

CLAVICEPS PURPUREA

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POLLEN

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**THE DANCE
OF THE HERONS**

by Meris Angioletti

CLAVICEPS PURPUREA

ERGOT OF RYE. Ergot of rye or *Secale cornutum* is produced by a common fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*) that grows like a parasite on the plant, transforming the seeds into rounded bulges that spread from the membrane to where normal grains are located, with varying shades of colour ranging from brown to purple.

Hofmann's Experiment

[1] “Last Friday, 16 April 1943, in the late afternoon, I had to interrupt my laboratory work to go home. I laid down and collapsed into a state of intoxication that was by no means unpleasant, marked by a particularly vivid imagination. In a condition similar to that of a dream, I managed to catch a glimpse of an uninterrupted flow of fantastic characters of extraordinary forms that revealed intense kaleidoscopic plays of colour. The development of these striking symptoms caused me to suspect an external toxin; lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate. This of course led me to another question: how did I manage to ingest the compound? Because of the well-known toxicity of ergot-based substances, I always followed a rigorous work routine.”

[2] Alles ist Samenkorn.
All is seed.

Eleusinian Mysteries

[3] A multidisciplinary analysis associates the initiation ceremonies of ancient Greece, that had remained a secret for almost 4,000 years, with the intoxication caused by the *Claviceps* fungus and with the state of inebriation that led to the rapture experienced during the Mysteries. The Eleusinian Mysteries, which were celebrated every year during the autumn season, were closely linked to the ceremonies and festivities in honour of Dionysus. These were established by Demeter, goddess of fertility, as thanksgiving for the freeing of her daughter Persephone, who had been captured by Hades, god of the underworld. Among the gifts of thanks offered to the two divinities by the highest minister of Eleusis, featured an ear of wheat. The solemn moment of the celebrations was the nocturnal initiation ceremony, of which we know little or nothing, because it was forbidden for participants to divulge what they had seen and learned in the most secret and sacred hall of the temple, under pain of death. The surviving fragments seem to all converge towards the description of experiences of illumination and revelation, of a deeper vision of creation and of life cycles. This vision could be associated with the ingestion of a drink, *kykeon*, that was offered at the ceremonies and whose ingredients were barley extract and mint, and according to cross-cutting research undertaken by Albert Hofmann on the works of Károly Kerényi, scholar in Greek mythology, it may have contained a preparation extracted from *Secale cornutum*.

The Unspeakable Girl

[4] Concerning the cognitive value of the mysterious ceremonies of Eleusis, in his book *The Unspeakable Girl – The Myth and Mystery of Kore*, Giorgio Agamben (1942) speaks of unspeakableness, of a form of knowledge that goes beyond language: “Knowledge acquired in Eleusis could therefore be expressed through names, but not through statements; the “unspeakable girl” (Persephone) could be named, but not said. And in the name something happened that was like touching and seeing.”

POLLEN

FRAGMENTS. Etymologically, the word 'fragment' refers to the violence of disintegration, dispersion, and loss. The fragment therefore works as a metonym, from a part to the whole.

Vision I

[1] "I knew, in reality, that I couldn't hold on to, or let alone depict more than just a fraction of those images. I had to struggle with myself to give them a description. I felt that I would have to immerse myself even deeper, within this strange and fascinating world, to accept that this incredible abundance would have an effect on me. At the beginning, there was something basic about the hallucinations: rays, bundles of rays, rain, whirlpools of rings. Then visions that were much more structured appeared: arches, rows of arches, a sea of heads, desert landscapes, balconies, leaping flames, starry skies. In the midst of all these complex forms the basic features that were at first predominant continued to appear."

[2] Alle Künste und Wissenschaften beruhn auf partiellen Harmonien.

(Poeten, Wahnsinnige, Heilige, Propheten.)

Art and science live in partial harmony.

(poets, madmen, saints, prophets)

Mineralogy

[3] In *Pollen* published in the first volume of the literary magazine *Athenaeum* (May 1798), the German poet Novalis (1772-1801) underlines the calling of man to the 'formation of the earth', i.e. his joint participation in natural events and particularly in the 'chaotic and organised' structure of stones and geological sediments. The study of geology and natural sciences in Novalis' writings take on a philosophical and poetic nature, that finds in the fragment/system dialectic the expression of a 'natural poetry' of possible or existing links between the elements as a starting point for immobile and almost initiatory exploration, of

a teaching stemming from mysterious and millennial sedimentation.

