

Read as artist's statement before the premiere of *The Young Prince* at Cimatheque Ontario, November 2007

### **An Immodest Proposal (Notes on Alchemy and *The Young Prince*)**

No, my proposal has nothing to do with "Preventing the Children of poor People in Ireland, from being a Burden to their Parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Publick."

I am not proposing that, in order to remedy the problem of the poverty-stricken, oppressed and uneducated population of Catholics in Ireland, thousands of the children should be killed and eaten. It has rather to do with aesthetics. Or rather, immodestly, it has to do with metaphysics.

Suppose art were less a matter of design and more a metaphysical attitude.

Suppose art were a path to regions beyond space and time.

Suppose we were to consider the square to stand for the material world of forms, and the circle to stand for the infinite spirit that surrounds and permeates all material forms.

Suppose that beneath, beyond, around, and through all manifested reality is an invisible reality that is formless. Suppose it also is infinite, eternal, luminous, and loving. Suppose, moreover, that only a few are continuously aware of this transcendent reality continuously, but only because egocentricity is an obstacle such awareness. Art might have a role in obviating that obstacle.

Suppose that art, if one is open to it, might crack the shell of egocentricity, and such cracks, as great contemporary poet reminds us, are "how the light gets` in." Or suppose at the very least, it might serve as a very valuable purgative – and that purgation itself might be preparation for escaping one's self.

Supposing all that, a formidable puzzle still haunts us: words work well to identify realities that exist inside the measurable world – that is to say, inside the sphere of space and time. However, as theologians such as Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite have pointed out, the effort to extend words beyond that sphere of space and time is useless. Here are parallel problems: How can one make an image of the invisible? How can one visualize the transcendent? Gesturing towards the transcendent with symbols and metaphors has some value. Perhaps music and rhythm, because of their proximity to the primordial, have greater value.

Suppose that emptying oneself out, that is getting rid of the Little Self, is a stage along the way to apprehending regions beyond space and time. Suppose, too, the greatness of photography is that an image that can into being without an image maker; such images are therefore utterly anonymous. A film, since it is a congregation of photographic images, is then a *Société Anonyme*.

Suppose we were to attempt the impossible conversion of a square into a circle of exactly the same area and the resulting circle back into the original square. But we might consider the matter in this way as well: not only is possible to construct a square with an area arbitrarily close

to that of a given circle, but bending the rules by allowing an infinite number of compass-and-straightedge operations, or performing the operations on certain non-Euclidean spaces, makes squaring the circle possible. For example, although the circle cannot be squared in Euclidean space, it can in Gauss-Bolyai-Lobachevsky space (hyperbolic geometric space). There is not reason to assume that the space we occupy would be that described by Euclid.

Suppose the longing art expresses can be captured in the phrase: "I am the finite square; I wish to be one with the infinite circle." The pentagram, the hexagram, the rose and the cross are also images of the uniting of the microsism and the macrocosm.

Suppose the unification of the male and female in the figure of the Androgyne were an achievable reality. It's an old idea, after all, and find supports in suprising places: In Paul's letter to the Galacians, he states that, after Baptism, "There is neither... male nor female, for ye are all one in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 3:28) Another apocryphal text, Second Epistle of Clement, states that when Jesus was asked at what moment the Kingdom of Heaven would come, the answer was: "When the two shall be one, the outside like the inside, the male with the female neither male nor female." (The Gospel of Thomas 22 ) Probably even older is the Jewish oral tradition recorded in the Zohar of the Kabbalah: "It behooves a man to be 'male and female' always..."(Scholem, ed., *Zohar: The Book of Splendor* New York: Schocken Books, 1977, p. 10.)

Suppose, moreover, that the Androgyne image represents one who has continuous awareness of the unity and order of the cosmos and therefore who can be said to have "cosmic consciousness." Suppose that not only deities but human beings can have this transcendent consciousness.

Suppose the Androgyne were realized in the Mystic Marriage – that through the Mystic Marriage the Androgyne appears as the Golden Consciousness that transforms life. Is the situation similar in yoga? No less an authority than Mircea Eliade says that it is: "The union of the divine pair within his own body transforms the yogi into [an] 'androgyne'." (Eliade, *The Two and The One*. New York: Harper Torchbook, 1965, p. 118.)

Suppose again, contrary to the iron laws of the finite realm, that doubling a cube were possible – a feat that would require finding the cube root of 2, which, as we all know is not a finitely constructible number. But again, there is a route through the finite.

Think of Duchamp's Bachelor, whose desires, ipse dixit, are "hallucinated rather onanistically" (Duchamp, *Notes and Projects*, Note 92 ): they take the scattered "form of a fog of solid spangles" (Projects, Note 92 ) . . . "each spangle retaining in its smallest parts the malic tint" (Ibid ., Note 100 ) [malic tint : sexual identity]. The spangles are then "dazed . . . they lose their awareness . . . . They can no longer retain their individuality." (*loc. cit.*) Finally "the spangles dissolve . . . into a liquid elemental scattering, seeking no direction, a scattered suspension!( *Notes and Projects*, Note 101)

Think of the psychological meaning of blackness (*nigredo*, or putrefication and spiritual death), whiteness (*albedo*, purification) and thirdly yellowness (*citrinitas*, the solar dawn or awakening),

and redness (*rubedo*, the integration of consciousness and matter).

Try it! You might see it works!

And oh, yes, regarding the title: the young prince travels to a foreign land, and when he has arrived there, he forgets his royal heritage and, through ignorance, sinks into the depravity of the foreign land. A heavenly female messenger reminds the prince of his status and mission. Once awakened, the prince finds the treasure and returns home in glory.