. Aeons pass until the Eye has caught up with Shu and Tefnut and brings them back to be cherished by Atum: but in the meantime Atum has replaced the Eye with one brighter than itself. Seeing this, the original Eye is inflamed with wrath and takes the form of a rearing cobra with swollen neck. Atum has but one way of appeasing it: he binds it on his forehead with the promise that the Eye, now and forever, will remain there as the sign of sovereignty; and at the same time he creates all the serpents, in their every form.





## URAEUS

The bearer of the solar disk is Horus the falcon god, whose soaring at a height fits him for the task. The disk itself is wound round by the Uraeus cobra, the feminine principle that creates life and shines forth as consciousness.

Above: Horus in the eyed sun-boat, bearing the solar disk. Egyptian funerary papyrus, c. 1400 BC.

Opposite left: Akhnaton and Nefretiti wearing the uraeus as tokens of royalty. Egyptian relief.

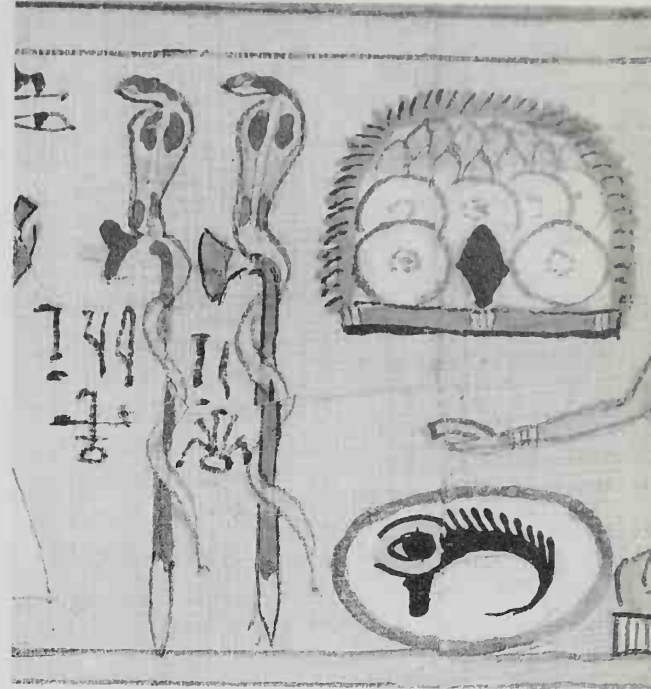
Opposite right: Horus eye guarded by two cobras. Egyptian funerary papyrus, c. 1310 BC.

The Eye thus becomes the Uraeus serpent, and is celebrated as 'She whose appearance strikes terror', as 'Lady of Slaughter, Mighty one of Frightfulness', as 'Most ancient female of the world, conductress of the One Lord.' Atum is none other than her consort, for he later announces that he will take back upon himself the form of the primeval serpent to destroy the world he made; but meanwhile she has the power.

But what is meant by this Eye? We must understand for a start that just as we may look for the common etymological sense of various words, so ancient theologies used word-play to define the sense of a mythical happening: and in Egypt, as elsewhere, they punned meaning into the very fabric of a story. The Greeks certainly appreciated the habit, for their word for the Eye, Uraeus, though taken from an Egyptian word, bears all the marks of it having been thought of as derived from *ouros*, a tail; similarly Plutarch took the name of Osiris as meaning 'many-eyed', from Greek *os*, many, and *iris*, eye.

But Uraeus derives from the Egyptian *iret*, 'the one who rears up', therefore a cobra – therefore too the erections of sexual desire and the uprightness of the world order. The name is spelt the same as *iret*, the eye, the pupil, and *iret*, to create, make or do. (However the Greek Iris, the rainbow as messenger of the gods and hence iris of the eye, seems to come from a root meaning to arch, to bend: but as the rainbow is so often taken to be the spectral body of the Serpent, an Egyptian link does not seem impossible.) The connection between these various meanings is plain enough: snakes are notorious for their lidless unwinking eyes, with which they are said to fascinate their prey; the cobra has fangs full of poison, which it may occasionally spit out; and in another story we find Ptah, the craftsman god, creating men and women by spitting them out of his mouth much as Atum spurted the first gods out of his phallus.

All these matters and more make up what Rundle Clark called the fundamental equation of Egyptian symbolism: eye = flame = destructive goddess = cobra = crown. But in spite of this the story remains somewhat opaque, and it may well be

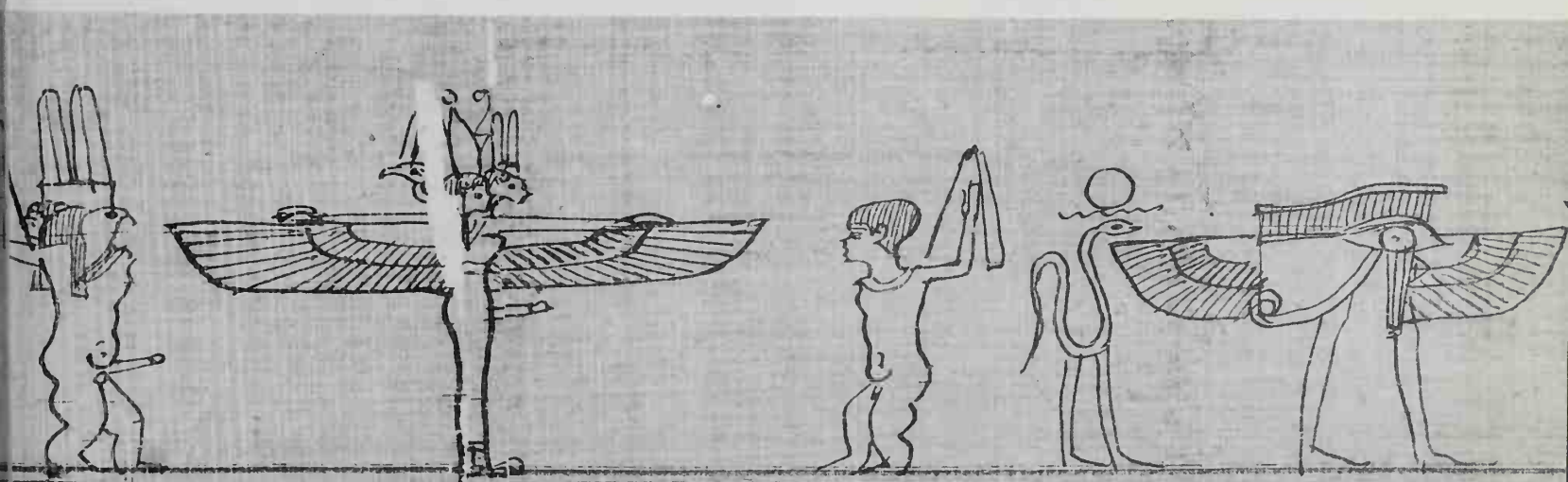


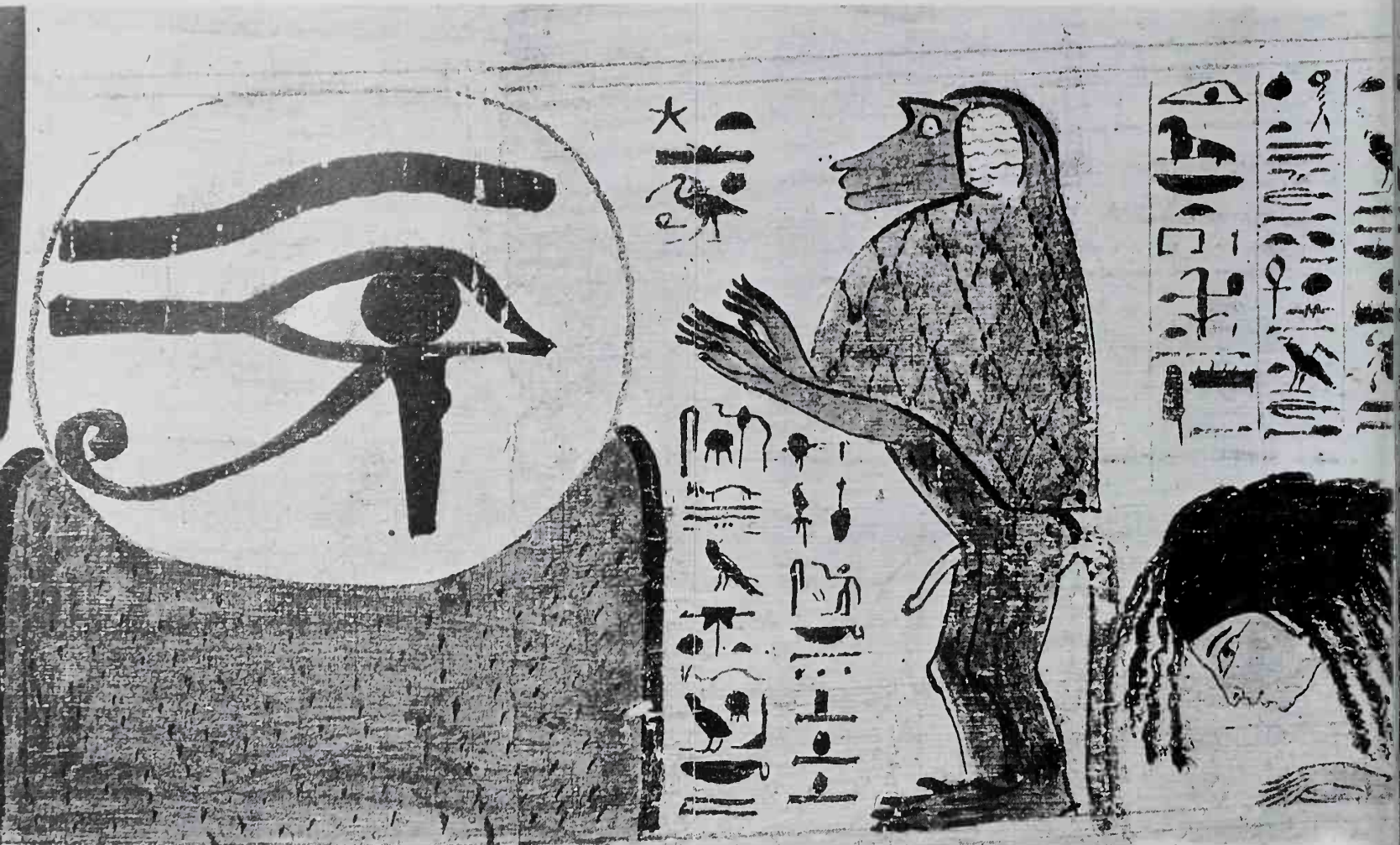
THE WINGED EYE

The Egyptian Winged Eye was a symbol of divine omniscience and power, and when it became known in the Renaissance it was seized upon by Alberti to indicate sharpness of vision, celerity of mind and constant vigilance. QUID TUM is a Ciceronian motto meaning 'What Then', and alludes to what only God can foresee.

Right: medal of Leone Battiste Alberti, made to his specifications by Matteo de' Pasti.

Below: winged eye on legs and phallic gods, Egyptian papyrus.





*The priestess Hent-Tau and the baboon god Hapi adore the sun-disk. Book of the Dead, Egypt, about 1000 BC.*

that its form was influenced by an earlier tale of eye-juggling. This story is certainly widespread, for we find it amongst the Bushmen of the Kalahari, whose version is worth repeating.

Its hero is Mantis, who in Africa shares the role of trickster with Spider. One day he decides to make war on the baboon tribe, 'the people who sit on their heels', and to prepare himself for the fray he sends his son to fetch sticks to make arrows with. He must have had a bow at hand already, for when it is not hanging in the sky as the new moon it exists in a man's body, only waiting to be strung by the woman he makes love to for both of them to shoot a new life into the future: or so the Bushmen say. In any case, young Mantis was searching for sticks when he was noticed by the baboon tribe. Baboons, as van der Post remarked when retelling this story, are remarkably touchy animals who like playing tricks on others but cannot abide tricks being played on them. They are also very suspicious, and it was quite in character that they asked young Mantis what he was doing. The guileless child told the truth: 'I am collecting sticks for arrows for my father to make war against the people who sit on their heels.'

The baboons, now enraged, attacked the child by beating him over the head until he died and an eye fell out; and that done, their anger turned to play as they threw the eye between them, crying out in turn:

And I want it.  
Whose ball is it?





#### THE WADJET EYE

Above: Horus eye, 9th century BC.

Right: stoppered vase painted with a guardian eye and hieroglyphs meaning 'Every good!'. From the tomb of Khai, Egypt.

And I want it.  
Whose ball is it?  
And I want it.

Now Mantis was asleep at the time but saw everything in a dream. He ran to the scene of the murder and after a great battle succeeded in making off with his son's eye. Coming to a spring, he immersed it in the water and left it there until, one day, he heard a splashing in the spring: it was his son, made whole again.

Van der Post has a fine thing to say about this son: that he should be 'an image of the father's self seems to me obvious; but perhaps I should say that the Bushman so strongly felt the son to be an extension of his own personality that I have heard him scold a boy thus: "How can you stand there in my body and not obey me?"' He also remarks that, although the paranoia of the baboon tribe is so marked that they have fewer friends in Africa than any other creature except the snake, they have something to recommend them. The Egyptians certainly thought so, for having witnessed the screams and agitation of baboons as they woke with the dawn, they had no doubt they were paying their devotions to the Sun God Re. We can accordingly see them in many a tomb picture as Re's servitors, though usually bowdlerized: for a signal mark of the male baboon is that he makes his dignity known to his fellows by sitting with erect phallus.

## THE EYE OF VIOLENCE

The story goes that the Gorgon Medusa, once the most seductive and beautiful of women, was cursed by the goddess Athene to bear the ugliest of faces because she had polluted her temple precincts by making love to Poseidon. Much the same tale is told of Demeter, raped by Poseidon in the form of a stallion. Her cult image was of a mare-headed woman which, like the Gorgon's head, would turn all who saw it to stone.

Hell has no fury like a woman scorned – and, in this case, raped – and the fearful expression on the Gorgon's face combines horror, outrage, and all the malevolence of vengeance into a portrait of Fear itself. Despite the usual story that tells how Perseus managed to cut off this head, however, it was from the beginning a mask, that of the Nightmare: the word mask being used since Roman times to denote a larva or ghost, that is, an underworld demon.

