

Announcing

# ♀ SULFUR ♀

*A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art*

Combustion. Inflamed language. And any of the numerous butterflies of the family Pieridae, with black-bordered yellow or orange wings. SULFUR on one level is an evolution of CATERPILLAR, a literary quarterly published and edited by Clayton Eshleman (with Robert Kelly as Contributing Editor), from 1967 through 1973.

SULFUR will appear April, October and January, beginning in the spring of 1981. A two-hundred page format, typeset and perfect bound, the magazine's production costs will be supported by the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. Eshleman and Kelly will again be Editor and Contributing Editor respectively.

SULFUR's subtitle is to convey that what we feel is needed is a journal of the whole art — writing — as it presents and represents. In addition, SULFUR will publish translations, book reviews (polemical as well as evaluative), archaic, archetypal and alchemical "source materials," as well as music, art and photography.

In the first issue there will be the first of three presentations of the complete extant correspondence between Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson; a 121 line section from Canto 84 suppressed by Pound; and ten unpublished letters from Hart Crane to Kenneth Burke.

There will also be poetry and prose by Kelly, Eshleman, Jerome Rothenberg, John Ashbery, Keith Waldrop, Michael Palmer, Gerrit Lansing, Diane Wakoski, Ron Padgett, Alan Williamson, Paul Blackburn, Lyn Hejinian, Tom Meyer, Michael Davidson, Theodore Enslin, a chapter from James Hillman's "Silver and The White Earth," and a previously untranslated letter by Antonin Artaud.

There will also be translations from the work of Leonardo Sciascia (Italy), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Jacinto Cua Pospoy (Guatemala), and Hector Manjarrez (Mexico).

## SHADOWS OF EROS: NOTES ON DOROTHEA TANNING'S SURREALISM

NORMAN WEINSTEIN  
(Boise)

Out of imagination and reality something new is born and it is this very knowledge which is the miracle. The distinction between imagination and experience is no longer valid. But contrary to what one thought, it is not the world itself that falls to pieces as a result, but only the image of an enlightened world, which, although very familiar to us through force of habit, no longer satisfies.

—Marianne Thalmann<sup>1</sup>

Surrealism developed as an artistic and philosophical movement in the years following the First World War. 1914 shattered the image of civilized Europe, a cracking of the public facade of reason and decency. While the surrealists created an extensive body of literature and painting to transfigure postmortem effects of the conflict, Freud and Jung probed the human unconscious to provide psychological keys to the event. The fact that the surrealists and the psychoanalysts never found a common ground is a curious and tragic paradox, given their common interest in dreams, fantasies, imagination, and the reconciliation of contraries within the soul.

The French surrealist painter, André Masson, recently described a meeting between the leader of surrealism, André Breton, and Freud:

... when Andre Breton went to see Freud, they didn't get along at all. Freud said to Breton, not in these exact words but this is the gist of it: that which I want to cure, you, on the contrary, wish to expand.<sup>2</sup>

Exactly what was it that Breton and his artistic disciplines were attempting to expand? Breton's definition of surrealism in his first Surrealist

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Manifesto offers a clue:

SURREALISM, noun, masc., pure psychic automatism which is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason. . . . Encycl. Philos. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Freud's unsatisfactory meeting with Breton should come as no surprise to the students of these movements. Surrealism spoke most powerfully to a generation of young artists intensely involved with sweeping cultural revolution. Freud's most loyal followers moved along the path of resignation and stoic adjustment to the cultural malaise. What Breton describes in his Manifesto belongs to Freud's "Id."

Examining Surrealism in the light of Archetypal Psychology creates a different set of possible cross resonances. Breton's emphasis upon "the superior reality" of free associations, fantasies, and dream imagery corresponds with this definition of soul:

the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image, and *fantasy*—that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical.<sup>4</sup>

Archetypal psychology reminds us that the soul speaks a wild language, one riddled with contraries and paradoxes. This image of the soul, ambivalent, fluttering in its growth between dream and waking, sanity and madness, anima and animus, satisfies the surrealist definition of the imagination perfectly.

This study brings the language and ideas of archetypal psychology to bear upon one of the outriders of the official surrealist movement: Dorothea Tanning. Like many other women painters involved with Surrealism, she was largely ignored by Breton. Her husband, the famous sculptor and painter Max Ernst, attracted more of Breton's attention. Her paintings had their genesis long before Surrealism was born and continue long after its demise. Her link with the movement was forged largely through her marriage to Ernst and her involvement with painting oneiric imagery.

