

PREAMBLE: JAPANESE WHISPERS

To Mrs. Brice, who took the edge off the poles

If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:9

Within days of my moving to Kyoto to work as an English teacher, a convivial Japanese man in a dapper suit and brightly coloured cravat appeared at my door bearing books. I had been witnessed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, and they had sent round a missionary to save my soul. Though I enjoy the company of rude apocalypticals, I had already read stacks of Witness literature and several books about them whilst researching a dissertation comparing their beliefs on the body to those of early Puritans. They were academically interesting to a point, but that point had been passed, and I was too old to enjoy baiting narrow-minded Christians for the hell of it. When my visitor introduced himself as William, however, and told me in a plummy accent that he had lived in York for ten years, I was intrigued by this curious specimen of cross-culturalism. I sent him away with my dissertation and told him I would speak to him again once he had read it.

He returned the following week with his wife, and I invited them in. My funky skinhead girlfriend and my curmudgeonly guests eyed each other with mutual disapproval. She bolted upstairs, and William (née Takeya) turned his attention to my work.

I notice you have quoted many books in your dissertation, but you have not quoted *The Bible...*'

I did not feel that *The Bible* was relevant to comparative history. I asked him about the seven failed predictions of the apocalypse made by the elders of his church. He did not feel this was relevant to the modern Witnesses, who ceased to set dates for Doomsday after a final misjudgement in 1975.¹ This tit-for-tat nastiness was not going anywhere so we moved on to scripture, and touched briefly on Taoism, but William was clearly suffering. Eventually he explained that he had been sitting Western style in chairs for so many years that his knees were severely tested by sitting cross-legged on the floor in the normal Japanese manner. There were no chairs in the house, so he decided he would stand.

His wife carefully helped him to his feet. She was not as westernised as his knees; her English was poor, her accent thick, and she barely entered our discussion. On one occasion, however, she piped up with a word pertinent to a scriptural point, but I couldn't catch it. I had her repeat it several times, but I couldn't understand what she said.

'Fruitage,' said William, helpfully.

'Fruitage?' I asked, suppressing a giggle. It is a silly word and it sounds like 'frottage'.

'Yes. "Fruitage".'

'That's not a word,' I said, with the calm authority of an experienced English teacher.

'Yes it is,' he said, flicking through his Bible with the calm ease of a dedicated Bible-thumper. He smiled warmly as he showed me the relevant verse. "Fruitage."

I see. "Fruitage".' No arguing with that.

Why was this poor woman learning archaic language fit for nothing but an angry red line in my classroom? She could barely string a sentence together, how had she beat the teacher? Why was this happening?

This ridiculous word is found in *Galatians*,² a letter Paul wrote because he was concerned about how the Gospels were being interpreted in a community a few Greek whispers away. *Galatians*, along with the rest of the *New Testament*, was written in Greek generations after the death of Jesus, who preached in Aramaic. This is just the beginning of the story. At one point there were around 50 more or less contemporary Gospels covering diverse subjects, esoteric to various degrees, written from various perspectives, including *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* and *The Gospel of Judas*. In the second century, in a political move against rapidly proliferating Gnostic groups, Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons decreed that all but *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and

PREAMBLE

John were heretical. Translations of his censored Bible multiplied in different tongues over the next millennium and a half, and were hastily compiled into several versions of the Greek *Textus Receptus*, all of which are full of typographical errors.

These were one major source for our familiar *King James Bible (KJV)* of 1611. The other was the Latin vulgate, translated from Hebrew by St. Jerome, a man who once described the writings of the prophets as ‘rude and repellent’.³ The *KJV* retains the errors and prejudices of both sources. The translators were not Hebrew scholars, and didn’t care to consult the rabbis who were, so they could not learn much from the original *Old Testament*. For reasons discussed in *Jürgen’s World*, King James was concerned that the good book should be conservative, neither controversial nor confusing, with few textual notes and as close as possible to the aging *Bishop’s Bible* which was popular at the time. Consequently the *KJV* was already dated when first printed, and has become progressively more arcane ever since. It is an admirable work of poetry, but as a translation it leaves much to be desired. The Witnesses revised certain details according to their own enigmatic beliefs, but left the archaic language as it was. The fruitage of all this is that my guest spends her evenings translating into Japanese this bastard Bible, which is a questionable revision of an archaic translation of a compilation of translations of contradictory transcripts taken generations after the events they purport to report.

