

PIETRO NEGRI [Arturo Reghini]

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SYMBOL ¹

According to Dante (*Convivio* II, 1), “writings can be understood and must be interpreted in four senses”: the *literal* sense, the *allegorical* sense, which, according to Dante, is “a truth hidden beneath a beautiful lie,” the *moral* sense, and the *anagogical* sense. This anagogical sense is “when a writing is placed spiritually, which, even in its literal sense, even for the things signified, signifies supernal things of eternal glory”; that is, it is the hidden meaning of a writing which, even in its literal sense, deals with subjects of a spiritual nature; and it must be clearly distinguished from the allegorical and moral senses which, in comparison, have, at least from a spiritual point of view, are of far secondary importance. Let us say in passing that the anagogical interpretation of the “*Commedia*” is still to be done.

Dante calls this anagogical sense *sovra senso*. The ἀν-αγωγή is in fact to lead or bring up, elevation; and as a technical nautical term it designates the act of raising the anchor and setting sail. Metaphorically, when referring to spiritual matters, anagogia therefore indicates spiritual elevation, rising high above the *earth*; and, in the symbolism of “sailors,” it indicates setting sail from that “earth” to which men are tenaciously anchored, from the *firm ground*, as it seems to them, in order to raise their sails and sail into better waters, setting the ship for “the high seas.”

Dante was referring to the writings of “poets”; but the distinction between the four senses can undoubtedly also be applied to sacred and initiatory writings and to any other means of expression and representation of spiritual facts and doctrines. The supreme meaning, the “superior meaning” in every kind of symbolism, according to this distinction, will therefore be the anagogical meaning; the full understanding of symbols will consist in the perception of the anagogical meaning contained in them; and, when understood and used anagogically, they can also contribute to spiritual elevation. In this sense, symbols are endowed with an anagogical “virtue.”

Of course, not all symbols are endowed with this virtue. By extension, in fact, the name 'symbols' is sometimes given to simple signs or characters that have only, or almost only, a representational value. Thus, the symbols of mathematics and chemistry do not possess, at least as such, a similar anagogical virtue; and it is possible, in these fields, to attribute the same meaning to very different symbols; for example, the operation of algebraic multiplication can be indicated indifferently by the usual symbol of the cross and by that of the dot. But the word symbol, taken in its most proper sense, has a much more precise and complex meaning, as can easily be seen from its etymological analysis.

In Greek, the word συμ-βολή designates the act of joining, putting together, and the related word σύμβολον indicates agreement and therefore the *sign*, the mark. Both these words consist of two elements: the first, the prefix σύν (Latin *cum*) simply indicates conjunction, while the second designates and specifies the nature of this conjunction. Βολή and βόλος indicate throwing or hurling; they are words related to the verb βάλλω, which indicates the action of throwing, striking, or launching. The verb συμ-βάλλω (I bring together) and therefore also the perfectly analogous word σύμβολον (symbol) thus designate *the act* of bringing together, while synthesis (σύν-θεσις, Latin *compositio*) indicates the *result* of this action, the accomplished fact. The dynamic character of the symbol is contrasted with the static,

immanent character of synthesis. As for the effect of the action, the verb συμ-βάλλω (I bring together) contrasts with the verb δια-βάλλω (I separate, I cross, I oppose); correspondingly, σύμ-βολον is the opposite of 'devil' (διά-βολος, transverse, adversary); and the attribution of dynamic and magical virtues to symbols in order to overcome diabolical opposition and adversity appears philologically spontaneous. And just as the symbol leads to synthesis, its opposite, the “devil,” leads to the opposite of synthesis, namely analysis; Γάνυσις, in fact, is dissolution, solution, disintegration, death.

The dynamic virtue of symbols is therefore opposed in a certain sense to all analysis, and is an instrument and means of arriving at synthesis. And just as in discursive knowledge we arrive at the thesis, *conceptually*, by logical means, starting from the hypothesis, so in initiatory *endogenesis* we can arrive at synthesis, making use of the dynamic virtue of symbols, by magical means, starting from the initial human condition. These simple etymological considerations, therefore, already allow us to glimpse how, in higher knowledge, symbols have a function corresponding to that held by concepts in discursive knowledge. The correspondence between symbols (σύμβολοι) on the one hand, and concepts (con-ceptus, con-cipio) and syllogisms (συν-λογίζοναι, com-puto) on the other on the other, is perfect; syllogism, in logic, brings together the word (λόγος) and thought (from *pondus* = weight, to think = to weigh), and leads discursively to weighing, to measurement (*mensura*, from *mens*, the mind, linked to *mensis*, the month, and therefore to the *moon*, which does not give its own light, but reflected light, *reflection*); the symbol in magical science or the pure and purifying science of the Magi (Persian *majidan*, purifying, by means of *fire*) operates with βολή, irradiation, projection, dazzling. The *word* of logic corresponds to the operation, *dazione*, of magic; to philosophical *discourse*, *Vopera*, the “Great Work” of the Hermetic and Masonic tradition.

