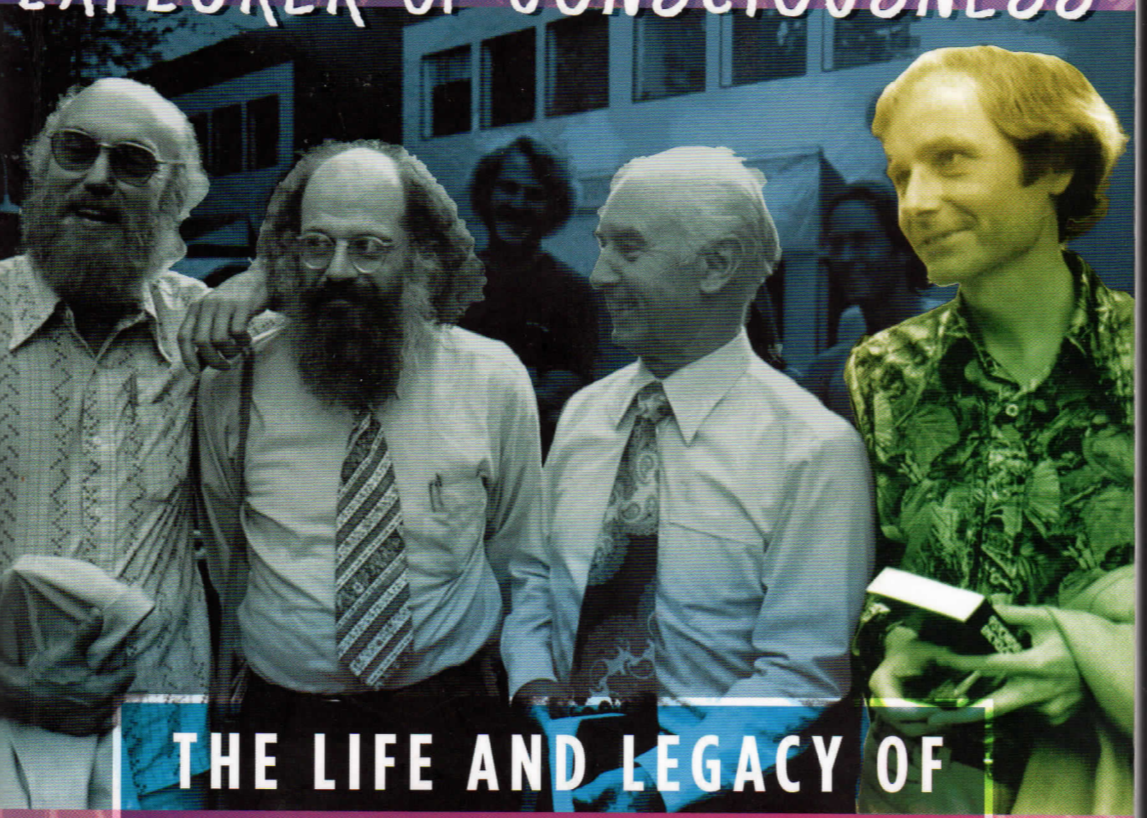
The Maternal Mythic Milieu of Ralph Metzner
Festschrift contribution by Alastair McIntosh - with appended material

Ralph Metzner

EXPLORER OF CONSCIOUSNESS



THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF A PSYCHEDELIC PIONEER

EDITED BY
Cathy Coleman, Ph.D.

FOREWORD BY DAVID PRESTI, PH.D.

$30.00 U.S.
$37.50 Can.

"This book will take you through the labyrinth to the origins of what it means to explore one's consciousness in its purest form. This is a beautiful testament to one of the great pioneers of our time. Today's psychedelic renaissance could have never existed if it weren't for the gift of life that was Ralph Metzner."

-ZACH LEARY, writer, facilitator, and host of *MAPS Podcast*

"Ralph was able to explore and articulate an enormous range of both innovative and ancient ideas and practices in ways that continue to ripple out into the larger world. This is a worthy testament to a visionary scholar whose life has made a difference."

-RICHARD TARNAS, PH.D., professor emeritus, California Institute of Integral Studies

Renowned as a pioneering psychologist, psychedelic elder, alchemical explorer, and shamanic teacher, the late Ralph Metzner (1936–2019) contributed profoundly to consciousness research, transpersonal psychology, and contemporary psychedelic studies across his more than 50-year career.

