

# Introduction

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Ron Phelps' pamphlet *The Sentence of Madison Morrison*, here retitled, stands at the head of a collection of distinguished essays, articles, translations and visual tributes that attempt to complete the author's grammatical utterance, or rather that of the gods, before MM, and the gods, have had their final word. Such an audacious summary of a life's work in progress, one that James Merrill called "unprecedented," itself has few precedents. Harry Levin worked on his comprehensive study while Joyce was still alive but missed the deadline. Blake had to rest at peace for three quarters of a century before Yeats and Ellis revived the slumbering giant. Milton, Shakespeare and Spenser received no just assessments during their lifetimes. Dante had to await Boccaccio, who was still but eight years old in the year of the divine poet's death. Ovid's judicial appraisal by Augustus resulted in political exile. In another act of judicious authority, Phelps, following Peter Carravetta's lead, has commuted MM's sentence to obscurity with a remarkable fullness of judgment. His final metaphor is one of the author's militant patriotism, somewhat surprising as a figure for this sociable internationalist: "Madison Morrison," he writes, "remains at his lonely post like a soldier whose comrades have all gone over to the enemy." With a nod perhaps to Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry, Phelps draws attention to the unegotistical character of the creator. Adopting a Bloomian term, he properly emphasizes the oeuvre's *strangeness* (thereby complementing Merrill's characterization of **Sentence of the Gods** as "unprecedented"). He hints at its affiliation with Italian tradition, a suggestion yet to be systematically explored; likewise, its affinities with Homer and Vergil, at one end of western tradition, with French poetics at the other. He properly emphasizes the extra-academic nature of a body of work promulgated by an author who remained within the academy throughout most of his professional career. He sees that the Bible provides an analogy for the **Sentence**. His serviceable review of its essential features, with which he introduces his essay, indicates another aspect of Phelps' Johnsonian judiciousness.

In an essay dated January 23, 1999 Peter Carravetta so indicates that he is a critic of "temporalities" as well as eternalities, one whose "Toward a Poetica Cosmographica" begins by locating MM's project within the context of "this past decade," of "the End of Modernity," of "the Avant Garde," of that tradition which defies tradition. "Ferocious iconoclast," he calls the author, "implacable innovator," "mind-bending researcher of (im)possible cosmographies." In a prose as gorgeous, eloquent and volatile as Hermes, whom he identifies as Morrison's "protector," "his guiding/guardian angel," Carravetta shuttles between "my own autobiography" and his subject, whose work, he

implies, imitates that of the “playful trader of signification,” of “the scripting nomad.” An extravagantly gifted reader, Professor Carravetta registers a dozen original points about *Revolution*, another half dozen about the half dozen books that comprise SOLUNA, which he calls “the transition from the ‘end’ of the experimental avant-gardism of western poetry” to “the beginning of a different, cosmographic, planetary approach to the writing art,” whose topic he denominates “geohistory.” His sweeping survey of leading tendencies also records trenchant observations about *Realization* and *Happening*. In a beautiful passage, reworked as follows for the jacket of *Scenes from the Planet*, he says of MM writ large: “From the very start of his career he inscribes a polysemic signature onto ever-changing scripted charts, always alert to the power of words as they beckon for an unseeable, unnarratable Word, but not for a negotiable Salvation: there is only the search itself, *la busqueda, la sfida perenne, l’entretien infini*, a communication with spirits both seen and dreamed and real after all, as if they were just rounding the corner, singing down the hallway, or somehow perceivable on the riverbank across. And yet elusive. And mysterious.” In so saying, Peter Carravetta has defined for us the infectious brilliance and underlying erudition of his own work as well as an important motivating force at the heart of **Sentence of the Gods**.

Frank W. Stevenson, an adept of philosophy, literature and literary theory, whose taste runs to Friedrich Nietzsche, Emily Dickinson and Franz Kafka, each of whom he has written about, has a fascination with what is difficult, paradoxical and cosmically ironic. This ideally suits him to introduce the reader to SOLUNA, which comprises the first two, solar and lunar, stages of the **Sentence**. Here Professor Stevenson offers an interpretation of SOL and LUNA as the cosmogonic stages of Morrison’s cosmological epic. Himself a student of physics, he has relied upon Serres’s reading of the non-linear dynamics of physical chaos theory to explain how Sun and Moon arise out of the background noise of the universe. Stevenson is especially skillful at unraveling and reweaving the mysteries of “10 Fingers,” “Yesterday” and “A War-film Is a Peacefilm,” the three poetic sequences at the opening of *Sleep*, the first book in **Sentence of the Gods**, but his comments on passages from *Light*, its third book, and his discussion of several poems in *A*, its sixth, also provide the reader with an overview of those larger sequences composed, respectively, of *Sleep, O, Light* (SOL) and *Light, U, Need, A* (LUNA). He concludes by leaping forward to the end of the **Sentence** and relating its final sequence, EL, to the pivotal “L” at the end of SOL and the beginning of LUNA. Typical of his own earlier work is an essay on Nietzsche that isolates riddles and rhetorical questions in *Zarathustra* and discusses them in relation to the concept of irony in Kierkegaard and Deleuze. Stevenson’s preoccupation with questions and answers is related to his preoccupation with classic Greek texts, which, in their

earliest redactions, we recall, had lacked punctuation, so that even what is a question and what is not was itself a question. Like Nietzsche, the philologist, who insisted that we understand the etymological meaning of crucial terms in ancient texts, in his explications Professor Stevenson teases the philosophical significance out of these intensely poetic texts of Morrison's. His readings of such difficult works from *Sleep* strike me as exemplary, in the sense of sparking interest in the poems, of giving us an example of how to read them, and of filling out their implications. His interpretations, though expert in every sense, nonetheless, like Kafka's allegories, have been conceived of as deliberately incomplete, thereby challenging the reader of his essay, and of the poems on which it is based, to complete, if not the poems themselves, at least her own interpretations of them. Like Nietzsche and Derrida, Stevenson is often playful, but as he makes clear in his essay on *Zarathustra* questioning and play are intimately related. In his introduction to SOLUNA he has asked, essentially, what is at work/at play—what, that is, has been “put in question”—by Morrison's own seriously playful work. His dialectical method provides a model for our appreciation of this latter-day Emily Dickinson.

Mark Sonnenfeld, the avant gardist, who says in a letter that he has “issued and distributed 70 ISBNs” to his international readership, has chosen an entirely different mode of commentary to convey his sense of *O*, the second book in the **Sentence**. For a radical innovator, his traditional gesture—a poem in response to other poems—is surprising. Mr. Sonnenfeld's densely concrete imagery and irrational argument belie his title, “Quick Abstract Thoughts.” His own prolific work in general eschews consistent reference to the real world as well as narrative coherence, and it follows no predictable, even recognizable, dynamic, whether emotional, intellectual or figurative. Such relentless integrity is part of his charm. In short, Sonnenfeld's writing seems deliberately devoid of meaning. The effect of this extremity of spirit is cleansing and salutary. In the empty set of *O*, whose 60 poems move like a hand across an urban clock face, the critic seems to find a counterpart to his own existential urbanity. At least his final “Yes” suggests as much. MM too was once an avant gardist, tending his rooftop garden for an hour a day; progressively he has taken to cultivating the world at large, now “24/7,” as they say. These photographic seconds of *O* lead on to the day and night of *Light* as SOL gives way to LUNA and we find ourselves in the grip of The Seven Days of the Week.

Ron Phelps worships John Lennon as some people worship the Buddha. His *crèche* of personal gods, like a popular *tableau vivant* in which Biblical figures are replaced by Hollywood celebrities, includes Updike (The Novelist), Rumi (The Poet), Donovan (The Rock Star), Hume (The Philosopher) and Castenada (The Guru). But his life-long idol has been James Joyce, author of the uncategorizable and nearly unreadable *Finnegans Wake*, which Phelps for twenty years has been condensing and clarifying into a film designed for three

simultaneous screens. His own voluminous imaginative work, which should be, but never has been, published, includes a book of memorable epigrams, *From the Hotel in Antarctica*, a dozen outrageously original works of fiction, among them a Buddhist mystery, *Murder by Dharma*, an American Civil War novella, *The Enactment*, a science fiction novel, *X* (along with five other novels that he had written before he finished high school) and the notebooks whose pages he daily filled, until his journals filled a shelf. In the field of music, where his taste is both popular and classical, he has composed a wonderful set of children's pieces for solo piano. Among several critical studies is another unpublishable, 99-page manuscript, in which Phelps perceptively scrutinizes Nicholas Roeg's cult-film, *Performance*. His letters to friends, printed in a first-grader's orthography, discourse on everything under the sun, always engagingly, always with stunning insight. One of Mr. Phelps's earliest heroes, and perhaps the genius whom he most resembles, is Friedrich Nietzsche, here invoked as an *anti-Nihilist* in his essay on Morrison's *Light*. Stephen Truelove, the American composer, with whom Phelps shares a rural Oklahoma background, reports that "in 1964, the year that we met as freshmen at OU, we were walking across the campus one day when Ron casually mentioned Nietzsche. 'Who's Nietzsche?' I asked. Phelps reacted with great astonishment. 'You've never heard of Nietzsche!?!'" Whereupon the polymathic poet "raced ahead shouting joyfully, 'Truelove is ignorant! Truelove is ignorant!'—with me," the composer adds, "running after him, shouting 'Truelove is ignorant! Truelove is ignorant!'" Phelps remains faithful to his Nietzschean love of the Truth (if his own hope for rescue from obscurity has dimmed). His insight into *dream*, *reality* and *poetry*, and the interrelationship among them, makes of "The Darkness of *Light*" a critical masterpiece. *Light* is for real, he shows us. And so is Ron Phelps.

Marc de Hay, like Ron Phelps a keeper of diaries, is another critic well qualified to comment on Morrison's ongoing epic record of his life experience. An *aficionado* of Anaïs Nin and her "registration of the personal life, of the dream, of the inner life in the process of living it," de Hay has also practiced journalism. In "De Cederhouten Vleugels van Berouw" he studies two poems by MM written a line a day, each over a three-year period. Born, 1956, into a Rotterdam still scarred by the bombings of World War II, de Hay as a youth had much to observe of historical significance. Having tried journalism and "hated it," he next took up a career as a painter, finally starting a magazine so as to express his idiosyncratic vision. *Stardust Memories* has grown into an institution "for many people all over the world," who, he says, "were in the same situation" as he, discontent with other outlets for their own artistic expression. In the year 2000 Mr. de Hay began an ambitious mail art project on the theme of "the Star(s)," for which he has received contributions from "more than a hundred artists," including MM. His own work, he says, "has been influenced

by the popular Dutch author Harry Mulish and by musicians such as Frank Zappa, Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan, who shaped a 'rock and roll' attitude toward poetry." Among the modern classics he admires Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina*, Dostoievskii's *Crime and Punishment* and Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, all epic novels. Add to this his interest in the religious classics and we see what makes de Hay an ideal critic to introduce **Sentence of the Gods** to a Dutch audience. Here it is the reciprocity of *U* and *Need*, MM's fourth and fifth books, that de Hay has taken for his theme. In these two 1000-line poems, one of everyday reality, one of dream within dream, he identifies an ambiguous relationship in Morrison's work between the objective and subjective realms. Using a dazzling metaphor he compares the two works to "the facets of two diamonds reflecting one another," a figure that calls into question the substantiality of both phases of the moon, waning and crescent. The ordinary, realistic, quotidian aspects of *U*, he says, are balanced by the heroic, oneiric, spiritual aspects of *Need*. Perceptively he observes how the figure of Alexander links the two poems. Like Ron Phelps in his essay on *Light*, the first book in LUNA, de Hay, in his study of the sequence's two middle books, also contributes to our general understanding of the relation of dream to reality. Like other esemplastic critics, both de Hay and Phelps have seen not only the diversity of MM's work but also its unity, the way in which prosaic and poetic elements combine in SOLUNA to form the basis for a new prosaic poetry, a new poetic prose. Like Phelps again, de Hay also provides the reader with an explanation of how the individual book titles work in sequence, as he meditates upon them in English and in Dutch.

