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# And Unto Dust Return: The Remembered Earth

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...And Unto Dust Return : The Remembered Earth

--Lawrence Kimmel

Have I told you of the rain?  
It has come, across the arid plain  
Beating a numb, dumb pattern  
Of newly wakened life  
On the patient face of clay:  
The long laboring Earth  
Sheds Her dusty cloak  
And endures.

The dawn breaks, clear,  
An unending tide  
Of crimson wave,  
Filters through resounding grave  
Where mind and calling meet,  
In the bleak morning gray.

Songs of joy and sorrow  
Awaken in the remembered earth.

--L Kimmel, *Collected Poems*, 1959

Prefatory Remark

The earth is a primal resource of human imagination; its conceptual and creative tie to literature is pervasive, in part, because of the profound ambiguity of our relationship to it. Home and prison, earth holds in bondage the life it sustains. The paradox of life as freedom and life as bondage gives rise to the conflicting task of holding to the good earth, yet becoming free of it. This paradox and conflicting effort forms a basic pattern in western thought. A deep ambivalence and generative tension frames metaphors in literature from the earliest mythic and creation stories to the most recent poetry. We will examine some of the best known poetic expressions within western literature to discern the reflective character and lessons that this literature brings to our understanding of the human condition and cultural project.

## I

“*In the beginning* God created heaven and earth... formed man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into him the breath of life...(but)...dust thou art and unto dust return.” So goes the story in a few short chapters of *Genesis*: beginning and end, non-being to non-being, earth to earth. So told, the life of man is but a dust that stirs, and settles. But what interests us most in this telling is what happens east in Eden, between first creation and the ensuing curse of death. In violating the conditions of Eden, Man gains a knowledge of good and evil in innocence overcome, but at what terrible price? In the moment of negotiation with the serpent everything is changed: the wages of existence are now suffering and death. Once this story is told, the once simple passage of being again into non-being becomes intolerable. For better or worse, the narrative is no longer God’s but Man’s. God’s occasional voice eventually becomes silent, and there remains only the sound of creatures bound to the seasons of the earth. The puzzle of Adam in Eden--and the ensuing temporality of the earth--frames the paradox of human existence, the passion of thought, the germ of literature.

In one of his parables Kafka remarks on the prohibition and penalty regarding the tree of knowledge:

Both God and the Serpent were wrong, in similar ways. Men did not die, but became mortal; they did not become like God, but received the indispensable capacity to become so<sup>1</sup>

In Kafka’s telling, Man’s situation regarding earth and heaven is that he is a free citizen of each, but he is fettered by two chains, each one anchored in contradictory domains of possibility:

If he heads for the earth, his heavenly collar chokes him, and if he heads for heaven, his earthly collar does the same. And yet all the possibilities are his, and he feels it...<sup>2</sup>

The result of this radical division of human sensibility can be a spiritual and carnal paralysis, which Kafka often captures in its most agitated forms. It can also be the source of creative invention. In the familiar Judeo-Christian framework, a third elemental domain of hell emerges, which places the earth as a transitory space for that willful, mortal creature caught between angel and ape. William Blake, in his commentary on the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, remarks that:

Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate are necessary to human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call good and evil. Good is the passive that obeys reason. Evil is the active springing from energy. Good is heaven. Evil is hell. Energy is the only life, and is from the body;

reason is the boundary or outward circumference of energy. Energy is eternal delight.<sup>3</sup>

This Manichean *poiesis* of divinity and demonicity centered in the earth becomes a fundamental creative resource in the history of literature.

A similar alternative to the usual interpretation of this story is that the loss of paradise is in fact a willful act of preference for the earth. The loss is not a result of corruption of innocence by an independent force of evil, but rather a deliberate choice by man of moral knowledge. The burden of moral choice is risk; indeed the choice of morality itself, is that the full consequence of that choice is never known in advance. Moral choice is not blind, but its effects await the act of choosing, and only take hold in the ensuing lives of those involved.

