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On the Unknown

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The prophecy of Isaiah presents the paradox of a people who cannot know what he is teaching them, and will suffer accordingly, because they are to be prevented from knowing. The gospel of Mark explores this paradox. The paradox becomes greater and stranger when one considers other Biblical texts that affirm that Israel does know, and other nations do not. Knowing is a particularly powerful and direct, personal process that involves all five senses. The books of Job and Jonah present ironic comedies about unknowing, which can be innocently disingenuous or maliciously intentional. The Hebrew prophets severally intimate that we cannot know what God knows because He knows all His creation, particularly the animals, in a way we cannot. Secrecy involves knowing something oneself and keeping others from knowing it. There is a "Secret Gospel of Mark" about such secrecy, and it is suggested that its discoverer and his critics both failed to know the text because their prejudices became a barrier to understanding. The author proposes the stories of Elijah and Elisha as a basis for the "Secret Gospel", and presents a Hasidic parallel to it. Prejudice is a harmful kind of unknowing, but many cling to it: the only way out, it is suggested, is faith in the realm of God — perhaps ironically, in the ultimate Unknown.

Keywords: Alexander Pushkin, Isaiah, Deuteronomy, Psalter, Mark, *beli-da'at* (Hebrew, "without knowledge"), Harold Bloom, Morton Smith, Yeghishe Charents, Jorge Luis Borges, "Secret Gospel of Mark", Job, Jonah, Elijah, Elisha, Hasidism, animals, Nikolai Gumilev, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Osip Mandelstam, Fr. Pavel Florensky.

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Там на неведомых дорожках
Следы невиданных зверей…

(*There on unknown paths*
Are the tracks of unseen beasts…)

А. С. Пушкин[1].

The job of a prophet is to speak on behalf of God, offering moral instruction and warning, and, often, foretelling the future. If he fulfills that task, will his au-

[1] A. S. Pushkin, Prologue to "Ruslan and Ludmila" (1828). See: *Russell J. R.* The Curving Shore of Space and Time: Notes on the Prologue to Pushkin's Ruslan and Ludmila // Shoshannat Yaakov: Jewish and Iranian Studies in Honor of Yaakov Elman / ed. S. Fine and Sh. Secunda. Leiden: Brill, 2012. P. 318–365 for a discussion of these lines and a Neoplatonic interpretation of the prologue. I like the couplet for its parallel assonance, old as the Indo-European ancestry of the Russian language, of *ved-* "know" and *vid-* "see" — concepts that are associated also and importantly, as we shall see presently, in Biblical Hebrew.

dience listen and take his advice? One would hope so, otherwise why go to the trouble? But at the very start of his voluminous prophecy, which only Jeremiah exceeds in length in Scripture, Isaiah declares (1:2–3): *Shimʿu shamayim ve-haʾazini ereṣ ki Hashem diber banim gidalti ve-romamti ve-hem pashʿu vi. Yadaʿ shor qonehu ve-ḥamor avus baʿalav Yiśrael loʾ yadaʿ ʿami loʾ hitbonan.* "Listen, heaven, and give ear, earth[2], for the Lord spoke: 'I raised sons, exalted them high, and they sinned against Me. The ox knows its owner[3]; and the donkey, its masters' stable. Israel does not know; My nation does not ponder deeply'". In 6:9–10, the prophet repeats the Divine command: *Lekh ve-amarta la-ʿam ha-zeh shimʿu shamoʿa ve-al tavinu u-reʾu raʾo ve-al tedaʿu.* "Go and say to this people, 'Listen carefully[4] but do not understand, and see clearly but do not know'". In the first statement, the prophet swears, on behalf of God, that his audience do not know about their Master what even dumb animals do about theirs. In the second, his God goes farther: they are to be prevented from knowing.

Isaiah, with his vivid prophecy of the Messiah and the messianic age, was of course believed by the authors of the Gospels to have been foretelling Christ, and therefore they quote him often. Mark, the most laconic and enigmatic of the Gospels, does so. We shall have more to say about him presently: his book ends abruptly and strangely with the women beside themselves with terror, running from the empty tomb of the risen Christ (16:8)[5]. Instead of the soothing, uplifting, inspiring Sermon on the Mount to be found in Matthew, the text that is parallel to the episode in the fourth chapter of Mark has Christ tell parables to a throng assembled on the lake shore of the Sea of Galilee. The text recounts only one of these. When the people disperse, the disciples tell Christ they did not understand the parable either — the implication is that the crowd had made even less sense of it. Exasperated, He scolds them for having received "the secret of the kingdom of God" but still failing to comprehend His teaching stories. Then he quotes Isaiah 6 at them — the passage we considered above. Mark doesn't trouble to identify the quotation: no help to the reader from that quarter.

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[2] Isaiah reverses the order of the verbs in Deuteronomy 32:1, *Haʾazinu ha-shamayim ve-adabera ve-tishmaʿ ha-areṣ imrei fi.* Why? Rashi suggests that this way both giving ear and hearing apply to both witnesses, heaven and earth, leaving no possibility of excuse or denial like "I strained my ear but I didn't hear anything" or "I heard something but I wasn't paying attention". Moses, speaking in Deuteronomy 4, to be considered presently, adds seeing to the acts of witnesses.

[3] Hebrew *qanah* means both "acquire, buy, own" and "create", the latter being the primary meaning in Biblical Hebrew. Ps. 104:24, … *malʾa ha-areṣ qinyanekha* clearly does not mean "the earth is full of Thy purchases" — as though its Creator had gone on a shopping spree. The overtone in Isaiah, then, is that even the dumb beast of burden knows Who made it, but Israel, God's chosen people, neither knows nor will take the necessary time and trouble to meditate on the matter.

[4] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks used to translate this double verb construction in a vivid and idiomatic way: "Listen, no, really listen!".

[5] Writers in antiquity composed various positive endings to explain and round out the story. Editions such as the New English Bible encumber and spoil the conclusion of the text with such bowdlerizing appendages.

Matthew, who is, unlike Mark, evidently concerned to help his reader know and understand, does note Isaiah by name. He also adds other parables and makes them easy to understand. Frank Kermode, for whom Mark is the archetype of secrecy in literature[6], speaks of "the gloomy ferocity of Mark's Jesus", who takes the fullest advantage of what Harold Bloom calls "Isaiah's bitter irony, in which [Hashem][7] sends forth a willing prophet while remarking that he will not be understood"[8]. Unknowing and the unknown are themes in the foreground of Mark, much more than in the other Gospels. Let us consider the structure of the episode in Mark 4: First, Jesus tells one of His parables. Second, where one might expect a response from a perspicacious audience, His disciples, instead of the reaction that *Rezeptionstheorie* would dictate, there is simple bafflement. Third, the teller of the parable is annoyed and disappointed. Here one might draw a parallel with Isaiah 5, which begins with God, through His prophet, expounding the parable of the vineyard belonging to His beloved. Instead of choice grapes, the vineyard brought forth smelly rubbish. Then God asks Judah and Jerusalem to explain why this is: they, after all, are the beloved of whom He has just spoken. The parable is about them. But, God declares, in a *tour de force* of assonance, instead of *mishpaṭ*, justice, they have produced *miśpaḥ*, bloodshed; instead of *ṣedaqa*, righteousness, *ṣeʿaqa*, cries of pain. God concludes (5:13): *la-khen gala ʿami mi-beli-daʿat* "And so, My nation is exiled because of [its] not-knowing". Like Jesus' disciples and initiates, who should have understood yet did not, Judah and Jerusalem ought to have known, but did not, and their grievous predicament is the consequence. In the next verse, in a sort of meta-play on words, in this case on *beli-daʿat* to highlight it, God (or Isaiah) growls that the underworld Sheol has opened wide its maw *li-beli-ḥoq* "for the one without-ordinance"[9]. In Isaiah 5, as later in Mark 4, it is all about unknowing.

Israel doesn't know the most important things in Isaiah's time, and seems to persist in steadfast ignorance of them, either constitutionally or willfully, centuries later during the life of Christ. But other Biblical passages assert plainly that Israel does, or at least should, know the kind of crucial spiritual and ethical truths that prophets are sent to remind them about. Deuteronomy 4 begins with what should by now be a familiar attention-getter, *Ve-ʿata Yiśrael shemaʿ* "And

[6] *Kermode F.* The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.

[7] Bloom makes free use of a standard vocalized form of the four-letter Name of the Lord, the Tetragrammaton. Practicing Jews substitute the euphemism *Hashem*, meaning "the Name". I have done so here and in citations of Biblical texts. The title of *Bloom H.* Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine. New York: Riverhead, 2005, contains the vocalized Tetragrammaton, and it is reproduced as it stands, for the sake of precision.

[8] *Bloom H.* Jesus and Yahweh. P. 34, 66–68.

[9] *Ḥoq* is the first member of the ubiquitous formula, with its counterpart *mishpaṭ*, "laws and ordinances". The former have a rational basis and explanation and correspond to human concepts of justice; the latter, however, are arbitrary, divine, and not susceptible to rational explanation or justification. Though both kinds of Torah law are to be followed simply because God has commanded them, ordinances such as that of the *para aduma*, the red cow, indicate more directly a Divine origin.

now, Israel, listen" and Moses summons heaven and earth as witnesses (4:26). Isaiah was copying Moses' format, of course, though this essay has reversed the chronological order. He, Moses, then insists (4:35) *Ata har'eta la-da'at ki Hashem hu' ha-Elohim ein 'od mi-le-vado* "You have been made to see in order to know that the Lord, He is God — there is none else other than Him". This striking reminder became so important that it is chanted in the synagogue every Shabbat before the opening of the Ark and the reading of the Torah[10]. And towards the end of *Musaf*, the Additional Service of the Sabbath, one reads the Six Remembrances, which hark back to the same knowledge enforced by sight, and to the events of the Exodus. These are mostly citations of Deuteronomy, and one is from the very same chapter as *Ata har'eta…* Deuteronomy 4:9–10: *Raq hishamer lekha u-shemor nafshekha me'od pen tishkaḥ et ha-devarim asher ra'u 'einekha…* "Only take care for yourself and guard your [bodily] soul very much, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw…"[11]. It is fair to say then that the reminder that one has known by seeing, with the injunction not to forget what one has seen, is a theme that pervades the liturgy, that encloses it. One might even suggest that a purpose of Sabbath prayer is to enter *in illo tempore*, to become a witness, to see and know. In Chabad Hasidism, the clause "there is none else other than Him" is interpreted, radically but rationally, to mean that nothing other than God really exists at all[12]. The second-person singular of Deuteronomy 4:35 suggests an immediate appeal by Moses the impassioned orator, not just collectively to the Children of Israel, but to each individual amongst them, asserting personal experience and assigning individual responsibility.

What was shown, that is, made visible to the eye, was the giving of the Torah at Sinai, when Israel *saw* the Divine sounds or voices (*qolot*, Exodus 20:15)[13]. A reader of the Bible can plead, "I wasn't born yet, so I couldn't have been there," but Rabbinic exegesis anticipates and dismisses such an alibi: *Be-khol dor va-dor ḥayav adam li-r'ot et 'aṣmo ke-ilu hu' yaṣa' mi-miṣrayim she-ne'emar, ba-'avur zeh 'aśa Hashem li be-ṣe'ti mi-miṣrayim* "In every generation a man must see himself as though he had departed from Egypt, as is said, 'because of this which the Lord did for me on my departure from Egypt'"[14]. What one hears with the ear alone is not certain; but that which one both sees and hears cannot be dismissed. Hence the Armenian word for "true", *čšmarit*, is a loan from Iranian going back

[10] *Siddur Tehillat Hashem nusach ha-Ari* Zal ("Prayer book 'Praise of the Lord' according to the custom of Rabbi Isaac Luria"). Brooklyn: Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, 5764/2004. P. 222.

[11] Ibid. P. 247.

[12] This idea, that only God really exists, is the subject of the treatise *Mi khamokha* ("Who is like unto You [O Lord]") 5629 [AD 1869] by the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Admo"r Shmuel Schneersohn: see *Admo"r Shmuel Schneersohn of Lubavitch*, Mi khamokha TRK"Ṭ ("Who is like unto You 5629 [=A. D. 1869]", English title, True Existence). Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 2002.

[13] See discussion in: *Russell J. R.* Deus Loquens // Homo Loquens: Язык и культура, Сборник научных статей, докладов и сообщений, Всероссийская научно-практическая конференция с международным участием. СПб.: Русская Христианская Гуманитарная Академия им. Ф. М. Достоевского, 2023. С. 104–126. (In publication)

[14] Passover *Haggadah*, from Babylonian Talmud tractate Pesaḥim 116b.

to *čašma.dīta-*, "seen by the eye"[15]. Every man is obliged to see himself as having departed from Egypt to stand at the foot of mount Sinai and witness theophany and revelation. It's incumbent on him to know.

