Note: *The Shaftesbury Chronicles* was intended to be a three volume novel spanning the period 1989 to 2015, setting out the changes that would have brought into being Shaftesbury as a New Age Centre. These chapters are set in 1989, when two sixteen year olds, the narrator and Woody, are helping Johannes, a mystic who has lost his way, to recollect and then implement the actions necessary to set Shaftesbury on its path to self-discovery.

Chapter 25

When Woody talked like that, full of enthusiasm but everything abstract, nothing to hold onto, soon I'd feel uncomfortable, want something to touch, do, change. So for a couple of days, while he was trying to talk to Johannes, or to make sense of the stuff in the house, I worked quietly on my own, in my own world. I realised it was something I'd always done when things were going wrong at home; as the arguments or stifled silences raged, I'd slip away, slip beneath it as it were, and sort my Lego, or reorganise my books according to my current system - alphabetical, or sequence of acquisition, or grouped "Christmas books", "Birthday books", "Books I bought" - any system as long as it *was* a system. On this occasion I cleared out Johannes' tool shed, emptying it, sweeping it out, cleaning and oiling and hanging all the tools, sorting screws and nails. I was fixing jam jar lids to the underside of a shelf, for screw-in nail jars, when Woody came panting to the door, 'he's talking,' he said, and sped off. I looked around the four-square space, a place of shape and slanting light, reluctantly stepped out into the dazzling sunlight that exploded through my eyes, in my head, and walked over to where Johannes stood, talking quietly, head down, scratching in the dust with a stick.

'In the beginning, men were travellers. As the seasons changed, herds moved, plants fruited, fish swam in, they followed a migrant path, a weaving and cyclical journey through a habitat which gave man all he required - for he required only what nature gave him. He developed tremendous skills - we see the remnants of those skills in the Polynesians who can navigate across the trackless seas without compasses, by the look of the water, the feel of the wind; in the Bushmen who

can find water-bearing gourds deep under featureless desert. Their senses were so developed and attuned that they lived in an indescribably rich sensory environment. And with the whispers to the senses came the whispers to the spirit. Even an insensitive person today recognises the effect of different places on mood - the stimulation of soaring crags, the restfulness of woodland glades. Imagine, then, a sensitised people, unencumbered by possessions, uninsulated by clothes (and remember Montaigne's famous question - did man first dress because he felt cold; or does he now feel cold because he dresses?) Every broad vista, every narrow cleft. every dark wood, every bubbling spring, must have spoken with a different voice. As the tidal moon spoke to his oceanic blood, the sun and planets to his astral body, the magnetic and telluric currents of the earth to his electrically-driven nervous system.

'Man was part of nature, as the animals and plants were. He was of their physical world, and their spiritual world. They spoke to him, he spoke to them. He made gifts to thank them, left tribute to placate them. As he walked his migratory path, he talked the landscape - as the Australian native peoples still do their song lines. Time passed, but it wasn't linear, it was cyclical, measured by the changing seasons, the annual journey, the return; men could adapt to the slow changes of climate, the precession of the equinoxes, the movements of the earth's magnetic currents. And man, the great story-teller, the great personifier, told stories - at the campfire, on the journey, with each activity; stories about the creatures who inhabited the world around him, about the origin of landscape features, of the history of the group and from the time before the group, reinforcing the group and its association with the prehuman inhabitants, the spirit world that parallels the physical. For the migration of the group wasn't random, but followed an annual path - following certain herds, arriving at the coast to catch certain migrations, reaching particular places as fruit ripened. Repetition developed ritual.'

As he spoke, he was scratching on the dry earth with a stick, making features, a route.

'A child's birth would be associated with the particular location, the time of year, a memorable event; his rite of passage into adulthood marked by a test

during which would be revealed his totem creature. And the movements of the people and their ceremonies strengthened the natural forces, reinforced the earth's richness. Man lived in intimate relationship with his environment, never taking more than he needed, wasting nothing, asking permission before killing an animal, never "storing up treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt" as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. It's all there, in the Sermon on the Mount. The earth was his mother, the sky his father. Life was lived, death was not feared, because it was part of life - and in death, wasn't he reunited with the mother? "Death came to them as sleep", Hesiod says, "and all good things were theirs". It was...'

'The Golden Age,' Woody whispered.