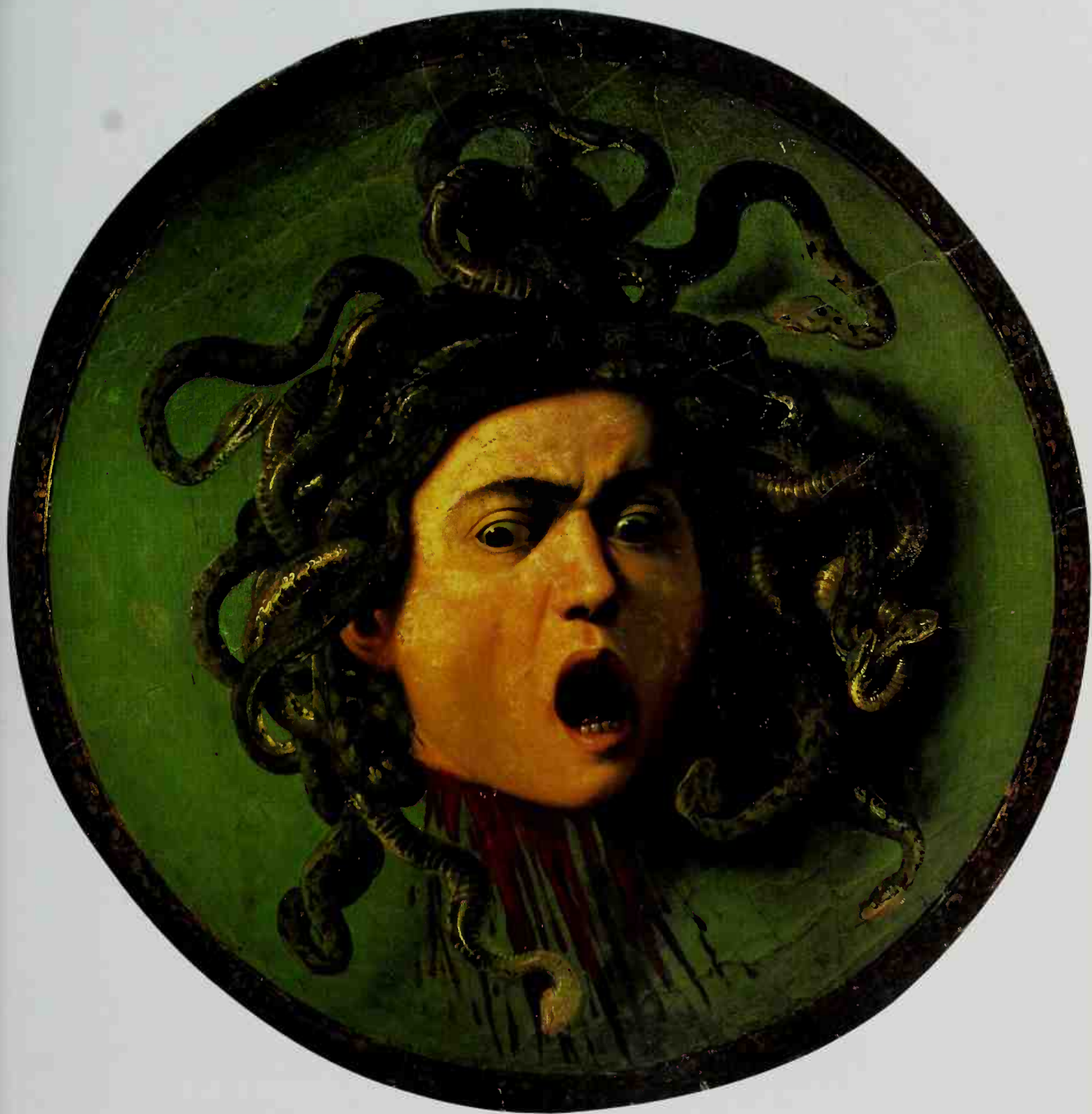
Masked demons of this sort figure in many an initiation ceremony, and their great eyes suggest that the novice is expected to enter a visionary state as a result of seeing them. The masks themselves can also act to frighten off ghosts, and thus become talismans against the evil eye. They do so by a competition of horror in which the worst face wins. Similarly, warriors would attempt to overbear their opponents with boasts and bloodcurdling grimaces, and it is no wonder that the face of the demon Horror was widely used on shields and helmets as an honorific badge. For honour is, at bottom, a matter of face.

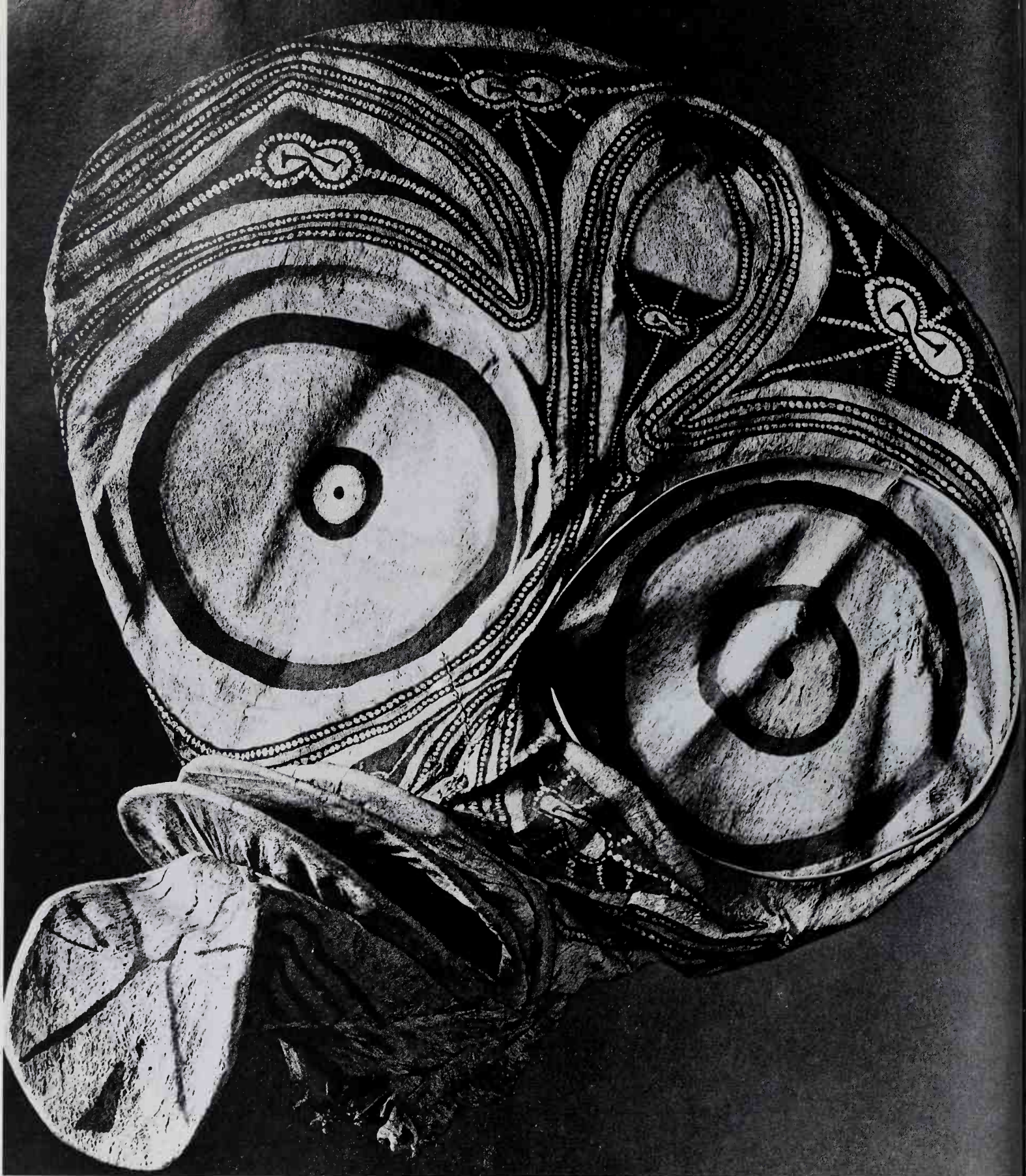
'The eyes', said Culpeper, 'are next in nature unto the soul, for in the eyes is seen and known the disturbances and griefs, gladness and joys of the soul. They are to the visage what the visage is to the body; they are the face of the face.' Meanwhile, the emotions that disturb the soul are those of the underworld demon within us, whose vital sap – called *rasa* in India – is held to be the essence of consciousness and, when suitably prepared, the drink of immortality called *Soma*.

Mead and wine are also held to be exemplars of this divine juice, and Greek drinking cups celebrate the fact by being decorated with enormous eyes, each of whose pupils is sometimes figured as a Gorgon's head. In Indonesia the monster's head is that of *Banaspati*, Lord of the Forest, usually depicted with shoots of vegetation issuing from its mouth, which has no lower jaw, or with a mouth so large that the lower jaw is the threshold of a temple doorway.

This shield was presented to the Duke of Tuscany, and the Gorgon's head painted upon it was held to be a tribute to his prowess in subduing his enemies. Though ghastly enough, it has lost all sacred attributes except for its coiffure of serpents. It is also the head of a boy, and while this may say something

about Caravaggio's sexual bent we must remember that the original Gorgon's head, though nominally that of a woman, was heavily bearded. This has led to several interpretations of which the psychoanalytical is the most juicy. (Caravaggio, *Parade Shield*)

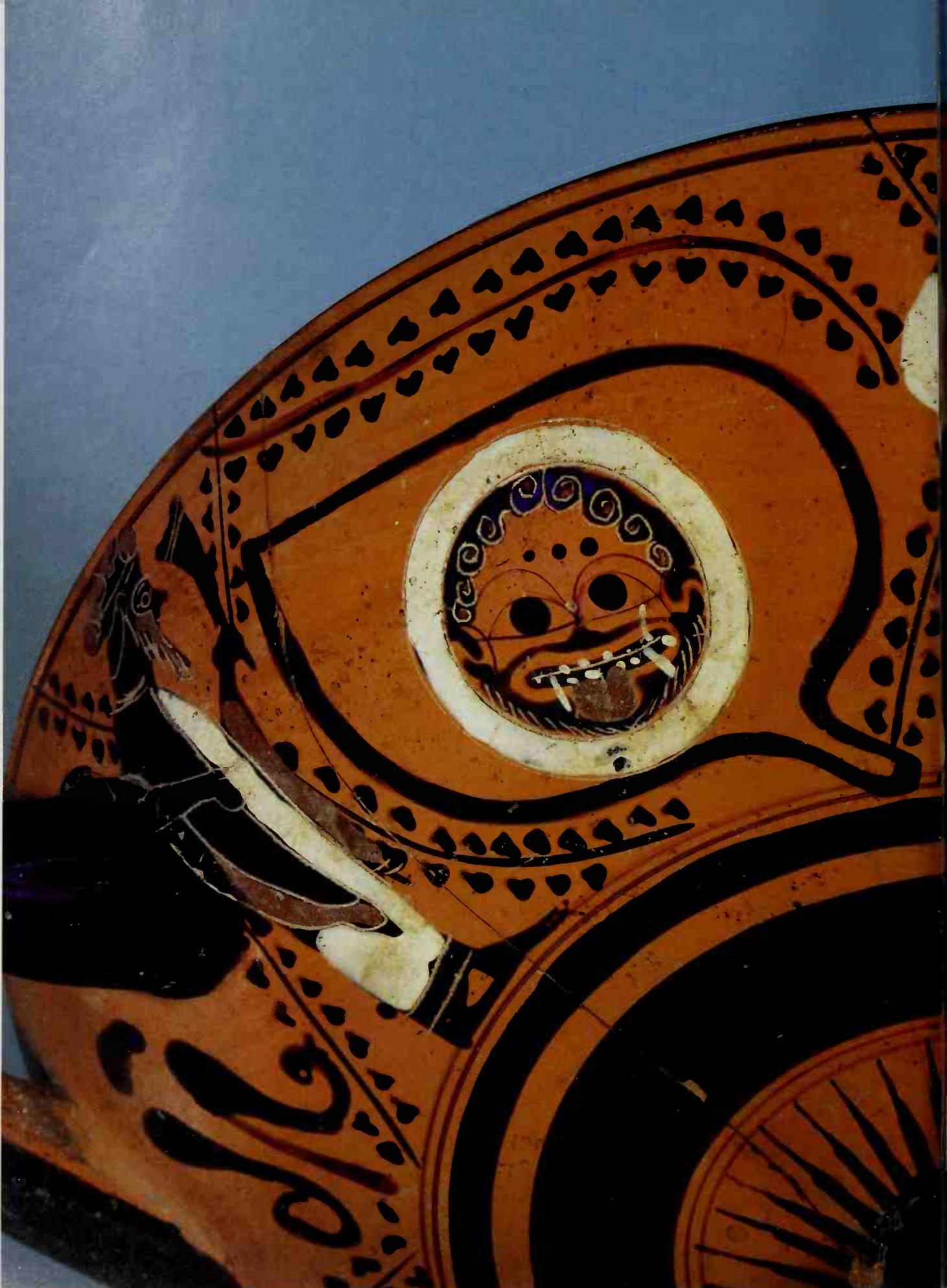




*Masked performances have an eerie character, the more so when they portray supernatural beings during initiation rites. These bogeymen educate the young novices in the traditions, browbeating and sometimes tormenting them, appearing too in mimic plays in which large-eyed masks can have their full hypnotic effect. (Tapa mask, New Britain, Baining)*

*Such beings are powerful, and once you are brought under their patronage their masks may protect you from ill chance and the evil eye. The bold circles and coils of eyes and hair on this Phoenician piece are well formed to catch the attention, and to return any bad looks to their source. (Amulet from Carthage, 4th–3rd c. BC)*





Greek wine was potent stuff, plentifully laced with narcotic herbs and dangerous to drink unmixed with water. The old-time Gorgon heads that stare out of the

eyes on this drinking cup thus give fair warning of the dangers of getting stone-drunk. They are bearded, being at once male and female, head and crotch; they

have fangs coming out of their mouths, tongues thirsty for blood, and snake-coils for hair. In addition they have three dots ornamenting their foreheads, a



position also occupied by the maenad who stands before an X or ivy-sprays between the large eyes of the cup. This is of course the place of the third eye, to

remind us that wine is blood of Dionysos (whose other name, said Heraclitus, is Hades), and that his revelations are those of ecstasy and

intoxication – ‘in vino veritas’. (Detail of Attic black figure cup from Vulci, 6th c. BC)







*Honour is intimately linked with the face, as is shame; and face is often a synonym for honour, as it was in old China and still is in English-speaking countries, where 'face' can mean the same as 'cheek' when both refer to shameless daring. A similar usage is known from the Tupi-speaking Indians of Brazil, who called their enemies tobajara, the word meaning the face-owner, hence your rival, the one you are face-to-face with; and they used the same word for their brothers-in-law, war and marriage being closely intertwined in their lives. (Thracian gold ceremonial helmet from Romania)*

*The faces on helmets, often with overbearing expressions and sometimes reduced to the eyes, are a development of this state of affairs, and speak of the close connection between helmets and masks. They may be decorated with every kind of heraldic device as, of course, may shields, which in Europe still bear the owner's coat of arms, and which in the past might use the Gorgon's head as a badge of honour. The head of this carnivorous nightmare was once well known throughout the Americas, in Europe, Asia and the Pacific, attesting to the universality and power of the vengeful being it represents. (Painted shields from Kenyah Dayak and Long Iram tribes, Borneo)*



We could therefore moralize upon the connection between the eye and sexuality in this Mantis story, were not this plain enough already. Even so, the eye still draws our attention and, information on the subject from the Bushmen being lacking, we can at least take a hint from the Tamils of India who are so endeared to their babies that they call them 'Eye'. In English the phrase is rather 'the apple of my eye', where 'apple' refers to the pupil (as 'prunelle', a small plum, does in French); but as we know, the pupil is so called because of the doll-like reflection of the one who looks into it. The observation is central to Egyptian theology, which has Re the Sun god declaim: 'I am Re. I am the Master of Eternity. I am Master of the Great Crown. I am he who is throned in the Divine Eye'. As Ammon-Re he is invoked with similar praise: 'O Ammon, who hides yourself in your pupil, luminous soul in your magic eye, divine eye, superb one whom no-one knows . . .' And to explain how the soul of the dead Osiris hides in the eye of the living Horus, it is said that 'In the eye there is the pupil, the reflection of a child. The Great God himself becomes a child again, he enters the womb to renew himself.'