Celebrating the life and legacy of Ralph Metzner, this book explores how Ralph touched the lives of those around him in extraordinary and remarkable ways, recasting people's worldviews and inspiring the flowering of creativity, personal growth, and spiritual transformation. There are recollections from the pivotal years of the Sixties, when Ralph conducted research with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (Ram Dass). Other contributors describe Ralph's involvement in the School of Actualism in the 1970s and the profound impact that Agni Yoga had on Ralph's explorations of consciousness and his healing therapies. We also learn about Ralph's development of Green Psychology, or ecopsychology, his mystical work exploring prenatal realms of consciousness and channeling, and his healing and transformative "Vision Circles."

Academic colleagues and a who's who of fellow psychedelic researchers share stories from their work with Ralph, illuminating his depth of knowledge and broad impact. This book paints a complete portrait of Ralph Metzner in his well-known roles as therapist and psychedelic pioneer and as an intrepid explorer of consciousness until the very end of his life.

CATHY COLEMAN, PH.D., was Ralph Metzner's wife of 31 years. A former dean of students at California Institute of Integral Studies, president of Kepler College, and director of IONS' EarthRise Retreat Center, she lives in Sonoma, California.

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cycles associated with a spirit or daimon, goddess or god, what Jung would have called an archetype.

Ralph himself reflects the archetype of the far-seeing Magus, the wizardly presence associated with figures like Thoth, Hermes Trismegistus, Merlin, and Lugh. People and the planet are better for all the magic he left us.

The Maternal Mythic Milieu of Ralph Metzner

Alastair McIntosh

Alastair McIntosh is known for modern Scottish land reform, environmental protection, and social justice. His books include *Poacher's Pilgrimage: An Island Journey,* which advances an ecology of the imagination, and most recently, *Riders on the Storm: The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being.* He is an honorary professor at the University of Glasgow.

You know how it is these days. You go to a conference, and they give you the program and your pen and badges in a cotton bag. Everybody makes out it's saving the environment, and having just arrived, you're happy at the contribution this might make to offsetting your bad carbon karma. All is well, until back home the rueful day comes when you have to clear out a closet-full of cotton bags. And, as the bard of Scotland, Robert Burns, put it to a mouse whose nest his plow had overturned:[7]

The best-laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

7. "To a Mouse, On Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough," November 1785, available on www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk. The phrase *gang aft agley* means "go all awry."

Notice the empathy with nature in that poem. Another verse has it:

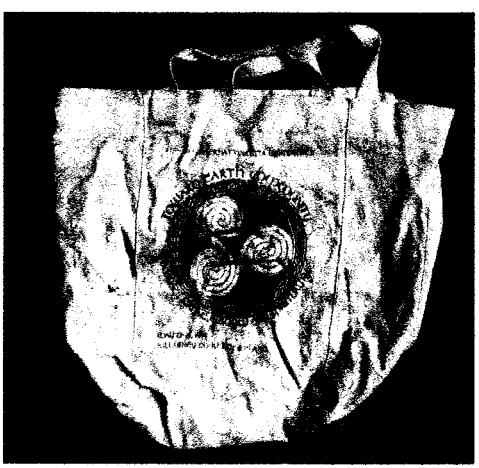
I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

Burns penned those lines in 1785 in his home county of Ayrshire, just south of Glasgow from where I'm writing this.

THE 13TH ITA CONFERENCE IN KILLARNEY, MAY 1994

In this Gedenkschrift contribution I will pay tribute to the impact of that event and use it as a springboard to reflect on Ralph's Celtic—to use that term loosely—ancestry on his mother's side here in Scotland.

It was probably in the fall of 1993 that I'd seen a call for presentations, and submitted a proposal to speak about the bardic—one might say, *shamanic*—underpinnings of our pioneering work on land reform in Scotland. The conference was called "Toward Earth Community: Ecology, Native Wisdom and Spirituality."



