

The relationship between the New Testament figures of “Mary,” the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” and “Mary Magdalene”

(Lightly footnoted version)

(taken from Part II of the essay “Against the Lie”)

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[If the reader can endure reading it, this section should—probably more than anything else in the essay—help to show not only why esotericist religion ought to be regarded as the product of individuals with significant mental disorientation, but also why religions of that kind can be assumed to potentially lead to substantial mental disorientation in those who seriously attempt to follow them.]

I propose—at least according to one *plausible* way of reading the New Testament’s Gospel narrative—that the understanding of the authors of the New Testament may have been that the figure of the “disciple whom Jesus loved” that is spoken of in the Gospel of John *started off* as a “woman” (“Mary Magdalene” in particular), and was then *transformed into* the archetypal “Son,” at which point “he” married his archetypal “Mother”—who, meanwhile, from the perspective of that “Son,” had been magically *transformed back* into a “virgin.” As bizarre and unlikely as this sounds, let us begin by considering the Greek Septuagint version of Isaiah 62:5, which says,

And as a young man [*neaniskos*, derives from *neos*, meaning “young” or “new”] **takes up residence with** [or dwells with; more literally, “houses with”: *syn-oikeō*] **a virgin** [or maiden: *parthenos*], **so your sons** [*huioi*, a plural form of *huios*] **will dwell** [*kat-oikeō*] **with you**. **And it will be (that) (in the same) way that a bridegroom** [*nymphios*] **would rejoice** [or make merry, or enjoy himself, or be glad: *eu-phrainō*] **over a bride** [*nymphē*], **(the) Lord** [or master: *kyrios*] **will thus rejoice** [or make merry, or enjoy himself, or be glad: *eu-phrainō*] **over you**.

Isaiah 62:1 indicates that this “virgin mother” (as well as “bride”) was meant to correspond to the symbolic city of “(new) Jerusalem”; and a comparison of Isaiah 62:4 and Isaiah 54:1 with Galatians 4:22-27 indicates that the authors of the New Testament apparently understood this “virgin mother” to correspond to the figure of “Sarah.”¹ Furthermore, notice that the “Lord” is being compared to *multiple* “sons” in Isaiah 62:5, suggesting that the “Lord”—in the person of the collective or archetypal “Son”—may have been understood to collectively represent *all* of the individual “sons of God” (by which term I mean all “disciples” who had been made fully “male,” or “spiritual,” or “pneumatic,” as I will explain more below). According to the allegory presented in the Book of Genesis, “Isaac” is the “son” of “Sarah”; so, by following the allegory it may be inferred that “Isaac” should be thought of as the “bridegroom” who would marry “Sarah.”

¹ Consider that the notion that is found in Isaiah 62:5 of a “virgin” also being a “mother” is very likely related in some way to the notion of Jesus Christ being born to a “virgin mother.” (See, e.g., Luke 1:26-34.)

Notice how such a figurative arrangement parallels the way in which in Galatians 3:16 Paul compares “Isaac” to “Jesus,” but in Galatians 4:28 Paul also compares “Isaac” to the Christian “brothers” (or “siblings”: *adelphos*) regarded as a collective entity. It also tends to imply that, since “Isaac” was understood to correspond to “Jesus,” the Old Testament figure of “Sarah” would have been understood to correspond to the New Testament figure of “Mary”—and, since the figure of “Mary” is depicted as a “virgin mother,” that would be consistent with the apparent identification in Isaiah 62:5 of the figure of “Sarah” as a kind of “virgin mother.”

Now compare Isaiah 62:5 to John 19:25-27, which says,

And standing [*histémi*] **beside** [or near: *para*] **the cross** [*stauros*] **of Jesus were his mother** [*mété*r] [i.e., “the virgin Mary”], **and the sister** [*adelphé*] **of his mother** [*mété*r], **Mary the (?) of Klopas** [*klōpas*], **and Mary Magdalene**. So Jesus, having **beheld** [or seen, or perceived: *idōn*, a form of *horaō*] **the mother** [*mété*r] **and the disciple** [*mathétēs*] **whom he loved** [*agapaō*] **standing near** [or comparing (to him), or standing side-by-side (with him), or “sizing up (to him)”: *par-istémi*], **said to the mother** [*mété*r], **“Woman** [*gyné*], **behold** [or look, or perceive, or understand: *ide*, a form of *horaō*], **your son** [*huios*].” **Then he said to the disciple** [*mathétēs*], **“Behold** [or look, or perceive, or understand: *idou*, a form of *horaō*], **your mother** [*mété*r].” **And from** [or out of, or because of, or in consequence of: *apo*] **that hour** [*hōra*] **the disciple** [*mathétēs*] **took** [or received: *lambanō*] **her into (his) own (home)** [*ta idia*].