## The Island of Fire

Egyptian religion has much to do with Osiris, whose name means either 'the place of the eye' or 'the one enthroned' – enthroned on Isis his sister-wife, whose name means throne. His story is simultaneously that of the rise and fall of the Nile, of the immortality of the soul, and of the kingship; a cyclic myth, in which every pharaoh is the Horus of his time, to be changed into Osiris at his death. He then fathers a new Horus spirit in his successor who is thus termed his son. At the head of this ancestral line is the self-created God; whether he be called Atum or Ptah, who creates mankind from a tear of his eye, perhaps at the same instant that he turns his eyes into sun and moon; and a large part of the rage of the Eye must be that the claims of this God conflicted with those of the Goddess to be the original self-created one and the mother of all.

Neith is her name in Upper Egypt. She is held to be the prototype of the Greek Athene who, like her, was a warrior goddess and had the snake-locked Gorgon's head upon her aegis. Neith is also called Wadjet, the Uraeus serpent, whose rage is later attributed to Hathor. Her story as Hathor is that Re, having created mankind from the tears in his eye, grew old, and mankind plotted against him. He summoned the gods, some of whom advised that the Eye should be sent against mankind, others saying that it was not strong enough unless it descended on them as Hathor.

So that goddess came and slew mankind in the desert, and lest all be killed Re had beer made from barley, mixed with red ochre, and with it he flooded the fields. At dawn Hathor came again and seeing the flood found that her face looked beautiful in it. Then she drank the red beer, and liked it, and returned drunk without noticing mankind any more. Re then said to her, 'Welcome, O Beautiful One!' And that is how beautiful women came into being in the city of Yamit.

Egypt is surrounded by desert, but the particular desert this myth has in mind is the southern, Nubian one. It is indeed from the south that Hathor descends upon mankind, from the source of the Nile itself; for the Goddess rages throughout the Dog-days, from the time that the heliacal rising of Sirius heralds the rise of the Nile to

*Statues of the Buddha are often set in a niche below the head of Banaspati, Lord of the Forest. This being has a dragonish nature, the sap that runs in its veins being a form of Soma. Its place of honour shows that it is the guardian of the third eye and the reflection of the Person within it. Because of this, the same features are given to Rahu, demon of the Eclipse, and to the Face of Glory by whose means Rahu was defeated.*

*With the opening of the third eye comes the passage of the initiate into the mysteries of the Sun-door. Temple architecture in Bali reminds even the casual visitor of this moment by framing its doorways with the head and open jaws of that demon who is also the guardian of enlightenment. (The Cave of the Elephant, part of a Buddhist monastery at Sungai Gajah, 9th–10th c., Bali)*

the day when she is placated with a beer-feast. The spirits of the dead are then made welcome and afterwards dismissed to their usual abode. In terms of the official theology, these spirits are the individualized portions of Osiris, the god whose murder at the hands of his brother Set is the necessary condition for the Nile flood. He, in the form of the Eye lost to the primal god, falls into the source of the Nile, a formulation similar to the one describing the succession to the throne, in which the soul of the dead Osiris becomes a child in the pupil of his son Horus.

In ancient times the Sirian calendar was in use from the Aegean to the Middle East, and in Mesopotamia the dog-days are also noted for the rage of the goddess, there called Ishtar, 'She who stirs up the waters of the Abyss.' The goddess is then in oestrus, the burning heat which, if it dries the land, makes the Nile boil at its estuary and beer or wine bubble over as it ferments; for she comes from the Isle of Fire, the paradise in the midst of the waters from which all waters flow.

Look with your faces, O God of eld! O primeval ancestors!  
Upon this spirit who comes today, taking the form of a beam of light, from the  
isle of Fire!

## The glory

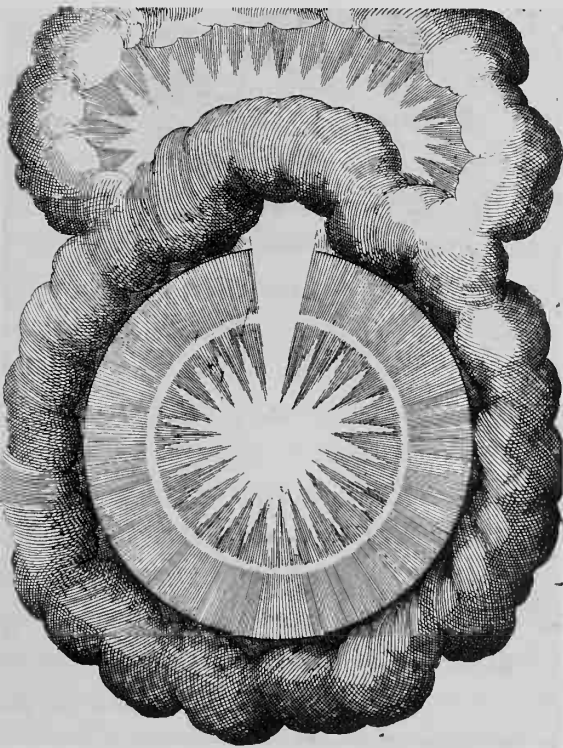
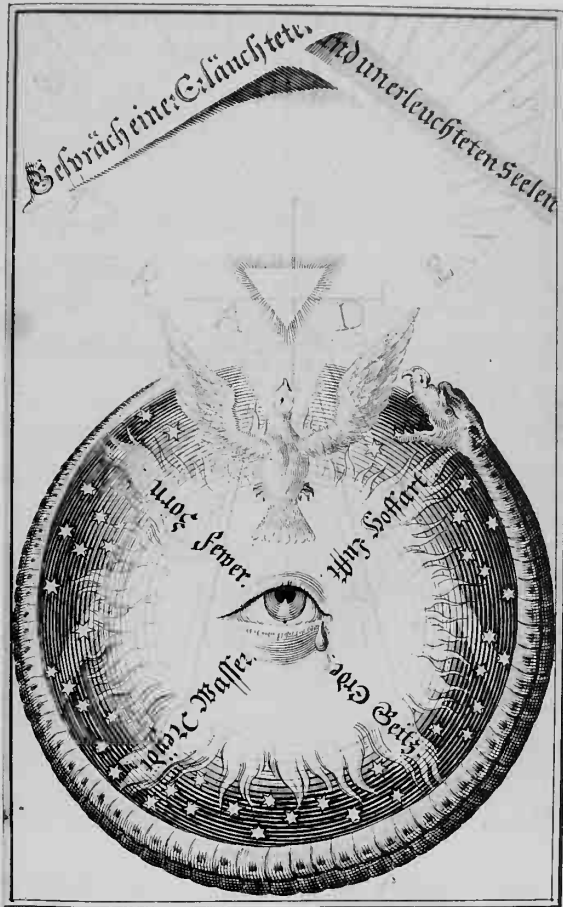
In the great Persian epic, the Shahnamah, this fire is the emblem of sovereignty called *Hvarnah*, the Glory. It lives in the waters of Lake Vurukasha and causes them to boil over whenever a claimant dives in to seize it, and as the claimant makes three attempts, each surge of the water produces a river. It is therefore a variant of the story told in Ireland about Boand and the spring Segais, whose triple outflow now allows us to identify the Glory as the light shining from the creative principle itself. According to traditional gnosis, this has a trinitarian mode, for the Light that streams into the dark waters of the beginning has always existed and begets itself in the very waters it is born from. The self-sufficient nature of this act is often described in more concrete language, as when Zeus is said to couple with his mother and then with his daughter by her, to become born in the person of his son Dionysos, sometimes called Brimos the thunder-flash; and a similar theology must have been used to justify Pharaonic or incestuous marriage as a religious duty for the ancient Mittani.

The intuition that the Self is born in the image of the Eye is not Christian doctrine as such, though the Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen made use of it without hesitation. In her illustration of the Conception we can identify the island of Fire as the lozenge above the Virgin's head. It lies in the upper firmament, the one that divides the world from the sweet waters of the beginning, and it is divided into three parts. Two of these contain twenty-four eyes apiece, the third, central part being connected by a tube to the Virgin's body, down which will pass the thirty fire-coloured suns and the strange head that it holds in readiness. Here the numbers twenty-four and thirty may refer to the hours of the days and the days of the month, to signify the entry of the new God into time. However, thirty is also noteworthy, as being the generative number of God, and the eyes surely refer to more than the hour-count in a visionary such as Hildegard.

Opposite

### THE BIRTH OF THE SELF

*The process by which the Self is incarnated into matter can be figured as if the body of the Self were an egg inseminated by a thunder-flash; as an eye weeping from excess of light, or more plainly in terms of human conception. In Hildegard's vision, the seed of the Self is full of suns and eyes; it descends from a square field amongst the stars, a constellation which in Sumerian times was pictured as the celestial Garden and now goes under the name of Pisces.*



Top: 'Dialogue between the enlightened and unenlightened Soul', from Boehme's Theosophical Works, 1682.

Right: the Creation of the soul, from Hildegarde of Bingen's Scivias, 1141.

Above: the Creation of the Primum Mobile, from Fludd's Philosophia Sacra, 1626.

A glance back at the Tukano indeed suggests that this picture illustrates the conception of spiritual vision, figured as easily by eyes as by eye-spots or by what in India are called bindu points, which mark the fertilization of the Void by the creative principle. The alchemists, in a tradition paralleling that of Hildegarde, pictured the visionary body as a rotundum, elsewhere called the Philosophic Egg, described by Caesarius as 'like to the sphere of the moon, but furnished on all sides with eyes,' while the mystic Jacob Boehme called it 'the Fiery Eye and form of the soul in the likeness of the First Principle.' Images of this kind were well known to Jung, partly through drawings done by his patients, and he considered them symptomatic of the conceptual moment in individuation.

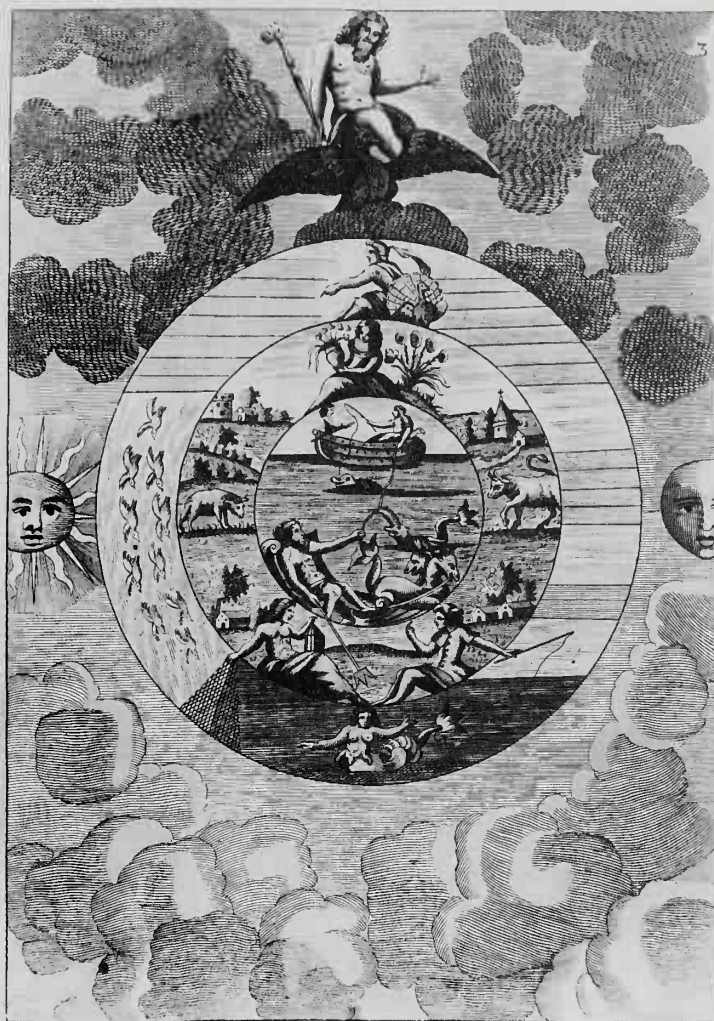
The same radiance of countless eyes refers elsewhere to God's knowledge and omniscience, a faculty he shares out amongst his angels who are similarly arrayed; and that he is the dweller in the Island of Fire is alluded to in theology by placing his throne in the Empyrean whence descends the Logos to its incarnation. This is a tenet of the perennial philosophy in all its versions, whether they be Christian, neo-Platonic, Egyptian, Celtic, or Indian, holding good for physical as for spiritual birth: and we can see something of the subtleties in this imagery when we recall that the early Christians gave the name of Ichthys the Fish to the Saviour, and that alchemical names for the fiery nature of the Logos include the scintilla or spark, the fish's eye, and the fish itself.

## The fish

The fish has long been sacred in the Middle East. There are taboos upon who may eat it, and when, or whether it may be eaten at all, and some kinds of fish have an important place in mythology. The oxyrhynchus of the Nile is one example, for it ate the phallus of the dismembered Osiris; the dolphin another. Its name comes from the Greek *delphos*, the womb, and it was associated with the oracle of Delphi and its god Apollo, whose principal shrine was the sea-girt island of Delos. It later gave its name to the heir-apparent of the French throne, the Dauphin, who shared the title with the more-than-royal child of the alchemical opus.

This child is none other than the Fire hidden in the waters of the celestial Lake, and in Vedic times was known as Apam Napat, the descendant of the Abyss. The word *napat*, which has come down to us as 'nephew', is also the title of the sea-god, the Roman Neptune and the Irish Nechtan, and he appears together with the dolphin in that wonderful alchemical picture-book the *Mutus Liber*. The central story is summed up in the third plate of that book and shows the eye itself, here known as Neptune's Mirror. In its pupil we see the alchemist and his spouse, whose fishing-line has caught the dolphin; she is linked by a cord to Neptune, whose trident strikes the earth in the iris of this eye, between another representation of the alchemist, now fishing for a mermaid, and Truth with her lantern, whose net will catch the ten birds of inspiration. Above them is Juno with her peacock of many eyes; below her, in the iris, is Ceres with her flowers and the ram and bull of the Spring, and above both is Jupiter, who oversees the operation and is to bring Delos, the island of revelation, to the surface of consciousness.

The Mirror of Neptune.  
Engraving from the Mutus  
Liber, by Altus, otherwise  
Saulat, Sieur des Maretz, 1677.

