

July 2019

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Egypt—Trisha English

Land of The Pharaohs and Illusions of the Mind

I am not sure any more why I wanted to return to Egypt. My first experience had been unsatisfactory. It was around 1977 and like millions before me, I thought how wonderful it would be to see the pyramids, the sphinx, and soak up the atmosphere of thousands of years of history.

I was naive to say the least. When a guide tried to extract extra payments from my husband, I had flatly refused. He accused me of “insulting him” and promptly confiscated our passports. With the help of a CIA operative, (who neither confirmed nor denied his status) we were able to get the passports returned and left the country soon after. We left no love behind.

But over the years, I followed the fortunes of the Egyptians. I felt the country had defeated me. There were mysteries to be uncovered, enigmas and riddles to be solved. So, at the end of my life, more-or-less, I thought I would give it one more try.

Now there is a famous poem called The Psychological Hour by Ezra Pound which begins:

*I had over-prepared the event –
that much was ominous.
With middle-aging care
I had laid out just the right books,
I almost turned down the right pages.*

That little verse sums up the totality of my mistakes. Prior to going to Egypt I read everything I could get my hands on about this great and ancient land. I listened to the 48 lectures by Bob Brier – an inspirational lecturer – which traced the history of Egypt from the builder of the first pyramid, to the last. I watched countless presentations on YouTube, most of them first rate. Finally, I was ready to discover Egypt for myself and yes, I had certainly over-prepared the event.

In reality there are two Egypts. One rich and prosperous, corrupt and devious, and the other poor and destitute where the people are oppressed and silent. Wherever you stand on the continuum it is a dangerous country.

I had read the Koran and knew exactly the configuration of Islam which today rules the country. I had carefully read the advice provided by the Australian Government whose overall recommendation was “consider your need to travel”. It is the second highest warning to travellers. I asked myself quite seriously if I was prepared to risk it. The answer turned out to be “yes”, after all, we are all going to die eventually.

Enquiries of travel agents close to where I lived proved unsatisfactory. The young people barely knew of a place called Egypt, let alone how to get there and back in one piece. Finally, I went through an Egyptian travel agent, and did all the organizing through my computer. This turned out to be my second mistake. My third mistake was to return to Cairo after the Nile cruise and my journey to Abu Simbel. I should have left immediately the cruise was over, rather than wasting ten days confined to something resembling house arrest. Ladies young and old are not encouraged to walk around without an escort.

A few hours before leaving Australia I was still trying to finalize arrangements for someone to meet me in Cairo. Once you pay your money, nobody is particularly interested in you. So, I improvised and it almost turned out to be a good result. I say almost, because I was on a steep learning curve right from the opening gambit. After a night in Giza, the most ancient of the cities, I boarded a 15 day Nile Cruise. I almost missed it because no one turned up to take me from the hotel to the ship. If the cruise had not spent the first night in dock, it would have left without me.

The ship comprised 40 passengers. Six Danes, one Australian and 33 Brits. The Danes had their own guide, the Brits were divided into one large group and a smaller group of four. Since no one claimed me, I ended up joining the group of four. I didn't eat with them, because I had my own table set up for the ghostly group of Egyptians who never materialized. At first I felt a little odd, but the crew were so generous and attentive, that I soon grew accustomed to my isolation. It gave me a wonderful perspective of the entire ship's crew. It also meant that I was assigned a wonderful Egyptian guide, who was passionate about Egypt, and not afraid to answer questions no matter how inappropriate they may have seemed. The group of four were very special people indeed. A GP and his wife who was a theatre sister; the widow of an Egyptologist and a Counsellor trained in palliative care. Better still, we had our own bus.

Frequently, we were required to rise at 5 am and be on the road by 6 am. This had the effect of missing the tourist rush and also the harsh afternoon sun. It also allowed our guide to take us to many excavation sites that were outside the normal tourist routes. Needless to say, I was in my element.

But good things do not last forever. While we visited all the main sites between Cairo, Luxor and Aswan and almost all of the villages in between, there were sights that left me silent and wondering.