■ Fig. 38. 13th ITA Conference, Killarney, Ireland, cotton cloth bag (Photo courtesy of Alastair McIntosh)

See the last page of this PDF for colour photograph

Ralph, as conference program director, accepted my proposal, which also meant that I could afford to attend the conference along with an astonishing 1,600 other delegates. As Cathy Coleman (his wife) would later tell me, "It reached maximum enrollment and was financially successful too."[8] Such was how I came by the cotton bag. Later, I enlarged it by splicing in a length of green cotton fabric from an old pair of trousers. It became the carrier for a drum I'd made with a rainbow eagle motif that I used on the campaign trail. Through the Contemporary Collecting Programme, that drum now forms part of the permanent collection of National Museums of Scotland as a "disobedient object" representing modern Scottish land reform.[9]

A lot of heady water has passed under the bridge since then. Not only did we succeed in striking the iconic spark that brought the seven thousand acre Hebridean Isle of Eigg—once "cleared" (i.e., evicted) of much of its population—back into community ownership, but we also stopped a multinational corporation from turning the majestic mountain Roineabhal on the neighboring Isle of Harris into the biggest roadstone quarry in the world.[10] Land reform legislation followed, formally abolishing feudalism and creating a community right-to-buy. Some 3 percent of Scotland is now held in five hundred community land trusts.

IMPACT ON SCOTTISH LAND CONSCIOUSNESS

My part as one of the leaders in these campaigns lay mainly in following an emergent land consciousness. In this respect the International Transpersonal Association's Irish conference came at the perfect time.

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8. Cathy Coleman email, October 14, 2020. The 1,600 figure was what was said at the conference itself. Elsewhere, I have seen the figure stated as 1,500.

9. See the museum curator's Sarah Laurenson's video *Collecting the Present: Land Reform* available on YouTube, from about 2:50 minutes in. Also, find her on X (formerly Twitter) as @SarahALaurenson and see the May 11, 2020, thread.

10. Alastair McIntosh, *Soil and Soul: People versus Corporate Power* (London: Aurum, 2001).

Vast areas of Scottish land were—indeed, still are, for this is work-in-progress—owned by private interests who can exert considerable control over ordinary people's lives. Such is a legacy of events around the so-called Highland Clearances, the dispossession of the clansfolk from their lands mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This, part of the "internal colonization" of the British Isles such as in Ireland, had led to the Famine, and in England, the Enclosures.

I had a strong vantage point as a lecturer in human ecology at the University of Edinburgh. But as the work gained traction, and as newspaper headlines were made, it ruffled powerful feathers. Our teaching center was notoriously closed down in 1996. To carry on, as an unemployed writer and activist, took a particular strength. Much of it came from having had my ideas from preexisting Scottish poets and historians further refined, endorsed, and supported in friendships that came out of the ITA's conference integration of ecology, trauma psychology, activism, and consciousness. It was only a three-day event. But never underestimate the power of what a person like Ralph and his team could constellate.

Just to give a hint at other speakers by whom I was fired up, we heard:

- The poetry of David Whyte, and his powerful rendition of W. B. Yeats' shamanic "Wandering Aengus" with its line "because a fire was in my head."
- The Irish presenters, such as Sister Imelda Smith, who led the welcoming ritual. Not for the first time, I experienced in my mind what Scottish tradition calls "the carrying stream," a great river of silver fire that was the Old People of Scotland. I don't easily cry, but Imelda's ritual of calling in "the voices of the land" from all four corners of the world had tears streaming down my face as my head ignited while we sung the responses.
- The Ojibwe activist Winona LaDuke, whom I remember explaining to her six-year-old daughter Waseyabin that "there are white

Indians in places like Ireland and Scotland, but you just don't hear very much about them."

- The psychotherapist Jane Middleton-Moz, who talked about the "lateral violence" that breaks out in colonized peoples when they can't deal with "intergenerational violence." She said that "children are the canaries of the community."
- The history of consciousness evolution and planetary survival in the face of violence, presented by Stanislav Grof.
- Then there was Ralph himself, the conference coordinator. I still have the Canadian journal *Interculture* that I happened to be reading at the time. I wrote on the cover something that I heard Ralph say that resonated: "Stories tell us about our past; visions tell us about our future."[11]

DARSHAN WITH RAM DASS

There was such generosity at the conference, too. There were all those bright-spirited volunteers who sat at desks, missing most sessions. And there was the bookshop owner, who'd laid out an enormous spread, most of which sold; but rather than flying back the unsold stock, he loaded me up with all that I could manage as a gift to our Centre for Human Ecology library.

