

## Women's Mystical Poetry:

### A Portal to Matte-Blanco's Theory Of Thinking, Feeling, and Being

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Today, I shall introduce you to some of the basic ideas of bi-logic -- Matte-Blanco's theory of thinking, feeling, and being -- within the context of women's mystical poetry across centuries, religions, and cultures. I believe the poetry of these women is illuminated by bi-logic, and I shall use their poetry to demonstrate some of its basic concepts.

Why women mystic poets? Mysticism and poetry, like dreams, bear a close relation to the unconscious. In general, mystics seek union with God, and they find God within and without the self. The work of women mystics, of course, reflects something of women's experience, both homely <sup>III</sup> and profound -- something captured by Roman Catholics when they refer to nuns as brides of Christ. As these women speak simply and directly about wisdom discovered within the self in the intimate presence of God, the "joy of the One" takes the particular shape of the relationship between the Lord and his beloved. Indeed, in some of this poetry -- including the Bible's "Song of Songs" and the work of Indian *bhakti* (devotional) poets -- we also "find the seeker and God portrayed as lover and Beloved in language that is openly erotic. Each of the two kinds of experience of union serves to illumine and enlarge our understanding of the other" (Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 22). If Marguerite Porete were writing to a human lover, she could not express greater passion:

Beloved, what do you want of me?

...

Take of me all you please --

If you want all of myself, I'll not say no.

Tell me, beloved, what you want of me –

I am Love, who am filled with the all:

What you want,

We want, beloved –

Tell us your desire nakedly. (tr. By Peter Dronke, 14th century. In

(In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 98)

Intense emotion and the juxtaposition between unity and the particularities of life are preoccupying themes of Ignacio Matte-Blanco, a Chilean psychoanalyst. About forty years ago he advanced a new theory called bi-logic, referring to the two logics of conscious and unconscious thinking. Over the course of about twenty years, he came to realize that what he was proposing went far beyond a theory of unconscious logic to a more general theory of human nature, as he reflected in the title of his second book, *Thinking, Feeling, and Being*. Like the women I'm discussing, he recognized a force that encompasses both emptiness and form, one that we may look for outside ourselves but can find within. Dakini Lion-Face, a Tantric Buddhist from the end of the 1st millennium, expresses it this way:

Kye ho! Wonderful!

You may say "existence," but you can't grasp it!

You may say "nonexistence," but many things appear!

It is beyond the sky of "existence" and "nonexistence" –

I know it but cannot point to it! (In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 52)

The core of Matte-Blanco's new paradigm is the marriage of infinity and symmetry in the *unrepressed unconscious*; that is, the vast amount of what is "known" but doesn't enter consciousness because consciousness requires differentiations and order, not because it is repressed. Christopher Bollas gives the unrepressed unconscious the more resonant name: the Unthought Known, but it might

also be referred to by the title of a book about mysticism, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. These brides of Christ, Shiva, Krishna, God, Jahweh, and Buddha embrace the terms of such a marriage of infinities.

While Matte-Blanco grounds his ideas in logic and mathematical set theory, the ideas themselves are fairly simple. One of the main governing principles of unconscious logic is what Matte-Blanco terms *symmetry*, which refers to a logical relation in which the terms being discussed are interchangeable. In contrast, ordinary conscious logic is rooted in *asymmetry*, which differentiates the terms, sees them as individually distinctive. Reversing “I am standing on the floor” to “the floor is standing on me” sounds like something from madness, dreams, or a surreal movie. In ordinary logic, the phrase “I am in San Francisco” cannot be reversed to “San Francisco is in me” and still make sense. If you know I am speaking emotionally, however, “San Francisco is in me” does make sense. We can see there is an intimate relation between emotion and unconscious thinking. In fact, Matte-Blanco points out that the differences between emotion and the unconscious, if they exist, have not yet been articulated, so unconscious logic can also be thought of as emotional thinking, and I shall sometimes use the compound verb thinking-feeling.

Symmetrical thinking pervades the writing of mystics. Catherine of Siena (14th century) concludes Prayer 20 with the lines:

“There [in her Father’s breast] the soul dwells – /  
Like the fish in the sea/  
And the sea in the fish.” (lin Hirschfield, 1994:,p. 117).

The symmetry of this image works in conscious as well as unconscious logic, since we can see that sea water is to fish as the air is to us: something that is within us and something that we are in.

The language of the mystics -- and of poetry and dreams -- gains much of its potency, however, from surprising symmetries. Emily Dickinson (19th century) (19th century) is a master of such mysterious regions of the spirit.