The hermeneutics of religious literature remain open to every generation, and one can sensibly interpret the Eden story alternately as victimization, pathetic seduction, willful rebellion, as a thoughtless error in judgment, or an horrendous blunder. But in retrospect, given the historical tendency of man to abuse power in disturbing the universe physically and spiritually, the story can also come into focus as a deliberate preference for eristic struggle--a natural propensity for temporal quest over eternal innocence, earth over Eden. The scriptural point of Man's willfulness is that he will have no garden without a serpent. Within religious literature we may recall Kierkegaard's approval of Lessing's choice, that if God offered the Truth in one hand and the search for Truth in the other, he would always choose the latter. The present reading of the Eden story attests to a view of human existence reflected in a similar way by Achilles' archetypal choice in *The Iliad*: rather a life of violent contest than one of inevitable peace. Recall also Achilles' testimony to the visiting Odysseus, that he would rather be a slave to the poorest man on earth than a prince here among the shadows of Hades.

We can only here suggest keys to the literature of classic cultures that both express and determine our relation to the meaning of the earth. In Hebraic script, the created earth was intended as a domain for dominion of man over beasts, but the empowerment escalated into Man's transformation of the earth in his own image. We have met the captious idol and it is us. From *Genesis* to the pastoral elegies of the *Psalms* and the weary wisdom of *Ecclesiastes*: the dominion of man over the earth is compromised and diminished. Extended to a Christian framework of redemption, heaven becomes a transcendent eternal realm, in which the sinful sorrows and sufferings of the earth are overcome. The migrant souls of exiles who seek asylum

from the earth transfer allegiance to a redeemer God and regard the earth as a cross to bear, a trial of faith, a ground of temptation or misery to test purity of soul. While this description may be an oversimplification or distortion of Christianity, such a characterization of the earth seems consistent with its doctrinal theology, if not substantive faith.

One might argue that the potential of the human spirit has been deepened in the soul's pilgrimage is search of solace and salvation. Santayanna's provocative remark that 'poetry is religion no longer believed' is both right and wrong. Literally, it applies to the jaded doctrines of theology, but it also points to the unity of spiritual culture that is inclusive of both poetic and religious expression. The ensuing literature of western culture is clearly more than romantic compensation for a lost Eden. Literature is perhaps better described in this context as an imaginative investigation and passionate expression of the moral ground east of Eden.

The religious picture of mythic creation expresses the deeply ambivalent relation of man toward the earth. This ambivalence is shared in the very different expressions of Hellenic myth and Hebraic script. In the typical Greek account, Earth is a primal force and enduring place. In Hesiod's retelling, Earth is a progenitor of first things and gods. In the *Theogony*, *Gaia*, Earth, is formed first, out of *Chaos*; she then becomes the continuing foundation of life in time. The immediate primal Earth conflict is with the second born, *Uranos*, the encompassing and constraining Sky. The mythic struggle is between the feminine and masculine conceptions of life and world, and two forms of power. *Gaia* would celebrate and proliferate life, *Uranos* would constrain and control life. *Uranos*' intention to suppress potential competitors for power in the body of the earth is only frustrated by the efforts of his son and heir, *Kronos*, Time. *Kronos*, in turn would devour possible competitors for control, and is only overcome by his offspring *Zeus* and the Olympians, whose victory over time is also a transcendence of earth and ascendance to the immutable realm of Olympus. The earth yields, and worlds emerge to order life.

In the literature of epic and tragic drama the earth continues to be a battleground for dominion. The primal conflict between fated creatures tied to earth and blessed creatures free of earth is repeated and embodied in the contending gods who give spirit and form to tragic drama. Nietzsche's familiar account in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the two sources of tragic drama in *Dionysos*, the violent, dying earth-god of darkness, and *Apollo* the shining god of light and transcendent space, again exemplifies the deep conflict in the heart of man. Plato's dialectical "correction" of tragic drama in the *Dialogues* in many ways parallels the solution of Christian

theology, the design of which is to escape the prison of the earth's body. The philosopher's access to the eternal forms through pure intellect, leaving aside the physical encumbrances of earthly existence, is mirrored in the Christian soul's access and ascendance to heaven, free of the earthly stain of body.