But another, rather different field of vision in another Biblical source demands attention, and will prove, one thinks, to be significant. Psalm 147 provides a cosmic overview of creation — the forces of nature, sea and sky, the birds and the beasts — similar to the panoramic vision of Psalm 104 although much shorter. The second part of Psalm 147 focuses also on the Creator's Covenant with Israel, leading to the concluding, scornful verse (147:20): *Lo' 'aśa khen lekhol goy u-mishpaṭim bal yeda'um halleluyah.* "He (the Lord) has not done so for any other nation; and [as for His] ordinances, they don't know them. Halleluyah!" The implication is that Israel does know, and the gentiles do not, and this has something to do with seeing the big picture, as it were: all those other beings and forces in nature that aren't us.

Knowing, Hebrew *da'at*, is even stronger than hearing and seeing. It presupposes an intimate, unmediated connection between the knower and the known. In the Bible, "know" is also an expression for what is delicately and euphemistically termed "carnal knowledge" in English. Thus, Admo"r Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Lubavitcher Hasidism, notes in *Tanya*, *ka-noda' she-da'at hu' leshon hitqashrut kemo "Ve-ha-adam yada'…"* "As is known, that knowledge is a way of saying connection, as in 'And the man [Adam] knew (Eve)' (Genesis 4:1)"[16]. This is in the course of a discussion of knowledge that cites, *inter alia*, 1 Chronicles 28:9, where David commands Solomon, *da' et Elohei avikha ve-'avdehu be-lev shalem ve-nefesh ḥafeṣa* "Know the God of your father and serve Him with an entire heart and a willing soul;" and the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:34, *Ve-lo' yelamdu ish et re'ehu le-'mor de'u et Hashem ki khulam yed'u oti* "No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another 'Know the Lord,' for all of them shall know Me".

To hearing and seeing, then, one adds touching — as in the act of love — to the senses that are invoked in the definition of knowledge. No tactile connection is more strongly felt than the act of love; and the Song of Songs is the Biblical text about love, which religious Jews interpret allegorically as the relationship between God and His people Israel (Christians were subsequently to alter the identities of the allegorized amorous couple to Christ and His church). In Midrash Rabbah to the Song of Songs, the two passages from Deuteronomy 4, *Ata har'eta* ("You have been made to see…") and *pen tishkaḥ* ("…lest you forget…"), are considered together, right next to each other, in the commentary on Song of Songs 1.2 — the first actual verse of the poem: *Yishaqeni mi-neshiqot pihu…* "Let him

[15] *Russell J. R.* Truth is What the Eye Can See: Armenian Manuscripts and Armenian Spirituality // Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Art, Religion, and Society. Eds T. Mathews, R. Wieck. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1998. P. 147–162.

[16] *Tanya* chapter 42. See further discussion in: *Admo"r Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn of Lubavitch.* Qunṭres tefila ("Tract on prayer"). Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 2007, no. 4, p. 27–28.

kiss me from the kisses of his mouth…"[17]. The Divine words Israel's ears heard and the voice her eyes saw at Sinai was also the Presence her lips felt: knowledge being an experience suffusing all the capacities of perception and being.

Knowledge can extend even to the sense of smell. It is a cliché that wild beasts "smell" fear, their sense of smell being so much more acute than our own. Smell is perhaps the most emotionally evocative of the senses, and fragrances are keenly remembered. It stands to reason that knowledge should involve this sense as well[18]. Isaiah 11:3 says of the scion of the root of Jesse that *Va-hariḥo be-yir'at Hashem ve-lo' le-mar'eh ʿeinav yishpoṭ ve-lo' l-mishmaʿ ʾoznav yokhiaḥ* "And he shall sense by means of the fear of the Lord; and not by the sight of his eyes shall he judge, nor by the hearing of his ears shall he reprove"[19]. Radak

[17] *Simon M.* Midrash Rabbah: Song of Songs. London: Soncino, 1977. P. 22.

[18] In the Zoroastrian faith, with which Judaism enjoyed relations that were often good and fruitful for over a millennium, the Avestan term *baoδah-*, which is cognate to the Sanskrit root which forms the familiar name Buddha, meaning the awake, aware, and enlightened one, develops semantically into Middle and New Persian *bōy*, "fragrance, smell". That is, keen perception comes to be associated with the sense of smell. But the word retains an association with cognition. Avestan *baoδašča* "and perception" is rendered in Zoroastrian Book Pahlavi (sacerdotal Middle Persian) as *bōy āšnāg* "fragrance of knowing"; in the treatise *Škand gumānig wizār* ("Doubt-dispelling Deliberation", a polemic of the early Muslim period against other religions preserved in Pazand — Pahlavi rendered in the Avestan alphabet), 5.86, we find *bōi ī xvaṯ vīnāi i rvą* "fragrance, which is itself the faculty of vision of the soul" (*Bailey H. W.* Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books: Ratanbai Katrak Lectures. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. P. 97–98). This "vision of the soul" would relate to the allegorical and macrocosmic description of the parts of the human body in the Zoroastrian book of creation, the *Bundahišn*: *ud dō bīnī ī čiyōn dō *dama ī Garōdmān rā gōwēd, ku-š pad-iš hamwār bōy ī xwēš ī gōnag gōnag pad-iš andar damēd kē ruwān hūbōyīh ud urwāhmanīh az-iš* "And the two nostrils are, it [i.e., the Religion] says, like the two bellows (?) of the House of Song; thereby one constantly breathes in its diverse fragrances: that is the pleasant fragrance of the soul, and joy emanates from it" (chapter 28.3 in *Anklesaria B. T.* Zand-Ākāsīh: Iranian or Greater Bundahišn. Bombay (Mumbai): Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, 1956. P. 245). Sections 12–13 of the same chapter discourse on leaves and plants with a pleasant fragrance (see edition and translation, with comparison to a similar list in the Judeo-Persian *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, by *Asmussen J. P.* The list of fruits in the Bundahišn // W. B. Henning Memorial Volume, Asia Major Library. Eds M. Boyce, I. Gershevitch. London: Lund Humphries, 1970. P. 14–19); and an appendix to the chapter assigns a particular flower to each of the Amahraspands — the archangelic supernatural emanations of God, Ahura Mazda, that embody the spiritual and temporal qualities of the seven good creations. Garōdmān, literally the House of Song, is the Edenic Zoroastrian afterlife: on a possible borrowing of the term into a Jewish mystical text, see *Russell J. R.* "Iranian in the *Hekhalot*," in Matteo Compareti, ed., Fabulous Creatures and Spirits in Ancient Iranian Culture, Bologna: Casa Editrice Persiani, 2018, pp. 93–110. The surname and epithet of the Muslim Persian mystical poet Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār ("Perfume-maker", cf. the Arabic loan into English, attar of roses) may allude to his mystical insight, awareness, and knowledge; cf. the saintly Moroccan Jewish Rabbi of the 18th century, Ḥayyim ibn ʿAṭṭār — "son of the Perfume-maker".

[19] Hebrew *ruaḥ* "spirit, wind, breath" and *reyaḥ* "smell" share the same root. This is also the case in the kindred Semitic languages Syriac and Arabic; so, both East Christian and Muslim writers take advantage of the semantic coincidence, with fine fragrances, often musk, being the whiff of Paradise (see *King A.* Scent from the Garden of Paradise: Musk and the Medieval Islamic World. Leiden: Brill, 2017. P. 341 and 353: I am indebted for this reference to Prof. Samuel Hodgkin at Yale University).

in his commentary relates the verb here translated as "sense" to Hebrew *reyaḥ*, "smell": *Le-fi she-ha-reyaḥ hi' hargasha qala 'omer la-davar qal ha-be-hargasha reyaḥ. U-ve-khen, U-me-raḥoq yariaḥ milḥama* "Since smell is a subtle sense: one says of a subtle thing, 'Can you smell it?' And thus, 'From afar he smells war' [Job 39:25]"[20]. The war horse of Job 39 who smells battle and whinnies "Ha!" belongs, of course, to the Lord's catalogue of mighty beasts, about whom we shall have more to say presently. The Messiah, then, will be fully equipped with the keen senses that many animals have, but that men enjoy in only rudimentary form.

The only one of the five physical senses we have not noted so far with relation to knowledge is taste. Psalm 34:9 enjoins, *ṭa'amu u-re'u ki ṭov Hashem, ashrei ha-gever yeḥeseh bo.* "Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy is the man who takes refuge in Him". Although the next two verses are included in the Jewish grace after meals, *Birkat ha-mazon*, and are thus associated with actual eating, verse nine seems still to be metaphorical. In his *Deliverance from Error*, the 11th-century Muslim scholar al-Ghazali calls the direct experience of God, which involves ineffable knowledge, *dhawq*, Arabic for "tasting": this, too, is a metaphorical usage. There is nothing in the least metaphorical, however, in the employment of Psalm 34:9 in the Christian liturgy, in whose service of Communion the believer tastes wine and wafer, which are the blood and body of Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself in sacrifice for the remission of sins. The Armenian hymn of praise before Holy Communion reads: *K'ristos patarageal bašxi i miǰi merum. Alēluia. / ZMarmin iwr tay mez kerakur, ew surb zAriwn iwr c'ōłē i mez. Alēluia. / Matik' aṙ Tēr ew aṙēk' zloys. Alēluia. / Čašakec'ēk' ew tesēk' zi k'ałc'r ē Tēr. Alēluia…* "Christ, sacrificed, is divided among us. Halleluyah. / He gives His own Body to us as food and sprinkles His holy Blood on us. Halleluyah. / Draw near to the Lord and take the light. Halleluyah. / Taste and see that the Lord is sweet. Halleluyah…"[21].

The sort of unknowing we have considered hitherto has a kind of wrongfulness, even wickedness, adhering to it; but there is also an ingenuous unknowing, a kind of childlike wonder at things one readily admits are beyond one's ken. One need but summon to the proscenium of inner, remembered poetic performance the young Miranda in *The Tempest* of Shakespeare marveling at the "brave new world" as she beholds other people than her father, the mage Prospero, for the first time. We the audience, here as in the book of Job (to be considered presently), know more: what seems to her a brave new world is in fact the tired old one of political intrigue. Shakespeare meant us to see Miranda as charmingly innocent but also naïve, and her exclamation came to be so cynically regarded that the Bard's phrase is now best known from the title of Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* as a synonym of dystopia. And there is Psalm 139:6, *peli'a da'at mimeni niśgeva lo' ukhal lah* "Too wonderful is that knowledge to me, so high

[20] *Scherman N, Rabbi*. Nevi'im aḥaronim: Yesha'yah. Rahway, Mesorah, 2013. P. 96.

[21] *Bishop Tiran Nersoyan*. Pataragamatoyc' Hayastaneayc' Aṙak'elakan Ułłap'aṙ Ekełec'woy. New York: Delphic Press, 1950. P. 88.

I cannot reach it". Is this speaker in the first person meant to be David? The king of Israel knew exile, as Prospero did, but David could have outdone Machiavelli in his experience and knowledge of statecraft. Jewish tradition instead assigns the authorship of this Psalm to the first man, Adam: one can well imagine our newly-created forefather gawking at Eden like a youthful tourist, peering up, up, up the rugose cone of the trunk into the dark foliage of a certain tree of knowledge whose fruit he has been cautioned not to sample. Fortunately the dim, plump apples (in a Latin Eden) or figs (in a Near Eastern one), sheathed in beckoning, rustling leaves, are beyond his grasp, at least for now. Or maybe he only means that Divine knowledge in general is beyond him, as he explores the brave new world. But prelapsarian innocence was as ephemeral in Scripture as it was to be a fragile thing satirized in the Globe theater. To Isaiah, Israel's ignorance is not of the ingenuous kind: whether feigned or otherwise, it is inexcusable and scandalous, and drives God and His Prophet into fits.

