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HERA

Cosmogonic Expansions in *Her* and *All*

Sentence of the Gods consists of seven sequences—or six if we take SOL and LUNA together as a single sequence: SOLUNA, ARES, HERMES, HERA, APHRODITE, EL. By enumerating its books we see that the epic’s actual center lies *between* HERMES and HERA, at a spatio-temporal-textual “location” determined by the fact that its first three and last three stages comprise thirteen books apiece.¹ Yet the H that HERA and HERMES share is the book entitled *Her*; and we are inclined to take *this* Her as the center of the epic, if only because it echoes both the initial HER of HERMES and the subsequent HER of HERA. (Its H is the hinge in the right angle formed by HERMES on the horizontal and HERA on the vertical.) Morrison has told me that he thinks of the crossbar of the H as the true center of the **Sentence**. In this fourteenth book of his epic he will amalgamate various cosmologies, from ancient Greek, Hindu and medieval Khmer myth, with contemporary physics. His own work will also be here “epitomized.” (We might note that *Her* is only one of several “centers” of the **Sentence**, among them *Life*, its final book, which also alludes to other books in the sequence, and *Second*, its western cornerstone.)

Hermes is of course a (male) god, just as Aphrodite (who as APHRODITE follows HERA in the syntactic or syntagmatic order of the **Sentence**) is a (female) goddess—the goddess of feminine eros and beauty, whose male counterpart (even if myth has her more amorously involved with ARES) is sometimes taken to be Hermes, particularly in the myth of their marriage. This marriage produced the son Hermaphroditus, who combined the features (as well as names) of both parents; in a well-known story the water nymph Salmacis joined her body with that of Hermaphroditus while he was bathing in a spring, thereby creating a true “hermaphrodite.”² Thus, projecting back from the son (who seems to “condense” or perhaps “expand” their implicit potentiality) to the parents, we may suppose that Hermes and Aphrodite both have a certain hermaphroditic or androgynous aspect insofar as they “desire their other” in order to complete themselves. And the two stages of the epic named after Hermes and Aphrodite are mediated by Zeus’ powerful, somewhat masculine wife Hera; she is often thought to embody the sanctity of marriage, a state that she goes to great lengths to protect. Inasmuch as the world’s cosmogonic myths all seem gender-based in one way or another, perhaps the key question is this: Do we begin with *either* female *or* male; or rather with an androgynous (hermaphroditic) female-male; or even with a pre-gendered chaos, the void or opened space of pure “difference”? If it is really true that “Her Exists Regarding All” (the sentence spelled out by the letters of HERA’s name), then there will be a certain temptation to correlate Her (or Hera) with the blankest space, the blankest (widest) gaze of All.³ This chapter will deal summarily with HERA’s first and last books, *Her* and *All*.

In the Babylonian creation myth, the male “Marduk splits the body of the primeval water-goddess Tiamat, making one of its halves into sky, which contains the celestial waters, the other into Apsu, the deep, and Esharra, the ‘great abode,’ or firmament of earth.” Kirk and Raven then (34) make the obvious comparison with the opening of Genesis, which was clearly written under the influence of the Jews’ Babylonian captivity: “And [the Father] God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under [it] from the waters which were above [it ...]. And God called the firmament Heaven.” Beyond the Hebraic ambiguity as to whether the firmament itself (i.e. “Nature”) did the dividing (“and let it divide”) or whether the Father-God did it, we note that this Hebraic account is less likely to seem a simple, violent rape than in the Babylonian account, where “Marduk splits the body of Tiamat.” (Of course the biblical account in Genesis may be giving us a “sublimated” form of rape.)

But the key point is that the earlier Babylonian Tiamat is a “primeval water-goddess,” one who might almost correlate with the Hesiodic Chaos (*Xaos*), out of which sprang (or within which appeared) Gaia, the earth-mother; Ouranos-sky-father is generated out of the womb of Gaia before he can take his position “on top.” That is, “First of all *Xaos genet*, Chaos came to be, and then broad-bosomed earth. . . .” We get a variation on this in the Pelasgian creation myth: “In the beginning Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but found nothing substantial for her feet to rest upon and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves” (Graves 27). The Babylonian Tiamat as primordial chaos-water-mother *might* be assumed to give the gender-priority to the female, even though she is “split” (into earth and sky) by the male god Marduk. In any event a greater gender balance, as compared with either these (matriarchal) Greek myths or the (patriarchal) Hebraic myth, is apparent in Homer’s version of the Pelasgian myth: “Some say that all gods and all living creatures originated in the stream of Oceanus which girdles the world, and that Tethys was the mother of all his children”; here, interestingly, the pre-existent surrounding water, a sense less of inchoate chaos than of geometrical order, is male.⁴

The Orphic creation myth claims that “black-winged Night [...] was courted by the Wind and laid a silver egg in the womb of darkness; and that Eros [...] was hatched from this egg and set the Universe in motion; Eros [or Phanes] was double-sexed [and] created earth, sky, sun, and moon, but the triple goddess [Night as Night, Order and Justice] ruled the universe, until her scepter passed to Ouranos” (Graves 30). We are struck by the image of Night as the primordial (if not quite Chaotic) Mother, impregnated by the free-floating wind, and by the central role of the mother’s egg, even if the baby Eros—desire as driving force of nature for Empedocles, of integration over

against the disintegration of thanatos for the later Freud—is itself androgynous.⁵ The Chinese myth of Pan Ku has the baby born inside a giant egg (usually a male human, or monkey as at the beginning of *Journey to the West*) itself separating this “cosmogonic egg” into sky and earth. These cosmogonic egg images might suggest that the priority to “water” as that which (chaotically) pre-exists has a biological basis—the amniotic fluid of the uterus, which hardens into the “yolk”—as well as a “geographical” one (our observation of the surrounding sea, Oceanus.) In the third line of the *Tao Te Ching* we get another “egg-shaped” cosmogonic image in the Chinese character *shih*, “origin,” while “mother” appears in the fourth):