Hebraic and Hellenic creation myth, epic, and tragic literature, all depict earth as a source of human life and imagination. However, the earth becomes in both sacred and secular accounts alternately a place of bondage and toil, and a theatre of carnage in which men are as flies to wanton boys. The enduring earth is womb and grave. One originating expression, then, of the deep divide in the nature and consciousness of man—a rupture that art and literature seek both to examine and to heal—is the religious picture of an alien earth in the schism of heaven and hell. A second primary expression of this deep rift in human consciousness is the conceptual disjunction of earth and *world*, separating the domains and activities of nature and culture.

In the Hebraic scripture, the primal situation in which man assumes the burden of the knowledge of good and evil, gives way finally to moral exhaustion, and human life is swept into the seasons of the earth. In the critical admonitions of Koheleth, there is only vanity upon vanity. In fact men are but the playthings of time, of the gods, of nature--creatures subject to the indifferent winds of change; but in our cultural conceits we contest this fate, would make time stand still, subdue nature, importune the gods, control change, eliminate chance. Man would, in the vernacular, have his cake and eat it too, that he might be a newly self-formed race free from bondage to the earth, set free to transform the earth into a world of his own making. We want freedom from, but dominion over, the earth. In his impatience with the slow movements of the long laboring earth, man's project of a competing *world* would seem to put the earth itself in harm's way. The metaphor that commonly describes the crisis of the earth in the modern world is that of a parasite relentlessly destroying its host.

We no longer share the confidence of *Ecclesiastes* that only human lives are subject to vanity. Nor do we believe the earth endures forever; rather, we know it will not do so. The way of all flesh to corruption is but a minor corollary to the greater law of the way of all things, in which eternity gives way to entropy. The sun also rises, and the earth endures, but nothing is forever. In the progress of intellectual culture even the poetry of our hopes is diminished, the anchor of our being is set adrift in an open sea of space. Even so, our literature still reflects the need of a fragile imagination for the substantial weight of a foundation. It is for this reason that

the earth is preserved as a spiritual force in literature and the arts at the same time it is reduced to an operational resource or negotiable space in science and politics.

Rilke's *Duino Elegies* initially contrasts human life with an enduring earth: "Fortunate first ones, Creations pampered darlings, ranges, mountain tops...seed of a blossoming god."<sup>4</sup> Although Rilke will eventually resolve this estrangement in a poetic voice of a very different key, the first shock of alienation is familiar:

And if I cried, who'd listen to me in those angelic orders...Because beauty's nothing but the start of terror we can hardly bear. Ah, who can we turn to then? Neither angels nor men...And the night, oh the night when the wind full of outer space gnaws at our faces...<sup>5</sup>

Human life, in which "we vanish in our feelings, breathe ourselves out, dissolve ember to ember" has a destiny apart from the fixtures of the earth and from creatures true to earth's ways:

...Our nature's not the same. We don't have the instinct of migrant birds. Late and out of season, we suddenly throw ourselves to the wind and fall into indifferent ponds...All other creatures look into the Open with their whole eyes. But our eyes, turned inward, are set all around it like snares trapping its way out to freedom...Always facing creation, all we see is the reflection of the free and open that we've darkened...This is destiny: to be opposites, always and nothing else but opposites...And we: spectators, looking *at* everything, and never *from*...We arrange it. It decays. We arrange it again, and we decay. ..Whatever we do, we always have the look of someone going away...so we live and are forever leaving.<sup>6</sup>

The basic contrast between earth and world is perhaps that of being, and doing or making. Man in his constitution is of the earth, while in his character he makes and destroys worlds. In the cases of Hebraic and Hellenic literature, the movement of man's spiritual history is from the primal yielding of earth to the striving contest of world. Although world is an open limit for invention, the imagination must first anchor its natural heritage in the earth. The earth is the stuff of our very being, what imagination gets hold of to tether its tenuous thread to what endures. Conceptions of alternative worlds, however powerful or provocative, and whether of fact or fiction, poetics or physics, are thought experiments--in the end, insubstantial bubbles of contrivance. In this sense, compared with the enduring earth, the worlds of man are trifles light as air. Traditional poetics celebrate the space and time of the human condition in the root passions of the earth--pervasive phenomena that moor existence in joyful and painful cycles of life and death.

