

Magic

Admittedly a loaded word! When you think of magic there invariably comes to mind a whole range of threatening images, especially if you're serious about practicing your religion. The dictionary defines magic as the power to influence the course of events by access to supernatural or mysterious powers. Some of these powers may be malevolent and others beneficial, though usually we associate magic with the former. Even if we tend towards the latter, a certain ambivalence remains due to the way we had been raised, religiously, that is. Magic had been popularized through the wildly popular Harry Potter books by J. K. Rowling, several of which have been made into equally popular movies. Although I haven't read the books nor saw the movies (nor am I so inclined for reasons that will become evident later), I was stuck by the worldwide positive response which points to a basic need society is reluctant to address. What lies behind this phenomenon is a desire not so much to contact forces of evil but to transform ordinary, humdrum life into something special. Usually the magical way to go about this is by becoming a wizard or witch endowed with the power to effect such a transformation. On the other hand, Harry Potter has provoked an almost equally strong reaction from some Christian quarters, much of it negative. Many of us can recall that when young, such clashes never or rarely occurred. They seem to be fairly recent, a polarization of sorts which was absent as recent as several decades ago. Then again, maybe the more vivid presentation of movies—realistic animation and the rest—has supplanted the use of our imaginations. When we had dealt with ghosts and goblins, the images were primitive by today's standards. Still they were suggestive enough and left more to each child's imagination. Another element that seemed to have crept in is a new-found seriousness about life probably due to the way the media portrays all sorts of human tragedies. This too is aggravated by a fairly new political correctness which spills over into other areas of human activity such as religion.

I began jotting down thoughts for this essay several weeks prior to Halloween, a holiday freighted with all sorts of images. During a recent trip to a local shopping mall, I was struck by the huge number of ghosts, witches and the like which adorned so many homes and stores. Most were on the cutesy, that is, babyish smiles and facial expressions which have become so much a part of the season. These images offer just the right mixture to make children tamely afraid. At the same time, their presence clearly lacked anything magical. Next to Christmas, Halloween in the United States is the most popular holiday which finds echo in the Harry Potter phenomenon revealing an innate desire to transform the ordinary into something extraordinary. No small wonder that merchants begin to stock their shelves with Christmas stuff almost the day after Halloween, as if to make the time between the two holidays a drawn-out period associated with things magical. This leads to a distinction between magic and magical. The former connotes that which is foreboding whereas the latter is broader in scope. That is to say, magical embraces anything which evokes wonder and awe and does not necessarily involve malevolent elements. For all intensive purposes, when I speak of magic it's to be taken in the magical sense, one bordering upon or equivalent to religious awe. At the same time I prefer not to equate magical with such awe because the former is a kind of in-between land that can be put at the service of Christian religion.

At first it may seem unorthodox to discuss magic in a Christian context because automatically it intimates hostility between two opposing camps. Throughout her history the Church has struggled with various incarnations of magic, let alone forms of gnosticism. Not that both are the same, yet they share a realm outside the scope of traditional Christian teaching. Both retain a few superficial orthodox features but serve only as take-off points where a particular slant on things is pressed to the max and to the neglect of the whole picture. The shadow tradition of gnosticism has always dogged the Church and serves to highlight a few points worth considering at greater length. There's a marvelous tradition of prayer and spirituality in the Catholic Church which largely goes unexplored and can be overshadowed by more unorthodox elements of one degree or the other. Too often Church presents herself as a relic from the past out of step with today's world which creates a smoke screen unfortunately hiding her rich treasures.

Then there's the professional clergy, sometimes cast in the role of legalistic Pharisees, whose only interest is to preserve the Church's face to the world, not much more. Another element peculiar to our times is that although the Church had been consistently faithful in maintaining her heritage throughout the centuries, a vague, indefinable lack is present. Where to pin-point this lack is another task. Now that we're a half a century distant from the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, it might be easier to locate this indefinable lack. It has nothing to do with the familiar litany of woes we associate with the Catholic Church: married priests, ordination of women, abortion and gay rights (interesting to note that most catch-words revolve around sex). More thoughtful persons will conclude that a deeper issue centers around the involvement (rather, lack of it) of the laity, although that's a subject not relevant to this essay.

From the beginning the Church has used the culture of Greece and Rome to express herself. This tradition gained momentum and continued through the Dark and Middle Ages, right down to recent memory or the Second Vatican Council. One offshoot of the upheaval of the 1960s during which the Council took place was an appreciation of traditions and cultures other than the Western one. During this time we witnessed abandonment of interest in the Classics or the heritage expressed within the languages of Greek and Latin. Clearly I recall that anyone majoring in Classics was considered as headed for a dead-end; despite a fuzzy perception that the Classics might still enjoy a role in society, it was close to impossible to get a job in that field. Yet it may be interesting to examine instances when the classical tradition had been a living force. A long-term interest in Henry David Thoreau—his stomping grounds are some forty miles to the east of where I live—made me think a bit more of how he came up with his rich images about nature for which he is celebrated. His **Walden Pond** but his **Journal** contains an extraordinary abundance of references from the Classics which can be daunting for the modern reader. The same applies to Thoreau's Transcendental associates such as Emerson, Margaret Fuller (more an exception along with Emily Dickinson) and Theodore Parker, to name a few major players. Classical thought was the common language that bound these widely different personalities together, virtually all of whom were clustered in the Boston area, relatively tiny compared with the rest of the United States. Allusions from the Classics are both explicit and implicit, something you pick up even with a cursory reading of their material. Nowadays that most of their reliance upon Classical myths, philosophy and history would be lost upon the casual reader. The Transcendentalists flourished not long after the American Revolution and before the Civil War, a crucial period when culture in the United States was attempting to establish its own legitimacy as far as literature goes. These people are significant on a personal level because as I said above, they are dyed-in-the-wool New Englanders and all flourished close to where I now live and had grown up (my mother and her two sisters learned to swim in Walden Pond). Thus they offer an exceedingly rich treasure house from which to draw. If you ever wanted imagery that evokes a sense of magic, here it is. Since I have constant access to the same physical environment from which Thoreau drew his images, no small wonder that it offers richer material compared with any Harry Potter book or movie. Precisely for this reason do the Transcendentalists afford a good template on which we can model or re-establish a lived expression of the classical tradition.

One of the best ways of getting insight into how we can dispose ourselves to see the magical workings of nature is by cultivating a sense of solitude or by deliberately standing apart from the normal flow of society. At first this is daunting but more within our reach than first imagined both for city dwellers and rural folk alike. Strange to say, both rural and urban living offer straight-forward types of solitude, easy to implement. Although the former is natural and the latter is man-made, both allow the individual to forget him or herself, the real goal of solitude. No matter for our purposes whether it is in the woods or on a crowded street. On the other hand, the suburban environment—where the majority of Americans find themselves—is an anomaly, neither fish nor fowl, which militates against the cultivation of solitude more so than a city. This is reflected in the familiar malls or shopping centers. When in a mall, it makes no difference whether you're in San Francisco, Dallas or Detroit. The colorless landscape grates on the nerves, even more so than being in the midst of a urban ambiance. The two extremes of rural and urban

living re-enforce an awareness that in suburbia you're never quite alone nor hemmed in by crowds...a gray zone, if you will. Suburban living thus is diluted and grates on the minds of more thoughtful people although on a low grade level whose influence is damaging over the long run. For example, it is here that those cute Halloween decorations noted earlier are found in abundance.

When I speak of solitude necessarily it doesn't have to be the physical kind, although it's preferable to cultivate a sense of magic in one's daily life. Being alone opens you up to both inner and outer dimensions which hitherto had gone unexplored. I think a modern person would ask someone inclined to being alone something like, "What do you actually do all day?" One on hand it's a valid question and on the other, it smacks of intrusion. Actually you don't "do" anything. Should a person suddenly hit upon someone in solitude, he'd find nothing new or extraordinary. Most likely our solitude-loving friend would be hanging around in one way or another such as sitting in a chair, standing or walking outside, nothing more. Thus the externals of such a life are essentially colorless. On a deeper level the person "just hanging around" has learned to turn attention away from normal attractions towards another dimension of reality. The external manifestations of this are unremarkable and offer nothing special. If we behold this person in a crowd, he or she fits right in among those who are pre-occupied with one thing or another. Always it is fascinating to muse on what people in a crowd might be thinking. If courageous, you might ask a passerby on the spot. The thoughts and emotions streaming through that passerby's head turns out to be representative of everyone else which leads to the conclusion that everyone is pretty much in the same boat. On the other hand, our anonymous friend who's cultivating solitude fits right in perfectly as far as externals go, but internally it's a different ball game.