'Yes. And man lived in...'

'The Garden of Eden.'

'The time before time. Cronus' time. The same Cronus who devoured his children. How they frighten us by characterising him thus! How grateful we are for mother Rhea for replacing infant Zeus with a stone! But really it's an image of timelessness, of cyclical not serial time, of repetition not succession. (And don't Hindus characterise the individual as repetition until emancipation into Moksa is attained? And isn't it, too, an image of the wisdom that knowledge should sometimes be swallowed rather than brought to birth? That, as Jesus says, sometimes "do not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing"? A wisdom that this rationalist, scientific age refuses to acknowledge?)

'So, what happened? What ended the Golden Age? If only we knew - maybe then we'd be able to order our lives better. There was something in man himself, in his brain. Maybe it was an accident, like a glitch in a computer system that's so complex, unforeseen connections are made. (Just such a glitch almost crashed the first Apollo landing.) Maybe a random mutation. Maybe it was the inevitable outcome of the evolution of an organism *so* complex - it was built into the structure of the brain. Maybe it was God's hubris - he allowed to evolve a creature complex enough to recognise Him, and worship Him; and that would inevitably depose him. The mother (matter) saved the child; the child (man) killed the father (God). Maybe it was matter's revenge on spirit - the change from a

world ruled by spirit to one ruled by matter, a result of the progressive cooling of the universe from the moment of the Big Bang. Maybe it was the outcome of there being three irreconcilable forces: timelessness; entropy; evolution. Whatever, the Bible is clear - it was the serpent.

'And what did the serpent bring? The knowledge of good and evil. The loss of innocence. The loss of oneness. The notion of dividing one into two - the this and the that - was as significant intellectually as sexual reproduction was biologically. It changed the whole basis of life. For with two - the self and the other - came self-consciousness, the most fundamental of alienations.

'So, man had fallen, to live for the rest of his existence in a post-lapsarian condition. It's the condition we have to live with, what *this* is all about.

But first, let me tell you what happened to the Golden race: "And then this race was hidden in the ground. But still they live as spirits of the earth, holy and good, guardians who keep off harm, givers of wealth: this kingly right is theirs". So writes Hesiod. While we must live in a time when, as Rilke says: "Each torpid turn of the world has such disinherited ones, to whom neither the past belongs, nor yet what has nearly arrived. For even the nearest moment is far from mankind".

'We who live like that must remember those of the Golden Age, the Golden race, who are not gone - but hidden.'

He stopped, emptied, staring down at the marks he'd been making automatically in the dust as he'd been speaking, then leaned forward, looking intently, as if he could almost see something there. Then he shook his head, drew back the stick as if to swish it all away, then turned abruptly and walked back to the house, thrashing the air, grumbling. Woody ran indoors and came out with pencil and paper and made rapid sketches as the wind smeared it, tumbled it all away. It looked vaguely familiar, but I couldn't think what it reminded me of.

Chapter 26

'I have a date,' Woody said.

'Congratulations - who with? Has she got a friend?' He looked at me blankly, then bleakly. Not a good day for facetiousness.

'A date for the activation, for doing - what it is we're supposed to do, here. September 19th.'

'Good. We have a date. The Circle has spoken. Shame we don't know what it is we're supposed to do, isn't it?' I was bored, fed up, pissed off. It was almost the end of the holiday. What had started with high hopes was fizzling out, like it had all been a waste of time. The feeling of superiority - that I was engaged in some important mission while my friends were just messing about, passing the time, hanging out - had been replaced by a sense that it'd been me who'd been missing out, wasting his time with a dropout and a loser, while they were getting their lives together. I was Woody Allen choosing the wrong train. For at the centre of the garden, in which we'd done such good work, was a house of chaos and confusion which we'd made no progress in making sense of, a mystery we were no nearer solving. And whether the house was the key to unlocking Johannes, or vice versa, they were intimately involved - and we were getting nowhere with either.

'Come on,' Woody said, 'let's have another look.' I plodded after him.

