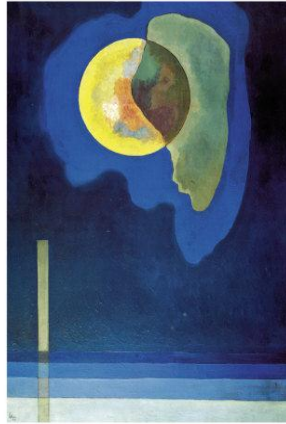


GEORGE COMTESSE AND ION SOTEROPOULOS  
THE GENEALOGY OF HEAVEN IN POETIC LITERATURE



*Courtesy Kandinsky*

According to the earliest-known Greek cosmogonical ideas (Hesiod), Earth and heaven were at the beginning one undifferentiated spherical mass. That mass was then divided into different parts: Earth, which is the source of weight, or gravity, and heaven, the source of lightness, or antigravity. This primitive division of the mass into different parts—into Earth and heaven, low and high, heavy and light, gravity/antigravity—is a cosmogonical mechanism that was widely used by ancient Near-Eastern cultures to produce an original difference that generated original work and motion within the differentiated mass. Thus we have a pulling-in motion toward the low heavy earth due to the earth's force of gravity, which we call *fall*, and a pulling-out motion away from the low heavy earth due to heaven's force of gravity seen from Earth as antigravity, which we call *elevation* or *recession* in the manner of our receding galaxies relative to Earth. These original motions produced by contrary sources or forces were captured by poetic literature in order to express the psychical forces and movements of the Self.

Four cases are then possible: 1) the pulling-out motion predominates: it is an elevation that violently escapes from the chthonic and psychical heaviness (Balzac, Novalis); 2) there is an unsolvable conflict between Earth and heaven, pulling-out and pulling-in motions, elevation and fall (Blake); 3) the pulling-out motion is an impossible elevation that is incapable of overcoming the compression of the melancholy and the psychical weight (Poe); and 4) there is a simultaneity of the pulling-out and pulling-in motions that expresses the simultaneity of the ascending and descending movements of the mind. For Nietzsche, the ascension of the mind toward the luminous heaven is its abyssal descent; and the descent of the mind toward the dark abyss is its celestial ascent.

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## (1) Poetic Cosmogony: Hesiod, Aristotle, and the Poet-Philosopher

*Given all these considerations we must conclude with confidence that besides the bodies surrounding us here-down, there exists another body separated from them and possessing a nature whose nobility is proportional to its distance from our world.*

—Aristotle, *On the Heavens*

Hesiod (a Greek poet-philosopher of the seventh century BCE) started his account of world-formation with the belief that the world was one undifferentiated spherical mass. Because work and motion cannot be achieved unless the world is differentiated into at least two regions, Hesiod intuitively divided this spherical mass into two opposite parts: the earth (Gaia) and the starry heaven (Ouranos), separated by Chaos—a vast, indeterminate gap between Earth and heaven (*Theogony*). This primitive division of the cosmic mass into Earth and starry heaven is a well-known cosmogonical mechanism that can be traced back to the mythological accounts of world-creation of ancient Near-Eastern cultures.<sup>1</sup> It produces an original difference that generates, in turn, original motion and multiplicity within the spherical mass of the world.

Aristotle situated the earth at the center *a* and heaven at the most external circumference *b* of the universe (*Traité du Ciel*). Taking the point of view of the terrestrial (individual) observer at rest on the surface of the earth, he assigned to the earth the properties of being: i) low; ii) heavy; iii) at the state of rest (minimum speed); iv) cold; v) corruptible or time-conditioned; and vi) an incomplete hetero-contained part (assimilated to the mortal individual) or the residence of incomplete parts. He assigned to heaven, situated at the extreme circumference *b*, the properties of being: i) high; ii) light; iii) rotating at the maximum speed equal to 1; iv) hot; v) incorruptible or timeless; and vi) a complete self-contained whole (assimilated to the divine universe defined as the totality of bodies) or the residence of complete wholes (see fig. 1). “We

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<sup>1</sup> G.S Kirk, J.E Raven and M Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge University Press, 1983), p 43

designate Heaven the most external and elevated region, which we regard as the seat of everything divine. In other words, it is the body that is continuous with the most external circumference of the universe where we place the moon, the sun and the stars as we also say that they are in heaven. In this last sense we call Heaven the body that is embraced by the most external circumference because the whole or totality we call Heaven.” (*Traité du Ciel*, I, 9, 278 b 15).

