

*"We say God and the imagination are one...  
How high that highest candle lights the dark."*

—Wallace Stevens, "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour"

— A SYMPOSIUM —

## That Highest Candle : Poetry & Spirituality

CELEBRATING THE OPENING OF THE HUMANITIES READING ROOM  
McDonald Library, Xavier University

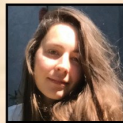
*featuring*

MICHAEL HELLER



PETER O'LEARY

TIRZAH GOLDENBERG



DONALD REVELL

ELIZABETH GRAY



HENRY WEINFELD

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 7:00 PM

A Round Table Discussion with the Poets on Spiritual and Poetic Texts  
Public Reception Following

**Texts for the  
Round Table discussion.**

The Humanities Reading Room, Second Floor, McDonald Library,  
will be open during the symposium.



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## Section from a Nying-ma manual for practicing the *Chöd* rite:

### I. THE OBJECTS NEEDED FOR PRACTICING THE RITE

Immediately after the “Obeisance to the One Deeply Versed in the Knowledge of the Space of Truth, the Great Bliss-Conferring Lady, the Conqueress of the Lake,” and an Introduction, composed of six verses, referring to the “Doctrine of the Great Perfection,” of Guru Padma Sambhava, the things necessary for the yogin who would practice the *Chöd* Rite are described as follows:

For overpowering the proud [elementals] by one’s being of majestic appearance,  
A hide, with the claws intact, of a beast of prey;  
A miniature tent, to symbolize one’s upward-tending aspirations;  
A trident-staff, to symbolize one’s upward-climbing aims;  
A human thigh-bone trumpet, for controlling genii and demons;  
A *damaru* (skull drum), for overpowering apparitional beings;  
A bell, with miniature bells attached to it, for dominating the *Mātrikās* (mother-goddesses, *dakṁīs*);  
A bannerette, made of narrow strips of tiger and leopard skin and human-hair braid.

### II. THE PLACE AND MENTAL IMAGERY PRESCRIBED

Then, in a [solitary] awe-inspiring place,  
And free from fear of being overawed by the genii and demons,  
Or by any of the influences [or motives] of the Eight Worldly Ambitions,  
One should be imbued with the virtue of the Four Boundless Wishes;  
[And thus] dominate every apparitional appearance [arising out of the mind].

If at this stage one should fail to safeguard oneself by means of mental imagery [or visualization],  
It would be like giving to the enemy the secret of one’s strength.  
Therefore energetically maintain clarity of intellect,  
And uttering “*Phat!*”, think that from within thy heart  
A nine-pointed *doṅje* (ritual dagger) made of thunderbolt iron,  
Unbreakable and equipoised, heavy and strong,  
Emitting flame-like radiances,  
Falleth with the might of a thunderbolt wheresoever one mentally projecteth it  
Against the local genii and antagonistic spirits with their followers,  
Rendering them powerless to flee or to be carried away.  
Think that thus they are held and cowed down, their heroic and dignified nature dominated.

Then putting aside all conventional feelings of shame or common hypocritical thoughts,  
But holding to devotional confidence with zeal and energy,  
Walk with four exalted steps,  
Walk with the vigorous gait [born] of unshakeable faith in the [Perfection] Doctrine.

Then, summoning the genii and demons of the invisible realms,  
And the malignant wandering spirits of the locality,  
Drive them all before thee like a herd of sheep and goats,  
Compelling them powerlessly to go to the awe-inspiring place,  
And, as soon as they have arrived there,  
With the gait of superabundant energy and force,

Catch hold of the legs of all of them,  
And whirl them round thy head thrice,  
And think that thou dashest them to the ground.  
Whilst holding to this visualization,  
Throw the hide and miniature tent to the ground forcibly.

[Thereby,] howsoever great and influential the genii and other spiritual beings may be,  
They will most certainly be controlled and made to remain passive.  
If, however, the devotional firmness of the yogin be weak,  
He should practice this mental imagery by gradual steps, in accordance with his courage.