It is interesting that, according to a more straightforward or “outer” reading, the author first identifies **four** persons (if one assumes that “the sister of (Jesus’s) mother” was meant to be seen as a different person from “Mary the (?) of Klopas”),² but he then says that Jesus “beheld” (or “saw” or “perceived”: *idōn*) only **two** persons: “the mother,” and “the disciple whom he loved.” That tends to imply, for one thing, that “the disciple whom Jesus loved” must have been *among* those four persons; and the most likely candidate would seem to be “Mary Magdalene.” (And, in any event, we know that the author **must** have meant for the term “the disciple whom Jesus loved” to refer to at least one of these four persons—**all** of whom are **women**.)³ But that would mean that, since according to the passage this “disciple” is identified as a “son,” “Mary Magdalene” would had to have been somehow transformed from a “woman” into a “man.”

I posit that this may have been thought to occur as a result of Mary Magdalene’s having renounced or advanced beyond her former status as a so-called “Mary” (this being understood as a kind of “role” or “function” or “type,” one which might or might not be carried out or conformed to by any particular individual). In other words, I think “Mary

² I think it would be reasonable to make the assumption that—according to this more “surface” or “outer” reading—the author would *not* have meant for “Jesus’s mother” (i.e., “Mary”) and “Mary the (?) of Klopas” to be regarded as the same person, on the grounds that two sisters would have been unlikely to have the same first name.

³ And it would be completely nonsensical and absurd—even by esotericists’ standards—to suppose that the author would first present the reader with a list of all of the persons who were “standing beside” (*histémi* and *para*) Jesus on the Cross; and then, that **the same author, in the very next sentence**, would say that Jesus suddenly noticed **someone else** “standing beside” him (*par-istémi*, derived from *histémi* and *para*) that the author forgot to mention in the previous sentence. The only reasonable way in which this passage can be explained is to assume that Jesus perceived a male “Disciple” that somehow existed (perhaps in germinal or potential form) **within** the “women,” or at least one of the “women.”

Magdalene” may have been meant to be understood as “laying aside” her “maryness,” so to speak—that is, her “femaleness”—and “taking up” the “sonness” and “maleness” expected of a “perfected Disciple.” The authors of the New Testament may have thought that with the “death of Jesus” (perhaps understood to signify or accompany the final “perfecting” of the “Disciple”), the archetypal “Disciple” would take over the role of the archetypal “Son (of God),” while Jesus would go on to take up the role of archetypal “Father” (see Revelation 21:7). Jesus’s perceiving of only *two* persons—the archetypal “Mother” and the archetypal “Disciple”—may have been meant to dramatize the stark *division* of the “body of Christ” into two elements: “soul” (Greek *psyché*, perhaps signified by “blood”), which may have been understood to correspond to the ideas of “motherness” and “femaleness”; and “spirit” (Greek *pneuma*, perhaps signified by “water”), which may have been understood to correspond to the ideas of “discipleship” and “maleness.” If so, it may be significant that it is only a few verses later, in John 19:34, that the author says that “blood” and “water” came out *separately* out of Jesus’s pierced side. The belief may have been that these two elements would need to be clearly *separated* or *distinguished* from each other before they could be properly “married”; but also that it was only *by means of* the metaphorical “death of Jesus” that these two elements could first be fully separated.

As strange and even absurd as all of this sounds, it is actually made somewhat more plausible by the fact that the final verse of the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas (verse 114) says,

Simon Peter said to them, “Make **Mary** [observe that Simon Peter does not say ‘Mary Magdalene’] **leave us, for females don’t deserve life.**” Jesus said, “**Look, I will guide her to make her male,** so that she too may become a living spirit [corresponding to *pneuma*, I would assume] **resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven.**”⁴

Also compare this passage to John 21:20-23, which says,

Peter turned back [*epi-strephō*] and saw [*blepō*] (that) **the disciple** [*mathétēs*] **whom Jesus loved** (was) following [*akoloutheō*], the one who also during the supper lay [or reclined: *ana-piptō*] **against** [or upon: *epi*] (Jesus’s) bosom [or chest, or breast: *stéthos*] **and said,** “Lord, who is it who is delivering you over [or handing you over, or betraying you, or transmitting you (as a teaching), or imparting you (as a teaching), or handing you down (as a tradition), or passing you down (as a tradition): *para-didōmi*]?” So, having seen him, Peter said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this one [*houtos*]?” Jesus said to him, “If I wish him to remain [*menō*] until I come [*erchomai*], what is that to you? You follow [*akoloutheō*] me.” So the saying [or word, or message, or meaning: *logos*] **went out** [or “came out”: *ex-erchomai*] **among the brothers** [or siblings; more literally, “sharers of the same womb”: *adelphos*] **that this disciple** [*mathétēs*] **does not die** [*apothnēskō*]. But Jesus did not say to him that he does not die, but, “If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you?”