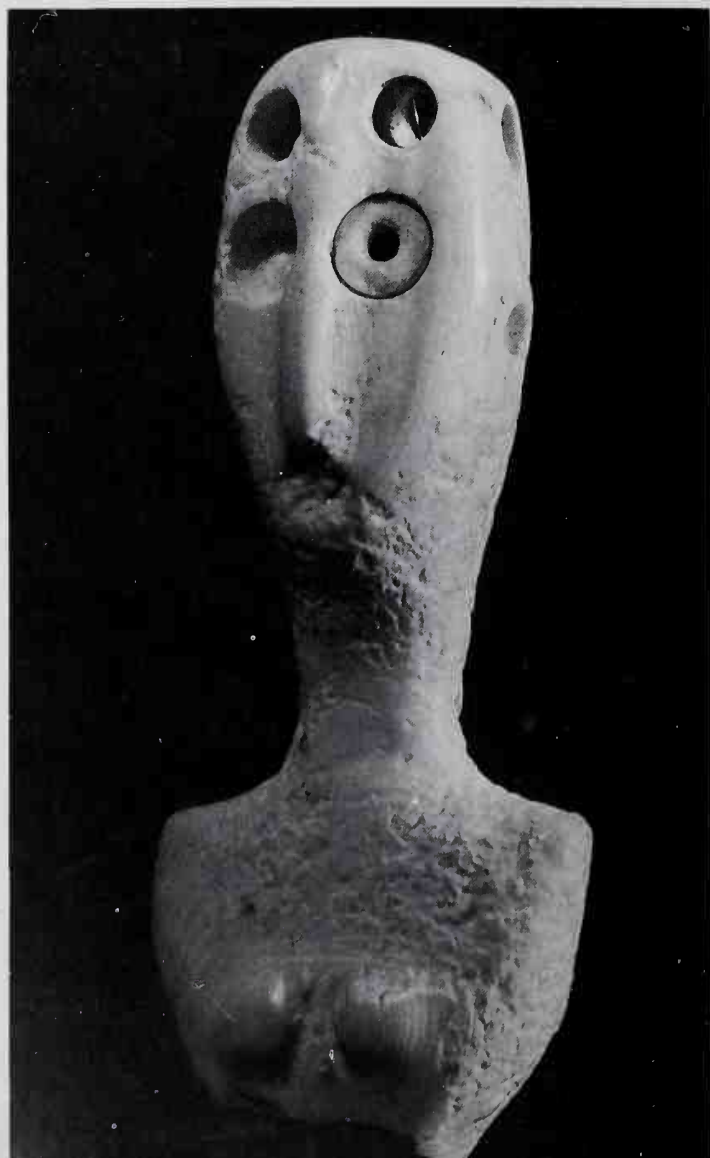


## The Eye-goddess

Fish are peculiarly the creatures of the goddess. In Madurai the Indian goddess Minakshi is the fish-eyed one; her ever-open eyes, filled with love, are fish-shaped and dart about like fish. In Palestine she is the one who is black but beautiful, her breasts like two fawns, her neck like a tower of ivory and her eyes like the fish-pools of Heshbon; Atargatis the fish-tailed one was one of her names, and another was Ishtar. And it is in the temples of Ishtar that we see some of her earliest manifestations as the eye, in those strange figures that have been dubbed spectacle-idols. They have been interpreted as forms of the goddess herself or as votive offerings to her, as a token that she is aware of her votaries and is pleased with them; and they must be seen in the context of early Mesopotamian statues with their enormous eyes set in rims of black stone, as if staring the viewer into obedience. The convention marks the time of the first city-states, with a kingship and priesthood organizing the populace for large-scale public works such as irrigation and the building of temples, palaces and city-walls, which had first to be visualized in detail and then put into effect by that body of overseers who made up the bureaucracy. This went hand in hand with the development of astronomy, and in these twin accomplishments we see the birth of that visual consciousness which now rules in the name of science: the word coming as it does from the Latin verb *scire*, to see and hence to know.

Goddess figures of the Paleolithic are seldom given faces, let alone eyes. In Neolithic times, however, the eyes of the Goddess start open with compelling effect, as much in Mesopotamia as in the megalithic cultures to the west. With the waning of the goddess, her stare is held to be malevolent and given to the Gorgon Medusa, whose divinity is indicated by the three dots at the place of the third eye.

THE EYE GODDESS



Top: eyes of the goddess. Tell Asmar, 3rd millennium BC.

Above, left to right: the Eye Goddess on a face pot from Tell Hassuna; on a plaque from Anta I da Farisoa, Portugal, and as an idol from Cyprus.

Right: ivory figurine of a woman found at Beersheba in Israel, 4th millennium BC.

Opposite above: Gorgoneion on an Athenian plate, about 560 BC.

Opposite below: idols of the Eye Goddess from Tell Brak, Syria, about 3000 BC.





But the virtue of the eye, as the Egyptians tell us, was originally in the Goddess's keeping, and the first science likewise: for the time had not yet come when reason took exception to the accounts of the perennial philosophy as found in the ancient Vedas, another word signifying both seeing and knowledge, or in what we refer to as mythology. The Eye-goddess, as she has been called, has been found throughout the ancient world as the guardian of mortuary urns and megalithic tombs, whose construction will have required powers of organization like those needed in Mesopotamia and Egypt. We may assume that if she was the Great Mother in whose embrace life and death changed places, she was also the giver of revelations, as the entoptic nature of her symbolism would suggest: for it is composed of concentric circles, spirals, meanders, chevrons, lozenges, cup-marks and, of course, eyes.

But these eyes are not necessarily benevolent, as we may see in that epitome of the goddess's anger, the head of the Gorgon Medusa with its petrifying glare. The first representations of this baleful object are found in Greece in the 7th century BC, and in them elements drawn from Egypt and the Middle East remodel the fearful masks used in the antique service of such goddesses as Artemis Orthia in Sparta. One such ritual is pictured in an Etruscan tomb; a man wearing the mask of the god of Death eggs on two hounds to the kill, the victim defending himself with a club as best he may, for a sack is over his head. He is doubtless a funeral sacrifice according to the archaic tradition, for we see the name Phersu written above the masked figure; and this figure, whose name which signifies a mask, is an early form of Perseus the Gorgon-slayer.

The Gorgon's head is in fact no more and no less than a mask, not of a beautiful woman as amongst the Mende but of a once beautiful woman made hideous with horror. The myth of Medusa tells us this plainly enough: she was the most beautiful daughter of Phorcys, the old man of the Sea, who by lying with Poseidon in a sacred place was cursed by Athene to be the most hideous of women. This moralistic fable ignores the fact that sexual rituals were once central to the old religion, and that Poseidon figures in another Gorgonic story in which he as a horse rapes the goddess Demeter. At Telphusa, the site of this tale, the statue of the outraged goddess bore the head of a mare and had the title of Erinnys, the angry one. This statue was death for a man to see, somewhat as the statue of Hecate at Ephesus was reputed to blind unwary visitors with its radiance. From this we may interpret the Gorgon's expression as that of a woman who has been raped and avenges herself with a curse that will drive the perpetrator mad and hound him to an ignoble death.

If the Eyes of Ishtar mark the development of the visual consciousness, those of the Gorgon reflect the birth of the guilty conscience. She is indeed chief of the Empusae, the demons of Hecate who take the form of bitches or beautiful women and are responsible for nightmares. But her visage was also used to warn intruders that her rites were in progress, and to ward off demonic assaults. This explains why pottery workers affixed it to their ovens, to stop their pots from breaking, and smiths to their furnaces; why it was placed in tombs, over hot springs, those conduits from the underworld, and on shields, to demoralize the enemy. It was, in fact, the emblem of the eye that reflected evil back upon its source, and was therefore an amulet against what it looked like.

## The evil eye

The concept of the evil eye has a wide distribution in the world today, and though it originated around the shores of the eastern Mediterranean it has spread wherever certain conditions are in force. J.M. Roberts has made a list of them; the evil eye is found in complex cultures where the society is stratified into three levels, kingship is the rule and a high god is worshipped. The villages are sedentary, the economy agricultural but often suffering from the intrusion of cattle-herders; inheritance is through the father's line, and girls go to live with their husbands on payment of a bride-price. Such societies live with the anxiety bred of constant exactions such as taxes, forced labour and conformity to patrilineal justice. As a result, the searching Eye of Sovereignty is perceived as envious or invidious – the meaning of these words being apparent in their Latin precursor *invidere*, to see intensively.

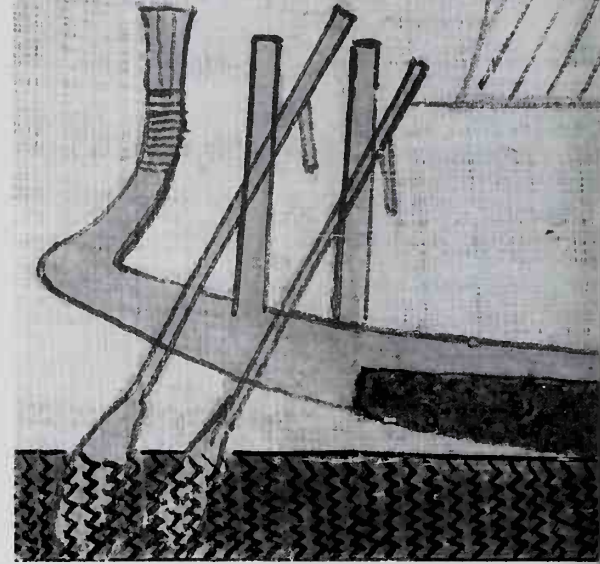
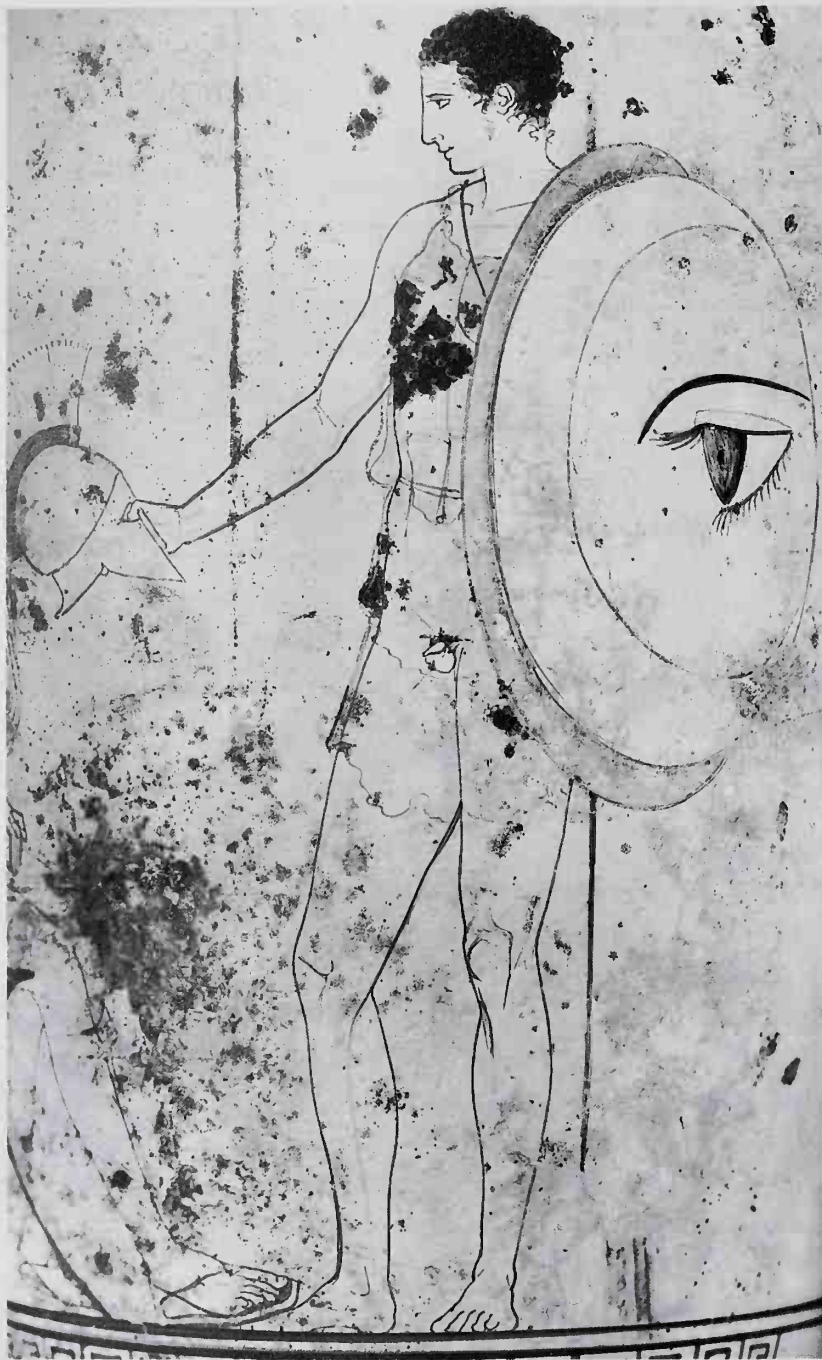
The end result of this unwinking dragon's stare – for the dragon is a notoriously envious creature – is paranoia, whose victims are diagnosed on the basis that they see plots everywhere and constantly suspect the worst. Similarly, cultures where the evil eye is strong have also been called paranoiac, in that even an innocent look may be suspected of wishing harm, the more so if it is accompanied by a compliment. The offender is then asked to spit on the ground to annul any such intention, while those offended may make one of those well-known gestures against the evil eye, the *mano cornuto* or the *figa*. The first gesture with its two extended fingers, once used in ancient liturgies, is now plainly intended to impale the eyes of the ill-wisher; the second rudely signifies sexual intercourse, according to the well-founded opinion that the eye is most easily diverted from its object by tempting it with an image of sexual desire. By this logic the chief talisman against the evil eye has long been the phallus, which thus bears the name of *fascinans*, that which weaves a spell over an ill-wish and leaves it bound to the author of all satisfaction.

The evil eye is here a single one, and is indeed often known as the Single Eye, the one that sees only for its own benefit. What it first sees is, of course, the breast, hence the Slovak injunction never to give a child the breast after it has been weaned, for fear that its desires will become implacable and look with evil eye on other things that it is forbidden to enjoy. But it is also known as the Double Eye, to account for the fact that it hides evil under the mask of friendship, or as a reminiscence of the Gorgon who was not afraid to glare with both eyes on those who dared pry into her secrets; a doubleness that is brought to a fine pitch in later folk-lore, which held that witches could be recognized by their having two pupils in each eye.

We can see this visage in the Gorgon's head painted upon a drinking cup, whose two eyes are each filled with another image of the Gorgon and so on, it may be, in an infinite regress. This would be a sombre image of the endless nature of a mother's curse, but its frequent use on drinking-cups, together with images of phallic satyrs, suggest that it was a warning against drunkenness, especially at wedding-feasts which in Greek myths are so often occasions for drunken lust and revengeful slaughter.



Above: gold eye ring from Sicily.  
Below: Italian brooch, 16th century.

