A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF LITERATURE

THE FUNDAMENTAL THEME AND UNITY OF WORLD LITERATURE

The Vision of the Infinite and the Universalist Literary Tradition

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PART ONE

The Light and the Shadow: The Fundamental Theme's Metaphysical and Secular Traditions

"Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?"

Bridges, 'A Passer-By'

"Change in a trice
The lilies and languors of virtue
For the raptures and roses of vice."

Swinburne, 'Dolores', vii

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The Early Literature of the Ancient World

Anyone preparing to set out the tradition of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature, must first ask the question: what is world literature? The answer sharpens the definition of literature already offered (see pp.4 and 7-8).

World literature is essentially the writings of all civilizations and cultures in verse or prose. It includes all *genre* s: religious texts; mythology; philosophy; epic, lyric, elegiac, pastoral and didactic poetry; comedy; tragedy; history; satire; and oratory. Literature is supra-national. It transcends nation-states, and world literature is the aggregate of all the writings detailed above at all times. In the more sophisticated civilizations world literature conforms to artistic specifications which writers such as Aristotle and Horace have laid out.

In the early civilizations the writings that have survived mainly relate to the pastoral living, creation myths and religious rituals of early peoples. But there are still epic narratives, and an intent to follow artistic presentation. It is as though the early writers were imposing a structure of order on the apparently chaotic universe to reflect their sense of a fundamentally ordered universe which had a purpose and meaning.

In the early stages of all civilizations a religion forms round a metaphysical vision, and it is not surprising that writers living in an agricultural priest-dominated society reflected their conditions. In the very early civilizations the metaphysical aspect of our fundamental theme is strongly present.

The first civilization, the Indo-European Kurgans who came from the Caucasus and entered Central Europe from at least c.4500BC and buried their dead in long barrows with shafts, left no writings. Recorded history, and the first writing, began around 3000BC. The early works dating from this time convey the fundamental literary theme of an ordered cosmos ruled by Light, in which the spirit can be immortal.

As we look at the literature of the early civilizations, it will be helpful to keep an eye on the chart on pp.354-5.

Mesopotamia

The Sumerians came into Mesopotamia from shamanistic Central Asia and Siberia,[1] where priest-doctors known as shamans ministered to

northern tribes. They brought with them the shamans' vision of the fundamental unity of an ordered universe of three worlds – Underworld, Earth and Sky, expressed in the poem 'Inanna's Descent to the Nether World'[2] – and the shamans' inner Light, which they passed on to their conquerors, the Akkadians and Assyrians.

Literature appeared in the Mesopotamian civilization by c.2600BC. Dating from c.2500BC, a Sumerian creation myth written on clay tablets discovered in Nippur, Mesopotamia is probably an epic on Kharsag, a town on the Lebanese-Syrian border. It features Anu, the chief Mesopotamian Sky God. His name meant "Sky" or "Shining", and he was head of the Sumerian pantheon by c.3000BC.[3] In the creation myth, the "Great Sons of Anu", the Anannage or Anunnaki, or "Great Shining Ones"[4] – who may have become the Sumerians (who were probably a mixture of Altaic and Indo-European stock) – come to Kharsag "where Heaven and Earth met".[5] There Enlil and his wife Ninlil set up a farm, and their primitive, grain-dominated life takes place in a universe dominated by Anu.

There are nine Kharsag epics, and the reference to Heaven and Earth meeting is in epic 2. In epic 1 Enlil's wife, "the lady of Kharsag" (Nin Kharsag), urges that a reservoir should be built so that food will be plentiful. "This perfect Eden is full of water". *Edin* in Sumerian means "plain", but the Eden of *Genesis* may have its origin in this paradisal Garden of Eden built at Kharsag. In epic 9 the reservoir bursts after a violent thunderstorm and:

> "The House…was destroyed by the thunderstorm….
> The Building of Knowledge was destroyed;…
> The Settlement of Learning – the whole Settlement with
> its food-storage building and its plantations, became marshland!
> The Building of Learning…was crushed
> by the thunderstorm; it was cut off and overthrown."[6]

The "House of Knowledge" may have anticipated the Tree of Knowledge. The flood may have influenced the story of Noah's Flood. After the flood the Anannage moved from Kharsag to Mesopotamia and founded city-states in what would become Sumeria. The building of the reservoir for the public good, the storm, the flood, the destruction of the farm and the settlement, all brought chaos but are described in an orderly epic as events in a universe presided over by Anu, the "Shining One".

Gilgamesh

The early Sumerian kings of c.3500BC were probably descended from a Kurgan dynasty, including Gilgamesh, the epic hero.[7] Around 2150BC there were three groups of stories written in Sumerian about kings of Uruk (or Erech), including a group about Gilgamesh.[8] The Sumerian

Gilgamesh and Agga of Kish and the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* were first written c.1900BC.

The historical Gilgamesh ruled at Uruk, a city identified with modern Warka in central Iraq. He is in the list of Sumerian kings as the fifth ruler of the First Dynasty of Uruk[9], and is thought to have lived between c.2800 and 2500BC. Although Gilgamesh was a historical figure, much of the story of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is fictitious, a mixture of mythology and a didactic religious text with a message: do the will of the gods, act as they have intended.[10] In the epic the gods and goddesses sometimes take part in the action but man's free will can choose his destiny and sometimes thwart the will of heaven.

There are different versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Texts in Akkadian appear in quantity from c.2300BC.[11] The main story is based on fragments of 12 clay cuneiform tablets dating from the 8th century BC, found at Nineveh in 1849 in the library of Ashurbanipal. These tablets in standard Babylonian, a dialect of Akkadian used only for literary purposes, incorporate Sumerian and Akkadian stories of c.2150BC. In one of the Sumerian stories the theme is Gilgamesh's quest for immortality, which is denied by the gods.

The main, standard Babylonian story is also about King Gilgamesh's search for immortality.

To curb Gilgamesh's harsh rule in demanding a "lord's right" over new brides, following entreaties from the young men of his kingdom, Anu causes Enkidu to be created, a wild man who lives among animals and eventually travels to Uruk, where there is a trial of strength between him and Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is the victor and Enkidu becomes his friend and companion. Both men set out against Huwawa (or Humbaba), the guardian of a cedar forest. Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, rejects Ishtar's marriage proposal to him and kills the divine bull she sends to destroy him. The gods Anu, Ea and Shamash decide that Gilgamesh must die for killing the bull. Enkidu falls ill and dreams of a "house of dust" that awaits him. He dies and has a state funeral.

Distraught, Gilgamesh embarks on a quest for immortality. He attempts to learn the secret of eternal life. However, "when the gods created man they allotted for him death, but life they retained in their own keeping."[12]

The gods had tried to destroy humans by sending a flood. Gilgamesh journeys in search of Utnapishtim, the sage who survived the Babylonian flood that destroyed the city of Shuruppak by building a great ship (perhaps anticipating Noah's ark), to learn how one can escape death. Utnapishtim tells him about a plant that can renew youth. Gilgamesh obtains the plant but places it on the shore of a lake while he bathes, and it is stolen by a serpent. Gilgamesh weeps, having lost all chance of immortality. He unhappily returns to Uruk knowing that he will not become immortal, and the spirit of Enkidu visits him, with a grim report of the Underworld.

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme is hinted at: the gods order the universe and control the Earth and the Underworld and decide what happens to humans. There is no escape from death. Nevertheless Gilgamesh pursues immortality and the infinite (eternal life). In table 10 of the Old Babylonian version, in which several tablets are damaged or missing, Shamash "spoke to Gilgamesh, 'Gilgamesh, where do you roam?/You will not find the eternal life you seek.'" Nevertheless, death is not the end, and the Underworld is within the gods' scheme. In the fragments of the tablets of the standard version that have survived Gilgamesh's soul does not blend with Shamash's Light. Perhaps the origins of the epic were too early for eternal life to be bestowed upon the King in c.2800-2500BC, or perhaps this denouement of immortality has not survived. Tablet XII of the main story is much shorter than tablet XI and is not part of the epic, but an Akkadian translation of part of a Sumerian poem about the Nether world.[13]

In a tablet reportedly from Sippar (18th or 17th century BC) Gilgamesh does attempt to blend with Shamash's Light:

> "Shamash grew worried, and bending down
> he spoke to Gilgamesh:
> 'O Gilgamesh, where are you wandering?
> The Life that you seek you never will find.'
>
> Said Gilgamesh to him, to the hero Shamash:
> …Let my eyes see the sun and be sated with light.
> The darkness is hidden, how much light is there left?
> When may the dead see the rays of the sun?"[14]

Nevertheless Gilgamesh, who failed to achieve immortality and become a god in his life, ironically became a god after his death and judged the dead in the Nether world.[15]

In the various fragmented versions of tablets and lacunae, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* reflects the 12 characteristics of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature and of Universalism. Gilgamesh focuses on the Reality of the infinite gods, who order the universe. He is on a quest to confront death, and he wants immortality now. He wants to experience the Light of Shamash in his universal being.

Dumuzi/Tammuz

The story of Dumuzi (the Sumerian form of Tammuz) is also set in an ordered universe. In one early text, 'Inanna's Descent to the Underworld', Dumuzi, a shepherd-god and vegetation-god, died and was imprisoned in the Underworld and appealed to the Sumerian Utu, who was now in charge of the universe. The best-preserved Sumerian narrative poem, 'Enki and the World Order' says:

> "Utu, the son born of Ningal,

Enki placed in charge of the entire universe."[16]

(Enki is addressed as the god who watches over the universe.) Utu evidently listened to Dumuzi's cry for help, for Dumuzi rose with the vegetation in the spring after Inanna, the queen of Heaven (and Dumuzi's wife or sister), descended to reclaim him.

About 2400BC Sumer was dominated by Akkad, its northern neighbour, and Utu became the Akkadian Shamash, the sun-god.[17] 'The Great Hymn to Shamash', the best of the Mesopotamian religious writings in cuneiform, addresses Shamash a god of divination: "You grant revelations, Shamash, to the families of men, your harsh face and fierce light you give to them….Which are the regions not warmed by the brightness of your light? Brightener of gloom, illuminator of darkness, dispeller of darkness, illuminator of the broad earth."[18] As giver of revelations, Shamash had become a god of mental light and those who opened to his divine influx became "Shining Ones" like the hero in this Sumerian text:

"He, whose body is shining splendour,
Who in the forest of fragrant cedars is cheered with joy,
Standing in the oracle-lace Apsu,
Purified with the sparkling lustration."[19]

By c.2200BC ziggurats, stepped pyramids surmounted by a temple, united Heaven and Earth and brought humankind closer to the Light of Utu-Shamash.

All the early works of Mesopotamian literature mirrored an ordered universe in which the infinite was metaphysical Light. The Sons of Anu, Gilgamesh, Dumuzi and the invokers of Shamash all frequented an ordered universe controlled by a god of Light. Death was not the end, for life of a different kind continued in the Underworld.

Egypt

The early Egyptian literature communicates the same view of the universe. It also had shamanistic roots and reflected a Sky World and Underworld, as well as Earth. The early Egyptian gods (Osiris, Isis and Horus) may have been Aryan-Sumerian gods. Ra, the sun-god, ruled the Sky World. His solar bark sailed across the sky. By 2750BC it was believed that the Pharaoh (or King) was divine and that his soul blended with the sun-god. A passageway from the King's Chamber of the Great Pyramid, which was completed c.2560BC, seems to have been designed to allow the Pharaoh Khufu's spirit to escape to the firmament and take its place within the sun among the circumpolar stars.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead

In one passage the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* speaks in the voice of Ra:

"I was Ra…when he began to rule what he had made….It means Ra… when he began to appear as king."[20] The Pharaoh *was* Ra, and on death he *was* Osiris.

The Egyptian cult of the sun-god did not only honour the exoteric sun. It also celebrated esoteric Light, for an experience of the Light in this life developed the *akh* or spiritual soul, which could then survive in the Judgement Hall. There are many references to the *akh* in *The Book of the Dead* and prayers for the deceased. Again and again we are told that the soul had to become an *akh* or "Shining One". A virtuous life meant becoming an *akh* seeing the Light.

The Pharaoh's body had a *ka* (or life force). It came to be believed that his dead physical body (*khat*) had to be mummified into a cocoon so that it would germinate or sprout a *sakhu* or spiritual body into which his *akh* ("glorious" or "shining one", or "spiritual soul") could pass. (Sir Wallis Budge wrongly translated the *akh* as *khu* in his 1899 edition of *The Book of the Dead*.) The *akh* in a *sakhu* dwelt in the Elysian Fields, the Egyptian Heaven after c.2000BC. (Pyramid texts from c.2000 to c.1800 refer to the region traversed by the deceased on their way to the Other World and to the Islands of the Blessed or the Elysian Fields.) Later, mummification ensured that the *ka* would be born again in a counterpart of Egypt, in which the Pharaoh would stand the best chance of reaching eternity.

The wording of the title, *"The Book of the Dead"*, was a mistranslation by Karl Richard Lepsius, the German philologist and translator, in the 19th century. The book's true title should be "Chapters of Coming Forth by Day" or "The Book of the Great Awakening". According to its rituals a deceased person spent his first night in the Underworld and emerged into Heaven at sunrise (*akhu*) the next day.[21] Then his hymn to Ra celebrated the survival of his soul, his "coming forth by day", which the texts, spells and prayers worked to secure.[22]

Amon-Ra was the Light, and brought eternity *now*. The important thing was to become an *akh* or "Shining One" who was illumined. A virtuous life meant becoming an *akh*, seeing the Light. Chapter 64 of *The Book of the Dead* proclaims on an eleventh-dynasty coffin: "I am Yesterday and Today; and I have the power to be born a second time. I am the divine hidden Soul…, the Possessor of two Divine Faces wherein his beams are seen. I am the Lord of those who are raised up from the dead, the Lord who comes forth out of darkness….To the Mighty One has his Eye been given and his face emits light when he illumines the earth. I shall not become corrupt, I shall come into being in the form of the Lion-god; the blossoms of Shu shall be in me" (*im-i* as distinct from "upon me", *hr-i*). The blossoms of Shu are "the beams of the Sun-god", according to Budge's note; which will be "in me".

A vignette in 'The Chapter of Making the Transformation into a Lotus' (81A) shows the illumined soul like a lotus which grows from the neck and unfolds to the sun. The second version from the papyrus of Ani

shows a blue lotus in full bloom, and the beautiful text can be translated in different ways. Either, “I am the pure lotus coming forth from the god of light (*akhu*), the guardian of the nostril of Ra, the guardian of the nose of Hathor. I make my journey, I run after him who is Horus. I am the pure one coming forth from the field.” Or, “I am the pure lily coming forth from the Lily of Light (*akhu*). I am the source of illumination and the channel of the breath of immortal beauty. I bring the message, Horus accomplishes it.” A more accurate translation of *akhu* is “Underworldly sunshine”. The sense is: “I am pure and come from the Underworldly sunshine, the Light.”

‘The Chapter of Making the Transformation into a Living Soul’ says: “I am the divine Soul of Ra proceeding from the god Nu; that divine Soul which is God….I am the lord of light.” The speaker’s soul is now immortal.

The Book of the Dead is full of the Universalist vision of the universal being as a Shining One” (*akh*) from the “Underworldly sunshine” (*akhu*): “Behold, I have come forth this day, and I have become an *akh* (or a shining being)” (65B); and “I am one of those *akh* s who dwell with the divine *Akh*, and I have made my form like his divine Form, when he comes forth….I am a spiritual body (*akhu*) and possess my soul….I, even I, am the *akh* who dwells with the divine *Akh*” (78). The universal being is delighted to discover its immortality: I, even I,….

The Book of the Dead reflected old Egyptian ritual. The Great Pyramid was called “*akhty*”: “horizon-dweller”.[23] It shone like a Shining One for its polished limestone casing stones acted as mirrors and reflected the sun. Hence its name “pyramid” (from the Greek *pyramis*), a word that has associations with “fire” (Greek *pur*). Khufu, the Pharaoh who supervised the building of the Great Pyramid, would emerge into the pre-existent sunshine of the Heavenly horizon to “come forth by day”. The *Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts* (c.2345-2150BC) suggest that in later times the *akh* flew to the circumpolar stars. Becoming an *akh* (spiritual soul) was a process within the order of the universe. Sun-rays were embodied in the architecture of Egypt: in the pyramid shape (rays of sloping sunbeams) and in the obelisk. Pyramids and obelisks also symbolized rays of Underworldly sunshine which illuminated the *akh*.