⁴ Translation by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer; the emphases are mine. Source: the Online Gnostic Archive, <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gosthom.html>, which cites as its source Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Polebridge Press, 1992, 1994).

Notice how in both passages Jesus similarly “comes to the defense” of the person about whom Peter expresses wariness and whom he seems not to wish to “remain” with the other disciples. So, based on a comparison of these passages, I again posit that the generic figure of “Mary” may have been understood to represent the archetypal “Female” or “Woman” (*gyné*) and “Mother” (*méter*), while the generic figure of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” may have been understood to correspond to the archetypal “Male” and “Son” (*huios*)—but only *after* “he” **started off** as Jesus’s **betrouthed** “Bride” or **future** “Wife” (or “Woman,” since the Greek word *gyné* can mean either “wife” or “woman”)—in other words, his “Mary Magdalene.” The figure of “Mary Magdalene” would have been understood to correspond to the symbolic “Bride” when she was still only “betrouthed”—that is, **when she was still at the stage of being the “harlot of Babylon.”** And if so, that would tend to suggest that the figure of (the virgin) “Mary” would have been understood to correspond to that *same* symbolic “Bride” *once she had reached the stage* at which, having been “made ready” by God (Greek *hetoimazō*)⁵—in other words, transformed into a purified “virgin”—it would finally be time for her to be revealed in the form of the “new Jerusalem.”

Consider what the last passage says: “**Jesus did not say to (Peter) that (the disciple whom Jesus loves) does not die, but, ‘If I wish him to remain until I come, what is that to you?’**” The “disciple whom Jesus loved” may have been thought of by the authors of the New Testament as representing the collective (parallel) “body of Christ” or “betrouthed Bride” that Paul was trying to “build up” **next to** or **alongside** some more **ideal** “body of Christ.” One might posit that this archetypal “Disciple,” considered as he (or she) existed **prior to** the symbolic “Crucifixion,” was associated with the archetypal “Woman”—but more specifically, the archetypal “harlot of Babylon”—who would have been imagined as carrying a symbolic “child”—and more specifically, the “Christ child”—within her symbolic “womb.” (As such, the “harlot of Babylon” would in this case have been understood to correspond to the symbol of the “outer body,” while her “unborn child” would have been understood to correspond to the symbol of the “inner body.”)⁶ If the “coming” (*erchomai*) of the “Son of Man,” i.e., the “Second Coming,” was analogized to a metaphorical “childbirth”—with this at the same time corresponding to a metaphorical “Crucifixion and Resurrection” (i.e., a “re-birth” out of the “tomb,” signifying a kind of “womb”)⁷—then the understanding of the authors of the New Testament may have been that with the metaphorical “birth” (or “re-birth”) of “the Son”—i.e., the **inner** body of Jesus Christ—the archetypal “harlot of Babylon” would metaphorically “die in childbirth.” This “death” of the “harlot” would at the same time constitute a “death” of the “female” (or “natural,” or “earthly”) aspect of the archetypal “Disciple”—i.e., the **outer** body of Jesus Christ—thus allowing “the Disciple” to become fully “male” (and fully “spiritual,” and fully “heavenly”); but at that point, there is a sense in which “he” could no longer even be properly considered to be “the Disciple” (thought of as some mixture of “male” and “female” elements), but could then be considered to be “the Son” himself (i.e., the figurative “Isaac” or “Jesus”).

⁵ See Revelation 21:2.

⁶ I discuss the ideas of the “inner body” and “outer body” more extensively in Part I of the essay.

⁷ See, e.g., 1 Peter 1:3 and Colossians 2:11-12.