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By the very nature of its formation, the symbol is something different and superior to the emblem, the sign, the parable, the metaphor, and the allegory.

The emblem (from εν-βάλλω, to throw in) and the sign have a representative rather than a cognitive and spiritual character; and the parable, the metaphor, and the allegory possess only in part the character of the symbol. In allegory, one thing is said to be something else (αλλο-αγορεύω, I speak of another), instead of what is really meant; the literal meaning is the 'beautiful lie', the true meaning is another, perhaps in contrast to the literal one. In the symbol, there is no contrast or real difference between what appears at first glance and what is meant; between the symbol and its meaning or meanings, there is usually a relationship of harmony, analogy, and correspondence, and it is not a question, as in allegory, of perceiving the true meaning without being deceived by the apparent meaning, which is unimportant. but (as far as simple understanding is concerned) of tracing the obvious meaning back to the hidden ones, so as to grasp the *full* meaning of the symbol, completing (and not overcoming) the initial meaning. Furthermore, and properly speaking, allegory is always verbal, whereas this limitation does not apply to symbols, since, in addition to verbal symbols, there are symbols of all kinds.

Even the parable does not have the value of a symbol. It (παραβολή, παρα-βάλλω = I place one beside the other) is nothing more than a simple comparison, a contrast, a similarity. Parables cannot lead us beyond the term of comparison; and the success achieved by Menenio Agrippa and Jesus in using them

shows that they are well suited to the plebs and the profane masses. As for metaphor and trope, both terms more properly used in rhetoric, we will note that they also refer to verbal expressions, and indicate that the meaning of words or phrases used metaphorically must usually be transferred from the concrete to the abstract. Metaphor (Latin *trans-latum*, the transferred) is nothing more than taking away (μετα-φέρω, Latin *trans-fero*), transferring elsewhere.

Allegory, parable, and metaphor are therefore not strictly symbols; they are ways of speaking that can deal with, and often do deal with, symbols, and in this case the characteristics of the subject, i.e., the symbol, are found, at least in part, in the verbal expression in question. In this case, on the basis of a symbol or a complex of symbols or special symbolism, a whole allegorical language is formed and sometimes even a secret and conventional jargon or phrase book develops.

We have had occasion to say that symbols are of many different kinds. Indeed, anything can form the basis of a symbol, but there are, of course, criteria for selection or determination. Thus, we have numerical symbolism, where whole numbers (an abstraction in themselves) constitute symbols, and their powers (δυνάμεις), their residues or roots (πυθμήν), their simple relationships and properties symbolically constitute their analogical virtues, a symbolism especially used by the Pythagoreans and later by the Kabbalists and Freemasons; we have the symbolism of the letters of the alphabet, connected, of course, to the numerical symbolism, which is at the basis of the Kabbalistic tradition. These symbolisms, and especially the first, are linked to the geometric symbolism of the Platonists and Neoplatonists; and the numerical and geometric symbolism is connected to the symbolism of all those sacred sciences and arts in which relationships, proportions, rhythm, and harmony come into play, such as architecture, singing, music, dance, poetry, painting (together with the symbolism of colors and others), and to which heraldry and emblematics are in turn linked as emanations, derivations, and applications in the social and political fields. Physical phenomena are the basis of polar, solar, and meteorological symbolism and the hermetic symbolism of transmutation; biological phenomena are the basis of the symbolism of fermentation, putrefaction and germination of plant seeds, sexual symbolism, the symbolism of metamorphosis and resurrection, and the symbolism of spiritual nourishment and drinks and immortality (Hindu soma, Mazdean haoma, Hindu amrita, Greek nectar and ambrosia, the archaic Latin *arma peremna*, the “bread” and “wine” of the). From the various forms of human weakness, royal symbolism (the royal palace of Philaethes, the royal or regalia art of Neoplatonism and Masonry, the royal road, the royal water, the royal wedding of the Hermes-Phorus), the symbolism of war, especially the “holy war” (*Bhagavad-gita*), the symbolism of shepherding (in the *Pimander* and in the Gospel), the symbolism of the cultivation of the “earth” or ge-organic, of “navigation” (Homer, Virgil, Dante), the symbolism of the foundation of temples and cities and in general of “building” (hence the title of Pontiff for the high priest of the Romans) and of “construction,” which is the foundation of traditional Masonic symbolism and is naturally linked to architecture (hence the Great Architect of the Universe); the symbolism of the custody and defense of objects, temples, and sacred lands (Knights of the Grail and Templars). Finally, the very facts of history and legend, both individual and collective, can serve as a basis and have symbolic value (the Trojan War, the labors of Hercules, the expedition of the Argonauts, the life of Jesus). Myths (μύθος = speech, *tra-ditio*) and fables (*fabula*, to speak) are nothing more than stories; mythology is the narration of the history of gods and heroes. Myths are not symbols, but they can have a symbolic character and serve as a basis for symbolism; thus, pagan mythology has provided numerous symbols to ennetists (Michele Meier, Pemety). This is a