Mundane experiences, not exceptional ones, provide the matrix for an appreciation of the magical. If we examine ourselves, quite a few sentiments existing in the present, even if fleeting, are governed by childhood experiences. By that I mean positive experiences we've had for the first time. For example, we might be aware of rain striking the window pane of a bus in a peculiar way. Immediately it evokes a long-lost experience when for the first time we had boarded a bus en route to school. Then again, the temporal gap—even if it's quite substantial—suddenly disappears, and the two experiences become one. Almost always these fleeting perceptions occur when we're alone as opposed to being in a social environment, and are so common that we barely give them further thought. Perhaps we should examine them more closely and see if the experience minus the precise historical contexts can be re-captured and made more consistent in our lives. What would happen if we could? Is it really worth our effort, and what would be the result?

Society has a peculiar way of making us conform to its standards in ways which escape our attention even if we protest against them mightily. Say you're trying to dispose yourself to solitude, of being at home with yourself, while sitting alone in your house or apartment. Even if you have a quiet environment, you can get a vague, nagging sense that you're not doing what everyone else is doing at the moment. We're all familiar with the heightened sense of aloneness over the weekend and even more so, during holidays. People are scurrying about here and there en route to various social gatherings. Since everyone seems to be doing it, why shouldn't I? Probably this is the biggest obstacle to cultivating solitude and therefore awareness of the magical, an obstacle more formidable than we'd like to admit. Once you come to grips with this impulse to be with people and apprehend its futility, you can move more easily into real solitude instead of sitting there all by yourself. A lesson as how not to approach this may be had from elderly people either living alone or in nursing homes. Already they are in solitude but many don't realize it. For example, they have a peculiar way of recalling minute details from the distant past while forgetting more recent ones. And this doesn't include loss of memory or other handicaps. Holding down a conversation can be formidable in that they faithfully reproduce distant experiences right down to the last detail, not unlike the replication of a CD. No matter how many times the original is produced, each copy retains precise fidelity to the original. There's nothing remarkable about replication, an insight we could extend to

other human endeavors. Sometimes I wonder if this phenomenon will apply to older folks in the not distant future. Baby boomers and subsequent generations don't seem geared to such replication, although it's too early to tell. Chances are they'll be different, not necessarily more insightful, but in a way distinct from their predecessors. Perhaps exposure to technological devices and means of communication right from their birth has something to do with it. Also, they are considerably higher educated than their even their parents. At the same time, this exposure doesn't necessarily include a sensitivity for things magical as we're describing the term here.

The real building blocks for apprehending magic don't seem to be in human relationships. Anyone who has difficulty engaging in them can take courage, although this isn't an endorsement of failed relationships or of those who have turned their backs on society. We're in neutral territory here, so no need to worry about one's failures. The building blocks of which I speak are more fundamental than human interaction and turn up in a realm we don't expect to find them. In times gone by they have been represented through a division of reality into four elements: earth, air, fire and water. We don't find anything personal there, just hardcore impersonal matter, the raw ingredients for everything else. This is helpful to put into perspective an accent upon human relationships which came on the scene much later. At the same time this rawness is terrifying because we feel exposed after being cuddled and warmed by the protective barriers of interpersonal relationships which society had raised. Clearly we are in the presence of something we don't understand; hence it's only natural to fear elemental manifestations. Yet there is a way to handle them. Many ancient societies have represented the four elements in terms of a square which formed a boundary to separate that which is threatening from what is familiar. A square's four sides serve as orientation points as well—north, south, east and west—designated places in which we can situate ourselves. If it weren't for these cardinal points we'd feel adrift in the world and at nature's mercy.

This bounded space set off by a square is crucial for getting started with magic. We know from experience that certain places are endowed with special significance either for good or ill: the dark space under our bed, a lonely road or a special beach we frequented during summer vacations. Memories of these places abide with us long after we've grown up. Either they delight or haunt us, depending upon our responses. Later as adults we come across similar places which automatically bring us back to them, virtually nullifying all the rational scientific-like knowledge we've accumulated over the years. We may not conceive of these places through the ancient imagery of a square yet space—in terms of the above defined limitation of north, south, east and west—is the prime ingredient for evoking magic. Each one of these cardinal directions, in turn, elicit more refined perceptions. East is where the sun rises. West is where it sets. South is associated with heat, and north with cold. The first two points are more loaded than the second two, for that is the sun's path which varies, traveling northward or southward, depending upon the season. Generally speaking, awareness of this over-arching pattern of the four cardinal directions can't be realized in the company of people. You have to get out by yourself and do it for an extended period of time in order to discover what's really going on. We could call this a skill, one not unlike learning a language.

One way of approaching the natural magic about us is attentiveness to natural sound as opposed to the intrusive made-made ones so common today. Sound is the primary method of grabbing our attention since it impacts us on the inside. Besides, sound requires no effort because we're passive to what strikes our ears. Should one happen to live in a crowded city, it may be difficult (if not impossible) to locate a chirping bird or the like, so maybe the sense of touch may be a better approach. By touch I mean something like the feel of wind on your face or a quick glance at the sky among buildings. I prefer sight as the last resort even though it's popularly considered our highest sense faculty; it involves too much complexity which can degenerate into distraction. Although sound appears the best introduction, neither sight nor the other senses should be excluded. The point is finding one that does the trick. I mean this literally, for the perception of things magical is a mental trick we employ for attaining that mysterious in-between world of science and transcendence. Yet it's deeper than a mere trick or technique; it is that which

is most human in us. The stuff at our disposal is, as noted above, raw matter unencumbered by human relationships. It might be better to say that this realm is the foundation for establishing real relationships, but that's a task we have to put off for now. Might as well stick with the rudiments.

Let's examine the sense of hearing more closely which is basic to all religious traditions. One only has to recall the famous *Shemah* of Judaism, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord." Israel is later rebuked by the Lord for "having ears but not to listen," a theme taken up by Jesus with his contemporaries. It's interesting to observe that the singularity of hearing is allied with the divinity of the Lord, as though one flows into the other and visa versa. All this is well and fine, but here I prefer to concentrate upon the non-scientific sphere wherein magic has its natural home. When we happen to hear the wind blowing around—no matter whether through trees or skyscrapers—it's the natural phenomenon we're after. It has no relationships nor demands, just out there for the taking. We can't pin down the wind nor assign a guilt trip to it as we'd do when confronted with another person. Paying closer attention to the wind lifts us from pre-occupation with ourselves, liberates us from distracting claims and makes us as transparent as the wind itself. Wind is pervasive in the sense that it's found everywhere yet can't be traced. The same applies to other natural sounds whether a bird, squirrel or flow of water. Not only do we become aware of them but an endless succession of sounds which seems endowed with a life of its own.

No matter how well science or religion examines phenomena, they elude our grasp. Every once and a while a sound suddenly evokes a childhood memory and brings us back to a happier time. When such a past event pounces upon us, it makes us more in tune with the world. On occasion these experiences fall under the label of *deja-vu* or even of a former life which conveniently can be designated as a previous incarnation. Apart from their suddenness, rarely do we give such experiences further thought; we accept them in an unexamined fashion and move on, that is, unless we're inclined to superstition. Here superstition parallels science in that it examines the experience yet reads into things that really don't belong there. The perception of things magical may border on superstition, a subtle parallel, though both are dissimilar. However, to the trained eye magic elicits something more which is able to be sustained for longer periods of time or re-occur more often. In this way the experiences sink more permanently into our memory which conditions us for the future. The ultimate goal is to make these gestures which evoke magic a way of life, a *Weltanschauung*. A note of caution. We can't force a perception of things magical. We need to start off small...take baby steps...on a long and occasional painful road to fluency. No small wonder that the realm of magic popularly understood involves an extended apprenticeship in arcane practices as chants, incantations, curses and spells. They are attempts to control events through human speech, a tendency as old as the human race.

Speech is related to hearing which as noted above is the primary way communication works in the religious sphere. It's almost as though the human tendency to speak wants to outdo or precede that of hearing, and as we know, that can get us into trouble. At the same time gestures at learning the new language of magic produce results right off the bat. Just recall our pride at having mastered even a few words or phrases of a difficult language in the presence of native speakers who can understand us. It expands our view of things and whets our appetite for more. Trying to get a better handle on this phenomenon is a mental way of crouching with the intent to pounce, not unlike a cat stalking a mouse. Most of the time is spent in solitude and stillness, watching and waiting. You could call it waiting to pounce. The actual acquisition or seizure of prey is lightning fast, almost incidental; once the mouse is caught, the game is over. Thus in a sense hunting is usually a solitary pursuit. If done in a group, the hunters must agree that they will be attuned to each other and their surroundings by maintaining full attentiveness. Silence remains the norm essential for their task. Any communication is done mostly through gestures or signs, not entirely unlike magic.