'I thought at first,' his hand sweeping around the strangely-shaped room, 'that this might be an actual built representation of Fludd's "Memory Theatre" - there was a vogue in the Renaissance for inventing memory systems based on places and images, "mnemotechnics" it's called. Fludd may have based his on the Globe theatre. This strange shape - it reminds me of a shape developed in the 60's by a Danish mathematician that most nearly combined the circle and the square - you've heard the phrase "squaring the circle", meaning attempting the impossible? It also means reconciling the spiritual circle with the material square. I thought they might, here, have been combining *ars rotunda* with *ars quadranta* - the memory systems using magical and concrete images respectively, but...'

‘Jesus, Woody - why couldn’t you have misspent your youth in snooker halls and low dives? I haven’t understood a word of what you’ve said!’

‘It doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter - even if it was a system once, it’s long since collapsed into chaos. Where’s the clue, where’s the clue?’

There were tiers of books, shelves of papers, the walls were plastered with pictures and quotations. If I tried to make sense of it, I became confused and anxious. But if I let myself just look, float around, treat it as a cabinet of curiosities, I found it strangely satisfying. “Whole Earth Catalogs”, and “Survival Scrapbooks”, “Ecologistics”, alchemical texts and philosophical works, a model of a perpetual motion machine, a drawing of a water pump, with beside it the text: “When I was in Rome, one Gruterus, a Swiss by birth and my master in this art, made this machine for Cardinal Sextus Giorgio whom he served as engineer. It caused the water from a tiny spring, bubbling up at the foot of a mound in his garden, to ascend to the top. I cannot praise enough his artifice and ingenuity, which from so mean a spring raised water to a height with such ease”. Robt. Fludd UCH p460. In red ink - ‘ingenious but impractical - find a way’. Beside it copies of Escher’s “Belvedere” and “Waterfall”. A mathematical paper on logarithmic spirals. A geometric study, “The Cosmology of Stone Circles”, an essay “Blake’s *Milton Diagram* Explained”. “The Rational Almanac 1903-4” by Moses B Cotworth. A beautifully engraved and gorgeously coloured plate of “The Grand Rosicrucian Alchemical Formula”. “The Magical, Quabalistical and Theosophical Writings of Georgius von Welling, on the Subject of Salt, Sulphur and Mercury”. “The Glastonbury Zodiac”. This;

> “gently was I charmed
> Into a waking dream, a reverie
> That, with believing eyes, where’er I turned,
> Beheld long-bearded teachers, with white wands
> Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky,
> Alternately, and plain below, while breath
> Of music swayed their emotions, and the waste
> Rejoiced with them and me in those sweet
> sounds”. Wordsworth *“The Prelude”*.

A note in red ‘Oh yes! Oh yes!’

And: “Tlön is surely a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men”. Borges. With the note: ‘and Shaston too!’

Annotated prints of Poussin’s “Les Bergers d’Arcadie”, Botticelli’s “Primavera”, and Holbein’s “The Ambassadors”.

This:

“they lived
Brief, anguished lives, from foolishness, for they
Could not control themselves, but recklessly
Injured each other and forsook the gods,
They did not sacrifice, as all tribes must, but left
The holy altars bare. And, angry, Zeus
The son of Cronus, hid this race away
For they dishonoured the Olympian gods”. Hesiod.

Annotated: ‘we had it made, we blew, my silver brothers’.

A picture “Ramon Lull with Ladder of his Art, 14th C”, with, next to it: “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognises them - as steps - to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)” Wittgenstein. The note: ‘the Ziggurat of Wisdom. The Tor Maze. Jacob.’ And more and more.

This room was the inside of Johannes’ head. He was lost inside his own maze. He’d built a library and was now lost in it. And we, how were we, two kids, supposed - it would all have been wonderful (would be wonderful), all this, the books and paper smell and beautiful pictures and fabulous words and mysterious worlds, all around, layer beyond layer, depth beneath depth, height above height, interlocking, interacting, interwoven, if we hadn’t needed to be trying - to make sense of it? I felt the same anger and impatience I felt with my parents, that I was being involved in adult stuff, that it wasn’t our job; I said, ‘I’m out of here’ and headed for the door, grabbing (why?) a folder on my way. Outside, out of the clotted, curdled atmosphere, the paralysis of damp stagnation, something inside me leaped with relief as I felt the sun hot on me, the buzzy

activity in the air, the greenness and sappy richness of the garden (I twanged a branch, felt its wonderful elasticity) stir me up. I looked down at the pamphlet: "Wind- and Water-Power in Wessex - A Plan 1974". A map of Wessex. I stared at the map. Then down at the ground, at Johannes' scratchings, almost gone now, except there - that familiar lozenge, on the map, too. Of course - 'Woody! It's a map! He drew a map!'