Village life was poor beyond imagining. I was familiar with Indian poverty and deprivation, but somehow the Indians seemed alive and vital. They would be laughing, singing, arguing, and above all interacting with each other. In Egypt there was a lingering silence. Men lounged about, occasionally talking with each other. Women were solitary figures, always surrounded by children who were also strangely alone. They waved to us when we went through the villages as if we

were “gods”, people from some other dimension. It was a while before I could make sense of it.

There were no cafes, no meeting places, no children with mobile phones, there was no music and no uncovered heads among the women. The “homes” were little more than hovels, and remarkably they had slits rather than windows, and the worship of death seemed to be everywhere. The guides assured us that every village had schools and hospitals. I never saw evidence of this assertion. On the contrary, the only “schools” I saw were the Madrassas attached to the Mosques. Friday night prayers were obviously the social highlight of the week.

When the cruise reached Luxor, the group of four disbanded and headed back to the U.K. Of the larger group, only some returned. With the collapse of the small group I was again reassigned. This time the guide was perfunctory and easily irritated. The honeymoon was over, and all that was positive became negative.

My discussion partners, were the original guide who remained on board to pick up a new group of tourists at Aswan and escort them back to Cairo, and the Security Chief who coordinated the police contingent that watched over us the entire time we were on the Nile. It was a considerable force. Two cars in the front armed with AK 47 Soviet rifles and two in the rear.

In the months prior to my visit there had been several attacks on foreign tourists. Each time an attack occurred, the Egyptian economy went into free fall. This explained the extreme security precautions which prevailed throughout Egypt during my visit.

It didn't help either, that during my visit the Palestinians decided to attack Israel. Discord and violence in one part of the Middle East, soon spreads to another. Thus, whenever I think of Egypt, I think of death and decay. The successive governments of Egypt since the end of World War II have not looked after the people, but for reasons beyond comprehension, they seem incapable of breathing life back into the population.

Egypt is dying, no matter what the propaganda claims. Yes, the Egyptian Government in partnership with the Japanese are building the largest Museum in the world. The project is already running 17 months behind. In the desert, on

the way to Abu Simbel, a great modern city lies deserted and unfinished. In town after town, village after village, along the Nile, people are living in hovels, while graveyards are full of well constructed “homes” or tombs.

Like the Pharaohs before them, modern Egypt seems to have embraced some vision of an afterlife that is more acceptable than life in the “here and now”. That is its choice, of course. But it is not mine, and I will not be returning.

Trisha English

Book of the Month—Margot Mann

Velda was the first to arrive, as usual. Sweeping into the small dining room, a long green and red scarf trailing, she let out a small scream at the sight of the laden table. “Di darling, how do you do it. And those purple berries – I always thought they were poisonous, but obviously not, ha ha. How did you get hold of all this wonderful, um, is it indigenous food – have you been out bush?” She sank into a chair and wound the scarf around her long neck.

Before she could reply Chloe shouted from the doorway, “Hellooo, where is everybody? Oh there you are Velda. Just look at all this food. Di you are amazing. Loved the book. Did you see the author on TV? Gorgeous. Articulate too.” She fanned herself with her hand and slid into a chair near the door.

“Hated it,” murmured Beth, following Chloe into the room and hooking her bag over a chair at the far end of the table. “I saw that TV programme. I thought the author was Australian but it turns out he’s American. Typical.”

At this point three or four women arrived together, jostling for space in the hall as they greeted each other.

“Didn’t you just love the bit where he didn’t realise he was eating a witchetty grub, until he’d bitten its head off,” Helen chortled, wedging her wheel chair close to Chloe’s chair. “Aren’t you meant to eat them in one mouthful? But what would I know?” Pause. “Wow, look at this feast, trust you Di, is this the kind of food aboriginal people eat in the bush? Are there any witchetty grubs?” She laughed for a moment and then spent several seconds wrestling with her handbag.

“I couldn’t get any,” Di said, “I think they have to be eaten fresh off the tree. Of course he knew he was eating a witchetty grub,” she added, “because he had to impress Trish before she went back to the States. I thought we should have at least some indigenous food to acknowledge the Australian content of the book, even if I was written by an American. Who would like a cupcake made from my grandmother’s recipe, with her special icing, which was published in the famous CWA recipe book in 1951? Oh here’s Lola.”