You can imagine what rocket fuel the whole jamboree was for me, a junior figure on such a distinguished stage. Indeed, a stage that profiled most of the distinguished figures who had come out of the 1960s counterculture era, and were ushering in an axial tilt into the emergent new millennium. It would be no exaggeration that the conference that Ralph coordinated was life-changing for many, and I recall some of the Irish participants even saying, "This will change Ireland."

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11. My note dates that quotation as on May 25, 1994, the day after the conference closed. Other presenters out of the many parallel sessions that had to be chosen from include Nuala McDowell Ahern, Edward Goldsmith, Vandana Shiva, Jill Purce, Rupert Sheldrake, Darrell Posey, Matthew Fox, Delores Whelan, Erik van Lennep, Bron Taylor, David Abrams, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Satish Kumar, and Sulak Sivaraska.

A most precious memory that lingers with me was an encounter with Ram Dass, whose keynote address was "The Spirit of Service." He was present at the preconference presenters' gathering, and he was obviously tired from travel. Over most of the weekend he was nowhere to be seen. But then, I think it was the Sunday afternoon, I was walking through central corridor of the conference venue, the Great Southern Hotel, when who should approach from the opposite direction.

I felt a surge of delight. Here was my chance to Be Here Now with himself. He'd recognize me as a presenter. I had an access point. At which, suddenly I realized that the last thing the poor man probably wanted was to be buttonholed by yet another punter who could go on and say, "I've met Ram Dass." As we closed toward each other, he slightly lifting his head in recognition, a different spirit came on me. I lowered my head to a bow, averted my eyes to the ground, and walked silently on past with my palms together and raised in the *namaste* position.

No transient conversation could have added depth. Only later did I realize, this had been darshan. The sense of a blessing has never gone away.

DARSHAN WITH RALPH

On the evening that I arrived by train from Dublin, and in a less silent but also lasting darshan, I was shown into a lounge at the Great Southern to meet Ralph face-to-face. There he was with Cathy, hosting a small group of other presenters who had arrived early over refreshments. There was no mistaking which he was. The Irish press, tickled at the prospect of such a 1960s-style "happening" in Killarney, had already found its form in cracking jokes about his "greying pigtail."

Ralph brought me warmly into his circle. The in-joke of presenters from the Celtic lands was that "an international conference" meant an American one, but this was not the usual cultural tourism. As the event got underway, it was clear the guests bore gifts. Here was a wave of returning diaspora consciousness. Here was a mirror to ourselves that

would advance us in the process of discovering, and recovering, our own Indigenous origins.

I wrote up the impact that the conference had on me in *The Trumpeter*—the Canadian journal of ecosophy (or ecological philosophy), in 1996.[12] So doing was hugely important. When I lost my job that year, I moved directly to write the book for which I'm best known, *Soil and Soul*, and the *Trumpeter* article provided me with a starting point and framework.

ORIGINS OF THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

Because my developing thinking was so boosted by Ralph's conference, I sent him a copy of *Soil and Soul* when it came out. In correspondence appreciating this in 2011, he mentioned that he and his daughter had recently spent a fortnight in Scotland visiting places where he had lived as a child and adolescent, as well as where he had gone to school at Gordonstoun. As his mother was from the little farming market town of Stewarton in Ayrshire, "the focus was on my daughter seeing her ancestral places."[13]

Twelve miles north of Stewarton, on a tributary of Glasgow's River Clyde, is the mill town of Paisley, famous for its brightly colored swirling teardrop patterns known as "Paisley shawl" or "Paisley pattern." Originally brought back from Persia and India, these had found their own legs in Scotland, not the least through their metacultural resonance with the remarkably similar motifs of Celtic art.

There's an amusing passage in *Allies for Awakening* where Ralph tells how his daughter, when she was nine, "came home from school one day and delightedly referred to some paisley pattern designs she saw somewhere as 'ooh, ooh, how psychedelic.'"[14] In the email he offered to

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12. Alastair McIntosh, "Community, Spirit, Place: A Reviving Celtic Shamanism," *Trumpeter* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 111–20; available on www.alastairmcintosh.com, search under the Published Articles tab. *Trumpeter*, founded in 1983 by Alan Drengson, is still very much thriving under the auspices of the University of Athabasca.