These contrasting notions which conflict and contend with the domain of *earth--heaven/hell* in Judeo-Christian scripture, *sky* in ancient Greek mythology, and *world* as we variously, and instrumentally remake it with the of progressive culture--all provide grist and continuing resources for literature. In each case the primary point of contrast is between the temporal and substantial, opposed to the abstract or ethereal. Each opposition identifies a field of imagination made possible by the fullness of the earth. As earth is a foundation, world is a moveable limit, and heaven a transcendent ideal. The first sustains the challenge or progression of the others. Archimedes' point is a case in point: although it is a useful index of the power of abstraction and the logic of scientific explanation, we need literature to remind ourselves it is only that. There is an elemental difference between being and doing: we cannot move the earth, it moves of itself.

The Earth is, of course, not just a venue for the life of man. It is, in itself, a living thing, with a history, a biography. It has both seasons and life cycles. Albeit in human sense and recording, it has given birth and nurtured progeny, born witness to events and suffered violations of its' being. The genius of literature, in the depth and scope of its accessibility to levels of reality, is its facility to tell stories in radically different ways and points of view. The earth can become narrator of its own life where it is no longer merely a place, playground, and battlefield of man or animate life, but is a living being. The changing seasons measure the slow heartbeat of a living creature, a natural metabolism against which both world and individuals mark their passing. Native American literature, for example, embodies this perspective. In Native American thought the natural state of existence is whole, a circle of being; disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty and goodness, as well as health is wholeness. In the literature of this culture, a person who uses the powers of the universe in a perverse way disruptive of this harmony is a witch, is called a "two-hearts", one who is not whole but split in two at the center of being. In this literature there is a natural convergence and healing of the rift we have cited in the foregoing theocratic texts:

I breathe as the night breathes, I live as the forest life live,  
The soft leaves and wet grass Are my protectors.

Above me in the clear night sea Are the torches of the gods  
And the eyes of the dead And the souls of the unborn.  
They surround my body with darkness,  
They give my shadowed mission  
Clear visioned sight  
The night is my friend.

My heart's song is to the night.

Below me in the moist red earth  
Are the smooth round stones,  
And the bones of the dead, And the seeds of the unborn.  
The night worker worms beneath my body  
Remind me of the living world Giving morning birth.  
My heart's song is to the earth.<sup>7</sup>

Less impressively, such a perspective figures often in the bumper sticker *logoi* of environmentalists: “Be good to your Mother”, for example, is a reference to the earth, not to some individual's wife. The bias of human *bioi* is understandable; still we should be aware of it as such. Without shifting completely to stories that personify Earth--e.g. as mother, as victim--we can acknowledge a distinct and varied literature in which the earth and all that it yields is alive. This is transcendently so in Native American culture; it is literally so in a writer like Loren Eiseley. Eiseley, naturalist and poet, spiritual pilgrim traveling the immense journey of an ancient universe, dedicated his book *The Unexpected Universe*, “To Wolf, who sleeps forever with an Ice Age bone across his heart, the last gift of one who loved him.”<sup>8</sup> In his story “The Judgment” he is standing in the stark country of the Badlands, “The ash of ancient volcanic outburst still sterilizes its soil, and its colors in that waste are the colors of that flame in the lonely sunsets of dead planets.” Looking up to see a flight of birds racing southward toward him Eiseley has a revelation, “standing in the middle of a dead world at sunset. Fifty million years lay under my feet, fifty million years of bellowing monsters moving in a green world now gone so utterly that its very light was traveling on the farther edge of space. The chemicals of all that vanished age lay about me in the ground.” Looking down at the chemicals at his feet, black streaks of carbon, the stain of iron in the clay, he remarks:

The iron did not remember the blood it had once moved within, the phosphorus had forgot the savage brain. I had lifted up a fistful of the ground and held it while that wild flight of southbound warblers hurled over me into the oncoming dark. There went phosphorous, there went iron, there went carbon, there beat the calcium in those hurrying wings. Alone on a dead planet I watch that incredible miracle speeding past. It ran by some true compass over field and wasteland. It cried its individual ecstasies into the air until the gullies rang. It swerved like a single body. It knew itself, and lonely, it bunched close in the racing darkness, its individual entities feeling about them in the rising night. And so, crying out to each other their identity, they passed away out of my view.<sup>9</sup>

These are very different voices emerging out of diverse cultures and traditions, but they express a common sense of organic unity in the life of the earth, and of the healing power of such recognition. In Rilke's elegies this sense emerges in a kind of visceral mysticism:

Why, when this short span of being could be spent like the laurel, a little darker than all the other green...why do we have to be human and, avoiding fate, long for fate? Not just to exercise the heart--that could be in the laurel too...But because being here means so much, and because all that's here, vanishing so quickly, seems to need us and strangely concerns us. But to have been on *earth* just *once*--that's irrevocable. When this silent earth urges lovers on, isn't it her secret reason, to make everything shudder with ecstasy? *This* is the time for what can be said. *Here/* is its country. Earth...What's your urgent charge, if not transformation? Earth, my love, you don't need your Springs to win me-- Look, I'm alive. More being than I'll ever need springs up in my heart.<sup>10</sup>

As the living creatures of a living earth, our moods and dispositions are subject to the seasons, may change with a swing in weather or with phases of the moon. The earth's places and seasons shape the character and dispositions of different cultures and peoples. The difference in the sensibilities of Mediterranean and Nordic peoples is manifest in both life and literature. Similarly, the earth's seasons symbolize a difference in individual sensibilities. At the very least, art makes intelligible distinctions between summer and winter temperaments and character: the summer ease with which some approach the opportunities of life, where another's deferral is a defining signature of a harsher season. The familiar opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales* "Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote/ The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour,/ Of which vertu engendred is the flour..."<sup>11</sup> sets the emotional tone not merely for a pilgrimage, but for the expression of a whole era. How different in spirit are the worlds of *The Lion in Winter* from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the *Rite of Spring*. But the dominion of the earth's time haunts even the most diverse expressions. Think of the buoyant ease of Dylan Thomas' "When I was young and easy, under the apple bough...in the mercy of his means, Time held me green and dying, though I sang in my chains like the sea"<sup>12</sup> with Tennyson's rhythmic and mordant "The woods decay, the woods decay and fall, the vapors weep their burthen to the ground. Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath, and after many a summer, dies the swan."<sup>13</sup> The mood of poetic expression lends itself to diverse appropriations; for example, Richard III's familiar "Now is the winter of our discontent turned glorious summer..."<sup>14</sup> is a locution that is used and misused in contexts far afield from political villainy.

## II

Nietzsche's suggestion to think of man as an ungrateful biped has a number of possible references to man's relation to the earth. In the two contrasting concepts of world and heaven--the first a transformation of nature into culture, the second a transmutation of time into eternity--man shows himself an impatient creature as well. Both domains are an effort to become free of the earth. Moreover, the contemporary idea of space as a place, and the obsession with space travel, are only the most recent efforts to overcome the perceived human condition of bondage to the earth.

It is not finally clear, however, that earth must be seen in fundamental conflict with world, heaven, sky, or other venues of domination or transcendence. The existential quest for self-knowledge and human identity finds its anchor and resource in the earth: we must see ourselves not only in what man makes of himself—world—but that of which he is made—earth. To continue this in a religious (or Platonic) idiom, God, not man, is the measure of all things, even of himself. Philosophy's dialectical effort to find a transcendental point of perspective, an abstract Archimedian point from which to give a neutral, objective account of reality, requires a founding source that literature initially discovers in the life and primal passion of the earth.

Literature, no less than philosophy, is the search for, investigation and creation of a foundation for human identity. It is an exercise of imagination in the quest for some permanent frame, whole idea or image of human existence--of the meaning of life, of the meanings in our lives. In this way literature is a defining activity, as well as the totality of collected stories in which meaning "appears." We both discover and create ourselves in the stories we tell.