“The traffic was shocking, sorry I’m late.” Lola flopped into a chair, selected a cupcake and took a bite before removing her jacket. “I’m afraid I didn’t finish the book but I did read the bit where, what was his name? Craig? ate the witchetty grub to impress his American girlfriend. What was her name again?” Nobody spoke.

“Why is an American writing about our outback anyway. My friend Lucy writes online books for Amazon and her editor made her delete the expression “as different as chalk and cheese” from one of her manuscripts because Americans wouldn’t get it.” Beth took a large bite from a cupcake and a lot of pink icing fell on the floor.

“It’s because the American market is so big,” Claire said soothingly.

“And,” Beth said loudly, “She wanted to call one of her novels “A Spanner in the Works” but the editor wouldn’t let her because Americans wouldn’t understand the reference. I think she had to call it “A Monkey Wrench in the Works” which isn’t the same at all. I couldn’t believe he made such a fuss about the stupid grub,” she went on, “and his name was Brent, by the way,” she said to Lola, “as if his girlfriend would be impressed by a dumb trick like that.” She turned quickly towards the other end of the table and knocked the remains of her cupcake onto the floor.

“I liked all the outback stuff – you know, the beautiful colours and the broodingness of the landscape...so old, with so many secrets...” Claire’s voice trailed away and she reddened slightly as she sank back in her chair. “Yes that was wonderful,” Jo quickly agreed, and smiled at Claire. She looked around the table and said, “I thought the mystery about Trish having to return to the States

was a bit weak. Why couldn't her brother visit and sort things out with her. After all, didn't he stand to inherit half of the property?"

"Well it was obvious that the brother – what was his name again? – was a bad egg. It said so in the blurb on the back cover," said Lola, stretching her long legs under the table.

Di carried a pot of tea and several mugs on a tray from the kitchen and placed it on the table. "He reminded me of my brother-in-law," she said. "Always trying to get people to join him in his hare-brained schemes. He's American too," she added, helping herself to a large slice of madeira cake. "At least he had the wit to pretend he was helping his sister. My poor sister doesn't know which way to turn. They're coming to Sydney next week – we've got tickets to the Opera. Has anyone seen it?"

"Lucky thing." Chloe poured herself a cup of tea from the big pot. "It's had wonderful reviews. Has anyone seen the Albert Namatjira exhibition at the Art Gallery? I love his landscapes." No one spoke for a moment and then Velda said "I've found a wonderful new physio, but you have to book weeks ahead and she can't fit me in before we go to Europe."

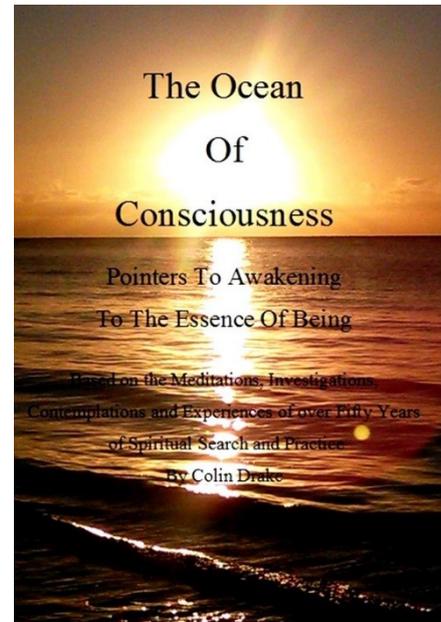
After some general conversation about difficulties with health professionals, Di said, "Well it looks as though we pretty much agree about this book. Interesting characters and a good-looking author, eh Chlo," she smiled at Chloe. "I also liked the way the landscape became one of the characters and lent a certain ambiguity to the story. It needs a skilled writer to do that effectively - and I don't think we have to worry too much about Trish – she seemed well able to look after herself."

There were nods of agreement. Di added, " I'll let you know what book we're reading for next month – there are two that have caught my eye. Now, please have some pavlova – or my grandmother's American Mother's apple pie."