'Tis little I -- could care for Pearls --  
Who own the ample Sea --  
Or brooches -- when the Emperor --  
With Rubies -- pelteth Me --  
  
Or Gold -- who am the Prince of Mines --  
Or Diamonds -- when have I --  
A Diadem to fit a Dome --  
Continual upon Me -- (Lin Hirschfield, 1994,;p. 178)

She is indeed the Prince of Mines! This poem has a simple almost metronomic meter, but the gaps and condensations --- and visually, those dashes --- beget the air of a breathless union. Out of something as common as looking up at the night sky she creates magic. Spurning worldly grandeur (saying, in effect, who needs diamonds when she has a crown of stars), she reveals herself as consort to the Lord of Lords. The image of God pelting rubies would be ludicrous with a lesser writer, but she can pull even that off with a lot of help from symmetrical dashings of her mind.

One of the significant advantages of bi-logical theory is the concept of the *stratified bi-logical structure*: a recognition that all of us are always operating simultaneously on various mental strata -- from the more asymmetrical conscious stratum through increasingly deep and symmetrical unconscious strata.<sup>[21]</sup> We perceive a ginkgo leaf on the ground. At the same time on a deeper level, its fanned shape triggers associations classifying it with something that is emotionally related (such as a production of *The*

*Mikado* with a ginkgo embroidered kimono). , aAnd on a still deeper level, we experience it as identical to all dead and living things. Perhaps one night Dickinson looked up and identified the Big Dipper, thought how the bright stars sparkled like diamonds, and felt strangely awed with an external-internal sense of ecstatic pleasure – registering the experience across bi-logical strata.

*Symmetrization* is the common process of treating as identical two things that are different in conscious thinking. This can happen on the basis of a single characteristic, such as color or sparkle, so a group of stars in the night sky strikes the psyche as my Lord's diadem. A religious leader's resonant deep voice may penetrate, intimating the divine. When symmetrization takes place, the individual objects treated as identical acquire all the characteristics and potentialities of that classification, and to the greatest degree. The Finn Edith Soedergran imagines the lowly frog with his being split into two:

One was nothing,

The other one was everything and God himself. (In Hirschfield, 1994, p. 227)

Symmetrization is thus a process that forms a psychological basis for spiritual power, as it is implicated in characteristics of both the unrepressed unconscious and mystical experience.

God, emptiness, fullness, self are all identical to Lal Ded, a 14th century Hindu princess who abandoned everything to become a wanderer worshiping Shiva:

Coursing in emptiness,

I, Lalla,

Dropped off body and mind,

And stepped into the Secret Self. (In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 123)

Mahadeviyakka, a 12th century disciple of Shiva and the path of Oneness, states a common theme of these mystical poets: the complete sufficiency of her experience of the oneness of self and the divine.

...When the mind becomes Your mind,

What is left to remember?

Once my life is Your gesture,

How can I pray?

When all my awareness is Yours,

What can there be to know?

I became You, Lord, and forgot You. (lin Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 83)

Like anyone seeking to put symmetrical experience into the precision of language (where emotion and unity are curtailed by differentiations) Mahadeviyakka and other women mystics come to the point where they revolt against the inability of any language to hold the uncontainable, inexpressible core.<sup>[3]</sup>

I do not call it his sign,

I do not call it becoming one with his sign.

I do not call it union,

I do not call it harmony with union.

I do not say something has happened,

I do not say nothing has happened,

I will not name it You,

I will not name it I.

Now that the White Jasmine Lord is myself,

What use for words at all? (In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 84)

Trying to convey boundless emotional experience, these women discover a technique that confounds the demarcations of “rational” language: they rely on contradiction and paradox. Refusing what is measured, they zoom in on the coexistence of contraries, again depending on a process that is characteristic of the unconscious. Matte-Blanco even states that the defining difference between conscious and unconscious logic is how they each uses contradiction. I think one can say that within unconscious symmetrical logic, contradiction becomes paradox, since the unconscious simultaneously allows both a statement and its opposite. Mystics like Mahadeviyakka show profoundly spiritual experience may be best illuminated symmetrically, as identities, contraries, and paradoxes.

You will hear

How in death

Life begins. (Nelly Sachs, 20th century, Jewish. In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 218.)

I have two enemies in all the world,

Two twins, inseparably fused:

The hunger of the hungry and the fullness of the full.