Of the half dozen Italian translators who have taken up MM's work, Gio Ferri was the first to attempt detailed commentary. As founder and co-director of the critical journal *Testuale*, he was amply qualified to have done so. Multitalented, Mr. Ferri has published, in addition to books of criticism and verse, a prose romance, visual poetry and graphic art. His "Un Brano di *Need*" translates the poem's opening lines, explicates them and summarizes the themes of the poem. Ferri has chosen to emphasize the cosmological, ethical and oracular dimensions of *Need*. He explains the meaning of its title as "the necessity of the poverty of the spirit, or of life *tout court*." Identifying its scene as both terrestrial and paradisaical, he helps us to see that even early on Morrison had Dante in mind, as well as Ezra Pound. An admirer of this long poem's temporal and thematic ambiguities, he discerns among its underlying archetypes the Fall of Man and the Wounds of Christ. Moreover, he helps us appreciate MM's universalization of these themes into what he calls a "Book of Books," a "Bible," a "Veda," a "Grail," an "Odyssey." Its "microambiguities," he acutely observes, lead unambiguously to a totalized illusion of Limbo, to a maximalization of Ambiguity Itself.

If SOLUNA's overriding theme is conjunction (the alchemist's solar and lunar *conjunctio oppositorum*), ARES' theme is struggle. *A*, the book that concludes LUNA and initiates ARES, represents a struggle with real-world materials that anticipates much of Morrison's later work. The collaborative *Revolution*, a Menippean satire that both accepts and criticizes the world, involved a struggle between two authors, who nonetheless by the end of the book managed to resolve their differences. *Each* represents a large-scale struggle to overgo or evade a single antecedent text, here the "pretext" of Raymond Roussel's *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique*, the illustrations for which the author used to "reconstruct" the original poem in prose. With his imitation of Homer in *Second* the martial ARES ends, and the mercurial HERMES begins. The book's first half interweaves scenes from the Iliad, its second half, scenes from the Odyssey. In doing so it initiates another, larger struggle on the part of Morrison to come to terms with and incorporate a series of predecessors, an activity that continues not only in the "intertextual" books that comprise HERMES but also in the four "hypertextual" books of APHRODITE.

*Revolution* is one of the liveliest books in **Sentence of the Gods**. Though its first edition was published in China and five of its chapters have been translated into Chinese (for a bilingual edition titled *MM's Revolution*), as yet it has attracted neither French translators nor a publisher who might revive the out-of-print original edition. Here the Belgian Guido Vermeulen, trilingual in Flemish, French and English, has upstaged the French by offering a Gallic but withal international tribute that imitates the ironic peregrinations of the book's narrators by transferring their American and French scenes of writing to Brussels. Humorously he reproduces the original text's reduction of political to quotidian observation. His "Démolissez pour reconstruire" identifies an important principle not only in the text of *Revolution* but also in the **Sentence** at large. His attention to the rhetoric of advertising looks back to *A*, a book of "found" poems indebted to television, magazine and newspaper ads, and predicts the importance of such language to later books in the sequence. His "Post Scriptum" offers a brief account of how the text combines the settings of America Today, Ancient China, Revolutionary France and France Today, compounding complexity as it proceeds. As Ad Breedveld's subsequent note makes clear, Vermeulen himself is one of the leaders in the contemporary movement known as mail art, which, according to the multicultural Belgian, by virtue of its rejection of "market rules" is "utopian and revolutionary in spirit and in its modes of expression." This helps us to understand another "revolutionary" ambiguity concerning MM's work, which, though marketed to date by five commercial publishers has been more widely distributed through the "network." "Network artists," says Vermeulen again, "do not sell: they exchange, they participate, they connect, they communicate, they rebel, they share, they support, they love." Early on Vermeulen founded *Kikoto*, "a

magazine designed to unite different media and artists from the various cultural communities that shape Belgium”; more recently he has established *Frïour*, a digital forum, drawing upon the expertise of “editors in different countries and on various continents” to promote globally “anti-global networks for art and peace.”

Like Sonnenfeld and Vermeulen, Alexandra Sattler, in her essay on *Each* titled “Seeing,” has offered less a *critical* than a *poetic* response to a text of Morrison’s. Nonetheless, in such phrases as “die transzendente Einheit der Apperzeption,” “das verum-factum Prinzip” and “die Realität eines jeden Individuums” she makes clear that her response to this “philosophical” work is also *philosophical*. Influenced by figures as diverse as Vico and Wittgenstein, she especially admires Isaiah Berlin, for “his modesty in the face of what we can know and what we cannot know.” As for famous German literary figures she says, “I don’t like Thomas Mann so very much,” and with Goethe, “it is difficult to say, for 75% of all Germans have a Goethe-trauma, because of being tormented at school with his books.” Nonetheless, she avers that she may at a later time—perhaps when her studies are finished—take up the question of experience in Homer, Goethe and Kant. Her essay, a dazzling tour de force, is pleasant to read but difficult to understand. I believe that I first made progress when I stopped thinking of it as an essay and began thinking of it instead as an indirect characterization of *Each*, achieved through a sort of distant imitation. It is rather like an individual chapter of MM’s book at a higher level of abstraction, which allows his seriously zany text (one of my favorites) to *come into contact with* philosophical observation. As Ms. Sattler’s title suggests, *perception* is one of her themes, but so is *history*. As a gloss on her reference to Max Sebald, we might recall that the famous writer once said, “The moral backbone of literature is . . . *memory*.” Elsewhere he speaks of his interest in photography (like history, another form of memory, and also another form of perception), regaling us with an anecdote about a photo that he had lost only to have it turn up “in a junk shop in the East End of London.” The picture in question was “a postcard of the yodeling group from my home town,” the discovery of which was “a pretty staggering experience,” he adds. “These old photographs always seem to have this appeal written into them, that you should tell a story behind them”—as Morrison has done with the illustrations for Roussel’s *Nouvelles impressions d’Afrique*. Alexandra Sattler is our youngest contributor. “Ich wurde geboren,” she writes in an email, “am 12. Juli 1976 in Celle, das ist eine Stadt, die etwa 50 km nordöstlich von Hannover liegt. Anfang 1999 zog ich nach Hannover, wo ich jetzt auch wohne.” Since this notice she reports that she has married a Dutchman and moved to Leiden, where she hopes to complete her philosophical education. Her essay for this collection represents an auspicious step towards its culmination.

About *himself* our next contributor writes, in MM's favored third person, "Jokie X Wilson was born in 1965 in Washington DC, received an A.A. in 1986 from Montgomery College and a B.A. from the University of Maryland in 1988, both in Studio Art. That year he moved to Tucson and in 1997 to San Francisco. In 1981 he began keeping a journal, which has since morphed into *Crazybook*, a documentation of his life in writing, drawings, photos and other media. It has grown to over 200 volumes. Involved since 1988 with mail art, Jokie has sent out over 10,000 items." In addition to exhibiting his work in galleries and performing in a variety of venues, he is director of the Radical Faerie Freedom Village, an annual gathering "at the heart of San Francisco's LGBT Pride celebration." His brief essay on *Magic*, which focuses upon the paradoxically religious dimension of our ordinary lives, initiates discussion of the personal half of the HERMES sequence, MES, the trilogy *Magic Every Second*. (For *Every* see R. Swaminathan's Tamil translation of its second part in our Section V and his commentary in the present section; for *Second*, see the various translations of its "Ten Poems" in Section V; Ross Priddle's lexicon compiled from *Second*,<sup>2</sup>; FnL Osowski's treatment of the relationship between *Second*,<sup>2</sup> and *Second*,<sup>3</sup>; and The GorpF's response to what he calls "Two Greek Scholars on a Chios Bus-stop Bench"; for *Every Second*, see Ad Breedveld's brief notice in Dutch, The GorpF's photomontage and verse appreciation, plus MM's own Preface to both books, which we have included in Section IV along with his essay "On the Question of the Personal.")

Ad Breedveld, the painter, poet, ethnographer and mail artist, in a review of MM's and Guido Vermeulen's activity (for a Dutch literary magazine and a Dutch magazine of the visual arts) summarizes *Every Second* (2004) and the earlier *SCENES FROM THE PLANET: In, All, Excelling, Or, Divine* (2001). He links the two mail artists under the rubrics of their common interest in the regional religions of the world and the geographical extent of their audiences. Breedveld himself has devoted much of his career to primitive art and anthropology, in Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Russia, in France, Spain and elsewhere. An imaginative print maker and assembler of dramatic tableaux, his most plangent images reconstruct the details of Neanderthal life. He has defined himself as "a nomadic outsider artist, poet and critic."

"A splendiferous Saturday (May Day!), cloudships sailing past our hilltop," writes The GorpF from Colorado's Continental Divide, "as the sunheat cooks the 3" of snow from the crunchscape. Crystal, birds-egg blue sky, the air tastes like a white French Cruse (from USAF fellow Sergeant Consago kindly sharing). I am replete, Tonia's excellent omelet, strip of turkey bacon, toast with grape jelly, savoring my third java, caffeine addiction, but the benefits outweigh the risk. As we cragsmon say, 'Risk is subjective; CLIMB IT!' But Ah, sippin' slowly, carefully, as the Oscar Peterson Trio jams frenetic in the living room. (Youthful climbers cry out, 'Gravity Sucks!' as they fall.)" In the same epistle



Geoffrey Michael Ricketts defines *himself*, at least in terms of his visual art, as an “acrylic abstractionist,” a “philatelic collagist,” a “surrealist/dadaist Xerox printmaker.” A living monument to America’s alternative culture (he is still writing letters on his 1962 Olympia manual typewriter, still driving his 1969 Volkswagen bus), The Gorp (“There is only one”), responds vivaciously to *Every Second*, with a ten-page letter in appreciation, and a photomontage. *Plus* a poem! His visual work (he encloses photos of paintings from his “Jackson Pollock Series,” elegant arabesques dripped from a bamboo rod onto a gorgeous ground, museum-quality work that surpasses its model in sheer esthetic beauty), is complemented by original work in verse (predictably he mentions more models: “Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Jack K.; William Burroughs, Henry Miller, Charles Bukowski,” though perhaps as a matter of cultural history rather than of actual influence, for his own work again outpaces such dowdy icons of authenticity). Glancing at the catalogue of his CD collection, MM’s narrative art inspires “daDaist poMe: Compact Disc Rap,” a formidable work in its own right (write). “ART IS LIFE!” says “Dr. dada,” aka “the OUTFRIDER,” but for “El Gorpfoh,” LIFE is ART!

R. Swaminathan teaches English language and literature at Tagore Arts College in Pondicherry, the former French colony on the coast of Tamil Nadu. For his M.Phil, he tells me, he “researched the pioneers of English-language fiction-writing in South India”; for his Ph.D. he produced a comparative study of John Steinbeck and the Indian novelist Raja Rao, taking for his topic nothing less than the “Nature and Purpose of Human Existence.” A poet and short story writer, Dr. Swaminathan has translated many things from English into Tamil. Doubtless his most demanding exercise to date has been the five poems that comprise the bilingual edition of MM’s *A Warfilm Is a Peacefilm*, which Tamarai Selvi Pathippagam of Chennai published in 1999. Several collections of his own verse and short stories are in print. Swaminathan’s first translation of MM’s work he undertook after the first of Professor Morrison’s visits to Pondicherry, as Fulbright Lecturer, under Professor P. Marudanayagam’s sponsorship. His second translation he undertook after Morrison’s third visit to Pondicherry, under the sponsorship of Professor P. Balaswami. It is rumored that the first Ph.D. dissertation about the Morrisonian oeuvre is currently under way in Pondicherry. What better place to study an American poet who has transformed modern French poetry and poetics, a westerner so profoundly influenced by Indic culture? MM has given five dozen lectures, he tells me, at four dozen Indian universities, colleges, museums and research institutes. Not surprisingly, then, his work has also been published in Bengali translation and been translated into Hindi.