In working with her paintings I discovered that myth was indeed a

viable tool for a critical sighting of her work. As well, I realized that several of Tanning's image clusters corresponded to imaginal movements within my own psyche; Tanning's art, as Jung insists all significant art must, speaks *transpersonally*, offers constellated images of universal significance.

My main interest lies in examining how the fiery inspiration of Eros moved Tanning to create art that transcends all the conventional notions of Eros. Tanning's portrayals show that the torch of Eros sometimes points down.

## II.

Dorothea Tanning's reputation rests largely upon a series of canvases completed in the late forties and early fifties featuring pubescent girls wandering in surrealistic interiors. Nothing in the history of modern art—or traditional depth psychology—prepares us for Tanning's young girls.

In "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" two girls dressed in tattered Victorian garb wander through a large corridor punctuated by several doorways, one slightly ajar. A stairwell leading to a lower level is blocked by a gargantuan sunflower with tendrils partially obstructing the corridor. The girls, one blond, the other brunette, are incompletely clothed. Their dress hangs in erotically provocative disarray. Long hair streams down a back like a cold river or defies gravity by rising in the air like a flame. Other young girls in Tanning's art sleepwalk to the night's music. In the terrifying "Jeux d'Enfants" they rip sheets of wallpaper off a bare wall revealing sexual portraits of genitals and pubic hair under the decorative surface. The nude girl in "The Guest Room" stands before an otherworldly gnome figure and in a bed a grown woman sleeps with a battered, deformed doll. In "Palaestra" six girls wander through a corridor full of closed doors, several girls levitating to the ceiling. The one whose head touches the ceiling is nude, the others in various stages of undress.

One could assume on the basis of these early canvases simply an obsession with awakening female sexuality. One could fantasize this involvement stemming directly from the artist's past. Tanning writes of herself in the third person:

Dorothea was raised in an atmosphere of strict Lutheran piety. But at the same time there hovered over the Tanning roof a genre of extravagance which might



have been named "Keeping Up." Thus, while dancing and card playing were forbidden to the three little daughters of the house, they were to be found wearing lace, and velvet cloaks, and dresses that might have been Paris originals.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly the raw materials for these works existed in Tanning's personal memories. But they function like buckets dipped into that eternally flowing river of the imagination which both surrealist and archetypalist seek to tap. As Tanning herself states: "One of the goals for me in painting was to *escape* biography."

Tanning's girls are overwhelmed by sexuality (suggested by teasing undress or total nudity). They embody some of the demonic airs suggested by Hans Bellmer's "The Doll." But while Bellmer infuses his doll with sadomasochistic fetishism, Tanning's girls suggest an erotic curiosity and impulsiveness. Sex happens to these girls, shocks and unbalances, sends them to the ceilings. Who are Tanning's girls? Rather than speaking of them as symbols of an individual psyche, allegories of Tanning's own childhood and adolescent erotic confusions, perhaps they are crystallizations, imagistically of her *various* souls. The notion of a polycentric personality realized on canvas is hinted at in Tanning's interview from Alain Jouffroy:

My personal space is so sumptuously furnished that there is not the least room for feeling exiled. . . . There is such a plethora, and everything out of place. Everything moves. Also behind the invisible door, another door. I suppose I should say that I live a double life.<sup>6</sup>

Later in the same interview Tanning speaks of living "a double life. Or triple or multiple."<sup>7</sup> Doors are the keystones of Tanning's pictures. As Lewis Carroll reminds us in *Alice in Wonderland* any doorway is a potential entrance to another reality, another level of consciousness. The various souls in Tanning's paintings flutter near thresholds, peek around doors slightly ajar, wander through endless corridors of shut doors searching for someone or something. In what is Tanning's most widely recognized canvas, "Birthday," the artist stands, breasts bared, before a series of open doorways. The maiden's positioning near the doors suggests the soul's fervor in wanting to cross the threshold into erotic fulfillment. Their long tresses, often defying gravity, intimate a desire to be swept away.

