

Treasures Revealed – 1

In *Death and the Dervish*, the Sheikh challenges Hassan: ‘Nothing exists until it is told.’ Hassan’s response? ‘Nothing can be told until it exists’ (Selimovic 1996, p.108). But what is it that we mean by existence? We assume it is that which we can apprehend with our five senses. In the world of forms, what we see, hear, touch, taste or smell is what is ‘real’, what ‘exists’. Yet if we move beyond the material, and open ourselves to further dimensions of being – by seeing with our inner eye, hearing with our inner ear – we find that, even though non-physical, the Otherworld teems with life. It is a rhizome comprising ‘all manner of becomings’ (D&G 2004, p.9), a totality of *existence* that can be contemplated thus: ‘(Physical) life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. The part that appears above ground lasts only a single summer. ... Yet I have never lost a sense of something that lives and endures beneath the eternal flux. What we see is blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains’ (Jung 1995, p.18).

Just as Hassan counters the Sheikh’s assertion, I too hold that nothing can be told until it *exists*. Yet in the telling, it exists anew, in a different form to its original conception. As such, I understand the Sheikh’s perspective as well. Laleima’s treasure exists, ever, in the Otherworld but I was gifted the opportunity to tell it new, fresh, in the material world – to transform its enduring invisible life deep in the rhizome into a blossom’s single summer, all with the intent to contribute to the conversation on peace. In this essay, I outline the various mechanisms by which I accessed the treasure, my task to translate same into a form which could be shared in the here and now. The result was a work of prose fiction, The Taste of Translation. Here, in an extended meditation covering four essays, the intent is to share several examples from the artefact’s making in the hope that my direct experience of communing with inner sources may help others become conversant with how they ‘think’, work and offer us their perennial treasures.



Lines of flight

Life in the rhizome is far from rational. The point of departure for any journey into its rambunctious territories is to shed the need for the linear and the logical – to accept order within disorder, form within chaos, and surrender to, rather than limit, its perpetual becoming. It is a place of systemic relationships: ‘A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. ... There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines *explode* into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another’ (D&G 2004, p.10). Nevertheless it remains a challenge for our linear-thinking brains to apprehend such interconnections in the process of flight.

Map-making helps. Documenting each firefly spark of information received in the inky blackness of the rhizome, no matter how disparate, random or irrelevant it may appear on first reckoning, eventually empowers the system to reveal itself. My experience suggests that in an *explosion* of clarity, as D&G so lucidly enthuse, lines of flight intersect and link up just as electrical synapses conduct the impulses in our own central nervous system. It is embodied knowing that affords me entry to an intertidal zone where I receive such firefly sparks of information from inner guides met in dialogic co-performance. Their incredible patience as I struggle to harvest knowledge uplifted from explosive lines of flight has been as much a revelation as the treasures shared themselves. In the Otherworld, time is *illinear* – what we think of as past, present and future does not exist in the same contextual setting as the material world’s chronology. In a space where everything exists on a single

plane of consistency (such is the basic ecology of the rhizome), the irony that it still takes *time* to apprehend and read the patterns revealed by *non-time* is not lost on me. In the process I have learnt that time is a space, and its shape is round: no end or beginning to a circle bound by the dance, simply a muddle of middles infused with the spirit of D&G's rhizomatic milieu.

My understanding of how the rhizome of the Otherworld works arose from the practice of several methods used to bring Laleima's treasure back to the land of time. In this essay, I elaborate on these techniques – character immersion, dreamwork and AI – supported as they were by synchronistic events to spur the different lines of flight toward synaptic intersections. In a process of translation, my task to give form to that which fluidly evolves in the space of co-performance, I learnt to discern the rhizome's myriad dimensions unfolding in ever-unpredictable ways and extending the field of reference in a plethora of different directions and times. I *lived* this evolution, yet for a reader to make sense of the different lines of flight navigated in the artefact's making, it may help if I preface the discussion with a synopsis of the narrative.

The Taste of Translation is a triptych – a three-panel piece which forms a single work. I conceived of this form, as opposed to the linearity of a trilogy, in order to convey the sense of holistic knowing which comes from unfolding or opening up all three panels to the light. In this respect, I was drawn to the original meaning of the word, a Byzantine description for a hinged three-panel icon or altarpiece. With an icon of this type, meditation on the one via the three draws the viewer into an embodied circle of spiritual knowing (Webb 1999). From a contemporary perspective, the triptychal works of Mark Rothko convey a similar intent. We may aesthetically engage with each panel and its distinct idea, yet the work's meaning remains incomplete and potentially misleading unless embraced as a whole (Wick 2001). Such is the case with the artefact where Panel One is devoted to the life of Laleima, a medieval Moor; Panel Three is the preserve of Kisha, a Bosnian Serb exiled from her home; and Panel Two, the slim sister in between, is the home of an icon of the holy mother of God (in Greek, *Kiria*, our Lady). A medley of voices against diverse backdrops offer their witness, but the three panels as a single artefact is the story of one – Laleima – and her message of love beyond borders raised by time, faith traditions, cultures, language, geo-politics.