“The Path of Mystic Sacrifice: The Yoga of Subduing the Lower Self.”  
*Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines.*  
Evans-Wentz, W. Y., Ed.  
Oxford Univeristy Press, 1935, 1967. 320-323.

## **Ghazal**

Happy the moment when we are seated in the palace, thou and I,  
With two forms and with two figures but with one soul, thou and I.  
The colors of the grove and the voice of the birds will bestow immortality  
At the time when we come into the garden, thou and I.  
The stars of heaven will come to gaze upon us;  
We shall show them the moon itself, thou and I.  
Thou and I, individuals no more, shall be mingled in ecstasy,  
Joyful and secure from foolish babble, thou and I.  
All the bright-plumed birds of heaven will devour their hearts with envy  
In the place where we shall laugh in such a fashion, thou and I.  
This is the greatest wonder, that thou and I, sitting here in the same nook,  
Are at this moment both in Iraq and Khorasan, thou and I.

Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273 CE)

*Anthology of Islamic Literature*. James Kritzeck, Ed. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964.  
p. 228.



Shechechyanth - (We) Who keep us -  
 Who brings us to life & sustains us.  
 Prayer said at start of anything - year,  
 month, season, planting of a tree in Israel,  
 etc.

<p>179 תהלים ספר שלישי פט  מלכנו: כ אז דברתי בקוץ לחסידיך  והאמר שויתי עזר עגל נפוד  הרימותי כחור מעם: כ מצאתי  הנד עבדי בשמן קדשי משחתיו:  כ אשר ידי תבון עמו לאחזרועי  תאמצנו: כ לא ישא אויב בו ויך  עולה לא יעננו: כ וכתותי מפני  צרו ומשנאו אנות: כ ואמיתתי  חסדי עמו ובשמי תרום קרנו:  כ ושמתו בים ידו ובנהרות ימינו:  כ הוא יקראני אבי אמה אלי וצור  ישועתי: כ אף אני בכור אתנהו  עליון למלכי ארץ: כ לעולם  אשמורלו חסדי ובריתי נאמנת</p> <p style="text-align: right;">יחזקאל</p>	<p>178 תהלים ליום רביעי פט  הים בשוא גליו אתה תשכחם:  כ אתה דבאת בחלל רהב בזרוע  עזך פזרת אויביה: כ לה שמים  אחלה ארץ תבל ומלאה אתה  יסדמם: כ צפון ומין אתה בראתם  תבור וחרמון בשמה ירגנו: כ לה  זרוע עם נבוכד תעז ידך תרום  ימינה: כ צדק ומשפט מכון כסאך  חסד ואמת יקדמו פניה: כ אשרי  העם ידעי תרועה יהוה באור פניה  יהלכו: כ בשמה יגליו בלחיים  ובצדקתה ירומו: כ כיתפארת  עזמו אתה וברצונך תרים קרגנו:  כ כי ליהוה מגנגו ולקדש ישראל</p> <p style="text-align: right;">תרום קרי</p>
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“Understand appearance to be the teacher.”

--Saraha

“The hard way, the arduous path of appearance.”