Say that we've recalled a past experience which had opened up a door to a world previously unknown to us.

This unknown world isn't far-off but close by, albeit hidden and unrevealed. Suddenly a sound, sight, taste or whatever jumps out at us, makes an indelible impression and vanishes as quickly as it had arrived. Still, our minds had remained sufficiently alert for the experience to have registered. Usually the agent effecting this registration is trivial, almost banal, which adds to the mystery of this whole process. In other words, such an agent isn't magic in the popular sense of the term. A better way of describing it is as mysterious, a word with more specific religious connotations. Objectively speaking, these aren't isolated events, for the warp and woof of existence is in a continuous flow. This makes it difficult to isolate an entry into the world by a seemingly incidental occurrence. We start by picking following this eruption as just one thread among many and trace it back to its source. Hence the necessity of focusing upon one of our senses as hearing, for if the others got involved, we could become confused. As noted above, hearing is abstract enough in that it allows us to be selective as to what grabs our attention while filtering out unwanted noises. I like this idea of a particular sense faculty latching on to a "thread" of reality and tracing it backwards. It bridges the distinction between a scientific mentality we all share to one degree or another and transcendence, the opposite side of the spectrum. A thread evokes a sense of mystery, of not knowing where we're going; attention is focused on the thread itself which hopefully leads us to our destination. While following our proverbial thread backwards we leave the world of science...hardcore reality...yet haven't reached the peg to which it is attached which lies within the transcendent realm. Such an adventure is not unlike leaving an open field and entering the dark woods to see where this thread leads.

While reading a book on Emily Dickinson, the famous reclusive poetess of Amherst (quite close to where I live), I came across a reference to the manner of life she had chosen to sum it up: "I live the way I do because I have certain private affairs to transact." Dickinson bears close kinship to Thoreau certainly were renowned for his writing, but the unconventional manner of life proper to both sticks out even more. It makes us return to them because they've hit upon something we haven't yet discovered. They never divulge their secret, just make intimations, for that would be forfeiting their "private affairs." In the context of this essay, these authors are akin to those magical threads enabling us to follow back to the source of their inspiration common to us all. They and others like them forsook travel and remained in one place more or less their entire lives. Stability, lacking in modern society, also is a major ingredient to how they comported themselves. It lies beyond the reach of most of us yet by reason of this makes Dickinson and Thoreau all the more appealing.

One of the greatest obstacles to seeing magic around us is the attitude we directly or indirectly pick up from the people with whom we associate whether they be relatives, friends, co-workers or casual acquaintances. Even with the best of intentions, they tend to create a banal atmosphere which militates against magic. People don't do this intentionally but unconsciously contribute to a general climate where everything is leveled to a degree of stifling banality and blandness. The environment to which they contribute is so pervasive that we have a tough time even being aware that we're in it much as fish trying to aware that they're in the ocean. Thus the task before us is waking up to the situation at hand and taking action to disassociate ourselves from such an environment. This desire is common among quite a number of people though remains too weak not to fully attack head on. After all, we're stuck in a society where people struggle to make their relationships more meaningful. The desire to escape is misdirected by an attempt to increase the frequency of relationships, not by minimizing them for a higher goal. Actually the right action consists in withdrawal, yet many are powerless to effect it. The two poles of human relationships and a desire to escape them conspire to keep us entrapped.

One evening during Vespers which commemorated monks and nuns of the Benedictine Order I was struck by the lovely hymn whose second refrain begins with "They set out places set apart to contemplate the promised land." These words—like so many in the liturgy—elicit something akin to that magical atmosphere we're discussing. It involves the following: the intent of actually setting out for special places, that is, remote from the normal human haunts. Next follows contemplation which in the context of this

essay involves not only the conventional ideas associated with prayer but that magical way of viewing reality. Finally we have the promised land or the object of contemplation, of seeing things in a magical way. It's fun to draw a correspondence between the yet-as-to-be-fulfilled object (promised land) with the places set apart or the context of here and now existence. Obviously the bridge is contemplation but contemplation under the gaze of an eye attuned to perceive reality in a magical fashion. Another concrete example of how magic might be carried out within a monastic context with application elsewhere is by realizing that magic has close affiliation with the night. This is the time when people are asleep and the world is at rest. Things normally outside our awareness emerge and assume a life of their own. No need to get into the popular images here, for we're all familiar with them. Even with the onset of twilight you feel on the threshold of a time and space very different from the mundane one. Objects such as buildings, trees and of course the sky change dramatically, sometimes assuming a sinister cast. Even sounds assume a completely different character as we know from the creaking of floors and wind against the house. However, there's more to it than that. Night is a time of shadows and artificial light. The moon sheds just enough light to illumine objects, and the stars act as sentries until the dawn. We could add special types of lights or those which blink on the distant horizon which are standing guard and protecting our territory. We could add another twilight, dawn, when we leave the night and go through a similar (though inverse) process of passing from daylight to night. Dawn is marked by a certain wistfulness at having to depart from the magical time of the darkened hours. Maybe this is the sentiment behind Jacob's wrestling match at night with a mysterious being: "Let me go, for the day is breaking" [Gen 32.26].

More specific to the monastery in which I live are the wide-open spaces offered by the cloister garth (180' x 90') whose 8' x 8' windows offer expansive views towards the south and west. All these windows are Romanesque as opposed to Gothic. Their semi-circular forms give just the right touch for bringing the great outdoors inside. As for Gothic windows, they seem "too religious" and not up for the job of conveying this sense of magic. Romanesque windows (at least in our cloister) are semi-circular and feel more natural. It should be noted that the other two cardinal directions are blocked by the church, scriptorium, chapter room and sacristy yet all open out onto the cloister itself. Just as well, because the land slopes off both in a southward and westward direction. It is here that we can see the horizon most clearly, in some spots some fifteen miles or more. Furthermore, New England the sun sets more southerly and westerly for a good bulk of the year. Getting a firm grasp on one's geographical position on one's environment, monastery or not, vis-a-vis north, south, east and west is crucial for setting the stage to perceive reality in magical fashion. People can't always do this, but a monastery offers an unparalleled layout for this endeavor.

Another crucial element associated with the night is that a fairly sizeable chunk of our monastic schedule takes place during this time (The monks rise at 3.15 am and go to bed at 8 pm). That is to say, apart from late spring and summer we experience more darkness than light while fulfilling our liturgical duties: Vigils, Lauds, Vesper and Compline. That's the temporal side or liturgical time-scheme; the monastery's physical situation is the other one. Both fit together seamlessly to set the stage for seeing things magically which is more striking than in other places by reason of the sacred atmosphere. Most of the time the cloisters are dark...not totally, of course, for we have night lights strategically placed here and there. When the moon is out, the red marble floors glisten brightly and reflect the Romanesque arches in so many mysterious ways. This combination of natural and artificial lighting is essential for evoking just the right magical atmosphere. Actually, you'd be hard pressed to find anything like it elsewhere, an observation made by many visitors. When you take up a position in the north cloister, for example, and can get a clear view of the other three cloisters, you see that the night lights offer the perfect combination of illumination and concealment. Then along comes a monk barely perceptible in the cloister. The night lights illuminates his figure made all the more mysterious by the monastic cowl, a completely white garment made impressive due to its long sleeves and hood. When the monk has his hood up, then the sight is really special. Should I seek the identity of this monk, the atmosphere would be spoiled; better to leave him anonymous. Such is the value

of the amorphous character of night. For an example of this night atmosphere I include a photograph taken in the south cloister which conveys some of this mystery:



Being an image obviously it lays heavy emphasis upon the sense of sight, the most complex of all the senses. However, this complexity is simplified by reason of darkness which allows just enough shapes or forms to impress themselves on your imagination. On the other hand, should I return during the day to the very spot from which I had viewed that monk—lovely as it is—and saw another monk walking by, the ambiance would be completely different, almost unrecognizable. Other magical insights might present themselves, but they would not be of diminished character; actually, the presence of daylight considerably weakens the possibility of perceiving them. In this way you can contrast the two modes of perception in one spot, magic and conventional. I believe in the long run both merge, but most of us haven't gotten that far yet.