In the 14th century BC a heretical revolution swept Egypt. The worship of Amon-Ra was replaced by worship of the Aton as the sun’s disk. Hands reached out from it, offering the hieroglyph of eternal life. Humans were shown reaching out to the hands and receiving a gift from the only god. The short-lived Aton was introduced by the Pharaoh Akhenaton in 1379BC and did not survive him in 1363BC. He was named after the Aton, his name being a combination of *akh* and Aton, “the shining spirit who serves the Aton”. The Aton was clearly a principle of Light that ordered the universe and nourished all humankind. During Akhenaton’s brief revolution against the priests of Amon-Ra, Egypt was at the centre of an ordered universe, and, as the ‘Hymn to Aton’ expressed, Aton was “sole god”[24] and could only be worshipped

via Akhenaton: “There is none other that knows you, save your son Akhenaton, for you have made him skilled in your plans and your might. The earth came into being by your hand, just as you made them [i.e. mankind]”.[25] To worship Aton the Egyptian people had to worship Akhenaton for only he and his family could worship Aton directly. The Egyptian people had been used to worshipping Amon-Ra directly, and their exclusion from direct worship of the Aton was as heretical as the dethroning of Amon-Ra.

After the death of Akhenaton the worship of Amon was restored and after the accession of his son Tut-ankh-amon (“Tut, the living image of Amon-Ra”) the universe reflected in *The Book of the Dead* continued to operate. Beyond the world of the senses was the world of “the Shining Ones”, whose *akh* s were filled with the “light of Ra”.

Iran

The Indo-Europeans who settled in Europe after c.2350BC, possibly after being displaced from Akkad, also settled in Iran c.2250BC. They worshipped the “Wise Lord”, Ahura Mazda, who represented the source of the Light.

Zoroaster, who is claimed to have lived at various times between c.6000BC and c.2000BC but is now thought to have lived between 660BC and 500BC, saw himself as a messenger of Ahura Mazda, the supreme god who created the twin spirits of light and dark (*Spenta Mainyu* and *Angra Mainyu*). Zoroaster seems to have had access to the religion of the earliest Indo-Iranians and of the Indo-Aryans who went on to India. This religion can be reconstructed from the Iranian and Indian sacred books, the *Avesta* and *Veda*s.

The Avesta

The *Avesta* that survives is only a fragment, the fourth part of the Sasanian *Avesta* (3rd-7th centuries AD). The *Gathas* (“songs” or “odes”) are ascribed to Zoroaster himself (c.7th century BC). Zoroaster rejected the polytheism of the *Veda* s for the monotheism of Ahura Mazda. The universe has unity: “Grant me the power to control this mind, this Lower Mind of mine,…and put an end to all Duality, and gain the reign of One.” (32.16.)

The *Gathas* are addressed to Ahura Mazda, for example: “Now will I speak to those who hear of the things which the initiate should remember; the praises and prayer of the Good Mind to the Lord and the joy which he shall see in the Light who has remembered them well.” (*Yasna* 30.) A sacrificial hymn from an initiate says: “Glory to you, O Mazda! Lo, I turn from dazzling visions of your home of Light and find me weary in the strife again….Yet in the sacred Fire I pray you let my waking thoughts recall sights that can soothe and strengthen….I passed the Heavens Three…And soared to the place of Everlasting Light.” (*Yasht* 22.)

Again: “And the wise walk on the side of Light, while the unwise follow the other until they grow wise….O Mighty Lord of Wisdom, Mazada! Supreme, Infinite, Universal Mind! Ahura! you that give Life to all! Grant me the power to control this mind, this Lower Mind of mine, this egoism, and put an end to all Duality, and gain the reign of One – as is desired.” (*Gathas* 32.16.) And *Gatha* 33 speaks of “the man who is the best towards the righteous saint…having Light”.

It is clear that Light in these passages was being seen in a vision of illumination, and that the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature was perpetuated in the early Iranian civilization. The universe of Light was kept functioning by fire-sacrifices in fire-temples such as the best-known at Naqsh-e-Rostam near Persepolis.

Mithras (Indian Mitra) was common to both the Iranian *Avesta* and the Indian *Veda* s, and possibly by 1700BC and certainly by 1380BC the gods of the Indo-Iranians were Mithras, Varuna and Indra, all of whom can be found in the Indian epic poem, *Rig Veda*. Zoroaster is strangely silent about Mithras. However, Mithraism continued into Hellenistic times.

In the myth, Mithras helped Ahura Mazda in his struggle against Darkness (which was ruled by Angra Mainyu or Ahriman). Mithras found the wild bull that was Ahura Mazda’s first creation and killed it with a knife, and his supremacy was consequently acknowledged by the sun. As a result Mithras became the god of celestial Light and truth, and was *Sol Invictus* (“the invincible sun”), and equated with Shamash, Ra and Helios. In Roman times the emperor was *felix* because he was illumined by Mithras’s Light and divine grace.

Mithraism arguably now became the Freemasonry of the ancient world. Initiates re-enacted the battle between light and darkness in a Mithraeum, a cavern or subterranean vault. (In the Attis mysteries an initiate was placed in a pit with a lattice across it, a bull was slaughtered on the lattice and blood gushed through onto the initiate.) Light fought darkness for the initiate’s immortal soul in rituals such as this. This battle is reflected in a number of later Iranian texts.

India

The Indo-European Aryan-speakers who had settled all Europe and Iran arrived in the Ganges Valley c.1500BC after the decline of the Indus Valley culture (which had arisen c.2500BC).

The Rig Veda

Their descendants, the Indo-Aryans, produced the *Vedic* hymns. The *Rig Veda* was the oldest of the four *Veda* s, and the earliest sacred literature in India c.1500BC. The *Vedic* hymns were written to Indo-Aryan deities, especially to Agni, the Iranian fire-god.

In the *Rig Veda* the concept of order in the universe is expressed as *rta*: the harmony in Nature which, the early Indians believed, is a reflection of the divine harmony. *Rta* is cosmic order in Jeanine Miller’s

The Vision of Cosmic Order in the Vedas, and in such passages as: "The wise seers watch over their inspired intuition refulgent as heavenly light in the seat of *rta*", *Rig Veda* (X.177.2); and "By the song born of *rta* the sun shone forth" (X.138.2d).[26]

In the *Rig Veda*, a divine creative flame, the Light (*tapas*), is released from the darkness of the Absolute, and can be perceived in contemplation by *rsi* s, or inspired poets. It is personified in Agni, Varuna, Visvakarman and Prajapati. This "universal Light" (IX.48.4) or *tapas* is cosmic and has its source in the divine harmony outside Nature, which mirrors it. It shines in the heart of the inspired poet or *rsi* and is perceived as "an internal light" that is set within the heart (VI.9.6). It is the "hidden light" or *gulham jyotih* (VII.76.4cd) which is received by the poet as the archetypal vision granted to his ancestors who "found the light" (IV.1.14d). The poet grasps this vision anew as a revelation of truth that was known to his ancestors, and he frames it in song as did his Iranian ancestors.

In *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, Professor Jan Gonda states that

> "belief in a light which, being suprahuman in origin and penetrating into the heart of the inspired poets, illumined their mind, was the complement of the conviction that these poets owe their praeternormal knowledge and their religious and political inspiration to 'visions', that they 'saw' the truth about the deeds and power of the gods which they formulated in their hymns. These authors, indeed not rarely, alluded to an internal light which is in the heart of the poet or to which he gains access in his heart….This light is brought into connection with the sacral world of the inspired poet."[27]

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of the literature in the ancient world involves the revelation of the universal Light or *tapas*. It is the traditional and perennial task of the poet (*rsi*) in all cultures including our own to restate this contemplative vision of truth for his or her time. It is the task of all poets in all ages to rediscover the knowledge of the vision.

The *Rig Veda* speaks of Agni who brought down the Light as an intermediary between the *tapas* and *rsi* s and bestowed immortality:

> "Agni, you are a sage, a priest, a king, protector, father of the sacrifice. Commissioned by us men, you ascend a messenger, conveying to the sky our hymns and offerings….You are…giver of life and immortality….Purge us from taint of sin, and when we die, deal mercifully with us on the pyre, burning our bodies with their load of guilt, but bearing our eternal part on high to luminous abodes."[28]

Agni purged from sin and gave immortality on behalf of the gods in accordance with the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of

world literature. The *Rig Veda* makes it clear that Agni is a Shining One: "I call for you Agni, shining with beautiful shine….May he illuminate the nights that are longing for him." Agni illuminated the nights by shining into the soul.

In due course Agni ceased to be needed as an intermediary and was replaced by a sacrificial mysticism. In the *Brahmanas*, ritual commentaries on the four *Veda* s c.900-700BC, the fire surrounding objects sacrificed on fire-altars was identified with the fiery power of creation and the universe, *tapas*: "By sacrificing with this (fire)," the *Gandharva* s told the lonely King Pururavas,[29] "you will become one of us" (*Shatapatha Brahmana* XI.5).

Two epics with a more secular emphasis, the *Mahabharata*, which was on the *Iliad*-like war between the Kurus and Panchalas that took place between 1400 and 1000BC, and the *Ramayana* ("Epic of Rama"), which is on the *Odyssey*-like wanderings of Rama and his wife Sita among two races (the Kosalas and the Videhas) who lived between the 12th and 10th centuries BC, exist alongside the *Rig Veda*. They began a minority stream of secular Indian poetry and arguably marked the beginning of the secular aspect of the fundamental theme in world literature.

The Upanisads

By 600BC Vedism had grown into Brahmanism,[30] the work of Brahman as Supreme God, and the Atman (the divine within man, the universal being or Self) united with the eternal Brahman, the Light. The *Upanisads*, reputedly the work of Indian forest seers that can be dated to the 5th century BC, formed the final portion of the *Veda* s, known as the *Vedanta* ("end of *Veda* s"), and the earliest *Upanisad*, c.9th century BC, says: "By the Light of the Self man sits, moves about, does his work, and when his work is done, rests….The self-luminous being who dwells within the lotus of the heart, surrounded by the senses and sense organs, and who is the light of intellect, is that Self" (*Brihadaranyaka*). One must "unite the light within you with the light of Brahman" (*Svetasvatara*).

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of literature could not be more directly expressed:

> "As sparks innumerable fly upward from a blazing fire, so from the depths of the Imperishable arise all things….Self-luminous is that Being, and formless. He dwells within all….He is the innermost Self of all….Self-luminous is Brahman, ever present in the hearts of all….In the effulgent (or shining) lotus of the heart dwells Brahman…the Light of Lights. Him the knowers of the Self attain….He is the one Light that gives Light to all. He shining, everything shines….Hail to the illumined souls!" (*Mundaka*.)

And:

> "The truth is that you are always united with the Lord. But you

must *know* this….To realize God, first control the outgoing senses and harness the mind. Then meditate upon the light in the heart of the fire....Thus the Self, the Inner Reality, may be seen behind physical appearance. Control your mind so that the Ultimate Reality, the self-luminous Lord, may be revealed….With the help of the mind and the intellect, keep the senses from attaching themselves to objects of pleasure. They will then be purified by the Light of the Inner Reality, and that Light will be revealed. Great is the glory of the self-luminous being, the Inner Reality….Follow only in the footsteps of the illumined ones, and by continuous meditation merge both mind and intellect in the internal Brahman. The glorious Lord will be revealed to you….Set fire to the Self within by the practice of meditation….Unite the Light within you with the Light of Brahman….as you practise meditation, you will see in vision forms resembling snow, crystals, smoke, fire, lightning, fireflies, the sun, the moon. These are signs that you are on your way to the revelation of Brahman….Said the great seer Svetasvatara: I have known, beyond all darkness, that great Person of golden effulgence. Only by knowing him does one conquer death….He is the great Light, shining forever. This great Being, assuming a form of the size of a thumb, forever dwells in the heart of all creatures as their innermost Self." (*Svetasvatara*.)

According to the *Upanisads* the consciousness of the Self is the fourth of four states of consciousness contained in the letters A, U, M and in the totality OM, the superconscious vision in which Atman and Brahman are one: "Beyond the senses, beyond the understanding, beyond all expression, is the Fourth. It is pure unitary consciousness, wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is ineffable peace. It is the supreme good. It is One without a second. It is the Self." (*Mandukaya*.)

The Bhagavad-gita

The other main *Vedanta* work, the *Bhagavad-gita* ("Song of the Lord"), which is contained within the *Mahabharata*, has been dated to the 5th or 3rd centuries BC, or the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Krishna, an incarnation of Visnu, visits Arjuna, who has refused to kill his kinsmen in the battle of Kurukshetra.

Arjuna asks, "How can one identify a man who is firmly established and absorbed in Brahman? In what manner does an illumined soul speak?"

Krishna replies: "He knows bliss in the Atman and wants nothing else. Cravings torment the heart: he renounces cravings. I call him illumined….This is the state of enlightenment in Brahman. A man…is alive in that enlightenment."

Arjuna has to understand that he must fight, and that he can still be illumined:

> "The illumined soul must not create confusion in the minds of the ignorant by refraining from work. The ignorant in their

> delusion...become tied to the senses and the action of the senses….Fix your mind on the Atman. Be free from the sense of ego. Dedicate all your actions to me. Then go forward and fight….The reward of all action is to be found in enlightenment….When you have reached enlightenment, ignorance will delude you no longer. In the light of that knowledge you will see the entire creation within your own Atman and in me."

Arjuna has to learn that the 'I' of the Atman of an enlightened person is quite different from the 'I' of the senses (the ego):

> "The illumined soul whose heart is Brahman's heart thinks always: 'I am doing nothing.' No matter what he sees, hears, touches, smells, eats….This he knows always: 'I am not seeing, I am not hearing: it is the senses that see and hear and touch the things of the senses.'…The Atman is the Light: the Light is covered by darkness: the darkness is delusion....When the Light of the Atman drives out our darkness that Light shines forth from us, a sun in splendour, the revealed Brahman."

Revealing himself to Arjuna in his divine form of Visnu, Krishna says: "Suppose a thousand suns should rise together into the sky: such is the glory of the Shape of Infinite God."

The Light of Atman passed into the growing worship of Visnu (and his ten incarnations, of which the main ones were Rama and Krishna), which began in the 7th century BC, and into the growing worship of Siva, who was first treated as Supreme God in the *Svetasvatara Upanisad*.

The *Yoga sutras* of Patanjali, who allegedly lived some time between 820 and 300 BC, were compiled between the 2nd century BC and the 5th century AD. To Patanjali, by means of intense concentration the concentrating mind (*citta*) vanishes, leaving the object concentrated on as the sole reality. *Samadhi* ("bliss" or "ecstasy") comes from eliminating the *citta* and concentrating on the "effulgent Light", which is "beyond all sorrow" (1.36).

Buddhist Scriptures

By 500BC there were many states in the Ganges Valley, and sects questioned orthodox Brahmanism. These included Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautama, who was born c.560BC into an area occupied by an Aryan tribe called the Sakyas, achieved his enlightenment (*bodhi*) at Bodh Gaya under a pipal or peepal tree (later called the Bo or Bodhi Tree) and became known as "the Buddha" (the "Enlightened One" or "awakened one"). In the Buddha's revolution against Vedism and Brahmanism, craving or desire, fire, must be extinguished.