Meanwhile, all of the *now-purified* “female” or “psychic” nature of the archetypal “Disciple” would by then have been *projected out* into the ideal (and idealized) figure of the “virgin Mother” (i.e., “Sarah” or “the virgin Mary”), whom the archetypal “perfected Disciple”—i.e., “Son”—would then be able to metaphorically “marry,” at the same time as making his *new* archetypal “Mother.” That is because the archetypal “perfected Disciple” or “Son,” by having purified *himself* so as to make himself fully “male” and “spiritual,” would have “earned the right,” so to speak, to also have a purified “virginal Mother” rather than an ordinary “whorish Mother”; and a “virginal Mother,” presumably, was thought to be just the sort of “Mother” and “Bride” that a now-purified “Son” would be fit to metaphorically “marry.” The “(inner) body of Christ,” *considered as a collective entity made up of individuals*, would then take over the symbolic “sonship” from “Christ” *considered as a figurative type*—the death of whom, considered as a figurative type (i.e., an “outer body”), would have occurred just in time to allow the “outer narrative” of the Gospels to avoid the awkwardness of having “Jesus” be depicted as marrying his own mother “Mary.” (And some of that awkwardness would also have been avoided by the author’s having been perhaps deliberately vague about what the figure of speech of “taking the Woman/Mother into the Son’s own home” was supposed to mean.) Perhaps the thinking of the authors of the New Testament was that “in the beginning [*arché*],” only Jesus, the “ideal type,” was pure enough to have a pure “virginal Mother” (perhaps signifying a pure “soul”: *psyché*), and all of his actual, flesh-and-blood followers would be temporarily stuck with an impure “whorish Mother” (perhaps signifying an impure “soul”: *psyché*). But, by the time of “the end [*telos*],” all of Jesus’s “disciples” who had successfully entered the “kingdom of heaven”—that is, all of the individuals who had learned how to be successfully *conformed to* (Greek *sym-morphōō* or *sym-morphos*) the “ideal type” of “the Son,” thereby becoming “instances” of that “type”—becoming, in other words, “sons of God”—would finally be pure enough to have that pure virginal “Mother” (and now “Bride”) for themselves. The *ideal type* of “the Son”—considered as an allegorical figure and role model, and considered apart from its embodiment in multiple, individual instances—would fall away, no longer to stand between the “sons of God” and their “Mother.”

Furthermore, assuming the correctness of my hypothesis that every so-called “Mary” was understood to represent the archetypal “Woman” (*gyné*), I propose that “Mary Magdalene” may have been understood—at least in certain respects—to be functionally equivalent to the figure of “John” (who is, incidentally, widely assumed to be “the disciple whom Jesus loved”). In support of this second hypothesis, consider the possibility that the Greek word *gyné*, meaning “woman,” may be etymologically related to the Sanskrit word *yoni* and the Latin word *juno/yuno* (as well as the Chinese word *yin*), which I have elsewhere in Part II of the essay given reason to think might bear both an etymological and conceptual relation to the figure of “John” (Hebrew *yonah*). If the two figures of “John” and “Mary Magdalene”—both corresponding, *ex hypothesi*, to “the disciple whom Jesus loved”—were thought to be equivalent (at least for certain purposes), then a comparison of the two passages quoted above (that is, Gospel of Thomas verse 114 and John 21:20-23) might again suggest that the “coming of Jesus” was thought by some early Christians to be equivalent to a “female” (or at least “female-ish”) entity being transformed into a “male” entity, perhaps by way of the symbolic “birth” of a “male child” or “son” (perhaps understood to symbolize the “male” *pneuma*)

out of the metaphorical “womb” of the “female” *psyché* that was thought to exist *within* every “disciple.” Since the “soul,” *psyché*, was and has been traditionally depicted by Christian esotericists and other esotericists as female—in fact, the ancient Greek mythological figure named “Psyche” was female⁸—it may be that, according to the scheme existing in the minds of the authors of the New Testament, every person was thought of as *starting off* as relatively “female”; and it was only when the person’s own *psyché* or “soul” had become *fully transformed* into *pneuma* or “spirit”—but also when what had *formerly been* the person’s “soul” or *psyché* had become purified *in the course of* its having been *projected out* into an *objectified* archetypal “Mother,” or “City,” or “Bride,” or “Woman”—that the person could be regarded as being a “*son* of God,” as opposed to a “*daughter* of God” (as all of the symbolic “daughters of God” would presumably by that point have been metaphorically “incorporated” into the archetypal “virgin Mother”). When the process of transformation was complete, that may have been when the “coming of Jesus” referred to in John 21:20-23 was deemed to occur. Similarly, the completion of this metaphorical “sex change” may have been what “overcoming” or “conquering” or “prevailing” (*nikaō*: see Revelation 21:7) was understood to entail, which would allow a person to gain entrance to the “new Jerusalem.” (Consider, for example, that the Book of Revelation never makes mention of any “daughters of God” to be found in the “new Jerusalem.”) And this may have been deemed to make it possible for every person to become a “son” (*huios*: once again, see Revelation 21:7) who was fully “pneumatic” or “spiritual,” who would then be eligible to “marry” his “virgin Mother” (that is, the figurative “Sarah,” or the “virgin Mary,” or the “new Jerusalem”). They would do this at the same time that “Jesus” *also* married her, in a sense, since all of the “sons” would be marrying her *through* “Jesus,” as they would all be “members” or “limbs” of the “body of Christ.” (Again, consider that in Galatians 3:16 Christ is compared to “Isaac”; and in Galatians 4:28, Christians are *also* compared to “Isaac.”) So Jesus could thenceforth be regarded as the “father” of his “sons” (see Revelation 21:7), even as his “sons” would be able to participate in Jesus’s “fatherness”—analogous to the way in which “the Son,” Jesus, would now be participating in the “fatherness” of his own “Father.”