The longing is surely for Eros. But the mingling of erotic and fearful

imagery, the static postures and raging stances declare that the embrace of Eros is not all sweet delight. We do well to remember that Freud, lifelong charter of Psyche in Eros' tangles, concluded his life meditating on the death wish, and that James Hillman has said: "Fear seems an inherent necessity to the eros experience; where it is absent, one might well doubt the full validity of the loving."<sup>8</sup>

Tanning's canvases show that Eros can sometimes be a god of the underworld, a sleeping monster, both animal and angel, dog as well as god. Dogs are everywhere in Tanning's work. The winged creature resting at the artist's feet in "Birthday" synthesizes characteristics of boar, porcupine, cat, eagle and dog. A pekinese—that classical 'lap'-dog—assumes a variety of conventional and non-conventional guises. In "The Rose and the Dog" it echoes the terribly sentimental gazing face of a child painted by a commercial artist like Keene. It wears a fully human face in "Maternity." In "The Blue Waltz" a girl dances with a serious looking pekinese her own size. We can note a strikingly similar use of the dog in Charles Olson's poetry. Charles Stein writes:

The figure of the "Dog" . . . occurs with some frequency in the series, and the various meanings which this figure is given bear archetypal resonance. Like the serpent, the image of the dog connotes a bi-valued principle of energy which is both creative-daemonic and rabid-demonic.<sup>9</sup>

As Olson's dog is both bestial and heavenly so too is Tanning's image of Eros. In her vision Eros is also a force which dogs us, sniffs in embarrassing places, tripping and screwing the soul at every opportunity. The tears and terror of many of Tanning's girls are not a preparation for Eros; rather they are the experience of Eros *as* Thanatos, the god *as* rabid dog.

Tanning's experience of Eros is reminiscent of Orphism. The Orphics too noted some of the shadows of Eros, claiming in their cosmologies that Eros was born from Chaos. This genealogy of Eros may account for the presence in many of Tanning's pictures of peculiar unformed creatures—unformed in the sense that there is no hint of human proportion. These shapes often resemble sculptures created in clay or bread dough, or energies fashioned by closely wrapping metal sheets haphazardly together. In "Interior" and "Interior With Sudden Joy" these figures rest on spidery, thin leg forms. As Tanning says: "My paintings bristle with objects that have no relation to anything in the dictionary." These



formless forms are not, I suggest, chaotic images, but are images of Chaos. Compelled to imagine the origin of Eros, Tanning repeated the Orphic genealogy.

The frightened sleepwalkers who wander through the halls, the winged animals and dancing partner dogs, the precise formlessness of Tanning's images of Chaos, imaginings of this dark truth: it is in our fears, our wounds, our chaotic emptiness, our private hells that Tanning would lead us. She says:

I want to seduce by means of imperceptible passages from one reality to another. The spectator is caught (oops!) in a net from which he can extricate himself only by going through the whole picture till he comes to the exit. My dearest wish: to make a picture without any exit at all, either for me or for him.<sup>10</sup>

Tanning desires to seduce us through the doorways, down the corridors, into these chaotic regions so that we, like her, may know Eros.

Many of the themes here discussed coalesce in the painting "Interior With Sudden Joy." Six figures coexist in a dark room featuring one wall covered by a blackboard. Curiously, the French word for shame, *Honte*, is written on the board. Reading from right to left: the first figures are two adolescent girls in partial undress, their small breasts revealed, linking arms in a loving gesture. The girl on the far right has one arm linked to the other girl (her sister), the other hand pets the head of a large pekinese, its rear its only visible aspect in the picture. The next two figures merge into one another: a nude black girl in tight embrace with one of Tanning's Tanguy-like globular masses. Next to this entwined couple a woman stands in an open doorway, dressed entirely in black, the bottom half of her body obscured in smoke. In her hand she holds a glowing object. Whatever she is holding emits a pale white light that frames her face in ghostly luminescence.

I propose the following reading: the painting is "about" the soul's relation to Eros. All of the actions are happening simultaneously, deepening and complicating each other. On one level there are the caucasian girls, a curious mix of eroticism and eeriness. Both are dressed in old-fashioned, long, white nightclothes, their tops unbuttoned. One wears a chemise totally buttoned under her nightclothes, the other wears a fashionable low cut, flesh-tone bra. The chemise girl wears bobbysocks—that perennial symbol of adolescence; the other wears black

nylons. A lit cigarette carelessly burns at the feet of the bobbysocked girl. One girl pats the pekinese while gazing away from the other figures; the other looks in the direction of the black girl locked in erotic embrace. Both girls are clearly toying with the outward trappings of being grown up, yet are still virginal and girlish.