In his revolutionary Fire Sermon (*Maha-Vagga* I.21) the Buddha declares that everything is on fire with craving:

> "All things, O priests, are on fire….The eye O priests, is on fire;

forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire; impressions received by the eye are on fire…with the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation….The ear is on fire; sounds are on fire; the nose is on fire; odours are on fire; the tongue is on fire; tastes are on fire; the body is on fire; things tangible are on fire; the mind is on fire; ideas are on fire; mind/consciousness is on fire; impressions received by the mind are on fire…with the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, the fire of infatuation….Perceiving this, O priests, the learned and noble disciple conceives an aversion for the eye, conceives an aversion from forms....And in conceiving this aversion he becomes divested of passion, and by the absence of passion he becomes free."[31]

When all craving and desire was extinguished one could achieve Enlightenment and Nirvana (a "blowing-out" of desire, leaving a state of bliss). The Buddhist Scriptures record the experience of Nirvana. In the second watch of the night of his enlightenment, the Buddha "acquired the supreme heavenly eye" and the world appeared "as though reflected in a spotless mirror".[32] The Buddha says of his Enlightenment: "When this knowledge, this insight had arisen within me, my heart was set free from intoxication of lusts,…becomings,…ignorance….Ignorance was beaten down, insight arose, darkness was destroyed, the Light came, inasmuch as I was there, strenuous, aglow, master of myself." (*Mahasaccaka Sutta*.)[33]

In his last sermon the Buddha advised: "Be ye lamps into yourselves, hold fast to the truth as a lamp."

Although he was "aglow" and a "lamp" as a result of his Enlightenment, the Buddha asserted that when desire is blown out there is "no self", meaning that there is no Atman. This doctrine, known as *anatta* (non-self), was taken up by Theravadic or *Hinayana* Buddhists. Even so, in the *Dhammapada* ("Way of Virtue") they assert the primacy of the Light: "The sun is bright by day…; but Buddha, the Awakened is bright with splendour day and night."[34] However, *Mahayana* Buddhists saw *anatta* as applying only to the personal ego and they continued to believe in an Atman-like universal self with which they were united during enlightenment. In the *Mahayana Surangama Sutra* (1st century AD, in Sanskrit) the Buddha distinguishes "the perception of our eyes and the intrinsic perception of Sight by our enlightened Mind that is conscious of the fallible perception of the eyes and receives "beams of Light".[35]

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature is broadly maintained in Buddhist literature, for the concept of the Atman and Brahman is still fundamentally present in *Mahayana* literature, and *Theravadic* literature emphasizes the importance of the Light.

Jainism also questioned Brahmanism's orthodox tradition. Its religion was founded in the form we know by Vardhamana, who was born c.599BC, a contemporary of Buddha and Zoroaster. Jainism may be the

original religion of the Hindu Brahmans,[36] which may have been merely reformed by Vardhamana, who was later called Mahavira ("great hero"). Mahavira spent twelve years as a wandering ascetic and achieved enlightenment at the age of forty-two.

Jainism's Sacred Book

The Sacred Book of Jainas (4.30) states the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature: "One should ever make his own self radiant by the light of the three jewels."[37] The Light filled the Jain soul, which expanded to fill the whole body as the light of a lamp fills a large room as well as a small room. The passions had to be subdued so that the soul (like the Atman or universal being) could be purified and reach a state of bliss in which it could be filled with the Light.

China

The early literature of China is intertwined with legend. The *I Ching* ("Book of Changes") is a book of trigrams used in divination. The trigrams were reputedly discovered by the legendary Fu Hsi in the 24th, or even 29th, century BC on the back of a tortoise shortly after the Huang Ho or Yellow River culture began (c.3000-2500BC). Hexagrams were found and written down by Wen Wang in 1143/2BC[38] shortly before writing was officially discovered in China, and the Appendices were completed some 700 years later.

The *I Ching* was one of the five classics that Confucius (Kung Fu Tzu, 551-479BC) edited and preserved. In a troubled time Confucius looked back to the stability of earlier kings when the Supreme Ruler (known as Shang Ti or Ti) was an intermediary (like the Egyptian Akhenaton) between humankind and Heaven (*T'ien*). By the time of Confucius the enlightened man was the mediator between Heaven (*T'ien*) and Earth.

The *I Ching* is still consulted today. I recall sitting in the mid-1960s with an Executive Director of the Bank of Japan who startled me by suddenly producing sticks that resembled firework sparklers, which he shook up and laid out. He then told my fortune with reference to a battered Chinese copy of the *I Ching*. (He said that my fortune was one of the best *I-Ching* fortunes he had ever seen.)

The first anthology of Chinese poetry, the *Shih Ching* ("the Book of Songs", c.600BC), perhaps compiled by Confucius, consists of folk and festive songs, ballads and hymns that focus on love, courtship, farming, hunting, and going to war – more secular and slight topics than the quest of the fundamental theme.

The Tao Te Ching

The Shang dynasty (c.1766-1122BC) was the first archaeologically secure dynasty in China. It was followed by the Chou dynasty (c.1122-481BC), under which Confucius lived together with his contemporary

Lao-Tze (who was born c.570BC). According to his biographer c.100BC, Lao-Tze, an archivist at the court, met Confucius and criticized his pride and ambition.

It has been questioned whether Lao-Tze in fact ever existed, and it has been suggested that his poems, the *Tao Te Ching* ("Book of the Way and the Power"), were a compilation made in the 3rd century BC. But although the doctrine of the *Tao* existed earlier than Lao-Tze, he has always traditionally been acknowledged as the founder of Taoism. "Lao-Tze" means "old master" or "old boy", his real name being Li-poh-yang.

The idea of the *Tao* (Way) has different levels. It can be seen as the way of one's life and of how a king should govern his country; or the way of the universe; or the way creation came out of the Void (poems 4, 11), which is similar to the Hindu Brahman: the One, the unity behind the multiplicity of the universe (poems 14, 42), the source of the impersonal, eternal energy (*ch'i*) behind the universe.

The Indo-European Iranian Light (or Fire) of Zoroaster seems to have spread through India and reached China. Iranian was the language in Chinese Turkestan in the 1st millennium BC. As a result there was an Indo-European influence on Taoism: the fire-sacrifice was internalized, and a subtle fire blended Heaven and Earth within the soul. The Light is crucial to Taoism.

According to the *Tao Te Ching*, the aim of life was to live in harmony with the *Tao*. The *Tao* is the basis for all things without having form itself (poems 14, 41). It is First Cause that existed "like a preface to God" or prior to God (poem 4). It is the "mother" and the "ancestor" of all things (poems 52, 4) that existed before Heaven and Earth (poem 25). It is "invisible", "vague and elusive" (poems 14, 35), "everlasting" and "unchangeable" (poems 7, 16, 25). It is "the great Form" (poem 35) and it cannot be described in known terms (poems 1, 32, 37, 41). It is Non-Being or *wu* (poems 1, 40), and "all things in the world come from Being and Being comes from Non-Being" (poem 40).[39]

This Universalist idea of the origin of all things is given even clearer expression by Chuang Tzu in the 3rd century BC: "There was Being. There was Non-Being before there was Being. There was No-Non-Being before there was Non-Being. There was No-No-Non-Being before there was No-Non-Being."[40]

The *Tao* is also the Light which is neither perception nor yet non-perception: "We look at it and do not see it….Its name is The Subtle (formless)….Going up high, it is not bright, and coming down low, it is not dark. Infinite and boundless." (Poem 14.) In other words, we do not see the Light with our sense-perception, and it does not obey the laws of the sun, but is eternally present. The *Tao* "is indeed Subtle Light" (poem 36).

The aim of life is to return to the Light of *Tao*: "All things come into being, and I see thereby their return. All things flourish, but each one returns to its root. This return to its root means tranquillity. It is called returning to its destiny. To return to destiny is called the eternal (*Tao*).

To know the eternal (i.e. *Tao*) is called enlightenment….Being in accord with *Tao*, he is everlasting." (Poem 16.)

The Taoist experiences in ecstasy a Reality that cannot be understood with the reason. He empties his mind and mirrors Heaven and Earth in an underlying Void (the Light), which inhabits his heart once it is cleansed (*hsin chai*). The macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of man obey the same laws, and Taoism explains how the two should always exist in harmony.

The Zoroastrian dualism of light and darkness impacted on Taoism in its two forces, *Yin* and *Yang*. These two principles appear for the first time in the Third Appendix of the *I Ching* (1.32, 4th century BC.): "That which is unfathomable in (the movement of) the inactive and active operations is (the presence of a) spiritual (power)." The "unfathomable" is the formless Light, the inactive *Yin* and active *Yang* represent Zoroaster's twin spirits of darkness and light (*Angra Mainyu* and *Spenta Mainya*). *Yin* and *Yang* are also represented as Heaven (*Yang*) and Earth (*Yin*), with Man in between.

In Iran, India and China, Zoroaster, Buddha, Mahavira and Lao-Tze all lived at roughly the same time (the 6th century BC) and there is a homogeneity in their Universalist view of the universe. They perpetuated the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature which had begun in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations and had in the meantime passed to Israel.

Israel

The Anatolian, Syrian and Israelite civilizations adopted different forms of the Indo-European Sky Father. The Indo-European Hittites arrived in Anatolia c.2000BC, and expressed the ordered, unified universe through a Storm-and-Weather god during the Hittite Old Kingdom, which lasted from c.1700 to c.1500BC. The Hittites ruled Syria as a Hittite colony, and the Syrians expressed unity through their cloud-ruling Baal from c.1500BC.

The Indo-European fire-cults influenced the Semitic Hebrews who began on the banks of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. The *Old Testament* tells of Abraham, who lived at Ur probably in the 19th or 18th-17th centuries BC, perhaps c.1750BC, as has been confirmed by a find of thousands of cuneiform tablets at Mari, a city on the Euphrates,[41] and migrated to Canaan in Palestine. He brought with him Ur's legal code, Hammurabi's "eye for an eye", to the Promised Land. As Hammurabi identified himself with the Mesopotamian god Shamash[42] Abraham must have brought a knowledge of Shamash. The Israelites went to Egypt and lived in bondage until their return to Canaan at the end of the 13th century BC under Moses, whose Ten Commandments founded Judaism as it has come down to us today.

The Old Testament

The *Old Testament* perpetuates the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature. It tells of YHWH, pronounced Yahweh (or less correctly, Jehovah), the Being who was First Cause. (YHWH may stand for "*Yahweh-Asher-Yahweh*", which means "He Brings Into Existence Whatever Exists", i.e. he is Creator and First Cause.)[43] He evolved from a tribal "jealous" idol-god who "died" and rose for the spring Passover festival and manifested in sunlight and thunderstorm, and became a presence that could be known in the soul. He ruled the priest-kings in the kingdom David established c.1000BC and then the priests who controlled the country after the Exile of the 6th century BC. His exploits extend from the 20th to the 4th centuries BC and were written by many hands at different times.

We have seen that the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature focuses on the confronting of death and seeing of the Light of Being in the purified soul, and the *Old Testament* as a whole conveys this. Yahweh was at first seen in terms of light, fire and lightning like the Indo-European Sky-gods and storm-gods. Abraham sees Yahweh in the form of "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp" (*Genesis* 15.17) and Yahweh's first appearance to Moses was "in a flame of fire" (*Exodus* 3.2). Yahweh's appearance on Mount Sinai, when Moses was given the Ten Commandments, was after "thunders and lightnings" (*Exodus* 19.16) when "the Lord descended upon it in fire". Yahweh had led the exodus "by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (*Exodus* 13.21). Yahweh "shined forth from Mount Paran" (*Deuteronomy* 33.2), and in the 9th century BC Elijah, challenging Baal, invoked Yahweh, who sent down "fire" from heaven (*2 Kings* 1).

The *Psalms of David* see Yahweh as Light: "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined" (*Psalm* 50.2); "the voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the word" (*Psalm* 77.18) and "yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (*Psalm* 139.12) – clearly a reference to the Light.

Yahweh was increasingly seen as the Light: "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light" (*Isaiah* 60.9). "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light" (*Psalm* 36.9). Yahweh made "his face shine" upon humans he favoured, and lifted up "his countenance" upon them (*Numbers* 6.25). "The light shall shine upon thy ways" (*Job* 22.28). "The lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear" (*Psalm* 27.1). "The Lord shall be a light unto me" (*Micah* 7.8)."Then shall thy light break forth as the morning" (*Isaiah* 58.8).

Yahweh descended as fire, spoke out of fire and had a countenance which shone as an everlasting Light. Although fire-sacrifices and burnt offerings were made to him at the ritualistic level in the Indo-European manner, he was also experienced in the soul as Light, an inner sun. Hence the ritual surrounding the tent of the Tabernacle, the mobile sanctuary which God revealed to Moses in a vision on Mount Sinai (*Exodus* 25), and its successors in the first and second Temple.

In the Tabernacle in the Temple of Solomon (10th century BC) and in the second Temple, there was a divine "Holy of Holies" within a Heavenly "Holy" and an earthly outer court. The gold Ark of the Covenant stood in the Holy of Holies, containing the "Testimony" which Yahweh gave the people of Israel. "And there I will meet with thee," Yahweh told Moses (*Exodus* 25.22), "and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, between the two cherubims which are upon the ark, of all things which I will give in commandment unto the children of Israel."

On the first day of the first month in the year following these words of Yahweh's, the Tabernacle was erected. "The cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle and fire was in it by night" (*Exodus* 40.34, 38). Yahweh came down and united with the world below and dwelt in the darkness of the Holy of Holies, from which the glorious Light of his indwelling radiated and his shining being, the bright radiance of his *Shekhinah* or Presence, revealed itself. According to the oral tradition of Talmudic and Rabbinical writings, the Tabernacle contained the Divine Light.[44]

In the 6th century BC the Judaistic Light was Iranised. The Jews in exile in Babylon from 587/6 to 538BC came into contact with the Iranian Light as Chaldean Babylon had been conquered by the Persian Cyrus the Great. The Jews of the southern kingdom of Judah, lamenting their exile "by the waters of Babylon", absorbed the Iranian monotheism of Ahura Mazda and a hierarchy of Babylonian angels.[45] (All the angels in the Biblical tradition with proper names derive from Babylon.) The Jews opened themselves to the Iranian dualism of Light and Darkness, to the Iranian Satan (Ahriman) and to guardian angels. As part of this process Yahweh blended with the Light of Ahura Mazda.

Whereas Taoism internalised the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature, the *Old Testament* externalized it. Yahweh is at first presented in terms of fire, lightning and storm. He then became a presence of Light, the *Shekhinah*, that dwelt in the mobile Tabernacle. He then became a Light shining in darkness that could be known by the soul. Yahweh took on some of the characteristics of Ahura Mazda.

Literary Summary

I can now summarise how the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature (see p.1) was presented in the early literature of the ancient world:

- The infinite that surrounds and orders the universe was present within: the Heaven/ Underworld of Dumuzi/Tammuz (Mesopotamia); the Elysian Fields/Underworld in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Egypt); light and darkness, *Spenta Mainyu* and *Angra Mainyu* in the *Avesta* (Iran); the fire of Brahman "which

created everything" in the *Svetasvatara Upanisad* (India); the *Tao* as the First Cause of all things, "infinite and boundless" (China); and Yahweh who "brings into existence whatever exists" (Israel).