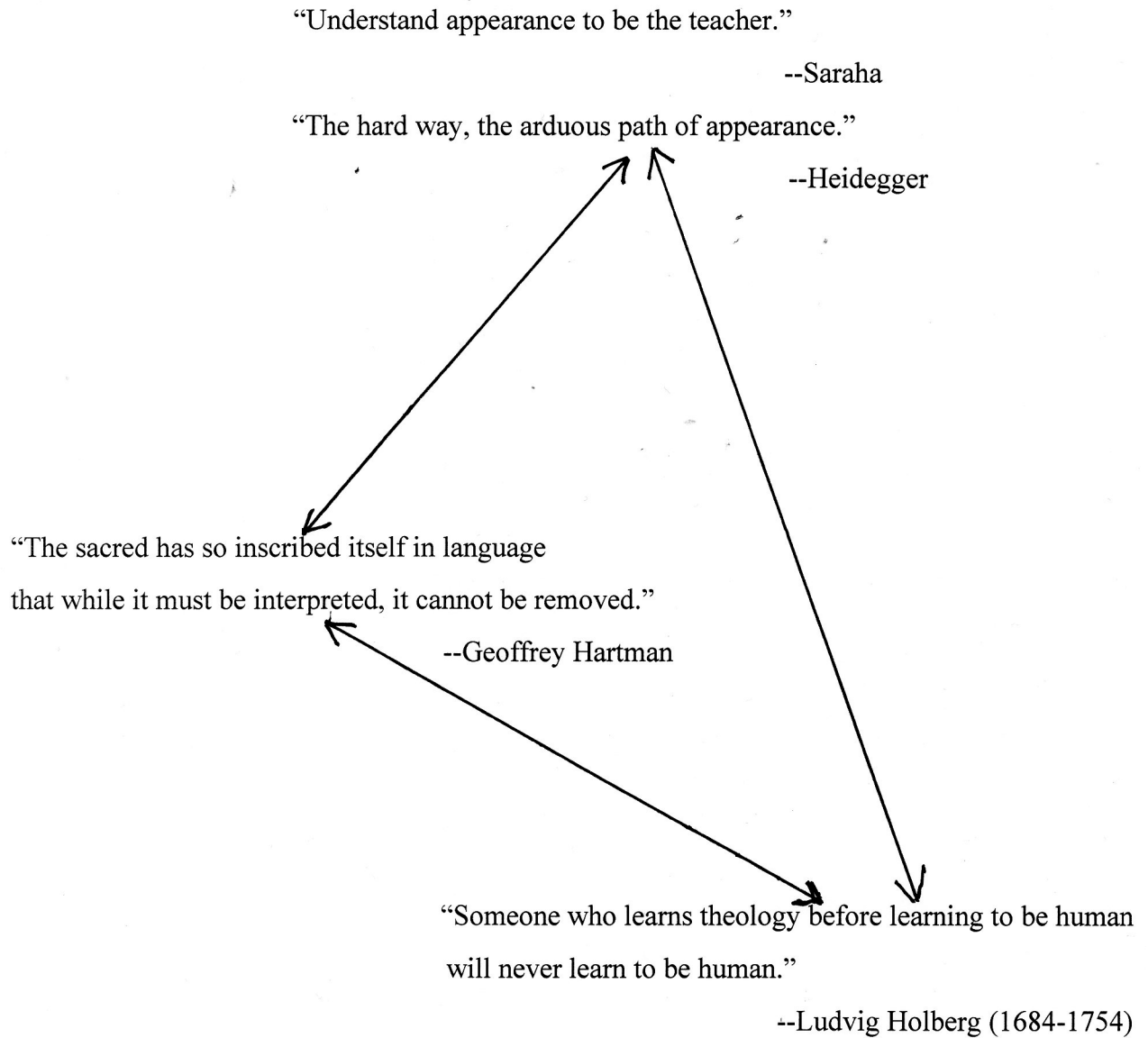
--Heidegger

“The sacred has so inscribed itself in language  
that while it must be interpreted, it cannot be removed.”

--Geoffrey Hartman

“Someone who learns theology before learning to be human  
will never learn to be human.”

--Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754)



Two Passages by Robert Duncan  
for *That Higher Candle: Poetry & Spirituality*  
Xavier University, October 2022

selected by Peter O'Leary

from "Rites of Participation," *The H.D. Book*  
(written in 1961)

The power of the poet is to translate experience from daily time where the world and ourselves pass away as we go on into the future, from the journalistic record, into a melodic coherence in which words—sounds, meanings, images, voices—do not pass away or exist by themselves but are kept by rhyme to exist everywhere in the consciousness of the poem. The art of the poem, like the mechanism of the dream or the intent of the tribal myth and *dromena*, is a cathexis: to keep present and immediate a variety of times and places, persons and events. In the melody we make, the possibility of eternal life is hidden, and experience we thought lost returns to us.

from "The Truth and Life of Myth"  
(written in 1967)