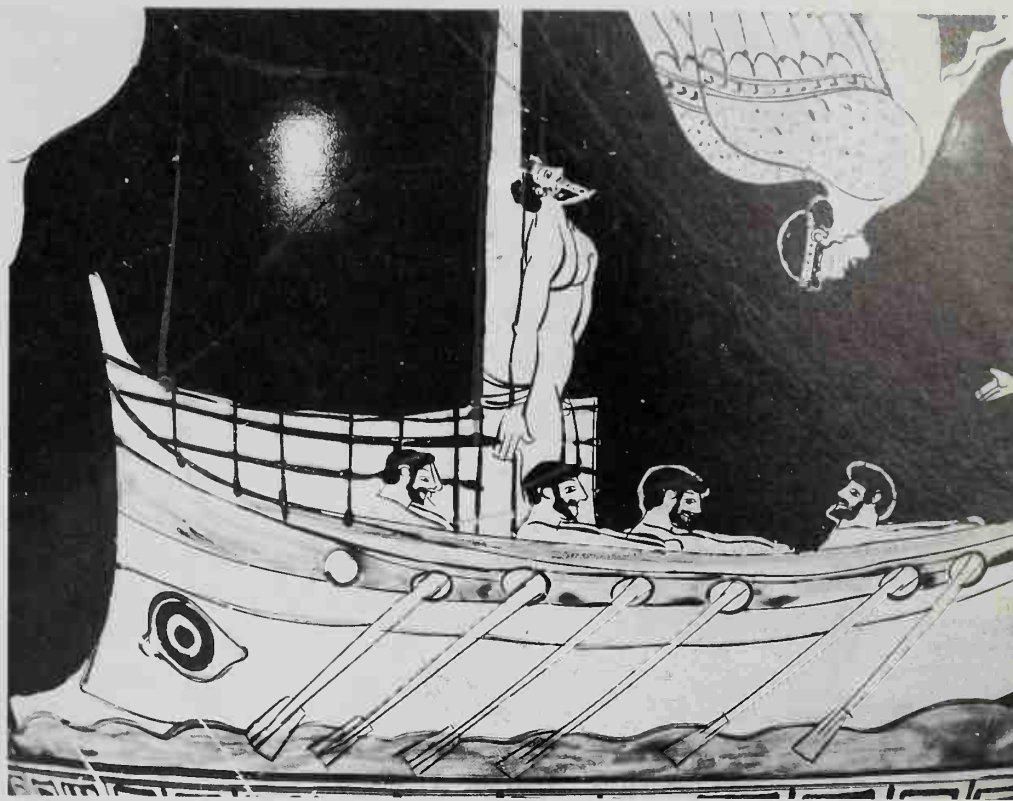
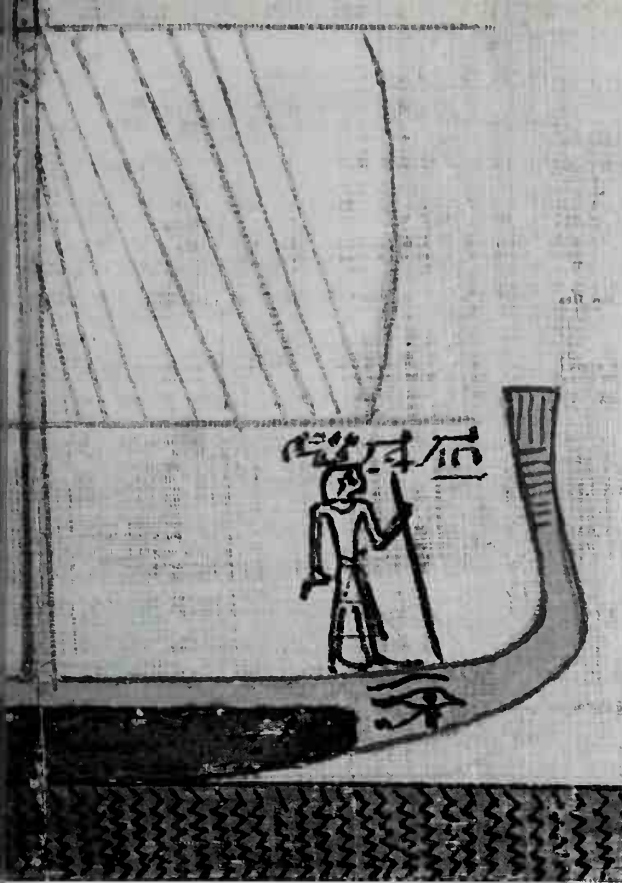


#### THE EYE AGAINST THE EVIL EYE

The eyes of a modern ship are where the anchor is brought home, but in the past they were to be taken literally: painted on the prow they gave life to the vessel and directed its course through every danger. Such an eye on a warrior's shield alarms the enemy, and on a wine jar reminds the drinker that wine is the blood of a god. And if it be an evil eye, it must be put in its place with threats of violence and of excrementitious ruderies.



Above: Nu crosses the Celestial River. Egyptian papyrus, about 1400 BC.  
 Left above: arming for battle. Greek lekythos by the Achilles Painter.  
 Below left: Dionysos, god of wine, between apotropaic eyes. Greek wine jar, 5th century BC.



Above right: *Odysseus and the sirens*, Greek red-figure vase, 5th century BC.  
Above: *defeat of the evil eye*. Roman relief.  
Right: *fishing boats beached at Nazaré*, Portugal.

## The third eye



Perseus with his sickle, below two fungi, takes the head of the Medusa. Campanian amphora.

Eyed phallus as a drinking cup, from Chios, Middle Wild Goat Style.



The wine of those days was a more powerful drink than we know today, for extracts of narcotic plants were added to the fermented grape-juice to increase its intoxicating effects. Drunk neat, it provoked violent behaviour which, even if it did not result in murder, could bring the drinker to exhaustion, coma and even death; hence the ancient custom of mixing it with water. Here the role of the Gorgon can be seen in a vase painting which shows Perseus cutting off her head as she lies near a clump of no doubt hallucinatory mushrooms, and C.A.P. Ruck has suggested that the gathering of such plants was the responsibility of a woman's guild who practised herbalism under the protection of the goddess Hecate, long famed as the patroness of drugs and witchcraft. In addition, it may well be that the potion drunk at the Eleusinian Mysteries contained ergot, a fungus growing on barley, one of whose constituents is a close relative to the hallucinogen LSD-25; for this would explain the millennial importance of the cult and its deeply satisfying effects, which are otherwise unaccountable.

The presence of gorgonic eyes on drinking cups would therefore indicate that the wine-god Dionysos held sway under the eyes of the Gorgon Medusa, patroness of medicine and revelation; it would be a case of *in vino veritas* if her protection was sought, and a descent into paralysing nightmare if not. She bore the sign of this protection upon her forehead, which was anciently marked by a group of dots, usually three in number, or by a three-fold set of lobes; the place of the third eye where, in India, followers of Vishnu would paint the *tilak*, the mark of the trident.

Vishnu's gender is always an ambiguous matter, for it is he who becomes a woman at the Churning of the Ocean of Milk to rescue amrita the deathless drink from the demons and so ensure the victory of the gods. His bisexual character puts one in mind of Tiresias, and of the priests of Cybele who castrated themselves to become one with her; and Cybele's importance in the rites of Dionysos needs no emphasizing. However, David Napier has drawn attention to her lions, whose eye-spots are a noticeable feature of Gorgon iconography, and to the Gorgon's name, which signifies the roar of lions and of thunder as well as the gorge it issues from. This puts us on the track of Vishnu once more, for in one of his incarnations he was the Man-Lion Narasimha, who vanquished the demon king Hiranyakasipu.

The significance of this lion-form is better seen through the medium of Siva, who on one occasion had compelled Vishnu in his female form to submit to sexual intercourse. Siva is otherwise famous for bringing the heavenly river down to earth as the Ganges, and as the master of the lingam and of the Third Eye. The practice linking these two is known as the raising of the serpent-power Kundalini up the rivers of the spine, a feat Siva perfected during the timeless aeons of his self-generation; but it only burst into existence at the time amrita was being made, when the king of the demons sent Rahu to rape the goddess Sakti from the embrace of Siva. Rahu, who swallows sun and moon during eclipses, is a horrendous lion-headed demon with emaciated body and irresistible force, a roar like thunder and eyes of fire; and on seeing him advance, Siva sent a burst of energy from the spot between the eyebrows called the Lotus of Command, in the form of a counter-demon similar in all respects to Rahu except for its greater power. Rahu having begged for mercy, Siva had then to restrain his own demonic energy, which he did by setting it to eat itself from the tail



#### THE FRONTAL EYE

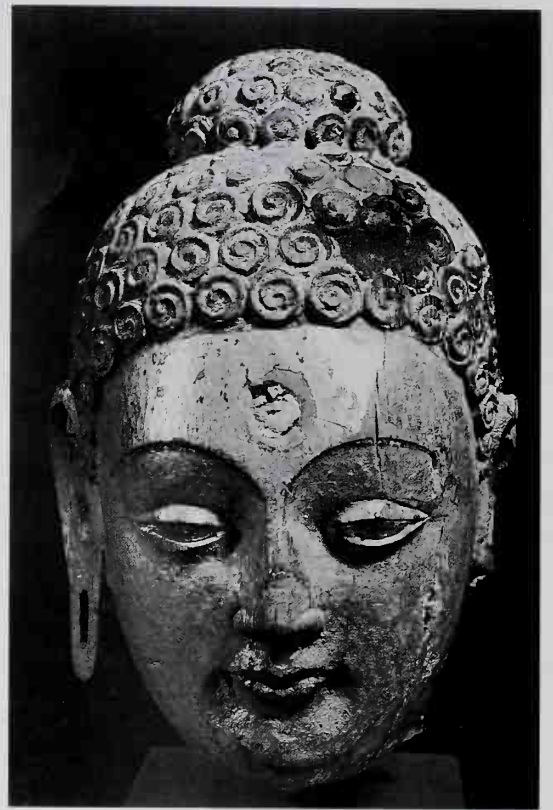
*The Gorgon is named for its lion's roar, and from lion and lioness, which are Cybele's beasts, it also takes its fangs and the Goddess's sacred mark upon its forehead.*

*Above: Greek drinking cup, c. 540 BC, by the Exekias Painter.  
Left: ivory from Nimrud, Assyria, 8th century BC.*

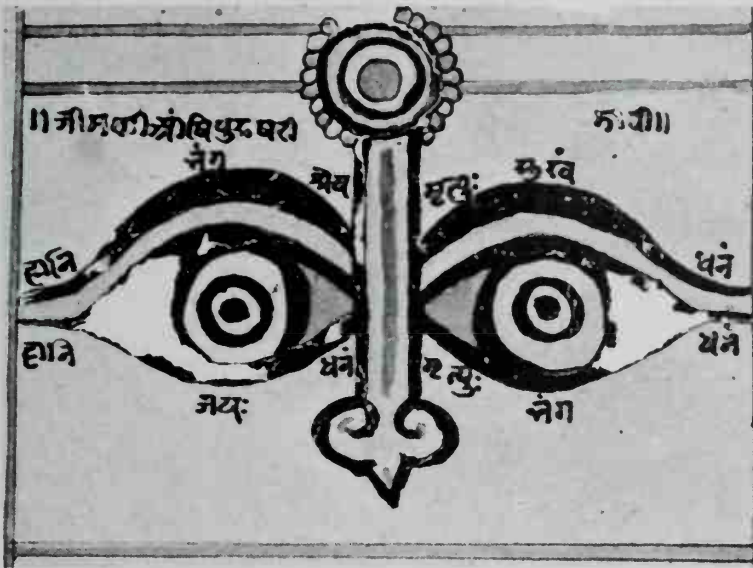
up, and that is why Siva's Face of Glory, as it came to be known, has no body.

'The frontal eye, the eye of fire, is the eye of higher perception,' says Daniélou. 'It looks mainly inward. When directed outward, it burns all that appears before it. It is from a glance of this third eye that Kama, the lord of lust, was burned to ashes...' The Face of Glory is the mask of this power, worn like the tilak of Vishnu upon the forehead, which is itself an organ of sensation.

The Mende, who take the eye as the most beautiful part of the body, make much of foreheads too: a beautiful and happy woman is said to have prosperity upon her forehead, which in turn is said to be the parlour by which you enter into relationship with others. We can take this literally enough, for in India the Tamil use the one word *natal* to mean brow, aim, and thought, while it has long been reported by the blind that they can feel the presence of whatever is in front of them by airy sensations localized upon the forehead.







This strangest of Gorgons has a pot for a head, broken in front to show the liquor it contains. The rift opens over the place of the third eye, marked by a sacred mole on the head of the Buddha, by a cross on that of the Madonna, and by the junction of the mystic rivers Ida and Pingala on those of yogic adepts.

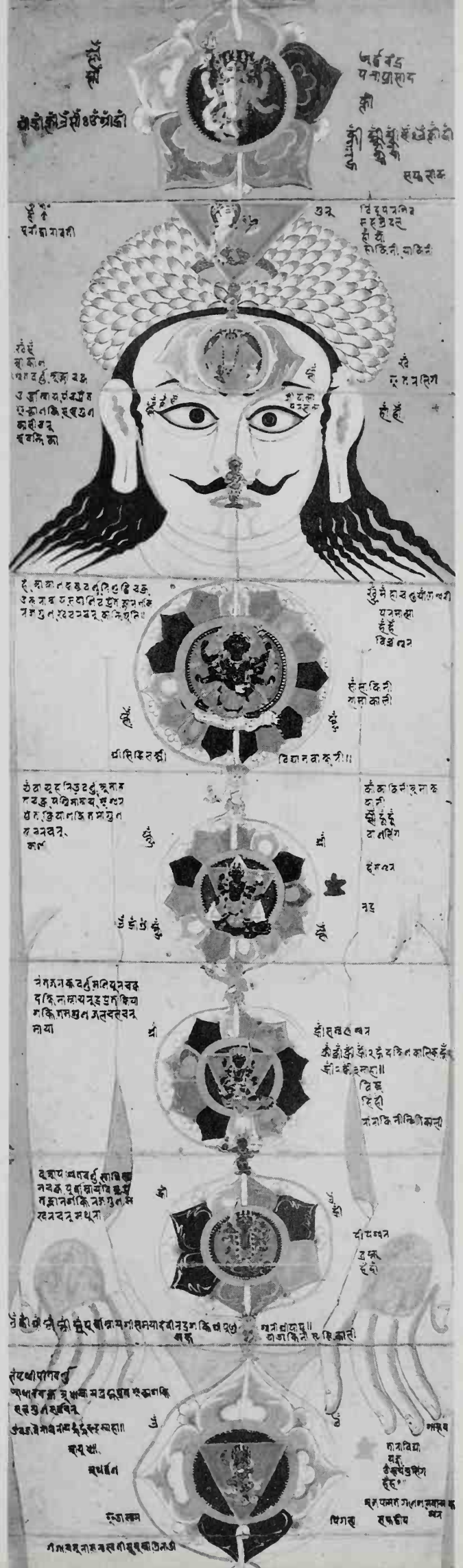
Above: planetary influence upon the third eye. Rajasthan, 18th century AD.

Right: the chakras of the body linked, via the fontanelle, with those of the subtle body above. Tanka from Nepal, 17th century.

Opposite far left: Gorgon on a Greek amphora from Eleusis, about 670 BC.

Opposite above: head of the Buddha from Tumchuq, India, about 5th century AD.

Opposite below: Madonna, from a frieze of the Adoration of the Magi, Cividale, Italy, 740 AD.



## THE OPENED EYE OF THE INNER LIGHT

According to report, the Divine Being is a great Light composed of lights, one and all of them being omniscient and omnipresent; it is an Eye. 'That ray of His, becoming sight, is present in all his children; whoever sees it, it is by means of His ray that he sees,' as one of the Brahmanas puts it.

The power attendant on this Eye as it manifests its light is known in theology as a seraph, whose winged and burning essence is itself set about with eyes. On a lesser scale, those in whom the inner life is just hatching often describe the egg of this beginning as being surrounded by eyes of serpentine light. Jung diagnosed this as polyopthalmia, a state in which separate complexes of psychic meaning are made visible to the mind's eye by the sparks of life they give off. They would then be as it were phosphenes of the imagination, those organizations of the visual field that bring sensation to its focus in the world of meaning.

The experience of such a moment is said to be piercing, and is described in a typical Taoist passage from Chuang Tzu by means of a story: 'Fuss and Fret, gods of the southern and northern oceans, once met in the realm of Chaos, god of the centre. Chaos treated them very well and they discussed what they could do to repay his kindness. They had noticed that, whereas others had seven apertures for sight, hearing, eating, breathing and so on, Chaos had none. So they decided to make the experiment of boring holes in him. On the seventh day, Chaos died.' This tale is, of course, a warning against busy-mindedness rather than an allegory of psychic ontogeny, as it is Indian in thought: there the originals of Fuss and Fret are known as the Measures of Fire, the organizers of living form.

