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## Book Reviews

J. Beluch

Don Chipley

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Bayley, Harold, (1993/1990), The lost language of symbolism: An inquiry into the origin of certain letters, words, names, fairy tales, folklore, and mythologies, Volumes I & II, CA: Citadel (Carol Publishing Group) (Vol. I, 375 pp., Vol. II, 388 pp. Paper)

It was a delight to review these volumes and the research of the symbols historically investigated by the author. A great quantity of information, insights, and interconnections is found in this monumental study. Seeing the progression of the hidden spiritual truths distilled and manifested in the diversity of symbolic forms is made easier by this writer's extensive 'history of origins and evolution' research and commentaries.

The books are a massive contribution as they open many avenues to greater awareness and understanding of symbolic/spiritual knowledge. In the Introduction, the author admits it is "better to run some risk of ridicule rather than by over-caution to ignore and suppress clues which, under more accomplished hands, may yield discoveries of high and wide interest,..."(pp. 15). This is said because Bayley includes everything of relevance uncovered in his research.

The old saying, 'A picture is worth a thousand words', has meaning when interpreting the graphic symbols considered here. The levels of meaning and interpretation can be traversed from the very basic and obvious to the utmost esoteric higher truths depending upon one's present level of growth. Also the present volumes show how the expressive form and experience of sacred precepts has changed and/or crystallized over several centuries and how certain universal stories and symbols have been saved, shared and disseminated.

The material presented here is clearly intended as a reference source and not meant for straight reading. Some of the titled chapters, include: 'The Ways of Ascent', 'The Millennium', 'The Hosts of the Lord', 'King Solomon', 'Cinderella' and 'The Eye of the Universe' (in Vol. I) and 'The Sign of the Cross', 'The Stone Hinge', 'The Garden of Allah', 'The Tree of Life', and an 'Appendix of the Letters of the Latin Alphabet as Seemingly Understood by the Mystics' (in Vol. II). These volumes are recommended for further study by those interested in exploring the esoteric origins of archetypal symbols which Jung and others often discuss in their studies of spiritual growth processes.

Some personal insights gleaned are that: 1) these symbols can be easily misinterpreted by untutored seekers; 2) humans are quite clever in the way they communicate something spiritual or unseen in the physical universe (e.g. perennial wisdom aspects) as a pithy symbol or story; and 3) a deep truth is what is left once the words and facts of a symbol, folktale, myth, etc. are stripped away.

In closing, a quote from the text that touched my heart is offered: "The healing of the world/ is in its nameless saints. Each separate star/ seems nothing, but a myriad scattered stars/Break up the night and make it beautiful." (H. Vaughn, Vol. I, pp.106).

JOSEPH BELUCH, R.A., M.A.

Young, Serenity. Editor (1994) An anthology of sacred texts by and about women. New York: Crossroad (448 pp Paper)

In her book The Wounded Woman (1982, Boston: Shambhala) Linda Schierse Leonard reports two important facts about Western mythology: 1) There are no feminine heroes and 2) in all the great Western love stories women suffer a largely tragic conclusion in that they die in order to realize unity on some higher plane of reality. IN the last decade two major scholarly texts have appeared to counter the thrust of these points. One is Barbara G. Walker's thousand plus page compendium, The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets (1983 San Francisco: Harper). The other is the Young book reviewed here.

This anthology offers readers a wideranging selection of excerpted primary source materials on the religious activities of women both as depicted in texts of seven world religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism) and those of other important traditions such as the Ancient Near East (includes e.g. Egypt and Mesopotamia), Greek and Roman antiquity, Northern Europe, Shamanism and Tribal Religions (Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii receive attention here), and 'More Recent' Alternative Movements (e.g. Quakers, Shakers, Theosophy and Voodoo). The selections are also set out to reflect certain themes (e.g. creation myths, women as evil, wisdom as feminine, dualities, gender conflicts, goddesses and the ideal woman) which for the most part are characterized by scope, balance, beauty and depth in their coverage. Each section and segment begins with an informative set of notes and concludes with an ample bibliography of source texts and related readings. Moreover the book has a detailed "Table of Contents" and two comprehensive indexes all of which aim to help readers quickly uncover a specific area of interest.

My sense is that the Walker 'Encyclopedia' and the Young 'Anthology' serve as excellent complements to one another. Whereas Walker's book presents an abundant flow of brief to lengthy descriptive entries ranging from Abishag, Achamoth, Akka and Athene to Ursel, Vidya, Witch and Zurvan, Young's book provides a host of originally (via translations) recorded spiritual background and context derived stories, folktales, etc. Thus you can read the selections in Young's book to get a fuller picture of the Goddesses, heroines and significant personalities identified in the Walker text.

This book has its own unique value as well. It supplies all of us--both women and men--with a multi-dimensional picture of what it has and in many contexts still does mean to be both human and spiritual. Hopefully, in this sense it will provide us with a clear foundation for identifying and integrating the feminine and masculine in our being, and in so doing enable us to ascend to a higher plane of existence both in respect to ourselves and others.

DON CHIPLEY