Chapter 27

Orientated on the familiar lozenge of the Isle of Wight, we soon made out, on the sketch Woody had made, the Dorset coast, the Somerset coast, the Mendips, a cross for Shaftesbury.

'But what's this?' An irregular shape, covering much of the area from Shaftesbury to the South Coast. A forest? A tribal territory? We had no way of knowing. Johannes came wandering round the corner, saw us and advanced slowly towards us, talking. Another appearance of Old Hamlet's ghost. Horatio's philosophy flattened underfoot. More from our enigmatic oracle.

'There was the physical landscape, that the tribe passed through, was part of - the deep, still forest, the sunny windblown Downs, the soft-flowing rivers. And, too, there was the energy landscape, unseen but felt - the surface of the earth washed by a flow of energy, the earth's magnetism, the lines of earth energy, that animals and birds feel, and only dowsers now locate. The tribe followed its annual path over the earth. They observed and took into their beings the physiognomy of the landscape, the patterns of the heavens, felt the flow of energy currents, the benevolent and malefic places. They painted rocks, and held ceremonies at auspicious sites. There were places where several tribes met at certain seasons, for exchange of goods and brides, and for shared ceremony.

'And then, man began to settle. And settlement requires agriculture. Or maybe - man began agriculture, and that required settlement? Why did it happen? Not for health or ease - the settled worked harder, were less healthy than their nomadic ancestors. That glitch? That devil? Because it had been thought, it had to be done? Once unity becomes duality, there's no limit - and maybe there's no stopping it - duality, this and that, the tick and tock of time advancing. Duality suits agriculture - active male and passive female, growing summer and dormant winter, fructifying heavens and fertile earth. But before that there is the first duality - sacred and profane. For the nomad, all is sacred; profanity is the absence of respect for that sacredness. And agriculture itself is profane, a profanation: as the Native American Smohalla put it, "you ask me to plough the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's breast?" A great taboo,

against desecrating the earth, is broken, day after day, every day. Smohalla again, “shall I dig under the earth’s skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again”. Guilt comes into existence.

‘And the cultivator, who cannot move, is dependent on what the weather brings to his small patch. Instead of company to be enjoyed, earth mother and heaven father become powers to be feared and propitiated. Ceremony must be intensified. With a sedentary life there is loss of varied experience - that experience must be encapsulated, created, in story and image. Agriculture takes up more time - Smohalla says, “my young men shall never work. Men who work cannot dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams”. Cultivators cease to tell stories, to dream; they pay specialists to dream for them, to tell stories to them, create images for them, bring forth wisdom for them, intercede with the gods for them. Priests, singers, philosophers, artists.

‘Man, having crossed the first line of altering the landscape with cultivation and habitation, goes further; he builds earthworks, stone circles, pyramids, barrows, alignments of standing stones. To reproduce the landscape and skyscape and cosmology of the nomadic tribe, reproducing on a small scale what they once experienced on a large scale. In memory of the lost migration, in penance for the first desecration, in propitiation of the powers of nature, in celebration of his own new-found and ever-developing powers, to strengthen and focus energies that supply his ever-growing needs, ceremonies increase in number and elaborateness. There are walked circuits to remember the tribal path. We see the remnants today in beating of the bounds, May Day celebrations, well dressings, water ceremonies. Oh yes, water ceremonies.’ He stopped. Old clockwork Johannes had run down again. Woody guided him towards the door then returned, said:

‘We’re getting nowhere. All that talk about duality - he’s still in the Geminian age, 8000 years ago. We’ve been through Taurus and Aries and we’re about to leave the Piscean.’

‘Pisces? Water ceremonies?’ I said hopefully. Woody stared down, kicking the ground moodily. ‘The ruling planet of Gemini is Mercury. And that’s what it feels like - like looking into a bowl of quicksilver; as soon as I think I see a shape,

something that makes sense, I reach for it - and it breaks up into rolling balls of mutual infinite reflection batting around in some bizarre pinball machine. I'll go and settle him down. See you.'

End note: they succeed.

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