Tao ke tao, fei ch'ang tao
 (Way that can be spoken, not constant Way)
Ming ke ming, fei ch'ang Ming
 (Name that can be named, not constant Name),
Wu ming, tian ti chih shih
 (No name, heaven and earth's Origin),
You ming, wan wu chih mu
 (Has name, ten thousand things' Mother).⁶

This *shih*-origin has “woman” on the left and “embryo” on the right, suggesting of course birth, regeneration. Needham in *Science and Civilization in China*, considering both the third and fourth lines here, reinforces the implicit priority to the woman-as-mother by suggesting that this is “the mother within the mother,” that the embryo is itself female and thus will repeat, recapitulate the process of reproduction. But how, one wonders, would we relate this primordial image of cosmic (re)generation—itself not yet of a definite form or gender, not yet “personified” as compared to the following Mother—with the current astrophysical theory of a universe constantly expanding at an accelerating rate? Or even with the earlier cyclic theory of a constantly expanding, contracting-back-to-origin, expanding one? (Here we must also keep in mind that, according to the more recent perspective, there may be an indefinitely large number of origin-points, whether taken as points of explosive expansion or implosive contraction.) Or with Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s eternal return (in *Difference and Repetition*) as not a “repetition of the same” (e.g. of this life that we are now living) but a “repetition of difference” pictured as a moment-to-moment succession of dice-throws, pure random explosions of multiple (if not quite infinite) possibilities? And if a “revolution” might also be seen as such an explosion, then we may want to recall that the last three letters of Morrison’s ARES spell out, within the larger context of **Sentence of the Gods**, “*Revolution Each Second*.” We might tend to think of this force of “exploding-out” as being more phallic (ejaculatory): is the feminine “exploding-out” (how else does the baby come out?) through sexual regeneration a fundamentally different force, or are we here, once again, at a gender-free stage before the mother-father, at or near the nameless “origin”?

The sequence of sonnets that comprises *Her* (half of them in traditional verse form, half in prose) is, according to Morrison, like the two middle books of HERA, “still in flux.”⁷ The opening seven, a “crown” of sonnets (in which the first line of the first serves as the last line of the last, the last line of the first, the first of the second, and so on) epitomizes (summarizes, encapsulates) the Hesiodic representation of divinity as found in his *Theogony*. There next will follow a long sequence of regular sonnets (already composed) that interweave in paraphrase Hesiod’s *Works and Days* with *in situ* descriptions of Oklahoma City (USA).⁸ The sonnets comprising the second half of *Her* will be based on *in situ* writing done at a very different location: Siem Reap, Cambodia, center of the great medieval Khmer culture. Into these Angkor sonnets, so Morrison tells me, will be interwoven the Hindu-Khmer creation myths, derived from the *Vedas*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Matsya Purana*, the *Harivamsa* and other Indic texts and adapted to the iconographic program of Angkor Wat by the sculptors of the Khmer empire. Into the total mix of *Her* will also be interspersed allegories of all 26 books of the **Sentence**, including “epitomes” of its ten most representative dimensions (the number of dimensions in the cosmos, according to the current speculation of M theorists), expressed in terms of ten of its individual books. Furthermore, on the crossbar of the H of HERMES/HERA, at the midpoint of *Her* and the **Sentence**, will be “hung,” as Morrison puts it, three “Shields”: prose sonnets in which Hesiod’s Shield of Heracles, Homer’s Shield of Achilles and Vergil’s Shield of Aeneas, themselves epic epitomes, will be further “epitomized.”

In thinking about this microcosmic encapsulation of the universe in the book *Her* we need to bear in mind three forms of “expansion” (and/or “contraction”): the apparent over-all, on-going (cosmogonic) expansion of the physical universe, which may nonetheless bear (contain) pockets of collapse or contraction within it (see the later discussion); the mythic-cosmogonic trope of human childbirth (in particular the birth of a daughter who can herself bear or potentially “contain” a daughter) as a metaphorical expression of astrophysical-cosmogonic expansion; and finally—closely tied to this mythopoetic dimension—the sort of *textual* expansion that we get in *allegoresis*, the (parodying and) allegorizing of earlier literary texts. It is this last that Morrison has primarily in mind when he talks about allegorically “epitomizing” earlier mythic texts (and the ideas, forms and relationships, including mathematical-physical concepts, manifested in them) in verbal, literary language. The key point here is that the “original” myths were much closer (than their later retellings, repetitions, allegorizations) to being actual expressions of perceived natural phenomena (even if already in metaphorizing, personifying terms); for “ancient thinking” did not yet make any clear distinction between a physical phenomenon (e.g. the sun moves across the sky each day) and a narrative with gods (e.g. Apollo pulls the sun with his chariot) that *explained* (not through “logic” or “rationality” but

precisely by rendering metaphorical, personifying, in effect allegorizing) these phenomena, these natural forces.⁹

Vergil's retelling in the *Aeneid*, for example, of a passage from Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus speaks to the souls of the dead who come up from Hades to a pit in the ground to drink the blood of sacrificed animals, modifies the earlier story (Aeneas actually goes down into the underworld, whereas Odysseus remained at the pit's edge) and in various ways "expands" it through allegorical ornamentation, adding to its complexity as we might further expand on a design, or indeed on a "plot," which now takes on a greater sense of historical "validity." Yet on the other hand what about the original "myth" according to which living people talk to the spirits of the dead? While it is today not (yet?) seen as a scientific fact that there are ghosts, or that there is a human "soul" that still exists in some form after the body dies, these are beliefs that orthodox religions commonly make part of their doctrines, beliefs widely held, beliefs that science tends to place in an ambiguous borderland along with "extra-sensory perception" (which is studied by "parapsychology"). That is, while we have so far no clear scientific proof that there is a continued form of human consciousness (or bodily energy) after (corporeal) death—or that people can actually perform telekinesis, bend things with their minds (though the empirical proof may seem to be nearer at hand in this case, depending on whether "seeing is believing")—science itself keeps expanding, and it will continue to "explain" things that previously had no (scientific) explanation: diseases, for example, or gravity, which once was thought of as some sort of divine or mythic force (I've heard people in the Middle East say that "Allah makes it fall"), just as the lightning and thunder were once explained by the sky-god Zeus. (Maybe after centuries people will return to the idea that such phenomena as "electricity" and "gravity" are indeed the effect or expression of "gods"?) But given the fact that initially (in pre-historic times) there was no clear distinction between the phenomenon and the narrative (e.g. mythic poem) that explained it, the sort of allegorical "expansions" of earlier mythic texts that we get with Vergil, Spenser or (in a much more cumulative, textually "mixed," scientifically sophisticated, self-conscious way) Morrison are in one sense also expansions of physical nature, of the cosmos—and more obviously so in the case of MM, since he is so intensely aware of this physical-textual (or *spatio-temporal-textual*) connection and indeed likes to express, allegorize, epitomize it in his own writing.¹⁰