In addition to the natural moonlight and night lights within the cloisters several communication towers are visible on the distant southwest horizon. There are three I can pick out with ease, all blinking at regular intervals. When coming down the "night stairs" around 3 am prior to Vigils, they are the first things I look for, sentries who have stood guard while the community has been asleep. Should they be invisible, that's okay, for I know their presence on that horizon is assured. Even more intriguing is a florescent light on the western horizon about five miles distant. While the red blinking lights are visible throughout the year, you can only view the florescent one when the leaves have fallen, that is, from October through mid May. Even then you have to look closely and from certain spots in the west cloister due to the branches. Although I'm familiar with that area (New Braintree), I've been torn, if you will, between wanting to find its actual location and not wanting to do so. If I did locate the light, the mystery would vanish; it would turn out to be just another florescent street light or more likely, one attached to a barn. I recall Thoreau's injunction somewhere in his **Journal** when he cautions the reader not to tread on the western horizon or where the sun sets. To go there would spoil the mystery. I heard that Thoreau had such reverence for the western direction that he'd never set out that way for his walks but almost always return home from the west. Because I too have had an fascination with the west since my childhood, I append a rather large amount of pages from Thoreau's **Journal** at the end of this document where he touches upon this particular theme.

These observations concerning magic represent just one way of presenting an important though little

appreciated gap in our lives, hard to put our fingers on. As noted several times during this essay, we're caught in a scientific world view yet which evolved from a religious one even if the latter has devolved into a cultural-social phenomenon (observance of holidays and the like). At the same time monasticism is, as you'd expect, imbued with religion. Actually it has a two-fold character: spirituality and religion, the latter commonly taken as representative of rituals or the more external forms of monastic life. It is this side which immediately strikes a visitor who, for example, hears the chanting of the Divine Office in church. You open the door to the side chapel for the first time, and its majesty can't but propel you into an ethereal realm. Spirituality and religion aren't contradictory but complementary. Nevertheless, monks can find it challenging to balance the two as they go through the externals day after day, week after month, year after year, a routine which can militate against cultivating a sense of magic. On the other hand, monks are blessed with the leisure to practice spirituality either together with like-minded men or individually in the privacy of one's cell. The Latin term for such leisure is *otium* which means more than relaxation, freedom from mundane affairs for the pursuit of things of the heart and spirit. While the particulars of each monk's orientation can differ widely—an integral aspect of the Benedictine tradition you don't see at first but discover only by following the life—the bulk of it centers around Scripture and the Church Fathers. In addition to these two grand streams quite a few monks supplement their reading in the disciplines of psychology, sociology and literature, giving them a rather formidable source upon which to draw.

A verse from Scripture presents an all-inclusive definition of magic in the sense we've been discussing, namely, Ephesians: "and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" [3.9]. The first word that hits you is mystery or *mysterion* in Greek which means something formerly unknown but now has become revealed. It's connected with plan or *oikonomia*, a comprehensive word meaning management of a household which conveys a sense of intimacy, that nothing is foreign to our experience. Okay, so we have this "household-management" laid out with respect to some previously unknown which is now manifest. Keep in mind that it was "hidden for ages:" not simply out of sight but hidden "in God" who, really, is pretty much out of sight anyway. Such a layout St. Paul puts out there ready to go but needs a spirit blown into it in order "to make all men see." The Greek word "see" isn't the ordinary one but *photizo*, to give light to. More specifically, such impartation of light directly concerns the plan (*oikonomia*), household management, if you will, as opposed to something exoteric and beyond our experience.

During the course of his life, a monk is privileged to be exposed to an incredible variety of religious ideas ultimately rooted within spirituality which becomes a fertile field in which a magical outlook on life can spring. Despite its monolithic appearance, monasticism is more varied than at first glance, a way of life many people would give an arm and a leg if they had an inkling of its treasures. Like the Transcendentalists noted earlier, a monk has many few educational resources available to him, ammunition with which enables him to make analogies between concrete experience and a tradition some two thousand years old. At the same time, monks have not been immune to the same societal pressures, albeit in a mitigated form, or those years when the West's classical tradition was jettisoned. Younger men from that culture entered the monastery who had little or no clue of monastic, let alone church, teaching and all the rest, are astounded at the high degree of intelligence among monks, many of whom are self-taught. And so the monastery affords all the equipment needed to see things in a magical way. There still remain obstacles or occupational hazards as you'd find in any way of life, chief among them is following the daily schedule in a literal sort of way. Keep in mind that the monastery is designed to distribute the work load evenly, thereby allowing each monk ample time to pursue the goals of this life. It frees you up in ways not known in the world by setting forth an orderly schedule which regulates details from dawn to dusk. This all-embracing pattern isn't monolithic as it appears to a casual observer, one of the first things a newcomer discovers. Since we humans are creatures of habit, it's convenient to follow a schedule that's already in place, better, has been tried and true for centuries. Not entirely unlike a security blanket. A monk can follow this schedule for a goodly portion of his life, yet there's a hard-to-define need awaiting

transformation. As with everyone else on this planet, a monk is affected by that above-mentioned hiatus between the scientific and religious worlds. In the monastic context there is, as you'd expect, a disposition to prefer the spiritual over the material. Monks do live a beautiful life in a beautiful place and do it well yet can lack an appreciation of beauty, partly due to the regularity of each day. Despite this, and many a monk down the years has become sanctified. By "beauty" I mean in the all-encompassing ancient Greek sense which gives form to matter. Still, that mysterious in-between land is easily overlooked, the place where magic has its native home.

In the last analysis magic is a gift. Some people have it and others don't, monks included. If they do have it, they prefer to keep it quiet either out of fear of being misunderstood or ridiculed. Perhaps that's why magic in the popular way of viewing it has always been practiced in secret, out of sight the bounds of normal society, and its practitioners preferred remote places. However, the Christian context of magic precludes it from devolving into what we associate as the occult. The secretive component to magic comes almost always in solitude. As for monks, they have more access to leisure than people in society and thereby are open to fields of interest despite being enclosed. At the same time, their schedule can be chopped up with intervals of time as opposed to having large blocks of it. Even the leisure you associate with monasteries can be marked by busyness. Despite this, a monk can employ his wonderful exposure to so many aspects of religion and culture to perceive the magic operating in his midst. This may be akin to play, an activity we associate with children. However, once children grow up, play is jettisoned for serious, adult stuff. Maybe this is where the regularity of monastic life can be a hidden asset. It allows them to remain as children throughout their careers.

When engaged in a playful activity, little or no attention is directed to why one does it. You just do play, simple as that. It's pretty hard to pin down the nature of play even though much has been written on it (Johan Huizinga's **Homo Ludens** is a classic work on this subject). Play requires a deliberate ignorance of the adult world which takes things too seriously. This emphasis upon ignorance is paradoxical because it reflects a knowledge of the recollective type wherein consists our true nature. That is to say, spontaneously we take knowledge of the adult world and direct it to the end of play. This is a real mystery, of how without reflection we pick out elements without giving the process a thought. We're touching upon a faculty sitting there deep within us whose spontaneous recall of facts resembles recollection along the lines of the Greek term is *anamnesis*. The preposition *ana* suggests a going-back-into our recollective faculty which is much better than the word "memory." Here gestures into (*ana-*) the past are required or accessing those places which already had informed us and continue to inform us even though outside play we may not be aware of them. Plato would explain all this in some of his **Dialogues** as forms, a higher reality, in which physical objects participate due to their inferior nature. Some may not agree with this, but the basic insight is sound. Memory-as-*anamnesis* is a backwards gesture...a gesture backwards in that it goes opposite to the one we employ for acquiring knowledge...and inserts us into a more comprehensive reality which does not detract from our innate human dignity.

Socrates applies his ignorance out in the field, that is, when dealing with people who presumably have knowledge about all sorts of things, human behavior and otherwise. He questions such folks as to where and how they got it and sets out to frustrate them with their inbuilt ignorance. At this point they have a choice. Either to accept their native ignorance and get back to *anamnesis* or continue on with their supposed knowledge. This dialectic between ignorance and knowledge is just one part of the story. The other part is that once we've grown accustomed to our ignorance (the only thing we can do effectively in this state is to ask questions) we're more open to perceive the state of our souls. This is where knowledge as *anamnesis* comes into play. By recalling our true nature we discover that we have (or always had) everything that's needed for life. A lot of people naturally are disinclined to take this route because it seems so foreign. Practically speaking, if we've become more adept at Socratic ignorance (which automatically leads to *anamnesis*), we get insight into features of reality and experience that hitherto were

beyond our grasp. You can see where this is going, namely, the manner in which a magical viewpoint operates. The features which hitherto remained unexplored hover between the distinction made above: between science (hardcore reality) and religion (transcendent reality). Magic is a kind of mediator between the two. I certainly wouldn't equate magic with Plato's forms or posit it as a kind of anti-form. It might be better to say that a whole, wide world of ambiguity exists out there which will always remain such to the scrutiny of both science and religion.