- The metaphysical Reality seen as Light was embodied in gods: Utu-Shamash; Ra; Ahura Mazda; Agni/Brahman; *T'ien;* and Yahweh. It was also referred to as *tapas*, or universal Light (India).
- The order of the universe can be found in: Anu and Utu-Shamash, who ordered the universe (Mesopotamia); in Ra as the sun-god ruling the sky-world and Underworld, and in the Pharaoh as Ra in his life and continuing as Ra in death, who ordered the universe (Egypt); in Ahura Mazda, source of the Light, who ordered the universe (Iran); in *rta*, which ordered the universe (India); in the *Tao*, which ordered the universe (China); and in Yahweh, who ordered the universe (Israel).
- The oneness of known humankind is assumed by the writers of: the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (in which all humans are under the rule of the gods); the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*; the *Avesta*; the *Rig Veda* and *Upanisads*; the *Tao Te Ching*; and the *Old Testament*.
- The similarities in cultures and civilizations can be detected in: the Indo-European influence on the Mesopotamian, Iranian, Indian and Chinese civilizations; the Mesopotamian influence on the Egyptian and Israelite civilizations; and Zoroaster's influence on India and China.
- The concept of a universal being or self that opens to the Light behind the rational, social ego is in the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Iranian, Indian, Chinese and Israelite civilizations and is named the *akh* (Egypt), Atman (India) and soul (Israel).
- Universal virtue is emphasized in: the stories of Gilgamesh, Dumuzi/Tammuz; the people in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*; Mithras; Arjuna; Lao-Tze; and the *Old Testament* prophets.
- The promise of the immortality of the universal being is present in the rituals of: Dumuzi/Tammuz; the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* ("coming forth by day"); and Agni as "giver of life and immortality". It can be found in: Gilgamesh's confronting of death and thwarted search for immortality; the *Rig Veda*; *Avesta*; Brahmanism; Taoism; and the *Shekhinah*'s covenant with the Israelites.
- The inner transformation or centre-shift from ego to universal being is in: the myth of Tammuz's dying into the Underworld and rising in the spring (Mesopotamia); the bringing to birth of the *akh* in 'Making the Transformation into a Living Soul' (Egypt); the "control of this egoism" and "end to all Duality" in the *Avesta* (Iran); the seeking of the innermost Self in the *Upanisads* (India); the transformation from sense-perception (China); and the transformation from the ego to the soul in prayer (Israel).
- The quest of the purified soul seeking a life after death is in: Gilgamesh's quest for immortality (Mesopotamia); the rituals of

the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* which proceed from ego to being (Egypt); the soaring "to the place of Everlasting Light" in the *Avesta* (Iran); the quest for the Light of the *rsi* s and Arjuna and in the wanderings which ended in the enlightenment of the Buddha and Mahavira (India); the quest for the eternal and enlightenment of the *Tao* (China); and the quest from darkness to the Light of Yahweh in the Tabernacle (Israel).

- The sensibility that approaches Reality through more than one discipline can be found in the ancient cultures' approach to the Light, which embraces early philosophy, religion, national history and literature. Details of individual authors have not come down to us, for many works have not survived and we often do not know the authors of those that have survived.
- The new perspective of unity in history, religion, philosophy and science, international politics and literature can be found in the early Mesopotamian creation myths and the ancient religions' approach to the Light in Egypt, Iran, India, China and Israel. Information is scanty in this early time, but the perspective of unity in disciplines is present.

Within the six civilizations whose early literature I have examined we have seen that there are variations on the metaphysical aspect of one fundamental theme of world literature. The classical world produced further variations.

2

The Literature of the Classical World

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature – the quest of a purified soul to confront death and receive the secret Light of infinite Reality – was perpetuated in the Greek civilization and what was to become the classical, Graeco-Roman world.

Not every work of a writer writing in the classical period or in more recent times is about the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme. Many works are about the secular everyday world of Nature, love and social feelings. It is, however, true to say that for some the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme is the core of their work, that there are traces of it in their essential work. The totality of their work is a kind of chiaroscuro, a blend of light and darkness, in which their core is a quest for the metaphysical Light and the rest is more shadowy, more secular about the outside world. When we consider their work as a whole, we can see that the metaphysical and secular aspects of the fundamental theme form the essence of their work.

Greece

The Indo-Europeans settled in Greece in two waves. The first arrived c.3500BC and became the Pelasgians.[1] The second wave arrived c.2200BC, shortly after the Indo-Europeans settled Iran and India, and became the ancestors of the Mycenaeans. They called themselves Achaeans (*Achaioi*) and were possibly displaced from Akkad which was originally called Achaia.

The Mycenaean Mysteries and the Fundamental Theme

These bearded Achaean Greeks were the Danaoi of Homer. They brought with them their Indo-European Sky-god Dyaeus Pitar, who became Zeus, the Sky-god with his thunderbolt and storm-god, who resembled the Altaic Sky-god. They also brought Shamash, who developed into Hyperion-Apollo, the sun-god. He was "*Phoibos*" or "light-bearer", and Enlightener, the god of mental light. He prophesied through the Pythia, the priestess at the Delphic Oracle who sacrificed animals to the Sky-god (Zeus) and rose to the Sky World on the smoke, which resembled a World Tree.

The Mycenaean culture introduced three mystery religions. The

mysteries at Eleusis go back to c.1800BC and worshipped Demeter, the Earth-Mother and Grain-Mother, along with her daughter Kore (Persephone), who was carried off into the Underworld by Pluto. An underground vault beneath the *telesterion*, the hall at Eleusis, served as a reconstructed Hades and elsewhere there was a reconstructed Elysium where the reuniting of Demeter and Kore was celebrated with torches. A papyrus fragment shows Herakles saying, "I have beheld the Fire….I have seen the Maid (i.e. Kore)."[2] The climax of the Mysteries, the *Philosophoumena*, presented a reaped ear of corn of brilliant gold.[3] It was presented in the *telesterion* in a brilliant light. The meaning of the Eleusinian mysteries was that the cycle of grain paralleled the cycle of man: grain sown in a field was like seed sown in man's universal being, "if it dies it bringeth forth much fruit" (*John* 12:24) – a new centre that reflects the Light.

The Greek Achaean Mycenaeans had brought with them the Sumerian Royal Sacred Marriage in which Tammuz's marriage to Inanna-Ishtar was celebrated at the Spring Festival at Isin, south of Babylon, at the end of the third millennium BC. This passed into the later Eleusinian Epoptic mysteries, in which Zeus married Demeter.

The Mycenaeans had also imported the Minoan bull-cult from Crete which had come from Anatolia. They invaded Crete, and the discovery of Linear B by Michael Ventris showed that Mycenaean Greek was spoken in both Mycenae and Minoan Knossos by the 15th century BC. A Cretan bull with a gold "rosette" on its forehead (c.1550-1500BC) was found in the fourth shaft grave at Mycenae.[4] The archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, the discoverer of Troy, described the rosette as "a splendidly ornamented golden sun, of two and a fifth inches in diameter". It reflected a sun-cult connecting the bull with the sun, and therefore represented the Light.

The Dionysiac Bull mysteries originated in the Mycenaean Age and perpetuated the bull-cult. They showed how Dionysus-Zagreus was brought up by the Maenads, wild women who wandered through the mountains drinking wine and eating ivy berries which had a hallucinogenic effect. Dionysus had a Light like the "rosette" that could be acquired. This could be achieved by the physically intoxicated Maenads whose inner eye was stimulated into seeing the *theon eidos*, the "vision of the gods" or mysteries sent from Heaven, the coming of the Light, later mentioned in Euripides' *Bacchoi* or *Bacchae*.

The Orphic mysteries worshipped Orpheus, musician, author of sacred writings and priest of Dionysus, who was torn to pieces by the Maenads. Orpheus was a poet who could charm wild life into listening to his song, and after his death his head continued to sing. The Orphic Light was called Phanes, and was celebrated by fire-sacrifices. Orpheus taught that the soul could be reborn after death, and that after three pious lives in which the soul or universal being received the secret Light it could live in the eternal sunshine and bliss of the Isles of the Blessed.[5]

Many of the Greek myths go back to the Mycenaean time. Greek mythology contains many parables regarding the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature. Cosmology and cosmogony are reflected in the myths of Chaos, Elysium, Erebus, the Isles of the Blest, Lethe, Oceanus, the Styx, Pandora and Uranus. There are accounts of the major deities: Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena, Eros, the Graces, Hephaestus, Hera, Hermes, Persephone, Pluto, Poseidon, Selene, Uranus and Zeus. Their attributes and qualities are conveyed: they feed off ambrosia and nectar, wear the aegis and benefit from apotheosis. The heroes fight mythical creatures: the Chimera, Cyclops, Echidna, Gigantes, Gorgon and Hydra, and resist the wiles of Scylla and Charybdis and the Sirens. The questing heroes include Odysseus, Oedipus, Theseus, Jason and Orpheus. There are many Greek figures who fought in the Trojan War such as Achilles, Agamemnon, Odysseus and Ajax, and there are many Trojan heroes such as Hector, Paris and Priam.

Jason seeking the Golden Fleece, Orpheus seeking Eurydice in the Underworld, the attempt to retrieve Persephone from darkness and bring her back to light, Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia to gain a favourable wind from the gods that will take the fleet to Troy – all are parables of the quest of the hero which brings him to an encounter with death, the Underworld and infinite Reality. All the Greek poets and dramatists who referred to or related versions of these myths provided fragments of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme.

The Mycenaean culture fell to the Dorians c.1100BC. The Mycenaeans handed on the secret of the Light as symbols within the Eleusinian, Minoan, Dionysiac and Orphic mysteries. The Indo-European fire-sacrifices to Zeus were thus handed on together with the symbols of bull's flesh, an ear of corn and fire.

Homer's Iliad

The universe of the Mycenaean mysteries was the universe of Homer's literature. Homer wrote in the 8th century BC, about the Trojan War, which Schliemann claimed from the evidence of his excavations at Hisarlik took place in the early 12th century BC. (Eratosthenes had given the date of the Trojan War as 1194-1184/3BC.)[6]

Troy was in Anatolia, which had been settled by Indo-Europeans known as Hittites from north of the Black Sea in 2000BC. Their descendants established the Hittite Old Kingdom (c.1700-1500BC), and according to cuneiform tablets discovered at Bŏgazköy, the Hittite ruler was the earthly deputy for a Storm-and-Weather god, embodying him in life and becoming him on death. After the decline of the Hittite Middle Kingdom (c.1500-1400BC), the Hittite New Kingdom restored the empire and conquered Syria (part of which was soon lost to the Assyrians). The Hittite Empire was invaded by the Phrygians, and then fell suddenly in 1225BC to "the Sea Peoples", probably the Bronze-Age Achaean Greeks or *Ahhiyawa*, according to Hittite tablets.[7] The Hittite

collapse coincided with the destruction of Hisarlik, the city of King Priam, if the modern Hisarlik was indeed Troy, and it is possible that the Trojan War was a phase in the invasion of the Sea Peoples who brought the Hittite Empire to an end about the time Troy fell.[8] North Anatolia now became Aeolia, west and central Anatolia were occupied by the Phrygians and southern Anatolia became Ionia, into which Homer is thought to have been born: in the vicinity of modern Smyrna (Izmir).

To some the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* drew on a tradition of oral poetry, an inherited body of material repeatedly reworked and reperformed. To some, Homer is a name attached to the author of the core narrative of this tradition. To others he was a master poet who drew together a variety of legends and created one or two super-epics. To still others, the *Odyssey* was composed by a later hand, and countered the *Iliad* in being its thematic opposite: about peace instead of war, about survival rather than glorious death, about a father, husband and ruler rather than a heroic individual.

In Homer's two epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Greek Zeus ordered the universe from his infinite world on Mount Olympus. The gods caused things to happen: an arrow to strike the best-protected part of a fighter's body, a bowstring to snap, armour to become unfastened, a stroke or heart attack, an epidemic, a storm at sea or the attention of marauders. The lives of mortals were lived in the knowledge that they would go to the Underworld on their death and (with luck) then to the Elysian Fields, the pre-Hellenic paradise the Greeks identified with the Isles of the Blessed. (In Homer the Elysian Plain was an island of perfect happiness at the end of the Earth, on the banks of the River Oceanus which surrounded the Earth.) Either way, there was the promise of immortality.

The action of the *Iliad* is overseen by the Olympian gods.

> The opening lines of the poem declare, "And so the plan of Zeus was brought to fulfilment." The first event of the poem, Agamemnon's insult to the priest Chryses brings down divine wrath: Apollo's plague. Agamemnon arrogantly slights Achilles, who withdraws from the conflict and sulks, with disastrous consequences for the Greeks. (Achilles is only just mortal: his mother, the goddess Thetis, had attempted to bestow immortality on him by dipping him in an immortal pool, but the heel she held him by remained dry and therefore mortal.) The goddesses Hera and Athena are angry, and the war must continue so that they are appeased. The war progresses slowly because powerful gods support both sides, and Zeus is slow to support the Achaeans. After the appeals of the Greeks, Achilles, who is inspired by Athena, concedes that his friend Patroclus may take his place in battle, wearing Achilles' armour to disguise himself as Achilles and drive off the Trojans. Patroclus kills Sarpedon, a Trojan son of Zeus – who weeps tears of blood, not wanting him to die. Patroclus advances too far and is killed by the Trojan champion, Hector. Achilles' anger now turns against Hector. He kills him and

mistreats his body. He is now consumed by both grief and wrath. Hector's father, King Priam, travels to the Greek camp by night and begs Achilles to return his son's body. Achilles' anger gives way to pity, and the poem ends with Hector's burial. Troy will now be destroyed as Hector had foreseen: "There will come a day when holy Troy will be destroyed."

In the *Iliad*, Homer's perspective is not pro-Greek. He is even-handed between both sides, as one might expect of a poet who reputedly came from formerly-Anatolian Ionia (the vicinity of modern Izmir). To Homer, an enemy deserves compassion in a poem even though he does not receive it in real life.

But the gods are in charge. It is Apollo who smashes the Greek defensive wall in book 12.

Virtue was rewarded by the gods, who were anthropomorphic onlookers for much of the time, but could intervene when it suited their interests. Aphrodite caused the Trojan War by carrying Paris off to his chamber, enhancing his beauty and then fetching Helen. Zeus caused the Achaeans to fight by sending the likeness of Nestor in a dream to Agamemnon to say, "I am the messenger of Zeus….He has commanded you to arm the long-haired Achaeans with all speed for now you will take the wide-wayed city of the Trojans." Homer treats the gods humorously. There is a double stage of divine and human action. It is comic that Zeus, ruler of gods and men, is constantly bothered by his prying and nagging wife Hera, and that Hera distracts Zeus from the Trojan War into an amorous interlude in book 14. She seduces her husband on the top of Mount Ida, Crete, to give Poseidon more time to prevent Hector from annihilating the Achaean forces before Achilles can be persuaded to join them and effect an Achaean victory.

The philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon was critical of Homer's anthropomorphism: "But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, and could draw with their hands and make works of art like men, horses would draw the shapes of gods like horses and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies of the kind that each had themselves." And: "One god, greatest among gods and men, in no way like mortals in body or in thought."[9]

In spite of the anthropomorphism of the gods, the Indo-European and Dorian tier of the infinite was still unquestionably part of Homer's universe. Zeus stands outside time and presides over the universe, and Apollo, as sun-god, controls the physical light of the sun and shines metaphysical Light into the soul. Universal being, so present in the mysteries, is missing from the two epic poems, which narrate action, but we know from the Mycenaean mysteries that it was widely known.

The *Iliad*, the oldest work in Western literature, focused on a single unified theme or action as no other literary work had previously done. It is a highly moral work on the wrath of Achilles and the fulfilment of the will of Zeus. Achilles breaks the Greek code of moral behaviour. In his

quarrel with Agamemnon he is guilty of *hubris*, pride. In his refusal to accept Agamemnon's attempt to make amends he is guilty of *até*, the infatuation that leads to disaster. He also lacks *aidos* (respect for one's fellow men) by neglecting the gods. The disaster (*nemesis*) comes with the death of Patroclus, his punishment. His revenge on Hector shows a further loss of *aidos*. Homer's heroes perform the correct rituals to the gods, who live on nectar and ambrosia while humans suffer and make sacrifices.[10]

Homer's opinions of the gods are hidden within the anonymity of his epic medium, and the extent to which he departed from the traditional, oral tale is not known. It is likely that he was conveying the senselessness of war. In book 20 of the *Iliad* Zeus summons the gods and gives them liberty to assist either side. At the end of the poem Priam, King of Troy, has lost his son Hector, and Achilles, the main Greek hero and killer of Hector, has lost his friend Patroclus. But such things are the lot of mankind: "For this is the fate that gods have allotted to wretched mortals, to live in sorrow while they themselves are free from care." (*Iliad*, 24.525-6.)

Homer's Odyssey

The *Odyssey* is about the homecoming of Odysseus from Troy after ten years of wandering.