summary and incomplete list, but it will suffice to give an idea of the vastness and variety of symbolism.

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For the reasons seen above, verbal expression, even in its various figurative forms, cannot compete with the vital conciseness of symbols. The symbol transcends the word, and even if we consider it solely as a means of expressing and communicating facts and doctrines, it still has

another advantage over language: words vary with time and place, are subject to wear and tear and variations in both form and meaning, and cannot achieve the stability and universality of symbols.

Nevertheless, words and symbols have at least one fundamental characteristic in common, and that is the metaphorical nature that links their concrete value to their abstract meaning. Both presuppose the recognition of unity, correspondence, and universal analogy, and therefore also implicitly admit human “similarity.” We say similarity and not identity or equality; that is, we admit as a postulate that beings, and in particular human beings, are similar to each other from an inner point of view to about the same extent and in the same way as from an outer point of view, that the senses and internal organs of various individuals are similar and equivalent to each other to about the same extent and in the same way as the physical senses and organs. This being admitted, our inner experience has a character that transcends individuality and can be expressed in words and symbols understandable to those who have had similar experiences, and can help to provoke it in those who have not yet experienced it. This is what happens with ordinary language for common human experiences; when we speak of light, sound, color, we presuppose, in fact, not only that the sound of our words is perceived by those who listen to us in the same way that we are able to perceive the sounds that strike our ears, but also that our experience, expressed by our words, is understood by those who hear it thanks to comparison with a similar experience known and possessed by those who listen to us.

Universal analogy, therefore, is at the basis of symbolism, as it is at the basis of metaphorical language, and it is therefore predictable that symbolism conforms to certain rules, just as the transition from the concrete to the abstract meaning of words obeys the rules of semantics. The “*Emerald Tablet*”, which Hermetic tradition attributes to Hermes (ζ^1), begins precisely with the solemn affirmation of this universal connection and analogy: “*Veruni sine mendacio, certum et verissimum: quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius; et quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetrando miracula rei unius*” (Latin translation by Khunrath).

Analogy between the physical and the metaphysical, between exteriority and interiority; and analogy between man and the universe. For this reason, man is potentially God and the microcosm is potentially a macrocosm. God, says the Bible, created man in his own image and likeness. The analogical relationship that links one thing to another makes everything a natural symbol of the things corresponding to it; hence the concept and use in magic of the “*signaturae rerum.*” The similarity between the thing and its symbol, between the object and its image, can be direct or inverse. In the first case, the relationship is similar to that between a note and its octaves: one ascends from the symbol to the thing signified by way of anagogical transposition; in the second case, the relationship is similar to that between an object and its reflected image, and one ascends from the symbol to the thing represented by way of reflection and inversion. This fact must be taken into account when interpreting

symbols. The two similarities, moreover, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Thus, sunlight, refracting and reflecting in water droplets, gives rise to the phenomenon of two concentric rainbows, in which the colors of the rainbow appear arranged in reverse order; Descartes' theory explains the formation of the inner rainbow by a simple reflection of the light ray, that of the

the external concentric rainbow with a double reflection; similarly, a double inversion, or repeated an even number of times, brings the second type of symbols back to the type of simple transposition; and one could vice versa think that in symbols in which the correspondence occurs by transposition, the inversion of the symbol is not perceived simply because it is repeated an even number of times. The meteorological phenomenon of the rainbow, due to the dispersion of the "sunbeam" in the "waters," therefore has the value of a natural symbol of the very process of universal analogy; and as in pagan mythology Iris was the messenger of the gods, the special minister of Jupiter and Juno, because the rainbow was the symbol of the union between heaven and earth, so the similarity between the process of analogical inversion and that of inversion in optical reflection shows us in analogy the link that unites heaven and earth, spirit and matter, interiority and exteriority, the divine and the human.