A good way to bring this essay to a close is that perceiving reality in a magical way leans towards the physical side of things. For example, take a person who has cultivated ignorance in the Socratic sense. Regardless of how ignorant he or she happens to be, there remains the hardcore nature of physical reality which bumps into you constantly. The same applies to a person who is "not ignorant" and thinks he or she is endowed with knowledge unbeknownst to everyone else. The only difference is that the former is fully aware of reality's predominance, that it hits you right in the face, whereas the latter prefers to theorize about it. This can reach such an extreme that hardcore reality is theorized out of existence. Should you stick with physical reality—recall the ancient division of four physical elements which includes the four points of the compass—you gradually realize that despite their hardness, they have a flexibility which defies attempts at theorizing them away. That is, we can shift attention on one of them such as listening to the wind. Like the other three elements, the wind is completely impersonal, free from how we feel at any given moment. If so inclined, you can move on to another sense, that of touch (wind in your face) and so forth. The wind's reality smacks you in the face with or without your awareness, only now we've decided to pay attention to this smacking without putting any reflection upon it. Because wind is the least tangible of the senses, it might be a good place to start. After some practice this intangibility can be extended to touch, hearing and finally to sight. Even the slightest exposure or attention to the wind without imposing our usual reflections (they go on in our head anyway) makes us say something like yes, we experience it all the time but haven't a clue as to what it is and this despite all the scientific data in the world. It should be noted that poets use the four elements to describe various states of human emotions. While completely valid, in this essay we're more focused upon the impersonality of the elements, not what they can signify in human fashion.

I have offered a more refined definition of magic situated within the Christian-monastic context and attempted to sketch out a few ways we can cultivate this special presence of mind. Certainly magic doesn't share more exalted levels of contemplation or higher planes of our relationship with God and our fellow human beings. It's attractiveness is by reason of being a neutral ground into which we with all our failings and various levels of development freely can enter and play. All this can be accomplished without fear or recrimination. Magic seems blessedly devoid of constraints or requirements we associate with initiation. Because magic stands midway between gross impersonal matter and the highest impersonal levels of contemplation, it's a good a starting point as any. I apply the word "impersonal" to the other end of the spectrum in the sense that most mystics speak of God as impersonal in the sense that we've transcended human notions of what this term implies. Both ends of the same spectrum differ radically, but to the untutored eye can appear the same. You could say that magic is in accord with the spirit of play with which we are all familiar. Actually, the best part about magic is its universal appeal and if understood and practiced well, can be a sound stepping-stone on our road to a deeper relationship with God.

+

Feast of St. John Damascus, 4 December 2003

References to Sunset and the West in the Journal of Henry David Thoreau

As noted in the essay, the westerly direction enchanted Thoreau throughout his life. Although he never strayed far from his home in Concord, Thoreau always felt a mysterious tug in this direction. Among all

his observations about nature and humanity, those concerning the West stand out as the best. For this reason some lengthy excerpts are included here from his **Journal**.

1837

October 29, p.7: How often have they (native Indians) stood on this very spot, at this very hour, when the sun was sinking behind yonder woods and gilding with his last rays upon the waters of the Musketaquid, and pondered the day's success and the morrow's prospects, or communed with the spirit of their fathers gone before them to the land of shades!

November 9, p.9: And now that it is evening, a few clouds in the mild atmosphere rest upon the mountains, more stand still than move in the heavens, and immediately after sunset the chirping of crickets begins to increase; then feels once more at home in the world, and not as an alien,—an exile.

1838

August 29, p.55: How strangely sounds of revelry strike the ear from over cultivated fields by the woodside, while the sun is declining in the west. It is a world we had not known before. We listen and are capable of no mean act of thought. We tread on Olympus and participate in the councils of the gods.

1839

August 31, p.88: In the twilight so elastic is the air that the sky seems to tinkle [sic] over farmhouse and wood. Scrambling up the bank of our terra incognita we fall on huckleberries, which have slowly ripened here, husbanding the juices which the months have distilled, for our peculiar use this night.

1840

February 11, p.118: Falsehoods that glare and dazzle are sloped toward us, reflecting full in our faces even the light of the sun. Wait till sunset, or go round them, and the falsity will be apparent.

June 15, p.140: It would be well if we saw ourselves as in perspective always, impressed with distant outline on the sky, side by side with the shrubs on the river's brim. So let our life stand to heaven as some fair, sunlit tree against the western horizon, and by sunrise be planted on some eastern hill to glisten in the first rays of the dawn.

June 24, pp. 151-2: Though the sun set a quarter of an hour ago, his rays are still visible, darting half-way to the zenith. That glowing morrow in the west flashes on me like a faint presentiment of morning when I am falling asleep. A dull mist comes rolling from the west, as it if were the dust which day has raised...The landscape, by its patient resting there, teaches me that all good remains with him that waiteth, and that I shall sooner over take the dawn by remaining here, than by hurrying over the hills of the west.

June 24, p.152: Red, then, is Day's color; at least it is the color of his heel. He is 'stepping westward.' We only notice him when he comes and when he goes.

June 30, p.155: In this fresh evening each blade and leaf looks as if it had been dipped in an icy liquid greenness. Let eyes that ache come here and look,—the sight will be a sovereign eyewater,—or else wait and bathe them in the dark.

July 3, p.159: We will have a dawn, and noon, and serene sunset in ourselves...What we call the gross atmosphere of evening is the accumulated deed of the day, which absorbs the rays of beauty, and shows more richly than the naked promise of the dawn. By earnest toil in the heat of the noon, let us get ready a rich western blaze against the evening of our lives.

July 11, p.167: Let us not wait any longer, but step down from the mountains on to the plain of earth. Let our delay be like the sun's, when he lingers on the dividing line of day and night a brief space

when the world is grateful for his light. We will make such haste as the morning and such delay as the evening.

1841

February 27, p. 225: I am attired for the future so, as the sun setting presumes all men at leisure and in contemplative mood,—and am thankful that it is thus presented blank and indistinct. It still o’ertops my hope.

February 28, p. 226: I hear a man blowing a horn this still evening, and it sounds like the plaint of nature in these times. In this, which I refer to some man, there is something greater than any man. It is as if the earth spoke. It adds a great remoteness to the horizon, and its very distance is grand, as when one draws back the head to speak. That which I now hear in the west seems like an invitation to the east. It runs round the earth as a whisper gallery. It is the spirit of the West calling to then spirit of the East, or else it is the rattling of some team lagging in Day’s train. Coming to me through the darkness and silence, all things great seem transpiring there. It is friendly as a distant hermit’s taper. When it is trilled or undulates, the heavens are crumpled into time, and successive waves flow across them.

April 15, p. 252: When I hear a robin sing at sunset, I cannot help contrasting the equanimity of Nature with the bustle and impatience of man.

July 10 to 11, p. 265: A slight sound at evening lifts me up by the ears, and makes life seem inexpressibly serene and grand. It may be in Uranus, or it may be in the shutter. It is the original sound of which all literature is but the echo. It makes all fear superfluous. Bravery comes from further than the sources of fear.

August 18, p. 273: If I were awakened from a deep sleep, I should know which side the meridian the sun might be by the chirping of the crickets. Night has already insidiously set her foot in the valley in many places, where the shadows of the shrubs and fences begin to darken the landscape. There is a deeper shading in the colors of the afternoon landscape. Perhaps the forenoon is brighter than the afternoon, not only because of the greater transparency of the atmosphere then, but because we naturally look most into the west,—as we look forward into the day,—and so in the forenoon see the sunny side of things, but in the afternoon the shadow of every tree.

December 29, p. 301: ...or when the setting sun slants across the pastures, and the cows low to my inward ear and only enhance the stillness, and the eve is as the dawn, a beginning hour and not a final one, as if it would never have done, with its clear western amber inciting men to lives of as limpid purity. Then do other parts of may day’s work shine than I had thought at noon, for I discover the real purport of my toil, as, when the husbandman has reached the end of the furrow and looks back, he can best tell where the pressed earth shines most.

1845-1846

August 23, p. 385: Toward evening, as the world waxes darker, I am permitted to see the woodchuck stealing across my path, and tempted to seize and devour it. The wildest, most desolate scenes are strangely familiar to me.

March 26 (1846), p.400: A serene summer evening sky seemed darkly reflected in the pond, though the clear sky was nowhere visible overhead. It was no longer the end of a season, but the beginning.

Also: Trees seemed all at once to be fitly grouped, to sustain new relations to men and to one another. There was somewhat cosmical in the arrangement of nature. O the evening robin, at the close of a New England day! If I could ever find the twig he sits upon! Where does the minstrel really roost?

February 22 (no year), p.435: Many a day spent on the hilltops waiting for the sky to fall, that I might catch something, though I never caught much, only a little, manna-wise, that would dissolve again in the sun.

1837-1847

Undated, p. 443: Consider the phenomena of morn, or eve, and you will say that Nature has perfected herself by an eternity of practice,—evening stealing over the fields, the stars coming to bathe in retired waters, the shadows of the trees creeping farther and farther into the meadows, and a myriad of phenomena beside.