(Marina Tsvetaeva, 20th century, Russian. In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 234)

One of the common paradoxical (and symmetrical) pairings in both the unconscious and mysticism is nothingness <-> everythingness.

...Ah blessed absence of God,

How lovingly I am bound to you!

...The nearer I come to you,

The more wonderfully and abundantly

God comes upon me. (Mechtild of Magdeburg, 13th century. In Hirschfield, 1994, : p. 94)

Mystics seek emptiness, with its potential for agonizing aloneness and even terrifying obliteration of the self. This nothingness can be discovered to be the fount of being, belonging, an embodied creative self.

In the Infinite

I reach

For the Uncreated. (Hadewijch II, 13th century. In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 106)

Deep in my looking,

The last words vanished.

Joyous and silent,

The waking that met me there. (Lal Ded. In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 124)

Mystics discover the light of God by confronting the darkness within, letting go of the passing show of ordinary life, engaging "the dark night of the soul". One abandons --- which in the deeper unconscious is the same as: is abandoned by --- the ordinary compasses of life. The only way out is through. Marion Milner, a British psychoanalyst who wrote about her ongoing search for the divine, expresses this beautifully: "Out of the *held emptiness* (my italics) comes a movement, a gesture, a reaching out to the world again" (1987:, p. 177, my italics).

You have probably already noticed an idea inherent in emotional thinking-feeling: *infinity*, boundlessness, the loss of delimiting boundaries, a sense of unity, a nothingness that is the same as everythingness. In

the deep unconscious, something is the same as its opposite, and (even deeper) is the same as everything else. To key into deep experience *is* to apprehend infinity. Emotional and spiritual power surge from the deep unrepressed unconscious. There is only the indivisible — that infinitely potent force of symmetry avalanching the dividing fences of consciousness and thus creating identities where there were individuals. “I am You.” “My life is Your gesture.” The “You” is the immanent God that inheres – is in here – in everything.

In the deeper unconscious, two individual things (feelings, ideas, people) become identical if they have even one point of similarity. Two things that share the characteristic of something sparkling – star, diamond diadem – become identical. At that moment (Dickinson’s “a Diadem to fit a Dome – continual upon Me –”) the self becomes part of the same symmetrical category as Emperor and Lord God Almighty. In this way “I” becomes continual with the firmament; she is consort and one with God. In a symmetrical relation of identity with something that on conscious strata is ordinarily delimited from it, the symmetrized object chains with increasingly broad groupings of identities and infinite degrees of emotion. It becomes infinitely penetrating, without any protective limit. It becomes one with the eternal flowing light of God. It becomes infinitely dangerous, subsumed into an all-encompassing dread.<sup>[4]</sup> It absorbs into primary love.

Mirabai (16th century) is the most renowned woman poet of India; her songs are recited from memory by Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus of various castes (Schelling, 1998). A favorite of Gandhi’s, she is a revolutionary figure in the popular culture, a subversive figure abjuring the strictures of tradition. In poetry that blazes with spirit and intellect, she proclaims the ecstasy <-> agony of seeking her quicksilver god, the Lord Krishna whom she calls Shyam, the Dark One.<sup>[5]</sup> The sheer recklessness of her devotion is shocking: she regarded Krishna as her true husband and refused her duties as wife to the crown prince of Mewar (and then as his widow) to the point where her in-laws tried to murder her. She is possessed.

...I see

only the Dark One....

I'm fixed in trances of darkness. (In Schelling, 1998:, p. 33)

Yes, Mira's hooked.

She goes into depths

Where every secret is known. (Ibid., p. 32)

With a startling image, she calls to those capable of understanding these dark passions: "When it rains/  
Does anyone drink from the gutter?" She blazes the erotic nature of the union: "Shyam, the ocean of  
pleasure/ Has come into me" and "Wet with Shyam's love". Hooked into a tantalizing lover, she can  
never achieve peace.

You abandoned your unwavering consort

After lighting her lamp-wick;

Call her a raft

Set to drift on an ocean of craving. (Ibid, p. 41)

Caught in a riptide

In the sea of becoming

Without your support I'm a shipwreck! (Ibid., p. 40)

The poetry reveals a shearing strain, as longing for the irresistible unfaithful lover and passion "shift into  
the other with the blurring speed of a hummingbird's wings" (Hirschfield:, 1994, p. 131). The infinity of  
union "Wherever I go/ His sweet form is laughing inside me" is followed only a few lines later by the  
infinity of despair "Unless she sees her dark lover/ how can Mira/ endure her own body?" (Schelling,

1997:, p. 53). Image after image unfolds from her (exceedingly) unrepressed unconscious, powered by her masterful use of rhetorical devices springing from it.