> Odyesseus encounters the Sirens, the bag of winds, the enchantress Circe who turns men into pigs, the Lotus-eaters and Polyphemus the Cyclops. In the course of his adventures Odysseus visits the Underworld and speaks to the ghosts of Agamemnon and Achilles, whose temper has led him to lose his life in battle. Odysseus never loses sight of his homecoming, of his home, family, friends and affection. When he returns to Ithaca he adopts the dress of an old beggar and tests the loyalty of his swineherd, his servants, his son and his wife Penelope, who asks if he has any news of her husband. Homer gives us Odysseus's reaction: "Through guile he masked his distress." He kills the suitors. He finally loses his self-control and confirms his identity.

In the *Iliad*, Hector is killed, his wife foresees slavery for herself and death for her son, and things have fallen apart. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is reunited with Penelope, who has had parallel sufferings, and order is restored.

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are about the breakdown of a moral order thought to be natural and divinely sanctioned, and about the restoration of that order.[11]

In the *Iliad* the moral order breaks down in Achilles' behaviour – his breach of *aidos* and his maltreatment of Hector's body – and is put right when he brings the Achaeans victory. Order is restored when the will of Zeus is fulfilled, and Troy falls to the Achaeans. But the restoration of order is fragile, and the breakdown actually continues into Agamemnon's

homecoming, when he is stabbed by his wife's lover Aegisthus in his bath. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is seduced by the nymph Calypso on the way home and the suitors move in on Penelope and occupy Odysseus's house. Things are falling apart, but order is restored when Odysseus returns and kills the suitors – with the help of the gods.

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* evoke the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme in an infinite universe ruled by the gods and containing a moral order that leads to immortality in the Underworld or the Elysian Fields.

The Homeric Hymns

Most of the Homeric hymns are about the birth and childhood of gods, and the tone is often humorous and playful. The 'Hymn to Demeter' traces Demeter's wandering in search of Persephone and the founding of the sanctuary at Eleusis. The 'Hymn to Apollo' falls into two parts; the first part is to Apollo of Delos and celebrates Apollo's empire (the only Homeric hymn some assert was really written by Homer), and the second part traces Apollo's arrival at Delphi. The 'Hymn to Hermes' includes the exploits of the infant Apollo, including his discovery of a tortoise and his making of the first lyre. The 'Hymn to Aphrodite' is about her love affair with Anchises, the father of Aeneas.

The 33 Homeric hymns are dedicated to the following gods: Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Asclepius, Artemis, Athena, Cybele, Dionysus, Demeter, the Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces, Gaia, Helios, Hera, Heracles, Hermes, Hephaestus, Hestia, Pan, Poseidon, Pythian Apollo, Selene and Zeus. They convey the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme.

Hesiod

Hesiod was a little later than Homer, perhaps mid-7th century BC. His *Theogony* (or *Birth of the Gods*) set out the powers of the universe and the ruling gods in terms of their genealogy. There were four generations of gods, and Zeus dominated the third generation. Almost the whole of Greek mythology is covered in a genealogical index, anticipating Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The whole poem is about the infinite's ordering of the universe.

The earlier *Works and Days* gives useful practical advice on how to work hard and do right. It includes vivid advice to farmers that anticipates Virgil's *Georgics* – within an ordered universe ruled by the gods.

Lyric Poets

A secular stream of lyric poetry about Nature, love poetry and drinking songs now appeared. In the 7th century lyric poetry flourished in both east and west through Archilochus of Paros (the first writer of Greek personal poetry), Callinus of Ephesus, Tyrtaeus, Simonides of Amorgos, Terpander of Lesbos, Stesichorus of Sicily and Mimnermus of Colophon.

Early in the 6th century Sappho of Lesbos founded a school of lyric poetry with her love verses, and her contemporary Alcaeus of Lesbos told of his wanderings and longings for home.

The elegiac iambic and lyric poetry of the early Ionian Greeks in the 7th and 6th centuries BC was dominated by the gods, despite its secular subjects. For example Anacreon of Teos has a prayer to Artemis and an appeal to Dionysus. The paeans of the 6th/5th-century Pindar were in honour of Apollo or Artemis, and his dithyrambs were to Dionysus. These Ionian poets reflected the religious culture of their time and with it the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme.

Pindar

The 6th/5th-century Pindar was the greatest of the nine lyric poets according to the Roman rhetorician Quintilian. Although much of his work serenaded athletes, victors in successive Games, his main theme was the Light. As C.M. Bowra put it, "Pindar's guiding and central theme is the part of experience in which human beings are exalted or illumined by a divine force, and this he commonly compares with light."[12] An example of this can be found in *Pythian 8*, which serenades the victory of a boy wrestler, Aristomenes of Aegina, in 446BC:

> "Creatures of a day! What is a man?
> What is he not? A dream of a shadow
> Is our mortal being. But when there comes to men
> A gleam of splendour given of heaven,
> Then rests on them a light of glory
> And blessed are their days."[13]

He also wrote of immortality and the transmigration of souls.

The Presocratic Philosophers of the 6th and 5th centuries BC

Homer and Hesiod perpetuated the context of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme in world literature, and it was taken up by the Greek Presocratic philosophers of the sixth and fifth centuries BC. They attempted to explain the physical, natural world. They saw an ordered "cosmos". The Greek *kosmos* meant "the universe as a well-ordered whole" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*), an ordered, harmonious system. The Ionian philosophers of Miletus and the Greek philosophers who moved to southern Italy were influenced by the monotheism of the Persian god Ahura Mazda, a strong presence in Ionia, which had been ruled by Persia since the 540BC.

Anaximander of Miletus, who flourished c.570BC, saw the world as emerging from the eternal, infinite, "boundless" (*to apeiron*). This was an eternally moving boundless Reality which threw up a finite germ (*gonimon*): the universe. The universe began from a finite germ within the infinite "boundless". (Compare the "infinite and boundless" in the *Tao Te Ching*.)

Xenophanes of Colophon in Ionia, who flourished c.530BC, saw "that which is" as motionless unity: "One god….Always he remains in the same place, moving not at all."[14] Some scholars claim that Xenophanes was an Ionian monist who asserted the unity of being, others that he was a pantheist asserting the unity of the material world of Nature. Theophrastus said: "Xenophanes…supposed that the all is one, or there is one principle, or that what exists is one and all….This 'one and all' is god."[15]

Heracleitus of Ephesus, who flourished c.500BC, held that Reality was fire which had always existed. He held that the world order was an "ever-living fire kindling in measure and being extinguished in measure"[16] that "ever was, and is, and shall be". The ever-living fire was the metaphysical Fire or Light that "ever was, and is, and shall be", and Heracleitus felt that the soul consists of eternal Fire.[17] He saw all opposites as being reconciled in an underlying unity so that although "everything is in a flux" (*panta rhei*)[18], "the way up and the way down are one and the same."[19]

Xenophanes' disciple Parmenides of Elea, who flourished c.450BC, saw the phenomenal world as an illusion, behind which was an immobile Being, the One. This was close to the singularity of modern physics. Space was a plenum: "Nor is it divided, since it all exists alike….It is all full of being."[20] Parmenides asserted the unity of Being as a monist. To him Reality conflicted with the world of appearances, and in his work the Way of Truth conflicts with the Way of Appearance.

Parmenides saw the One as infinite and a single "Whole",[21] according to one view. Melissus of Samos saw the Eleatic One as coming from infinity (*to apeiron*):[22] "It has no [spatial] beginning or end, but is infinite (or always was and always will be)."[23] Others claim that Parmenides saw the phenomenal world, the world of appearances, as finite, but the infinite One was still behind it.

There were, in fact, different views of the One. To Heracleitus, the One was in perpetual flux, and "god" was immanent in things or the sum total of things.[24] To Parmenides, the world of flux was an appearance, an illusion, and the One behind it was immobile.

The Tragic Dramatists of the 6th and 5th centuries BC: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides

The focus of the philosophers on the infinite universe was reflected in the works of three great tragic dramatists of the 6th and 5th centuries, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

The spirit of Greek tragedy is essentially religious in conveying a universe ruled by the gods. All three dramatists agreed with that, although there were minor differences of emphasis between them. Aeschylus did not question the existence of the gods or their justice, but saw the handiwork of the gods in everything. He focused on human

beings, and considered Orestes' matricide as a moral issue and questioned whether Orestes was right to do what he did.

Aeschylus was the founder of Greek tragedy. He introduced a second actor when there had previously been only one actor and the chorus, and he subordinated the chorus to the dialogue. Of his 90 plays, only seven have survived.

> In Aeschylus's *The Persians*, the Persians are guilty of *hubris*, pride, which is resented by the gods and is punished both nationally and, in the case of Xerxes and his mother Atossa, personally. Aeschylus fought against the Persians at Marathon and seems to have been an eyewitness at the sea battle of Salamis, which a messenger describes, and his sympathy with the Persian enemy in their tribulation enhances the play's tragic art. *Hubris* gets in the way of the questing soul's harmony with the infinite gods.

Sophocles accepted Orestes' rightness and concentrated on characterization. He was morally unconcerned, accepting traditional views without making an issue of his traditionalism. He did not think that divine rule required any explanation or defence.

> In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* ("Oedipus the King"), the gods have fore-ordained human events. At the birth of Oedipus, his parents, Laius, King of Thebes, and Jocasta, were warned by an oracle that their son would kill his father and marry his mother. They gave the baby to a herdsman with instructions to abandon him on a hillside so that they would avoid this fate. The herdsman gave Oedipus to a Corinthian, and he was brought up by Polybus, King of Corinth, believing himself to be Polybus's son. On reaching manhood he learned of the prophecy, and left Corinth to avoid the possibility that the oracle would be fulfilled. As he approached Thebes he was involved in a quarrel where three roads meet. He killed four of the five who were arguing with him, not knowing that their leader was his biological father, Laius. The survivor kept quiet out of fear. Thebes was focused on the Sphinx, who devoured anyone who failed to answer her riddle. The young Oedipus discovered the answer and rid Thebes of the monster. He was hailed as the new king, and married the widowed queen Jocasta, by whom he had four children, including Antigone.
>
> Sixteen years later, at the beginning of the play, Oedipus is seen as a wise, just and happily married king. There has been a plague on Thebes, and it can only be lifted if the murderer of Laius is discovered. Oedipus launches a search for the murderer and vows to avenge Laius "as I would for my own father's sake". The seer Teiresias is asked to help. He knows that Oedipus was the killer and the truth is dragged out of him. But no one believes him. Jocasta had understood that Laius was killed by robbers, and tries to exonerate Oedipus. But she now has inklings of the truth and implores Oedipus to enquire no further. The herdsman arrives, and denies all knowledge of preserving the baby Oedipus out of fear of the consequences. Finally Oedipus realizes that the prophecies have

> already been fulfilled. He rushes out and stabs out his own eyes. Jocasta hangs herself. In contrast to the wise, just, happy king at the beginning of the play, Oedipus has blinded himself. He laments, "What need had I of seeing, to whose sight nothing was good?" (Line 1329.) He says that Apollo blinded him.

The message of the play is that in a universe ruled by the gods humans' free will is powerless to avert what the gods have decreed. Oedipus's anguished cry when he realizes that he has fulfilled the oracle, "*Io, io, io, io, io,*" "Alas, alas, alas, alas, alas," includes his awareness that the gods have brought his doom to pass. He has been blind in not realizing he had killed his father and married his mother, and the gods were responsible for his blindness, and now he is physically blind as a symbol of his mental ignorance and blindness.

Euripides was more of a modernist than the other two, and less conventional. His characters rebel against the injustice of the fate that is ahead of them. Medea does not accept her doom as Oedipus does, but plots the death of Jason's new bride and of her own children. The terrified chorus lament that man has forgotten the gods.

> In Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*, Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra, slayer of his father Agamemnon. It was Apollo who ordered the deed (lines 1244-6). Orestes is therefore destined to be acquitted by the court of the Areopagus, but he cannot escape the ensuing madness. It is made clear that Agamemnon would not have approved of the murder of his widow, and Euripides suggests that humans may be nobler than the gods they worship.

Sophocles said, "Aeschylus gave us men and women of colossal stature. Euripides depicted human nature as it is." He himself drew "men as they should be drawn in tragedy", fully characterized but sufficiently idealized to inspire an audience.[25] In the works of all three, the gods are mentioned at regular intervals, and there are frequent prayers and hymns to them. In Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Sophocles' Oedipus cycle and Euripides' Trojan and Herakles cycles, the gods are in charge.

An era ended in 406/5BC when both Sophocles and Euripides died, 50 years after Aeschylus. Besides the progress in tragic drama, there had been an advance in the writing of history – Thucydides now stood alongside Herodotus for his reflective narrative on the Peloponnesian War – and also in the writing of comedy, in which Aristophanes had parodied Euripides. Although Athens fell in 404, closing the Peloponnesian War and ending the Athenian Empire, the city-state of Athens remained the literary centre of Greece and soon produced the historian Xenophon and the orator Demosthenes. However, Athens' main claim to distinction in the 4th century was in philosophy.

Plato

By the end of the 5th century BC Greek philosophy passed to the

Sophists, who "made a living out of being inventive and clever" (*sophizesthai*), and eventually to Socrates. His dialogues are recorded by his pupil Plato, who wrote that "the Eleatic school, beginning with Xenophanes and even earlier, starts from the principle of the unity of all things (or explains in its myths that what we call all things are actually one)".[26] One of his most metaphysical dialogues is the *Parmenides*, in which Parmenides, Zeno and Socrates discuss the Theory of Forms. (The *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Politicus* complete a quartet of highly metaphysical dialogues.)

Plato visited Sicily c.388BC, and met Dion, the brother-in-law of the ruling tyrant Dionysus I, who said he would implement Plato's political ideas. In response Plato set out his political ideas in his *Republic*, which describes an ideal state run by philosophers. In this work he addressed the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature by declaring that, at the age of 50 "guardians of the state…must raise the eye of the soul to the universal Light which lightens all things, and behold the Absolute Good".[27]

Plato reflected Parmenides' view that reality differs from appearance in the *Republic* (book VII). There he argues that a fire (Reality) differs from the flickering shadows it throws on the wall of a cave.[28] In other words, the Light, the One, is Reality, and the shadows are appearances and illusory.

Plato is thought to have been an initiate in the Eleusinian mysteries, where he would have been taught to associate a ripe ear of corn with the Light (see p.40).[29] Socrates, too, may have been an Eleusinian initiate. Plato has Socrates say of initiation into the mysteries, "We were surrounded by rays of pure light, being pure ourselves and untainted by this object we call a 'body' and which we carry around with us now, imprisoned like shellfish" (*Phaedrus*, 250c).[30] The Greek language surrounding this passage is filled with the terminology of the Eleusinian mysteries, and has been taken as an admission by Socrates that he was an initiate at Eleusis.[31] (Plato's description in the *Republic*, book VII, of shadows thrown on the wall of a cave by a fire may have been inspired by the fire in the underground vault at Eleusis.)[32]

In *Phaedo* (69a) there is a passage that can be translated:

> "There is but one true coin, and it is for this that we must go about exchanging all other things; this coin being the experience of a spiritual light. And perhaps, using its value as our base, and availing of it as our medium of exchange, we may buy and sell all such things as fortitude, temperance and justice; in a word, true virtue, through spiritual light."[33]

Other translators translate "spiritual light" as "wisdom".[34]

Plato is thought to have visited Egypt soon after 399BC, and he may have obtained his view of Reality, including Forms or Ideas (archetypes),

from the Egyptian sense that Ra is everywhere. His belief in the immortality of the soul may also have come from his awareness of the Egyptian *akh*.

Plato thought deeply about immortality. In four dialogues he focused on eschatological myths, asserting that the soul is immortal and that the earthly life is one episode in a long journey. In *Gorgias* (523a-527a) he writes of the judgement of souls. In *Phaedo* (107c-115a) philosophers' souls get preferential treatment. In the *Republic* (X. 614b-621d) he writes of the Pamphylian Er's journey into the Other World. Er, a dead soldier, visits the Underworld but is allowed to return to Earth to report what he saw. In *Phaedrus* (253d-257a) he writes of the Winged Soul, comparing the soul's control of bodily passion and reason to a charioteer's control of a team of two horses.