When the Divinity bursts theatrically on the scene in a whirlwind at the beginning of Job 38, He asks menacingly, *Mi zeh maḥshikh ʿeṣa ve-milin beli daʿat.* "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"[22]. Now, the reader knows from the first two concise prose chapters of the book that Job has been suffering only because God allowed Satan to test the man's steadfast faith and loyalty. The Accuser poses a provocative question to the Judge: Is Job pious just because things are going well for him? Let's see how he reacts when they don't. God's confident his man will stay the course. Why would Satan place a bet with an omniscient opponent? Perhaps for the sheer *Schadenfreude* of inflicting destruction, bereavement, and boils on the unfortunate Job. Satan is merely state prosecutor at the divine court here, but he is well on his way to his future career as fully-fledged (or, more precisely, bat-winged) prince of darkness. In the intervening verse chapters, between wager and epiphany, that constitute the bulk of this dramatic work in verse punctuated by stage directions for the characters, Job has argued his innocence with cogent passion and even wit. He is scornful

[22] Constructions with *beli* abound in Job, notably the apparent neologism — or, at least, an expression not common in Biblical Hebrew — *beli-mah*, literally "without-what", which means nothing, voidness, null set, zilch. It was to be snapped up by the unknown genius, the proto-Kabbalist philosopher, mystic, and mathematician who wrote *Sefer Yeṣira*, the Book of Formation. See one's discussion of the term, the book, and some implications therefrom in *Russell J. R.* Deus Loquens, op. cit. The construction *beli-* or *bal-* as used in Job is good Semitic (we have seen it here, in Psalm 147:20, and it is indeed common), but the work was probably composed in the form that has come down to us around the fifth-century BC. Moreover, one has argued that Job is a play, and that the author worked under the spell of the golden age of Athenian drama (see *Russell J. R.* Notes on Job 3 // *Issues of Theology.* 2023. Vol. 5, no. 2. P. 170–198). The construction might therefore, here, be a calque on the Greek privative prefix α-, with *beli-daʿat* the equivalent of ἄγνωστος; *beli-mah* (=οὐδέν, μηδέν) might belong then to the same sphere of cosmological speculation as απειρον. Whatever the case, such constructions are commonplace in Modern Hebrew: in 1992 I went to the cinema in Jerusalem to watch a favorite Western, "The Unforgiven" with Clint Eastwood. The Hebrew title was *Bilti nislaḥ*. (But whenever the hero launched into a stream of colorful curses, the subtitles rendered them all, primly but disquietingly, as the divine Name *Elohim*).

of the ostensible consolations of his three dubious visiting friends plus the awkward young Elihu — the latter thrown in for comic relief, perhaps. They have asserted, with conventional piety but wrongly — as the reader knows, but as they cannot know, they couldn't be *more* wrong! — that some sin or fault on Job's part must be the reason for his present distress. God later excoriates the smug, sanctimonious band of friends, but never tells Job the reason which we ourselves know and have known from the very beginning. Instead, the Lord treats Job to a kind of cosmic overview, a catalogue featuring prodigious animals that are red of tooth and claw and of scant use to puny earthly man, like Leviathan, Behemoth, and the ostrich. The war horse whom we met above, sniffing and saying "Ha!" is of human utility indeed, though not in our most shining moments. Job's is an animal kingdom more fearsome, perhaps, than that of Psalms 104 and 147, but then it is God speaking, or, rather, booming here, not a timorous Prophet or lyrical Psalmist. Size matters in Job 38–39: a big Deity, with His big storms and big monsters, is making big plans we puny mortals cannot hope to grasp. All we can do is nod humble assent and get with the program[23].

The faithful, anonymous editors of the New Testament were not satisfied with the sudden, disquieting conclusion of Mark that we noted above and added a tidy ending that many canonical editions employ. What of the ending of Job? After God's tour of a sort of Middle Eastern Jurassic Park, the book of Job has a bland prose conclusion, quite as clipped as the prose introduction, that ties up all the loose ends as neatly as would a Restoration comedy (and, for all I know, an editor of Mark might have seen it and drawn inspiration from it). God awards Job, who has passed His test, a whole new household, even better than before, and adds twice the three-score-and-ten standard Biblical lifespan to Job's days after he emerges from Satan's trials. Job, already satisfied that his Redeemer really exists (and who could doubt it, after all the *Sturm und Drang*), is happy. The end of Job, which is as coldly prosaic and telegraphic as the beginning, seems to me symmetrical and authentic, unlike the additions to Mark: as such, it demonstrates also that not only is Job a play, it is, precisely, a comedy — and a darkly sardonic one at that. It is a comedy about not knowing, and about the unknown: Job never finds out, and never can know, the reason for his trials and griefs. We, the audience, *do* know the formal reason, but the knowledge that the God of Israel (or wherever Job's world is) placed a bet and won, is neither consoling nor particularly instructive. I think we need to look for knowledge in a place where we might least expect it: that will become clearer presently.

Let us consider another strange book of the Hebrew Bible, one of the shortest in the canon (Obadiah's tiny book takes the prize for brevity) and another comedy of unknowing: Jonah. Isaiah begins his long prophetic career with the Divine decree that Israel not only doesn't know, but it also cannot know — and God and His messenger will make sure of that by stopping up its ears, just in case. There is a classic example of a prophet doomed not to be heeded. The reader

[23] "Man thinks and God laughs," says the Yiddish proverb, whose Russian cousin says, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans".

has probably already remembered the case in Greek drama of the Trojan princess Cassandra. She refused to go to bed with the god Apollo, who cursed her: Cassandra was to be a prophetess, and everything she foresaw and told would come to pass, but nobody would believe her. This is the exception to the rule, a particular individual predicament brought about by one's tactless refusal to obey the erotic whim of an Olympian (note: If Apollo wants you to sleep with him, say yes. But don't take the initiative, for the Hellenic gods are difficult, and as the adage cautions, "Neither is one to attempt to marry Aphrodite"). But Cassandra's isolated quandary is Isaiah's job description. It seems to be the business of a Hebrew prophet not to be taken seriously by his listeners.

Keeping that in mind, we read that God summoned Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire that the Israelites feared and hated so much, and to command everybody there, in God's name, to repent or else be destroyed. Jonah, presumably figuring he'd be ridiculed at best, killed in some exquisitely painful manner at worst, and not heeded in either case — since those to whom one preaches both don't know and are prevented from knowing— fled. Why should Nineveh be spared divine wrath anyhow? After a very big fish[24] intercepted the ship and deposited him back on land, Jonah grudgingly performed his mission. It was an immediate and total success. Jonah was displeased: since God is *raḥum ve-ḥanun* "merciful and compassionate" anyway, he reasoned, why was the trouble of travel necessary in the first place? And maybe, as an Israelite, he did not want the enemy capital to hear, repent, and be rescued — all the precise opposite of Isaiah's situation! A further irony within the story: Jonah is the sole Israelite of the text, and the only character in a very diverse cast who is rebellious, ungenerous, mean-spirited, and irascible. His name means "dove", but instead of being like his gentle namesake, who dutifully returned to the Ark with an olive leaf in her beak, he flees and gets tipped into the briny drink[25]. The story is thus a multiply ironic comment on the prophetic mission as we find it outlined in Isaiah, and there is a further twist to come, this one a comment on Jonah: wicked Nineveh is indeed finally destroyed at the end of the book of Tobit[26], which may be read as a kind of apocryphal sequel to Jonah. The main characters in Tobit have names meaning "God is good" — a comic reflection, perhaps, on the relentless goodness of the Divine, whether towards wicked but surprisingly repentant Nineveh, in Jonah, or towards Tobit and his ingenuous son Tobias as they stumble blindly through various challenges.

[24] Greek calls it a whale, hence Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, but it is portrayed in Byzantine and Armenian art as a dragon or the Sasanian mythical beast called *sēnmurw*. Might the big fish have been the Lord's faithful pet, Leviathan?

[25] During the storm at sea, all the sailors are wide awake and pray dutifully to their gods. Jonah alone is fast asleep in the hold, oblivious and uncaring; and when he confesses that the tempest is his fault, the kindly crew are loath to cast him overboard. *Brody A. J.* "Each Man Cried Out to His God": The Specialized Religion of Canaanite and Phoenician Seafarers. Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1998 (Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs 58).

[26] See discussion in *Russell J. R.* God is Good: Tobit and Iran // Iran and the Caucasus. Erevan; Tehran, 2001. Vol. 5. P. 1–6.

Perhaps the key to understanding the theme of the unknown in Isaiah, Job, and Jonah — a theme that unlocks other theological and thematic problems — may be found in a subject that is common to all three. We encounter it in God's peculiar statement with which Jonah concludes, 4:10–11: "The Lord then said, 'You yourself were fretting over the *qiqayon* plant, on which you did not labor, nor did you cultivate it, a plant that came up one night and perished the next; yet I myself am not to have compassion on Nineveh, that large city, where there are more than twelve myriads of human beings, who cannot discern between their right and left hands, **and animals galore**?'"[27]. Isaiah: ox and donkey; Job: Leviathan, Behemoth, ostrich, and keen warhorse; Jonah: dove, big fish and animals galore indeed. A list of animals, which we find here in Jonah, but also in Job and in the first few lines of Isaiah, seems to me to be the key to understand something of the extent of what God knows — and what we cannot. God knows everything there is to know about all His creatures and their needs, all the time and more thoroughly than they can possibly know themselves. Christ scolds His worried disciples that God sees the falling of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29). The list of prodigious beasts in Job, Isaiah's humble farm animals (and the tame beasts of the peaceable kingdom), the animals at the abrupt conclusion of Jonah: these are the world, ever around us, that we seem to see yet do not really see or know, but whom their Creator knows. It is little wonder that we are perplexed, ignorant, and unhappy. As W. H. Auden quipped in a bitter epigram, "Man is not the center of the universe, / And working in an office makes it worse".

Most of us, except perhaps for poets like king David when they are possessed by their pantheistic, psalmodic ecstasies, cannot begin to comprehend the plethora of living beings that surround us in their manifold forms of consciousness and feeling. We can't know that non-human, conscious cosmos; but God, their Creator, always does, and they know Him in their way, too. Even David did not know that other creatures could craft songs, and praised his poems in an anthropocentric way until a frog spoke up and informed him that its repertoire of poetic and wisdom compositions was far superior, not only to David's output, but even to that of his prolific son Solomon (whose literary career had presumably not yet begun)[28]. The animal world: that is what we don't know and can't

[27] One follows the learned and witty translation of *Sasson J. M.* Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation. New York: Doubleday, 1990 (The Anchor Bible). P. 6.

[28] This episode occurs in the strange and charming text *Pereq Shira*, "the Chapter of Song", where various animals speak and cite Scripture: see *Slifkin N., Rabbi.* Perek Shirah: Nature's Song. Brooklyn: Zoo Torah, 2009. P. 21: *Amru raboteinu zikhronam li-vrakha ʿal David ha-melekh ʿalav ha-shalom be-shaʿa she-siyem sefer tehillim zaḥa daʿato ʿalav. Amar li-fnei ha-Qadosh Barukh Hu', Yesh briʾa she-baraʾta be-ʿolamkha she-omeret shirot ve-tishbaḥot yoter mimeni? Be-ota shaʿa nizdamna lo ṣefardeʿa aḥat ve-amra lo, David! Al tavzaḥ daʿatkha ʿalekha, she-ani omeret shirot ve-tishbaḥot yoter mimeka. Ve loʾ ʿod ela kol shira she-ani omeret memashelet ʿaleha sheloshet alafim mashal, she-neʾemar, Va-yedaber sheloshet alafim mashal va-yehi shiro ḥamisha va-alef.* "Our fathers of blessed memory said of king David, peace be upon him, that in the hour that he completed the Psalter he became conceited [lit., "his knowing was removed"]. He said before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, 'Is there a creature that You created in

know, at least outside the genre of the fable, where animals can talk in language we can understand.

We have considered texts in which Israel is told it knows the Lord's ordinances and other nations do not, that it has been made to hear, see, and feel, maybe even smell the miracles of the Exodus, such as the parting of the Sea of Reeds, and God's subsequent manifest presence at Sinai when His voice was not only audible but visible. Even a person born millennia after these events must assume responsibility for having witnessed and known them. The *Haftara* — the Scriptural reading following the weekly Torah portion — for the end of the week-long Passover feast consists of Isaiah 10:32–12:6. This includes the prophet's Messianic vision of the peaceable kingdom of chapter 11, when the panther will stretch out placidly beside the little goat and so on. Verses 6–8 are a catalogue of hunter and prey of the animal world co-existing, an unusual and unlikely condition that goes together, in verse nine, with universal, vast knowledge of God: *ki mal'a ha-areṣ de'a et-Hashem ka-mayim la-yam mekhasim* "For the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea". When the Messianic age arrives and even the animal kingdom is transformed, then all will see it all and will know, with a breadth and fullness comparable to that of the ocean. But not till then.

People don't know because they obstinately don't want to, or because they can't — someone else, for whatever reason, is concealing knowledge from them or impeding their capacity to know. There is another kind of unknowing: I cannot comprehend that which is so above and beyond any human capacity to know that it is in all respects alien. *Dirshu Hashem be-himaṣ'o qera'uhu bi-heyoto qarov* "Seek ye the Lord where He is to be found; call ye upon Him at His being near," suggests Isaiah 55:6. The next verse hopefully predicts, *Ya'azov rasha' darko ve-ish aven maḥshevotav ve-yashov el Hashem vi-yraḥamehu ve-el Eloheinu ki yirbeh li-sloaḥ* "The evil man will abandon his way; and the man of sin, his thoughts — and he will return to the Lord and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will be abundant in forgiving"[29]. But verses 8–9 rise from the

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Your world who speaks more songs and praises than I do?' At that same hour a frog happened upon him and said to him, 'David! Don't be conceited, for I speak more songs and praises than you do. And not just more, but every song I speak tells parables upon itself, three thousand in number, as it is said [I Kings 5:12, of Solomon], 'He composed three thousand parables, and his songs were one thousand and five'".