Undated, p. 446: In whatever moment we awake to life, as now I this evening, after walking along the bank and hearing the same evening sounds that were heard of yore, it seems to have slumbered just below the surface, as in the spring the new verdure which covers the fields has never retreated far from the winter.

Undated, p. 447: All actions and objects and events lose their distinct importance in this hour, in the brightness of the vision, as, when sometimes the pure light that attends the setting sun falls on the trees and houses, the light itself is the phenomenon, and no single object is so distinct to our admiration as the light itself.

Undated, p. 449: It [purple finch] has the crimson hues of the October evenings, and its plumage still shines as it had caught and preserved some of their tints (beams?). We know it chiefly as a traveler. It reminds me of many things I had forgotten. Many a serene evening lies snugly packed under its wing.

1850

May 12, p. 12: I have heard my brother playing on his flute at evening half a mile off through the houses of the village, every note with perfect distinctness. It seemed a more beautiful communication with me than the sending up of a rocket would have been.

No date, p. 26: The horizon is very extensive as it is, and if the top were cleared so that you could get the western view, it would be one of the most extensive seen from any hill in the county. The most imposing horizons are those which are seen from tops of hills rising out of a river valley.

July 16, p. 51: There was a glorious lurid sunset to-night, accompanied with many sombre clouds, and when I looked into the west with my head turned, the grass had the same fresh green, and the distant herbage and foliage in the horizon the same dark blue, and the clouds and sky the same bright colors beautifully mingled and dissolving into one another, that I have seen in pictures of tropical landscapes and skies. Pale saffron skies with faint fishes of rosy clouds dissolving in them. A blood-stained sky. I regretted that I had an impatient companion. What shall we make of the fact that you have only to stand on your head a moment to be enchanted with the beauty of the landscape?

September 19, p. 74: The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's house.

September 19, p. 76: Looking through a stately pine grove, I saw the western sun falling in golden streams through its aisles. Its west side, opposite to me, was all lit up with golden light; but what was I to it? Such sights reminded me of houses which we never inhabit,—that commonly I am not at home in the world. I see somewhat fairer than I enjoy or possess.

November 11, p. 94: We had a remarkable sunset to-night. I was walking in the meadow, the source of Nut Meadow Brook. We walked in so pure and bright a light, so softly and serenely bright, I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it. The west side of every wood and rising ground gleamed like the boundary of Elysium.

November 21, p. 106-7: Some distant angle in the sun where a lofty and dense white pine wood, with mingled gray and green, meets a hill covered with shrub oaks, affects me singularly, re-inspiring me with all the dreams of my youth. It is a place far away, yet actual and where we have been. I saw the sun falling on a distant white pine wood whose gray and moss-covered stems were visible amid the green, in an angle where this forest abutted on a hill covered with shrub oaks. It was like looking into dreamland. It is one of the avenues to my future. Certain coincidences like this are accompanied by a certain flash as of hazy lightning, flooding all the world suddenly with a tremulous serene light which is difficult to see long at

a time.

November 21, p. 108: Every sunset inspires me with the desire to go to a West as distant and as fair as that into which the sun goes down.

November 25, p. 112: When I got up so high on the side of the Cliff the sun was setting like an Indian-summer sun. There was a purple tint in the horizon. It was warm on the face of the rocks, and I could have sat till the sun disappeared, to dream there. It was a mild sunset such as is to be attended to. Just as the sun shines into us warmly and serenely, our Creator breathes on us and re-creates us.

November 29, p. 119: The pines standing in the ocean of mist, seen from the Cliffs, are trees in every stage of transition from the actual to the imaginary...You are reminded of your dreams. Life looks like a dream. You are prepared to see visions. And now, just before sundown, the night wind blows up more mist through the valley, thickening the veil which already hung over the trees, and the gloom of night gathers early and rapidly around. Birds lose their way.

December 17, p. 126: I noticed when the snow first came that the days were very sensibly lengthened by the light being reflected from the snow. Any work which required light could be pursued about half an hour longer. So that we may well pray that the ground may not be laid bare by a thaw in these short winter days.

December 24, p. 129: In walking across the Great Meadows to-day on the snow-crust, I noticed that the fine, dry snow which was blown over the surface of the frozen field, when I [looked] westward over it or toward the sun, looked precisely like steam curling up from its surface, as sometimes from a wet root when the sun comes out after a rain.

1851

January 5, p. 138: I felt my spirits rise when I had got off the road into the open fields, and the sky had a new appearance. I stepped along more buoyantly. There was a warm sunset over the wooded valleys, a yellowish tinge on the pines. Reddish dun-colored clouds like dusky flames stood over it. And then streaks of blue sky were seen here and there. The life, the joy, that is in blue sky after a storm! There is no account of the blue sky in history.

January 10, p. 140: There was a remarkable sunset; a mother-of-pearl sky seen over the Price farm; some small clouds, as well as the edges of large ones, most brilliantly painted with mother-of-pearl tints through and through. I never saw the like before. Who can foretell the sunset, -what it will be?

February 27, p. 170: Westward is heaven, or rather heavenward is the west. The way to heaven is from east to west round the earth. The sun leads and shows it. The stars, too, light it.

June 14, p. 254: A serene evening, the sun going down behind clouds, a few white or slightly shaded piles of clouds floating in the eastern sky, but a broad, clear, mellow cope left for the moon to rise into. An evening for poets to describe....All nature is in an expectant attitude.

June 14, p. 257: How moderate, deliberate, is Nature! How gradually the shades of night gather and deepen, giving man ample leisure to bid farewell today, conclude his day's affairs, and prepare for slumber! The twilight seems out of proportion to the length of the day. Perchance it saves our eyes.

June 14, p. 258: The moon is accumulating yellow light and triumphing over the clouds, but still the west is suffused here and there with a slight red tinge, marking the path of the day. Though inexperienced ones might call it night, it is not yet. Dark, heavy clouds lie along the western horizon, exhibiting the forms of animals and men, while the moon is behind a cloud.

July 5, p. 283: As we come over Hubbard's Bridge between 5 and 6 P.M., the sun getting low, a cool wind blowing up the valley, we sit awhile on the rails which are destined for the new railing. The light on the Indian hill is very soft and glorious, giving the idea of the most wonderful fertility. The most barren hills are gilded like waving grain-fields. What a paradise to sail by! The cliffs and woods up the stream are nearer and have more shadow and actuality about them. This retired bridge is a favorite spot with me. I have witnessed many a fair sunset from it.

July 6, p. 284: Ah! But that first faint tinge of moonlight on the gap! (Seen some time ago)-a

silvery light from the east before day had departed in the west. What an immeasurable interval there is between the first tinge of moonlight which we detect, lighting with mysterious, silvery, poetic light the western slopes, like a paler grass, and the last wave of daylight on the eastern slopes! It is wonderful how our senses ever span so vast an interval, how from being aware of the one we become aware of the other. And now the night wind blows,—from where? What gave it birth? It suggests an interval equal to that between the most distant periods recorded in history. The silver age is not more distant from the golden than moonlight is from sunlight. I am looking into the west, where the red clouds still indicate the course of departing day. I turn and see the silent, spiritual, contemplative moonlight shedding the softest imaginable light on the western slopes of the hills, as if, after a thousand years of polishing, their surfaces were just beginning to be bright,—a pale whitish lustre.

July 9, p. 295: Coming out of town,—willingly as usual,—when I saw that reach of Charles River just above the depot, the fair, still water this cloudy evening suggesting the way to eternal peace and beauty, whence it flows, the placid, lake-like fresh water, so unlike the salt brine, affected me not a little...What can be more impressive than to look up a noble river just at evening,—one, perchance, which you have never explored,—and behold its placid waters, reflecting the woods and sky, lapsing inaudibly toward the ocean; to behold as a lake, but know it as a river, tempting the beholder to explore it and his own destiny at once?

July 21, p. 322: The undersides of the leaves, exposed by the breeze, give a light bluish tinge to the woods as I look down on them. Looking at the woods west of this hill, there is a grateful dark shade under their eastern sides, where they meet the meadows, their cool night side,—a triangular segment of night, to which the sun has set. The mountains look like waves on a blue ocean tossed up by a stiff gale.

August 5, pp. 370-1: Moon half full. I sit beside Hubbard's Grove. A few level red bars above the horizon; a dark, irregular bank beneath them, with a streak of red sky below, on the horizon's edge. This will describe many a sunset...The air is still. I hear the voices of loud-talking boys in the early twilight, it must be a mile off. The swallows go over with a watery twittering.

