

PROLOGUE

November 10 1493. Einsiedeln, Switzerland. Sun in Scorpio.

First there is the forest and inside the forest the clearing and inside the clearing the cabin and inside the cabin the mother and inside the mother the child and inside the child the mountain.

Paracelsus, physician, magician, alchemist, urge, demiurge, *deus et omnia* was born under the sign of the occult, ruled by Mars and driven by a mountain in his soul.

What do we know of him? That he was short and ugly. That he wore an oversize sword. That he wanted to be a hero and looked like a victim. There he was a bellicose, bellyaching, belching, belfry of a man with a pelvis like a beldam. So odd was the anatomy of this mis-bodied *bel esprit* that some hazarded his sex as female.

Man or manikin his genius brought him considerable reputation. If he had signed a pact with Mephistopheles, the Old Deceiver did not reward him in the usual way. Paracelsus made enemies faster than he made friends, and he had a habit of re-beggaring himself whenever he was beginning to do well. Perhaps this was necessary for an alchemist who did not want to turn base metal into gold. Like his contemporary, Luther, Paracelsus wanted to change the whole world.

The sign of Scorpio takes as its symbols the scorpion and the eagle. If its higher nature is as lofty as its mountain haunts, its nether part is creviced and hostile. The poisoner and the scientist are one.

And both. Hired by the town of Basle to cure its epidemic of syphilis Paracelsus despatched as many as he re-hatched. The mediaevals were entrail-minded and Paracelsus often delivered his lectures over a scalped corpse. This was not the nineteenth-century model of diagnosis by pathology. It was, if it was anything, diagnosis by cosmology. Paracelsus was a student of Correspondences: 'As above, so below.' The zodiac in the sky is imprinted in the body. 'The galaxa goes through the belly.'

What is it that you contain?

The Dead. Time. Light patterns of millennia. The expanding universe opening in your gut. Are your twenty-three feet of intestines loaded with stars?

The Miracle of the One that the alchemists sought is not so very far from the infant theory of hyperspace, where all the seeming dislocations and separations of the atomic and sub-atomic worlds are unified into a co-operating whole. This is not possible in three spatial dimensions or even in four. Ten, at least, lure us out of what we know.

Star-dust that we are, will death lose its sting? Theoretically there will be no death, only an exchange of energy into what is likely to be another dimension.

The marriage of Heaven and Hell?

The old sceptics used to say that if Hell exists, where is it? What part of the Universe does it occupy? What are its coordinates? It had to be a latitudinal Hell, a longitudinal Hell. A Hell subject to tape measure and set square. The question 'Where is it' could not be answered satisfactorily.

Many tried. Traditionally, the afterlife lairs at the centre of the earth: Odysseus got in through a cave entrance in Persephone's Grove, while Virgil and Dante had only to look under the floorboards in Italy. In 1714, an Englishman, Tobias Swinden, published his *Enquiry into the Nature and Place of Hell* and concluded that Hell is on the Sun. In 1740, Whiston, Newton's successor as Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, proved that Hell was somewhere in the regions of Saturn.

Such determined Hell-spotting may have had some sound science behind its normal devoutness and abnormal morbidity. Hell, we think, is hot. The waste heat generated by the endless stoking of sinful souls would be impressive. Heat gives us a clue. These days physicists scan beyond our solar system for evidence of heat emissions. The energy consumption of an advanced civilisation would be considerable and we should be able to detect its fall-out. As yet nothing. No spacemen, no Heaven, no Hell. But perhaps they have curled up on the Planck scale, in the six-dimension sister universe, smaller than small, bigger than big.

This is the theory.

In the beginning was a perfect ten-dimensional universe that cleaved into two. While ours, of three spatial dimensions and the oddity of time, expanded to fit our grossness, hers, of six dimensions wrapped itself away in tiny solitude.

This sister universe, contemplative, concealed, waits in our future as it has refused our past. It may be the symbol behind all our symbols. It may be the mandala of the East and the Grail of the West. The clouded mirror of lost beauty that human beings have stared into since we learned to become conscious of our own face.

Can anyone deny that we are haunted? What is it that crouches under the myths we have made? Always the physical presence of something split off.

Paradise: The Eden from which we have been forcibly removed.

The Twins: Missing self, other half, completeness again.

Male and Female: The uniting mystery of one flesh.

The Christ Motif: The Divine infills the human form and makes it whole.

Suppose the moment of Creation and our torn-off universe were recorded in the star-dust of our bodies? What is it that you contain? The atoms that you are were shook out of a star-burst ante-dating the Solar System.

We are the beginning. We are before time.

It may be that here in our provisional world of dualities and oppositional pairs: black/white, good/evil, male/female, conscious/unconscious, Heaven/Hell, predatory/prey, we compulsively act out the drama of our beginning, when what was whole, halved, and seeks again its wholeness.

Have pity on this small blue planet searching through time and space.