[29] This attribute of being abundant in pardon serves as the source, evidently, of the benediction *marbeh li-sloaḥ* in the Eighteen Benedictions or *'Amida* ("Standing") prayer. Blenkinsopp finds the plural of *ḥesed* in Isaiah 55:4, *ḥasdei David* shortly before this, anomalous, noting that this is also the only occurrence of David in "Deutero"-Isaiah. That is perhaps so for early texts, but the phrase *ḥasadim ṭovim* "good graces" is to be found at the very opening of the aforementioned *'Amida*. This is a prayer whose centrality cannot be overstated. One recites it silently, standing and bowing, three times a day every single day. At most communal prayers save the evening prayer, the Emissary of the Congregation repeats it aloud. Hannah's prayer at Shiloh is the precedent for its silence. It replaces the sacrificial liturgy, the *qorban*, of the Holy Temple. Festival liturgies are largely expansions and elaborations of it. And the plural of *ḥesed* "grace, kindness, love" is at front and center stage.

mystery of abundant and often undeserved Divine grace to the sublime level of a knowledge transcendent and alien: *Ki lo maḥshevotai maḥshevoteikhem ve-lo darkheikhem derakhai ne'um Hashem. Ki gavhu shamayim me-areṣ ken gavhu derakhai mi-darkheikhem u-maḥshevotai mi-maḥshevoteikhem.* "For My thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not My ways, saith the Lord. As high as the heavens are from the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways; and My thoughts, from your thoughts". This may be read as a simple assertion of superiority; but the 19th-century commentary Malbim claims that it means much more: God's thoughts are qualitatively, not quantitatively, different from those of men. They have nothing in common[30]. Let us consider this radical statement in the light of the prophet's simile. The principal, visible characteristic of the earth is its flatness, its two-dimensionality. Above it, from its surface to heaven, is a three-dimensional space. The inhabitant of a two-dimensional world, a Flatland, would perceive a line as a barrier impossible to cross; but a visitor to Flatland from a three-dimensional world might place his two feet to either side of the line. To the Flatlander that is a paradox, perhaps conceivable in mathematics but impossible in nature. Yet his two-dimensioned world is contained, unbeknownst to him, in our three-dimensional one. Just as the space of air and sky and the flatness of earth are incommensurable, in Isaiah's *simile*, so our three-dimensionality in space-time, and the knowledge of which we are capable in it, are incommensurable with the being and thought of God. What might seem to us an insoluble paradox, such as Divine foreknowledge and free will, would be to the Lord a matter of planting a Divine foot to either side of our uncrossable fortress wall. In Psalm 50, God challenges the unjust man: What, do you think I am like you? And He stresses that He and human beings are, precisely, incommensurate (using Hebrew *'erekh*, in verse 21; compare David's rueful lament in Psalm 55 that the treacherous betrayer Achitophel had been, ostensibly, a man of his own measure).

Isaiah 55:10–11 goes on to give an example of how God's thought acts: *Ki ka-asher yered ha-geshem ve-ha-sheleg min ha-shamayim ve-shamah lo yashuv ki im hirvah et ha-areṣ ve-holidah ve-hiṣmiḥah ve-natan zera' la-zore'a ve-leḥem la-okhel. Ken yihyeh devari asher yeṣe' mi-pi lo yashuv elai reiqam ki im 'aśa et asher ḥafaṣti ve-hiṣliaḥ asher shalaḥtiv.* "For just as when rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there unless they have watered the earth, and given birth in it, and made it flower, and given seed for the sower and bread to eat; so will be My word that comes from My mouth. It will not return empty to me; rather, it accomplished what I wished and succeeded in what I sent it for." That is, His word is not spoken in vain, emptily, unfulfilled (*reiqam*). It is not only deed[31], in a way our words are not — it has the power of insemination[32].

[30] *Scherman N., Rabbi*. Nevi'im aḥaronim. P. 419 n. 9.

[31] Goethe's Faust thought he had hit on something, when he came up with *Im Anfang war die Tat!* in his rendering of John 1:1.

[32] This passage will have inspired the wording of one of the blessings recited after the reading of the Haftara — the selection from the prophetic or historical parts of the Hebrew Bible read after the Torah reading: *Ne'eman ata hu' Hashem Eloheinu ve-ne'emanim devarekha,*

Another reason human beings cannot know something does not involve agency and intent: they do not know something, simply because it is beyond the context of their cultural experience. Even if they saw it, they would have no conceptual frame to put it into, and it would not register in their consciousness and become a subject of thought, a thing susceptible to ratiocination. A literary example of this kind of unknowing is the short story "Averroës' Search" by Jorge Luis Borges[33], in which the medieval Spanish philosopher Ibn Rushd is engaged in translating the *Poetics* of Aristotle into Arabic. It is a futile endeavor, though he cannot know this. Since the medieval Islamic world had neither theaters nor plays, there is no cultural context, no mental frame of reference, that would make it possible for him to conceive of what a tragedy or comedy was. In the story, two boys are clowning below the window of his study, imitating a muezzin and a worshipper. They are enacting a comedy before his very eyes! Averroës can see and hear them, but still does not and cannot know what it is they are doing, in terms of the *Poetics*. There is no basis on which he might make the connection. Irritated by the noisy children, he turns back to his serious scholarly work, oblivious to the explanation of comedy that has just been presented to him in a *tableau vivant*.

Let us return to the subject of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible and the citation of his prophecy in the New Testament (the authors of the latter, it is pertinent to note, employ in general the reading of the Septuagint, the Greek rendering of an earlier version of the Hebrew Bible than that which was to be canonized many centuries later by the Masoretes). Rabbinic Judaism and Christian exegesis differ radically in their claims about knowledge of the meaning and message of the text. Messianism is the issue at stake. In the Hebrew text, one certain thing one can know about the anointed one from the stock of Jesse about whom Isaiah speaks with such eloquence, is that he has not yet come. In Rabbinic Judaism that still holds true. In his thirteen articles of faith, Maimonides says one must expect the Messiah every day, even if he tarries. There have been several false messiahs in Jewish history, the most well-known being Shabbetai Ṣevi in the mid-seventeenth century. Most Jews seem not to expect the arrival of the Messiah anytime soon, if at all. The attitude is summed up in a Yiddish anecdote about Chelm, a

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ve-davar eḥad mi-devarekha aḥor lo' yashuv reiqam ki El melekh ne'eman ve-raḥaman ata. Barukh ata Hashem, ha-El ha-ne'eman be-khol devarav. "You are He Who is faithful, O Lord our God, and Your words are faithful, and not one of Your words will return back empty, for You are God, faithful and merciful king. Blessed are you, O Lord, the God Who is faithful in all His words" (Siddur. P. 228–229). In his 1976 novel *Radio Free Albemuth*, which was published posthumously in 1985, the American visionary thinker and science fiction writer Philip K. Dick imagined that a transcendent cosmic power of good called VALIS (Vast Active Living Intelligence System) implanted "firebright", a plasmatic entity "like a little egg of pale, cold fire" in certain spiritually awakened people (*Dick Ph. K.* Radio Free Albemuth. New York: Arbor House, 1985. P. 177). A former preacher named Leon later explains that the pearl of great price in the New Testament alludes to this inseminated silver egg (pp. 210–211). Just as the Romans killed Jesus, he explains, modern fascist America tracks down and murders, co-opts, or silences its own holy men and women.

[33] *Borges J. L.* Collected Fictions / transl. by A. Hurley. New York: Viking, 1998. P. 235–241.

town in Poland whose inhabitants were proverbially reputed to be fools. Once upon a time the good people of Chelm heard the Messiah was on the way. Not wanting to be left out, they put a chair by the side of the road at the entrance to town and hired a man to sit there as a lookout. The punchline: It did not pay too well, but it was a steady job.

There is a strong Messianic strain in present-day Judaism, whose causes may be various or multiple: a largely internal development generated by a hopeful, prophetic idealism; a symptom of apocalyptic impatience and despair with the nightmare of history; or a phenomenon resulting from some external source, particularly Christian influence. Chabad Hasidim profess the arrival of the Messiah is imminent, and some overtly consider the deceased Lubavitcher Rebbe, Admo"r Menaḥem Mendel Schneersohn, to have been the Messiah. His imminent return is expected. For Christians, of course, the matter has been, seemingly, resolved: the Messiah came, died on the Cross, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven. He will return. Early Christians lived in expectation of Christ's second coming, the *Parousia*, but it still has not happened, two millennia later. In the Gospels of the Evangelists, it is accordingly asserted that the Messiah whom Isaiah predicted is none other than Jesus Christ, specific incidents of Whose life are adduced as fulfillment of this or that detail of the prophecy. Christians believe Jews were and are mistaken in not recognizing Christ as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy; Jews, in turn, believe Christians are in error and find their belief in the incarnation of the transcendent God to be scandalously wrong. The third party to the dispute, as it were, is Islam, which gives a nod to the Jews in its belief that the messianic figure called the Mahdi, the "rightly guided" one, has not yet come; but the Qur'an does recognize Jesus as a prophet, but reflects the Docetist tradition — heretical in the view of mainstream Christianity — according to which another man died on the Cross, whilst Jesus Himself ascended to heaven, only seeming to have suffered. At best, the three great faiths are different and distinct, despite their common roots, and must find a way to coexist; at worst they are existentially irreconcilable and mutually incompatible.

It is possible to view the relationship of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament another way: from the standpoint of literature rather than of competing dogma. This approach has its obvious limits, since the historical and social context of Scripture is very different from that of, say, a book by Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy or Jane Austen. Nineteenth century novels are not normative in intent and do not claim supernatural origins. To the contrary, they are works of fiction. But a strictly literary analysis of Scripture can still produce interesting discussion. The American Jewish literary scholar Harold Bloom arrived on the scene with his bold and well-argued theory of the "anxiety of influence", the idea that originality in literature comes often from an ingenious, imaginative, creatively powerful, sophisticated (Bloom's overdetermined epithet for all this is "strong") **mis**reading of a work that has influenced one. The motivation for this can be an effort to escape the charge of plagiarism, or a Freudian rebellion against the literary precursor, as though he were one's father. Bloom, who was born into a Russian Jewish home in New York City, wanted to consider the case of the Old

and New Testaments in his initial work on the anxiety of influence, but was wary of the effect such an argument, potentially offensive to Christians, might have on his nascent career in the genteel and restricted Ivy League. He postponed consideration of the case to an elegant, provocative monograph, "Jesus and Yahweh" (2005) that he published when his academic eminence and security were unassailable. He argues there that Christianity is a "strong" misreading of Judaism, the most massive and brilliant act of plagiarism in history. Part of the motivation for its divergence from its source, he writes, is embittered, malign intent, and an aspect is the ignorance of pagans who became Christian and adapted the new faith, which had originally been a branch of Judaism, to their radically different needs and conceptions, de-Judaizing and paganizing it. Mark, the earliest, most curtly telegraphic, and most bizarrely secretive of the four Gospels, exerts a particular attraction on Bloom's discussion as a "strong" text[34]. Bloom argued that the Christian use of the Hebrew Bible, from the tendentious reordering of its parts to produce the text of the "Old Testament", to the (mis)interpretation of its contexts on the minutest level, was a massive act of usurpation founded on hostile intention and deliberate ignorance. But it was an ingenious, creative act as well.

Given Bloom's focus on Mark, the fate of a text purported to belong to a second, "secret" version of Mark is of interest to the present discussion of religion and not knowing: it is a stark case in point and will embrace the various aspects of unknowing reviewed above. A Secret Gospel? Was not the purpose of the Evangelists to broadcast the good tidings, not to conceal them? It seems an oxymoron. Yet secrecy looms large in religions, which offer the experience of mysteries to initiates. Incarnation, Transubstantiation, and Holy Communion are mysteries, although all mankind are invited to share in the mystery. Secrecy is the practice of making sure somebody else doesn't know what you do: another facet of the kinds and uses of the unknown. And so to the Secret Gospel of Mark. In 1958 Prof. Morton Smith, a scholar of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity at Columbia University in New York, discovered a three-page manuscript in an 18th-century hand, written on the blank end-pages of a bound 17th-century work of theology printed in Greek, in the library of the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Saba in the Judean desert. Smith devoted many years of study to the manuscript, consulting scholars such as Arthur Darby Nock, to be mentioned presently, and corresponding with his friend Prof. Gershom Scholem of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem about it. The tone of his letters to the latter is one of ingenuous fascination: Prof. Guy Stroumsa, of the same university, who edited and published the letters, once told me in conversation that the

[34] *Bloom H.* Jesus and Yahweh, e.g. p. 77 and 142. If that were all there were to the monograph, it might be relegated to the long list of polemical responses to the deeply rooted problem of Christian theological anti-Semitism. But Bloom was a heroically large figure, the equal and fellow of the poets like Whitman whom he studied. His monograph is studded with fascinating side discussions, as of James the Just and the Ebionites, and with aperçus such as the brilliantly anagrammatic reply to Karl Marx, that religion is the *poetry* (not the *opiate*) of the people (p. 33).

correspondence, which was private and between friends, persuaded him beyond doubt that Smith did not forge the manuscript. That is, as wee shall see presently, a charge that was to be brought against the professor.