Autobiography--self-life-writing--is a kind of model for the more generic indirections of literature. We can usefully think of literature as autobiography-writ-large: the self-life-writing of Man. The Earth--image and idea--is elemental to this task, and essential to contrasting differences in our boundary conceptions of human reality. In the contrast and conflict between Earth and World, the concept of World is the open field of our imagination made operational--the limit or scope that imagination draws for itself. Wittgenstein's recantation and redescription of his early and familiar claim about the world in the *Tractatus*,<sup>15</sup> abbreviated should read: 'The world is the totality *not* of facts, but of *meaning*.' *World* is a province of human endeavor forming abstract and physical limits of our total conception of ourselves.

*Earth*, in contrast, is an ontological foundation--a felt presence and source of life, a sustaining, nurturing force. We can conceive of alternative worlds. Indeed we speak of categories in this way: the world of art, the world of science, the world of politics, of economics... There is the world of the physicist, the psychologist, the musician, the poet, the world of the insane, of the addict. There is the world according to scripture, according to Einstein, according to Hoyle and Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, the world according to Garp. There is, however, only one Earth, home to all life. The earth is not an abstraction: we live on it, we are of it, and past generations lie within it. We are the living dust of its yield, its scars memorialize our wars, mark our progress and our madness.

So far we have only viewed half the task of literature--to investigate the ambiguity and ambivalence of Man's relation to the earth. We have done that by noticing fundamental contrasting domains that mirror a deep uncertainty in the nature of Man himself. Even left with this schizophrenic break, Nietzsche's Dionysian/Apollinian point about tragic drama fits the whole of literature: both sides are required: earth and sky; passion and form, darkness and light, intensity and lucidity. We should at least make a few remarks about the second half of that task which literature has, viz. not merely to reconcile domains, but to heal rifts, to celebrate the wholeness of the earth's yield, the organic unity of earth and life, the spiritual continuity of the earth's man and man's world. At times this expression is simple and positive, as with the poet Robert Frost's lines in *Birches*:

May no fate...snatch me away not to return.  
Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.<sup>16</sup>

In a poet of different temperament the expression can be complex and ominous, as in the context of Marlow's venture into the heart of darkness, where the contrivances of civilization--moral and technical are simply devoured:

Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth...An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine...you thought of yourself bewitched and cut off forever from everything you had known once--somewhere--far away--in another existence. There were moments when one's past came back to one...but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intuition. It looked at you

with a vengeful aspect. When you have to attend to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality...fades. The inner truth is hidden--luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me...<sup>17</sup>

However hidden or ominous the inner truth may be, even here it is comprehensive and whole, and it is embodied in the earth.

### III

In what sense, then, is the earth a riddle, and in what way is literature a solution to, or resolution of that riddle? We have suggested that the problem of Eden, of Adam in Eden--is, at root, a consequence of a traditional conception of and comportment toward the earth, which we have described as deeply ambivalent. Both the Judeo-Christian and Hellenic creation myths characterize the earth as both home (to the body), and prison (to the mind or soul.) This great original divide of the physical or phenomenal, and the psychic or noumenal sets the stage for a continuing discontinuity in our conception of human existence.

The philosophical oppositions of mind/body, appearance/reality, form/substance, and reason/passion, are traditional "problems" in intellectual history that reflect a continuing schism in the understanding of human identity and experience. The archetypal forms of this divisive opposition are mirrored in theology on one hand, dividing earth from the immutable, eternal realm of heaven, and in science on the other, abandoning earth for an abstract Archimedean point. But the above conceptual oppositions are all are "faulty" disjuncts, or rather, they are meaningful distinctions only if they are *not* disjuncts. The earliest of these in the mythic and religious accounts of creation required a categorical separation of earth/sky and earth/heaven to attain a transcendence for meaningful existence. This seeming disavowal of the organic unity of earth and life, existence and essence, made an indelible mark on ensuing intellectual history. It created a dismemberment of human sensibility, and generated confusion about the human condition, in which the world and the soul of man seemed to be divided in a way that all the king's horses could not repair.