Margot Mann

New Book—Colin Drake

Overview by the author—The main aim of this book is to act as a stand-alone guide to Awakening; which is synonymous with Enlightenment when maintained. The title comes from a photo I took of the sunrise over the ocean which a friend suggested I use for the cover. This book is composed of articles, resulting from my further investigations (and contemplations) into the nature of Reality. The thrust of the book is that beneath the surface appearance of thoughts (including all mental activity) and sensations there is a deeper level of being, which is the perceiver of these. The former are a flow of fleeting objects whereas the latter, which is the Awareness of these, is a constant conscious subjective presence. This is the only constant that has been (with) you since you were born and that which has witnessed your entire life. So this is what you actually are rather than the ever changing body/mind in which these thoughts and sensations have occurred.



The introduction, prologue, appendices one and two, and first three chapters discuss ways of investigating this moment of experience which reveals the underlying substratum in which these experiences occur and by which they are ‘seen’ that is Pure Awareness. They should be read, and considered, slowly and thoughtfully whilst the practices they describe should be undertaken assiduously until their effect is apparent. Investigation of experience, appendix 1, is the core practice and one which I carried out twice daily for ten years after my first ‘awakening’ until this was established. The other practices, and nuances, given are slightly different ways to come to the same recognition of, and identification with, Pure Awareness and I sincerely hope the reader will find them useful.

Chapters four, five and nineteen are discussions concerning the ‘nature’ of The Absolute, Consciousness (at rest as Pure Awareness and in motion as Cosmic Energy) whilst relating this to modern science and its understanding of time, space, energy and matter.

Chapters six through eighteen, and appendix three, are discussions, and practices, relating to identity, Consciousness, body/mind and living as (an expression and instrument of) Pure Awareness Itself.

Chapters twenty to twenty five stem from my early morning reading of classic mystical texts which were freely downloaded onto my phone and then read there. For this I have to thank Evelyn Underhill for her classic book 'Mysticism' which has myriad quotes from the writings of many mystical authors, all of which may be accessed by the bibliography, and many of which are available as free downloads. I recommend that you download this book by just Googling 'Mysticism Evelyn Underhill Free Download' and proceed from there. In these chapters I have compared, and given nondual commentary, on writings from Christian, Islamic (Sufi), Jewish (Kabbalah) and Buddhist Mysticism.

Finally there is a chapter on Sri Ramakrishna which was the course work for my honours year on the topic "The correlation between self-identity and world-view in the world's major religions". This, together with my thesis has been published as *Humanity – Our Place In The Universe*. He was chosen as an example of the themes discussed, especially relating to self-identity and because he followed many of these different paths, achieving the final goal of each one. He is the only person I am aware of who accomplished this and his views can be considered with reference to both Hindu paths considered, plus those of Christianity and Islam. It is also an introduction to Hinduism and its world-view, dealing with Advaita Vedanta (Nonduality) and Vaishnavism which is the worship of Vishnu or any of his incarnations. The form considered here is Gaudiya Vaishnavism which is concerned with the worship of Krishna.

Colin Drake

The Spread Mind–Alan Mann

Why Consciousness and the World Are One by Carlo Manzotti. – Greville Street Meeting Sunday 7 July

My presentation of Manzotti's Spread Mind hypothesis met with a mixed reception at our July meeting. The essence of his theory is the idea that conscious experience

is the physical object(s) one is conscious of. Everything that is real is physical, is located somewhere in space and in time and has an actual causal role, consciousness too. Consciousness is not some mysterious activity going on inside the brain but the very content of experience and thus coterminous with whatever the occasion might present. The theory runs into stormy waters when considering the nature of experiences that do not involve directly available objects of attention like illusions, dreams and misperceptions. Manzotti handles this with an extension of the spread mind to include a 'spread now'. All this can be followed up at the links and references supplied below.

I was intrigued to find that a number of our regular references offered similar if not exactly the same view on the nature of mind and I put up this list as a means of creating a degree of acceptance or openness to the Manzotti hypothesis:

Dogen Zenji - ... the ten thousand things advance and confirm the self equals enlightenment.

Douglas Harding – I die, to arise again in my objects.

David Bohm – The implicate order.