August 31, pp. 435-6: There was a quiet beauty in the landscape at that hour (half an hour before sunset, Tupelo Cliff) which my senses were prepared to appreciate. The sun going down on the west side, that hand being already in shadow for the most part, but his rays lighting up the water and the willows and pads even more than before...The trivialness of the day is past. The greater stillness, the serenity of the air, its coolness and transparency, the mistiness being condensed, are favorable to thought. (The pensive eve). The coolness of evening comes to condense the haze of noon and make the air transparent and the outline of objects firm and distinct, and chaste (chaste eve); even as I am made more vigorous by my bath, am more continent of thought. After bathing, even at noonday, a man realizes a morning or evening life. The evening is such a bath for both mind and body. When I have walked all day in vain under the torrid sun, and the world has been all trivial,—as well field and wood as highway,—then at eve the sun goes down westward, and the wind goes down with it, and the dews begin to purify the air and make it transparent, and the lakes and rivers acquire a glassy stillness, reflecting the skies, the reflex of the day. I too am at the top of my condition for perceiving beauty.

August 31, p. 438: What unanimity between the water and the sky!—one only a little denser element than the other. The grossest part of heaven. Think of a mirror on so large a scale! Standing on distant hills, you see the heavens reflected, the evening sky, in some low lake or river in the valley, as perfectly as in any mirror they could be. Does it not prove how intimate heaven is with earth?

(Continued, new paragraph) We commonly sacrifice to supper this serene and sacred hour. Our customs turn the hour of sunset to a trivial time, as at the meeting of two roads, one coming from the noon, the other heading to the night. It might be [well] if our repasts were taken out-of-doors, in view of the sunset and the rising stars.

(Continued, new paragraph) The air of the valleys at this hour is the distilled essence of all those fragrances which during the day have been filling and have been dispersed in the atmosphere. The fine fragrances, perchance, which have floated in the upper atmospheres have settled to these low vales!

September 7, p. 473-4: I hear no larks sing as in the spring, nor robins; only a few distressed notes from the robin. In Hubbard's grain-field beyond the brook, now the sun is down. The air is very still.

There is a fine sound of crickets, not loud. The woods and single trees are heavier masses in the landscape than in the spring. Night as more allies. The heavy shadows of woods and trees are remarkable now...The sky is singularly marked this evening. There are bars or rays of nebulous light springing from the western horizon where the sun has disappeared, and alternating with beautiful blue rays, more blue by far than any other portion of the sky. These continue to diverge till they have reached the middle, and then converge to the eastern horizon, making a symmetrical figure like the divisions of a muksmelon, not very bright, yet distinct, though growing less and less bright toward the east. It was a quite remarkable phenomenon encompassing the heavens, as if you were to behold the divisions of a muksmelon thus alternately colored from within it. A proper vision, a colored mist. The most beautiful thing in nature is the sun reflected from a tearful cloud. These white and blue ribs embraced the earth. The two outer blues much the brightest and matching one another.

September 8, p. 484: The eastern horizon is now grown dun-colored, showing where the advanced guard of the night are already skirmishing with the vanguard of the sun, a lurid light tinging the atmosphere there, while a dark-columned cloud hangs immanent over the broad portal, untouched by the glare. Some bird flies over, making a noise like the barking of a puppy. It is yet so dark that I have dropped my pencil and cannot find it.

September 24, p. 14: Returning over the causeway from Flint's Pond the over evening (22d), just at sunset, I observed that while the west was of a bright golden color under a bank of clouds,—the sun just setting,—and not a tinge of red was yet visible there, there was a distinct purple tinge in the nearer atmosphere, that Annursnack Hill, seen through it, had an exceedingly rich empurpled look. It is rare that we perceive this purple tint in the air, telling of the juice of the wild grape and poke-berries. The empurpled hills! Methinks I have only noticed this in cooler weather.

September 27, p. 28: The shadow deepens down the woody hills and is most distinctly dark where they meet the meadow line. Now the sun in the west is coming out and lights up the river a mile off, so that it shines with a white light like a burnished silver mirror. The poplar tree seems quite important to the scene. The pastures are so dry that the cows have been turned on to the meadow, but they gradually desert it, all feeding one way. The patches of sunlight on the meadow look luridly yellow, as if flames were traversing it.

September 30, p. 37: The sun has been obscured much of the day by passing clouds, but now, at 5 P.M., the sun comes out and by the very clear and brilliant light,—through the shadows begin to fall long from the trees,—it is proved how remarkably clear or pure the atmosphere is. According to all accounts, an hour of such a light would be something quite memorable in England.

October 1, pp. 38-9: The twilight is much shorter now than a month ago, probably as the atmosphere is clearer and there is less to reflect the light. The air is cool, and the ground also feels cold under my feet, as if the grass were wet with dew, which is not yet the case. I go through Wheeler's corn-field in the twilight, where the stalks are bleached almost white, and his tops are still stacked along the edge of the field. The moon is not far up above the southwestern horizon. Looking west at this hour, the earth is an unvaried, undistinguishable black in contrast with the twilight sky. It is as if you were walking in night up to your chin.

October 15, p. 78: The sun sets when we are off Israel Rice's. A few golden coppery clouds, intensely glowing, like fishes in some molten metal of the sky, and then the small scattered clouds grow blue-black above, or one half, and reddish or pink the other half, and after a short twilight the night sets in. We think it is pleasantest to be on the water this hour.

November 18, p. 122: Now at sundown I hear the hooting of an owl,—hoo hoo hoo, hooer hoo. It sounds like the hooting of an idiot or a maniac broke loose. This is faintly answered in a different strain, apparently from a greater distance, almost as if it were the echo, i.e., so far as the succession is concerned.

November 22, pp. 128-9: As I returned through Hosmer's field, the sun was setting just beneath a black cloud by which it had been obscured, and as it had been a cold and windy afternoon, its light, which fell suddenly on some white pines between me and it, lighting them up like a shimmering fire, and also on the oak leaves and chestnut stems, was quite a circumstance. It was from the contrast between the dark

and comfortless afternoon and this bright and cheerful light, almost fire. The eastern hills and woods, too, were clothed in a still golden light. The light of the setting sun, just emerged from a cloud and suddenly falling on and lighting up the needles of the white pine between you and it, after a raw and louring afternoon near the beginning of winter, is a memorable phenomenon.

November 25, p. 130: When returning between Bear Hill and the railroad, the sun had set and there was a very clear amber light in the west, and turning about, we were surprised at the darkness in the east, the crescent of night, almost as if the air were thick, a thick snow-storm were gathering...That kind of sunset which I witnessed on Saturday and Sunday is perhaps peculiar to the late autumn. The sun is unseen behind a hill. Only this bright white light like a fire falls on the trembling needles of the pine.

December 14, p. 138: There is a beautifully pure greenish-blue sky under the clouds now in the southwest just before sunset.

December 19, p. 142: IN all woods is hard now far and near the sound of the woodchopper's axe, a twilight sound, now in the night of the year, men having come out for fuel to the forests...Why should it be so pleasing to look into a thick pine wood where the sunlight streams in and gilds it? The sound of the axes far in the horizon sounds like the dropping of the eaves. Now the sun gets suddenly without a cloud, and with scarcely any redness following, so pure is the atmosphere,—only a faint rosy blush along the horizon.

December 20, pp. 144-5: A clump of white pines, seen far westward over the shrub oak plain, which is now lit up by the setting sun, a soft, feathery grove, with their gray stems indistinctly seen, like human beings come to their cabin door, standing expectant on the edge of the plain, impress me with a mild humanity. The trees have hearts...A slight vaporous cloud floats high over them, while in the west the sun goes down apace behind glowing pines, and golden clouds like mountains skirt the horizon.

December 21, p. 148: Tonight, as so many nights within the year, the clouds arrange themselves in the east at sunset in long converging bars, according to the simple tactics of the sky. It is the melon-rind jig. It would serve for a permanent description of the sunset. Such is the morning and such the evening, converging bars inclose the day at each end as within a melon rind, and the morning and evening are one day. Long after the sun has set, and downy clouds have turned dark, and the shades of night have taken possession of the east, some rosy clouds will be seen in the upper sky over the portals of the darkening west.