13. On a Post-it note and in email of October 10, 2011.

14. Ralph Metzner, *Allies for Awakening* (Sonoma, CA: Four Trees Press, 2022), 6.

send my choice of one of his books, and it was natural that I chose *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture* that he and Ram Dass had authored the previous year with Gary Bravo.

On its dedication page is a photo from the 1996 Harvard Project Reunion of what I've always thought of as the original psychedelic triumvirate of the counterculture—Alpert, Metzner, and Leary—prophet, priest, and holy fool. There's Ralph in the picture, born of his Scottish mother and German father. His shoulder gives support to a very old Timothy Leary, this being just before his passing. Tim is regaled in a baseball cap that proclaims: "100% Irish." And Ram Dass (Richard Alpert), who was, of course, of Jewish provenance.

"So there you have it," I once had occasion to quip to Ralph, mindful of those fading jokes where three men walk into a bar. "That tells you everything you need to know. The psychedelic revolution was set off by a Scotsman, an Irishman, and a Jew."

A GERMAN SCOTTISH FAMILY AND TRANSPERSONAL CALLING

Ralph's father, Wolfgang, was German, and a successful Berlin publisher. He met Jessie "Jill" Laurie, his Scottish wife, in 1932 in Geneva when he was a student at the university. She worked for the League of Nations, the forerunner of the United Nations, which would suggest a competence with languages. The family, in penury, fled at the end of the war to northern Germany to escape approaching Russian armies.[15] Taking advantage of Jill Laurie's Scottish provenance, Jill and her three sons then left Germany. As his brother Robin takes up the story:[16]

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15. This information is in his obituaries. See Neil Genzlinger, "Ralph Metzner, LSD and Consciousness Researcher, Dies at 82," *New York Times*, April 4, 2019; "Ralph Metzner 1936–2019," *Sonoma Index-Tribune*, March 29, 2019. Cathy Coleman told me it was she and Ralph's younger brother Robin who provided the childhood information here.

16. Email October 16, 2020, from Robin Metzner to Cathy Coleman, addressing some of my queries.

> Ralph was 10 when we first came to the UK and I was 8. Neither of us spoke a word of English. All our childhood days were spent in Berlin where we only spoke German and read or had read to us German stories of which there are many. Jill was incredibly busy as she had to support us and my maternal relations, with whom we lodged in Stewarton in grossly overcrowded conditions . . . Apart from that we were at boarding schools in England and Edinburgh, as a result of which we were only in Stewarton together for a very short time, a few months. Ralph was there the longest and actually attended the local primary school, which was a bit of a rough house.

EDUCATION AT GORDONSTOUN

For his secondary schooling Ralph went to Gordonstoun, a top Scottish "public" school. That terminology developed at a time when "public" meant a nonchurch school. Paradoxically, today it means a private school, and with elitist overtones.

He attended Gordonstoun boarding school through an exchange his father arranged, and a Scottish boy went to a similar boarding school in Germany. Ralph had asked to go to boarding school in Scotland, rather than in Germany where his brothers went. He said that he always felt more of an affinity with the West. This would be followed by Oxford University, Harvard, and then a life in California.[17]

Gordonstoun, for all its overtones, was an avant-garde experiment in pioneering education. It was founded on the estate of a Scottish aristocrat, Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun (d. 1656), and became a school in 1934 when the Berlin-born Jewish educator, Kurt Hahn, fled Germany in 1933 after being briefly imprisoned by the Nazis. He had written to the pupils at his pioneering Schule Schloss Salem School in southern Germany, telling them they had "to break with Salem or break with Hitler."

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17. Email from Cathy Coleman to me, October 29, 2020.

One of the pupils had been Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark, the school being owned by his brother-in-law's family. When Hahn left for Gordonstoun, Philip followed to complete his education, and went on to meet Princess Elizabeth who later became queen. Their son, King Charles, was also sent to Gordonstoun.

In Ralph's 2011 email to me about revisiting with his daughter where he'd lived "as a child and adolescent," he said that they had gone not only to his Ayrshire mother's "ancestral places," but also to Gordonstoun, nearby Findhorn, and the Highlands. ~~In having so done he made the observation that~~ Ralph's period of schooling overlapped with Hahn's headmastership.[18] The Berlin educator (with his Berlin pupil) remained at his post until 1953, when he retired on health grounds and went back to Germany. He was eventually buried in Salem in 1974.

