Your Dark Eyes Don’t Fool Me
A Note on Stephen Jonas’s Poem, “LXVI”

Stephen Jonas writes, in poem “LXVI” that “The First Matter of the spiritual work / is always w/ in us” and thus asserts a gnostic perspective which, broadly speaking, relies on a transformative energy that comes from what Jack Spicer called the Outside, variously defined, and is a source of knowledge other than faith. He writes, addressing the reader in an intimate, conversational manner, “consider w/me for a moment the phenomenon of / the burning bush.” For Jonas, the burning bush is “all consuming but is not / itself consumed.” Herein is “the Divine Seed / manifested to the beholders.” This is not the gross material fire but the spiritual flame. He writes, “we (momentarily) approached / The Palace of the King, / after the descent from the Mount of Vision.” Man has arrived at this point of revelation, but it is only momentary, the time of the poem.

He continues: “concerning the Lower to the Higher have I come to speak / of a grace above all // normal grace / recognized in the heart.” Here I believe one can use the image of the rosy cross of the Rosicrucians to reflect on the nature of this grace. Each petal of the rose upon the cross signifies the acquisition of inner knowledge and as the rose continues to bloom there is a
fuller realization of the Great Work, resulting in a state of grace not normally recognized, because of an order that cannot be reducible to terms outside its own. Nevertheless, Jonas writes, we “hear of stories” of “minor attainments” but they do not “bear close scrutiny.” “Hundreds,” he writes, “have wandered endlessly through maze / after maze of error lacking this preface,” i.e. misunderstanding the real work of poetry.

For Jonas “the quest begins & ends w/in.” Knowledge derived from “an audacious willingness to experience” is the key to grace. All other attempts “to prod / further would be to multiply the deeply wooded.” “Beyond grace” Jonas writes, “I transgress not. / “make poetry” is my aim. // goldmaking / I leave to the cracks.” The poem is never in the service of the “goldmakers,” the false alchemists who claim to transform lead into gold and thus claim knowledge of the Divine agency. For them, the secret of money is that it’s shit, and it’s as if they “were / to defecate” and then from this expect to achieve “salvation.”

“The Divine is beyond our eager notions,” Jonas writes. Furthermore, he writes, “What can we give that is not a Gift of God?” What we give in the poem is a gift from the alien God. According to Jonas, we cannot do otherwise. For Jonas, the Secretum Artis / remains w/God & unpublished.” The Poem (as opposed, in Jonas’s formula, to the poem), the divine logos, remains “unpublished.” Spicer’s East Mars cannot be found on a map. The poet “makes the poem,” in other words, receives it by dictation and never through intention. It is not predetermined and where it goes “is anybody’s guess … venus, mars, the kitchen sink, south station.” In his final work, “Orgasms / Dominations” Jonas would answer the question “how do you write a poem” with “you don’t it comes to you,” and, furthermore, “It is not enough today / to say / ‘write.’” This word can only, like the

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1 In a June letter from 1962 Jonas writes to Gerritt Lansing that, “the whole picture of the Great Work is clear.” In 1967 Jones, in the midst of writing the Orgasms writes to Lansing, “I allow the, what I term ‘poetic judgment,’ [to] take precedent over my formal judgment.”


3 From part one of “Orgasms / Dominations,” in Selected Poems.
rational mind, approximate what actually occurs, which is, in a sense, that which you never saw coming. In this way the poem can “kill.”

It is the “Divine Seed,” the flame that consumes itself but is not itself consumed, that gives birth to and illuminates the poem but only for a moment. These are “illumination / problems / playing upon a surface,” because the poet is essentially in the dark. But to “make the poem” is to look “into the heart of light,” the light of knowledge, the rose blooming in the heart of man as he approaches the “The Palace of the King” or goes to meet that “queen with the gone stick,” his angel, his demon brother. In Orgasms 2, Jonas would write, “Only in The Poem, / only in the middle / of the interrupted Poem / do we come / to wing or brush stroke / what we know / we have come so / to know.”

“The search for truth can mislead us thru many corridors / of false leads,” Jonas writes. The “word is loose” and in fragments. The Word is divided from the flesh. The words of the poem are like the fragments of an original unity and “the communication inaccurate if at all communicated.” In “Word on Measure” Jonas writes, “In the beginning: The Word / imperfect—half meaning half longing.” In the making of the poem what “rubs off” is “fairydust.” The rest is “silence.”

Poets in the gnostic tradition, like Jonas, are “thrown back upon an earlier revelation” that is “better / suited to its times than this inchoate present.” In “Advertisements of the Tribes” he speaks of a prehistoric time when man known as a “Hunter / drew bison on the cave walls // altamira / buttocks as fine as any Ruben.” For Jonas, as well as for Spicer, there is the problem of representation in language. Jonas speaks of “the image that preceded the dream.” He glimpses the “cinematic exhibition / fragmentary or half- / illuminated, we glimpse / the pathos of / heretofore unplumbed depths / the which once long ago / a boor enlarged into / parenthesis, / voluminous & / syntactical.” Thus “God, its three selves, / give in and quietly / disentangle Himself / from a syntactical / subordination to the Word, / no longer made flesh.”
In “The Music Master (after a Mozart divertimento)” Jonas writes, “Use / the music of / the streets.” He says, “you must / hear yr language spoken.” He writes of the poem as a kind of mask, “drest.” But he urges the reader to be “discreet / (upon the street)” and yet “in the pad … / let the bedsprings creake. / Marvel. Question.” Add petals to the rose of self-knowledge. Sex magick, the tantric mysteries. Thus the “making” of the poem is entwined about a sexual experience, or the possibility of consummation; its subject is always desire. The word and the flesh have the possibility of communing. But it is temporary and frustrated. Finally, when asked, “did you make him / YET?” the poet replies, “Hell noe / besides, he's straight.” There is only the word that “bugs” the poet, “the crabbed ambiguity of lost connections,” the word divided from the flesh.

Jonas concludes the poem: “In short, the music / is more explicit than the lyrics.” The reason for this is that music can signal that which is beyond words, using the medium of language. The music transcends the limits of meaning. And thus more “explicitly” states what cannot be otherwise said. Where the words are fragments of an original unity, the music alludes to the unbroken state of origin. It does not mean. It represents desire.

Works Cited