Anyone who takes an English Bible as Gospel is seriously misinformed. As well as the errors, much of the depth of the original language is lost in translation. For example, the *KJV* begins:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.⁴

But Hebrew is a complex tongue, and Biblical grammar is not normal. The line can also be rendered:

With a beginning, [it] created *Elohim*, the heavens and the earth.⁵

This is much more interesting. There is something before God, but it is an unnamed gap, as befits something limitless and indefinable. This implied thing created *Elohim*, which is a more complex word than our ‘God’. The root is *El* (power), but though the grammar surrounding *Elohim* suggests a singular noun, *-im* is a plural ending, equivalent to *-s* in English words. It is also occasionally used for abstractions, as in ‘*la chayim!*’ (to health!) This emanation, which **can** be named, can be conceived of pluralistically or in the abstract. Right in the first line of *The Bible*, we meet a God who is created, like heaven and earth, like Adam and Eve, and like us. We are given a relative to relate to, and licence to conceptualise ‘the powers’ in more than one way. The Hebrew

of *The Old Testament* is deep and ambiguous, open to all kinds of interpretations, like any good esoteric text, like all the best people, like the elementary particles of matter, but few know enough Hebrew (or psychology or physics) to appreciate the ambiguities.

The book in your hands is far more virile than the dusty old *King James* in your bookshelf. Text is my bread and olive oil, my miso and rice, my coriander, my pickles, my sultanas. Nouns are my proteins and idiom my fruitage salad. I cook every day, every moment I can, and I am a happy chef, but there are some meanies in the kitchen. As with all vital commodities, nasty bullies have taken control of words and texts as best they can. They feed you rubbish and tell you it is the nectar of the gods. Cooked with malice, words offend the mind, disturb the body, and constipate the soul. Cooked with love, they delight the mind, energise the body, and refresh the soul. I have been marinating ideas for thirty years, and I'm going to cook up a wholesome feast, but the fare may provoke an allergic reaction, so here follows a list of ingredients that may not suit some constitutions.

Firstly, there is a pinch of obscenity, though I don't find it obscene. What can you say to people who are offended by the occasional dirty word on a page, by talk of the act that made them or the breasts that nursed them? It's not sordid; it's life.

Secondly, there are the diabolical dumplings, but the devil contains some essential acids. He is definitely scary, but he has our best interests at heart. **His** case is also translated with prejudice in the *KJV*, when Eve meets him in his guise as the snake. We read 'The serpent beguiled me and I did eat', but the Hebrew can also mean 'He elevated me, and I did consume.'⁶ The adversary drags you up, Lucifer illuminates the way, as his name suggests: *lucem ferre* (to bring light).ⁱ Duality is a veil of illusion, you will feel much better rid of it, and this much-maligned dark angel of light helps tear it down. Satan is God's left hand man. The Garden of Eden doesn't make sense otherwise; why would a benevolent and omnipotent father put a scheming snake in his children's playpen? Why would God plant a forbidden fruit tree for the devil to hide in?

This brings me to my third point. Some of the ingredients have been forbidden by bigots. The meal before you is liberally spiced with intoxicants, though intoxication is a misleading word. Intoxication

ⁱ This Latin term in a pre-Latin book is a very early corruption of the text by Latin scribes. In the Hebrew, it is *chayel*, meaning shining one, and referring to the Babylonian god of the Morning Star.

PREAMBLE

implies impairment of faculties, but psilocybin, for example, makes experimental subjects more perceptive of small changes in the visual field.⁷ Psychedelics reveal what usually goes unnoticed. As with all power tools, they should be used respectfully and carefully with experienced people. In this way, they can liberate the mind from its soporific state, and also make people happier. Another psilocybin study found that it induced 'full mystical experiences' in 60 percent of subjects. More importantly, 79 percent of subjects reported "moderately to greatly increased" well-being or life satisfaction' when questioned two months later,⁸ and other research reveals that 25 years after psilocybin, people are still happier, less fearful of death, more appreciative of nature, and more compassionate towards others than control subjects.⁹

I am very careful about what goes in my body. I go easy on wine, most of the time, I avoid processed things, meat, antibiotics, headache pills, or anything else from the doctor. I don't even have a doctor. I prefer the ADHD God gave me to the Ritalin my teachers offered me, but I do like divine spices, both recreational and inspirational (see note on the spices, below).