Jean Gebser – The aperspectival

Merleau Ponty – and the embodied nature of experience.

Thomas Nagel – The view from nowhere.

William James – and his World of Pure Experience

Walt Whitman - I am large, I contain multitudes.

Whitehead -the world is included in the occasion, the room is 'in you'.

Thomas Traherne - his essence as being with the being it doth note.

Krishnamurti – You are the world—The observer is the observed, etc.

Wallace Stevens - I am what is around me.

Dave Knowles challenged the 'strong' version of the theory and provided us with a modified version based on Merleau-Ponty's ideas, which he summarises thus:

As to Monsieur Maurice Merleau-Ponty I had 2 very different first reactions:

that M-P was concerned primarily with Perception as opposed to Consciousness and his words therefore may not be helpful unless we assume that both Perception & Consciousness arise from the same place within or without the human body

However M-P was emphatic that our Perception could not be fully understood unless we acknowledged that it arose by taking our body into the Lived World and was not a purely internal (to our mind) matter

Let me quote from M-P's entry in the Oxford Companion to Philosophy: French phenomenologist and co-founder with Sartre of existential philosophy.

M-P's constant target was the subject-object dualism of Cartesianism, which arguably still continued to dominate Sartre's existentialism.

Drawing on Husserl's notion of a pre-predictive intentionality and on Heidegger's exposition of human existence as being-in-the-world, M-P developed a description of the world as the field of experience in which I find myself. Which to me sounds very supportive of Riccardo!

The other point I made at the meeting was that I find it difficult to attribute the experience of colour to anything outside the mind, as outside is just electromagnetic radiation of different wavelengths.

Dave's observation that Merleau-Ponty lends some credence to the Manzotti approach added to my own attempt to counter incredulity with the list of respected authorities who point to the 'at large' nature of consciousness, usually expressed by statements such as 'consciousness is its content'.

My own response is that the issue is best addressed by the Kahnemann* distinction between the experiential self and the remembering (or explanatory) self, two aspects of our being of which only the first conforms to the Mazotti perspective. This can be read as a version of David Loy's duality of nonduality and duality.

The last word to the creator of the theory. This is the final paragraph in Riccardo Manzotti's book *The Spread Mind: Why Consciousness and the World Are One*

The deeper we look inside ourselves the more our experience reaches the world. No interior world looms inside the brain. When we look inside ourselves, we do not see an inner mental world, but the universe itself. We see the universe, because we are the universe we see.

References:

Out of My Head a novel by Tim Parks—Bestselling author Tim Parks embarks on an entertaining quest to understand the theories of consciousness.

<https://www.penguin.com.au/>

You Tube presentations by Manzotti.

The Spread Mind <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O60bs89Sdx8>

The Spread Mind and Special Relativity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnJqOCJdmcg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O60bs89Sdx8>

*Daniel Kahneman

https://www.ted.com/.../daniel_kahneman_the_riddle_of_experie...

Also a note in NOWletter 196 at

<https://www.capacity.org/now/NOWletter%20196.pdf>

Alan Mann

Ice-block Consciousness—Alan

In discussing the Harding experiments with a member of the Sydney nonduality group we adopted an ice-block analogy to represent the stuckness of individual identity. The ice-block thinks there is only the ice of individual, separative existence but suddenly comes across free flowing water (representing the wholeness of life, the ‘undivided’). Ice-block, overwhelmed by the wonder of water, wants a piece of the action. It is however, trapped by its desire to have the water rather than be the water. It remains blocked, in both senses of the word, until it melts.

I was rather pleased with this little parable and thought Josh and I were the creators of it but whilst working on this edition of the NOWletter I came across another version at the website below:

It reads as follows:

The greater the contraction and density of this sphere of Consciousness, the less wisdom is cognitively present. It doesn't know its true nature as

being pure Consciousness. The greater the dynamic self-centered focus on the sense of localized “me”-ness, the more “dense” the energetic contraction and its lack of intelligence.

Whether one is inhabiting any particular domain of samsaric experience (the Six Lokas), is determined by one’s degree of energetic self-fixation.