The embrace of the black girl and the other worldly creature is a psychic deepening of the virgins and the pekinese. The virgins become a black nude woman, worldly wise—the anima is no longer so pure. Eros is no longer a force easily domesticated and house broken. Here the god is a terrifying ungainly form, plaster white, that suggests *anything but* unbounded sexual pleasure; or sexual pleasure as death. The relationship between virginal anima and cherubic pekinese is no longer a condescending pat; instead the black woman bends one of her knees slightly to allow for maximal genital contact with the alien form.

At the threshold of a *coniunctio*, a voluptuous union, is the final figure. Dressed in black, her marriage will also be a funeral, a death of psychic virginity, an awakening through death of soul into life. She looks frozen—perhaps already feeling the icy wind of Hell—her pose is an essential one, she is a soul iced in its own essence. Already occurring is the change of anima into psyche, a change signified by the smoke, and as Wheelwright has noted: "... smoke, cloud, and vapor are but different forms of the state of being of things intermediate between fire and water, and soul belongs ontologically in this area. Being vaporous a soul is also smoky. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Finally, the light is a lunar light, pale and white, the self-reflective light of an awakening psychic consciousness.

Tanning's surrealist art connects not only to Orphism but also to Neoplatonism, alchemy, and to archetypal psychology. This tradition imagines that the anima, the white virgin, the innocent young maiden is awakened into psychic life only through tortures. While the pathology must be valued for its own sake, it is not the end. The anima is tortured *out* of innocent girlhood and *in* to something else: the torture by Eros in to the complications of beauty.

### III.

These bodies are rather affirmation, symbolic perhaps, of voluptuousness, but also of the fierceness of a connection, of the amazing will of a being to affirm his most ancient roots upon the civilized plane.

—Dorothea Tanning<sup>12</sup>



The leap from Tanning's paintings of the forties and fifties to her most recent works exhibited at the Gimpel and Weitzhoffer Gallery in November 1979 in New York is a dizzying passage. In his 1974 interview with the artist Jouffroy attempts to establish discrete stylistic periods that Tanning's pictures can be classified within. Tanning rejects such categories:

Each of my paintings is a station on the same track. I don't see any breaks or deviations—even temporary ones. The same preoccupations are obvious from the beginning, the same obsessions rise to the surface. . . . My paintings, and lately my sculptures, are part of the same search, with discoveries, storms, hilarity, sufferings, rebirths.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the links between works of different periods require a patient and critical eye to detect. The surface trappings of her surrealistic style are absent from her recent works. The adherence to sharply defined objects arranged in startling juxtapositions in realistic interiors (a style connecting her with various works by Ernst, Dali, Magritte, and Sage) is no longer present. Nude girls have vanished. Even the doorways are absent.

In place of those images, Tanning has created luminous adult bodies that are swirls of vortical physical energies. An inspirational figure for this transition toward energetic whirls of color might have been Matta. In any event, Tanning's dancing, gyrating, twisting bodies dominate each canvas so totally that they suggest that the very air and ground they inhabit are created by their movements, inscapes *made* by imagining. Bodies are no longer destined to wander through long corridors. Ecstatically they celebrate being alive in the flesh in a universe humming with Eros.

Consider, for example, the 1977 painting "Family Portrait." An earlier painting with the same title has a dark and forbidding atmosphere, and was dominated by a massive male figure with eyes totally concealed behind glasses. Like a stony faced Underworld deity, this 'god' voids life as he himself is devoid of it. But how different the later canvas! Three humans and one dog twist and turn in a kaleidoscopic swirl of ruddy flesh tones and pastoral greens. The sex of the two figures is obscured. The woman's figure is corpulent, luxuriously fleshy, a soul ripened and round by experience. Her abdomen and legs are bathed in a bright white light from an unknown source. Above the abdomen her body is wrapped in a

greenish wash, a rich protoplasmic broth. The remaining two human figures merge simultaneously into the body of the pekinese and woman. Many of Tanning's later canvases celebrate a psychological universe, a world where the soul's sheer exuberance in being incarnated in matter gives life to the earth. In "Tango Lives" a male and female dancer, their bodies emanating a cool blue luminosity, dance a tango in celebration. Their long limbs gracefully punctuate a backdrop of green floor and chalky white atmosphere. The cobalt blues and ivories imply a subtle cultured eroticism, a contrast to the hot passionate sexuality of "A Family Portrait."

Given Tanning's adamant insistence that "each of my paintings is a station of the same track" what is to be made of this astonishing transformation? A way into this enigma is offered by her novelette, *Abyss*, a wonderful surrealistic gothic fable in the tradition of Poe and E.T.A. Hoffman, where the haunting binding of Eros and Underworld is ambiguously stated.