In these myths Plato seeks to justify his theories of Forms and Recollection. He asserts the soul's immortality and the reincarnation or transmigration of souls (an Orphic idea).[35]

In *Laws* (c.360BC) Plato writes of the soul:

> "Even in life, what makes each one of us to be what we are is only the soul; and when we are dead, the bodies of the dead are rightly said to be our shades or images; for the true and immortal being of each one of us, which is called the soul, goes on her way to other gods, that before them she may give an account."[36]

Plato reflected all the characteristics of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme for literature: the infinite; Reality; order; the oneness of humankind; similarities in cultures; the being that opens to the Light; virtue; and focus on immortality.

Aristotle

Plato's pupil Aristotle took a different view. He was more of an empiricist and realist. Aristotle held that the world of sensible phenomena and appearances was real and that "universals" (which Plato called "Ideas") are within the phenomena of Nature. In later summaries it was said that Plato advocated "*universalia ante rem*" ("universals before the thing") whereas Aristotle advocated "*universalia in re*" ("universals in the thing") or "*universalia in rebus*" ("universals in things").

Plato held that reality is Light, and that the phenomena of Nature have manifested from it as shadows. Aristotle held that the phenomena of Nature are, on the contrary, real and are observed by the senses in real sunlight. In other words, the shadows have their own reality, according to Aristotle.

Universalism reconciles the two contrary positions. An Aristotelian approach to contemporary science shows that we are living in an expanding universe, and that the universe can only be expanding into what the Presocratic Greeks called "the infinite" (*to apeiron*), beyond which is the metaphysical Reality from which the Big Bang emerged: the

One, the primordial Fire of Heracleitus which is experienced as the Light. Universalism, which takes account of both hidden Reality and the scientific world of appearances, reconciles Plato and Aristotle by reconciling the Light and the so-called shadows it casts.

The views of Plato and Aristotle can be reconciled on this basis. A world in which sensible phenomena and appearances are real conceals a Reality that is hidden. The physical world, which is real, conceals a metaphysical infinite order which shapes it.

Universalist philosophers have a scientific approach to a metaphysical, orderly universe. The scientific approach to its appearances and laws is complemented by the revelation of the infinite law of order that is behind it.

In *The New Philosophy of Universalism* I showed that the universe is now thought to be expanding at an accelerating rate. I saw the expanding universe as the crest of a wave rolling forward, and imagined an astronaut surfer on the advancing expansion.

The expanding universe is space-time. What, then, is the surfer advancing into? What is the blackness around the edge of the expanding universe of space-time? It can only be the infinite, the boundless (*to apeiron*) which surrounds the universe and permeates it.

4th-Century Pastoral Poetry

After Aristotle there were a number of influential 4th-century Greek philosophers, dramatists and poets, notably Epicurus and his fellow student Menander, the dramatist.

Alexander the Great conquered the ancient world and transferred the centre of learning from Athens to Alexandria in Egypt. The Hellenistic poet Theocritus, who mainly lived in Sicily, invented pastoral poetry: idyllic poems about the lives, loves and singing-contests of simple shepherds and herdsmen in remote rural settings and rustic scenes. His bucolic poetry, and that of Callimachus of Cyrene, brought Nature, pictures of outdoor life and the rule of the gods to the townsfolk of Alexandria. All of them fell under the influence of Pan, the god of the countryside. In Menander's *Dyskolos* ("Difficult Man"), for example, Pan emerges from a cave of nymphs in the centre of the stage. The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme can still be found in the treatment of the universe in 4th-century pastoral poetry.

Rome

The Etruscans probably emigrated to Italy – Latium – from Anatolia. Their kings go back perhaps to c.1200BC,[37] and certainly to 800BC,[38] and lasted to 509BC. The legendary founding of Rome by the Trojan Aeneas in the 12th century BC, when he was said to have been welcomed by King Evandrus on the Palatine, may have been an early Etruscan contact, Trojans having left Troy and settled in Italy as Etruscans after the Trojan War. (Settlements around the ancient town of Tarquinia can

be dated to the 12th century BC.) Rome was founded (or re-founded) by Romulus in c.754BC.

Soon after the Etruscans, c.475BC, the Latin League unified the Italians around Rome, and the Roman culture came to consist of a State religion, the Latin language, coinage, international legions, an urban network, the rule of law and civic institutions inherited through trade from Greece. These Roman cultural benefits were spread across the advanced Eastern provinces to the less-advanced Western provinces.

The Roman State religion was imported. The Etruscans may have accepted Greek influence near the end of their rule over Rome. They brought the prophetic Sibylline Books from the Greek colony at Cumae to Rome. When the Etruscan kings were expelled c.500BC Rome was faced with a shortage of grain and arranged for grain to be imported from Cumae. With it came a new round of Greek religion: the Olympian gods, including the Indo-European Sky-god Dyaeus Pitar, who became Jupiter (Ju-pitar), the Greek Zeus. With it came knowledge of the Sibyl of Cumae and Cumaean notions of the Underworld, including Pluto, god of the Underworld.[39]

Apollo arrived from the Greek colony at Cumae c.431BC. Two years before there had been a plague and according to Livy (4.25.3) on the recommendation of the Sibylline Books a Temple of Apollo Medicus was built to avert the plague.[40]

After the expulsion of the Etruscan kings, a Roman king of the sacred rites (*rex sacrorum*) embodied Jupiter.[41] He was similar to the Pharaoh who embodied Ra. The Roman State religion imported the Light among other foreign ideas. The shrine in the circular Temple of Vesta in the Forum at Rome contained the eternal fire, which had originated in Vedic India and was known to Indo-European Indians as *garhaptya* ("house-father's fire").[42] It was looked after by the Vestal Virgins. The Sky-god, solar god and 13 other solar deities were served by flamens (or more strictly, the Latin *flamines*), "those who blow (the sacred fire)" or "those who burn offerings". The chief flamen was the priest of Jupiter, *Flamen Dialis*.[43]

Roman religion provided order and structure, but was at first practical and organized, reflecting the character of the Roman people and their involvement in growing food on the land and their dependence on the powers of Nature.[44] No important Latin literature has survived from the first five centuries after the founding of Rome as shepherds and farmers tended their flocks and fields. Roman literature began after the First Punic War in the 3rd century BC. During the Punic Wars there was general anxiety, and all gods were appealed to. As a result, the Eastern cults of Astarte, Cybele and Mithras became established in Rome.[45]

Early Roman Poetry and Drama

Roman literature really began when Livius Andronicus, a prisoner-of-

war, translated the *Odyssey* into Latin. Andronicus wrote Latin versions of Greek dramas and included the Greek approach to divinity in his works.

Naevius, the first Roman poet, wrote till after the end of the Second Punic War, translating or adapting from Greek originals the *Danaë* (i.e. "Trojans"), *Iphigenia* and *Andromache*, and at the end of his life wrote the first Roman epic, the *Bellum Punicum* about the First Punic War against Carthage. He established a precedent for a story connecting the First Punic War through Aeneas with Troy. Naevius laid the foundation of the Roman epic and Virgil was much in his debt.

Greek mythology had now been co-opted into the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature, and illustrations of the quest of Jason, Theseus, Orpheus and Odysseus contained aspects of the soul's quest for Reality. Roman poets and dramatists began to convey the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme through their focus on Greek myths.

Ennius, who was born 30 years after Naevius, wrote *Annales*, a historical epic on the history of the Roman state from the arrival of Aeneas to the events of his own time. The work became *the* Roman classic until Virgil's *Aeneid* dislodged it. He reflected State rituals: he gave an account of a State cult instituted by King Numa, and described a *lectisternium*, a ritual in which images of gods recline on couches at a banquet. Ennius translated two works from Greek with conflicting explanations for divinity. In *Epicharmus* the gods are natural physical presences, yet in *Euhemerus* the gods are former humans honoured for their good deeds.[46]

Plautus (who flourished between Naevius and Ennius) imitated Greek models. He wrote at least 21 comedies – two-thirds of the 130 attributed to him are spurious – and all owe their construction to the Greek originals of Philemon, Diphilus and Menander,[47] and draw on Greek mythology in which the Greek gods are in charge. His *Amphitryo* moves between the Greek god Hermes and his Latin counterpart Mercury, and revels in Rome's dual heritage with many puns, for example on words beginning "merc" (suggesting Mercury). His fellow dramatist Terence, a Berber born in Carthage who was brought to Rome as a slave, also based his plays on Greek originals by Menander or Apollodorus.

In these early works fragments of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature were transmitted from the Greeks to the Romans through Greek mythology. Early Roman literature reflected this metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme in their historical epic poems and comedies.

Early Roman Golden Age: Lucretius

The Golden Age in Roman literature began in the 1st century BC with Lucretius, whose didactic philosophical poem *De Rerum Natura* ("On the Nature of Things") is an imitation of the scientific works of the Greek philosopher Empedocles, a follower of Epicurus. It seems to be a

materialistic work, referring to atoms long before they were discovered, and it seems to deny the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme, but its philosophy is close to the thinking of Gilgamesh: there is no eternal life, and men can free themselves from "anguish and distress of mind" and pursue pleasure (an Epicurean idea). The first line "*Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas*" ("Mother of the Aeneadae, pleasure of men and gods") addresses Venus as a figure of politics, myth and philosophy.[48] He invokes her as Muse, creator and guarantor of imperial peace. Lucretius contradicts the idea that in Epicureanism the gods do not intervene in mundane affairs.

Catullus

Catullus was influenced by the Greeks and Alexandrean poets such as Theocritus of Sicily (c.300-260BC) and Callimachus of Cyrene (c.305-240BC); hence his Alexandrine lines. He looked back to the brevity and direct style of Sappho, which he adapted to Latin in describing his affair in Verona with Lesbia, named after Sappho's Lesbos. She was later identified by Apuleius more than 150 years later as Clodia, sister of P. Clodius, Cicero's enemy, an immoral woman who turned Catullus's love into disgust and hatred.[49] Clodia was seven years older than Catullus, who was at first infatuated by her and soon came to loathe her because of her infidelities. He says she had 300 lovers, "bursting their groins" (11.15-24), and that she became a prostitute and went with anybody, including Egnatius (37). She was to be found plying her trade in alleyways (58).

Although regarded as a modernist, Catullus also wrote of archaic piety: "*Dianae sumus in fide*" (Poem 34 – "We are in trust of Diana"). In 'Peleus and Thetis', which reflects Greek mythology, he writes of the Golden Age: "In former times heaven-dwellers used to visit heroes' chaste homes in their full bodily presence and show themselves to mortal gathering when piety had not yet been spurned" (64.384-6). But, he says, after the age of sin began, the gods did not show themselves to humans. Human beings therefore no longer experienced the divine presence. Jupiter visited mortals during the Golden Age but now, Catullus says, humans and gods no longer eat together. In writing of gods visiting homes, Catullus may have been describing a *lectisternium* (images of gods at a banquet). In poem 68 Catullus shows a "shining goddess" ("*candida diva*"), who is actually his girlfriend arriving. She is seen in terms of an epiphany, or revelation, of a goddess.

Catullus writes of the fundamental theme of world literature in its absence, by saying it no longer happens. Jupiter does not visit homes and the only hint of a goddess is his girlfriend. In Catullus's work the Golden Age may be over and gods may not visit directly any more, but there is a strong sense of the soul seeking divine blessings among the explicit poems to Lesbia. In his envoy he prays that his addressee will receive divine blessings of the kind once bestowed by Thetis, and the world of the gods is never far away.

Prose: Cicero and Caesar

The 1st century BC was a stormy time. The Cataline conspiracy attempted to destroy the republic, and Julius Caesar fought a civil war with Pompey. It was a time when political eloquence flourished, and the key figure was Cicero, who modelled himself on the Greek Demosthenes and advanced Roman prose. He made four speeches as consul that saved Rome from the Cataline conspiracy – he talked of the gods' direct guidance and support against Cataline in a speech to the people – and 12 Philippic orations after the assassination of Julius Caesar. Cicero's philosophical dialogues, such as *De natura deorum* and *De divinatione* reflect his view that (despite his apparent secular worldly wisdom) the gods were behind everything. At home he entrusted the cult of the gods to his wife but always cultivated Minerva during political crises and spent months planning a shrine (*fanum*) for his dead daughter to achieve apotheosis. These works heralded in the Roman Golden Age of prose.

The role of the gods was emphasized in Varro's *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, which amassed antiquarian material about Roman religion. Julius Caesar's commentaries on the Gallic and civil wars were in the tradition of Thucydides, and his true beliefs about the gods can be gleaned from the fact that after ten volumes of silence about the gods in his *Commentarii* he cites a mass of omens and divine signs after his arrival in Asia:

> "It was established by counting back the total number of days that in the temple of Minerva at Elis, on the day that Caesar had fought his successful battle, a statue of Victory which had been placed in front of Minerva and had formerly faced the statue of Minerva had turned around towards the doors and threshold of the temple. On the same day, at Antioch in Syria, on two occasions there had been heard such a loud noise of an army shouting and trumpets sounding that the people put on armour and rushed to defend the walls. This same thing happened at Ptolemais. And in Pergama, in the hidden and secret temples, where it is forbidden for anyone but the priests to enter (the Greeks call them *adyta*), drums sounded. In Tralles, likewise, in the temple of Victory, where they had dedicated a statue of Caesar, they pointed out a palm tree which had sprung up in that period out of the pavement between the joints of the stones." (*De bello civili*, 3.1.5.3-6.)[50]

Caesar's travels were responsible for introducing the cult of Isis in the 1st century BC following his contact with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt (who also had a love affair with Mark Antony and contact with Octavian).[51]

Virgil

The height of the Golden Age was the Augustan Age, which succeeded the Ciceronian Age. After the Battle of Philippi, armies were disbanded. Tired of wars, men delighted in living in tranquillity. Virgil's pastoral *Eclogues* imitated Theocritus. They told of cattle seeking the cool of the

shade and the activities of shepherd boys (including one called Lycidas) and of the likes of the shepherdess Amaryllis.

However, Virgil introduced into his poetry an element of political allegory which had been largely absent in Theocritus. His vision of the Golden Age can be found in the fourth Eclogue, in which he intimated that a new Golden Age of peace and justice was about to return, which would perhaps counter Horace's pessimism in his sixteenth epode:

> *"Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas;*
> *magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo:*
> *iam redit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna;*
> *iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto."*
>
> "Now the last age of Cumae's prophecy has come;
> The great succession of centuries is born afresh.
> Now too returns the Virgin; Saturn's rule returns;
> A new begetting now descends from heaven's height."[52]

This has been called the "Messianic Eclogue" as it seems to foretell, in 40BC, the birth of a child who would bring back the Golden Age. The child may be Octavian's or Antony's rather than Jesus, and the language is probably Sibylline rather than influenced by Hebrew.

His *Georgics* (published two years after the battle of Actium) were about the tillage of the land, his father's cornfields, coppices and hives. The work was influenced by Hesiod, Aratos and Lucretius, and its title (*georgica*, Greek for "books on farming") was taken from Nikandros.

The Aeneid

All epics have one of two plots: war and a quest or journey. The *Iliad* is about war, the *Odyssey* about a journey. The *Aeneid* combines the two: a journey in the first half and war in the second. (I combined the two in my epics: both Eisenhower and Bush are on a journey while they fight their wars in *Overlord* and *Armageddon*.)

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature, the soul's quest for the infinite, is present within the *Aeneid*. Aeneas's quest for knowledge about Rome's coming greatness takes him to the Underworld and reunion with his father. He inhabits a universe in which the gods are in charge:

Juno, wife of Jupiter, is opposed to Aeneas in book 1. She persuades the wind-god Aeolus to scatter his fleet, which is blown towards Africa and Carthage. After Dido's suicide he returns to his kinsman Acestes in Segesta, Sicily, where his father dies. In book 4, Juno, appearing in human form, persuades Trojan women to burn his ships. Four are destroyed. The shade of his father has asked him to descend to the Underworld to consult him, and he goes to the Sibyl at Cumae, who tells him he must find the golden bough to gain entry into the lower world. Eventually, in the Elysian Fields he meets the beatified spirit of his father and is shown a pageant of the

souls of future Romans awaiting reincarnation, including Augustus. The cosmology adopted by Virgil suggests Pythagoreanism, with souls, polluted by experience on Earth having to be purified and cleansed in a kind of Purgatory before they can be born again. The beatified (the *pauci* or "few", 6.744) live permanently in Elysium. The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature, the purification of the soul to achieve union with the Light, is strongly present in Aeneas's visit to the Underworld.