But the author of the **Sentence** is also showing us how the text-cosmos connection is mediated by human civilizations, cultures, religions: whole civilizations (the Catholic Middle Ages, Hindu-Buddhist Khmer Cambodia) have been built on mythic "views" of the world-design (cosmic-design) that are expressed in spatial form—as we see in European cathedrals or at Angkor Wat, which I visited with Morrison in April, 2001—i.e. through the architectural

design, construction and ornamentation of sacred buildings. Altars (or crucifixes) are placed at central focal-points that vertically “communicate” earth-heaven; mythic-divine figures are carved or painted on walls (e.g. Hindu gods at Angkor Wat) where they communicate a certain metaphorical-divine meaning; the arrangement, lay-out, subdivision of the architectural space, the spatial relations (or really, given the sacred history also being expressed here, the spatio-temporal relations) between the various rooms and/or (as at Angkor) between the many sacred buildings themselves—these all point simultaneously to a metaphorical-allegorical meaning (stories of gods or mythic heroes) and a cosmic one: after all, the gods themselves indicate or embody a cosmic meaning. Temples like Angkor Wat (or Stonehenge in England) point, through their design and/or the spatial arrangement and *orientation* of their parts, to a “cosmic order,” thereby *aligning* the human polis (Khmer Cambodia) with the harmonious celestial one.¹¹ The problem then becomes, how to catch (express, expand and/or condense) this divine spatiality and sacred-historical temporality in a literary text? This is what Homer, Spenser and Milton all were trying to do; the difference with Morrison is precisely his intense (French symbolist, modernist, postmodernist) awareness of the innately spatio-temporal nature, texture, the “dimensions” of *langue* (verbal language) and (literary) textuality.¹²

By way of pursuing this last point, we note that in the very first poem of the stunning crown of sonnets with which *Her* begins, and which recapitulates certain mythic and cosmogonic themes of Homer and Hesiod, Morrison gives us “Zeus . . . swallowing his own conception,” so that he “swelled his own conception / Solidifying thought’s divinity . . . / that insidious trinity / Athena inside Metis inside him . . .”¹³ Here we get the play on “conception” as physical birth and birth-of-a-thought—Plato later uses the same metaphor, or metonym, in his image of the Socratic midwife who helps the student “conceive” her/his own idea by recollecting it—in relation to the praxis of swallowing one’s own offspring in order, presumably, eventually to regurgitate and reconceive, redeliver it. Indeed we might even place such a notion (conception, image) in relation to the design of/on Achilles’ shield in Homer—and, following and allegorically expanding upon it, Heracles’ shield in Hesiod, Aeneas’ in Vergil—that Morrison intends to epitomize in sonnets “suspended” (i.e., hung like shields on the wall) from the crossbar of the H (we may think of the crossbow, of Odysseus’ bow) of HERA/HERMES. This shield, like the shield-sonnets which will mark the central space or “point” of **Sentence of the Gods**, symbolically depicts the cosmos, with the river Oceanus or circular Ocean running round its outermost circumference—a Mercator-map projection of the three-dimensional globe onto a two-dimensional surface. If this is not quite a classical-relativistic “curved space-time” marking the limits of the cosmos, there is nonetheless a modern cosmology already implied in its ancient cosmographic map-design. Within the space of the flattened topocosmic

surface of the shield, with its outermost circular limit, appear the City of Peace and the City of War. The question is left open as to whether war (disorder, chaos) encompasses peace or the latter (as order, harmony) encompasses war, or whether both patterns or “events” occur simultaneously. This ambivalence echoes that of gender: man before woman (or encompassing her?), woman before man (or, as in a dominant trope of French feminism, encompassing him with her womb?), or both simultaneously, or neither? That is, the move “back” to a pre-original, pre-gendered *shih*-origin may seem to parallel the move back to a time before (or “between”) war-and-peace, order-and-disorder¹⁴—perhaps the truest meaning of Hesiod’s Golden Age, the Taoist sense that it acquires when we think of it as our lost childhood or rather infancy, a time when we “knew nothing,” knew neither order nor chaos.

In *Her*, at the center of his epic, in a sequence of sonnets, Morrison has chosen to define his own “place” within a long western literary tradition (a feature of the book that also brings us back to the temporal dimension). Thinking especially of the opening crown of sonnets, which recapitulate Hesiod’s cosmogonic myths and which together with other poems, the projected shield-sonnets, will constitute the cosmological epitome, we note that the sonnet is a form of love poetry that came into English literature (with Wyatt, Surrey and Sidney) from Petrarch: in the traditional sonnet the male poet praises the divine (perfect, eternal, Platonic) beauty of his Lady (goddess, queen, Hera). This invocation of the “goddess” is one of the signs that the sonnet—as becomes clearer with Spenser and Milton—is really a modification (in the direction of lyric poetry) of the grandiose narrative of the epic. It is indeed an extremely “conservative” form, not least in its metrical and stanzaic rigidity, and Morrison in the *Her* sonnets (particularly in the opening crown of sonnets) is doing precisely what epic poets (including Spenser and Milton) do: he is praising the old god/kings and goddess/queens by retelling, recapitulating, *reliving* their legends, their mythic history (or herstory). By using the “crown” of sonnets—poems conjoined with one another in a “ring” or “circle” by their opening and closing lines, like the young maidens and men holding hands as they dance in a circle in the City of Peace on Achilles’ shield—he catches this regal sense of the god/goddess as king/queen as well as the sense of their central location. Yet if a “crown” marks the ruler’s power by being placed on top of the royal head, here the central section of the **Sentence** is being “uplifted,” the smooth surface of the text “raised.” Here then is a picture (geometrical model) that fits the spatio-temporal (space-time integrating) “folds” of contemporary (Einsteinian and post-Einsteinian) physics—whether taken as infoldings or (their virtual equivalent) outfoldings—and of Deleuze’s “surface projections” (in *The Fold*) of dynamic forces, his Leibnizian “folds.” It may, that is, suggest a spatio-temporal-textual “folding.”