So that readers of *MM: The Sentence Commuted* in Africa, the Americas and the Arab world, in Europe, in Australia, and in other parts of Asia may also benefit from his commentary, Professor Swaminathan has obliged our request

for an English summary: “With a unique three-dimensional vision Morrison telescopes the present into the remote past and shows the relative merits and demerits but leaves the rest to his readers to draw their own conclusions. He creates parallels between happenings characteristic of the Old Testament, such as religious wars and the Exodus, and present-day afflictions that have assumed such alarming proportions. Three strands of narration are by turns typographically and stylistically foregrounded: the biblical events, narrated in bold font; present-day events, in italics; the author’s view, in normal font. The past and the present exist simultaneously in MM’s consciousness, and these represent a continuity of Time and Space independent of the individual’s existence on Earth. The reader is invited to undertake the formidable task of coordinating such apparently different strands so as to arrive at the hidden message. Thus author and reader are likened to quiz master and puzzle solver. The reader stands in the forefront but must take a backseat, when the text unfolds with its display of fanfare before his inquisitive perceptions.”

Francis and Leonie Osowski, two independent scholars of the Greek philosophical tradition, who are well known for their hundred artists’ books, have contributed a Heideggerian meditation on *Second* that takes the form of what they call an “étude” that they have “implemented” as six “poèmes concrets.” In one sense the theme of this scholarly work is the progress from oral poetry (such as Homer’s) to written poetry (such as Vergil’s) to computer poetry (such as FnL’s). In another sense “Un (VEILED)” draws our attention to the similarity between modern renditions of the classics, such as those of Joyce, MM and the Osowskis, and their Greek and Roman objects of imitation. Like Homer, Francis and Leonie are entertaining; like Vergil and Joyce, their texts are riddled with enigmas that require explication. FnL’s visual poems remind me of the visual element in Greek culture. As Heidegger in his *Parmenides* helps us to see, The Truth for the Greeks was a mythos in which the disguised was revealed by unveiling, forgetfulness was overcome by memory, relationships were understood by noticing. The names Odysseus and Ulysses are related (the second a dialectical form of the first), and they overlap, in Homer’s *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and Vergil’s *Aeneid*, in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, MM’s *Second* and the Osowskis’ “Un (VEILED).” The computer in which FnL’s concrete poems were composed and coded, the screen on which they were later decoded and displayed, the paper on which they have now been revealed by being printed out offer us the tools to manage a complexity by referencing rather than repeating (as in Homer), by manipulating alphabetic or typographical symbols (as in Vergil or in Joyce), by juxtaposing and superimposing past and present, by reversing and otherwise rearranging received and gathered texts (as in MM). The textuality of FnL’s Greek, Latin, French, English and Chinese exists in a two-dimensional simultaneity that references the four-dimensional space-time—in short FnL’s composite “RÉALITÉ”—of China, the USA, France,

Rome and Greece, permitting the Australian critics to compact this continuum in their computer, to pull it up as an abstract and imprint it on our consciousness, so that as critical readers we may “gather” afresh the multifold significance of parallel universes. What more could we ask of criticism?

In response to our request for bio-bibliography D. Ross Priddle suggested that we “Google” him. An Internet search reveals that this editor of his own little magazine, called *bat*, was “born in Calgary 1964,” has “worked as a tree planter” and is “conscientious about the kitchen floor.” In keeping with the Alexandrian tradition of miniaturizing the Homeric epic Priddle has compiled a list of words from the Odyssean part of *Second*, many of which not surprisingly are Greek. This reminds us that several of *Every Second*’s currently non-Greek settings, the Holy Land, Anatolia and Southern Italy (the first described in *Every*,1-4, the next in *Second*,1, the last in *Second*,3) at one time or another were, like the Aegean Islands and the Peloponnisos (described in *Second*,2), Hellenophone. There is, in other words, a geographical and linguistic unity that underlies *Every Second*, the diptych that MM has called “the cultural cornerstone of the **Sentence**.” Moreover, the Bible, no less than the Iliad, the Odyssey and the Aeneid, is an epic (Old Testament heroes overseen by divinity struggle in battles of national consequence; books of the New Testament reveal Homeric traces; a Savior arrives whose coming many have thought that Vergil, as well as the Biblical Prophets, predicted). As MM opines in one of his essays, the story of Menelaos, Helen and Paris may have been regarded as a parable of Original Sin. Like those Greeks who colonized Asia Minor, Professor Morrison has traveled to East and South Asia burdened with fundamentally Greek values and returned to the West bearing Asian values. Thus the MM-Homer-Odysseus-Vergil-Ulysses parallel is not entirely fanciful. We know that Vergil made four trips to Greece; we suspect that Homer traveled almost as widely as Odysseus; in this regard MM, Hermes-like, has outpaced them all; nor could his universal in situ epic have been composed by a stay-at-home. Like Vergil, Morrison has transmogrified Homer; like Dante, he has also transmogrified Vergil, a summary of whose Aeneid appears in *Divine*,1 along with quotations from the Georgics in *Divine*,2&3; likewise, he tells us, will the Eclogues later be absorbed in *Renewed*,2, the Nilotic section of his book about Egypt.

Next we turn to an interview from *Second*,2 in which a Greek scholar on the island of Chios, whom MM encountered during his travels, suggests that Odysseus is really Homer, Homer, Odysseus. This learned dialogue, whose italicized material is drawn from Herodotus and interpolated in the English paraphrase of a modern Greek, persuades us that Homer, like the modern Chian student of Orpheus and Hermes Trismegistus (and like MM himself) was also a *scholar*, or at least that antiquity so regarded the author of Iliad and Odyssey. When I read the interview, I am reminded of Lucian’s thoughtful playfulness in his subtle handling of Homer and the absurdities of the larger

tradition, for as he retells and fabricates stories from the epics, often hilariously, he also does so to serious purpose. Like MM, with his talent for the comical interview that he himself arranges and orchestrates, Lucian brings out the humor inherent in Homer by making it more explicit. What is taking place in the interview on Chios, as in Lucian, Homer, Herodotus or in MM's *Second* at large, could not be clearer, yet why things are said and what they mean are often profoundly elusive. In MM some of this has to do with his interweaving of texts, the amalgam of which is different from any of its individual strands. Some has to do with the interplay of biography and autobiography that Morrison has introduced and thereby highlighted in the epic tradition. The athletic Gorpf, still "baggin' 14ers at the age of 59," still, that is, climbing Colorado's 14,000-foot mountains, in a letter describes his descent of Long's Peak as follows: "I manage to stay on the trail, despite the hairpin turns, blind Homer with trekkin' pole, tappin' mah way down, feet sensitive to the shiftin' sand." Though the **Sentence** too tropes the traditional epic (*Second* specifically Homer, Vergil and to some extent Dante), it may be Herodotus, Lucretius and others who represent the true precursors of MM, not Homer, Vergil and their continuators in the heroic narrative mode. Like The Gorpf, whose painterly work is nothing if not personal, and who accomplishes autobiography by reworking traditional modes, most of them modern (abstract-expressionist, surrealist, modernist, beatnik, hippie), MM, from beginning to end, is also personal. In some sense the same may be said of Homer and Vergil, but Morrison's representation of real men, such as Homer himself (in Herodotus's retelling), the Chian scholar, or his own person, implements and corresponds to an autobiographical representation and resonance in the whole of the **Sentence** that is more explicit than what we find in his classical predecessors. Perhaps the time has come for us all to rethink the biographical and autobiographical elements in traditional epic, especially in the light of later figures such as Dante and Milton, Byron and Whitman, Proust and Morrison.

Manjushree S. Kumar is especially well suited to provide us with a general introduction to the HERMES sequence, the fourth and central stage in **Sentence of the Gods**, for in a letter to the present writer she has identified the "two key concepts" of her "living, thinking and working" as "journey" and "the feeling of having arrived." Hermes is the god of travel, who arrives at one place only to depart for another, who voyages out only to return. Like MM, who half a dozen times has visited India and returned, Dr. Kumar has several times visited the USA and returned to India. The process whereby so much of the **Sentence** has been created, that is, journey, is akin to criticism, whose object is to provide us with perspective and to sharpen our judgment, which it enables us to arrive at and later depart from. Like works of literature journeys too are subject to multiple interpretations. "Discovering the 'other' in multi-cultural communities," says Ms. Kumar, is a special concern of hers. Among

her varied interests she lists “classical Indian and western music,” the relationship of “the spiritual and the mundane,” the synthesizing “oneness in Nature.” Again she is defining herself as an ideal critic of HERMES, the stage of the larger work in which Morrison polyphonically interweaves religious voices of eastern and western provenance with mundane experience, then integrates them to produce a unified sequence. In her essay Kumar regards *Realization* as “denouncing and embracing the temporal and the spatial,” “the textual and the ‘extra’-textual.” Its deconstructive activity she calls a “labored, ceaseless, uninterrupted devotion,” its journey, “an untiringly amalgamated quest,” its process “almost a spiritual experience.” Unlike her own account of a richly personal history, she identifies *Realization* as a text “without personal history,” one astride the borderline between modernist and postmodernist ideologies. Like her own work, it creates a critical dialogue between contemporary mass culture and traditional Indic values. As a student of South Asian literature, postcolonial theory and traditional western culture, Manjushree S. Kumar has afforded us an array of perspectives and a coherent thesis for the understanding of this new spirituality.

In a learned and wide-ranging essay, “The Intertextuality of Body and Soul: A Realization toward Self-Realization,” D. Gnanasekaran, a South Indian critic, has extended the observations of Dr. Kumar, a North Indian critic, to the whole epic, **Sentence of the Gods**, in which he discerns “a magnificent obsession with the quest for self-realization.” Professor Gnanasekaran too is interested in Morrison’s “synthesis of eastern and western ways of thinking.” Overwhelmingly qualified as an expert in English, Dr. Gnanasekaran holds an M.Phil in stylistics and a Ph.D. in ELT. At Pondicherry’s K.M. Centre for Post Graduate Studies, where he is research supervisor, he teaches English literature and linguistics. Like Professor Swaminathan, Professor Gnanasekaran has published poems, short stories, critical essays and translations in various literary journals of repute and has read his imaginative work over the airwaves. In his professional capacity, he says, he has reviewed “hundreds of books” and has also served as educational consultant for competitive examinations of international standard such as TOEFEL and IELTS. A mature critic of both eastern and western traditions, Dr. Gnanasekaran is well placed to judge MM’s larger enterprise. “It cannot be over-emphasized,” he says, “that Morrison is happily and magnificently obsessed with the ideal . . . of being a seeker of the Truth,” an Indic as well as Enlightenment ideal. “As a long-time student of India, he moves from the known to the unknown through their correlative divinities.” “Morrison’s realization of the time-bound happenings,” he says with regard to *Happening*, MM’s study of India (and much else), “mingles with his realization of the timeless Truth and projects a unity of his multi-layered consciousness.” Not only are Body and Soul interactive here, in Professor Gnanasekaran’s view, but also Author and Reader, whose “own insightful and ebullient response is highly

expected.” MM’s works—and this critic has touched upon features of the **Sentence** from its very beginnings to its latest published installment, in verse as well as in prose—“outline the pathway,” he says, “of Morrison’s self-chosen mission and signal the progressive enlightenment that dispels the gloom of ignorance from the dark recesses of his consciousness.” There is much to be pondered in Professor Gnanasekaran’s essay.