The Measures of fire also figure in the shamanic experience of being dismembered, boiled, and blacksmithed into a new shape complete with bones of iron. Here they animate the joints as much as the sense organs, and in many districts figures of men and animals have their joints ornamented with faces, or eyes, or merely by dotted circles, apparently for that reason. In India, such marks can signify another kind of joint action, that between the sexes. Thus it is said of Indra that he once seduced the wife of the rishi Gautama, and was punished for his licentiousness by having yonis appear all over his body, which the rishi agreed to change to eyes when Indra begged to be forgiven. This is in accord with the close link between love and seeing, and the sexual element in the opening of the inner eye.

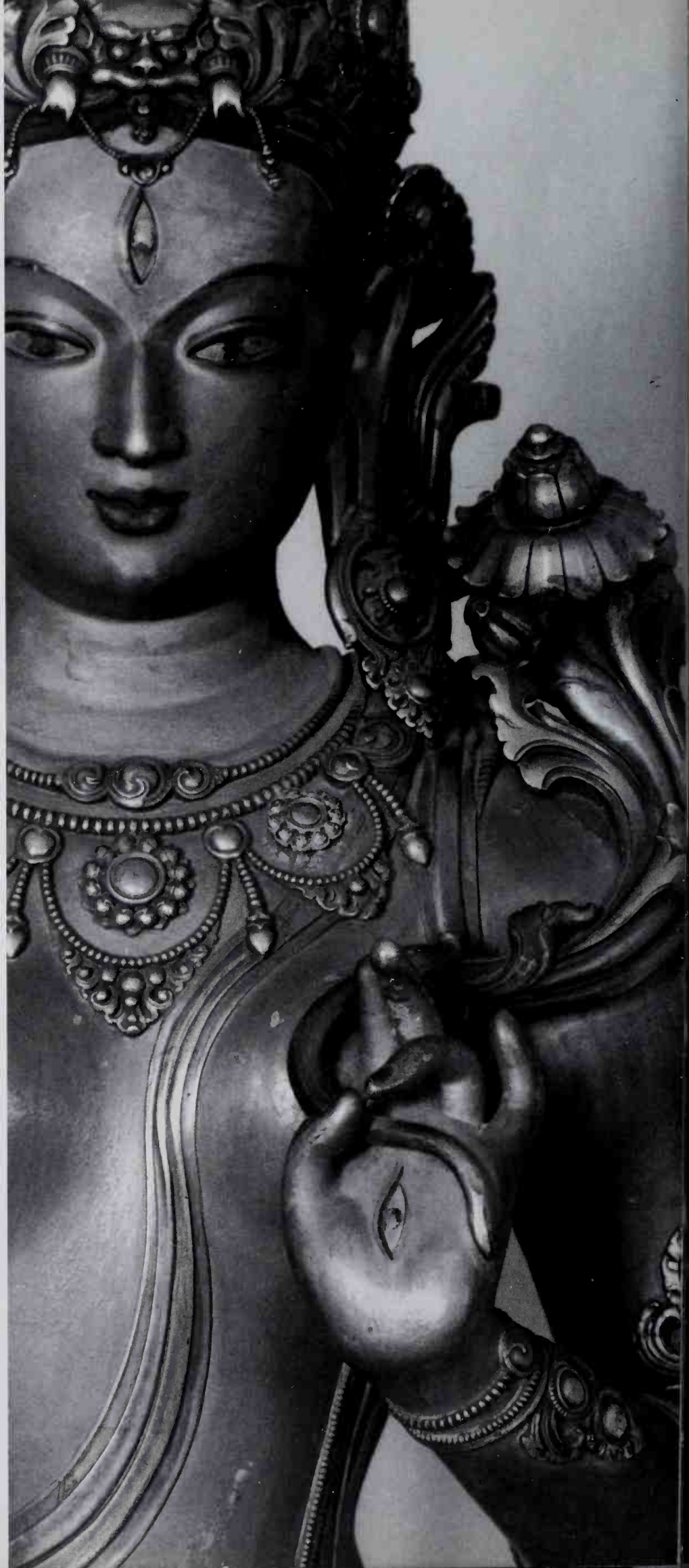
The seraph holds the first rank in the hierarchy of angels, attending the Throne of God and crying out continually: 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' The seraph, later typifying the flame of divine love, is the first emanation of this glory, and

has six wings, one pair to cover its face – lest it be blinded by the radiance it manifests – one pair to cover its feet, a euphemism for its sexual parts, and one pair with which to fly: and all are stuck about with eyes of glory. (Wall painting from the church of S. Clemente, Tahull, 13th c.)



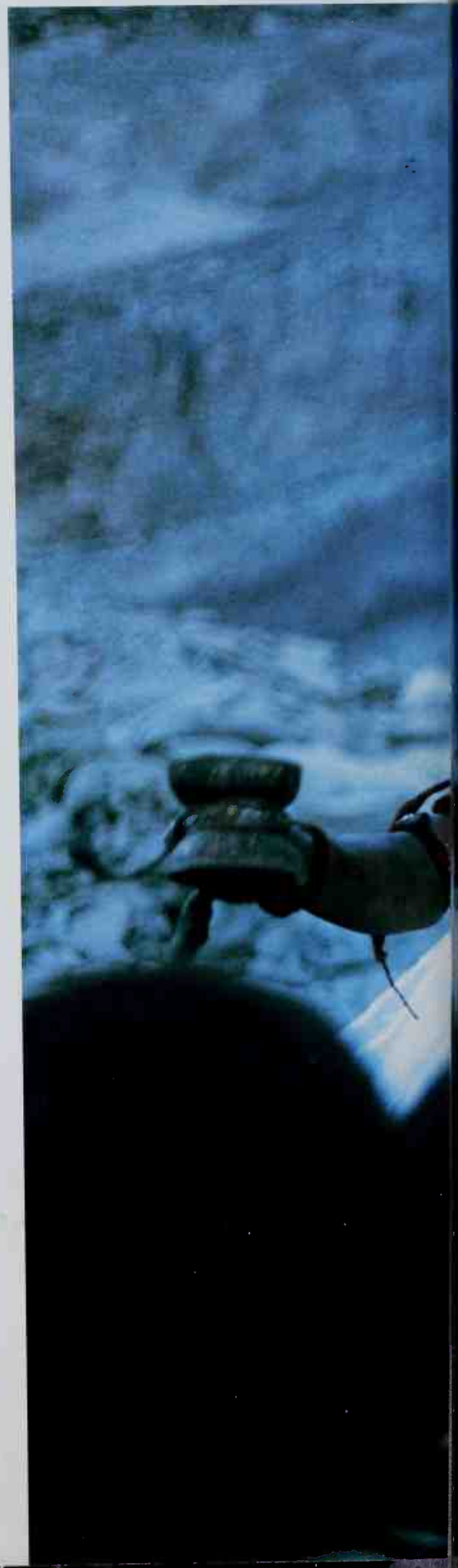
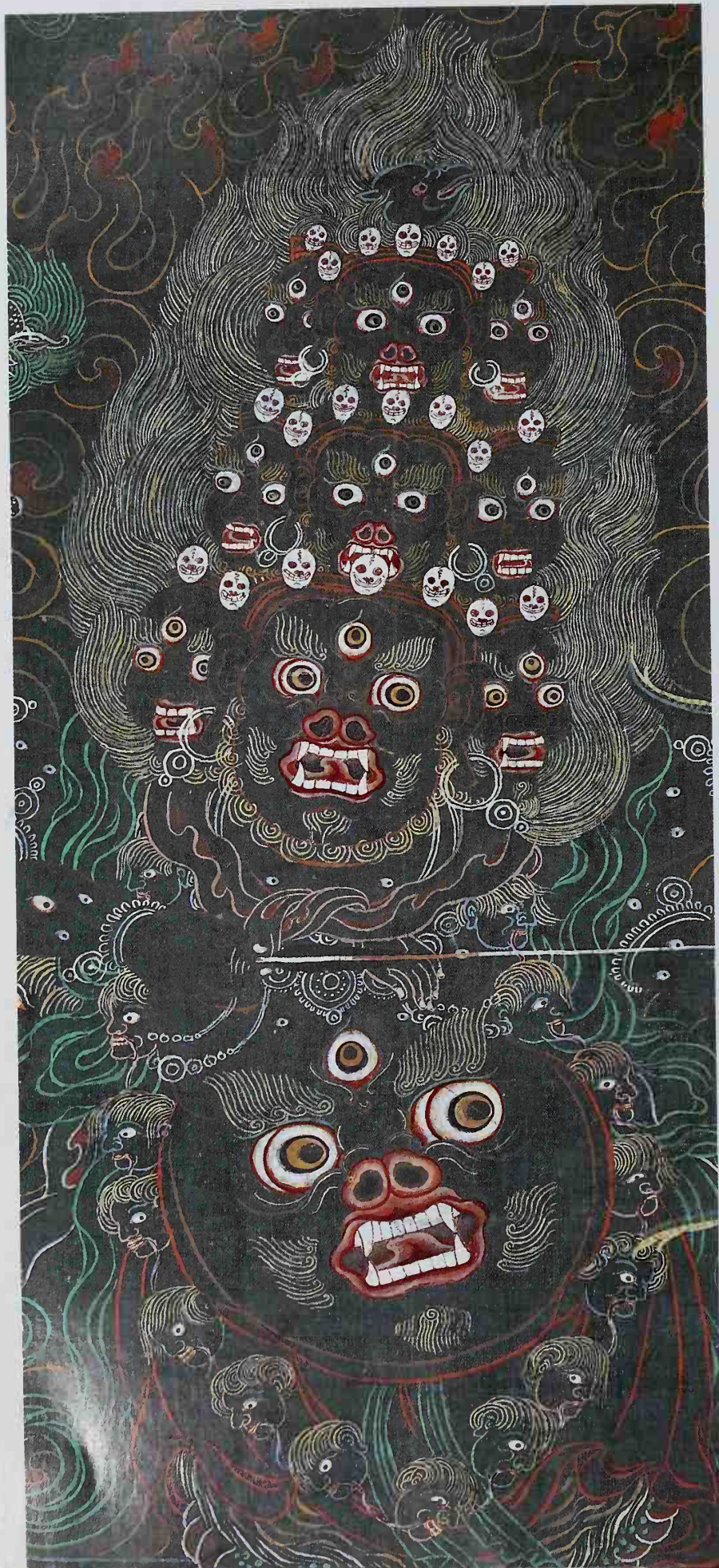
Buddhist divinities such as the goddess Tara are given five additional eyes, upon the forehead and in their hands and feet. These are the signs of enlightenment, on the lines of Goethe's phrase, 'the seeing hand, the feeling eye'. They are granted after what can often be a shamanic initiation, during which the body is experienced as being dismembered and then reformed according to its true and adamant nature. (Bronze figure from Mongolia, 15th c.)

In the same way, the risen Christ is shown with the five wounds of the Crucifixion, in the right side and in the hands and feet. These likewise are the insignia of the Perfect Man, to be meditated upon by those who would be initiated into this mystery. (Christ Blessing, painting by G. Bellini)





Rahu is the eclipse demon, he who eats the sun and moon until he is made to disgorge the light by the power of Siva's third eye. In Buddhism he is also regarded as the patron of epilepsy and therefore of revelation. (Painting on silk, Tibet, 18th c.)



*In Tibet his mask is painted upon the chests of entranced matho oracles who are blindfolded but can yet see their way around the temple grounds by making use of his eyes. (Matho oracles at Stok monastery, Ladakh)*





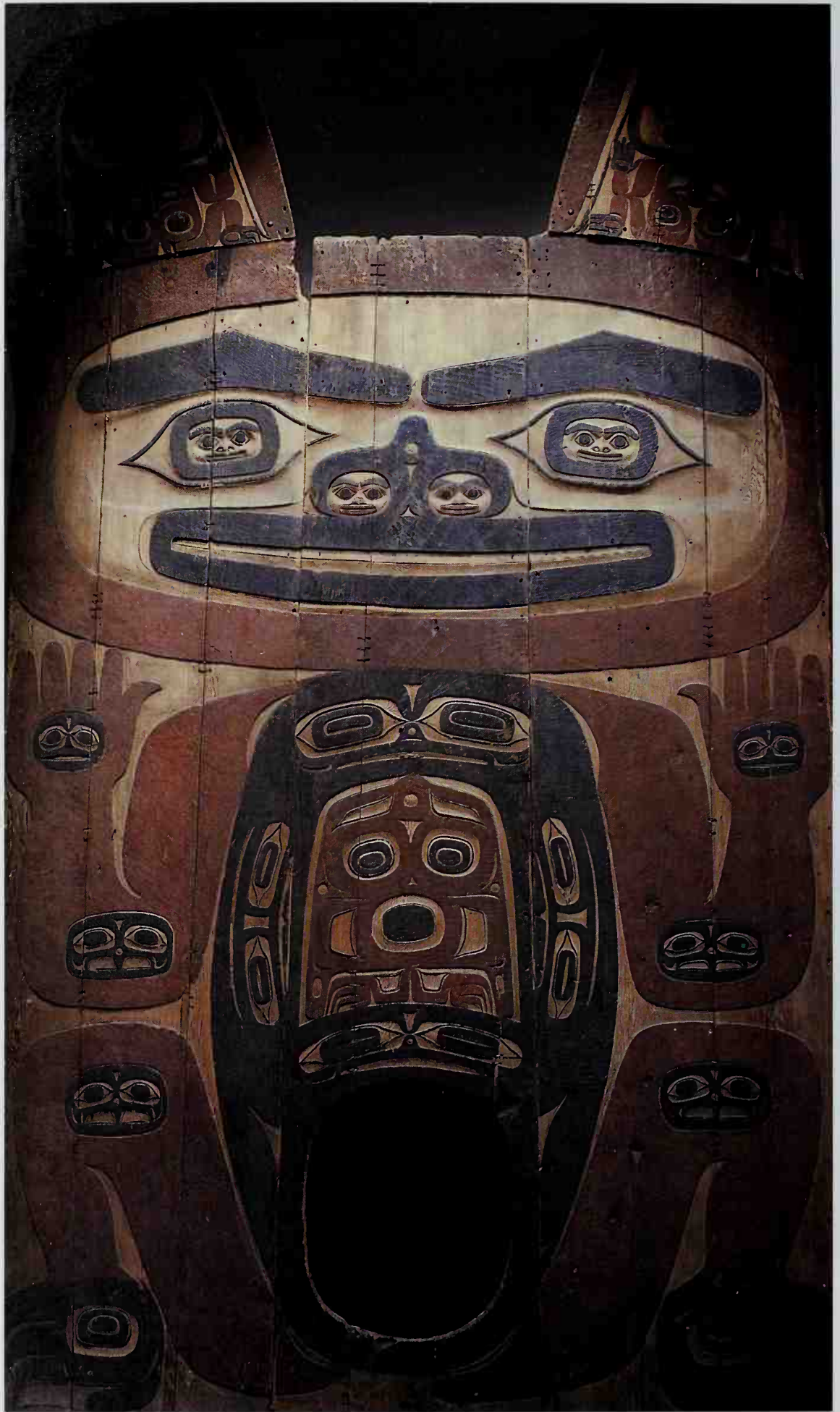
*The head of Shiva is marked with the crescent moon in his hair and a third eye upon his forehead. It is with this eye that he destroyed the power of Lust when it disturbed him during his long*

*meditation, and it cannot be an accident that it always takes the form of the left eye, whose vertical setting confirms its feminine nature. (Terracotta head, Rajghat, Benares, 5th c.)*





*The importance of the eye-spot on the forehead is not confined to India, as this Bakuba mask shows. We do not know who this mask represents and why it has such extraordinary eyes, but its general meaning is plain enough.  
(Bakuba mask, Bushongo, Kuba, Africa)*



Just as notable is the tradition that associates the forehead with the pot and the womb. We see inklings of this in archaic Europe, where the pots used to hold the bones or ashes of the dead take the form of heads, originally that of the goddess of death and rebirth. She appears to be none other than the Eye-goddess herself, whose power over the forehead is attested in China where acupuncture uses the third-eye point to anaesthetize women undergoing operations on the uterus. The further significance of this appears in the Middle East and India through such pot-shaped figures as Humbaba the god of the intestines and Khumba, lord of the womb and of the vessel in which amrita is stored. This distillation of the instinctual life of the body is also called Soma, whose bodily form is that of a dragon. Brought up from the Lotus root at the base of the spine to its confluence in the centre of the forehead, the liquid Soma is poured into the central fire of the mind. Thus it is that the Lotus of Command comes into existence, and that the human spirit can pass through the Sun-door into the empyrean world of the immortals.