The opening sonnets in *Her*, then, invoke and recapitulate the Hesiodic myths of generation—and through them the mythic background or “back story” of the **Sentence**—as well as the conservative western literary tradition that allegorically expands (upon) these myths. They thus could be considered as fundamentally more narrative (chronological-historical) than lyric; the conservative metrical and stanzaic limitations of the sonnet “form” also reinforce this sense of narrativity as opposed to pure lyric abstraction.¹⁵ After all, even the metaphysical conceits of Donne—two lovers are like the legs of a compass, they “extend”/are extended by the compass-image—or of Shakespeare—the lady is “more lovely and more temperate” than a “summer’s day,” she expands upon/is expanded by our sense of such a day—are fundamentally more *predictable* (Shakespeare’s image considerably more so than Donne’s, admittedly) than what we get with a French symbolist like Mallarmé: “But if my stroke liberates [...] / like a profound shock, / this frigidity will melt / into the laughter of a drunken blossoming, / To cast the sky in fragments [...]” (“*Éventail*,” “Fan” [Mallarmé 67-68]). This same fan whose wing-like flutter or “stroke”—a romantic variation on Nietzsche’s violent dice-throw (explosion of possibilities) also appears in “*Un Autre Éventail*,” “Another Fan”: “A twilight coolness / comes to you at each fluttering, / whose captive stroke / delicately pushes back the horizon / Vertigo! Behold space shivering / like a vast kiss / which, driven mad by coming to birth for no one, / can neither gush forth nor calm itself” (66).

The point is that the “laughter of a drunken blossoming” or “space shivering like a vast kiss” are less expected metaphorical “connections” than we get even with Donne’s lovers/compass conceit. Lyotard (who loves Mallarmé) would say that even Donne’s conceit remains metonymic (syntagmatic), and thus in a certain sense “narratological” rather than “poetic.” Jakobson (“The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles”) and Lacan (“The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious”) expand in different ways upon Saussure’s distinction (in his *Course in General Linguistics*) between the metonymic-syntagmatic function of *langue*—we connect words in a horizontal stream to make a sentence, “The boy went to the store”—and its metaphorical function, the substitution of “similar” terms, on the vertical axis, for each term in a sentence, as in “The man ran to the train station.” Saussure’s point is that the sentence’s syntax is a metonymic structure because, given the logic of syntax, it gives us a predictable or pre-determined connection: terms like “the,” “boy,” “went,” “to,” “the,” “store” are contiguous, already “adjacent to” one another (“connected” to one another) within *langue* (e.g. within English, French or Mandarin.) On the other hand, Saussure is suggesting that the vertical-metaphoric “substitutions” (“man” for “boy”) are less predictable: we could also say “The tiger flew to the seashore.”

However, Lyotard argues (in his essay on Freud, “The Dream-Work Does Not Think”) that this “tiger” for “man” and “seashore” for “store” substitution

are still metonymic in their similarity or predictability: that is, these terms are still relatively contiguous or connected within *langue* (as nouns of person, nouns of place), perhaps because in narratological terms we could easily put both within the same “story.” Much less predictable, thus more violently disruptive of *langue*, would be a more extremely modern-poetic or abstractly-poetic line like “The refrigerator exploded to the adjective”: although in a sense this “still fits” English syntax, it is not something we would ever normally imagine or *conceive of* saying. Freud maintains that the dream-work, transforming dream-thoughts into the manifest dream, works through condensation and displacement; Lyotard ties the figurative “condensation” and “displacement” of a sentence like “The refrigerator exploded (to) the adjective” to modern or abstract painting: here the condensation and then displacement of meaning to another level within *langue*, as in a kind of quantum leap, is something like the spatial displacements, incongruities, incommensurabilities of abstract painting.¹⁶ Inasmuch as it is a spatial displacement of meaning *across time*—and in this way Lyotard’s “modern poetry” escapes the rational, linear temporality of “grand narratives”—the modern-poetic metaphor also could suggest Einsteinian and post-Einsteinian physics.

We get another kind of metonymic or syntagmatic style in *All*, the fourth book of HERA (“*Her Exists Regarding All*”). The narrative form here still suggests the condensed imagism of Pound and Williams (as in *Sleep*) but also that of their latter-day disciple (of sorts) Gary Snyder, for this is truly “nature writing.” A solitary, Emersonian Morrison is engaged in a very close observation of nature: his authorial/narratorial I (eye) interacts with the objective world or surrounding cosmos (subject-object dialectic) and also becomes embedded within it—or reabsorbed into it, “swallowed” by it. *All*, set in Arizona, begins: “Broad-winged fly on rock-shard, ant across pebble terrain. Sun from-behind-cloud-striation early morning blaze. The near ground in sage brush, mid ground in palo verde, cactus clumps catching light. Feathery deciduous trees to left, igneous rocks to right. Maiden hair, crone delight.” By contrast with the linear-temporal narrativity of the crown of sonnets, this is a linear-spatial (horizontal) narrativity, a metonymic-panoramic view (scene) in which each element is connected with the one contiguous to it in the narrator’s sweep of the eye. Yet coming from the Pound-Williams-Snyder tradition we also sense the “poetic” aspect here, which (like Snyder and the imagists) Morrison reinforces through the subtle natural rhythm and also (unlike them) through the rhyming of the last three phrase-ending nouns: “light,” “right,” “delight.” The metaphoric connections of “feathery [...] trees” with “maiden hair” and of “igneous rocks” with “crone delight”—although the latter, quite striking connection is more abstract, more purely “metaphorical”—approach, on a Lyotardian reading, being metonymic connections, as befits the spatio-temporal narrativity of the style.¹⁷