Hermes is the interpreter of signs and therefore the first practitioner of hermeneutics. Among his followers is Frank W. Stevenson, who, in addition to his other accomplishments, has proven himself an accomplished Sinologist with a dozen published articles in the field. At the end of his essay on SOLUNA, he had placed the Chinese Book of Changes, with its *yin/yang* polarities, in relation to SOL and LUNA. In his second essay, “Ritual and Sign in Morrison’s *Engendering*,” he makes even more thorough-going use of his expertise in the fields of cultural anthropology, comparative religion and East-West philosophy to explore a text that embeds Confucius and Lao-zi within the context of an American college town. The classic Chinese texts, like the classic Greek, Hebrew, Egyptian, Indic and Khmer texts elsewhere deployed in Morrison’s intercultural HERMES sequence, have all been quoted in English translation. If one meaning of *hermeneuein* is “to interpret,” “to translate” is another, for translation is a metaphorical or hermeneutic process. Leaving behind the images of MM’s first, Francophile phase, the poems of SOL and LUNA, Stevenson here fast-forwards to the visual signs of *Engendering*, which he associates with Hermes in his role as strewer of yet-to-be-interpreted signs, “extra”-textual as well as textual. Professor Stevenson provides us with an illuminatingly integrative approach to the book and to the sequence within which *Engendering* occurs.

Poet, editor, publisher and literary impresario, for a decade at the center of the popular poetry world of Norman, Oklahoma, Robin Schultz over the past dozen years has occupied a similar position in the popular poetry world of Seattle. Whereas in Norman, at The Town Tavern, he convened readings in someone else’s restaurant, in Seattle he has done so at his own Globe Café, a well-known New Age venue that he only recently relinquished. In Norman, where he had founded Poetry Around, he was mentor to younger poets. In Seattle, where he continues to publish under the same imprimatur, he expanded his entrepreneurship of poetry events to include shows of conceptual poetry. Himself the author of two books, *Unexpected Affinities* and *Sun Days: Hiking the Appalachian Trail*, Schultz has latterly acquired a reputation as street musician (the cover of a current guide to Seattle features him in the role of accordionist) and as member of a spoken word band. Poetry Around, whose eclectic list includes street poets as well as more academic writers, distinguished itself in 1986 and 1988 by publishing the first two parts of *Realization* and again in 1990 by publishing the first edition of *Engendering*, books subsequently reissued by

Anterem of Verona and Cosmos Culture of Taipei. Schultz's reflections upon the circumstances surrounding the composition and original publication of these important segments of the HERMES sequence remind us of the decisive role that he has played in the development of MM's reputation.

HERA, the sequence whose initial letter coincides with the "H" of HERMES and whose final letter coincides with the "A" of APHRODITE, has naturally attracted less critical attention to date, since three of its four books are still incomplete. *Her* (the "H" that HER, the Athena of HERMES, shares with the HER of HERA), will eventually consist of 69 sonnets, the first 34 of which, already written, interweave in situ description of Oklahoma City with the text of Hesiod's Works and Days. After a pivotal thirty-fifth, the remaining 34 will constitute a more ambitious amalgamation, for in the second half of the book Morrison intends both an epitome of the cosmos (of the sort that we find on Homer's Shield of Achilles and Vergil's Shield of Aeneas) and an epitome of **Sentence of the Gods**. According to the author, string theory will provide the cosmological model, its 26 "clockwise" dimensions corresponding to the 26 books of Morrison's epic, its ten "counterclockwise" dimensions to those ten books that epitomize the **Sentence**. Hesiod's Theogony provides the mythic "subtext" for the second half of *Her*, whose prose "sonnets" overlying it will incorporate the Khmer synthesis of ancient Indic and native medieval cosmology found at Angkor. The remaining three books of HERA, for which the in situ description has been collected, will portray the American Southwest: those cities of Oklahoma—Tulsa and Lawton— not treated in the first part of *Her* or in *Engendering*, and the landscapes of New Mexico and Arizona. Three dynastic types of Chinese painting—Yuan, Song and Ming—serve as the "subtexts" for *Exists*, *Regarding* and *All*.

Carol Stetser has lived in the Mohave Desert for 30 years. The founder of Padma Press, she herself has published, she tells me, "fifty xerographic bookworks plus fifteen one-of-a-kind books." "The combination in my prints," she says, "of contemporary visual symbols with the rock art of the past is a reflection of my environment as well as my philosophical belief in the theories of relativity and simultaneity." In *All* MM has constructed a composite description of the eternally contemporary landscapes of Eastern Arizona with distant reference to Ming Dynasty landscape painting; his text in turn is grounded in the mythic Brahma, first of the Trimurthi that includes Vishnu and Shiva. These latter two divinities imbue *Regarding* and *Exists*, above which, reading the sequence backwards, stands *Her*, whose divinity is Shakti. "The role of today's visual poet," says Stetser, "is to carry on in the tradition of the Vedic poets." Her xerographic collage in homage to *All* is "a synthesis of the visual and the poetic." Its eye's blank pupil is the globe or the void or the cosmos (*das All* in German), or Omniscience. She connects the petroglyphic text of aboriginal Americans with modern text in the Roman alphabet, in *kanji* and *hiragana*,

isolating the Chinese radical for “arrow” and connecting it with the visual arrow above. “The visual poet,” she says, “by a simultaneous layering of signs and symbols of past and present can mirror this new world as well as reveal the archetypal images that continue to speak to us from ancestral memories.” Her work, then, seems the perfect complement to *All*, which likewise provides “the means to discover the hidden truths of reality.” Hera (the Mother), wife of Zeus (in MM the “Be-All” and “End-All”), is not only *his* sister but also the sister of Poseidon (the Earth) and Hades (the Underworld).

The initial “A” of the third landscape book, which has been published, is both the last letter of HERA and the first of APHRODITE. The latter sequence is unusually complicated, for its nine books, as MM points out, have 72 relations among them. Four of the nine will employ as “hypertexts” the principal work and charismatic example, respectively, of Cervantes, Spenser, Dante and Ovid. The APHRODITE sequence too is incomplete. *Possibly* will take up the Luso-Hispanic world of Miami, South America and Iberia in relation to El Quijote; *Renewed* will use The Faerie Queene to organize the Egyptian world of Alexandria, the Nile and Cairo; *This* will combine Lady Murasaki and the history of Japan with The Metamorphoses. *Divine*, the only “hypertextual” book yet to appear, modeled on the example of Dante and his *Divina Commedia*, is here the subject of studies by Arvind Thomas, Frank W. Stevenson and Mowbray Allan. Of the five other books in the sequence four—*All*, *Or*, *In*, and *Excelling*—have been collected in *Scenes from the Planet*. The fifth, *Happening*, a compendious book about India published in New Delhi (1997), is the subject of an article by Arvind Thomas.

A native speaker of English, Mr. Thomas acquired Tamil as a child and Hindi as a young adult displaced to the capital city for his college education. Following his graduation he taught himself Italian, French and Latin, so that he might pursue study abroad in medieval European culture. To Morrison’s book about northern and southern India, with its multiple foci in space and time, he brings to bear the unique perspective of an Indian with northern and southern experience, one who had prepared for the task of analysis and interpretation not only by mastering his native tradition but also by acquainting himself with advanced western theory. In an essay of self-effacing objectivity, Thomas begins by identifying his topics with a precise title: “Causality, Chance, Intertext, *Topos* and Plot in MM’s *Happening*.” His disarming questions challenge the reader to participate in the critical process. What kind of time does the text, with its intercalations of past and present, unfold in? he asks. Which worlds do its characters/events inhabit, those of myth or reality? Clearly Thomas’ queries have relevance to **Sentence of the Gods** as a whole. How does the reader negotiate the co-presence/nesting of multiple worlds within a Morrisonian text? he asks. If Mr. Thomas offers more questions than answers, it may be that, like Professor Stevenson, in his fascination with the rhetoric of questions, he is



following a deliberate strategy. "This brings us," he says in his concluding section, "to the question of plot." Far from merely Nietzschean provocations, the questions that follow indicate uncommonly thoughtful answers to the problem of MM's open-ended procedures and their relationship to more traditional plots with their Aristotelian beginnings, middles and endings. In *Happening* Thomas sees an "accumulation of accounts," "a spectacle of individual events that relate by accident," a series of "disruptions and dissonances" that relativize the Truth. By remarking upon the text's affinity with collage he, like Manjushree S. Kumar, associates Morrisonian technique with modernism but simultaneously highlights its postmodernist features. How fortunate we are, in Thomas, Kumar and Gnanasekaran, to have three learned Indian readers of Morrison's "Indian" books.

This collection's second essay by Arvind Thomas has been conceived as the Introduction to a deluxe edition of *Divine*, one that will also reprint, as its Afterward, the learned article that follows by Frank W. Stevenson. Like Professors Stevenson and Allan, who are both concerned with the ways in which modern and traditional views of divinity come into focus in MM's book, Mr. Thomas looks at the question of divinity from a double perspective: as an Indian familiar with the Hindu theology that has so influenced Morrison and as a western medievalist thoroughly versed in the theology that informs Dante's conception of the Christian God. He finds it of interest that the Vergil-Beatrice figure in Morrison's *Divine* should be a Chinese girl, whose presence in a sense displaces Dante's classical and Christian values. He sees that Chaucer, the pilgrim, as well as Dante, the pilgrim, are models for Morrison, the pilgrim. (MM tells me that at Harvard, in his twenties, he had taught a year-long course in Chaucer; much later in life, in his study of Italy, he brings to fruition forty years of attention to Dante, in *Divine* a hypertextual figure and the author of a text, *La Divina Commedia*, which his own text interweaves, imitates and transforms, along with Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.) When Mr. Thomas has completed his double Ph.D. in English literature and medieval studies, he tells me, he plans to return to India and found "an alternative school," based upon multicultural principles. "I do believe," he explains, "that a classroom in which Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Sikh kids study together, reading all four cultures in as holistic a fashion as possible, is a powerful instrument for promoting communal harmony, and, if I may say so, better relations between India and Pakistan." Arvind Thomas is the sort of multiculturalist whose theory and practice have consequences.

Frank W. Stevenson was born on a mountaintop in Utica, New York (USA), took his Ph.D. in philosophy (at Boston College) and has subsequently spent many years teaching in the Middle East and East Asia. He has written extensively on ancient Chinese-Greek comparative metaphysics as well as on more explicitly contemporary issues. A forthcoming collection of his academic

articles will include such titles as “Chuang-tzu’s Tao as Background Noise,” “Early Chou *Luan De* and Girard’s Sacrificial Crisis,” “Inverted surfaces: Bataille’s Pineal Eye and the Mythopoetics of Augury” and “Configurations of Babel: Benjamin, Derrida, Serres.” He is also at work on a book-length study of **Sentence of the Gods**, the first academic monograph to treat the subject. Three of its chapters, in earlier form, appear in this collection: “Dissolution and Flow in SOLUNA,” “Sign and Ritual in *Engendering*” and “Focus and Transfiguration in *Divine*.” The third of these is concerned with the techniques of framing, focusing, inversion and transfiguration as keys to understanding Morrison’s conception of divinity and how it relates to Dante’s. Here is how Stevenson defines “the central transcendent problem of the Dantean quest”: “We strive upward, through space and time, toward a God . . . who . . . by definition dwells beyond space and time.” But in Morrison (to simplify the matter) God seems locked in space and time; accordingly Professor Stevenson has isolated and emphasized just such spatio-temporal dimensions of *Divine*, so as to study these techniques of visual or spatial “framing” and “focusing” in relation to “the problem of the ‘figure,’ of figuration and transfiguration.” The problem of figure and ground is of course central to the intertextual method of many books in **Sentence of the Gods**; likewise the question of “perspective” in MM’s in situ observation. With *Divine*, according to Stevenson, we encounter varieties of “spatial inversion (or inversion of perspective)” that we had not encountered in earlier intertextual books. In his account of MM’s technique and in his scintillating discussion of its theological, philosophical and literary consequences, Stevenson considers “the mythopoetic spatialization of time,” as it is rendered by what he calls “the dynamics of focusing”; thus he is the first to take seriously MM’s indebtedness to photography, cinematography and video registration. The conclusions that Professor Stevenson reaches should be of great interest to the serious student of a fascinating problematic, both in Dante and in Morrison.