In 1972 and 1973 Smith published first a popularizing book about the manuscript and its contents, then a compendious scholarly work about it intended for specialists. In both, he argued for the authenticity of the ancient text, of which the manuscript is a late copy. It purports to be a letter addressed by the second-century theologian Clement of Alexandria to an otherwise unknown Theodore, concerning the misuse by the heretical sect of the Carpocratians of certain portions of a "Secret Gospel of Mark" that was supposed to be made available only to those confirmed, orthodox Christians whose faith and morals could be trusted. The Carpocratians somehow got hold of it and deliberately misinterpreted it. The translation provided in a recent study of Morton Smith, the letter, and the controversy surrounding it, runs as follows[35]:

> "From the letters of the most holy Clement (author) of the *Stromateis*, to Theodore. Rightly did you silence the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians. For they are the 'wandering stars' that have been prophesied, those who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into the boundless abyss of fleshly and bodily sins. For having been puffed up in knowledge, as they say, about the depths of Satan, they are unaware that they are tossing themselves into the utter gloom of the darkness of lies. And even though they boast that they are free, they have become slaves to base desires. These people, then, should be opposed on all sides and in all ways. For if they might say something true, one who loves the truth should not agree with them. For not all true things are truth, nor should the truth that merely seems to be true among people be preferred to the true truth that is in accordance with the faith.
>
> "Now concerning the chatter about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are complete fabrications, and others, even if they contain some truth, are nonetheless not reported truly. For true things mixed with fictions are effaced, so that, as it is said, even salt loses its saltiness.
>
> "Now concerning Mark, during Peter's stay in Rome, he wrote about the Lord's deeds, not, however, disclosing all of them, nor intimating the mystical ones, but choosing what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of the initiates. But following the martyrdom of Peter, Mark came to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his earlier book the things appropriate for making progress toward knowledge. He composed a more spiritual gospel for the benefit of those being made perfect. Nevertheless, he did not yet disclose the ineffable things, nor did he write out the esoteric teachings of the Lord, but to the things already written he added even more; further, he introduced certain sayings, the interpretation of which he knew would lead mystically the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of the truth that is veiled seven times. In this way, then, he prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor recklessly, to my mind, and after he died he left his book to the church in Alexan-

[35] Translation by Smith and Landau: *Smith G. S., Landau B. C.* The Secret Gospel of Mark: A Controversial Scholar, a Scandalous Gospel of Jesus, and the Fierce Debate over its Authenticity. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2023. P. 27–30.

dria, where it is still very well guarded, being read only by those being initiated into the great mysteries.

"But since the defiled demons are continuously concocting ways to destroy the human race, Carpocrates, taught by them and making use of deceptive means, enslaved a certain presbyter from the church in Alexandria so that he might get from him a copy of the Secret Gospel, which he interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine, and even defiled, mixing with the immaculate and sacred words lies most unabashed. From this merging is drawn off the teaching of the Carpocratians.

"To these, then, as I said before, one must never yield, nor, when they propose their fabrications, concede that the Secret Gospel is from Mark, but even deny it with an oath. For not all true things are said to all people. Because of this the wisdom of God through Solomon commands, 'Respond to the fool from his foolishness,' teaching that the light of the truth should be concealed from the cognitively blind. Now it says, 'From the one that does not have it will be taken,' and 'Let the fool walk in darkness.' But we are children of light, since we have been illuminated by the dawning of the spirit of the Lord from the heights, and where the spirit of the Lord is, it says, there is freedom. For all things are pure to those that are pure.

"Now, to you I will not hesitate to answer the questions you have asked, by refuting the lies with the very words from the gospel. For instance, after 'They were on the road traveling up to Jerusalem' and what follows, until 'After three days he will rise,' it [the Secret Gospel] adds these very words:

'And they came into Bethany, and a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And after coming she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him: Son of David, have mercy upon me. But the disciples censured her. And Jesus, angered, went away with her into the garden where the tomb was. And immediately a loud cry was heard from the tomb. And Jesus approached and rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And entering immediately in to where the young man was, he extended his hand and raised him, grasping his hand. But the young man, looking at him, loved him, and he began to beg him to be with him. And leaving the tomb, they arrived at the young man's house — for he was wealthy. And after six days Jesus commanded him, and in the evening the young man comes to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, because Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And from there he got up and returned to the other side of the Jordan'.

"And following these words is '*And James and John came to him,*' and the rest of the passage. But 'naked man with naked man,' and the other things about which you wrote are not found. And after the words *'And he comes to Jericho,'* it [the Secret Gospel] only has: *'and the sister of the young man whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.'* But many of the other things about which you write appear to be and are fabrications.

"Now the true interpretation, also the one that agrees with the true philosophy…".

The text on the most basic level is an expansion and explanation of a mysterious incident at the arrest of Jesus in the canonical text of Mark, 14:51–52, one that has no parallel in the other three Gospels: "Among those following was

a young man with nothing on but a linen cloth. They tried to seize him; but he slipped out of the linen cloth and ran away naked". The image of a naked youth running is, no pun intended, arresting: it seems to belong more to the Roman palestra than to the Holy City[36]. And the naked male body has, for modern readers, obvious sensual associations. Smith was homosexual and lived most of his adult life in the rather repressive society of postwar America. He considered the letter containing a pericope of the Secret Gospel of Mark that he had discovered the work of Clement of Alexandria himself and read the text as proof that at least some of the earliest Christian sources were reporting that Jesus Christ Himself had a homoerotic relationship. The suggestion, which Smith with some glee fully appreciated was audacious in the extreme in the context of the time, scandalized many of his fellow academics. This seems to have been part of his intention.

Devoted members of Christian churches rightly considered Smith's work a deliberate and blasphemous assault on their faith. His critics, misled, it would seem, by Smith's own interpretation of the text he was publishing, went on to deride the "Secret Gospel", erroneously, as a fake. Some advanced the argument, sometimes in book-length refutations, that Smith himself had forged the text, either as a sophisticated joke or as an embittered, mendacious attack on a religion he felt had excluded him because of his sexuality. The attacks were thus of both an academic and an *ad hominem* character[37]. Although Smith enjoyed annoying the geese, as the Russian saying goes (Не дразни гусей! my teacher and friend Prof. Nina Georgievna Garsoïan, a friend and contemporary of Smith's, used to caution me, to no avail), neither his Greek nor his paleographical skill was up

[36] Hellenizing Jews of the second century BC built a gymnasium below the Temple Mount where naked athletes in training competed in footraces and so on. Some of them even tried to reverse the appearance of their circumcision. This and other outrages against orthodoxy, sufficiently enraged the Hasmoneans and other traditionalists of Judea that they rebelled against Seleucid suzerainty, hence the Maccabees and the festival of Hanukah.

[37] These accusations cast a long shadow of doubt over the study of the text: ten years after the scholar's death, *Jenkins Ph.* Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. P. 101–102 rehearsed an array of innuendos against Smith, without giving equal time to positive evidence for its authenticity. Jenkins' book is typical of the reception accorded Smith's work. Another, egregious example is *Gathercole S.* The Apocryphal Gospels. London: Penguin, 2021, where the Secret Gospel of Mark is printed in the chapter entitled "Two modern forgeries". Prof. Gathercole resurrects the red herring that Smith's tale of discovery "has some remarkable details in common" (p. 403) with *The Mystery of Mar Saba*, a novel in which the Nazis plant a forged manuscript claiming Jesus did not rise from the dead. This fake is supposed to break Britain's fighting spirit — as though Spitfire pilots spent their spare time debating theology. How is this like the Secret Gospel? My plane has just flown into a cloud of unknowing. Gathercole remarks, rather fastidiously, that some "have noted that the overtones of homosexual behaviour" belong more to the 20th than the second century (p. 404). Yet another red herring, but readers of the *Symposium* of Plato can breathe easy that the fifth century BC is not under Gathercole's dissecting fish fork. Gathercole concludes that "it was probably written by Morton Smith in the twentieth century" (p. 404). If only the dead could sue for defamation. But what a tasty, salty platter of red herrings lies before us! Выпьем и снова нальем! (Drink up and fill the glasses!).

to the task of producing such a fake. And there is no hint in his correspondence with Scholem that he had perpetrated fraud.

Professor Morton Smith cut a forbidding figure: when I was a junior faculty member of Columbia University in the 1980s, I used to see him striding down the long corridor on the sixth floor of Kent Hall, which the Middle East and Religion departments uneasily shared. Smith, a member of the latter (I worked in the former), was tall, bald, unsmiling, often clad in a long black leather coat. He never condescended to talk to me, an untenured mortal, and the one time I did hear him speak was when he cuttingly and coldly eviscerated the thesis of a nervous young feminist lecturer to the Religion department. Senior colleagues and friends knew him better, and one of them, now an emeritus professor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told me how he and Smith were walking on the East Side of Manhattan one cold winter day, when they passed a young male couple who were too lightly dressed for the bitter weather. "Their love keeps them warm," wistfully observed Smith, who lived alone. He was a patrician who did not suffer fools gladly, and it is understandable that he held his detractors with their convoluted arguments and personal animadversions beneath contempt: he never condescended to reply to their charge of fraud. But surely it was in large measure his own provocative behavior that had led to their peremptory conclusion that the text was a forgery[38].

[38] I had an experience somewhat similar to Smith's. The most prominent and gifted poet of Soviet Armenia, Yeghishe Charents, ridiculed Stalin as the clown Pierrot in what was to be his last collection, *The Book of the Journey* (*Girkʻ čanaparhi*, 1933: see *Russell J. R.* The Book of the Way (Girkʻ chanaparhi) of Yeghishe Charents: An Illuminated Apocalyptic Gospel for Soviet Armenia / general ed. S. Astourian. Spring, 2012 (Armenian Studies Program Occasional Paper Series, University of California, Berkeley)). The first edition of the book, a bibliophilic masterpiece designed and copiously illustrated by the artist Hakob Kojoyan, was seized and withdrawn by the authorities, and the poet fell into official disfavor. He foresaw his end and became frantic and feverish. On the eve of his arrest during the great purge of 1937, Charents entrusted his unpublished manuscripts and some other papers to various friends for safekeeping. Many of these documents were buried in tin cans in backyards and suffered water damage. In the decades following the rehabilitation of people who had been unjustly repressed, and the critique by N. S. Khrushchev of the cult of personality at the plenum of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, these manuscripts were brought out of hiding and the surviving fragments began to be deciphered and published. Charents had given a sheaf of manuscripts of his poems, of homoerotic content, to Gevorg Emin, who was to rise to prominence as a respected Soviet Armenian poet in the postwar decades; Emin bequeathed the papers to his son, Artashes; and in Erevan in 1998 Artashes gave photocopies of the entire dossier to me. He did this over the objections of Emin's widow, who volubly protested that the texts should be published in Armenia, or, preferably, not published at all. I deciphered the poet's fevered scrawl, transcribed the Armenian text, translated the poems, and provided them with commentary in a collection of my *opera minora* (*Russell J. R.* From an Archive of Unpublished Poems of Yeghishe Chʻarentsʻ // Armenian and Iranian Studies, Armenian Heritage Press and Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 9. Cambridge, 2004. P. 1365-1432: the publication was originally to appear in a Festschrift that its editor did not complete). That study and another article of mine on Charents' several translations of A. S. Pushkin's poem «Пророк», "The Prophet" were re-published five years later in Armenian translation in Erevan: *Russell J. R.* Eɫiše Čʻarencʻi antip banastełcutʻyunneri arxivicʻ, "Čarencʻə: margare" // Inkʻnagir grakan handes. Erevan, 2008 (2009). Vol. 5. P. 5–41. Charents was a Com-

In their new book, Smith (no relation) and Landau[39] have argued cogently and convincingly that Morton Smith did not forge the letter of Clement. More likely, they suggest, an Orthodox monk of around the fifth century did, as indeed the great historian of religions Prof. Arthur Darby Nock had once suggested to Morton Smith. Smith and Landau have advanced the additional hypothesis that the anonymous fifth-century pseudo-Clement did all this with the aim of defending the well-established institution of non-sexual unions of two monks. Smith and Landau cite the liturgical rite of *adelphopoiesis* in the medieval Greek Orthodox church and encourage future researchers to pursue this line of inquiry. This insight is crucial.

(At this point in the discussion the author deems it fitting to add a parenthetical but important note. This study has the good fortune to appear in a theological journal and in the Russian Federation, a multi-religious, multi-national polity committed to traditional spiritual, cultural, and family values. In particular, Russian society and law are committed to the safeguarding and defense of the rich, precious, millennial heritage of Orthodoxy — a heritage apart that stands fair to serve in the redemption of mankind from the nihilist apocalypse towards which age-old adversaries are dragging the world. The author wishes to state, without hesitation, mental reservation, or any secret evasion of mind whatsoever, that it does *not* endorse in any way the propagandizing, advocacy or advertisement of the so-called LGBT* political and social agenda pursued by the ideologues of the West. Quite to the contrary, the whole point of one's argument is that friendships such as in the Biblical story of David and Jonathan have been *distorted* by the prism of that malign agenda, rendering it impossible for those with a warped perspective to perceive the truth).