On the one hand Morrison, in this book, embeds or absorbs himself into the “all” (or cosmos) usually *via* the creatures he is observing and that in turn observe him: “Bird chirp. [...] A fly investigates author’s perspiration, notebook, pen. Breeze page up-whip. Hawk overhead-observation, floating on currents. [...] Sand flies attacking author’s lips. [...] Yellow butterfly flutter-by. Wind shoo-shoo. [...] Two black flies, copulating, descend ponderously onto notebook page. Under foot: the splendid detritus of recently rain-washed forest clearing. [...] Fingers of author’s writing hand chilled by the wind. A large ant, having climbed atop his boot, pauses indecisively.” (This last is the final line of the book, letting it end with nature’s—the object’s, the other’s—point of view but also with a slight emphasis on the non-human contingency, undecidability of nature.¹⁸) On the other hand the human author, rather than focusing on his own “transparent eyeball” like Emerson in *Nature* (due to the epiphany achieved by gazing at certain natural objects), sometimes records natural objects that seem, in their very “thusness” (*tathagata*), to “reorient” the natural world or cosmos: “Two meandering insects explore involuted crevices. A white pine tilts, reorienting the universe.” Played against this dynamic is the author’s own (self-induced) “relocation,” the process of which remains outside (invisible to) the narrative: “View of plain: tall saguaros cacti; spike-like rock formations against-horizon silhouette. Light washing down through crevice divide. Bird chirp. Relocation. Panoramic mountain rise, saguaros perspective points. Broad-leafed bushes. A progressive down-scale chirp. Fly buzz. Cactus on gravel ground, sun to author’s back.” These abrupt “reorientations” and “relocations” suggest the spatial displacements of (Lyotard’s) quantum-leap modern-abstract metaphors, here interplayed against the horizontal-metonymic “scanning” of the desert scene. Also, of course, with “perspective points” and “progressive down-scale chirp” we get a subtle self-reflection on technique: the author is marking his own calibration points, his own frame of reference.¹⁹

Morrison is indeed giving us here the rudiments of a “cosmology” in the sense of twentieth-century relativity and quantum theory, one in which the “indecisiveness” of nature—paralleling, if not strictly an effect of, the human incapacity totally to know or understand the natural world/universe—may suggest the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics (Heisenberg): the observer of extremely small (e.g. subatomic) particles cannot simultaneously know their location and momentum. In *All* the author is sometimes “seen” gazing endlessly into discrete objects (the microscopic quantum world) and into the sky (the macrocosmic, relativistic world), well aware of his own limited or uncertain capacity to measure, judge, understand:

Author receiving radiant heat from volcanic roadside boulder, view toward sensuous pasture. [...] Clouds in light grey weave lead the eye to their smoky interiors, to misted, secret passages, their undersides trailing off into wisps of precipitation. The sky has opened westward into a smudged grey-blue against a white foundation. Author gazes past pines into the starry night, into its flood of luminosity, at individual constellations, at the Milky Way. A rabbit rushes past through blackened brush. Horizontal flush, followed by darkness. Again, the star-brightened heavens, ever receding, ever enlarging. For reference points only the faint yellow of pulsating stars. He peers into dusky surround, its smoky black, its nebulous grey. Stars appear through trees outlined only in charcoal. The galaxy is dissolving, others are forming. A cabin light in the distance.²⁰ (132)

As MM, who is interested in “cosmology” as defined by astrophysics, knows very well, “receding” and “enlarging” are complementary terms. If the universe merely continues to expand toward no projected terminal-equilibrium state (the maximum disorder of classical entropy theory in thermodynamics) or contraction (return-to-origin) in its future, then it is indeed “enlarging”—the dominant view of contemporary physics—and this ongoing enlargement is measured *via* the accelerated rate at which the most distant (yet still visible) celestial objects are seen to be receding from us. But in overturning the old Big Bang theory with its notion of a single cosmic origin-point (single explosion “in the beginning”), and seeing instead a “pluriverse” or “multiverse” with numerous origin-points or energy-nodes of maximum density, astrophysics has actually reawakened the possibility of a cosmic suspension at the point of terminal equilibrium or cosmic collapse. The on-going problem, one that Einstein himself began working on in the early 20th century, of reconciling relativity theory (“vast space” or macrocosmic theory) with quantum theory (“minute space” or microcosmic theory), is that of whether “vacuum space” has zero energy (is absolute nothingness), or a (slight) positive or negative energy.²¹ This issue initially arose from Einstein’s need for a “cosmological constant” which would give matter an “expansive” (or perhaps “disintegrative”) force, to counteract the “integrating” (contracting) force of gravity. In its drive to unite, within a single, encompassing theoretical framework, relativity theory and quantum mechanics—which is concerned with subatomic space and quantum leaps in energy-level—today’s physicists have cast doubt on the degree of certainty with which we might predict future expansion, suspension or collapse at any given point in space-time:

[T]he discovery of cosmic acceleration [accelerated cosmic expansion] has forever altered our thinking about the future. Destiny is no longer tied to geometry. Once we allow for the existence of vacuum energy or something similar, anything is possible. A flat universe dominated by positive vacuum energy will expand forever at an ever-increasing rate, whereas one dominated by negative vacuum energy will collapse. And if the negative energy is not vacuum energy, then its future impact on cosmic expansion is uncertain. [...] If the density rises, the cosmic acceleration will increase, tearing apart galaxies, solar systems, planets and atoms, in that order [...]. But if the density falls, the

acceleration could stop. And if the density becomes negative, the universe could collapse. [...] [T]he physics of nothingness will determine the fate of our universe! (“A Cosmic Conundrum” 59).