A relic of this practice is found wherever a lion's head, Siva's Face of Glory, ornaments the spout of an ewer or of a fountain, and something of its ancient roots may be seen in Malaya where the lion is unknown but its cousin the tiger is described as having eyes of water. This brings us back to the story as told in South America where the jaguar lives in a lake and, by juggling with his eyes, establishes the relation between fire and water, sun and sexuality, vision and intoxicants, in a rainbow of symbolic meaning.

## The eye of reason and the rainbow

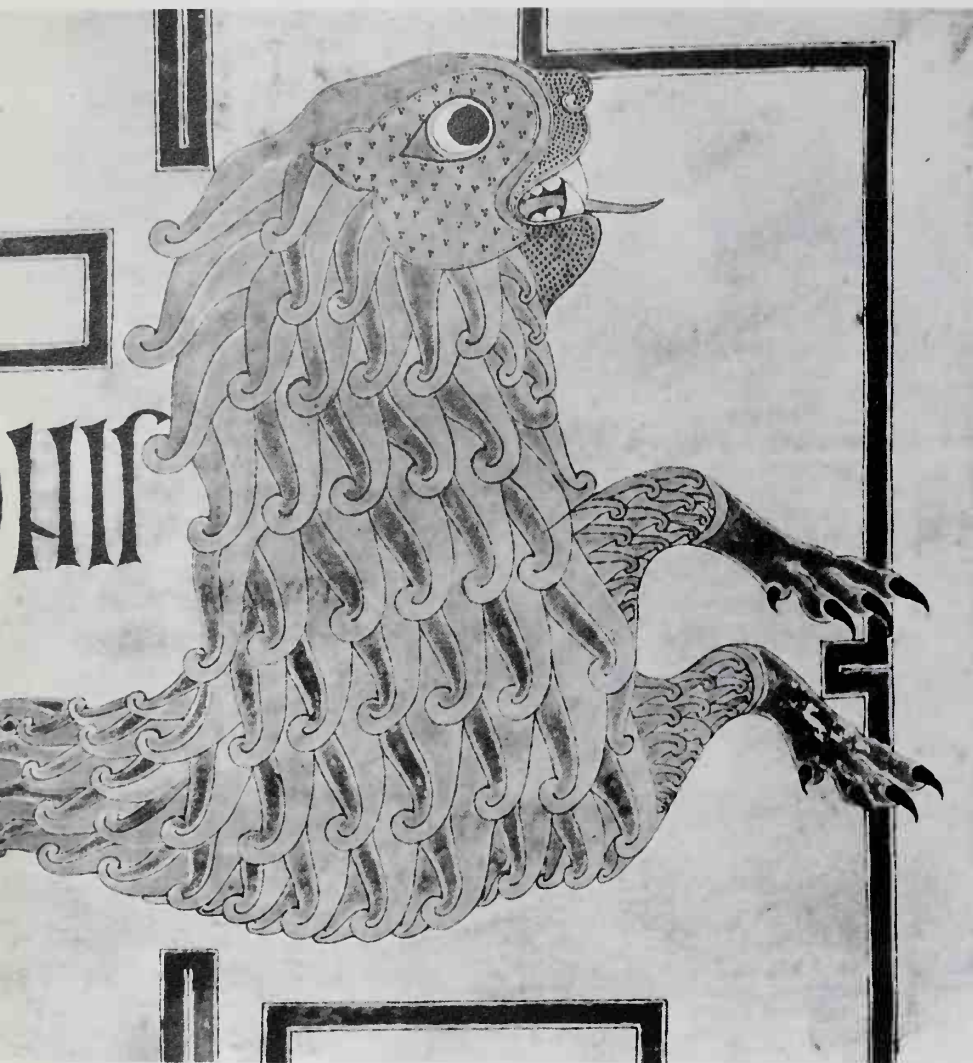
But the nature of the Lotus of Command is equivocal, for the exaltation of the sensory eye is at once ecstatic, visionary and destructive. The early Indian sages who were noted for their highly developed third eyes were, according to the stories, headstrong and irascible: like Shiva, they could burn entire forests with a glance, and their power was a constant threat to gods and men alike. The Greek Cyclops and the Irish Balor had similar destructive powers, though the Cyclops is represented as having but a single eye while Balor's third eye, the one with the baleful stare, was at the back of his head.

These two are figures of the sun-god, otherwise called Baal and Moloch, to whom sacrifice is always due. The sun-god has something in common with the lion, that king of the beasts whose gaze was long held to be as deadly as the Gorgon's, and with those kings of men whose rule is enforced by an ever-open eye and absolute power. Such were the Assyrian kings, whose emblem was the solar disk, and such the monarchies of Europe whose grandiose powers were epitomized by Louis XIV of France, 'Le Roi Soleil' himself.

Renan once remarked that the sun is the only rational symbol that we have of God, and it cannot be accidental that the reign of the Sun King heralded the time of the Enlightenment when human reason was held to be all-sufficient in its understanding of the universe. Amongst the notable figures who brought the Enlightenment into being were Bacon, first exponent of the scientific method;

*Tlingit houses are very large, and tall screens divide the interior into a spacious room in front, where ceremonies can be held, and a small sacred chamber at the rear. This screen, complete with door, is fifteen feet high and is carved with the Brown Bear clan crest of Chief Shakes of Wrangell. It commemorates the young woman who, taken by the Bears to their village after she had insulted them, married the chief's son and gave birth to two children.*

*The art of the Tlingit, like that of the other tribes of the north-west coast of North America, is heraldic in function, to impress the spectator with the inherited status of the householder. The inclusion of fesser faces and eyes in the design is common enough, but this piece is exceptional for their number which monitor the proceedings from the eyes themselves, the nostrils, the body, the hands, and the joints of the arms and legs: an authoritative compendium of the power of the eye in all departments of life. (Housescreen of Chief Shakes, Tlingit, N.W. Coast of America)*



Left: the Lion of St Mark, from the Echternach Gospels, mid 8th century AD.

Above: the Tree of the Sun, from an Achaemenian seal, 6th–9th century BC.

Descartes, who installed the absolute dualism of mind and matter; Newton, whose mathematics showed God to be the Mechanician of the solar system; Locke, who denied the existence of innate ideas, and La Métrie, who developed the notion of Man as Machine. The instrument of this knowledge was the eye, no longer that of Ishtar but of a quite rational god whose contemporary cults were experimental science, Deism and Freemasonry. The Masonic thread is apparent in the founding of the United States of America, where George Washington, like so many of his colleagues, was a Freemason, a fact commemorated in the eyed pyramid that figures on the dollar bill. He was also a mason in the literal sense, being a considerable architect and town-planner, though not on the scale of those architects who were to rebuild Paris under Napoleon or, in our times and with such depressing results, other cities under Hitler and Stalin. One of the aims of these plans was to keep the populace under easy supervision and military control, an idea that Jeremy Bentham, the Utilitarian philosopher, had already come up with in the late 18th century in the form of the Panopticon. This was his model of the ideal institution, whether it be prison, hospital, school or factory, in which one inspector could effortlessly monitor the goings-on of every inmate; its essential point, Bentham proudly announced, was that the inspector could see without being seen, so that the inmates would at all times feel themselves under inspection whether they were or not. George Orwell was to bring the idea up to date in 1984 with the universal television camera that let

## EYES, SUN AND FIRE

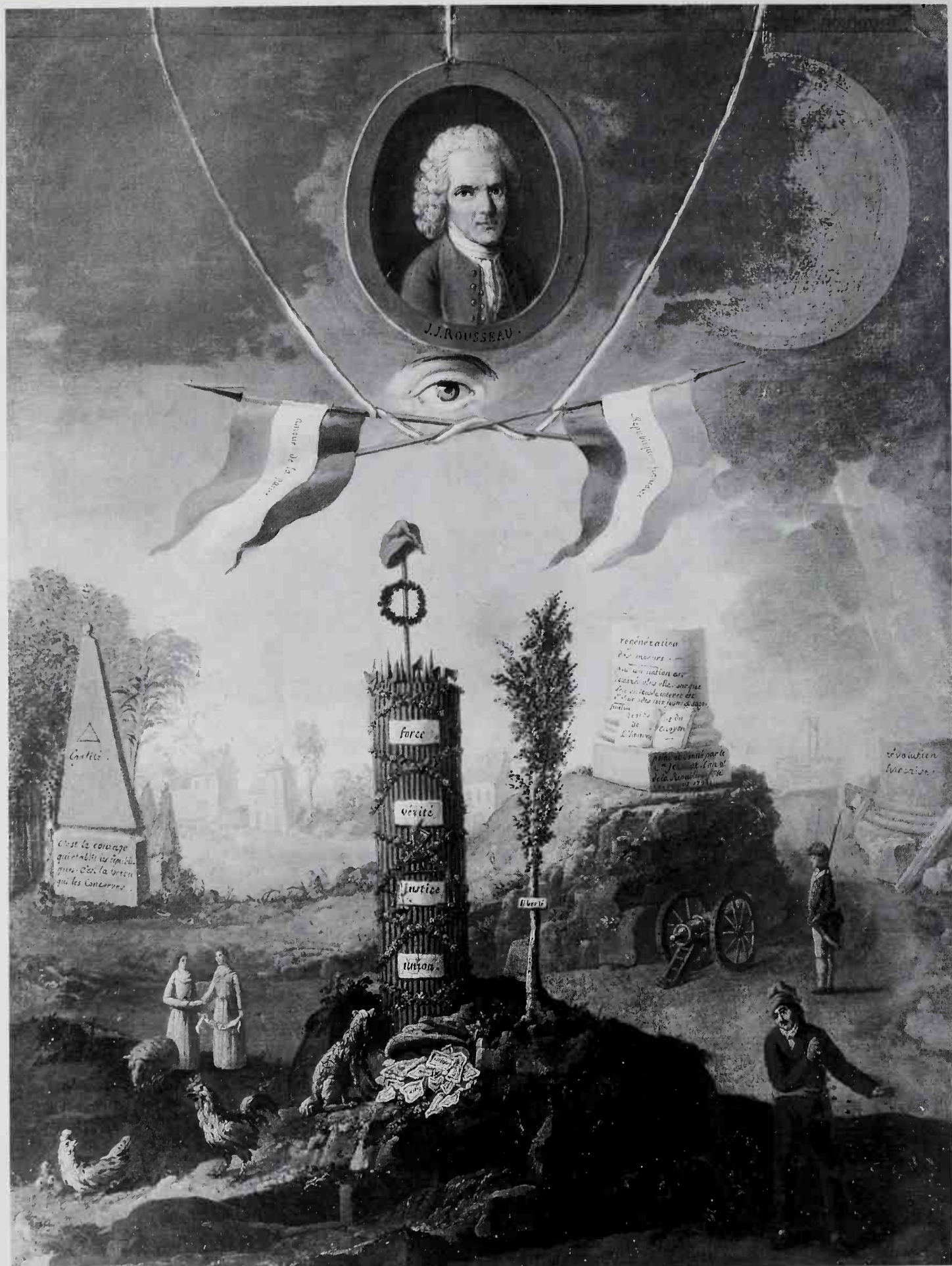
The lion is a solar animal, and long before it became the emblem of St Mark it was one of the four beasts of Elijah's vision. It comes to its strength in the constellation of Leo when the sun is at its hottest, only to have its Polyphemus eye put out at the winter solstice.