Honi soit qui mal y pense: such unions evidently aroused condemnation by some clerics in Late Antiquity whose imaginations were no less pruriently active than both Morton Smith's and his critics', some fifteen centuries later. This predisposition to see Christ's intimate contact with the young man as a specifically

munist warrior and Christian mystic, a family man and a philanderer, a drug addict, and, as it happens, bisexual as well: great poets are often multifaceted, contradictory, protean, and cannot be made to fit the Procrustean bed of a prevailing ideology or official morality. Charents' private, adult proclivities would not raise an eyebrow today. In any case that is not the point: poems say what they do. The job of the editor of a text is, pre-eminently, to be faithful to its literal content. But the ensuing controversy in Armenia, after the publication of one's articles, was immense and went on for several years; and this writer was accused, *inter alia*, of having composed the poems himself. That would make one, of course, not only an uncannily talented forger of Charents' late, inchoate scrawl, but what is more important, a great Armenian poet in one's own right. One replied, with some of the same hauteur that, one imagines, had animated the late Morton Smith, that one's detractors might better have addressed their outrage at the content of the poems to Charents himself — the author of the same! But they could not do this, since the local police had tortured and murdered him back in the late 1930s, dumping his corpse into an unmarked grave. One published the recovered manuscripts because they are good poems and because the entirety of the work of the greatest poet of 20th-century Armenia must be made available for scholarly study, irrespective of its content. This is a basic prerequisite of scholarship.

[39] *Smith G. S., Landau B. C.* The Secret Gospel of Mark.

* Is recognized as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation.

sexual act enforced an inevitable ignorance, rendering modern scholars unable to perceive the meaning of the text in front of them. This led Smith, on the one hand, to make a scandalous and polemical claim; on the other hand, it led his detractors to concoct elaborate, far-fetched theories of forgery and fraud. The propensity to see sexual activity where it wasn't there — a cultural predisposition that they could not have avoided entirely even if they wanted to — prevented both Morton Smith and his critics from appreciating what the Secret Gospel of Mark actually describes: a rite or procedure of initiation into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in which the initiate experiences the full force of the intimacy of *da'at*, of knowing, as we have seen the term expounded above in the Midrash Rabbah and the later teachings of the Hasidim. For such ultimate knowledge is so total and immediate that it is compared to Adam's "knowledge" of Eve! Compared, not identified as, please note. Although Christianity is itself a mystery religion — somewhat paradoxically so, to the extent that the whole point of the mystery is for everybody to partake of it — the Secret Gospel hints at additional teachings in Jesus' circle that were revealed only to a few[40].

Let us follow the line of inquiry that Smith and Landau encourage. We, like the early Christians, are presented with the starkly enigmatic, isolated image of the young man clad in a bedsheet on the scene of the arrest of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Mark. It begs for explanation: how does the youth know Jesus Christ, why is he attired so strangely, and why is he in Christ's company on the fateful night of His arrest? The aetiological expansion of the image and episode in the "Secret Gospel", which seems to imply that Jesus Christ pursued the practice of lying together with a disciple through the night in order to impart secrets to him, provides that explanation. Events in the New Testament often have a precedent in the Old: as we have seen, the "anxiety of influence" can come into play here. Setting such theory aside, I suggest that the narrative of the "Secret Gospel" might have found Scriptural precedent in two closely similar stories about prophets of the Hebrew Bible. It is certain that these stories inform an action of Christ in the canonical Gospel of Luke. Neither of these prophetic stories, both of which have to do with physical contact, has any direct imputation of sexual activity; nor, indeed, does the "Secret Gospel".

Here are the two cases: in I Kings 17, the prophet Elijah lies with the widow's dead son and revives the boy. The story is repeated almost exactly in

[40] *Stone M.* Secret Groups in Ancient Judaism, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018 considers religious secrecy around the time of Christ, particular with reference to the community of the Essenes at Qumran and the production and transmission of apocalyptic texts. He judiciously refrains from drawing too many conclusions from the textual evidence, for which we have very little in the way of a social and historical context, and points out that ancient secret groups, in contrast to modern ones, generally did not profess to possess or believe anything of necessity alien to the thinking of the rest of society. That is, they were, one might say, more like Odd Fellows in Iowa than followers of Alastair Crowley in Los Angeles. Often the secret of a mystery religion is not the doctrine itself, but the experience of the initiate in having it conveyed to him. I can attest to this, having received the Third Degree in Freemasonry, but can say no more — not that words could be an adequate substitute for experience. They would not convey knowledge.

II Kings 8:1-6, when Elijah's disciple, the prophet Elisha, does the same thing for another boy, stretching out on top of him and touching him mouth to mouth. According to one legend, the widow's son raised by Elijah became the prophet Jonah, whom we have met above[41]. It is perhaps significant, considering the overtures that Apostles of the new faith made to the gentiles, that Elijah performs the miracle of resurrection, not in the Land of Israel among his own people but at Sarepta (Hebrew Ṣarefat, a name used in later millennia to designate France) in the vicinity of Sidon, in pagan Phoenicia — the turf of his archenemies, the wicked queen Jezebel and the priests of Ba'al[42]. Moreover, the New Testament relates the ministry of Jesus to the precedents of Elijah and Elisha; Elijah has the enduring role in Judaism of herald of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead; and the episode of the raising of the widow's son in Luke 7:11–17 is patterned directly on Elijah's procedure in I Kings 17[43]. The two prophets' acts

[41] *Lasine S.* Matters of life and death: the story of Elijah and the widow's son in comparative perspective // Biblical Interpretation. 2004. Vol. 12.2. P. 119. The author notes anthropological references to "contractual magic" and "symbolically transferring… life-force"; some shamans lie with their patients (pp. 123–124). Interestingly, the authoritative medieval Jewish commentators David Qimḥi (Radak, 12th century) and Gersonides (Ralbag, 14th century) themselves advanced the theory of transferal of life-force, to explain Elijah's miracle, hundreds of years before the invention of the academic discipline of anthropology (*Matt D.* Becoming Elijah: Prophet of Transformation. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. (Jewish Lives series). P. 17 and 21). The episode of Elisha's raising of the dead boy forms the *Haftara* — the Scriptural reading that follows the weekly Torah reading — to the *Parasha* (weekly Torah reading) that includes the Binding of Isaac (Hebrew *Aqeda*) in Genesis 22. The theme that links the two texts is, obviously, resurrection. But the commentators explain the abrupt and vague beginning of the *Aqeda* narrative, "After these things/words (*devarim*)…" as a reference to a conversation in heaven in which Satan challenged the steadfastness of Abraham's faith, so God decided to test it. This imagined colloquy, for which there is no Scriptural evidence whatsoever, doubtless was inspired by Job.

[42] *Matt D.* Becoming Elijah. P. 17 and n. 22, stresses the alien locus of Elijah's miracle, not as a prefiguring of Christian missions to the gentiles, as Luke saw it, but as an incident in the contest between the prophet of the Lord and the priests of the Phoenician god Ba'al.

[43] See *Brodie Th. L.* Towards unravelling Luke's use of the Old Testament: Luke 7.11–17 as an *imitatio* of 1 Kings 17.17–24 // New Testament Studies. 1986. Vol. 32. P. 249. The author highlights the difference between ancient literary *mimesis*, which was grounded in continuity, and the striving for otherness and originality (that causes the very "anxiety" Bloom identified). Brodie's narrowly literary approach to the problem would seem to make the charges of plagiarism and cultural expropriation methodologically anachronistic. But such an arbitrarily straitened view is itself problematic, not least because it fails to take the dimension of proselytizing for a new religion into account. The Christian church has historically argued its legitimacy and primacy with the claim not only to have fulfilled, but to have superseded or replaced its older source, Judaism. That is not an accusation but the observation of a typology: Zoroastrianism came out of *daēva*-worship, and Buddhism emerged from Hinduism, in similar ways. The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are formally literary works, or can be studied as literature, but in essential respects they belong to a different world from that of other compositions in Classical antiquity that occupied a central and venerated place in their respective cultures, like the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer and the Aeneid of Virgil. The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament address different concerns, and make normative, existential claims. The term "Old Testament" itself, which Brodie uses in his title, belongs to the very stream of polemic that he does not consider, perhaps because of an unawareness that he is practicing it: a case of the kind of ignorance Borges explored in his

of lying on the body of someone younger of the same gender — whether boy or young man — to revive him is sufficiently striking as to have inspired stories in recent times by Gustave Flaubert and Franz Kafka, nearly two millennia later. Surely the stories could have made an even stronger impression on the author of the letter of pseudo-Clement and the Secret Gospel of Mark, sometime around the fifth century AD.

In Flaubert's story "La légende de St. Julien l'Hospitalier", the saint feeds and then lies naked, mouth to mouth, beside a horribly diseased leper to heal him. The cured leper then reveals himself as Christ. In the actual 13th-century *vita* of the saint, the leper asks to lie next to Julien's wife: Flaubert's alteration of the detail is telling and seems to reflect inspiration by the stories of Elijah and Elisha. In Kafka's story, "Der Landarzt" ("The Country Doctor"), a doctor is given a pair of miraculous horses and a coachman to make a nocturnal house call. When he arrives, the patient's family force the doctor to strip naked and lie in bed with the sick boy, touching the festering wound on the child's ribs. It is not clear at the end whether the doctor's cure has been successful; but as he escapes, in such a hurry that he cannot pull on his fur overcoat, they chant *Freuet Euch, Ihr Patienten, der Arzt ist Euch in Bett gelegt!* "Rejoice ye, O patients: the doctor is lying in bed with you!" This song confers a bizarre sacrality on the scene — a nightmarish parody of the Biblical stories since it evidently echoes Martin Luther's hymn *Nun freut euch, Christen, insgemein*[44]. There are other details of the story that resonate with Biblical lore: Elijah and Elisha both had celestial horse-drawn chariots; and the founder of the new Hasidism, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the Baʿal Shem Ṭov (1698–1760), used to go on his missions in a carriage. It had a miraculous aspect: his faithful coachman Alexei did not need to tell the horses where to go. The doctor's fur coat, which he loses, is a dark refraction perhaps of the prophetic mantle[45]. Kafka, as one would expect, has adopted the two Biblical narratives to evoke his own vision of a surrealistic world. I do not think there is "anxiety of influence" here: he does not seek to undermine or supersede the Hebrew Bible and promulgate a new faith of his own devising, nor is he strongly misreading it to take a quantum leap into the new. On the contrary, the Czech Jewish writer was at home in his tradition and culture, which he cherished. His work is more midrash than appropriation. But he does insistently probe and question the ways of God: his friend Max Brod compared Kafka's searchings to Job's; and "in his wake, Northrop Frye has called *all* Kafka's works commentaries on Job"[46].

story about Averroës, considered elsewhere in this essay. Brodie (*Brodie Th. L.* Towards unravelling… P. 258) writes, for example, "Where the OT [Old Testament] might seem to suggest a negative image of God, a vindictive God who brings death, the NT [New Testament] presents the *kyrios* as inspiring hope, as one who saves". "Negative", "vindictive", death-dealing, hopeless, and failing to save: such facile, pejorative caricatures of the God of Israel and the Hebrew Bible are the very soul of replacement theology.

[44] *Lasine S.* Matters of life and death. P. 125–129.

[45] *Barzel H.* The Biblical Layer in Franz Kafka's Short Story 'A Country Doctor' // Biblical Images in Literature / ed. R. Bartel. New York: Abingdon Press, 1975. P. 92 and 100–101.

[46] *Frye N.* Anatomy of Criticism. New York: Atheneum, 1967. P. 42, cited by *Barzel H.* The Biblical Layer… P. 90, no. 2.

Now, to return to Smith and Landau's hypothesis about close, consecrated, non-carnal male relationships, one finds that in the pre-modern period such friendships were more the rule than the exception. The *locus classicus* for them in Christendom is not Classical Greece — Achilles and Patroclus in Homer; the *Symposium* of Socrates, Alcibiades, and their friends in Periclean Athens; the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton — but the love of David and Jonathan in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, which in any case predates all the others. In a remarkable book published posthumously, the medievalist Alan Bray assembled epigraphic, literary, and liturgical evidence for same-sex unions such as that of two English knights, John Clanvowe and William Neville: their grave monument in Galata, Constantinople, shows their helmets and escutcheons touching; John died in early October 1391, and his friend expired of grief a few days later. Bray cites the ballad of two star-crossed lovers, Bewick and Graham, a product of the 16th century and thus contemporary with Shakespeare's similar but better-known tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. He also provides the complete text of the Catholic rite for "making brothers", *Ordo ad fratres faciendum*[47]. Although Bray mentions and discusses David and Jonathan at various points[48], and the Latin of David's lament over Jonathan and Saul appears in the photograph of an epitaph on the front of the dustjacket of the volume, the names of the prototypical Israelite Biblical lovers seem to have been fastidiously expunged from the index. The Mishnah, contemporary with Clement of Alexandria, exhibits no such reticence: *Avot* (the "Ethics of the Fathers") 5:16 explains: *Kol ahava she hi' teluya ve-davar, baṭel davar beṭela ahava, ve-she-eina teluya ve-davar, eina beṭela le-ʿolam. Eizo hi' ahava she-hi' teluya ve-davar, zo ahavat Amnon ve-Tamar, ve-she-eina teluya ve-davar, zo ahavat David vi-Yehonatan.* "Every love that is dependent on a thing: when the thing ceases, love ceases; and that which is not dependent on a thing does not cease, forever. What is the love that is dependent on a thing? That is the love of Amnon and Tamar. And the one that is not dependent on a thing? That is the love of David and Jonathan".