Various forms of writerly expression were required to honour my Otherworld sources – the way they offered information as much as how the becoming landscape of the narrative, played out in different sections of the rhizome, unfolded. I felt ethically bound to be faithful to a spirit of translation throughout, to undertake my work 'lovingly' (as Benjamin 2007a, p.78, counsels) even though this impacted on language, style, voice, tone and texture, both within and between panels. It included, for example, my decision to dispense with quotation marks for dialogue in order to not disrupt the flow of voice so that the rhizome of the triptych stays 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions' (D&G 2004, p.13). What this means is that *The Taste of Translation* is no easy read for a generation brought up on genre literature. Each panel was elaborated differently, depending on my dialogic co-performance. Like Jung's *The Red Book*, there are different stylistic registers that 'rub' against one another. Yet to honour the source, it stands as given.

My task was that of a translator, my request to a reader to heed EM Forster's dictum to 'sit down alone and struggle with the writer' (Forster 2005, p.31). A rhizomatic reading of the triptych would reveal that any one of a myriad lines of flight *not* pursued in the text could lead to further insights within its holistic becoming landscape. While acknowledging there is no end to such infinite knowing, as a contained space embracing a plethora of gaps the triptych offers expression to my knowledge of treasures sourced from the vast reservoir of the Otherworld as it stood *at that moment in time*. In the process, I discovered how some circles closed but others flew off on alternate and far distant lines of flight, lines I could not pursue without the results appearing artificial.

Throughout, embodied knowing guided my co-performance, production and translation, enabling me to tell the story which needed to be told and, in so doing, returning me to Selimovic's Sheikh but with the continuation of Hassan's counsel (Selimovic 1996, p.108):

S: Nothing exists until it is told.

H: Nothing can be told until it exists. The only question is whether anything should be told.

In my case, the imperative to tell extended to what has been told but no further. The remainder stays existent in the dark, hidden in the rhizome, gaps in the conscious map until they *ever* should be told. Laleima arrived as an image accompanied by words formed. Writing her story into existence gave her density, solidity, texture, an afterlife made manifest via the translation of a symbolic portal – the *Kiria* icon – between spiritual and material dimensions. The intent of her longer-than embodiment in a sacred object, written as an act of love in Panel Two of the triptych, was directly engaged in Panel Three as part of Kisha’s story. Yet it was only one among many stories in which a *Kiria* icon written by the iconographer’s hand could have channelled her loving essence.

In his Norton Lecture on *Quickness*, Italo Calvino shares a legend about the emperor Charlemagne whereby a symbolic object (in this case, a magic ring) holds a chain of events together in the narrative. He suggests that the object is the ‘real protagonist of the story ... an outward and visible sign that reveals the connection between people or between events’ (Calvino 2009, p.32). Around it, he continues, there ‘forms a kind of force field that is in fact the territory of the story itself’ (ibid.). He cites Norse sagas, chivalric romances and Renaissance poetry as examples: ‘The moment an object appears in a narrative, it is charged with a special force and becomes like the pole of a magnetic field, a knot in the network of invisible relationships. The symbolism of an object may be more or less explicit, but it is always there’ (Calvino 2009, p.33).

Just as WG Sebald conducts a rhizomatic traverse of a patch of English countryside and the resultant *The Rings of Saturn* (1998) ‘display plurality in unity ... mov(ing) in a coordinated orbit around a single regulative centre ... a gravitational anchor that directs and choreographs the ... rings’ (Gray 2009, p.28), *The Taste of Translation*’s rhizomatic traverse of European time-space across more than six centuries is anchored by the icon’s embodiment of love incarnate. The icon could be described as a fulcrum, the pivotal point on which the entire triptych is hinged, yet the gravitational pull of Saturn’s heavenly body on its multiplicity of rings offers a contextual equivalent, as does D&G’s reading of their own *A Thousand Plateaus* as ‘a set of split rings ... each ring, or each plateau, (with) its own climate, its own tone or timbre’ (Deleuze 1995, p.25). Each panel of the triptych likewise forms a circle of convergence, a plateau of the rhizome with its own landscape and climate, which the icon choreographs into a temporal-spatial framework through her whirling dervish dance, my writing the bridge to traverse the chaos of the fecund swamp. Thus have I returned to the territory of Deleuzian thought: ‘To write is to struggle and resist; to write is to become; to write is to draw a map’ (Deleuze 1988a, p.44). Similarly, Kisha discovers through the writings of Basho: ‘The moon and the sun are eternal travellers. Even the years wander on. ... Every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home’ (Hamill 1999, p.ix).



In the following essays which form part of this extended meditation on revealing

Otherworld treasures, I shall describe my experience of bringing the inner out in each of the three triptych panels – *Laleima’s Story*, *Kisha’s Story* and *Cantigas de Santa Maria* respectively. I hope you will stay with me.