Fear not, you are not about to chew your way through a spiced Bible. We will crunch through fresh, raw slices of a usually overcooked book, but there is much more to the menu than that. The starter is a tart mouthful of raw theorising, the main course is a big hunk of the history of science and society, and there are side dishes of linguistics, psychology, and magick. There will be several glasses of ayahuasca, and the pudding is a surprise with a sparkler sticking out of it. This is a meal of philosophy, full of hidden chillies and strange glutinous nuggets to chew over, but woe to the jaws of true believers and reactionaries. With metaphors mixed, whipped, folded and stretched, it is confuzing and inconsistent, roundabout and back round again, silly and sublime, spot on and plain wrong. There are oblique tangents, impassioned rants, endless digressions, bigoted conclusions, and thinly veiled provocations. There are also strange cults, venerable sages, foolish hippies, wild women, and other two-dimensional characters pushing the plot forward, like poor William, who turned up with such panache, and hobbled away in disgrace the following page. Like William, what I offer is unabashedly apocalyptic, handsomely cross-cultural, and rather self-confident, but this is the fare, laid bare on your table. As a drug crazed eclectic mystic chef with Satanic leanings and a raging libido, I cannot in good faith serve up anything else. I offer it with love.

Black pepper, madam?

Note on the spices:

If you want to consume only that which is prescribed by your government, that is your choice. If you want seven pints of Stella and a donner kebab, go ahead. I wouldn't do it, and I am confident that seven glasses of ayahuasca and a big fat joint is much healthier, but do what you will!

Many people malign psychoactives, whilst enjoying the fruits of activated psyches, ignorant of the bigotry. Virtual Reality was created on LSD. Kary Mullis won his Nobel Prize for developing DNA testing, which he did on acid. He campaigns for legalisation of all drugs, and claims that LSD is of little danger to anyone as long as there is no heavy machinery around, and as one of top molecular biologists in the world, he probably knows more about it than the lawmakers. Freud was a coke-head, William James was on giggly gas, R. D. Laing was a ganja-fiend; the list goes on, with inventors, evolutionary theorists, founders of the United States and even British monarchs using drugs which would land them in prison today.

Drugs have also been influential in the arts, in most early jazz, nearly all reggae, and half of the Beatles discography. The first 200 lines of Coleridge's masterpiece were dreamt up during an opium sleep, as was much of Swinburne's and Browning's work. Baudelaire, Balzac, and Victor Hugo used cannabis,¹⁰ and there is good forensic evidence that Shakespeare did too, as well as other drugs.¹¹ Robert Louis Stevenson was chopping up all sorts on the looking glass, and Jack Kerouac dropped Benzedrine and climbed aboard his typewriter to speed through pages taped together for hours without a stop. *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* was written on mescaline and LSD, and went on stage in the West End of London. Even our religions are derived in part from psychedelics. Robert Graves, the Oxford classicist, argues that the magick mushroom lies at the heart of some intriguing Greek myths, and that the Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell derive from the psychedelic experience of the Eleusinian mysteries.¹²

Drug fuelled ingenuity is the subject of *Science Revealed*, but this is only one aspect of a larger story. In the first part of the book we look at how science and culture often develop through revelation rather than reason. We will see how the structural theory of chemistry was revealed in a dream, how Tesla was struck dumb with a vision of the AC motor, how Einstein leapt out of bed one morning clutching the key to relativity. Revelation, or '*apocalypse*' in Greek, is the magick bus bouncing down the path of understanding towards the light, whereas rational materialism is a bulldozer lurching down a dark cul-de-sac at

PREAMBLE

the end of the world. This book is the story of the apocalypse, how it has been experienced in the past, and how it unfolds in our world, in our philosophies, and in our brains. It is written in the faith that revelation is open to everyone, and in the hope that we will embrace the apocalypse before our bulldozer squashes the life out of us.

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- 1 In 1873, 1874, 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925 and 1975. *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* - James M. Penton (Toronto, 1997)
 - 2 *Galatians* 5:22
 - 3 *Letter XXII to Eustochium* - St. Jerome
 - 4 *Genesis* 1:1
 - 5 *God is a Verb* - Rabbi David Cooper (Riverhead, 1997) p. 66
 - 6 Cooper, p. 56
 - 7 *Psilocybin-Induced Contraction of Nearby Visual Space* - Roland Fischer et al. *Agents and Actions* 1, no. 4 (1970), pp. 190-197
 - 8 Study conducted by the John Hopkins University of Medicine, reported in *Tripping Out: Scientists Study Mystical Effects of Mushrooms* ABC News July 11, 2006
 - 9 Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment': a long-term follow-up and methodological critique - Doblin, R. in *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 1991: 23(1)
 - 10 *A cannabis reader: global issues and local experiences. Perspectives on cannabis controversies, treatment and regulation in Europe* - Sharon Rödner Sznitman, et al. (EMCDDA Monographs) p. 6
 - 11 Chemical analysis of residues from seventeenth century clay pipes from Stratford-upon-Avon and environs - Thackeray, J. F. et al in *South African Journal of Science* 97: pp 19-21
 - 12 *The Greek Myths* - Graves, R (Folio editions) Author's preface