A life-long student of Dante, Mowbray Allan has devoted a series of articles to the problem of Vergil’s eschatological status within the Christian dispensation of *La Divina Commedia*. His work too has been concerned with the nature of divinity. In “Two Dantes: Christian versus Humanist?” he writes: “The real question is not the existence of God (God is, for example, Energy, if you will) but the nature of God, and the crucial question about that is whether there is some overlap, at least, between human and divine values; if there is not, what is God, that man should be mindful of him?” Much of Professor Allan’s work has had as its ulterior purpose the rescue of Dante from a Counter-Reformation interpretation and his restoration to the position of a medieval Humanist. Just as Allan’s later scholarship represents an attempt to rescue Vergil from eternal damnation by casting a thread of hope for the Sage’s future salvation, so his earlier scholarship, based upon the premises of F.H. Bradley’s thought and T.S.

Eliot's reading of it, had attempted to save us from subjective idealism. This work had culminated in a book about Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry, about the consequent realism of his style and the importance of "point of view" in his verse. Like his work on Dante, Allan's essay on Morrison's *Divine* represents another rescue effort, part of our larger effort to rescue MM from obscurity. Though Allan draws parallels between Dante and Morrison, between *The Divine Comedy* and *Divine*, he finds most interesting Morrison's relationship to Joyce and Eliot, those modernist appropriators of Dante (Allan chooses not to take up Pound or Yeats). Here again it is "realism" and "point of view" that interest Professor Allan. His genial essay points the way for others to consider Morrison's representation of Italy and to explore in greater detail his relation to Dante, especially the imitation of Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso in *Divine*. Perhaps another fruitful project would be to consider *Divine* in relation to Pound's *Cantos*, to Yeats' *A Vision*, to Merrill's *Changing Light at Sandover*, or in relation to the infernal, purgatorial and paradisaic aspects of Joyce's and Eliot's oeuvres. The **Sentence** is rife with trilogies. Reading backwards and forwards from the *All* of APHRODITE, we notice that it even includes two trilogies of trilogies.

Though *Excelling*, the last book in APHRODITE and the first in EL, appeared in 2001, it has yet to draw Chinese response. Perhaps the residents of Shanghai, Congqing, Chengdu, Kunming and Guangzhou do not recognize themselves, however accurately they and their cities have been depicted. Less surprisingly the final book, like the **Sentence** itself incomplete, is still awaiting critical comment. Titled *Life*, it will have at its core the 28 *Interviews with MM* conducted during his 2002 trip around the world. To these will be added more interviews, those in *Pattaya* and elsewhere, along with more studies of Asian, American and European locales. *Life*, befitting the sequence's tutelary divinity El (the Summerian, Babylonian, Phoenician and Hebrew god, who corresponds to the Greek Cronos and the Roman Saturn), has a fateful as well as lively aspect. In MM's imaginative plan it will retrospectively "predict" other books of the epic as it initiates a retrograde reading of the **Sentence**:

Life Excelling This In Divine Or Renewed Happening Possibly All Regarding Exists Her  
Engendering Realization Magic Every Second Each Revolution A Need U Light O Sleep.

A graduate of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Saigon and the Université de Québec, La Toan Vinh, whose portrait of MM serves as the frontispiece for the present volume, is internationally known as a painter, as a performance artist and as a practitioner of mail art. His work has been exhibited in North and South America, in Eastern and Western Europe, in Northeast Asia and Australia. Mr. Vinh makes his home in Montreal.

Equally international is Suwan Methapisit, whose work is part of permanent collections in Japan, the USA, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania and France as

well as in his native Thailand. Professor Suwan has exhibited more widely still. In response to *Or*, the middle book of APHRODITE, a study of the modern Buddhist Kingdom, he has given us a computer graphic called “Genome Kid” that maps onto its surface Bill Gates’ “Rules for Succeeding in the Digital Age” along with other images from our current cyberspace. Its Thai visage reflects the depth and compassion of this mature culture, all the while unpredictably fusing East and West into a penetrating, modern Buddhist icon.

About as profound and engaging an artist as the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has produced, Denis Mizzi owes much to the estrangement but also to the radical revision of our way of conceiving reality that we find in the best avant garde work of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among his favorite modern artists he lists Heartfield, Malevich and Duchamps; Rodchenko, Vertov and Tatlin; Man Ray, Maholy-Nagy and Max Ernst. Like them in their seriousness, he is even more sophisticated in technique. The medium in which he normally works, monochromatic photomontage, he calls “a subversion of consciousness, the elevation of the subconscious,” an ideal found in the precursors of Surrealism, Lautréamont, Jarry and Roussel. Highly literate, Mizzi works on the interface between text and image, usually in the form of the “artist’s book,” sometimes in collaboration with writers, often inspired by figures such as Beckett, Pavese, Pessoa and Mandelstam. “Photomontage,” he remarks, “develops from the socio-political nihilism of Dada and the more positive work of the Suprematists and the Constructivists.” A chronicler, critic and parodist of these revolutionary artists, he knows whereof he speaks, but I nonetheless find him too modest when it comes to his own art, which—in a statement perhaps overly influenced by his own critics—he calls “dark” and “negative.” “I thrive,” he says of his work, “in a predominantly nocturnal world of shadows.” True, but in the world of art and fashion, sometimes dark is bright, the negative, uplifting. Modestly Mizzi does not speak of his own enormous powers of invention, though he does say of photomontage (“a simple medium of photos, scissors, glue stick and board”) that it “produces very complex images” and represents for him “a hybrid of mechanical, chemical and cyber art.” His complexity of mood and vision, his inexhaustible originality is epitomized in the illustrations for *Every Second*. Section III includes his tribute to MM’s Vergil, originally tilted “Ubu Roi?”; Section V, his abstract rendition of Odysseus.

It does not require a paragraph to summarize Daniel Dandoy’s life, which he had recounted for MM in the first of the interviews (included in Section VI) for *Pattaya*, whose front and back covers are graced with two of his photographs. The image here reproduced shows the gregarious Soi Post Office, the flags of Norway and Finland displayed before its Norwegian and Finnish establishments. The composition is organized along the axes of a cross, a figure that appears many times in Dandoy’s photograph of this international city.

According to a learned informant, Japanese was originally written in Chinese characters, some of which were used to represent the meaning of Japanese words that retained their native pronunciation, some to represent the sound of other Japanese words by their phonetic similarity. These latter characters were gradually simplified and standardized into two sets called *hiragana* and *katakana*. Traditionally *katakana* has been used for western words, *hiragana* for grammatical particles and to aid in pronouncing Japanese words printed in *kanji*, or Chinese characters. In another homage to MM, Keiichi Nakamura, of Tokyo, the well-known visual poet, has created three elegant works that assimilate Madison Morrison's name to Japanese tradition. In his first panel its syllables are reproduced in *katakana* as a spiral, a form associated with the unknown or mysterious, from whose center its letters emanate. In his second panel the circle opens to become an inverted omega, whose two halves, above and below, are named in *hiragana*, a syllabary customarily used for foreign phenomena but never to pronounce names. In his third panel the greatest clarity is achieved, as three-dimensional *katakana* highlight "Madison Morrison" against a background that plays wittily upon his initials. Nakamura's balancing act recalls the skill of other Japanese visual poets, such as Ryosuke Cohen and Eiichi Matsubishi, in their imaginative fusion of eastern and western aesthetics, or the tact of Tanabu Hiroshi and Tanabe Shin, in their assimilation of western vocabularies to native tradition. Nakamura, who began by writing traditional Japanese verse at the age of sixteen and at eighteen to work as a visual artist, now devotes himself entirely to this new mixed esthetic, when he is not pursuing his career as a businessman.

El Hassan Errezzaki lives in a Moroccan village a hundred kilometers across the desert from the nearest Internet café. Despite his apparent isolation, his accomplishment is international. His first book of poems, in English, appeared in London, and he has also produced literary work in French. Like Keiichi Nakamura, however, he has used his native language to stylize the name of Madison Morrison, producing for this occasion an elegant and elaborate piece of Arabic calligraphy.

After India, China has proven to be one of MM's greatest inspirations. Accordingly, it is helpful that a Chinese scholar has seen fit to take up one of Morrison's books in relation to another Asian tradition. A student of the western epic, Han Wei-min is the first Taiwanese to have treated four major European writers in a single thesis, his study of the imperial theme in Vergil, Dante, Tasso and Milton. To **Sentence of the Gods** he brings, then, an understanding of how later writers can transform a tradition in unpredictable ways. As Whitman had incorporated Indian wisdom into his *Leaves of Grass*, so Pound had fashioned out of Confucian wisdom the "moral backbone" of his *Cantos*. *Engendering* corrects for Pound's omission of Lao-zi, much as *Realization*

had corrected for Whitman's neglect of Buddhist doctrine. In his Introduction to this, the critical edition of *Engendering*, Mr. Han—so another learned informant tells me—is impressed with the westerner's confidence in applying classical Chinese thought to contemporary life (a confidence that he finds lacking among the Chinese themselves) and remarks upon the application of these ancient doctrines to Norman, Oklahoma and its University, where Professor Morrison spent two decades teaching western literature, film, Asian studies and creative writing.

His pedagogical activity was to continue for another dozen years in Asia, where MM lectured widely at Indian, Chinese and Thai universities, offered graduate seminars in the Greek, Roman and Indian epic, the European renaissance and modern western expression (as well as lectures for undergraduates in English and American literature). Here he concluded a 40-year career that had begun with four years of teaching at Harvard and included two more in Germany, France and Greece. The seven chapters of *Particular and Universal: Essays in Asian, European and American Literature* (1999) represent the critical harvest of Professor Morrison's international experience as a teacher. In *The Berkeley Review of Books*, H.D. Moe describes this collection of essays as "a powerful argument for numinous humanism & the enlightenment canon." Morrison's humane, enlightened views, which he has made public in more than ten dozen lectures worldwide, have latterly gained for his thought more formal recognition, in India, where his essay on Whitman and Hindu culture has been published, in Singapore, where the country's Foreign Ministry and its National University invited him to lecture on Chinese literature, in Germany and Korea, where translations of *Particular and Universal* are being prepared for publication and in Italy, where The University of Rome recently organized a conference to discuss his view of Dante.

Moreover, five of the seven collected essays have been translated by Alessio Rosoldi and reissued under the title *Particolare e universale: riflessioni sulla letteratura in Asia, Africa, Europa e America* (2004). The book's publisher, Flavio Ermini, Director of Anterem Edizioni, has added an Introduction, here included in its Italian original. A well-known poet and critic, recently retired as editor at a major publishing house, Ermini in 1976 co-founded the journal *Anterem* to promulgate his own literary program and theoretical views. Among the latter is the notion that poetry can transform the world. As the title of his journal indicates, the poetic word, like the Biblical Logos, precedes the object world. Poetry for Ermini, far from being merely a realm of sensation, is a determinative mode of thought. As such, it serves not only to *organize* reality but also to *establish* a reality hitherto unknown. Ideally, he says, it concerns "the truth of man," his "position in the world" and "the nature of the world itself." In an interview Ermini has placed his own poetry in the line of such other ambitious European poets as "Arnaut, Scève, Hölderlin, Mallarmé and Ungaretti," thereby

indicating not only the historical range and cultural diversity of his interests but also the absolute seriousness of his own verse, which to date has been collected in nine volumes. In his poetry as well as his poetics Ermini posits a prelogical state in which the creating word and the thing created are coterminous. Both word and thing are (to translate his terms) both “universal and individual.” If this sounds coolly rational, in his editorship of *Anterem* Ermini has entertained—as he says a journal of poetry should—work that is “arbitrary, impenetrable, dissonant and disconcerting.” Learned in philosophy, psychology, literature and theory (he serves on the editorial board of other journals devoted to these disciplines), Ermini nonetheless insists at every turn upon the primacy of poetry, upon the ability of poetic thought to provide its own “primitive value,” its own “revelation.” In addition to the Veronese journal, under his direction *Anterem Edizioni* has published a long list of distinguished books in verse and prose. Its latest series includes Morrison’s collection of essays, edited by the publisher himself, whose Introduction is titled “L’Anima e il cielo stellato” (“The Soul and the Starry Heaven”). Despite the postmodernist bent of the *Anterem* project, Ermini here praises Professor Morrison’s refusal to be bound by theory, his respect for works of literature but also his ability to transform the received text through a passionate, even “tumultuous,” process of engagement with it into something more readily accessible to the reader, who, he says, in these essays becomes “the interpreter of the text.” Ermini notes a lack of fixity in Morrison’s “asystematic,” “multicultural” criticism, which, he remarks, “follows no Aristotelian rules” and depends upon “no specific cultural point of view, either national or international,” but instead explores a “diversity of experience” without “precognizant typology or classification.” *Particolare e universale*, so the editor argues, achieves its effect not through logical but “poetic consensus”—a phrase of MM’s that Ermini has modestly chosen to highlight.