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The analogical character inherent in symbols gives them a polysemy and an indeterminacy of meaning which, while on the one hand constituting their richness and fertility in contrast to the precision and determination of words, on the other hand makes them much less easy to understand and use. Even in words, awareness of the etymological meaning and links with related words allows us to grasp their hidden meaning and opens the way to greater knowledge, but the analogous process has a much greater latitude and depth in the case of symbols. Understanding a meaning is the first step towards conquering further meanings in related and higher fields, and even in this case, one is not forced to give up in the continuous overcoming of the mystery of the ultimate roots of language, which inevitably lies at the basis of all etymological analysis.

Through constant meditation, the symbol ends up imprinting itself on the mind, and with its continuous presence it is always ready to inspire it, to suggest the analogical relationships it has with whatever is the object of thought at any given moment. Even independently of references to various ideas, the symbol, on the basis of the analogical relationships contained within it and due to its intrinsic syncretism, provides the mind with the elements it needs to work with, it fertilizes it, so to speak, giving it creative power. In this sense, symbols constitute modes of motion and action, factors of endogenesis, which push, guide, and lead to conditions of consciousness not yet experienced, and therefore to effective, direct, *distinguished* knowledge. From the meaning shadowed and enclosed in signs, one thus ascends to conscious possession, and *Vin-segna-mento* (signification) achieved through signs is also in-segna-mento (teaching) in fact. Indeed, it is not without historical and philological interest to note how language uses a word constituted in this way to denote teaching.

This fertile, magical action of the symbol on the mind corresponds perfectly to the similar action of symbols in politics and religion, an action that everyone can observe. Think of the waves of enthusiasm and heroic determination that a flag, an anthem, a national or party symbol can arouse in individuals and masses, think of the ardor and fanaticism that a religious symbol can provoke, and you will understand how, even in magic, the symbol can have a similar energetic virtue, a similar power of

stimulation and virtue of spiritual elevation. There is one essential difference, however: while in politics and religion the symbol appeals to love of country, partisan passion, faith, and religious prejudice, that is, solely to sentiment, which it provokes and manifests, in esotericism the symbol never appeals to sentiment, but rather to the higher capacities of understanding and creation of the mind and spirit. Feelings, beliefs, theories, the very meaning of any framework and subordination to the masses are human elements, and it is a mistake to rely on them or in any way side with them when one wants to rise above the level of mortals and transcend the human to the divine.

Magic, and with it all initiatory traditions, is perfectly consistent in replacing the dogmatism of religious and philosophical beliefs, the mere verbalism of certain sciences, with symbolic teaching, that is, the process of symbolization. is perfectly consistent in replacing the dogmatism of religious and philosophical beliefs, the mere verbalism of representation and relation of certain sciences, with symbolic teaching, that is, the spiritual process which, with the aid of symbols, brings about the explanation of experiences and inner conditions through the perception and direct notion of the transcendent.

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This magical use of symbols is traditional in Hermeticism and in the rituals of certain organizations that have been partially influenced by it. It is grafted onto the practice of the *rite* that leads to the implementation of *the Work*.

Hermetic tradition says that to accomplish the Work from beginning to end, only one *vessel is* sufficient, or at most two (as seems to have been the case with Flamel). This vessel, *Vathanor* of the "Philosophers," must be hermetically sealed, that is, according to the Hermetic ritual (the term "hermetic sealing" has remained to designate the corresponding chemical operation), so that it is possible to operate within it, after isolating it from the outside. A well-known Hermetic maxim says in this regard: *Visita interiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultimi lapidem (Aurelia occulta philosophorum* by Basilio Valentino - *Theatr. Chemic.*, second edition, 1613; but it is also found earlier in a slightly different form). The vessel, the *grasale*, the Holy Grail, is in fact made of 'earth'; but 'earth', with an archaic symbolism of which there are abundant remnants in various languages, is the human body; humans (from *humus*, *teiTā*) are the earth, the earthlings; their body is shaped from the mud of the earth (see the etymology of Adam), it is their dwelling place (German *Boden* = earth; English *body* and *abode*). Visiting the interior of this vessel, and *rectifying* (another technical term that has remained in chemistry to designate the corresponding operation), one finds the *philosopher's stone*.