In fact, in their attempt to formulate the unifying quantum-relativistic framework, today’s astrophysicists have “remapped,” with what is called string theory or M theory, the classical Einsteinian, four-dimensional space-time (time as then a fourth dimension of space), which already had postulated the cosmic limit as “curved space,” and hypothesized a (virtually) fantastic world of at least ten dimensions:

The possibility of extra dimensions has also come to play a vital role in unifying general relativity and quantum mechanics. In string theory, a leading approach to that unification, particles are in actuality one-dimensional objects, small vibrating loops or strands. The typical size of a string is near the Planck length, or 10^{-33} centimeter. For the theory’s equations to be mathematically consistent, a string has to vibrate in ten space-time dimensions, which implies that six extra dimensions exist that are too small to have yet been detected. Along with the strings, sheets known as “branes” [...] of various dimensions can be immersed in space-time. [...] [I]n effect, the particles themselves would be smeared across the extra dimension. Strings, in contrast, can be confined to lie on a brane. String theory also contains fluxes, or forces that can be represented by field lines [...]. [T]he physical laws that we see depend upon the geometry of hidden extra dimensions. [...] This energy is called the vacuum energy, because it is the energy of the space-time when the four large dimensions are completely devoid of matter or fields. The geometry of the small dimensions will try to adjust to minimize this energy, just as a ball placed on a slope will start to roll downhill to a lower position. [...] How the hidden space behaves depends on the initial conditions—where the “ball” that represents it starts on the curve. If the configuration starts out to the right of the last peak, the ball will roll off to infinity, and the size of the hidden space will increase without bound [...]. Otherwise it will settle down at the bottom of one of the troughs—the size of the hidden space adjusts to minimize the energy. These three local minima differ by virtue of whether the resulting vacuum energy is positive, negative or zero. In our universe [...] we seem to be sitting in a minimum with a slightly positive vacuum energy. [...] The theory of strings predicts that the universe might occupy one random “valley” out of a virtually infinite selection of valleys in a vast landscape of possibilities. (“The String Theory Landscape” 61-64)

This “landscape” trope reminds us that Morrison’s central *topos* in *All* is indeed a very close (“scientific,” thus “poetic”) observation of the Arizona desert *landscape*. This physicist’s image of taking a random cross-section, picking “one random ‘valley’” out of a virtually infinite selection of valleys in a vast landscape of possibilities—which is what poets and novelists as well as physicists do, albeit in different ways—could almost describe Saussure’s *langue* (synchronic system of language) as a field that combines the horizontal-metonymic-syntactic function with the vertical-metaphorical function. Yet the “quantum leap” in human imagination that is required here suggests in particular the vertical-spatial displacement *across time* of the modern-poetic

metaphor (Lyotard), that totally unpredictable, *langue*-disrupting and non-metonymic (non-contiguous) connection we get in the detemporalized, spatialized *moment*—as, for example, with Mallarmé’s “space shivering / like a vast kiss / [... in] the unanimous fold (*le pli unanime*).” This poem, “Another Fan,” is of course itself reflecting on or “embodying,” “epitomizing” its own radical technique of the modern-abstract metaphor. Indeed the French figure “*éventail*” (“fan”) can also mean “range of choices,” and is related to *événement*, “event,” and *éventualité*, “possibility” (Larousse 207).²² Mallarmé’s extremely condensed and “displaced” poetic form, in combining two normally quite unrelated words (signifiers), in effect takes language to the limit, or vibrates it at the limit, just as Deleuze (who also speaks of Leibnizian “folds” and the pure singularity of the “event,” and takes Nietzsche’s return as series of explosive dice-throws) speaks in “He Stuttered” of the vibration of *langue* at the limit—as if *langue* were itself a kind of material or non-material space, a “vacuum energy” with a certain unpredictable value.

Perhaps Morrison is, after all, in both the sonnets of *Her* and the desert-observation narrative of *All* (in quite different ways) *singing* the praises of the gods (*Her*) and/or the non-human cosmos (in *All*, physical Nature): perhaps the combination of these respective metonymic-narrative forms (mythic-historical-repetitive in *Her*, spatial-horizontal-perceptual in *All*) between them creates the “spark” of the abstract-metaphor, the quantum fold of the Other. In the *Her* sonnets we have the voice of an epic poet telling, recapitulating, embodying, *becoming* the “old story” of the gods and goddesses in their amorous relations and procreations. In *All* the silent (thinking not speaking) writer’s focus on the sounds of the birds and insects, an animate (but non-human) nature’s “voice,” must be factored into the implicit “cosmology” of the poem; thus we have the voice of neither human poet nor anthropomorphic divinity, but instead of a purely contingent, non-human nature.

One could (in theory) even project these bird-and-insect choruses into the totally inanimate world of intergalactic space, thinking now of a Pythagorean-Ptolemaic “music of the spheres,” that is, of the “beauty” (heard therein as harmonious music) of the mathematical equations which, as with Newton, Einstein and their successors, so elegantly themselves embody or “epitomize” (more than just “explain”) the *kosmos*, cosmic order. (Einstein claimed that the “next equations” came to him in a kind of “aesthetic reverie.”) Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille Plateaux* speak of molecular multiplicities, including those of the human “self,” which may in their (trans-human) “transformations” be expressed as pure sound, as a “sonic block.” Some astronomers also listen with giant, parabolic, ear-like “microphones” for repetitions, the sign of extra-terrestrial intelligent life, against the on-going cosmic background noise, the celestial static.

And perhaps the shift of meaning we get when a term or value—e.g. G for Newton's gravitational force, or λ for Einstein's cosmological constant to counterbalance the force of G —is transposed from one side of the equation to the other (see "The Cosmic Conundrum" 55) is echoed, in another sense or on another quantum-linguistic plane, by the two "sides" (as well as "genders") of Morrison's **Sentence of the Gods**, whose pulsating centerpoint and cosmological epitome is HER(A).

Notes

1. This is counting the (crossword-style) doubled letters just once, and also counting the H shared by HERMES and HERA as part of HERA. Noting that 26 is also the number of letters in the English alphabet, it seems appropriate to recall here that Mallarmé in “The Book: A Spiritual Instrument” also speaks of the “infinite expansion of the alphabet,” that “miracle of words led back to their origin, which is the [French] twenty-four letters of the alphabet, so gifted with infinity that they will finally consecrate language. Everything is caught up in their endless variations and then rises out of them in the form of the principle. Thus *typography becomes a rite*” (Adams 691, my emphasis).

2. Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 6) says that Salmacis prayed to the gods to make their two bodies one—“So two became nor boy nor girl, / Neither yet both within a single body”—and that the resulting “hermaphrodite” (which in biology usually means an organism with both male and female sexual organs) prayed to the gods to make “all who swim in these waters impotent,” half male, half female.

3. German “*das All*” is the cosmos or universe; cosmos (*kosmos*) means “order” in Greek (over against chaos, *chaos*, disorder), while universe is literally “one turn” or (as befits Einstein’s curved space perhaps) “one fold.”

4. “Homer’s myth is a version of the Pelasgian creation story, since Tethys reigned over the sea like Eurynome, and Oceanus girdled the universe like Ophion” (Graves 30, note). This curving-around of Ocean—forgetting now the issue of gender-“orientation,” even if women are often considered to be the “curvaceous sex” as well as the “softer” one—might also suggest Einstein’s notion of “curved space”; see the later discussion.

5. This also appears to be true of the Hesiodic Eros, which appears out of Chaos immediately after *Gaia* and then “unites” Earth and Sky. Dante’s God as Love comes from Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover as both First Cause (that pushes) and Final Cause (that pulls); Aristotle is in the tradition of Empedocles (that is, of the study of physical forces, potential and kinetic energy). The *Paradiso* (and so *La Divina Commedia* itself) ends with the line: “my / desire and will were moved already—like / a wheel revolving uniformly—by / the Love that moves the sun and the other stars” (Mack 1429).

6. We note here that there is a kind of analogy with Hesiod: out of nameless Chaos come (named, personified) Earth, Eros, Sky. One aspect of Hesiod’s *Xaos* is that it is “indefinite”; Anaximander’s later *Apeiron* (an “hypostasis,” Cornford calls it, of this Chaos) is translated as the “Unlimited” but also the “Indefinite” (“Indefinable,” “Nameless”). The line between the physical “mixing together” (thus indeterminacy) of things and the uncertainty of a fixed “meaning” (within *langue*) is a very fine one that may (as in poststructuralism) sometimes disappear.

7. His earlier plan for this sequence of 69 sonnets (whose number, the author says, brings the total of pages in manuscript for the six books of HERMES to 1024, or two to the tenth power) had consisted of two parts, in the first of which Hesiod’s *Theogony*, or English paraphrases thereof, were to be interwoven among *in situ* descriptions of one or another Asian city; Hesiod’s *Works and Days* was to be interwoven among *in situ* descriptions of Oklahoma City (USA). The latter group of sonnets has now been completed, the earlier group abandoned. The seven transitional sonnets between these two parts, which epitomize the Hesiodic vision of divinity, have now been promoted to the front of the sequence, followed by the poems based on Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, among which will be interspersed prose “sonnets” that epitomize **Sentence of the Gods**. These will be followed by a sequence of sonnets that interweave ancient Hindu-Khmer texts (as represented in the bas reliefs of Angkor Wat’s interior) among *in situ* description of the author’s experience of the monumental cosmological temple at Siem Reap, former center of the medieval Khmer empire. Midway through the sequence of 69 poems, on the crossbar of the H that joins

HERMES and HERA, will occur the three prose “sonnets” that epitomize three classical western texts by Hesiod, Homer and Vergil, texts that already take the form of epitomes in their representation of ancient Greek heroism, of the cosmos (according to Homer) and of the political empire of Rome (according to the greatest poet of the Augustan age).

8. *Exists*, the second book of HERA, will take up the landscapes of Oklahoma plus Tulsa and Lawton, her second and third cities; thus it will “echo” *Engendering*, the next-to-last book of HERMES, which is set in Norman, Oklahoma (Morrison’s home for 23 years). This Oklahoma trilogy (in *Engendering*, *Her* and *Exists*) will then be followed by another landscape book, *Regarding*, the third book of HERA, which will describe the landscape of New Mexico. The sequence ends with *All*, which describes the landscape of eastern Arizona. As *Her* expresses Hera and Athena (among the Greek pantheon), so *Exists*, *Regarding* and *All* express her three brothers, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus respectively. The Greek gods’ Hindu counterparts, operating at a deeper level, are Shakti, Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. *Exists*, *Regarding* and *All* are also patterned on Chinese landscape types, from the Yuan, Sung and Ming dynasties.

9. The point is that in “primitive” human thinking nature is “alive,” it at least “animated” or “inspired,” so that lightning will “naturally” be seen as a god (Zeus); there was no idea about the mechanical, inorganic forces of physics, the tiny particles and/or waves and/or fields that would today explain “electricity.” Thus there were only mythopoetic explanations in this “pre-scientific” period; mythos *was* the only logos. The “strangeness” of ancient thought, its “non-logical” aspect (e.g. the seeming tendency not always clearly to distinguish waking from dreaming states of consciousness), is more evident in the ancient Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*, which may date to as early as 2000 B.C., than in Homer’s poems of a millennium later.

10. Thus adding to through “intensification” the on-going, spatio-temporal-textual, daughter-in-mother dynamic of condensation, recapitulation and expansion.

11. In the previous chapter we noted the “ritualistic” aspect of ancient Chinese Confucian thinking: by facing south the emperor could properly align or “attune” his kingdom, that is, set it in harmony (correspondence, alignment) with the cosmos. This notion of “attunement” catches not just the notion of Serresian sounds/meanings “tuned in” out of chaotic background noise and passing again back into it but also our sense of both music and lyric poetry as “formed sound” (that is, “formed noise”), and the role of music, song, ritual chanting in prayer and other sacred rituals, often performed in temples. The astounding Hindu-based sacred buildings, including those of Angkor Wat, in and near Siem Reap, Cambodia, were built by Khmer kings between the 9th and 13th centuries A.D. Many of these were conceived as “temple mountains” or pyramids, symbolic of the cosmic Mt. Meru of Hindu mythology. This five-tiered mountain-temple at the center of the universe was said to be encircled by seven chains of mountains (the enclosing walls) that were themselves surrounded by the sea (moat). This is an example of that essential topocosmic model in which heaven-and-earth are joined or “communicated” by a central pole, axis, “tree of life,” “Tower of Babel” or, as here, temple-mountain: this is perhaps the fundamental pattern for heaven-earth (man-god) “harmonious alignment” or “attunement.”