Young Jay Lee is one of those rare Asians who not only reads, writes and speaks English fluently but also has mastered a second European language. His French has proven adequate to the task of organizing an international art exhibition in Paris, at which he presented the work of Korean artists. Moreover, he reads Spanish and German and is teaching himself to read Chinese. Principally a translator, Mr. Lee has worked for over two decades as a critic of the arts and as an organizer of cultural events. In 1982 he served on the Seoul Olympic Committee, where he “was responsible for International Communication.” From 1988 to 1993, on the basis of a B.A. in painting and an M.A. in aesthetics, he taught fine arts at a school on his native Jeju-do, where latterly at its Culture and Art Foundation he has developed a “long-term plan” for the island’s cultural development. In 1995 he served on the Steering Committee for the Gwangju Biennale. “My early dream,” says Lee, “was to be a professor,” but his varied experience, his broad, self-acquired learning, “in

symbolic logic, the philosophy of science, and aesthetics,” along with his worldwide travel, his practical experience as a critic of literature, music and architecture, have helped to define him instead as a roving cultural ambassador, one ideally suited to translating Korean values into terms comprehensible to westerners, and vice versa. To this end, he reports, he has turned his attention to the study of politics, economics and law. As the person directly responsible for MM’s recent lecture to the internationalized community of Jeju-do, Mr. Lee asked our professor to address a distinguished audience on the topic of “Particular and Universal in Homer and the Western Epic,” in connection with which Lee translated the relevant pages from “Allegory and the Western Epic” under the title, “Is Homer Allegorical?” “To translate literary work,” Lee has said, “requires more than linguistic prowess, logic and erudition. It requires sensibility as well.” Elsewhere he has observed, “Any translation of this sort must involve a translation from culture to culture, not just word to word.” “Translation is a medium whereby we *approach* other cultures,” he adds, “an imperfect step in the direction of mutual understanding.”

Alessio Rosoldi, who at the age of 20 figured in the Roman pages of *Divine*, a decade later has also emerged as a highly qualified literary translator with two dozen books to his credit, many on oriental topics. The University of Rome had provided him his background in English and American literature, and Rome’s Institute for African and Oriental Studies later allowed him to specialize in Asian culture. But if his erudition has been studiously acquired (and he has worked in several fields already), his natural gifts were conferred on him by the god of eloquence. According to MM, as an undergraduate “he was singing popular Cantonese songs that he had picked up by ear”; latterly he has become, says Morrison again, “a fan of English films and rap lyrics, both of which he convincingly imitates.” It is this feeling for the contemporary context that keeps his work alive and gives it edge. Like Professor Stevenson, Mr. Rosoldi regards translation as an hermetic art, the translator “as a kind of Hermes, a messenger between the bestowers of knowledge and the reading public, who without him would simply not have access to the culture of the world.” “What,” he asks rhetorically, “turns the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Dao De Jing*, the *Mahabharata*, *War and Peace* into world-renowned masterpieces? The translator,” he responds, dramatically. Rosoldi regards his professional activity as a natural continuation of his own education, of his “passion for study and research,” of his “willingness to keep cultivating and improving” himself. “Every new book represents an adventure for me,” its “unknown elements a challenge,” an incitement “to improve and refine my own language,” “to rediscover” in the art of translation “the beautiful *Italico idioma*.” Thoroughly Italian—despite his ease with Asian, American and European culture generally, when asked which among the world’s famous dishes he prefers, he responds, “Spaghetti aglio, olio e peperoncino,” in reference to a Roman staple that he



has doubtless enjoyed al fresco at a small table in the narrow byways of the Trastevere. We have included here as the second contribution to a collection of translations the entire text of “Allegory and the Western Epic,” a key to MM’s view of the epic as well as allegory and a demonstration of Alessio Rosoldi’s mastery of his own necessary art.

If Morrison’s work is allegorical, governed as in Tasso’s theory of the epic by the goal of representing “The Life of Man,” **Sentence of the Gods** attains to this by encompassing human experience. It is important, then, that we understand what MM means by “experience,” and for this purpose there is no better place to turn than to his essay, “Experience in Late Modern British Literature,” which we here include in Alexandra Sattler’s translation. Though a student of philosophy—quite literally a “student,” enrolled at the University of Leiden—Ms. Sattler is concerned that her own erudition in the philosophy of Experience, as expounded by Locke, Hume and Kant, is not yet complete. Her philosophical attention has more recently been preoccupied, she tells me, with other philosophers, though she does *admire* Kant (if more “for his sense of humor and his *Menschenkenntnis*” than for his theory of *Erfahrung*). She is, however, a devotee of another philosopher of experience, Henry David Thoreau, whose work, when she first encountered it at the age of seventeen, she has said in an email, made a great impression upon her. Sattler’s theory of translation “has been influenced by a notion of Vico’s in his *Dizionario Mentale Comune*,” one that she finds “most charming and intriguing,” to wit, “his conception of a mental word and a mental language in which the Particulars do not fall victim to the Universal” but rather through a process of accumulation “from one language to another together represent the universality of the thing.” Like Flavio Ermini, and like MM himself, we might say that Sattler is a universalist devoted to the particulars of experience. Accordingly we now move from Rosoldi’s Italian to Sattler’s German so as better to grasp the universality of Morrison’s own ideas. In the essay that Sattler has expertly translated his topic embraces various concepts of experience and applies them all to the subject of nineteenth-century English literature, a field in which Sattler herself is surprisingly well read, and whose view of which, she tells me, has been influenced by “the essays of Virginia Woolf,” her “favorite of which is *The Waves*, a great book,” she adds. Asked whether she imagines a future for herself as philosopher or as novelist, Ms. Sattler says that she would rather “go the Thoreau-way and become a gardener and make nice garden parties.”

Many readers of this collection will feel comfortable with Italian and German translations, fewer with Korean or with Tamil, to whose excellence Professor Swaminathan has drawn my attention. Scholars of world literature know the latter as the medium for another great version (not a *translation*) of the Ramayana, composed about the eleventh century A.D. by Kamban. Tamilians, who have spoken the language continuously for more than 2000 years, consider

Kamban's version superior to Valmiki's Sanskrit original. With 60,000,000 Tamil speakers in Tamil Nadu alone (not counting those in Sri Lanka and elsewhere), we should know more about the language, and to this end Mr. Swaminathan has provided me with the Preface to an 1862 English-Tamil dictionary compiled by one M. Winslow. Independently I had understood that contemporary linguists are puzzled regarding the origins of the Dravidian languages of India and fascinated by their unexplained similarities to such diverse languages as old Avestan and modern Japanese. "Unlike several of the Vernaculars of India," writes Winslow, "it is not, as some have supposed, a daughter of the Sanskrit. Its Alphabet differs not only in character, but also in sound; and is more limited. Its Grammar, though conformed to the Sanskrit . . . is still very different. It has no article, no relative pronoun, no dual number, no optative mood. It differs in its numbers, in many nouns, verbs and adverbs, and technically in grammar. In the declension of its nouns, the conjugation of its verbs, and the arrangement of its sentences, it more resembles Latin." According to the Reverend William Taylor, whom Winslow quotes, Tamil "is one of the most copious, refined and polished languages spoken by man." Simon Casie Chitty, in the Preface to his *Tamil Plutarch*, says, "Few nations on earth can boast of so many poets as the Tamils." In his own voice Winslow concludes: "It is not perhaps extravagant to say that, in its poetic form, the Tamil is more polished and exact than the Latin or the Greek." Elsewhere he remarks that "in its fullness and power it more resembles English and German than any other living language. In one respect," he adds, "the Tamil has an advantage over the other vernaculars of India: it has a great amount of Christian literature. As the number of Native Christians speaking Tamil is two or three times greater than of those speaking any other vernacular, so the books prepared in that language are proportionately more numerous." It is highly appropriate, then, that MM's imitation of the Bible be translated into this distinguished tongue and by such a distinguished translator.

Valérie Gauthier is that rare poetic translator who is both a poet and a professional student of translation theory (she is a specialist in Internet communication technology and has written second language acquisition software). Having studied in the USA, her English sounds like a native speaker's. All this background has proven especially relevant to her translation of "Ten Poems from *Second*," texts intermingled with Morrison's prose imitation of Homer's *Odyssey* in the second part of the first volume of the HERMES sequence. Here excerpted and rendered in half a dozen languages, in Gauthier's version they reveal affinities with Morrison's early, French-influenced work (the verse of SOL, the found poems of *A*, the prose of *Revolution* and *Each*). What better way to emphasize his Gallicism than to return MM's Ten Poems to France in French translation, thereby completing an *Odyssey* of their own? The apparent lucidity of the English text, which had imitated the manner of good critical

prose, required of the translator a special skill. Gauthier's poems strike this non-native reader as appropriately light, precise and deliberately late, as befits their belatedly neoclassical originals, here included in German, Chinese, Korean Italian and Greek as well.

Alexandra Sattler protests too much when, asked to enumerate her qualifications as a classicist, she claims that she has "nearly none at all." For not only has she read many Greek and Latin texts in translation, under further questioning she admits that her classical Latin has arrived "at a point where I can translate Cicero," that she has also done "Horace and a bit of medieval Latin" and that she is capable of "a reasonably good translation of Plato." Presently her facility with English originals and her German matter most, but of importance too is her ability to grasp the great Greek original upon which all else, MM implies, is modeled. In a sense, then, the knowledge of other redactions and renditions, of other imitations and appropriations, is part of one's preparation. The more languages one knows, the better one is prepared for such an intertextual task. Ms. Sattler, in moving recently from Germany to Holland, learned enough Dutch in six months to enroll in a new curriculum. To translate the Ten Poems is above all to translate a nearly universal Homeric tradition into one's own particular cultural and linguistic situation but in so doing also to glance sideways at other traditions of assimilation intended to enlarge the world that Homer had universalized, one which his followers both particularized and further universalized. As for rival German translators, Ms. Sattler says that she admires Paul Celan; among those who have rendered the classics, the more exceptional: "Büchner, for instance, in his little speech by Cato, or Hölderlin, in his work with Sophocles and Empedocles." This may explain her choice of an idiosyncratic manner to render successfully these unusual poems. Her study of Greek and Latin date not from her years at the university but from her days in school, when the unavailability of formal instruction had cast her in the role of autodidact. Later she also sought the help of renowned tutors. Her reading of MM's poems, implicit in her translation, is far from academic; perhaps the brief glimpse into her education that she has afforded helps us to understand why.