Cardinal Nicolò di Cusa (1401-1464) says (Opera, Basel, 1563, p. 632) that the master descends from Jerusalem to the rugged mountains of the desert to form and cut the stones, and to bring them and place them in the holy building (the place for the vision of the Gods), and that the soul, chosen as bride for the son of God who dwells in immortality, adapts itself to transformation, *sicut lapides poliuntur*; as the stones are smoothed that are to be transported to the building of the temple of Jerusalem where the vision of God is. This *edifying* symbolism of Cusano corresponds precisely to the later Masonic symbolism, according to which the workers (the *fellows*) work on polishing the stone, squaring it and forming the *cubic stone* or perfect stone in the "inner chamber," the "middle chamber" in the corresponding Italian terminology. And Dante, at the beginning of the "*Vita Nuova*," states: "I say *truly*

that the spirit of life dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart.” If the vase and the hermetic earth are nothing more than the human organism, the entrails of the earth, the “heart” of the organism, can be nothing other than the heart. It is the sanctuary, the *crypt* of the temple, depicted precisely *underground* in the crypt of ancient temples. And we understand why an ancient French alchemist, whose name we do not know, explained the name of the Holy Grail with the incorrect but significant etymology of *sang reai*, royal blood. This connection between the vessel and the heart dates back to ancient Egypt, since the ideogram for the heart is a vessel with *orecchiette* (the *ears* of the heart); this similarity between the heart and the *athanor* is not without interest when we remember the Egyptian origin of the Hermetic tradition.

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We have spoken of *descent* into the bowels of the earth. The symbol we have used is so widespread that it goes unnoticed. We know well that consciousness is not an object found *inside* the body, we know well that there is no up or down and that it is absurd to *pray to* God, stretching our necks toward a hypothetical “sky” and twisting our faces with the supplicant and pitiful determination of a dog waiting for its master's leftovers (not without a vague fear of being kicked). Even the sensation of consciousness sinking into its innermost recesses cannot be expressed in human language except by resorting to analogous sensations of human material life. The origin of many ancient and important symbols (if we can speak of origin), and therefore their interpretation, must be sought in the *need* to express inner sensations by means of analogy (an analogy that *exists*, and which the human mind recognizes and uses) between these sensations and the sensations of everyday life. All the symbolism of the “descent into hell” is connected with this. Thus, in Egypt, the *underworld*, the *neter khert*, the abode of the dead, is called Amenti, from the word *Amen*, which means invisible, occult; thus, the Greek Hades is likewise αειδής, invisible. It is necessary to descend into this invisible underworld, illuminated by the occult sun, *Amen-Ra*, the “Midnight Sun” of the Isiac initiation; and this descent must be made without losing consciousness, without drinking or feeling the *lethal* effects of the water of Lethe, but drinking instead from the fresh spring of *Mnemosyne*, giver of immortality in Orphism, from the water of Dante's Eunoë. Mnemosyne, memory, remembrance (*corda*), which contrasts with Lethe and defeats it, is the mother of the Muses; correspondingly, truth is in Greek *Va-leteia*, and to understand is nothing more, platonically, than an an-amnesia, a remembrance.

Even the symbolism of the *stone*, *Yoccultum lapidem*, which is found by rectifying the entrails (or *inferiora*, as it is said, and now we understand why in some later variants of Basilio Valentino's maxim) originates (not chronologically) from an inner sensation; this, at least, seems very plausible to us. However, while an initial and uncertain sensation of sinking into the inner depths of consciousness is easily accessible, in order to achieve the sensation of “petrification” a long period of assiduous practice of the ritual is generally required. An Italian document from around 1600, entitled: *La prattica dell'estasi filosofica (The Practice of Philosophical Ecstasy)*, possibly by Campanella, and published by D'Ancona together with writings by Campanella (Turin, 1854, Vol. I, p. CCXXIII), says precisely that at a certain stage of practice one becomes “immobile as if one were a plant or a natural stone”; and it confirms how spontaneous and accurate it is to assimilate the attainment of such a condition to the discovery of the stone. According to the Rosicrucian Michele Maier, the philosopher's stone is none other than the stone that Cybele made Saturn swallow in order to save her son Jupiter from his father's