12. There are numerous writers that could be mentioned here, including Mallarmé (“infinite expansion of the alphabet”) and Joyce (who is said to have had a very “material” sense of language, of its sounds); however, in the following discussion I give a certain priority to Lyotard and his theory that literary writing (as *petits récits* rather than grand narratives) “writes the event”: drawing from Freud’s conception of the dream-work as working through condensation and displacement, Lyotard speaks of the incommensurable “figure” in/of the literary text, that is, its operation of “figuration” through which we are vertically-metaphorically, thus “spatially” displaced to another “level” of language (or perhaps placed at the very outermost boundary of *langue*), a level at which there will no longer be (syntactic-syntagmatic-temporal) “narration.”

13. And just after this we get, not just the egg of Orphic cosmogonies but the Hermes-Dionysus parallel, with those “goddesses who lay at night with Zeus / . . . Serving the egg . . . / Thus Maia Atlas’ daughter . . . / Conceived the gracious Hermes . . . / while Semele . . . / Didst

bear a glorious son who is to mortals / O Dionysus! The sweet vine's life blood...."

14. A fundamental notion in chaos/complexity theory is, as we have seen, that the random pre-order of "chaos" forms or self-organizes itself into "order" through repetition, then finally returns through hyper-order (hyper-repetition) to (another form of) disorder. In this sense "human order" (human life) itself comes "between" order and (the hyper-order of) disorder; in another way the pre-order of chaos could be seen as the "betweenness" of hyper-order (blank chaos, terminal equilibrium) and (self-)ordering, and/or as the betweenness of its own pre-ordered state and the initial order that it is already becoming; these two are *Gestalt*-switched, virtual images of one another. Or as Lao Tzu says in Chapter 1 of the *Tao Te Ching*, "These two [subtle essence and manifestation] are one, though they come out with different names." "Subtle essence" here is miao 妙, which has "woman" on the left and "tiny" on the right.) See also Serres (in *Genesis* 117): "Time is a threshold between disorder and redundancy, it is the multiplicity next to chaos and prior to all spatialities. It is the first injection of redundancy into a pure multiplicity. [...] Make redundancy increase slightly, and an order begins to be born, you enter spaces."

15. This is of course an extremely complex issue. And as is abundantly clear from the SOLUNA poems discussed in Chapter 1, Morrison also has very close connections with the American '50s beat tradition as well as Snyder's "nature writing" (see the following discussion of *All*), behind both of these the Pound-Williams imagist tradition, and behind that both Whitman (Pound's progenitor) and the French Symbolist tradition (which influences Stevens, Eliot and Pound). Behind them all, and in certain respects very close to the epic-creation impulse that generates the **Sentence**, arguably stands the mad "prophet-visionary" William Blake. It is much to the point to mention "poetic traditions," or "generations," in discussing the **Sentence**, and certainly in discussing *Her*, since (like that other Blakean, Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*, and also with the Oedipalizing ramifications Bloom develops) Morrison is very concerned here with "generation" in several senses of the term, including that of "cultural tradition." We must remind ourselves that all the poems in the *Her* sequence occur within the HERMES as well as the HERA sequence. Hermes is the god of literary tradition, his hermeneutical powers devoted not only to their creation and transmission but also to their explication

16. For a much fuller discussion of Lyotard in relation to Freud, Saussure and Lacan, see Stevenson, "Lyotard's Future" in *Concentric*, June 2005.

17. Assuming that the connection is between the "rough" surface of (an) igneous rock and that of the face of a crone or "withered old woman," this is actually a very metonymic connection between adjacent surfaces—especially if the woman is sleeping on the rock. "Igneous" (derived from the Sanskrit for "fire") tacitly suggests cosmogonic starfire; perhaps Hera is the "crone" to Aphrodite's "maiden"?

18. One might think here of the indecisive, slow-moving snail's point of view (replacing that of an omniscient human author/narrator) in Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens," just as with the "author's writing hand chilled" one might think of Omar Khayam's "The moving hand [of Fate] writes, and then moves on."

19. As in, for instance, W. C. Williams' "Spring and All"—"One by one objects are defined— / It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf . . ."

20. This final "cabin light" abruptly brings us "back down to earth," perhaps with something like the uncanny shock effect of the 17th century French drawing room where Keir Dullea "lands" at the end of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or of the "witch house" that suddenly appears to the lost characters, in the middle of a dark wood, near the end of *The Blair Witch Project* 1.

21. Interestingly the notion of a "vacuum space" with zero energy parallels the most ancient cosmogonic myths of a "void," which is not simply nothingness but rather takes some form of energy. Thus for instance we have Hesiod's *Xaos* out of which emerged Earth and then Sky: this primordial mixture (or "mixed-space") could hardly have been "absolute nothingness," since the

primordial matter was generated out of it; we also have Lao Tzu's Tao (in one of its interpretations and/or manifestations) as a *shu* or "fertile void."

22. The French suffix "*tail*" is related both to "cut" and (metonymically) to "size," so that "*éventail*" (a "fanned-out range") might be interpreted as "event-cut" or "event-size," just as "*détailler*" is to "*break down* into details." And lest we have any doubt that "casting the sky in fragments" by fanning oneself is a kind of dice-throw, i.e. that through its "beating" the fan fragments (or dissolves) the future along with the sky, Mallarmé's first fan poem (an "*Éventail*" of and for his wife) makes this (metaphoric or perhaps metonymic) connection explicit: "With for language (*Avec comme pour langage*) / nothing except a beating in the skies (*battement aux cieux*) / the future line of poetry frees itself (*Le future vers se dégage*) / from the most precious dwelling-place (*logis*, "lodging" but we will also think, though they are not etymologically connected, of "logic," poetry's arch-enemy), / wing swooping low, the messenger (*courrière*), / this fan [...]" But here the "future" becomes more explicitly "the future (line) of poetry."