Hirschfield gleanms from such despairing passion a paradoxical symmetrical solution: “longing becomes in itself the sign of the Beloved’s presence....(I)t may be that it is through our vulnerability itself that the always-present sacred can make itself known” (Hirschfield, 1994:, pp. 131-2). She quotes Nelly Sachs:

“But perhaps God needs the longing, wherever else should it dwell...

And the radiant voice across fields of parting which calls to reunion there?”

(in Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 224).

I can’t speak of the women mystics without referring to joy. Mirabai is only one example of a tradition proclaiming God as her lover, averring that it is only through a love that tidal waves all distinctions (self, conventions, the bounds of a normal life) that one can find the Lord. Mechtild of Magdeburg exclaims:

...Let me see You dance and sing –

Then I will leap into Love –

And from Love into Knowledge,

And from Knowledge into the Harvest,

That sweetest Fruit beyond human sense.

There I will stay with You, whirling. (In Hirschfield, 1994:, p. 86)

Her words about ‘the joy of the One’ sing without restraint:

Effortlessly,

Love flows from God into man,  
Like a bird  
Who rivers the air  
Without moving her wings.  
Thus we move in His world,  
One in body and soul,  
Though outwardly separate in form.  
As the Source strikes the note,  
Humanity sings –  
The Holy Spirit is our harpist,  
And all strings  
Which are touched in Love  
Must sound. (IbidIn Hirschfield., 1994, p. 93)

Finally, there is another concept woven through everything I've said, a concept so essential to Matte-Blanco that one can say it is alpha and omega, a *sine qua non* of his theory: the *fundamental antinomy* of being and world. He defines antinomy as "the incompatibility between two assertions which can claim equal rights to be true" (1988:, p. 70). Matte-Blanco believes he is talking about something more than two logics, conscious and unconscious. The two logics comprising the whole of bi-logic reflect different aspects of thinking, feeling, and being. The same reality is simultaneously treated as formed of parts (thus divisible or heterogeneous) and as one and indivisible. Symmetrical logic discovers and shows us the indivisible, homogeneous mode of being, while asymmetrical logic reveals the divisible, heterogeneous mode. Matte-Blanco (1988) affirms that

there is in the very structure of humans a fundamental antinomy resulting from the co-presence of the two modes of being which are incompatible with one another and, in spite of this, exist and appear together in the same subject. This is incomprehensible to our normal thinking. They appear together yet remain

incompatible and never fuse to form a wider unitary concept which comprises both (Matte-Blanco, 1988:(pp. 70-1).

I know of no more beautiful expression of this fundamental antinomy than a letter written by the 13th century Flemish mystic, Hadewijch of Antwerp:

May God make known to you, dear child, who he is and how he treats his servants...how he consumes them within himself. From the depths of his wisdom, he shall teach you what he is and with what wonderful sweetness the one lover lives in the other and so permeates the other that they do not know themselves from each other. But they possess each other in mutual delight, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, soul in soul, *while a single divine nature flows through them both and they both become one through each other, yet remaining always themselves* [my italics] (translated by Oliver Davies and quoted in Hirshfield, 1994, :pp. 99-100, my italics).

In this essay, I have shown the following bi-logical concepts through the poetry of 14 women mystics <sup>[6]</sup>: symmetry, asymmetry, symmetrization, the unrepressed unconscious, the stratified bi-logical structure, the fundamental antinomy, and the relation among emotion, infinity, and the unconscious. I would like to end with a poem that embodies these abstract ideas, evocative with the imagery of symmetry and rich with asymmetrical distinctions of craftsmanship. It was written in the 8th century by Yeshe Tsogyel, the “foremost woman in the history of Tibetan Buddhism” (in Hirshfield, 1994:, p. 46).

If you recognize me,

Queen of the Lake of Awareness,

Who encompasses

Both emptiness and form,

Know that I live in the minds

of all beings who live.

Know that I live

In the body of mind

And the field of the senses....

We are not two,

Yet you look for me outside;

When you find me within yourself,

Your own naked mind,

That Single Awareness

Will fill all worlds.

Then the joy of the One

Will hold you like a lake....

Hold to that knowledge and pleasure,

And the Creative will be your wings.

You will leap through the green meadows

Of earthly appearance,

Enter the sky-fields, and vanish.

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