



Energies of Exchange **by Alys Goldenthorpe**

(former Abbess 1984 to 1996 approximately)

Germaine Greer once wrote a book called *The Female Eunuch* in which she compared the style and implications of the stories which appeal disparately to males and females. Her analysis indicated areas of potential trouble within human sexual relationships. Women, it appears, still look for the virginal 'sentimental' relationship; a man still seeks to be the only person able to tame the tigress. Even in the old stories, such gender differences in attitude and expectation seem to exist.

Central to both kinds of story is the notion of giving something up. Whether that something is one's virginity, one's independence, one's sexuality, one's mastery or whatever. The idea seems to be that to have a relationship something must be given up. This implies that there is a kind of nobility inherent in sacrifice, but I think that in itself is a very incomplete notion. Neither offering nor giving up includes what seems to me to be the essence of relationship or magical working. I prefer the notion of 'exchange', though not in a mechanical sense.

In *The Demon Lover* Dion Fortune gave a very clear picture of the general notion of manifestation. The idea is that some energy or material force is

needed for a spiritual being to manifest, and that this costs - if not the magician, then his victim - a great deal in terms of life energy. This idea is prevalent in rites of invocation too - the idea that spirits may 'feed' off life force, or blood, in order to manifest. In these terms it does not matter whether one is speaking of sacrificing a King, a rabbit, a meal or a sleep - one thing is lost in order to gain another. A good harvest, the peace of the realm or a magical experience.

But the same holds true if what is given is unconscious. If one sets aside time, or attention, or energy, one has created space whereby the new and much-wanted event can occur. Is it possible that the technology behind 'sacrifice' could equally well be based on the principle that nature abhors a vacuum? That it is not so much feeding the spirits or providing an intercessor with the 'gods' on the other side, as a gift- between different kinds of world, and the forming of a bridge between them? It is a repositioning of experience, which allows something different to occur than might ordinarily be part of the stream of events.

There are clearly different ways to set about such things. Some people will sit up all night simply to watch a Sports Fixture on the other side of the world.

They would not for one moment suspect themselves of sacrifice, indeed they might well sneer at someone else who stayed up all night in order to catch a 'working tide'. Nevertheless their enjoyment and satisfaction at the game is bound to be enhanced by their sitting up. By their 'ritual preparations' of beer and chips and blankets - even to the waking of a child to share in the event.

What if the central reality of sacrifice is not so much offering, as exchange? For example, the ancient fisherman offered his seed to the river before beginning his task. The witch places silver at the foot of the willow before she cuts the branch which will become her wand. Neither action costs very much at all, but both are acts of pleasure and attention. Such an interpretation of the principle of sacrifice must have implications not just for our own magical practice but also for our understanding of the old myths. Did witches, and old Celts and the like practice the 'sacrifice of the king'? Or is this a fantasy brought on by too much Golden Bough (twelve volumes of examples).

No matriarchal religion actually needs to spill life with blood. Menstruation is the shedding of living blood - the origin perhaps of the wound, which neither heals nor kills. However, this king-killing must have some meaning, or the idea would not have lasted. What happens to the paradigm if one omits the old notion of sacrifice from the king-killing theories? Do the stories have any meaning left at all? What is the

connection between male fertility, and blood? Violence, sex and magic? The paradigms are not those with which a modern woman is so very happy, and that unease is of itself interesting. Is sex itself a violent, animal act? Isn't the bit where humans can be tender and funny and loving an added, and really rather optional, extra to the main function - of providing the next generation?

The romantic ideal really took hold in the Middle Ages, with the Cathars and the Troubadours. It was already there in Roman attitudes towards sex and sensuality. (Romans were really rather prudes, and looked down their noses at the loss of control inherent in sexual pleasure. This suspicion of lack of control is, I think, germane to the whole connection between sexuality and sacrifice) This romantic ideal lies behind a lot of commonly-held notions about human sexual relationships. One waits for the perfect marriage, the perfect love, remains faithful to that. It has the drawback that people who are mistaken in their choice tend to pretend that they were not, or deviate to some depressing misinterpretation of the idea of Karma. It has some odd implications. Of course the idea of waiting for perfect love before marriage is not the same thing as making marriage the only place for love, or lovemaking. But the idea behind all of these ideas is simple. The woman is beautiful and basically, if you touch her, make love with her, you bring her down, you sully her. Of course this is a life-denying, horrible idea. But it spins out, by implication, a world where an

anorexic is considered to be beautiful. The wise wound, the connecting of blood and life, has become the symbol of the suffering god, and the Fisher King; endless pain, and a symbol of death. Laying down ones life. Losing instead of renewing. Life to come, rather than the gift of language now. It seem to me that the primal meaning of the sacrifice of the king must have some aspect now overlaid in which it is understandable as a life giver.

One of the foundation texts of this silly deification of the Virgin is a book called *La Princesse de Cleves*. A book in which, despite the overwhelming love of the hero and heroine, she would rather go mad, enter a nunnery and die, than actually go to bed with him, or anyone else. The emotion and the soul were everything; the body was dirty. Even in marriage, carnal love was the destruction of sacredness.