Cai Yuan-huang, the renowned professor of foreign literature at National Taiwan University, among Chinese scholars is perhaps the best equipped to bridge East and West, as he has done in *his* translations of the "Ten Poems from *Second*," which my informant tells me are engagingly colloquial yet also erudite. (The bi-lingual English-Chinese edition of *Selected Poems* had included his learned notes to the text.) Professor Cai, an authority on both Chinese and European literature, who received his Ph.D. in the USA, has spent his career translating the western tradition to generations of Taiwanese students. Here, I am told, he wittily renders Morrison's title so as to represent the author as a Chinese scholar.

Korean scholarship, by contrast, has not yet come to terms with Homer. Young Jay Lee, himself a Christian, notes that “though Korea has 10,000,000 readers of the Bible, we have only a handful of scholars familiar with the classics of Greece and Rome.” A new convert to Homer (under MM’s influence), he himself is no stranger to the Greeks, whom he first encountered, he tells me, during his aesthetic studies, “in Plato’s Republic, Aristotle’s Poetics and Longinus’ On the Sublime.” A quick read, Mr. Lee has now finished the Iliad and the Odyssey; a practiced hand at synthetic criticism, he already regards Homer as “a window onto western culture at large.” “For Asians who wish to understand the fundamental myths of the western world,” he says, “these epics should be valued as second only to the Bible.” Having visited Tokyo and Hong Kong, Mr. Lee can speak at least for Korea, Japan and China. Having studied at first hand Renaissance painting and architecture in Rome, Florence and Venice, Neoclassicism in Amsterdam and London and Romanticism in Germany, Lee is currently at work on a book in English that will generalize, with examples from East as well as West, about Neoclassicism, Romanticism and Surrealism. The third of these subjects he is familiar with from his experience as a gallery director in Seoul. His translations of the first three of the poems from *Second*, which a Korean informant has characterized as “simple but emotional” (a phrase reminiscent of Aristotle’s characterization of the Iliad), show that Young Jay Lee is a capable student of western psychology, of Greek mythology and of the allegorical reading of the greatest western poet.

Ironically, of all those who have translated Morrison’s poems about the Homeric *nachlaß* the best qualified to do so has treated only one of them. Professor of English at the University of Rome, Lina Unali mastered the classics as a student through a severe regimen of Greek and Latin. Likewise her knowledge of the whole European tradition is exhaustive. A teller of stories herself, Professoressa Unali’s mellifluous economy sets a poetic standard. Like many scholars in *MM: The Sentence Commuted*, she is an adept of yet more exotic cultures, having served as visiting professor in India, in China, in Africa and, on several occasions, in the USA.

Nadia Trata was born in Athens, studied French literature at its university and went on to do her graduate work in International Studies at the University of Reading. Her fluent French, English and Spanish have served her well in the field of International Relations with Hellenic Telecommunications. Apart from her business career, she maintains an interest in the arts and is devoted to her family. (She is married to Ilias Grammatikopoulos, a naval architect and marine engineer; they have two sons, Christos and Romanos.) In her skillful rendition of the first of the Ten Poems, flat in tone like its original, Homer and Odysseus return to Greece, this time twenty years after MM had first cast their stories into English verse.

Born, 1956, in Vila Real, Portugal, Alberto Augusto Miranda, a former secondary school “professor,” has pursued an unusual career as writer, literary critic and translator. A poet himself, he has translated the work of many figures in the Spanish-speaking world, of French writers such as Antonin Artaud and Paul Éluard and of American poets such as Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath and MM, whose “On a Reef in Tenerife” describes a new world order, in which a white girl washes up on a beach, falls asleep and dreams that a black man has sauntered by: “‘Those are very pretty rings you have on,’ says Sandy. ‘Would you like one?’ says the black man.” Slipping off his largest golden ring, he gives it to her with a smile. “‘Thanks,’ says Sandy. ‘But who are you?’ ‘I’m the son of God. Welcome to New Brazil.’ ‘This’ll take some getting used to,’ says Sandy.” Miranda, as director of the literary department of a Lisbon publishing house, is devoted, he says, to “what does not yet exist,” to “asking for what is impossible but real.” Joaquim Matos has characterized this widely published, quixotically energetic literatus as, “Em suma, um vagabundo da cultura, sem pouso certo, mas sempre com a luminosidade solar escorrer da sua cabeleira.”

José Roberto Sechi has offered not a translation but a response to a translation. In his “Numa Praia em Santos” the Brazilian poet responds to the Portuguese translator’s “Num Recife em Tenerife,” Alberto Miranda’s version of MM’s “On a Reef in Tenerife.” Whereas the English original offers a political fantasy, the Brazilian response returns us to reality. The Son of God has become a seaside peddler of trinkets and soft drinks. Sechi defines himself as “visual artist, poet, mail artist, performer and cultural activist.” Founder and editor of the mail art magazine “Think Here,” which provides the contributor with a name-tag-sized space in which to register his thoughts, José Roberto is also the proprietor of Sechiisland, an international retreat from which he curates “an alternative library specializing in art and experimental publications.” An erotic poet and collagist, his beautiful work restores with Brazilian flair an element so often lacking in our high modern culture. Among his collections of poems are *Como Derreter uma Mulher: Guia de Sexo Oral* (2003), *Poemas Epidérmicos* (2004) and (with his friend, the lively Brazilian artist-poet Letícia Tonon), *Sol Azul* (2004). Mr. Sechi lives and works in Rio Clara.

Miguel Muñoz is a native of Santiago, where he resides to this day. If Chile lacks what the Brazilians call “*bagunca*” or the Argentines “*quilombo*,” a passionately messy, turbulent and chaotic quality, her success in the world at large is a tribute to her embrace of modern international standards of economic development and foreign commerce. A student of foreign languages from childhood, Muñoz, who early on was attracted to European and Russian poetry, has published much of his literary work abroad, notably in Italy and Spain. Thus as an international poet and a global traveler himself, he is well qualified to translate Morrison’s *Escapade ’74-’75*, with its broad canvas and multiple perspectives. Muñoz has remarked upon the poem’s mix of the ridiculous, the

ironic, the sentimental and the real. “The real is that which leaves a trace,” he says, quoting the critic H. Blumenberg. “The compulsion of the tourists who constitute the poem’s cast may be understood as a trace, as a vestige of chimeras pursuing other traces, the traces of the dead. *Escapade* represents a double world of phantoms, for it involves, on the one hand, the superfluous extravagance of touristic journey, on the other, the critique of this extravagance.”) In addition to his interest in cinema and modern art Muñoz has worked in more contemporary modes such as video and has employed various materials to realize poetical texts, among them a work called *Códice Pacific 231*. Against this background of artistic interests he, like Nadia Trata, maintains a successful professional career. As a geophysicist, he has explored “large regions of the Andes” and “various volcanic zones of Italy,” initiating “new lines of research” in his own country. His perspective, then, is both scientific and literary, his view of the Hispanic world, both new and old.

Chen Rui-shan, Professor Morrison’s student at the University of Oklahoma (where the native Taiwanese received his M.A.), has imitated his teacher on a number of occasions, by teaching Chinese culture in the USA (at the University of Texas, where he received his Ph.D.), by teaching western literature in Taiwan (where he is now a professor of English), and by rendering his teacher’s work into Chinese. In addition to many books of his own verse Chen has published translations of Eastern European poets. In 1985 he wrote the Afterward for the English-Chinese edition of MM’s *Selected Poems*, a collection later reprinted in India. For our collection he has contributed a Chinese translation of Morrison’s verse redaction of an essay by the Oklahoma poet Charles Campbell, whose prose MM had converted into a miniature *ars poetica*. Upon his return from Oklahoma, Chen published “Poetry’s Cobblestones Cut Diamond-faceted by Charles Campbell” in the Chinese-speaking world, whose theories of poetry James J.Y. Liu, Morrison’s mentor in Chinese literature (MM attended the great scholar’s 1980 NEH Seminar at Stanford), conclusively summarized in English. It was Professor Liu who recommended that Morrison’s essay, “Poetry and Philosophy in the Lao-zi,” be published in China. A decade later it served as an inspiration for Chen Rui-shan’s Ph.D. dissertation in Austin. Today Mr. Chen is one of Taiwan’s leading poets.

In *her* role of interpreter of East to West and West to East, Manjushree S. Kumar has two avatars, professor of literature and television commentator. On many projects for Doordarshan, the national Indian television channel, she has served as scriptwriter, narrator and presenter of cultural programs. Terry Kennedy, the well-known early feminist poet, has had a complementary career, one that took her from Vermont to California, from the USA to India, where she has lived for more than a decade, as writer, editor and organizer of cultural events. It is she who conducted the first of this volume’s two interviews with

MM, in a project imaginatively conceived, whereby Terry Kennedy in India kept track by email of the traveler during his nine-month trip around the world in 1999-2000. Ms. Kennedy's voice is thus appropriately worldly: popular, forceful and provocative, as she elicits from the subject of her interview answers that he might not otherwise have provided to sometimes difficult questions. Manjushree S. Kumar is no less universal in her concerns. Like Kennedy, she also addresses, if somewhat more systematically, the question of the cultural matrices of Morrison's work. As a consequence we are able to include two delightfully complementary interviews, one conducted over the Internet, the other before the television camera. Both reflect the role played by contemporary media (photography, cinema, television, computer technology) in **Sentence of the Gods**. The first interview, we should bear in mind, was intended to be read, the second, to be heard and seen.

It is a privilege to include in this collection several more general pieces, in Korean, Russian, Catalan and Burmese, along with a piece from Africa in English that opens Section VII and a piece about China in German that concludes it. The languages in which they are written, in particular the languages in which their titles are composed, are themselves of some interest. "The Path to a Cultural Democracy in Africa" uses a now nearly universal language to help define a continental (not to say universal) concern, focusing upon a key term, "democracy," not available, the author tells us, in Swahili and other native African languages. The title of our Korean contribution is composed of a pair of Chinese characters known to all Northeast Asians. In modern fashion the title of our Russian contribution mingles English with Russian. The all-Catalan title of the next contribution asserts the importance of a minority language. The title of our first Burmese contribution is in Burmese, of the second, in English. "Das Reich der Mitte" reflects a long-standing German fascination with China. All these miscellaneous pieces comment obliquely on MM's work by expressing concerns compatible with his. In their diversity they reflect the global reach of our anthology and the position of the individual in relation to a newly emerging world. Each in some way is concerned with political or social pressure brought to bear upon the individual, and each contributor concludes by reconfirming the restorative power of the human spirit, whether through art, religious faith or the individual's mere determination in the face of collective power.

Sub-equatorial Africa is the only locale represented that MM himself has not visited. His visit to Belgium in 2002 led to an introduction to another African writer who in turn introduced him to Raïs Neza Boneza, a native Congolese living in Norway. In 2004 Morrison toured Korea, where he collected material for a pamphlet; in Gyeongju he encountered Young Joungh Kwon, a retired business executive from Busan; later the same year he returned to Jeju-do to lecture. In the summer of 1960, during the midst of the Cold War, he toured

the former Soviet Union as a member of the Yale Russian Chorus, singing Russian folk songs and engaging in open-air debate with crowds of Soviet citizens in Odessa, Lvov, Kiev, Kharkov, Moscow and Leningrad; in 2000 he returned to St. Petersburg to collaborate by reading with Talonov Net, a Japanese-style “harsh noise” band. Dmitri Babenko, born in 1970, a distributor of his own visual poetry, artist’s books and mail art, lives and works in Krasnodar. In the year 2000 MM also toured Spain; among the cities that he visited was Barcelona, the center of Catalonia. Moisès Stankowich, son of a Catalan mother and a Castilian father (whose own grandfather was Yugoslavian) is a poet and journalist who writes for a local newspaper called *La Voç de Castelldefels*. In 2004 Morrison toured Myanmar; in Bagan he met Shwe Ni Than, a student at the nearby University of Meiktila, in Yangon, the lawyer, Aye Khin Maung. In 1992 he toured the southernmost provinces of mainland China, describing his experience in *Excelling*, the last book of APHRODITE and the first of EL. In 2002 he visited in his native Euskirchen another visitor to China, the German artist R.A. Westphal, who shared with MM his own experience and his collection of staged photographs by artists from The People’s Republic of China.