In researching this piece, I phoned up Maxwell MacLeod, the son of Scotland's most influential twentieth-century Presbyterian churchman, Lord MacLeod of Fuinary, the founder of the ecumenical Iona Community. I asked MacLeod what it would have been like at Gordonstoun in Ralph Metzner's time in 1950 when Ralph started there at age fourteen, and through 1954 when Ralph graduated and went to Oxford.

If I might meld a telephone conversation and emails, Maxwell put it to me thus: "Gordonstoun was just a big Highland estate. Kurt Hahn chose it for the climate, the east being less wet than the west. He wanted to import Teutonic principles of education to Scotland."[19]

School life was legendary for its austere regime. Maxwell continued: "Every morning you'd get up at five-past-seven and the house master stood outside the house and you ran with just your shorts on for a morning run, then your warm wash and cold shower."

Every day you had a discipline test. You were asked, Have you

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18. Email October 10, 2011.

19. Conversation March 10, 2021, and emails March 13, 2021.

performed your training plan? Two warm washes—one in morning and one in evening; two cold showers; sixty skips with a jump rope; five press-ups; and one hour's study. And then you added your own discipline—an extra activity you'd take on. A prefect would ask each boy what discipline he'd performed.

Hahn's educational principles were rooted in Plato's *Republic.* His guiding motif was "education for democracy," with students being encouraged to participate in the school's running.[20] His educational principles, *The Seven Laws of Salem*, that he imported to Gordonstoun from his previous venture, were:

1. Give the children opportunities for self-discovery.
2. Make the children meet with triumph and defeat.
3. Give the children the opportunity of self-effacement in the common cause.
4. Provide periods of silence.
5. Train the imagination.
6. Make games important but not predominant.
7. Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege.[21]

Perhaps importantly, we might note the value placed on times of silence and training the imagination. Some boys struggled with the regime at Gordonstoun. King Charles is said to have been miserable there, famously describing it as "Colditz in kilts." It seems that Ralph not only survived but thrived. At Gordonstoun he was at the top of his class, even though he was a German boy who had to learn English.

I ask you stand. And raise the traditional toast:

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20. Michael Knoll, *Schulreform through "Experiential Therapy" Kurt Hahn—An Efficacious Educator* (Eichstaett, Germany: Catholic University, 2011).

21. Emily Hanford, "Kurt Hahn and the Roots of Expeditionary Learning," APM Reports (website), September 10, 2015.

Ralph Humphrey Guenther Metzner, son of Wolfgang Metzner and Jill Laurie.
A great German, a great Scotsman, and a great American.
The immortal memory.

As Above, So Below

Sam Mickey

Sam Mickey, Ph.D., earned his doctorate in philosophy and religion from CIIS. He is an adjunct professor in the Theology and Religious Studies department and the Environmental Studies program at the University of San Francisco. He is an author of several books on ecological philosophy and spirituality, including *On the Verge of a Planetary Civilization: A Philosophy of Integral Ecology* and *Whole Earth Thinking and Planetary Coexistence: Ecological Wisdom at the Intersection of Philosophy, Religion, and Ecology.*

What do you learn when you learn about yourself? In many wisdom traditions, inquiry into one's own consciousness opens out onto the whole world. Consider this saying from Dōgen Zenji, the thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist who founded the Soto school of Zen. "To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind, as well as the bodies and minds of others, drop away."[22] In brief, "What Buddhists call the self is the entire universe."[23]

One can see that the many traditions, numerous rituals, symbols, scriptures, and beliefs are oriented toward connecting the self to the world, the microcosmic to the macrocosmic: when yoga practitioners align their posture with the axis of the world; when taiji practitioners

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22. Eihei Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 70.
23. Eihei Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 164.

The Maternal Mythic Milieu of Ralph Metzner

***Appendix* to festschrift contribution of Alastair McIntosh**

My contribution to Ralph's festschrift is one of the longest in the book, but the original draft submitted to Cathy had a further 1,500 words, less about him directly than unpacking his Scottish maternal mythic milieu. Here's what couldn't make the final cut, together with a colour image of the splendid cotton bag with Newgrange spirals from the 1994 ITA Killarney conference.