voracity; thus Jupiter was able to escape time and become king of Olympus. The “black stone,” symbol of Cybele, was brought to Rome and kept on the Palatine Hill by the Romans themselves, who for centuries had possessed and venerated another “lapis niger” in the forum, at the beginning of the “sacred way.” This stone had fallen from the sky and was called *abadir* by the Romans and *betilo* by the Greeks. According to René Guénon (*The King of the World*, p. 69, Italian edition, Milan, Fidi, 1927) the word “bethel” is nothing more than the Hebrew “Beth-el” = house of God; Beth-el was the name given by Jacob to the “stone” that served as his pillow when, in his famous dream, he saw the house of God and the gate of heaven; and it was also the name given by Jacob to the city near the place where he had his dream. It is interesting to note that Genesis specifies that the original name of this city was Luz; now luz is the Hebrew name for an indestructible bone to which the soul remains attached after death until the resurrection; and it is also the name of the almond tree; near the city of Luz there was an almond tree, at the base of which was a hole through which one could enter an underground passage which led to the city of Luz, also completely hidden. We thus return to the symbol of the underground, a symbol associated with the symbol of the stone. All the symbolism of “spiritual edification” used in the Gospel, and characteristic of Freemasonry, and the symbolism of the “philosophers' stone” are deviations

of this fundamental symbol, which cannot be understood (or taught) until the “hidden stone” has been found.

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We have seen that this is a *lapis niger*; and there are observations and comparisons to be made about the importance of *black stones* in ancient Rome, in the Muslim tradition and in the tradition of *Agartha*, the underground world dealt with by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre in *Mission de binde*, Ossendowski in his famous *Bêtes, hommes et Dieux*, and Guénon in his *Roi da Monde*. That this occult stone, found by descending into the underworld, in the “dark realms” below and within “earth,” must be black may seem a simple consequence of consistency in the development of symbolism; but while not forgetting how much it may be linked to the luxuriant efflorescence and fruition of symbolism, it seems to us that this symbol also has a precise reference to the sensation of the “blackest black” of the Hermetic tradition. Let us not forget that the “hidden stone” is the Philosopher's Stone and not the philosopher's stone, that is, it is the matter of the work and not the matter of the perfect work; and when the stone is found, the sensation of “petrification” is combined with that of complete blackness.

Once this condition is reached, the symbol becomes understandable, and the meaning of the further symbolism is illuminated, which can thus suggest what needs to be done next and lead to a further stage of the work. The identification of references and the determination of the symbol are not left to the mind's eye. As one proceeds, the inner voice (the “voice of the heart”) and the inner ear (the “ears of the heart”) come into play. Thus, the transmission of symbolism is carried out hermetically and precisely. Sometimes this voice responds to a question that the mind asks itself about a particular stage or sensation, at other times it intervenes directly at the right moment and concisely reveals a mystery. Let us be clear: this is not the “voice of conscience,” the “categorical imperative,” or similar manifestations of what Nietzsche calls “moralina,” nor is it mediumistic voices or phenomena; it is those inner senses to which people usually pay no attention because they are deafened by external noise and unable to perceive and distinguish subtle inner impressions. Truly, *oculos habent et non vident*,

aures habent et non audiunt. This inner voice and hearing can function as much in the waking state as in sleep and in the various states of consciousness that are reached in the practice of the *rite*.

Simultaneously with their coming into action, there are sometimes real, materially tangible phenomena, sufficient to dispel any possible skepticism. Such phenomena often have a manifest symbolic character and sometimes possess incomparable beauty and nobility. We could recount some of them, but we have only touched on this subject to mention facts that cannot be confused with *ideas* or hallucinations, as one might be tempted to believe in the case of inner voices and perceptions, and to hint at the extent of the symbolic character of these manifestations. Symbolism is also grafted onto them, so that they rise to a kind of universal language, an initiatory language, which finds its correspondence and expression in the initiatory language through signs, gestures, and “universal words” used by some organizations more or less connected with the initiatory tradition.

(*) The text of the “Emerald Tablet” was first given by Jdbir ibn Fayyàn (Geber), who says he drew it from a work by the Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana (see the article by E. J. Holmyard, “Chemistry in Islam” in “Scientia,” 1, XI, 1926). According to the Hermetic tradition, reported by Albertus Magnus (De Alchemia), the Tabula Za-radi was found by Alexander the Great in the tomb of Hermes; and Hermes, in turn, according to this tradition, had found after the “flood” the tablets that the ancient sages and Enoch had carved before and in anticipation of the flood to perpetuate the tradition. Masonic tradition attributes the discovery of these tablets to Hermes and Pythagoras.

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