Spiritual love happens. One can meet the same person in lifetime after lifetime. One can love for eternity. And when it happens, it is romantic. But it has to deal with the real bodies and temperaments and genders of the couple. And you can't wait around for the feeling, which is in some ways as unromantic as salt, bread, breathing out

and breathing in. The passion and the tenderness follow, but the loyalty has nothing to do with bodies. Indeed, the more carnal the loving then the more animal the union. Then the less the actual bodies seem to matter, and the more one cares for them. Caring may be almost whimsical. There is tenderness, cherishing, and much less attention paid to what other people might think. Old men and young

girls... people of different races and cultures... all these external matters fall away in the honesty and creativity of ordinary everyday love.

But the spiritualisation depends on (and is expressed by) the carnal. Without it, it has no life in the real world. It must in some way be earthed. When we cut off the holy from the

material, what we incarnate is death and sterility. When we fail to earth the magic, we do not fail to earth the energies. But what we earth is rejection energy, a killing energy. To sacrifice, (in the old sense to kill) the Hunter King, is to reject his seed. To celebrate his offering may be a different thing. To see his death in the line of duty is a meeting with reality, and a salvaging and transformation of the griefs along side of which we live, in our every day lives. To demand it as a necessity may



Tiamat

well be to miss the deeper meaning of the stories.

No wonder witches, and shamans and other apparently material magicians are so scary to the proper-minded. They refuse to give up half their power to be allowed to experience the other half. Conversely, by giving up their power into another person, they increase it.

If nothing else, the legend of Adonis, the mysteries of blood, sex, royalty and death open our minds to the cost of real relationships, the need for fertility. Aphrodite and Adonis had a love that was carnal and practical. She continues. She holds the historical thread, the meaning, by which he may return. It is the inner, human need to find meaning in tragedy, to be consoled for the loss of the Beloved of the Goddess.

Life doesn't merely continue. There is nothing inherently beautiful about that death in the undergrowth, bleeding helplessly. But there is something - some mystery of life which is far more powerful than the sentimental spiritualisation of love, which asks that its heroes die, giving their seed, their lusty enjoyment of life and their trust, that they will come again.

It seems possible to me that the story of Adonis, like the story of Persephone, speaks of deeper rites of fertility than are possible if one takes the notion of the shedding of the blood of the king literally.

With the Persephone story we begin with the cave, and the labyrinth. The womb; Pluto who ravishes that cave, entering it with his rod of plenty and

attaining Lordship within her; and at the very moment of his glory, he dies. The spilling of the seed, which will make fertile the Goddess, is the 'death' of the power which delivers this offering. He has entered her sacred place and made it fertile by dying within it.

Thus does he become his own son, and hers. Thus is she transformed from virgin queen to mother empress. And he transformed from Green Man to child.

So. The Sacrifice of the King is not an exaltation of the 'passions' that happen. An understanding of meaning and creativity, even in loss. The blood and sex and violence and mystery and royalty indicates loss of 'control'. But it has more to say than that.

I hold that the clues to the spiritual mysteries are all there in the physical forms they take. Actual maleness and actual femaleness. Actual blood, glair and semen.

There are some that believe that the male envied this capacity of the female to shed blood and give life. Not understanding his own role in fertility he invented warfare (the sacrifice of the fittest) and the hierarchy of importance among the animals, in order to make himself feel better about killing some of them for food. It could be possible that there is fear inherent in his primal act of self-giving. Perhaps this may be rooted in the 'loss of control' inherent in both parties to love making.

When a woman bleeds she does die, or runs the risk of dying. Indeed, when a girl becomes a woman, she is never going to be a child again. She has died.

fast, I let it eat an entire crate of cherry plums!) Even if one's notions of nature are picked up from Walt Disney Wild Life, it must occur to one that life depends on death, on biting first, and protecting the kill.

The best. The noblest. The King and hero are always on the front line. That is why they become the blood shedders. They change too. The butcher, the farmer and the vet have gentle hands. They know how to make the kill quickly, and they hope that when their time comes the killer will be merciful in like manner. In their own kingdom, on their own farm, they probably delivered the animal they slaughter. They know the value of what they do, and the price they pay. What they do has inherent value of connection and exchange. It is an act of real sacrifice. For it is intimately concerned with the giving of life. Those who give birth, and take life, know the value of what they do. These are not the values of control.

So there are two sets of mysteries and not one. The king is sacrificed, or battles to the death. Both of them return, in the spring. The male, to battle the King of the old year, marry the

Goddess, and in his turn to die. What happens to him then? If he is Osiris, he stays as Lord of the Other World, returning as his own son Horus to battle Set, and to be the pharaoh. What of Adonis, Tammuz, Attis?

It is intriguing that Inanna, Allat, Tiamat, all go down to the Underworld too, as Persephone, and Kore do. But they do not die there, they rule. They return. Rather as the woman shedding blood does not appear to die, but changes utterly. They do not truly die since their historical thread holds strong. But Adonis and Tammuz really die. They have to be resurrected in Spring.

There are some constant images here that I want to look at. Followers of Cybele castrated themselves. The lovers of the Goddess are nearly always crippled either before they die, or instead of dying. How can I make sense of these images? Only, I think, if I begin to understand the inner nature of the rod of power, the spindle around which She in her formative function spins the universe, the axle of the worlds, the wand.

After all, though the fulfillment of desire is the ending of desire, that rod of potency will always rise again!