Yes, by clinging to the sense of personal identity, we get a sense of being a continuing self, but at the price of forfeiting the Natural Bliss of Being, which always, intrinsically attends our impersonal Natural State.

Our nature is always this Divine Consciousness, even in the contracted state of localized selfhood. This is like water appearing as an ice cube.

No matter how energetically contracted our inner consciousness seems to be, it is never other than contracted Consciousness, whose fundamental nature is “Knowing Awareness”.

By recognizing our own empty, “Knowing Awareness”, at any time, there is a relaxation and expansion, whether great or small, back into our own impersonal Natural State, like ice melting back into water.

<https://zenawakened.com/ocean-of-consciousness/>

Byron–Celia Novy

Celia Novy writes from Byron Bay: I am just reading a most interesting biography on Goethe—in German—by Karlheinz Schulz. I was surprised to hear that Goethe himself appreciates his scientific work on Nature more than his Poetry and Writing. In the Introduction to Steiner's *The Philosophy of Freedom*, it says - "As a student, Steiner's scientific ability was acknowledged when he was asked to edit Goethe's writing on Nature. In Goethe he recognized one who had been able to perceive the spiritual in Nature, even though he had not carried this as far as a direct perception of the spirit. Steiner was able to bring a new understanding to Goethe's scientific work through this insight into his perception of nature. since no existing philosophical theory could take this kind of vision into account, and since Goethe had never stated explicitly what his philosophy of life was, Steiner filled this need by publishing in 1886 , an introductory book called "The Theory of Knowledge in Goethe's World Conception" (later "Goethe the Scientist")

There are small books available by Henry Bortoft and Jeremy Naydler= (author came to lecture at the TS Sydney) = "Goethe on Science". I also have the Theory of Colour by Goethe where he gives a new vision on Newton's experiment . According to scientists, Goethe's theory on Light is an improvement on Newton's "quantitative method".

You may, of course, know that the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, is performing Goethe's Faust every now and then. (Oh , to be young again !)

I replied to Celia reminding her that she had brought Goethe to my attention many years ago in another context which resulted in me finding the following Goethe quotation which I think is relevant to what we have been discussing in recent issues:

“There is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory... The ultimate goal would be to grasp that everything in the realm of fact is already theory... Let us not seek for something beyond the phenomena – they themselves are the theory” (Goethe, 1988, p.307,

I discovered later that the word theory in this context is best interpreted as 'vision'.

Following our inclusion of poetic examples in recent issues Celia writes to tell me that the streets in Byron Bay are named after poets:

It all started with the mistake that Byron Bay could be named after Byron the Poet, but it was actually named after Byron the Captain who gave realized that this point, where the lighthouse now stands, was a good signal for the ships, not to collide with rocks hidden in the waters. He was, it seems, actually the grandfather of Byron the Poet.

The Hall we meet is called Marvell Hall in Marvell Street - and the meeting room is called after Lawson. Andrew Marvell, 17th Cent. was writing poetry not just in English, but also in Latin, filled with insight - including critical openness towards politicians. (He should be here now ! ha.ha.)

Celia Novy

Tree planting 'has mind-blowing potential' to tackle climate crisis.

Research shows a trillion trees could be planted to capture a huge amount of carbon dioxide

There is an interesting article in the latest Guardian Weekly which reports on new research which estimates that a world-wide tree planting programme could remove two thirds of all the emissions that have been pumped into the atmosphere by human activities. It would not intrude on land currently used for food production and it would take 50 to 100 years for the full beneficial result. The scheme would be enhanced by reduction in the present amount of land used for meat production and re-allocated to trees. Some scientists think that the estimate of the amount of carbon it is claimed will be sucked from the air is too high. Read all about it at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/04/planting-billions-trees-best-tackle-climate-crisis-scientists-canopy-emissions>

Greville Street Meeting Programme

There will not be an August meeting owing to travel clashes so our next meetings will be on the first Sundays of September and October.

Byron Sophia Philosophical Group

Marvell Hall, 37 Marvell Street, Byron Bay, Beyond Sports-Fields

Open Meetings: every Thursday from 1.30 pm to 3.30 pm

Celia – 02 6684 3623 / byronsophia@gmail.com