In the world at large there exists a culture of democracy, but not all countries are democratic, nor is democracy the only solution to the problem of the body politic. In China, the world’s most populous nation, democracy has not been achieved, and China, it is sometimes argued, has more important priorities. In “The Path to a Cultural Democracy in Africa” Raïs Neza Boneza argues that Africans must achieve democracy in their own terms and according to their own cultural priorities. Having suffered through war and political turmoil, but having also experienced the rich diversity of life in his native Congo, in Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, having mastered seven African tongues as well as “the European imperialistic languages,” Mr. Boneza is wise beyond his years and is well equipped, both as an inside and latterly an outside observer (from his current vantage point in Norway, where he works “as a peace researcher and practitioner”) to offer us perspective on how alien values such as democracy must be “converted” into native values, not merely “diverted” to and forced upon unwilling subjects of political and cultural colonization. As important as the principles of equality, freedom and human rights may be, Boneza reminds us that “dignity,” “peace,” “unity,” “harmony,” “justice” and “tolerance” are also essential democratic values, and that these concepts, as expressed in native African languages such as Swahili, predate “the European imposition of democracy on the people of Africa.” The interested reader may pursue these matters further in Raïs Neza Boneza’s *Peace by Africans’ Peaceful Means* (Oslo: Kolofon, 2004).

Young Joung Kwon, in his essay titled “Women,” employs the form of the traditional exemplum but fills it with personal experience, recalling his own



encounters with women, single or married, with or without children, each of whom poses a threat to the life principle, either by accident or through the obsessive cleanliness of her husband. One couple is unable to have children, because they wash themselves at the well after sex, another because the husband spends too much time dusting off his clothes. How does one rise above such puritanical behavior while maintaining proper hygiene? Young Joung Kwon admits that he too has been influenced by a desire for cleanliness. “Even now, many times a day, I wash my hands and clean the door handles of my house,” he tells us. “But I”—unlike the childless husbands—“have two sons and three daughters.” (In a biographical note he proudly reports that his elder son works in Seoul, that his second son is a New York manager for Daewoo, that his eldest daughter is a painter in Michigan, that his second daughter lives in Paris and that his youngest daughter is a doctoral student at the University of Hawaii.) “Ask *me*,” he says, “if you want to keep your surroundings clean and at the same time have children (ha ha ha). There is no need to use a condom. I know. I can teach you (ha ha ha).” Mr. Kwon’s essay concludes with the following lines from a famous old Korean poem: “Like the mountains and waters / I have achieved peace and serenity. / I shall be sedate and free / Living now in pleasant serenity.”

By “Contemporary Boredom” Dmitri Babenko means the dispiritedness of the current Russian art scene. Like Young Joung Kwon he is seeking escape from the death principle, embraced, he finds, by his artistic contemporaries, who have given up any pretense to the role of prophet or revolutionary. (“The problems of Russian art,” he says, “are the problems generated by transition from a totalitarian system to a postindustrial system and by the consequent moral and intellectual disorientation.”) Freed to pursue their art without political restraint, his colleagues have turned away from a social consciousness toward a “collective unconsciousness,” implicit in “the material culture of our civilization.” “Art and artistic activity today,” Babenko observes, “is based on the mass media,” hence the emphasis upon performance art and video. More broadly speaking, whether consciously or not, the contemporary artist is responding to “the global terrorism threat” and “the new propaganda of PR.” Following in the footsteps of the great revolutionary artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian artists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have renounced the tradition of the Great Refusal and are left with neither revolution nor conformity to guide them. Being liberated from a repressive political culture is as dangerous to the arts, Babenko implies, as the political stultification of art that preceded liberation. So where does this leave Dmitri himself? In a biographical note he says, “I am following the principles of ‘automatic writing,’ like the Surrealists, and the principles of the ‘school of analytical art’ (Pavel Filonov).” Babenko’s concern is with time and its “destructive consequences,” which he wishes to engage as a theme in his own art. “Time,” he tells us, is my own beloved art and the main

theme of my work.” At the moment he is producing a series of drawings under the collective title “Entropy.” They are concerned, he says, with “eschatology” and with his own understanding of “the Christian dispensation.”

Moisès Stankowich, as a Catalan activist, is even more politicized than Dmitri Babenko, though politics are only one facet of his multifaceted career. Whereas Young Joung Kwon expresses his concern lest the “foreigner” misunderstand his stories, Stankowich, a “foreigner” in his own country, has pursued the experience of the “foreign” in, of all places, Korea, where he served for four years as a teacher of Spanish and Catalan (at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies). From Korea he visited Japan, where he married “a Japanese girl.” Though they later were divorced, he is grateful for his Asian experience, which, he tells the reader, “made me rich, intellectually speaking: Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, Shamanism, Christianity.” He regards himself fundamentally as a poet but has nonetheless taken one degree in Semitic Studies at the University of Barcelona and another in Madrid. He reports that he has visited Jerusalem and Weimar. By nature optimistic, “as a poet,” he says, he believes that “a better world is always possible.” His careful account of “La llengua catalana a la Unió Europea: Un dret indiscutible,” which the reader of Spanish, Italian or French may scan with passing comprehension, helps us to grasp at first hand the political and social constraints of life in Catalonia and how they impinge upon the freedom and identity of the individual Catalan citizen. There follow two pieces from Burma.

Shwe Ni Than, a college student who lives in Bagan, has retold for us in Burmese a story concerning the previous life of The Enlightened One. Called “Thuwanna Thar Ma,” it recounts the experience of a loveless couple who selflessly retreat to the forest in the face of an arranged marriage. Here the Bodhisattva is miraculously born to the wife, but as Indra has predicted a snake blinds man and wife. Accordingly their child must care for his parents. One day the king, out hunting in the forest, shoots at a deer and by accident kills the Bodhisattva. When he apologizes to the parents, they make two wishes: that their son may return to life and that their own sight may be restored. Both wishes are fulfilled. Ms. Shwe Ni has pursued her education through local secondary school and now, like many Burmese who cannot afford residence at a university, is enrolled by correspondence while she works in an international guest house. For her principal areas of study she has chosen ancient Pali, the Myanmar language and English. The first of these enables her to deepen her Buddhist studies, the last, to improve her work with tourists in Bagan, where visitors arrive from around the world to view its magnificent Buddhist temples. Later she hopes to acquire computer skills, so that she may accommodate the needs of these international guests and better communicate the greatness of traditional Burmese culture. For despite her modern education, Shwe Ni Than

is deeply traditional: in her view of the family, in her attitude toward her own society and in her religious faith.

Aye Khin Maung, an attorney in Yangon, has written for us an article “that provides,” he says, “the facts and figures about Myanmar.” He has included general information about the country’s physical features, her political geography and borders; about Burma’s climate, flora and fauna; about her demographics (so complicated by her ethnic diversity); about her various religions; about her requirements for citizenship and the regulations regarding immigration. Born in the southern city of Shwe Bo, Mr. Aye took a degree at the University of Yangon, where he studied psychology, philosophy and western history, before going on to study law. He regards Burmese historiography as a relatively recent affair, since “before the 11<sup>th</sup> century,” he reminds us, “the country was very weak and had no recorded history. It was only with the ascent of King Anawrahta and the establishment of the Bagan dynasty,” he continues, “that Burma became a great Southeast Asian empire. Bagan was ruled by Chinese invaders in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and the second Burmese dynasty was established in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.” It is Mr. Aye’s view that “Burmese rule has traditionally been very harsh on the people. One of the factors,” he opines, “that enabled the British to extend their empire to Burma was the arrogance and ignorance of the king.” Mr. Aye’s view of Myanmar’s history and its contemporary reality, like Ms. Shwe Ni’s emphasis upon the Buddha, complement MM’s treatment of the country’s actuality, history and religion in *Myanmar 2004*, one in a series of pieces about Asia that includes *Bangalore Esightings* (2003), *Pattaya* (2003), *Korea 2004*, *Macau 2004*, *Jeju-do* (2004), *A Visit to Vietnam* (2005) and *MM’s Seoul* (2005).

Rüdiger Axel Westphal teaches art to elementary school students at the Marienschule in Euskirchen, not far from Cologne. His studio in town, a refurbished automotive garage, includes an ample exhibition space for local artists. Westphal’s own artistic activity, however, is, and always has been, conspicuously international. Born in 1944, the following year he fled Germany for North Africa, subsequently lived in England and finally returned to his native country for his Abitur. After military service he began to travel even more widely. Among many other countries he has visited Russia, India, Turkey and China. The last of these provides the subject for the fascinating piece that he has given us. Himself a photographer (he also works in other media and has exhibited in Russia, Korea and Canada as well as throughout Europe), Westphal here, in addition to several photographs of his own and a recent portrait of himself, has included ten photographs from The Middle Kingdom. Since something has been lost in our translation from the original color prints to black-and-white, I will describe various details. In the first photo, behind the man tied to a cross *in imitatio Christi* fly red Communist flags before a traditional Chinese building; beneath him, within the courtyard surrounding the crucified

Christ, a seated worshiper is eating a red apple, a red Coca-Cola bottle before him. In the second photo a man painted gold strides past an official building, a wand, extended from his hand, dangling paper money on a string. The third photo requires no explanation. In the fourth a man sits in a cauldron of boiling soy sauce. In the fifth “Pioneers” surround a transvestite posing as the Virgin Mary, a blond female Christ child in her arms. The sixth photo shows a room full of stone tablets bearing traditional calligraphic inscriptions not legible from this perspective. The seventh shows an artist standing before a display of his own graffiti-like work, which brings together, or juxtaposes, western and eastern cultural archetypes. The eighth shows a staged assassination (perhaps in imitation of the famous photo of an actual Vietcong assassination), in which the assassin’s pistol is aligned beneath a sign for McDonald’s; behind the assassin is a military figure, to the right of the girl a boy in a camouflage cap; as underneath the arm of the assassin a red-shirted photographer photographs the photographer. The ninth shows a woman who has overdosed on drugs. The tenth represents the marriage of a man to a donkey attired in a pink and white bridal dress. At the end of his piece, a biographical note explains, Westphal himself is represented, following his coronation at “Goriz on Lake Annency in France,” as “King of Nonsense.”

The assimilation of West to East, like the assimilation of East to West, can be a difficult process, as the history of the late Qing Dynasty, as China’s subsequent Marxist revolution, as the turmoil that it suffered during The Great Cultural Revolution, along with its current growing pains as the apostle of continental Asian capitalism have demonstrated. If what lies behind, in China’s 5000 years of history, is to some degree certain, what lies ahead is much less so. Collectively and individually the Chinese may face the uncertainties of cultural and political identity that have plagued sub-Saharan Africans, Koreans, Russians, Catalonians and Burmese. The dramatic tableaux of these Chinese photographers (the medium itself significantly western in origin) are meant to be disturbing, yet to some degree this artistic expression has been officially sanctioned or at least tolerated. What even more difficult issues might be raised by a yet more unofficial, prohibited expression? MM’s *Excelling*, the penultimate book of the **Sentence**, which treats his 1992 visit to China, like Mr. Westphal’s essay and like the ambiguous photographs of the Chinese themselves, beneath its “realistic” surface hints at cultural and ideological conflict or at best paradox. Morrison’s oeuvre includes six books that concern China, past, present and future: three that do so explicitly (*Engendering* and *Revolution* as well as *Excelling*), three that do so implicitly (the trilogy *All Regarding Exists*, which is based upon the subtexts of traditional landscape painting). It will be interesting to see how the Chinese come to terms with the image of themselves held up to them by their own contemporary artists and by **Sentence of the Gods**.