Thus the understanding of the authors may have been that in the “new Jerusalem,” Jesus (i.e., “the Lamb,” Greek *arnion*, corresponding to the figure of “Isaac”) would become *united* with *his* “father” (i.e., “God,” Greek *theos*, likely corresponding, for reasons I give elsewhere in Part II, to the figure of “Abraham”) by their sharing of the same “throne” (*thronos*), as indicated in Revelation 22:1-3:

And (the angel) showed [*deiknymi*] me a river [*potamos*] of water [*hydōr*] of life [*zōē*], clear [*lampros*] as crystal [*krystallos*], going out [*ek-poreuomai*] from the throne [*thronos*] of God [*theos*] *and of the Lamb* [*arnion*] in the middle [or center: *mesos*] of the street of (the city), and on either side [*enteuthen kai ekeithen*] of the river, (the) tree [*xylon*] of life [*zōē*] producing [*poieō*] twelve [*dōdeka*] (kinds of) fruit [*karpos*] according to month [*mén*], each yielding [or delivering, or rendering; or, more figuratively, “explaining,” or “expounding,” or “defining,” or “interpreting”]: *apo-didōmi*] its fruit [*karpos*], and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations [*ethnos*]. And no longer will there be any curse [or “anything accursed”: *katathema*

⁸ Conversely, in Luke 1:31-35 the “spirit” (*pneuma*) is depicted as serving in a “male” role.

or *kat-anathema*] (in the new Jerusalem), and the throne [*thronos*] of God [*theos*] **and of the Lamb** [*arnion*] will be in it....

To state the matter more bluntly, a good argument can be made that there is something “oedipal” involved here, since the author of this passage seems to have been imagining that “Isaac” (i.e., the “Son”) would be *joined together* or *merged together* with “Abraham” (i.e., the “Father”); and this so that “the Son”—*along with* “the Father” (or *as* “the Father”)—would, because he had inherited the Father’s “throne,” finally be able to participate in the “paternal” role of “watering” the archetypal “City” (that is, the archetypal “Mother,” represented by the figure of “Sarah”) with the fertilizing “river of water of life [*zōē*],” thereby making it possible for the “tree of life [*zōē*]” to “bear fruit” (i.e., “bear or deliver offspring” out of its metaphorical “womb”).

However, until all of the members of Jesus’s Church or Body became fully incorporated into “Isaac,” i.e., the “Son” or “Lamb,” it appears that they would continue to be regarded as part of the female “Bride” that had been betrothed to Jesus the “Bridegroom” (see 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:23-33), presumably because they would still be “psychic” or “natural” rather than “pneumatic” or “spiritual.” Or, maybe the understanding was that those persons who were unable to completely “conquer” or “prevail” or “overcome” (*nikaō*) and thereby become “sons” would, to the extent they were not able to “overcome,” continue to serve as Jesus’s “Bride” even in the “new Jerusalem.” (This suggestion receives some support from Matthew 9:15, which speaks of “sons of the bridechamber,” to be distinguished from the “bride” whom they were charged with escorting to the house of the “bridegroom”; and these “sons” may have been understood to correspond to the “disciples” or “apostles.”) Or, as a variation on this, maybe it was thought that the “psychic” or “natural” part of each individual person itself constituted the archetypal “betrothed Bride,” which needed to be metaphorically transformed into the archetypal “virgin Mother Bride” by means of its “purification,” while the “pneumatic” or “spiritual” part of that same person constituted the archetypal “Disciple,” which needed to be metaphorically transformed into the archetypal “Bridegroom” and “Son” by means of an analogous purification—so that once the process of “purification” was complete on both sides, the “sacred marriage” would be consummated in an essentially internal and hermaphroditic way. If so, then whether the still-impure Church was depicted by the early Christian apostles and evangelists as a “betrothed bride” or as a “disciple whom Jesus loved” would depend only on whether the particular apostle or evangelist who was speaking or writing happened to be in the mood to focus more on people’s “natural” (*psychikos*) aspect, or more on their “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) aspect—again, assuming that their belief was that both of these aspects needed to be “purified.”