... even though he was a German boy who had to learn English (at the foot of p. 216).

Robert Burns and the Shaping of Shamanic Calling

The psychedelic triumvirate – our Scotsman, Irishman and God-inebriated Jew[1] - our prophet, priest and holy fool - were shamanic figures of the 'sixties counterculture. By shamanic, I mean that they mediated between inner world collective psychospirituality and outer world socio-political expression. As both Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell describe, such figures – the medicine people prophets, bards and artists of all types who are in touch with the sacred as distinct from the narcissistic – recognise the sicknesses of their people and an era. They engage with the spiritual Otherworld, wrestle with angels and perhaps haggle with God, and return to re-

[1] It is customary to talk of "God-intoxicated", but that is rooted in "toxin", the proto-Indo-European etymology of which suggests to run or flee. I therefore choose "inebriated", the probable PIE origin of which, deeper than merely getting drunk, suggests "to drink in": www.etymonline.com.

open blocked wellsprings of life that can flow back into the community.

I have outlined Ralph's German background in the war that may have given him backbone in this regard, and I have pointed to the nature – nurturing yet with potentially traumatic aspects – of the Gordonstoun experience. But what, finally, of the wider aspects of his Scottish heritage?

For me, as soon as I hear that a family is rooted in Ayrshire, I think of poetry. And not just any poetry. "I was a shaman without a tribe," wrote the professor of twentieth century poetics at the Sorbonne, Kenneth White, who was born in Glasgow and raised twenty miles away from Stewarton in another market town, Fairlie. White's work expresses his concept of "geopoetics" – a higher unity of geography and poetry – and his essays have such Metzner-friendly titles as "The Archaic Context" (from which I've just quoted), "Tam o'Shanter: a New Reading" and "A Shaman Dancing on the Glacier".[2] The heart of Ayrshire is Burns country. There's an understated pride in Ayrshire folk in knowing this, and you cannot be a Scot without experiencing that every year, on or around 25th January, there are Burns Suppers up and down the country to mark the birthday of the bard in 1759. The school will have a Burns Supper. The pub and club will have one. The police, the fire brigade, expatriate societies in Australia and the town council will all host one. Haggis will be eaten, made from the innards of a sheep – for in Scotland we don't just read the entrails. Whisky will flow. The main speech is *The Immortal Memory* competed with the raising of a toast to the bard, followed by a toast to the lassies (the women), followed by a suitably sarcastic lassies' reply and much

[2] Kenneth White, *On Scottish Ground: Selected Essays*, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1998 (quote from p. 21).

further revelry. The event closes with the singing of Auld Lang Syne ("old long ago"), with its theme that no matter what fate might have put between us, "we'll pass the cup of kindness yet."

The ritual of the Burns Supper punctuates the rhythm of each year with poetry. It reminds us who we are and of the values that we stand for. It does so from a plowman poet who could be raucous enough to win respect across the spread of social currency, but fundamentally, who passed with flying colours the acid test of relevance to both the poor and to the broken in nature. Moreover, some of Burns' poetry is rich in its numinous allusions, to a degree that can be nothing less than shamanic. It's not just his rich renditions of two of the Psalms, the Biblical and mythic references, or his graces and epitaphs. Neither is it just his innate feel for the residual elder culture of faeries, witches, ghosts and the devil. What strikes me most, is his long poem, "The Vision". As Burns rests by his fireside, alone and weary from a day's labour in the fields, an apparition of Coila appears before him. She sets herself in as the local goddess of the land in due cosmological perspective:[3]

> "All hail! my own inspired bard!
> In me thy native Muse regard;
> Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard,
> Thus poorly low;
> I come to give thee such reward,
> As we bestow!
>
> "Know, the great genius of this land
> Has many a light aerial band,
> Who, all beneath his high command,

[3] Robert Burns, "The Vision", 1786: https://bit.ly/2Q39AGb.

Harmoniously,
As arts or arms they understand,
Their labours ply….

"Of these am I-Coila my name:
And this district as mine I claim…"

In this vision as from out the greenwood, Burns describes "green, slender, leaf-clad holly boughs" twisted gracefully around her brows, her "wildly-witty, rustic grace":

Her mantle large, of greenish hue,
My gazing wonder chiefly drew:
Deep lights and shades, bold-mingling, threw
A lustre grand;
And seem'd, to my astonish'd view,
A well-known land.