Myth, for Dante, for Shakespeare, for Milton, was the poet-lore handed down in the tradition from poet to poet. It was the very matter of Poetry, the nature of the divine world as poets had testified to it; the poetic piety of each poet, his acknowledgment of what he had found true Poetry, worked to conserve that matter. And, for each, there was in the form of their work—the literary vision, the play of actors upon the stage, and the didactic epic—a kind of magic, for back of these forms we surmise distant origins in the rituals toward ecstasy of earliest Man. Once the operations of their art began they were transported from their sense of myth as a literary element into the immediacy of the poem where reality was mythological. In *The Divine Comedy*, moving back of actual time and space (and, I would recall here that Dante makes a fiction, an artful dodge in actual time for his Vision, for he predates his poem so that he continually has foreknowledge of the event, as in his stanzas he fore-rhymes) in the tradition of the Descent to Hell and Ascent to Heaven poem, a form that has its remote origins in shamanistic practice, and its myth in the story of Orpheus, Dante "finds himself" in a dark wood. The leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf are charged with allegorical meaning; but with Dante always the meaning is more than one; the fictive proposition is also visionary reality. He figures ratios of actual time and place that are poetic measures. The actual world is filled with messages, and actual persons give signs.

## PASSAGES FOR PANEL DISCUSSION: DONALD REVELL

- 1) And in this vision he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel-nut, lying in the palm of my hand, and to my mind's eye it was round as any ball. I looked at it and thought, "What can this be?" And the answer came to me, "It is all that is made."  
--Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Short Text 4.
- 2) The smallest thing, by the influence of eternity, is made infinite and eternal.  
--Thomas Traherne, "The Fourth Century" 8.
- 3) There is a grain of sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find,  
Nor can his watch fiends find it; 'tis translucent and has many angles.  
But he who finds it will find Oothoon's palace, for within,  
Opening into Beulah, every angle is a lovely heaven.  
--William Blake, *Jerusalem*, Chapter II, 383-386
- 4) The tiny is the last resort of the tremendous.  
--Richard Howard, "Closet Drama: An Aporia for Joseph Cornell"



Dante, *Purgatorio* 2.76-133 (The Casella Episode)  
Allen Mandelbaum, trans.

I saw one of those spirits moving forward  
in order to embrace me—his affection  
so great that I was moved to mime his welcome.

O shades—in all except appearance—empty!  
Three times I clasped my arms around him and  
as often brought them back against my chest.

Dismay, I think, was painted on my face;  
at this, that shadow smiled as he withdrew;  
and I, still seeking him, again advanced.

Gently, he said that I could now stand back;  
then I knew who he was and I beseeched  
him to remain awhile and talk with me.

He answered: “As I loved you when I was  
within my mortal flesh, so, freed, I love you:  
therefore I stay. But you, why do you journey?”

“My own Casella, to return again  
to where I am, I journey thus; but why,”  
I said, “were you deprived of so much time?”

And he: “No injury is done to me  
if he who takes up whom—and when—he pleases  
has kept me from this crossing many times,

for his own will derives from a just will.  
And yet, for three months now, he has accepted,  
most tranquilly, all those who would embark.

Therefore, I, who had turned then to the shore,  
at which the Tiber’s waters mix with salt,  
was gathered in by his benevolence.

Straight to that river mouth, he set his wings;

that always is the place of gathering  
for those who do not sink to Acheron.”

And I: “If there’s no new law that denies  
you memory or practice of the songs  
of love that used to quiet all my longings,  
then may it please you with those songs to solace  
my soul somewhat; for—having journeyed here  
together with my body—it is weary.”

*“Love that discourses to me in my mind”*  
he then began to sing—and sang so sweetly  
that I still hear that sweetness sound in me.

My master, I, and all that company  
around the singer seemed so satisfied,  
as if no other thing might touch our minds.

We all were motionless and fixed upon  
the notes, when all at once the grave old man  
cried out: “What have we here, you laggard spirits?

What negligence, what lingering is this?  
Quick, to the mountain to cast off the slough  
that will not let you see God show Himself!”

Even as doves, assembled where they feed,  
quietly gathering their grain or weeds,  
forgetful of their customary strut,  
will, if some thing appears that makes them fear,  
immediately leave their food behind  
because they are assailed by greater care;  
so did I see that new-come company—  
they left the song behind, turned toward the slope,  
like those who go and yet do not know where.  
And we were no less hasty in departure.