The novelette is, at least in some respects, a reverberation of the Eros/Psyche myth. Destina, a seductive little girl living in a large mansion housing a number of her tutors and other boarders, reveals a secret treasure to Albert, a painter residing in the house. Her treasure is a "memory box," a wooden toy box that contains bits of animal, human and supernatural anatomy. Destina shares another secret: somewhere in the nearby desert she has befriended a panther. In attempting to confirm the existence of such an unlikely animal, and seduced by Destina's convincing tale, Albert meets violent and untimely death.

Albert's fate hints at the result of splitting Eros, as is so often done in life and in theory, into a physical and spiritual component. Albert's desire is ravenously physical:

He dragged his eyes away from the table and looked at her face. There was a choking pain in his chest. His gaze devoured the little red mouth, the throat, the hair, the white dress, as his mouth had devoured the plateful of food.<sup>14</sup>

The reader's nose right away smells something rotten. Albert's desire is so engorgingly physical, without reflection, timing or culture. But at the same time the fascination with Destina is too puer, too spiritual. Falling in love with the fantastic animal of Destina's imagination, Albert must know if it is *real* or not, and it is this complex of to be or not to be that







- 1 Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 89.
- 2 Deborah Rosenthal, "Interview with André Masson" in *Arts Magazine*, November 1980, p. 93.
- 3 Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 89.
- 4 James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. x.
- 5 Elsa Honig Fine, *Women and Art* (New York: Allanheld and Schram, 1978), p. 210.
- 6 Dorothea Tanning, *Catalog From the Exhibition at the Centre National de l'Art Contemporain*, Paris, June 1974, p. 47. (The interview with Alain Jouffrey translated from the French for the author by Sandra Blackaby.)
- 7 *Ibid* p. 45.
- 8 James Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 81.
- 9 Charles Stein, "Olson and Jung: The Projection of Archetypal Force Onto Language" in *New Wilderness Letter* #8, Spring 1980, p. 52.
- 10 Dorothea Tanning, *10 Recent Paintings and a Biography* (New York: Gimpel and Weitzenhoffer Gallery, 1979), unpaginated.
- 11 P. Wheelwright, *Heracitus* (Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 66.
- 12 *Tanning Catalog*, p. 47.
- 13 *Ibid* p. 46.
- 14 Dorothea Tanning, *Abyss* (New York: Standard Editions, 1977), p. 43.
- 15 *Tanning Catalog*, p. 48.
- 16 Robert Kelly, *Kill the Messenger* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1979), p. 21.

## THE BENZENE UROBOROS: Plastic and Catastrophe in *Gravity's Rainbow*

MICHAEL VANNOY ADAMS  
(Easton, Pennsylvania)

Apart from the python, the snake in general appears in Dahomean symbolism and art, though little in Yoruba. In the clay wall mouldings (bas reliefs) and decorated cloths in the palace-museum at Abomey there are striking representations of brightly coloured snakes, red, blue, and white, the most sacred colours. The snake is curled in a circle, with its tail in its mouth; a very ancient and almost universal symbol of immortality and eternity. . . . by swallowing its tail it forms a circle . . . which goes round and round for ever, 'like a great ring,' or like 'first, and last, and midst, and without end.'

The coloured snake is not only called by the name of the principal snake Dā, but is also regarded by the Ewe as representing the rainbow, Aido Hwedo.

Geoffrey Parrinder<sup>1</sup>

Fate the rocket describes a parabola  
In darkness mostly, more rarely on a rainbow.

Andrey Voznesensky<sup>2</sup>

From the title, *Gravity's Rainbow*<sup>3</sup> seems exclusively a novel of classical physics. And indeed Thomas Pynchon does combine Newton's theories of mechanics and of optics, his laws of mass and motion, light and color, in a metaphoric pun of immense imaginative complexity: gravity's rainbow is attraction's diffraction. Pynchon describes the trajectory of the visible spectrum; he plots the prismatic curve of a projectile, the plastic rocket that writes its iridescent, catastrophic way across the sky until gravity forces it to crash and explode at rainbow's end. The vapor from the exhaust of the rocket diffracts the white light of the atmosphere into red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, and as gravity's influence attracts the mass of the rocket in motion, the result is a rainbow. Pynchon's rainbow is not, like Noah's, the symbol of a covenant that God will never again destroy man in a diluvian catastrophe, but a symbol of the last judgment—that man may well destroy himself in a plastic one.

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