December 23, pp. 152-3: By half past three the sun is fairly out. I go to the Cliffs. There is a narrow ridge of snow, a white line, on the storm side of the stem of every exposed tree. I see that there is to be a fine, clear sunset, and make myself a seat in the snow of the Cliff to witness it. Already a few clouds are glowing like a golden sierra just above the horizon. From a low arch the clear sky has rapidly spread eastward over the whole heavens, and the sun shines serenely, and the air is still, and the spotless snow covers the fields. The snow-storm is over, the clouds have departed, the sun shines serenely, the air is still, a pure and trackless white napkin covers the ground, and a fair evening is coming to conclude all. Gradually the sun sinks, the air grows more dusky, and I perceive that if it were not for the light reflected from the snow it would be quite dark...Now the sun has quite disappeared, but the afterglow, as I may call it, apparently the reflection from the cloud beyond which the sun went down on the thick atmosphere of the horizon, is unusually bright and lasting. Long, broken clouds in the horizon, in the dun atmosphere,—as if the fires of day were still smoking there,—hand with red and golden edging like the saddle-cloths of the steeds of the sun. Now all the clouds grow black, and I give up tonight; but unexpectedly, half an hour later when I look out, having got home, I find that the evening star is shining brightly, and, beneath all, the west horizon is glowing red,—that dun atmosphere instead of clouds reflecting the sun,—and I detect, just above the horizon, the narrowest imaginable white sickle of the new moon.

December 24, pp. 153-4: I had looked in vain into the west for nearly half an hour to see a red cloud blushing in the sky. The few clouds were dark, and I had given up all to night, but when I had got home and chanced to look out the window from the supper [table], I perceived that all the west horizon was glowing with a rosy border, and that dun atmosphere had been the cloud this time which made the days adieus. But half an hour before, that dun atmosphere hung over all the western woods and hills,

precisely as if the fires of the day had just been put in the west, and the burnt territory was sending out volumes of dun and lurid smoke to heaven, as if Phaeton had again driven the chariot of the sun so near as to set fire to earth.

December 25, pp. 155-6: I go forth to see the sun set. Who knows how it will set, even half an hour beforehand? Whether it will go down in clouds or a clear sky? I feel that it is late when the mountains in the north and northwest have ceased to reflect the sun. The shadow is not partial but universal.

In a winter day the sun is almost all in all.

I witness a beauty in the form or coloring of the clouds which addresses itself to my imagination, for which you account scientifically to my understanding, but do not so account to my imagination. It is what it suggests and is the symbol of that I care for, and if, by any trick of science, you rob it of its symbolicalness, you do me no service and explain nothing. I, standing, twenty miles off, see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence.

December 27, pp. 158-9: Sunset from fair Haven Hill. This evening there are many clouds in the west into which the sun goes down so that we have our visible or apparent sunset and red evening sky as much as fifteen minutes before the real sunset. You must be early on the hills to witness such a sunset,—by half past four at least. Then all the vales, even to the horizon, are full of a purple vapor, which half veils the distant mountains, and the windows of undiscoverable farmhouses shine like an early candle or a fire. After the sun had gone behind a cloud, there appears to be a gathering of clouds around his setting, and for a few moments his light in the amber sky seems more intense, brighter, and purer than at noonday.

I think you never see such a brightness in the noonday heavens as in the western sky sometimes, just before the sun goes down in clouds, like the ecstasy which we [are] told sometimes lights up the face of a dying man. That is a serene or evening death, like the end of the day. Then, at last, through all the grossness which has accumulated in the atmosphere of day, is seen a patch of serene sky fairer by contrast with the surrounding dark than midday, and even the gross atmosphere of the day is gilded and made pure as amber by the setting sun, as if the day's sins were forgiven it. The man is blessed who every day is permitted to behold anything so pure and serene as the western sky at sunset, while revolutions vex the world.

December 30, p. 164: Consider in what respects the winter sunsets differ from the summer ones. Shall I ever in summer evenings see so celestial a reach of blue sky contrasting with amber as I have seen a few days since. The day sky in winter corresponds for clarity to the night sky, in which the stars shine and twinkle so brightly in this latitude.

1852

January 17, pp. 200-01: In proportion as I have celestial thoughts, is the necessity for me to be out and behold the western sky before sunset these winter days. That is the symbol of the unclouded mind that knows neither winter nor summer. What is your thought like? That is the hue, that the purity, and transparency, and distance from earthly taint of my inmost mind, for whatever we see without is a symbol of what is deepest within. The lover of contemplation, accordingly, will gaze much into the sky.

January 17, pp. 201-02: Those western vistas through clouds to the sky show the clearest heavens, clearer and more elysian than if the whole sky is comparatively free from clouds, for then there is wont to be a vapor more generally diffused, especially near the horizon, which, in cloudy days, is absorbed, as it were, and collected into masses; and the vistas are clearer than the unobstructed cope of heaven.

January 19, p. 206: From Bare Hill I looked into the west, the sun still fifteen minutes high. The snow blowing far off in the sun, high as a house, looked like the mist that rises from rivers in the morning...The low western sky an Indian red, after the sun was gone.

January 12, p. 208: To see the sun rise or go down every day would preserve us sane forever,—so to

relate ourselves, for our mind's and body's health, to a universal fact.

January 22, p. 217: One mother-o'-pearl tint is common to the winter sky half an hour before sundown.

January 23, pp. 220-1: Just before sunset there were few clouds or specks to be seen in the western sky, but the sun gets down lower, and many dark clouds are made visible, their sides toward us being darkened. In the bright light they were but floating feathers of vapor; now they swell into dark evening clouds.

It is a fair sunset, with many purplish fishes in the horizon, pinkish and golden with bright edges; like a school of purplish whales, they sail or float down from the north; or like leopards' skins they hang in the west. If the sun goes behind a cloud, it is still reflected from the least haziness or vapor in that part of the sky, the air is so clear; and the afterglow is remarkably long. And now the blaze is put out, and only a few glowing clouds, like the flickering light of the fire, skirt the west. And now only the brands and embers, mixed with smoke, make an Indian red along the horizon. And the new moon and the evening star, close together, preside over the twilight scene.

January 24, pp. 222-3: When the mountains in the horizon are well wooded and the snow does not lodge, they still look blue. All but a narrow segment of the sky in the northwest and southeast being suddenly overcast by a passing kind of snow-squall, though no snow falls, I look into the clear sky with its floating clouds in the northwest as from night into day, now at 4 P.M. The sun sets about five.

Walden and White Ponds are a vitreous greenish blue, like patches of the winter sky seen in the west before sundown.

January 24, p. 223: When the cars passed, I being on the pond (Walden), the sun was setting and suffusing the clouds far and near with rosy light. Even the steam from the engine, as it flocks or wreaths rose above the shadow of the woods, became a rosy cloud even fairer than the rest, but it was soon dissipated.

January 24, pp. 224-5: When I come out on to the causeway, I behold a splendid picture in the west. The damask-lined clouds, like rifts from a coal mine, which sparkle beneath, seen diving into the west. When clouds rise in mid-afternoon, you cannot foresee what sunset picture they are preparing for us. A single elm by Hayden's is relieved against the amber and golden border, deepening into dusky but soon to be red, in the horizon.

January 26, p. 235: From these cliffs at this moment, the clouds in the west have a singular brassy color, and they are arranged in an unusual manner. A new disposition of the clouds will make the most familiar country appear foreign, like Tartary or Arabia Felix.

About 2 o'clock P.M. these days, after a fair forenoon, there is wont to blow up from the northwest a squally cloud, spanning the heavens, but before it reaches the southeast horizon it has lifted above the northwest, and so it leaves the sky clear there for sunset, while it has sunk low and dark in the southeast.

January 29, p. 247: That point where the sun goes down is the cynosure which attracts all eyes at sundown and half an hour before. What do all other parts of the horizon concern us? Our eyes follow the path of that great luminary. We watch for his rising, and we observe his setting. He is a companion and fellow-traveller we all have. We pity him who has his cheerless dwelling elsewhere, even in the northwest or southwest, off the high road of nature.

February 3, p. 272: The sun had set without a cloud in the sky,--a rare occurrence, but I missed the clouds, which make the glory of evening. The sky must have a few clouds, as the mind a few moods; nor is the evening the less serene for them. There is only a tinge of red along the horizon. The moon is nearly full tonight, and the moment is passed when the light in the east (i.e., of the moon) balances the light in the west.

February 14, p. 302: I think it was before the first thaw, which this winter came before the end of December, that the main attraction in my afternoon walks (at any rate when the days were shortest and the cold most intense) was the western sky at and before sunset, when, though the vistas there between the

clouds, you saw a singularly crystalline, vitreous sky, which perhaps is not seen at any other season of the year, at least not in such perfection.

February 17, pp. 307-8: Perhaps the peculiarity of those western vistas was partly owing to the shortness of the days when we naturally look to the heavens and make the most of the little light, when we live an arctic life, when the woodchopper's axe reminds us of twilight at 3 o'clock P.M., when the morning and the evening literally make the whole day, when I traveled, as it were, between the portals of the night, and the path was narrow as well as blocked with snow. Then, too, the sun has the last opportunity to fill the air with vapor.

February 24, p. 320: As we grow older, is it not ominous that we have more to write about evening, less about morning? We must associate more with the early hours.

+