I wish to point out—in case it is not already clear—how well this material illustrates why one might reasonably expect esotericist religion to promote significant mental disorientation and perhaps even insanity. Regardless of whether one chooses to accept my suggested interpretations of the passages I have been discussing, just consider the quoted and cited passages themselves, on their own terms: We find four persons being transformed into only two persons in Jesus’s perception. We find a mother being transformed into a virgin. We find multiple sons being transformed into a single “Lord” or “Master” so that they can all marry their mother at the same time. We find this mother

being transformed in the reader's perception into a city, with this city eventually becoming **MARRIED TO A LAMB** out of which a river of living water unceasingly flows. We find women being transformed into men. We find the mother of one person being transformed into the mother of another, presumably unrelated person. We find the figure of Jesus being transformed into the figure of Isaac; and all Christians likewise being transformed into the figure of Isaac; and all Christians being transformed into the various limbs of Jesus's body.

As these examples ought to illustrate, one of the primary defects at the heart of esotericist religion is, not its mere *use* of metaphor (which in itself is unobjectionable and indeed necessary for human thought and communication), but its thoroughly **undisciplined, unrestrained, reckless, self-absorbed, and irresponsible** use of metaphor. Esotericist writing is, in short, metaphor run amok. What it produces resembles a moving kaleidoscopic image or the contents of a psychedelic hallucination in which everything is always left free to transform, or shift, or metamorphose, or merge, into *something else* other than what it was, so that there can never be any firm mental standing ground or sure sense of what the author of the writing had in mind. One feels that **nothing ever stays put** (and that same feeling may have been what motivated Plato's frustration with the poets and philosophers of his day); and the result is that when one makes any serious, sustained attempt to understand what the authors of the Bible actually *meant* by their writings, the experience has a pronounced "Alice in Wonderland" quality to it. One thing or symbol or idea corresponds to another only as long as the individual author or interpreter wants it to—and then it can stop, so it can start to correspond to something else that, to most people, appears to be completely different from and unrelated to the first thing it corresponded to (with the thread that connects together all of these various things—to the extent that any thread exists at all—existing solely within the mind of the individual author or interpreter). Whether one thing will be deemed to correspond to another is based almost entirely upon the whim of the author or interpreter, and not on *consensual social* understandings regarding whether one concept (for example, a "mother") can legitimately be thought to be equivalent to another concept (for example, a "virgin bride")—even if "only" for purposes of a metaphor—based on what most people have in mind when they ordinarily use the words corresponding to those two concepts.

An individual metaphor constitutes a single element of the language we use, and just as the language that we use is shared in common, so too must each of its constituent metaphors be used in such a way that their meanings can be shared in common. Given that most people in a society would think that there is a basic logical inconsistency at the heart of any metaphor or simile in which a "mother" was being *equated with* (rather than *compared to*) a "virgin," or in which the relationship between a "mother" and her "sons" was being *equated with* (rather than *compared to*) the relationship of "marriage," an author or interpreter should feel obligated to respect the ways in which people do *in fact* think about and would define those words. If an author presents the reader with the verbal image of "a virgin marrying her sons," the simple fact is that this will make no sense whatsoever to just about anyone *unless* the reader chooses to **privately redefine the meaning** of the word "virgin," or the word "marry," or the word "sons," which are contained in that verbal image—perhaps only in this one instance, or perhaps in other instances as well. So it is precisely this that he ends up being forced to do—at least so long as he is unwilling to simply ignore and walk away from the whole mental tangle

with which he has been confronted. And it is the *making necessary* of this ongoing “private redefining of meaning” that constitutes the essential problem with religious esotericism. The way we achieve peace among individuals in society is by coming to share our *meanings* in common with each other as much as possible (which is not necessarily the same thing as everyone sharing the same *beliefs* in common regarding how one ought to live and think). But esotericist religion, by its nature, constantly works against that goal.