The second half of the *Aeneid* is about Italy. In book 7 he meets Latinus, king of Latium, and his daughter Lavinia, whose suitor is Turnus, king of the Rutuli. Latinus wants Aeneas to marry Lavinia. Juno intrigues strife between Aeneas and Turnus. After a summary of Roman history in book 8, Aeneas visits Rome and in his absence Juno intrigues for Turnus to attack the Trojans' walled camp. In book 10, at a council of the gods and an angry debate between Juno and Venus, Jupiter declares that the outcome of the war must be left to Fate. Aeneas returns reinforced by Etruscans and there is an inconclusive battle, in the course of which his friend Pallas is killed. A truce is declared to bury the dead. Aeneas offers to settle the war in a single combat with Turnus. This takes place and Turnus is wounded and pleads for this life. Aeneas sees he is wearing Pallas's belt and kills him. During this narrative there are many references to traditional religious practices, which suggest Virgil's piety towards the gods.

Virgil's *Aeneid* looked back to Homer and a universe controlled by the gods. Virgil took over the Olympians from Homer, but the anthropomorphic gods are less satisfactory and more tedious as his tone is loftier than Homer's and the wrangling of the gods seems unworthy. The gods seem intruders. Nevertheless, they are present and order the universe as forces at work in human affairs, and mortals have epiphanies, moments of revelation, when gods appear to them. For example, in book 1 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is beautified by his mother Venus as he meets Dido. Aeneas " shone in the bright light, similar to a god in his face shoulders" (1.588-9). Where Catullus lamented that the gods were absent, Virgil celebrated their presence.

In Homer the Olympians are opposed by "*moira*" (or Moera, fate). In the *Aeneid*, the concept of Fate (*Fatum*) creates problems. Aeneas is a "chosen vessel" (*fato profugus*), and so the opposition of Juno is doomed to failure and seems foolish. Nevertheless, Aeneas's quest is on the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme.

Horace

Virgil's friend Horace – they journeyed to Brundisium in 37BC (Horace, *Satires*, 1.v) – lacked Virgil's depth of thought and breadth of reading. A soldier in Brutus's army who fought against Octavian/Augustus and was taken up by the patron Maecenas, who gave him his Sabine farm, he came to revere Augustus. He took his models from Greece: Archilochus of Paros, Alcaeus of Lesbos and Sappho. And he preached the Aristotelian doctrine of the Golden Mean (moderation in all things) in

exquisitely crafted verse. Though a man of the world who enjoyed friends, books and wine, Horace's world was dominated by the gods.

The *Epodes* belong to the time after Philippi when he was poor and friendless. He had lost his father's small estate and become a Treasury scribe. Slight, immature works, the *Epodes* show the influence of Archilochus' iambics and are full of invective, love and wine. His *Satires* (c.35BC) or *sermones* (sermons), chatty essays, are full of self-revelation, and are based on the satires of Lucilius. He spent seven years writing his *Odes*, which are influenced by Archilochus and Pindar, and follow Catullus in bringing "Aeolian verse to Italian measures" (*Odes* 3.30.13). The first three books came out together in 23BC and include an ode to the ship carrying Virgil to Greece some time before Virgil's last voyage in 19BC.

In Horace's *Odes* the gods are present as is the metaphysical aspect – along with the secular aspect – of the fundamental theme. He praises Jupiter and other gods. He hymns Diana, Venus and Mercury, and blatantly imitates Pindar. Pindar in his second Olympian asks the Muse, "What god, what hero, what man shall we celebrate?" and answers: Zeus, Heracles and Theron (the athlete he was serenading). Horace in his *Odes* (1.12) asks the Muse, "What man, hero or god shall we celebrate?" and after referring to Jupiter, Pallas and Liber (Dionysus), answers: Augustus, who is all three, following the establishing of the imperial cult.[53] Horace foretells his own immortality as a swan, Apollo's sacred bird.

Horace addresses gods as rustic images of piety (*Odes* 1.4; 3.8, 13, 18, 22-3). But in 3.22 he addresses Diana as he plants a pine by his villa and sacrifices a pig. This poem has been shown to have been written on 13 August, the birthday of Diana's temple on the Aventine Hill in Rome, and the day of Diana's festival in Italy. (It was the day Virgil's hero Aeneas spent in Evander's hut on the Palatine Hill where Augustus's palace would arise, along with temples to Diana and Apollo.) In other words, the private rites were linked with public rites, and Horace was writing within the context of the State religion.[54] In 3.23 Horace assures a rustic lady that her sacrifices have a role within Roman religion as they appease the Lares (household gods) and protect Italy from national disasters. Again the private rites of the *Odes* are linked to public rites.

Horace's late work made open reference to public rites, for Augustus commissioned him to write *Carmen saeculare* ("Song of the Age").[55] Horace undertook the work as an official duty in the same vein as a modern Poet Laureate. The *ludi saeculares* ("saecular games", ceremonial games held every *saeculum* or hundred years),[56] first staged in 249BC when the Sibylline oracle issued instructions, were revived by Augustus in 17BC, two years after the death of Virgil. The *Acta* of Augustus (discovered in 1890) record: "*Carmen composuit Q Horatius Flaccus*" ("the hymn was composed by Q Horatius Flaccus"),[57] and that a *carmen* was sung twice on the last of the three days of the *ludi* before

Apollo Palatinus and then before Jupiter Optimus Maximus. On the first night, 31 May, Augustus sacrificed in the Campus Martius, Rome, wearing Greek dress. At night he sacrificed nine male lambs and nine female kids to the Moerae (Greek) or Parcae (Latin), the Fates, and a pregnant sow to Terra Mater (Mother Earth). Augustus and Agrippa each sacrificed a bull to Jupiter and a cow to Juno.[58]

In the *Carmen*, Greek and Roman rituals blended:

> Horace begins by invoking Apollo and Diana. Stanza 2 is about Apollo's role as the new custodian of the Sibylline verses that controlled the *ludi*. Stanza 3 invokes Apollo as Sol, the sun, or Helios. There is an address to Ilithyia, goddess of childbirth. There are prayers to the Fates and the Earth.

Horace then returns to Apollo and Diana. The *Carmen* seems to turn to Jupiter and Juno, who must be addressed according to the *Acta*. However, they are not named. Virgil had suppressed the names of Apollo and Diana in his invocation in the *Georgics*, referring to them as "the extremely bright lights of the universe" (*clarissima mundi/lumina*, 1.5-6), and Horace now compensates for the suppressal of their names by invoking Apollo and his sister Diana as Phoebus, Sol, Lucina and Luna. Horace in turn suppresses Jupiter and Juno except for a brief mention of Jove (i.e. Jupiter) as Sky-god in line 32 and a mention of Jupiter's approval of the regime of Apollo and Diana in the last stanza. In other words, the Capitoline gods of the Republic have been replaced in the ritual by the Palatine gods of Augustus's Principate, and Horace's *Carmen* or song leaves Republican ritual behind to promote the new Augustan policy.

In the *Carmen* Horace presents Augustus's present actions as the fulfilment of the text of the *Aeneid*. Anchises, Aeneas's father, had prophesied that Augustus would achieve world dominance (*Aeneid* 6.792-800, lines that became a Sibylline oracle). Anchises says, in Sibylline language, "Remember, Roman,…to spare the conquered and battle down the proud" (*Aeneid* 6.851-3). In the *Carmen* Augustus is "superior to the one waging war, gentle to the prostrate enemy" (51-52), and his empire is world-wide (53-6). The *Carmen* tells us that Virgil's and Augustus's Sibylline oracles have come to pass.[59]

Officially the *Carmen* is a poem and not a rite, but by stating Augustus's new religious policy regarding Apollo and Diana so clearly, the *Carmen* has the force of a new rite.

Although Horace is more superficial than Virgil and his poems reflect a narrow range of subject, with limits of thought and feeling in accordance with the "golden mean", and would verge on the dull but for their minute elaboration and felicity, the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature can be found in his work as the soul opens to Apollo during private and public rites. Augustus is a god like the Egyptian Pharaoh under the developing imperial cult which came

to see the Roman Emperor as a god during his lifetime. The cult socialised divinity. In *Odes* 3.25 Horace writes of "how to insert the eternal glory of Caesar among the stars and the council of Jupiter?" In *Epistles* 2.1.5-17 Horace says that Augustus is superior to the other demi-gods as he is honoured during his lifetime as a god rather than having to wait until after his death. Poets are the "temple-keepers" (*aeditui*) of the great (229-31). In Augustus's case the temple-keepers are Virgil, Horace and Varius (*Carmen*, 247).[60]

Elegists: Tibullus and Propertius

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme also lurks within the works of the elegists Cornelius Gallus, Tibullus and Sextus Propertius.

Tibullus (who hated war and thought constantly of Delia, a plebeian named Plania) writes of rustic piety, following Callimachus. The first poem of his second book enacts a festival of purification, the Ambarvalia celebrated in late May for his local farm, a ritual that controlled the environment. It warded off disasters during ploughing and weaving, and being overrun by weeds and wolves.

Propertius, who was also influenced by Callimachus, writes of Cynthia (whose real name was Hostia, who died c.18BC). But he also writes about the cults of Bona Dea ("The good goddess") and Hercules at the Ara Maxima (4.9). He commemorated the *ludi quinquennales* for the festival of Apollo Palatine in 16BC. In poem 31 he tells Cynthia he is late because he has been looking at the new temple of Apollo Palatinus.[61] The elegists focused on everyday life within a universe whose natural rhythms were dominated by the gods.

Ovid

Ovid's debut was his love-elegies on Corinna (who may not have had a real-life inspirer like Lesbia, Delia or Cynthia). These elegies passed into *Amores*. The six books of the *Fasti* present a calendar for half the year, a record of festivals and anniversaries drawn from astronomy, history, legend, folk-lore and religion. Ovid's aim was to study ritual in the light of ancient records ("*annalibus eruta priscis*", *Fasti*, 1.7-10).[62] They seem to be based on the *Aetia* of Callimachus. Book 6 includes a long section on Vesta's feast day on 9 June (249-348).

Ovid asks how Vesta could best be represented in art. He claims to be aware of a divine power communicating with him (251-6): "I was lost in prayer: I felt the influence of celestial divinity, and the glad earth gleamed with purple light. Not that I saw you, goddess – away with the lies of bards! – you were not one to be seen by a man. But the things I didn't know, concerning which I was held in error, were understood without anyone giving me information."

Metamorphoses

Though influenced by Virgil, Ovid produced a work that is not unified

enough to be regarded as epic but is often (wrongly) regarded as epic: *Metamorphoses*. In 15 books based on Theocritus he adopted a systematic, encyclopaedic approach to mythography, focusing on bodies transformed into new shapes. Many of his chosen myths present gods. The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature, the quest for Reality, is in the transformations he recounts; for example, in his tales of Jason, Orpheus, Ulysses and Aeneas.

Ovid restates the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme in terms of mythology and transformation in 250 mythical tales which span from the creation of the world to the reign of Augustus. The underlying theme of the arrangement of the myths in *Metamorphoses* is of the transformation of chaos into an ordered universe.[63] The transformation of chaos is followed by a sweep through Greek mythology, which embodies and illustrates stages of the fundamental quest, beginning with Jupiter reporting to the gods on the transformation of man into beast and continuing with Apollo's slaying of the python and love for Daphne and with myths of quest: Jason, Theseus, Orpheus and Ulysses. Ovid progesses to the Trojan War.

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme can be found in both Greek mythology and the Trojan War, as we have seen. Ovid presents the escape of Aeneas to Italy, the Roman kings, the transformation of Julius Caesar into a star – reminiscent of the Egyptian Pharaoh becoming the sun-god and dwelling among the circumpolar stars – which is to the glory of his adopted son Augustus. Book 15 asserts that it is the greatest glory of Julius Caesar to be "father" of Augustus.

But Ovid's flattery of Augustus did him no good. In AD8 he was banished by Augustus to Tomis on the Black Sea, his books were withdrawn from Roman libraries to counter his claim in the last lines of *Metamorphoses*, "If there be any truth in poets' prophecies, I shall live to all eternity, immortalized by fame." He himself said he committed "two crimes, a song and a blunder" ("*duo crimina carmen et error*", *Tristia*, 2.207). No doubt his *Ars Amatoria* ("The Art of Love"), which some felt was depraved, was the "*carmen*", for Augustus was trying to restore morality and marriage and would have felt undermined by Ovid, whose verses he may have held responsible for the adultery of his granddaughter, the younger Julia, with D. Silanus. But the work was ten years old when he was banished, and can only have been a pretext for the banishment. The "error" seems to have involved his accidental discovery of hidden information about the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which Augustus wanted to keep secret. It may have involved his daughter Julia. (I wrote a verse play, *Ovid Banished*, on the tyrannical persecution of the artist by the embodiment of the world government of the Roman time, and further details are discussed in the Preface to that work.)

Ovid's artifice made some of his earlier work seem artificial. His elegiac last works from exile, the autobiographical *Tristia* and *Epistolae ex Ponto*, reveal a wretched soul who longs for Rome and pleads unsuccessfully to be allowed back.

In the poems of Catullus, Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, Horace's *Odes*, Ovid's *Amores* and in the elegies of Tibullus and Propertius a secular stream of verse exists alongside the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme.

Seneca and Lucan

The Golden Age included the history of Livy but was already in decline when Seneca wrote, "They have forgotten to speak the Latin tongue at Rome." He expounded Stoic philosophy in 12 Dialogues and wrote his tragedies, which worked out the Stoic doctrine of practical necessity in action. These plays would influence Corneille and Racine, and the Elizabethan dramatists including Shakespeare. Seneca's nephew Lucan wrote an epic poem, *Pharsalia* (on the civil war between Pompey and Caesar), which breaks off in the tenth book of a 12-book scheme. It is a vision of the dying Republic as the Roman people suffer from a fratricidal civil war and are subjected to slavery under Caesar's tyranny. The work is an anti- *Aeneid* in the sense that it despises rather than glorifies Augustus's forebear, Julius Caesar.

The Silver Age

The Silver Age of Roman literature accommodated Statius, the Elder Pliny, Martial, Quintilian, Tacitus, Juvenal (who satirized vices), the Younger Pliny, Suetonius, Apuleius, the *Pervigilium Veneris* ("The Night Watch of Venus"), Tertullian and other Latin-Christian patristic writers. The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature can be found in a number of their works, and in the works of Lesser Augustans and other Roman authors too numerous to consider here. In this work I am stating the two aspects of the fundamental theme of world literature in terms of the line of the Universalist tradition, and it is important to preserve the clarity of the line by concentrating on the main reflecters of the metaphysical and secular aspects of the fundamental theme in each age, and not to clutter it with too many minor writers.

The Christian Classical World

The end of the classical period in the Imperial Roman world was marked by the steady rise of Christianity.

The New Testament

The *New Testament* reflects the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme of world literature.

The three synoptic Gospels (*Mark*, *Matthew* and *Luke*, ADc.65-83) describe Jesus's transfiguration by the Light on Mount Tabor in ADc.28, and his Gilgamesh-like quest for eternal life in Heaven. Jesus was a preacher of the Light, and many of the parables were about the Light.[64] He came into conflict with the Sadducean Jewish hierarchy and the


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Clement's *gnosis* was knowledge of God: becoming a part of the Being of God, an experience which anticipated the experience of immortality. In *Miscellanies* (7.10.57) he writes: "And so knowledge easily translates the soul to the Divine and Holy which is akin to it, and by its own light conveys a man through the stages of mystery until it restores him at last through the supernal place of rest, teaching the man who is pure of heart to gaze on God, face to face, with perfect silence and understanding." Clement restated the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme.