One is not aware of heroic male friendships in second-century Israel, though Rabbinic literature holds up the prototype of David and Jonathan as a model to be admired and followed. It is not hard to find examples of such strong friendship elsewhere in the Near East, though, from around the same time as the compilation of the Mishnah. A series of mosaics depicting scenes from Greek epic and myth, now kept in the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, include a portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus seated together on a couch: captions in Syriac Estrangela script identify them by name[49]. In the high Middle Ages, the heroes Tariel and Avtandil in Shota Rustaveli's romantic epic poem, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, are both engaged in quests undertaken on behalf of absent prin-

[47] *Bray A.* The Friend. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, on Clanvowe and Neville: P. 13–15 and fig. 1; on the ballad of Bewick and Graham, p. 30; and for the Latin rite of "making brothers", pp. 130–133.

[48] Ibid. 13 and 143, for instance.

[49] *Russell J. R.* The Epic of the Pearl // Revue des Etudes Arméniennes. 2001–2002. Vol. 28. P. 61, no. 49 and p. 62, pl. 9.

cesses, but their strongest bond, a friendship that commands pride of place in the Georgian national epic, is to each other[50]. Once one overcomes the ignorance caused by prejudice — in this case, those prurient and narrow assumptions about the nature and possibilities of human relationships that the puritanical culture of recent centuries has imposed on our perception, and that the commercial sexualization of everything has done to Western culture — the encounter between Jesus and the young man of the Secret Gospel of Mark becomes not only understandable, but, in the context of the history of religions, even unremarkable. Unknowing here is not of a small thing, but of so very much; just as for Job and Jonah, even David, there is a vast realm of human unknowing: the animal kingdom of God's creation.

But there is a still better example to illustrate how Smith and his critics alike were unable to know what Secret Gospel of Mark meant, because of their cultural prejudices and predisposition to interpret personal intimacy as invariably sexual. This example is a religious parable embedded in a major 18th-century Hasidic book already cited in this essay, the *Tanya* (Aramaic, "Teaching"). The parable is in some respects identical to the second, initiatory, part of the narrative of the Secret Gospel that follows the young man's resurrection. It is illustrative in a negative way, in that it has been taught in a milieu where it was understood for what it was and therefore never aroused the slightest controversy or prurient comment. Chapter 46 of the *Tanya* discusses ways of kindling the light of the love of God and the desire to be united with Him, that is "implanted and concealed" (*tequ'a u-mesuteret*) in a man's heart. The love for a friend, the Alter Rebbe explains, awakens love in that friend's heart, *ve-hineh zehu ṭeva' ha-nahug be-midat kol adam af im shneihem shavim be-ma'ala* "and see, this is the way nature works in the character of every man even if they are equal in status." Then he introduces a *mashal* ("parable") to extrapolate to the love of God:

Ve-'al aḥat kama ve-khama im melekh gadol va-rav mar'eh ahavato ha-gedola ve-ha-'aṣuma le-ish hedioṭ ve-nivzeh u-shefal anashim u-menuval ha-muṭal ba-ashpa. Ve-yored elav mi-meqom kevodo 'im kol śarav yaḥdav, u-meqimo u-merimo me-ashpato, u-makhniso le-heikhalo heikhal ha-melekh ḥeder li-fnim me-ḥeder maqom she-ein kol 'eved ve-śar nikhnas le-sham, u-mityaḥed 'imo sham be-yiḥud ve-qeruv amiti ve-ḥibuq ve-nishuq ve-itdabqut ruḥa' be-ruḥa' be-khol lev va-nefesh, 'al aḥat kama ve-khama she-tit'orer mi-meila' ha-ahava kefula u-mekhupelet be-lev ha-hedioṭ u-shefal anashim ha-zeh el nefesh ha-melekh be-hitqashrut ha-nefesh mamash mi-lev va nefesh me-'umqa' de-liba' le-ein qeṣ. Ve-af

[50] The *Vep'xis tqaosani*, composed more in a Persian than a Christian setting and spirit, does idealize the heterosexual love of Majnun, Georgian *mijnuroba*. But the devoted friendship of Tariel and Avtandil at the heart of the poem is worthy of attention. The Yazidis, a Kurdish religious sect with roots in both medieval Sufism and pre-Islamic Iranian religion, have an institution of *adelphopoiesis*, the "brother (or sister) of the afterlife (*akhiret*)", that can be considered in this connection as well: see *Asatrian G.* The Holy Brotherhood: The Yezidi religious institution of the 'brother' and the 'sister' of the 'next world' // Iran and the Caucasus. Erevan, 1999–2000. Vol. 3–4. P. 79–96.

im libo ke-lev ha-even, himes yimas ve-hayah le-mayim, ve-tishtapekh nafsho ka-mayim bi-khlot ha-nefesh mamash le-ahavat ha-melekh.

"And how much more so if a great and mighty king shows his great and powerful love to a commoner, one despised and degraded among men, held in contempt, and cast onto a dunghill. And he descends to him from the place of his glory with all his ministers together with him, and raises him up and elevates him from his dunghill, and causes him to enter his palace, the palace of the king, to a chamber within a chamber, a place that no servant or minister enters, and there comes together with him in unity and true closeness and embracing and kissing and the clinging together of spirit to spirit with all heart and soul — how much more will love be awakened in and of itself, doubled and redoubled, in the heart of this commoner, this lowly one among men, towards the person of the king in an actual attachment of the soul, from heart and soul, from the depth of the heart, infinitely. And even if his heart is that of a stone, it will melt utterly and become like water, and his soul will pour itself out in passionate longing for the king's love"[51].

The prince and pauper, retiring to inner room, coming together in intimacy, hugging and kissing, experiencing the transports and the passion of heartfelt love: *none* of this parable would suggest a homoerotically carnal undertone to the thousands upon thousands of Hasidim who study the *Tanya* every day of their lives; but then, they still read the Song of Songs, the great Biblical love poem we encountered above, in the ancient and medieval allegorical manner of which contemporary man in the secular West is no longer capable. Indeed, chapter 46 of the *Tanya* goes on to discuss Solomon's composition shortly after the parable translated here.

There is yet another case, perhaps the strongest of all, to be adduced in the historical and religious dossier of such male friendships imbued with spirituality yet untainted by carnality. The Christian church, as noted above, has a rite consecrating such unions. In Orthodoxy it is known as братотворение or побратимство, and it has been described as "the lyrical center and culminating idea"[52] of *Столп и утверждение истины* ("The Pillar and Ground of the Truth"), the *summa theologica* of Fr. Pavel Florensky, one of the greatest Russian Orthodox thinkers of the modern age. The book is structured in the form of twelve letters to a friend: in the eleventh, "On Friendship", Fr. Pavel describes the "gracious office" of *adelphopoiēsis* in detail, heaping praise on "this summit of human feeling, like clouds brushing against the twin-peaked Ararat, the heaven-

[51] Tanya: Admo"r Shneur Zalman of Liady, Sefer Liqquṭei Amarim Tanya. Benei Brak, Israel: Pe'er Miqdoshim, 5774. P. 207.

[52] *Florensky P.* The Pillar and Ground of the Truth / transl. by B. Jakim with an intro. by R. F. Gustafson. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, introduction, p. xviii. The author of the introduction to the English translation of the book is Richard F. Gustafson, who was a professor of Russian literature at Barnard College in New York. As a Columbia undergraduate I attended his course on L. N. Tolstoy in the early 1970s. Gustafson was an open champion of gay liberation at the time, and his learned introductory essay is somewhat weighted toward the theme of homophilia in general.

ly swirls above the earthly"[53]. The letters that form the chapters of the book are addressed to this friend in the faith, a fellow clergyman: the two lived in the same quarters and shared a common life, from the humdrum and daily to the sacred and eternal. Such a friendship might be sexualized in the view of the followers of Carpocrates, of the detractors of Morton Smith, perhaps by Smith himself, and certainly by many Western readers whose perceptions have become incapacitated by the global commodification of sex and the reduction of human relations to transactional materialism and carnality. They would be veiled from knowledge; but in the 20th century, in the era of revolutionary change, a Russian clergyman still could see.

It is, thus, prejudice that is one cause of unknowing — of the inability, in the case of the Secret Gospel, to read an allegory of Divine love in innocence, or to see a kind of human relationship sanctified over millennia and across many cultures, celebrated in every genre of writing, and in plain view. That relationship was called friendship once. Scant wonder it is so scarce in the cultures of the West today. *Magna vis veritas*, "Truth is a great power": the tall, lapidary uncials march in stone across the wall of the vast, airy reading room of Butler Library at Columbia University, where Morton Smith and his colleagues read, and thought, and wrote. The motto is so close to the high ceiling of the room that as an undergraduate of Columbia College, half a century ago, I used to muse that the truth had to be not just *vis*, but *avis* — a bird — to get that high. Yet the case of the Secret Gospel, considered in this essay on unknowing, proves that not knowing, in this instance, a malign and perverse inability to know, to understand, has proven to be far more powerful than truth in human affairs. There is a wry old Jewish anecdote: Why do they say the truth is everywhere? Because anywhere it goes, people chase it away!

The power of the lie endures despite all the plain evidence of the harm that it does: ignorance due to prejudice depletes the human state and is perennially the cause of personal tragedy and social violence. That knowledge of what makes

[53] *Florensky P.* The Pillar and Ground… P. 326–327. The vivid simile was well chosen. Although it is located at present on the territory of Turkey, *Mount Ararat* (Armenian Azat Masis) is not only the resting place of the Ark of Noah but the symbol of the Armenian homeland. Father Pavel was half Armenian: his mother belonged to the gently-bred Saparian family. My teacher and lifelong friend of blessed memory, Prof. Nina Georgievna Garsoian (1923–2022), shared that ancestry and mentioned on occasion being related to Pavel Florensky. In Erevan a quarter of a century ago I had the pleasure of meeting her cousin Karen Saparov, a professor of the Russian poetry of the Silver Age at Erevan State University. A number of foreign scholars were under ultra-nationalist attack at the time for various imagined sins. Prof. Saparov had collected a neat stack of articles vilifying this writer, who, he remarked only half in jest, was "our Solzhenitsyn". I have never received higher praise. Florensky's mention of the twin peaks of Ararat will also summon to mind the contemporary seminal text of Имяславие ("Name-Worship"), "On the Mountains of the Caucasus": Fr. Florensky was of course closely associated with this school of Russian Orthodox mystical speculation and practice. In his essay on friendship Fr. Pavel cites also Nikolai Fyodorov, an important early figure of the strange Cosmist school of Russian speculative and scientific thought. The book is about truth (истина), yet its real subject is love. In the Psalms, truth (*emet*) reaches the firmament; but love (*ḥesed*) is higher, reaching heaven — thus, the truth is encompassed by love.

us unknowing, is known all too well, yet it is plain that humans, in the main, do not wish to know and prefer to linger in the illusory comfort of *beli-daʿat*. H. P. Lovecraft began his epic tale of a monstrous submarine divinity, "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), with these words of fright and resignation: "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age". But he is wrong: the dark ages were not, and can never be, peaceful or safe.

For reasons that have nothing at all to do with monsters, human beings have a propensity to confront our Creator, and each other, with our eyes tightly shut. Perhaps Isaiah is not indulging in irony at all but describing an existential dead end. That refusal to know, to allow the intimate encounter that defeats *beli-daʿat*, is the true terrifying vista, the genuinely frightful predicament in which humanity has been collectively mired, deaf to the perorations of prophets and the explanations of evangelists. Sometimes God forces a man's eyes open: this is the case of the pagan prophet Bilʿam (English Balaam), who is hired to curse Israel but instead is made to bless it. In one of his latter blessings he declares (Numbers 24:15–16), *Neʾum Bilʿam beno Veʿor u-neʾum ha-gever shetum ha-ʿayin. Neʾum shomeʿa imrei El ve-yodeʿa daʿat ʿElyon… nofel u-gilui ʿeinayim.* "Balaam speaks, of Beor the son; and the man whose eye has been opened speaks. The one who hears the commands of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High speaks… who lies prostrate, but whose eyes are forced open to revelation". God forced Balaam's eyes open. But the resources of the phenomenal world alone, without such helpful intervention, seem to afford scant reason for hope of such revelatory knowledge.

In 1933, as Hitler was coming to power in Germany, the English writer James Hilton published his novel *Lost Horizon*, in which the survivors of a plane crash make their way through the snowy wastes of the Himalayas to an enchanted valley called Shangri-La[54]. The abbot of the monastery there foretells an approaching storm to Conway, the hero who must make his way back into the world: "It will be such a one, my son, as the world has not seen before. There will be no safety in arms, no help from authority, no answer in science. It will rage till every flower of culture is trampled, and all human things are leveled in a vast chaos"[55]. The Great Patriotic War that came a few years later was to be that storm;

[54] The novel is the source of the famous fictional name: *la* is Tibetan for a mountain pass, as this writer can testify from experience, having crossed the terrifying and decidedly un-paradisiacal Zoji La from the Vale of Kashmir on the road up to Ladakh in the summer of 1985.