Here, rivers in the sea were lost;
There, mountains to the skies were toss't:
Here, tumbling billows mark'd the coast,
With surging foam;
There, distant shone Art's lofty boast,
The lordly dome.

Burns pays homage to Matthew Stewart (b. 1717) and his son Dugald (b. 1753), both professors of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University.

With deep-struck, reverential awe,
The learned Sire and Son I saw:
To Nature's God, and Nature's law,
They gave their lore;

This, all its source and end to draw,
That, to adore.

There we glimpse the spiritually grounded depth that the philosophy of an earlier age once took for granted. Whether the learned Sire and Son were ancestrally connected to Stewarton, I do not know; but they appear to have been connected to Coila's (or Kyle's a modern usage) general domain. Moreover, Robert Burns' near-eponymous paternal uncle, Robert Burnes, settled and died in Stewarton in 1789, thereby placing "the bonnet toun" as it was called for its manufacture of traditional headwear (including the Tam O'Shanter) very much in the poet's field of mental geography. Furthermore, just twelve miles south of Stewarton is Mossgeil Farm. From here the delicious organic milk that my wife, Vérène, and I purchase in Glasgow is sourced. It was tenanted by the farmer-poet from 1784 to 1786, and it was here that he probably composed, and certainly put the finishing touches to, "The Vision".[4]

There is both a driving imaginative pace and tenderness in this poem, as this spiritual feminine presence unfolds to the "rustic bard" (as Burns has her call him) the way she'd watched over him since he was in his mother's womb: "I mark'd thy embryo-tune,/ Thy natal hour."

Might the same have been so, for Jill Laurie? Might it have followed, as the bardic gift is often said to do in the tradition, down the mother's line to our dear late friend, Ralph Metzner? Through Cathy, I asked Robin if he and Ralph were raised on stories of the

[4] James Mackay (ed.), note with "The Vision", *Robert Burns: The Complete Poetical Works*, pp. 114-121, and not to be confused with Burns' shorter poem, "A Vision"; Mossgeil Organic Farm https://mossgielfarm.co.uk/about/robert-burns/; listen to the poem read by Crawford Logan (and with a BBC commentary): https://bbc.in/3vkOpPY.

land in Scotland and its supernatural presences. Disappointingly but honestly, he answered, “I have given this some thought but fear that I cannot help him [McIntosh] or you about the issues raised,” and went on to say, as quoted above, how “incredibly busy” Jill was with the extended family that she struggled to support, and that his maternal relations, who “were not the sort to be interested in knowing about or reading anything of the kind.” In addition, if I might now fill in the ellipses from that email of October 16th 2020: “I do not actually recall anything being read to us boys by either of our parents or being told stories of the kind which interest McIntosh, although I have no reason to doubt it might have happened.” But then his final sentence: “Of course, we all read some Burns later in our education, even in England.”

Of course. And of course, parents pressed by the exigencies of their time might have struggled to replicate the watchfulness of Coila. But that’s why gods and goddesses, and the archetypal holy saints, are there. That’s where, in many a bleeding heart and artist, the imaginal comes in to play.

> "I saw thy pulse's maddening play,
> Wild send thee Pleasure's devious way,
> Misled by Fancy's meteor-ray,
> By passion driven;
> But yet the light that led astray
> Was light from Heaven.
>
> "I taught thy manners-painting strains,
> The loves, the ways of simple swains,
> Till now, o'er all my wide domains
> Thy fame extends;

And some, the pride of Coila's plains,
Become thy friends….

In the collective unconscious, in its superconscious realms, lonely we may walk, but never alone.

"To give my counsels all in one,
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan:
Preserve the dignity of Man,
With soul erect;
And trust the Universal Plan
Will all protect.

"And wear thou this" - she solemn said,
And bound the holly round my head:
The polish'd leaves and berries red
Did rustling play;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away.

Friends, wherever it might be across Coila's wide domains that you might read this piece, I ask you now, or when the time is settled, to fill your glass.

I ask you stand. And raise the traditional toast:

Ralph Humphrey Guenther Metzner, son Wolfgang Metzner and Jill Laurie.

A great German, a great Scotsman and a great American.

The immoral memory.


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