The Golden Ass

The Roman Empire Romanized the local gods throughout the Empire and identified them with the gods of Roman State religion. Jupiter was adopted in place of Zeus, Taran, Baal and Sol, and the Germanic Wotan/Odin became Mercury. The syncretizing process gathered force from the Christian movement towards monotheism, and Jupiter-Sol became the chief Roman god in the 3rd century. The Isis mysteries involved the Light.

In *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius,[66] Lucius is initiated into the Isis mysteries in Corinth. The priest's head was shaved, and a metal receptacle for alcohol was placed on it. The alcohol was set alight in a dark room, and it shone for some seconds. Lucius reports that there "came from Isis a Light and other unutterable things conducive to salvation….I will record as much as I may lawfully record for the uninitiated….At midnight I saw the sun shining as if it were noon." The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme lurks behind this description: the soul turns away from the senses and, following the example of the light in a darkened room caused by blazing alcohol on the priest's head, experiences the metaphysical Light.

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

The Desert Fathers now restated the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme. Constantine founded Constantinople and made it the Roman capital in 330. There was now an alliance between the Church and the Roman State, and many contemplatives chose to leave for the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine in the 4th century. They joined ascetics driven into the desert by the Roman persecutions of Decius. (In 250 all Roman citizens were ordered to sacrifice to the Roman State gods in the presence of commissioners, and many Christians defied this edict.)

Many had been influenced by Manichaean asceticism and by Clement's Christian Gnosticism. In the clean desert air many lived to great ages. Anthony the Hermit, who lived to be 105, Pachomius, Gregory of Nyssa and St Ephraem Syrus in the 360s, and John the Dwarf all reflected the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme in sayings that passed into print:[67] their souls withdrew from the life of the senses and were (in the words of Gregory of Nyssa) "made bright and luminous…in communion with the real Light". Christ acted on their


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Romantic Literature

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme's quest for Reality was immensely strong during the Romantic Age.

The Romantic Revolution

The Romantic Revolution began in Germany. It evolved from the *Sturm und Drang* movement of the early 1770s and the view of Goethe and Schiller that art is the spontaneous expression of the personal experience of the individual artist's creative genius. The German Romantics of 1797 were based in Jena. The group, which included Novalis, the philosopher Schelling and Hölderlin, revolved round the brothers Friedrich and August Schlegel, and it was Friedrich Schlegel who first used the word "Romantic" in a literary context.

The English Romantic movement of 1798 had its origins in Blake's 1789 *Songs of Innocence*. Wordsworth and Coleridge brought out *The Lyrical Ballads* on 4 October 1798. By then they were making a long visit to Germany to make contact with the German Romantic movement, having left England on 16 September and remaining in Wordsworth's case until April, and in Coleridge's case until July, 1799. Coleridge studied physiology and *Bible* criticism, and steeped himself in German metaphysics, at the University of Göttingen while Wordsworth lived in Goslar (at 86 Breitestrasse). There is no record of their meeting Goethe, but they both met Klopstock in September.

The English movement was relatively undoctrinaire: the word "Romantic" does not appear in Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* or Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. There was therefore no great breach in the continuity between English Neoclassical and Romantic literature, which had evolved from Gray and Cowper, as W. Jackson Bate first pointed out in *From Classic to Romantic*.

French Romanticism was arrested by the French Revolution, for Neoclassicism was restored and from 1790 to 1820 it was dangerous to question the official line in literature, especially under Napoleon's Imperial rule. Lamartine introduced Romanticism into French poetry in 1820, and Hugo introduced it into French drama in 1830.

Romanticism was thus a German-English, or Anglo-Saxon,

movement. It surfaced after a wave of Evangelical Protestantism, a "religion of the heart" that swept through both countries. It contained both Realist and Idealist strands. Wordsworth's poems about solitaries (for example 'Michael' and 'The Solitary Reaper') are realistic whereas his sense in the *The Prelude* of "unknown modes of being" suggests an Idealist outlook. Idealism holds that Reality is approached through the mind. The Idealist strand was the stronger as the best English Romantics saw behind the Neoclassical "inanimate, cold world" (Coleridge's 'Dejection: An Ode') to the infinite, eternal Reality beyond it. The Greek "*meta*" can mean "behind" as we saw on p.2, and so the Romantics' metaphysical Reality was the Reality *behind* the physical world.

The English Romantic Imagination

The English Romantic poets believed that they were linked to this infinite Reality through their imagination.

Whereas the Neoclassical poets had written in general terms of common experience, dwelling on familiar appearance as interpreters, and had regarded the imagination as "fancy" (visual impressions and metaphors) that should be controlled by their rational "judgement", the English Romantic poets saw themselves as creators rather than interpreters, and they believed that they created from the active imagination which reflected God's shaping of the universe, not from the passive part of the mind which recorded impressions, as Locke, described and was "a lazy looker-on on an external world" (Coleridge)[1]. They mistrusted all views of the mind and the universe that were based on Locke's mechanistic approach, as Coleridge made clear: "If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God's image,…there is ground for suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system."[2]

To the Romantics the imagination was the most vital of the mind's activities, and it was the source of spiritual energy. It connected the mind to the infinite, and its inspiration was God operating in the human soul, whose immortality it guaranteed, as Blake wrote:

> "This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite and Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination."[3]

Coleridge took this up and claimed that the imagination reflected the workings of the creative activity of God:

> "The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[4]

This view was also held by Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. Shakespeare had also been aware of it for in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus suggests that the imagination bears no relation to external reality: "The poets' eye in a fine frenzy rolling,/Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;/And, as imagination bodies forth/The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen/Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing/a local habitation and a name." Hippolyta contradicts him, saying that the imagination's images are not "airy nothing" but represent reality: "But all the story of the night told over,/And all their minds transfigur'd so together,/More witnesseth than fancy's images,/And grows to something of great constancy,/But, howsoever, strange and admirable."[5]

To the English Romantic poets, the imagination is a form of insight that reveals truth as Light which the ordinary rational mind cannot see. Blake explained: "Mental things are alone Real; what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, and its Existence an Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought? Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool?"[6] According to a 'Fragment' in Blake the materialist scientific theories of Democritus and Newton could not deny the divine Light: "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." Blake is referring to the tent of the tabernacle in which the divine Light shone. The tents are an image to present the Romantic imagination as the Light.

The Romantics' quest for Reality as Light through the imagination expressed the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme. It was a search for an unseen world that inspired their minds from beyond, appealing not to their logical mind but to their complete self, and turned them into poets. Blake rejected the Neoclassical generalising of Johnson:

> "To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess….What is General Nature? is there Such a Thing? what is General Knowledge? is there such a Thing? Strictly Speaking All Knowledge is Particular."[7]

Contact with the unseen world fused the poet's soul with the divine, an experience Coleridge sought to capture in 'Kubla Khan': "And all should cry, Beware! Beware!/His flashing eyes, his floating hair!/Weave a circle round him thrice,/And close your eyes with holy dread,/For he on honey-dew hath fed,/And drunk the milk of Paradise."

To Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats the visible world mirrored eternity. They wrote of the search for an ulterior Reality and saw the

imagination as a divine power, the power of the Light, from which everything real derives. This Reality manifests into, and is masked by, visible things. As Blake wrote: “One Power alone makes a Poet: Imagination, The Divine Vision.”[8] In ‘Auguries of Innocence’ he describes this masked Reality: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand/And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,/Hold infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour.”

To the English Romantic poets, the visible world mirrored, and was a tangible symbol of, the invisible world, and so a spiritual Reality was at work in all living things. It poured into the soul. The ultimate Reality expressed itself in the imagination, the power which creates and reveals. The senses’ appreciation of beauty revealed absolute Reality which the visible world masked. Beauty therefore revealed truth: the ultimately real that is permanent and universal. For Wordsworth, the imagination links to the One and is known by children. It is still known by mature poets, who have retained the childhood power in later life: “For feeling has to him imparted power/That through the growing faculties of sense/Doth like an agent of the one great Mind/Create, creator and receiver both,/Working but in alliance with the works/Which it beholds.”[9]

Wordsworth saw the imagination as Reason, saying it “Is but another name for absolute power/And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,/And Reason in her most exalted mood.”[10] Most of the other English Romantic poets, however, saw the imagination as superior to Reason, dethroning the supreme position Reason held under Neoclassicism. Shelley wrote of poetic images as “nurslings of immortality” in *Prometheus Unbound*, in which a Spirit describes the poet: “He will watch from dawn to gloom/The lake-reflected sun illume/The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom/Nor heed nor see, what things they be;/But from these create he can/Forms more real than living man,/Nurslings of immortality!” The implication is that humans are being nursed by Nature towards immortality.

To the English Romantic poets, imagination was a unifying faculty. Coleridge asserted “the esemplastic power of imagination”.[11] “Esemplastic” comes from the Greek “*eis en plattein*” (Coleridge; *plassein* in *Shorter English Dictionary*, see p.3), “to mould into One”. To Coleridge, the imagination makes bits into a whole in a process that is the opposite of the reason’s analysis, which makes distinctions and reduces into bits. Shelley followed him in seeing the imagination as a unifier. Poetry to him was “the expression of the Imagination” because it brought diverse things together in harmony instead of separating them through analysis. In *A Defence of Poetry* he wrote that the poet “not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time”. He adds, “A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one.”

Reality is a timeless, unchanging, complete order, and the visible world is a broken reflection of it. The poet uncovers the invisible absolute real that is behind visible phenomena. He presents the whole in its unity and shows that the phenomenal depends on the real unity behind it, the many on the One.

Through the imagination the English Romantic poets found an unseen transcendental order which explains the world of appearances. The Romantic movement was an attempt by the solitary soul to discover the world of spirit. It is an expedition into the unknown, the quest for Reality of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme given fresh expression. Through their poetry poets were able to penetrate into a world denied to most of their fellow human beings who saw only the visible world, and their creations were embodiments of eternal things perceived by the imagination. The English Romantic poets saw the visible world as within the infinite Reality of the metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme, which made humans “nurslings of immortality”.

A great influence on Romanticism, and on the development of its view of the imagination, was Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, who revived an anti-Christian Neoplatonism. Romanticism therefore lay outside the mainstream Christian tradition. He inspired the first generation of English Romantic poets.

Blake

The metaphysical aspect of the fundamental theme returns with the mystic William Blake, a printer, engraver and artist as well as poet who illustrated and published his own work. Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* contain complementary poems with opposite perspectives, that suggest “the two contrary states in the human soul” and his doctrine of contraries.

Songs of Innocence contains poems of childhood simplicity that convey a world that is good. *Songs of Experience* presents a world contaminated by unnatural restraint, frustration and evil. The two “contraries” are reconciled in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in which soul and body are no longer identified with reason and evil: “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul….Energy is the only life, and is from the Body….Energy is Eternal Delight.”

Blake reconciled Taylor’s pagan Neoplatonism with Swedenborg’s spiritual Light, which Swedenborg believed is inwardly within the natural light of the sun. There was therefore a Neoplatonist dimension of four ascending (or here descending) worlds behind the “fourfold vision” Blake referred to in verses within his letter to Butts of 22 November 1802. He writes that these “were composed about a twelve month ago, while walking from Felpham to Lavant to meet my Sister”: “Now I a fourfold vision see,/And a fourfold vision is given to me;/’Tis fourfold in my supreme delight/And threefold in soft Beulah’s night/And twofold Always. May God us keep/From Single vision & Newton’s sleep!” The fourfold vision is of the Light, as the first two lines of the poem make

readings are from Robert B. Blakney's translation.
40. See W.T. De Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, pp.70-5. In Eliade, *op. cit.*, p.604.
41. *EB*, 1.12.
42. On the stele of Hammurabi in the Louvre the king is represented as receiving a collection of laws known as the Code of Hammurabi from Shamash. Bas-relief from Sousa, 18th century BC. See *EB*, 11.1002.
43. *EB*, X.786. See also E.O. James, *op. cit.*, p.217.
44. Leo Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, pp.362-4.
45. *EB*, 19.1176.

2. The Literature of the Classical World

1. Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess, The World of Old Europe*, pp.372-3.
2. John Ferguson, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions*, p.53. For the *telesterion* as Underworld, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p.287.
3. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p.53.
4. The bull with the "rosette" is in the National Museum, Athens. For an illustration, See Sinclair Hood, *The Arts in Prehistoric Greece*, p.163.
5. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p.137.
6. According to the scholar Wilamowitz **(**Emmo Friedrich Richard Ulrich Von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff) in *Die Ilias und Homer*, Berlin, 1916. Eratosthenes, in his lost *Chronographiai* (c.220 BC), dated the Fall of Troy to 1183BC, as we know from surviving fragments of ancient chronography.
7. *EB*, see IX.8 for Achaeans/ *Ahhiyawa* as Sea Peoples and *EB*, I.56 for identification of the Achaeans with the Mycenaeans. See also *EB*, I.819.
8. T.A. Sinclair, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, p.19.
9. Xenophanes of Colophon, Fragment. 23-5 (170-2), in G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp.169-70.
10. C.M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*, pp.17-21.
11. Peter, Levi, *The Pelican History of Greek Literature*, p.38.
12. *The Odes of Pindar*, trans. by C.M. Bowra, p.xvi.
13. *The Odes of Pindar*, trans. by Geoffrey S. Conway, p.144.
14. Clement, *Stromateis*, v109, 1 and Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 23.11, 23.20; quoted in Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *op. cit.*, p.169; and in Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists*, p.28.
15. Simplicius, *op. cit.*, 22.26-23.20; quoted in Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp.43-4.
16. Heracleitus, *On the Universe*, in Hypocrates, trans. by W.H.S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library, vol. IV, p.47; Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *op. cit.*, p.198; Long, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, p.99.
17. Charles H. Khan, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, pp.128, 28-43 and 248ff.
18. Plato, *Cratylus*, 401d, 411b, 436e, 440. Also *Philebus*, 43a; *Symposium*, 207d; *Theaetetus*, 160d, 177c, 179d, 181d, 183a. Quoted by Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *op. cit.*, p.186.
19. Heracleitus, *op. cit.*, p483.
20. Waterfield, *op. cit.*, p.53-5. For space as a plenum, see David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p.191.
21. Long, *op. cit.*, p.119.
22. Long, *op. cit.*, pp.125-7. Also, Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *op. cit.*, pp.268, 277.
23. Long, *op. cit.*, pp.126-7.
24. Kirk, Raven and Schofield, *op. cit.*, p.191.
25. Quoted in Walter Blair, *The History of World Literature*, p.45.
26. Plato, *Sophist*, 242d.
27. Plato, *Republic*, VII, 540.
28. Plato, *Republic*, VII, 515a, 532b.
29. Plutarch, *On the Soul*, quoted in Stobaues IV, translated by George Mylonas in *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*; Edwin Hatch, *Greek Influence*, pp.295-8, quoted in Goblet D'Alviella, *The Mysteries of Eleusis*, p.122, note 30.
30. Plato, *Selected Myths*, ed. by Catalin Partenie, p.76
31. Plato, *Selected Myths*, *op. cit.*, p.143, note on 250c.
32. Plato, *Republic*, VII, 514-5. A "subterranean cavern" is mentioned in the first three lines of Book VII.
33. Raphael, *Initiation into the Philosophy of Plato*, p.71.
34. Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, p.51.
35. Plato, *Selected Myths*, ed. Partenie, *op. cit.*, pp.8ff, 40ff, 57ff and 69ff.
36. Quoted in Peter Levi, *The Pelican History of Greek Literature*, p.384.
37. *EB*, 15.1085.
38. *EB*, III.984.
39. *EB*, 15.1061.
40. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p.123.
41. *EB*, 15.1065-6. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p.1311.
42. *EB*, 15.1063.
43. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, p.178.
44. J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome*, p.39.
45. *EB*, 15.1061; Jocelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*, p.38.
46. Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome*, p.100.
47. J.W. Mackail, *Latin Literature*, p.30.
48. Feeney, *op. cit.*, p.16.
49. Apuleius, *Apologia* ("Defence"), 10. H. E. Butler and A. S. Owen, *Apulei Apologia*, Oxford, 1914 http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=Apulei+Apologia%2C+Oxford%2C+1914&x=0&y=0
50. Quoted in Feeney, *op. cit.*, p.20.
51. *EB*, 15.1121.