[55] James Hilton's words have a particular resonance for this writer. In August 1969 at the age of fifteen I first visited the Soviet Union, in a summer study group organized by the Choate School in Connecticut. The stay in the USSR was delightful, but on the way back westwards we stopped in Poland and entered a living nightmare. Poland, whose anti-Semitic and Russophobia

and survivors hoped the world after it would recover and achieve knowledge. Why else the cost of unimaginable suffering? But it did not recover, and humankind learned nothing. Ignorance, and the hatred that it engenders, endured; and we are still on Matthew Arnold's darkling plain where ignorant armies clash by night. Psalm 46:10–11 commands: *Mashbit milḥamot ʿad qeṣeh ha-areṣ, qesh-et yishaber ve-qiṣeṣ ḥanit, ʿagalot yiśrof ba-esh. Harpu u-**deʿu** ki Anokhi Elohim, arum ba-goyim, arum ba-areṣ*. "He makes wars cease, to the ends of the earth: He shatters the bow and splinters the spear, burns chariots with fire. Desist, all of you, and **know** that I am God. I will be exalted in the nations. I will be exalted on the earth".

A religious person wanting his fellows to open their eyes and by doing so and coming to knowledge, avert apocalypse thereby, might consider taking a fresh look at knowing and unknowing in Isaiah, Job, Jonah, and Elijah; and in Mark, the "Secret Mark", and Matthew. Perhaps the way out of the mire of ignorance requires the recognition that authentic knowledge is inseparable from morality, and that morality cannot be empirical, a matter of cultural relativity, but an imperative. That imperative has its source, paradoxically, in what is beyond rationality, beyond what is intellectually knowable: it comes from God, in Whom all paradox is resolved. Hebrew has no precise equivalent of penitence. The term it offers is *teshuva*, meaning "return", a concept akin, perhaps, to Christian *metanoia*, that sea change of mind that is the beginning of the soul's road home. That may be the only way left to us, to recover one's humanity, to open one's eyes, and to know. Perhaps the five diurnal senses have proven inadequate to this necessary task: the kind of knowledge we need comes, I think, from a source beyond the limitations of time and space. And therefore a more subtle kind of perception, a sixth sense, must be cultivated, in order to perceive it[56].

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proclivities at the present time animate far too much of its civil life, had expelled nearly all the tiny postwar remnant of its once vast and thriving Jewish community, just a year before. In Warsaw, as I was walking down Marszalkowska street reading a guidebook about the Warsaw Ghetto, a tall, burly middle-aged Pole stopped me, spat in my face, and cursed me: *Psa krev zhid!* ("Dirty Jew, blood of a dog!"). In Kraków, the six Jewish kids in our group were regularly served our food last by the Polish waiters. I had a paperback copy of the novel *Lost Horizons*, and inscribed the passage quoted here after a visit to Auschwitz, in a guidebook to the camp. Our local Polish tour guide listed many nationalities but carefully avoided any mention of the million Jews murdered there. The words of *Lost Horizon* rang truer than their author probably imagined.

[56] Cf. the poem that Nikolai Gumilyov wrote in 1921, the year of his arrest and execution:

ШЕСТОЕ ЧУВСТВО

Прекрасно в нас влюбленное вино
И добрый хлеб, что в печь для нас садится,
И женщина, которою дано,
Сперва измучившись, нам насладиться.

Но что нам делать с розовой зарей
Над холодеющими небесами,
Где тишина и неземной покой,
Что делать нам с бессмертными стихами?

Ни съесть, ни выпить, ни поцеловать.
Мгновение бежит неудержимо,

The writer Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam, widow of the murdered poet Osip Mandelstam, a Russian Jew by birth who embraced the Christian faith, writes about such a spiritual hope that is beyond time and space, in the second volume of her memoirs of her husband and their life together till his arrest and deportation in the late 1930's. "I do not know whether Mandelstam was right when he considered Byzantium (but not Athos) the symbol of division. But what matters is not that, but what will happen next, whether strength will be found to overcome the final collapse, the total extinction of people and things, of the grass, animals, and trees. When I look at people's faces as they ride up the escalator in the Metro or stand in line for cutlets, it seems to me that the life in them is already seeping away. But sometimes even they, past exhaustion as they are, will suddenly pronounce a human word, and then hope is resurrected. Till his dying day a man does not lose hope, even though he recognizes all its deceptions. There

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И мы ломаем руки, но опять
Осуждены идти всё мимо, мимо.

Как мальчик, игры позабыв свои,
Следит порой за девичьим купаньем
И, ничего не зная о любви,
Все ж мучится таинственным желаньем;

Как некогда в разросшихся хвощах
Ревела от сознания бессилья
Тварь скользкая, почуя на плечах
Еще не появившиеся крылья;

Так век за веком — скоро ли, Господь? —
Под скальпелем природы и искусства
Кричит наш дух, изнемогает плоть,
Рождая орган для шестого чувства.

THE SIXTH SENSE

The wine in love with us is beautiful,
And the good bread, that sits in the oven for our sake,
And woman, by means of whom
Although tormented first, ourselves in pleasure we may sate.

But what are we to do with the rosy dawn
Over the heavens breathing cold
Where silence is, and an unearthly peace?
What are we to do with immortal poems?

One cannot eat them, drink them, kiss them.
The moment flees beyond our grasp.
And we wring our hands, but yet again
We are condemned to walk on past, to walk on past.

Like the boy who, having forgotten his games,
Will sometimes follow maidens bathing,
And, knowing nothing of love,
Is still tortured by a mysterious craving.

As once in a thicket overgrown
A slimy creature, conscious of its impotence,
Roared, feeling on its shoulders
The not yet sprouting pinions:

So age after age — Lord, is it far hence? —
Beneath the scalpel of nature and art
Our spirit cries, our flesh grows weak,
Giving birth to the organ of sixth sense.

is another hope as well. That one will not deceive. It is in no way connected with eschatological alarm and is not commensurate with it — it is outside time and outside space"[57]. Outside time and space: the ultimate Unknown and Unknowable, yet the source of all meaning, of all that can be known. There is no doubt that Nadezhda Yakovlevna's closing words, "outside time and outside space", speak of a return to God, the ultimate Odyssey, the one of every soul.

The use of the concept of space-time here, the sense of return, is surely foregrounded in a poem of Mandelstam from his own *Tristia ex Ponto*, written at the dacha of S. Sudeikin in Alushta, on the Black Sea coast of the Crimea, where he had gone for a respite from the chaos of the two successive Russian revolutions and the ensuing, sanguinary civil war. As has been recognized, it is plainly inspired by these lines: *Heureux, qui comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage, / Ou comme cestuy là qui conquit la toison, / Et puis est retourne, plein d'usage et raison, / Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son age!* "Happy is he who, like Ulysses, has taken a beautiful journey / Or like the one who has won the Golden Fleece, / And then returns full of experience and wisdom / To live with his parents the rest of his days" (Joachim du Bellay, 16th century, *Les Regrets*, sonnet no. 31). Perhaps the change from use and reason to time and space reflects Mandelstam's awareness of Einsteinian thought. In Mandelstam's poem, being away has a relativity: the outward journey to regain Helen and the return to Penelope are associated. With du Bellay we have both the Odyssean *nostos* and the outward voyage of the Argo to Colchis, whose shores the same sea washes as Tauris (Crimea). (But Constantine Cavafy in his poem "Ithaka" taught us also — maybe it was Homer all along who did — that the *nostos*, the return, is only the fitting conclusion to what matters most, which is the journey, hence a justification of going through life on earth: Σα βγεις στον πηγαιμό για την Ιθάκη, / να εύχεσαι να ʽναι μακρύς ο δρόμος, / γεμάτος περιπέτειες, γεμάτος γνώσεις "When you set out on the journey to Ithaka, / Pray that the road be long, / Full of adventures, full of knowledge [*gnōseis*: the poet uses a plural for gnosis]").

> Золотистого меда струя из бутылки текла
> Так тягуче и долго, что молвить хозяйка успела:
> Здесь, в печальной Тавриде, куда нас судьба занесла,
> Мы совсем не скучаем, — и через плечо поглядела.

[57] *Мандельштам Н.* Вторая книга. Paris: YMCA Press, 1972. С. 555: «Я не знаю, прав ли был Мандельштам, когда считал Византию (но не Афон) символом разделения. Дело не в этом, а в том, что будет дальше и найдутся ли силы для преодоления окончательного распада и полного вымирания людей, вещей, травы, животных и деревьев. Когда я смотрю на лица людей, поднимающихся по лестнице метро или стоящих в очередях за котлетами, мне кажется, что жизнь в них уже иссякает. Но иногда и они, безмерно усталые, вдруг произнесут человеческое слово, и тогда надежда воскресает. До самой смерти человек не теряет надежды, хотя и знает все ее обманы. Есть и другая надежда. Она не обманет. Она никак не связана с эсхатологической тревогой и с ней не соразмерна: она вне времени и вне пространства».

Всюду Бахуса службы, как будто на свете одни
Сторожа и собаки, — идешь, никого не заметишь.
Как тяжелые бочки, спокойные катятся дни:
Далеко в шалаше голоса — не поймешь, не ответишь.

После чаю мы вышли в огромный коричневый сад,
Как ресницы, на окнах опущены темные шторы.
Мимо белых колонн мы пошли посмотреть виноград,
Где воздушным стеклом обливаются сонные горы.

Я сказал: виноград, как старинная битва, живет,
Где курчавые всадники бьются в кудрявом порядке:
В каменистой Тавриде наука Эллады — и вот
Золотых десятин благородные, ржавые грядки.

Ну а в комнате белой, как прялка, стоит тишина.
Пахнет уксусом, краской и свежим вином из подвала,
Помнишь, в греческом доме: любимая всеми жена, —
Не Елена — другая — как долго она вышивала?

Золотое руно, где же ты, золотое руно?
Всю дорогу шумели морские тяжелые волны.
И, покинув корабль, натрудивший в морях полотно,
Одиссей возвратился, пространством и временем полный.

The golden honey streamed out of the bottle
So thickly and long that my hostess had time to pronounce:
“Here in sad Tauris, where fate has swept us,
We miss nothing at all” — and glanced suddenly over her shoulder.

Everywhere Bacchus’ rites, as though the world
Had only guardians, hounds — you walk, notice no one.
Like heavy barrels, the quiet days roll:
Far off in the shed, voices you don’t catch and don’t answer.

After tea we went out in the vast brown garden,
Dark curtains like eyelids let down over windows:
Past white columns we walked to look at the vines
Where the sleeping mountains pour as airy glass.

I said: The grapevine’s alive like an ancient battle,
Where curly-haired horsemen contest in shaggy ranks:
In stony Tauris is Hellas’ wisdom; and here
Are the noble, rusty golden acres’ hedges.

And now — in the room white as a spinning wheel stands silence.
The smell of vinegar, paint, and white wine from the cellar:
In the Greek house, you remember, the wife they all loved,
Not Helen, the other, how long she unraveled?

Golden fleece, where are *you*, golden fleece?
All the road long crashed the heavy sea breakers.
And, leaving the ship, working a sail upon the waves
Odysseus returned, replete with time and space.

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О неведомом

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Пророчество Исайи парадоксально тем, что слушатели его не поймут — и из-за невежества пострадают — потому, что им понять не дано. Этот парадокс отражается и в Евангелии от Марка, в Новом Завете. Однако парадокс еще усиливается ввиду многократных утверждений иных библейских текстов, что именно Израиль знает истину, в отличие от других народов. Знание представляется при этом как сильный процесс, охватывающий всю личность и суть человека. Книги Иова и Ионы трактуются как трагикомедии о незнании или

невежестве. Все пророки Израиля намекают, что мы не в состоянии знать то, что знает Господь Бог, поскольку Он понимает все Свое творение, в частности, животных, в недоступном нам ключе. Далее автор, привлекая понятия тайны и неизведанного, рассматривает «Тайное Евангелие от Марка»: издатель текста и его разъяренные критики, одинаково ослепленные каждый своими предрассудками, не смогли понять ни суть текста, ни социальный контекст его. Автор выдвигает в качестве источников повествования в «Тайном Евангелии от Марка» рассказы о пророках Илии и Елисее и приводит параллельный по содержанию хасидский текст XVIII в. Предрассудки, как известно, вредны, но люди с ними расставаться не хотят. В результате автор делает вывод, что выход из отчаянного положения (не)знания, ведущего к скорби, парадоксальным образом заключается в возвращении к Неведомому — к Божественному началу всего ведения.

Ключевые слова: Александр Пушкин, Исайя, Второзаконие, Псалтырь, Марк, Иов, Иона, бели-да'ат (др.-евр. «невежество»), Илья, Елисей, Гарольд Блум, Мортон Смит, Егишэ Чаренц, Хорхе Луис Борхес, «Тайное Евангелие от Марка», животные, хасидизм, Николай Гумилев, Надежда Мандельштам, Осип Мандельштам, отец Павел Флоренский.

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