But the varied conceptions of earth as they emerge in the images of literature provide a key to a solution of this divisive tradition of oppositions. The advantage of the whole field of literature is that it is congruent with the whole of the life field, and need make no additional claim to the possession of a separate Truth. The truths of literature are lower case, they are in the details, the density of literary expression, the scope of its genres, the depth of its vision. As such

it is distinct from the more exacting or assertive fields of science, philosophy, and theology, all of which claim a kind of exclusivity of Truth, and each strives for a point of transcendence of the life field--that is, of existence.

*Poiesis* sanctions a convergence of form and substance, passion and reason. The capacity of literature not to divide, not to have to be objective, or neutral, or explain from an abstract point outside of experience, outside of time and existence endows a creative space for the full expression of the human condition. The philosophical importance of art is the paradox that art is both a riddle and the solution to the riddle, or rather, the riddle is its own solution, in the life-lessons of art. Literature has no need to abandon the earth, no need to resolve the ambiguity of thought and passion that tear at the fabric of resolve to keep faith with the whole of earth and sky, body and mind. The idea of soul is inclusive of both mind and body--its form and substance taken together constitutes the human being. In literature, the Eden story can be reversed, or be a source for improvisation such that it is the earth which is celebrated. Consider the following short poem "A.D. 2267":

Once on the gritty moon (burnt earth hung far  
In the black, rhinestone sky—lopsided star),  
Two gadgets, with great fishbowls for a head,  
Feet clubbed, hips loaded, shoulders bent. She said,  
'Fantasies haunt me. A green garden. Two  
Lovers aglow in flesh. The pools so blue!'  
He whirrs with masculine pity, 'Can't forget  
Old superstitions? The earth-legend yet?'<sup>18</sup>

This simple image is an inversion of the Eden story, it requires neither explanation nor elaboration, even though its layers of sense and reference may invite just that. In this way literature can keep faith with the earth; there is no need for further transcendence. Literature can thus make use of symbols in ways not bound by doctrine, in a way that opens, broadens, and deepens our understanding of existence. This simple poem integrates the modalities open to literature: *imagination* creates a *memory* of the *future* in which we are brought forcefully on *reflection* into the *present*. We suddenly see in a concrete way our residence on earth as the Eden it is. The knowledge of good and evil is destructive only if we reduce knowledge to power, or rather mistake the empowerment of understanding as an occasion for domination. A return to this shared edenic space does not require innocence, but rather a full understanding of, and total commitment to the whole earth.

We should follow and complete the metaphor of dust to dust, and come full circle to where we began. As children of the earth we are also creative creatures graced with memory. N. Scott Momaday, a contemporary Native American poet, writing out of an oral tradition still in tune with the sounds and rhythms of the earth, extends Blake's augury of innocence to see the world in a grain of sand, and leaves our inquiry with a simple and specific directive:

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth...give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience...imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season, and listens to the sounds that are made upon it...imagine the creatures that are there and all the faintest motions in the wind...recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradox*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Kafka, *Parables and Paradox*, p. 31

<sup>3</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. ed. Geoffrey Keynes, (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927).

<sup>4</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*. II Trans. A. Poulin, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Rilke, I

<sup>6</sup> Rilke, VIII

<sup>7</sup> Susan Shown Harjo, "Heart's Song to the Earth", p.145 from *The Remembered Earth*, ed. G.Hobson, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Loren Eiseley, *The Unexpected Universe*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Loren Eiseley, p.171 ff., from *The Immense Journey*, (New York: Random House, 1946).

<sup>10</sup> Rilke, IX

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Prologue. *Great Books*, ed. R. Hutchins, Volume 22.

<sup>12</sup> Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill". *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1973), p.910.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Tithonus". *Collected Poems*, ed. S.C.Chew, (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1941), p.66.

<sup>14</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, I.1.

<sup>15</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, I.1, tr. D. Pears & B. McGuinness, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Frost, "Birches". From *Come In and Other Poems* (New York, Henry Holt, 1943).

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in *A Conrad Argosy*, (New York: Doubleday, 1942),p.48.

<sup>18</sup> John Frederick Nims, *A.D.2267*

<sup>19</sup> N. Scott Momaday, from "The Man Made of Words" in *The Remembered Earth*, p.162.