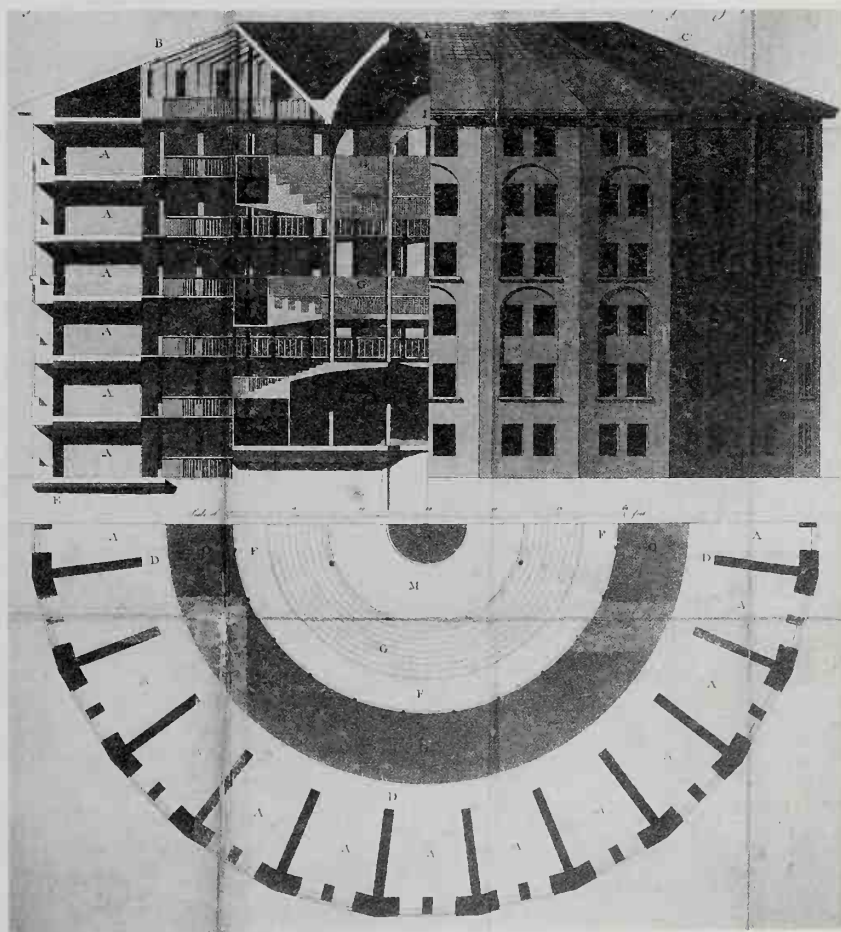
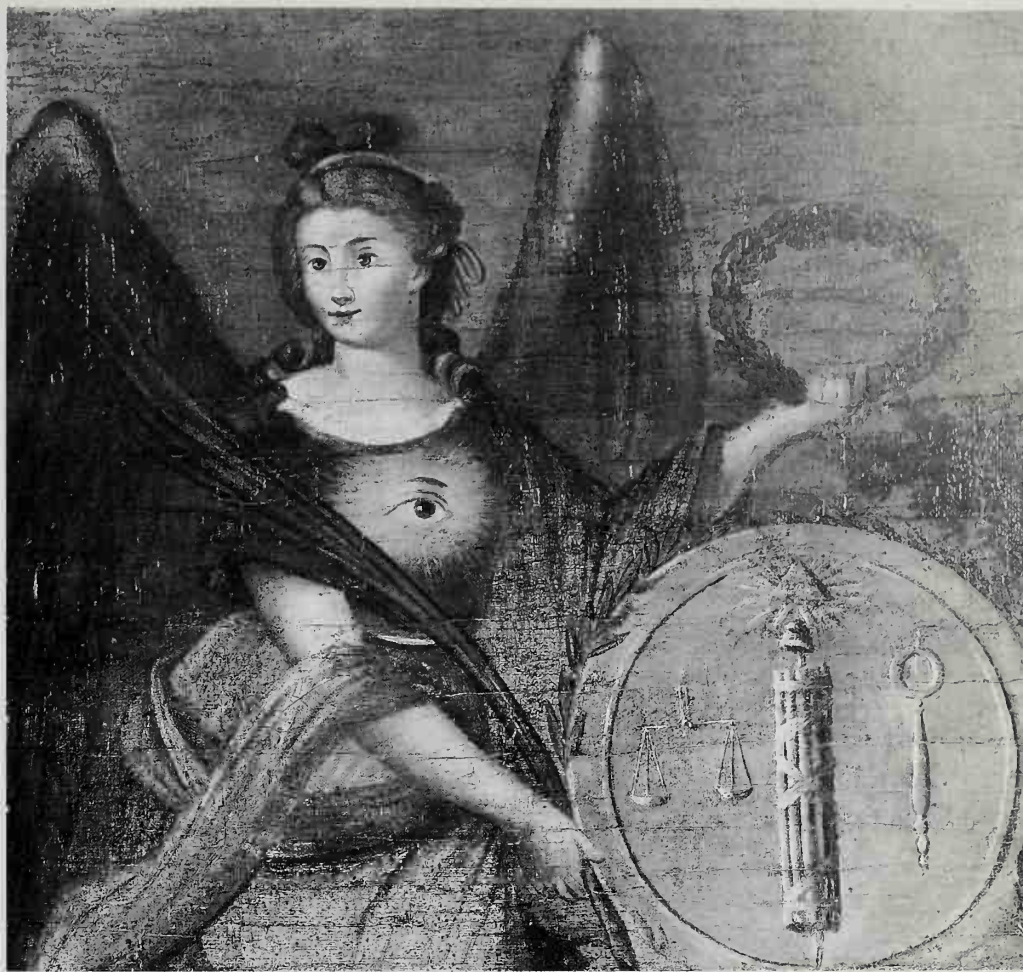
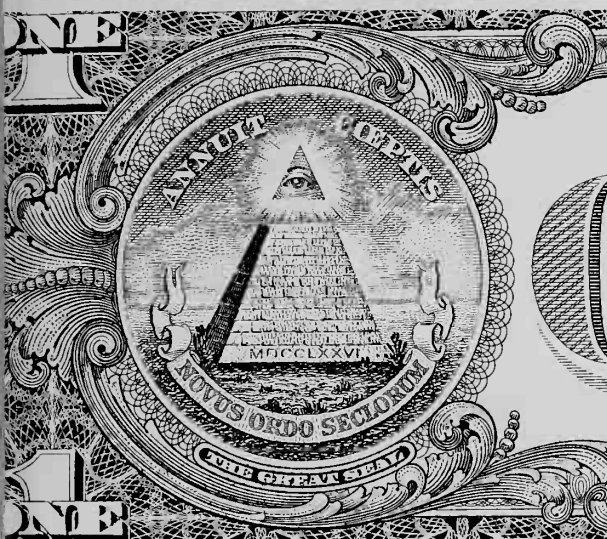
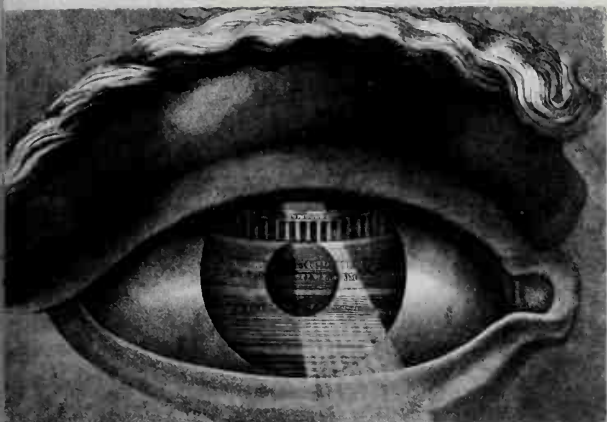
Right: the blinding of Polyphemus. Archaic Greek vase.



Big Brother see everything, and Tolkien mythologized it in *The Lord of the Rings* with Sauron's dreadful device of the Lidless Eye.

This triumph of rationalist vision was also to deal a mortal blow to the poetic imagination. 'We are happy when for everything inside us there is an equivalent outside us,' wrote W.B. Yeats. 'I think it was Goethe who said this. One should add the converse. It is terrible to desire and not to possess, and terrible to possess and not desire. Because of this we long for an age which has the unity which Plato somewhere defined as sorrowing and rejoicing over the same things.' Plato himself had done what he could to keep the peace between inner and outer reality, nowhere more so than in his theory of vision that married the opposing philosophies of the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans held, as materialists still do, that visible objects give off minute particles which stream into the eyes, stimulating them to form images; the Stoics maintained that the eye is itself the source of a visual ray. In Plato this ray witnesses to the activity of the divine Mind that also makes the sun to shine – the Tukano would have called this the Sun Father – and he therefore concluded that when the inner ray met the outer one the two coalesced as an image. By this theory he also accounted for the sensation of colour, and in a fine passage he described how a particularly fiery ray from without can overcome the visual ray and penetrate the eye-balls. The eyes then water, and this quenching of the outer fire creates us that confused spectrum of colour which he called 'the dazzling'.





### THE EYE OF REASON

The faculty of sight is so much the organizer of the conscious mind that it can at times stand for the powers of reason itself: of reason, of republican virtues and social engineering, and of the control of the many by the representative of the common will.

Opposite: Revolutionary allegory, painted by J. de Bertry. France, about 1785.

Top: the interior of the theatre of Besançon depicted within an eye. C.-N. Ledoux, *Architecture . . .*, 1804-46.

Above: the eye of the pyramid, on a one dollar bill.

Above right: Reason paying honour to the emblems of Liberty and Equality. French, 18th century.

Right: plan of Bentham's Panopticon, 1791.

The colours of the dazzling are those of the rainbow which, besides being the spectral body of the water-monster known variously as jaguar and dragon, is also the sign of God's covenant to mankind after the Flood. Plato's doctrine establishes a similar covenant between objectifying reason and innate form, which was to endure for nearly two millennia. It barely managed to survive Descartes, who allowed the awful duality of mind and matter to meet in one place, and one place only: the pineal gland, since discovered to be a relic of a third, central, ancient reptilian eye, now lodged in the brain behind the spot where the Lotus of Command comes into being; but with another of Newton's great works, the one on Optics, the days of the covenant were numbered. In this study he showed that a prism would divide white light into all the colours of the rainbow, and though he managed to convert these colours back into white light through another prism, his demonstration effectively destroyed the coherence of the inner and the outer light, which thus let dualistic reason triumph over the participative symbol.

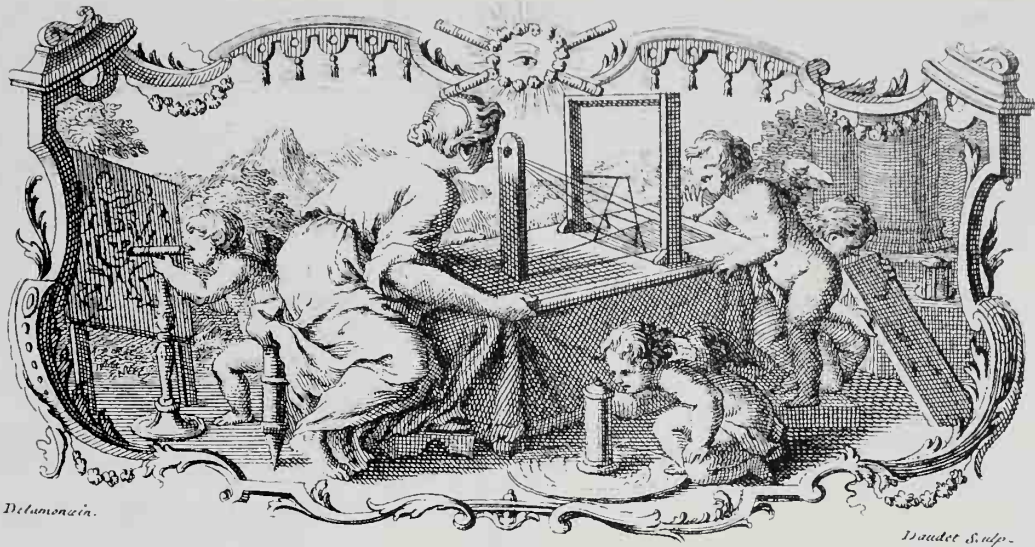
A century later that great visionary William Blake was to rank Newton along with Bacon and Locke amongst the great enemies of the imagination and therefore of the spiritual life: 'May God us keep', he wrote, 'From single vision and Newton's sleep!' Charles Lamb berated Newton for destroying the poetry of the rainbow: he called him 'a fellow who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle'. Wordsworth was to bemoan the loss of the visionary gleam and Hölderlin his sense of blessed unity. Goethe also saw Newton and his one-sided approach as a spiritual aberration, and in his own Theory of Colour he proposed a quite different, experiential science, based not on measurement but on 'an exact concrete imagination' in which you see with a feeling eye and feel with a seeing hand. This 'thinking in things' is our most ancient gift, and we have witnessed what it has done with vision ever since it had the Sun Father juggle with his eyes, create mankind from his tears, order the course of sun and moon, and see himself reflected and reborn in what he most desires. The story has to do with what Goethe called the deeds and sufferings of Light, which in the end must include the light of the mind as well as that of nature if the account is not to be schizoid; and, as he well understood, the rainbow is the sign that these two orders of reality are at one with each other, not that they are at odds. Blake knew this as well as Goethe, and in his poem against materialists of all kinds he saw Newton's prism shining by another light:

Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau!  
Mock on, mock on! 'tis all in vain!  
You throw the sand against the wind,  
And the wind blows it back again.

And every sand becomes a gem  
Reflected in the beams divine,  
Blown back they blind the mocking eye  
But still in Israel's path they shine.

The atoms of Democritus  
And Newton's particles of light,  
Are sands upon the Red Sea shore  
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.





Emblem from the title page of Newton's *Optics*, 1740.



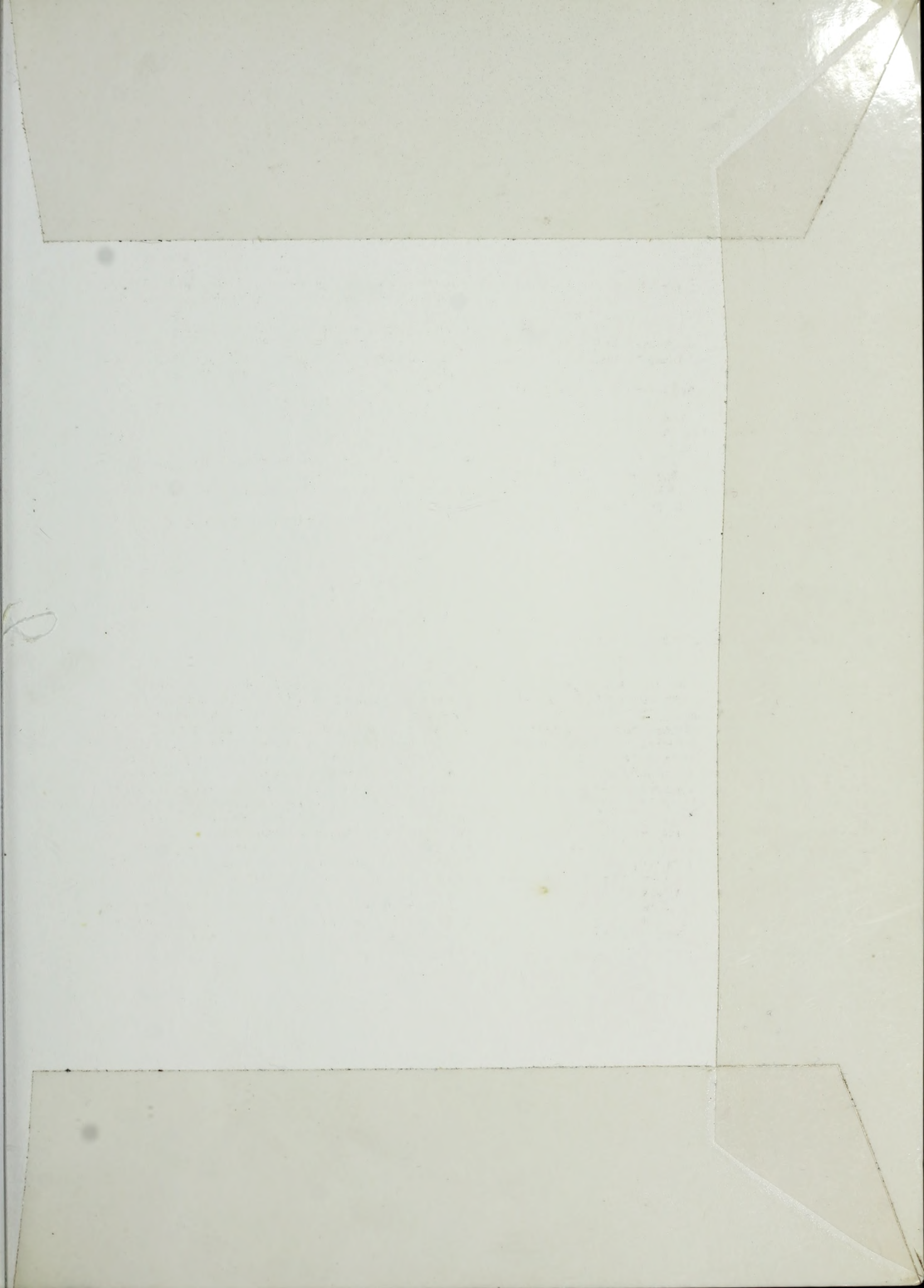
Blake's *Newton*, about 1804.

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The eye sees light, but it is by its own light that it knows what it looks at. The eye is a fire, is the sun, the center of origination and the light of reason; and again, it is the Evil Eye, full of jealousy, cunning and menace. It is the window of the soul. Myths abound that tell of eyes being exchanged or lost, of an eye being sacrificed in order to gain second sight, and of the powers of vision, knowledge and command coming together into the Third Eye. In nature, in dreams, in art, in legends from around the world and in many forms of mysticism, the eye – mirror of divinity – reflects our gaze inwards in search of the self and the Great Being who sees all.

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