[4] Wo ist der Urkeim, der Typus der ganzen Natur zu finden? Die Natur der Natur? Where can we look for primitive germination, the prototype of nature? The nature of nature?

Ecuador

[5] Invited by his Ecuadorian friend and poet Alfredo Gangotena, Henri Michaux (1899–1984) embarked at the port of Amsterdam for a one-year journey to Guayaquil, in Ecuador, on 27 December 1927. He returned to Le Havre on 15 January 1929 and in the same year published *Ecuador*, a fragmented and problematic journal, a metaphor for an existential experience, broken and ontologically fragile.

Semblable à la nature [...]
Semblable à la pensée
Et semblable aussi en quelque manière
au globe de la terre,
[...] Semblable à l'erreur,
[...] A la moelle en même temps
qu'au mensonge,
Semblable à moi enfin,
Et plus encore à ce qui n'est pas moi.

Similar to nature [...]
Similar to thought
And also similar somehow to the
terrestrial globe,
[...] Similar to error,
[...] To the core as to the falsehood,
Similar to me, in the end,
And even more to what I am not.

[6] Nichts ist dem Geist erreichbar als das Unendliche
Nothing is easier for the spirit to access than infinity.

THE DANCE OF THE HERONS

PSYCHODELIC. It was the psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (1917-2004) who coined the term ‘psychedelic’ (‘manifesting the mind’) to differentiate between exploratory drugs and narcotics. In a correspondence dating from March 1956 with the writer Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), the latter at first misread the word and interpreted it as ‘psychodetics’: ‘sharing of the mind’ and then transcribed it as ‘psychodelic’, considering the term ‘psychedelic’ as etymologically incorrect. He added further variations to the word, to underline the aspect of revelation linked to the use of this type of drug, describing it as psychophanic, from the Greek verb phaneroein ‘to make visible or manifest’ or phanerothyme, from the Greek Thymos, an early term referring to the spirit (Animus in Latin).

Vision II

[1] “Then some herons appeared on the honey-golden coloured lacunaria. They were swaying lightly like flowers. There were two of them. One was looking towards me, observing me. I glanced back, carefully. I saw knots in the wood. But our gaze remained fixed. The herons continued their expressive dance. Silent. I understood them... I proved to my mentor that I was aware of the shadow-nature of these, but I wanted to send them a sign of understanding. In spite of everything. Understanding sufficed. Understanding with the herons, whose long beaks were touching at the tips, understanding with the calm and involved voice of the mentor, that shrouded itself around me whenever she came close.”

[2] Alles Sichtbare haftet am Unsichtbaren – das Hörbare am Unhörbaren – das Fühlbare am Unfühlbaren. Vielleicht das Denkbare am Undenkbaren.

All that is visible stems from the invisible – the audible from the inaudible – the sensitive from the non-sensitive. Perhaps the thinkable from the unthinkable.

Precious stones

[3] In a conference on “Visionary Experience” (1961) held during an international psychology meeting, Aldous Huxley raised the question “Why are precious stones precious?” to speak of the manner of passing to the intelligible world, of the characteristics of this experience and its value from a religious, folkloric and artistic viewpoint. He affirmed that all precious stones are in some way “crystallized fire” and their function is that of a channel, capable of revealing an invisible world to the conscience, in which some succeed in entering through psychological or chemical induction whereas other accede freely.

[4] Der Akt des sich selbst Überspringens ist überall der höchste – der Ursprung – die Genesis des Lebens. So ist die Flamme nichts als ein solcher Akt. The action of transcending oneself is the supreme act among all – the original act – the act of life. The flame is none other than this act.
DNA

[4] Attempts to transcribe visions are the expression not only of the intuition of a shifting and non-Euclidean space, but also of a voyage in the deep morphology of the world. The anthropologist Jeremy Narby, for example, has explained the formal relationship between the serpentine visions induced by the ritual use of ayahuasca and the double helix structure of DNA. In this case, it would concern emerging from the deep memory of space and the world, that remains in the somatic memory of DNA.

“I began my research by considering the enigma of talking plants. Very soon I had to give in to the idea that hallucinations could be a source of verifiable information. Thus, from the outset, I knew that my route would enter into contradiction with some basic principles of Western thought. I accumulated other contradictions of this kind to reach the theory that posits the possibility of establishing communication between the networks of living beings with DNA and the human conscience, and that this communication eludes rational vision, but it may be perceived only by a blurry conscience”.

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