As a complete whole containing everything, namely itself, heaven is self-contained, that is, both a containing whole and a contained part governed by the synthetic principle of self-order. As the incomplete part contained in everything, Earth is governed by the analytic principle of heteronomous (external, irreflexive) order. The distance Earth—heaven, which is simultaneously the cosmic radius  $ab$ , was in Aristotle’s times the distance earth—sun (estimated now to be  $1.5 \times 10^{11}$  m), whereas actually it is the distance earth-cosmic singularity, which is roughly  $10^{15}$  times the earth—sun distance (estimated now as  $10^{15} \times 1.5 \times 10^{11} = 1.5 \times 10^{26}$  m =  $1.5 \times 10^{10}$  LY, which is 15 billion light—years).

The fundamental spatial contrariety of heaven/Earth, high/low, universe/individual, circumference/center, defines two fundamental translational motions in the universe caused by contrary forces: 1) the downward-inward acceleration toward the earth due to the earth’s force of gravity  $F$ ; and 2) the upward-outward acceleration away from the earth and toward heaven due to heaven’s force of gravity  $F'$ . Heaven’s force of gravity is of a repulsive (or centrifugal) nature relative to the earth called antigravity and of attractive (or centripetal) nature relative to heaven. Hence, some cosmologists qualify heaven—the totality of bodies—as the great attractor. In this sense we can conjecture that the recessional motion of the galaxies is caused by heaven’s force of gravity  $F'$ , which attracts them toward heaven and away from the fixed earth. Because according to the Hubble law, already cited in Aristotle’s *Physics* (Book VIII), the speed of the receding mobile (galaxy) is proportional to its distance from the starting point at rest, when this

distance becomes maximum at the heaven's extreme circumference  $b$ , then the speed becomes equally maximum, that is, equal to 1.<sup>2</sup> If we call light "that which moves away from the center" (*Traité du Ciel* 1, 3, 25), when the distance from the resting center becomes maximum, the receding galaxy is the lightest body moving at the maximum speed, which is the speed of weightless light taken as 1. Now this recessional acceleration, in which the body influenced by antigravity moves away from the low corruptible earth and toward the high incorruptible heaven in the manner of the receding galaxies, the poet-philosopher qualifies as elevation sublimation or progression. On the other hand the contrary translational acceleration, in which the body influenced by gravity approaches the low and corruptible earth, the poet-philosopher qualifies as fall corruption or regression (see fig. 2).

Taking into consideration the above introductory note concerning the original cosmogony of the ancient Greeks, we will explore synoptically their influence on poetic literature and show a vivid analogy between the cosmic forces of the universe and the psychical forces of the Self.

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<sup>2</sup> "For there is no uniformity between the way things move on a straight line when they are leaving the starting-point and the way they move when they are approaching the end-point, since they always accelerate the farther they get away from a state of rest" (Aristotle *Physics* VIII, 265b, 11)

## (2) The Movement of Sublimation in Literature

Literary writing likes to be regarded as the expression or manifestation of an invincible life—force that restores life and ensures the existence of a powerful and proper life in a vital, energetic, and vigorous body. Such a life—force is grounded in the desire to be a different being in a different world, a desire that is problematic because it continuously fails in profane poetic literature.

The life—force can be regarded therefore as a force of difference and distance relative to our ordinary world here down on Earth. Literary writing is therefore marked by the same movement of restoration and elevation, *pulling out* from that which is low and heavy in order to become rooted in a verticality aspiring toward the high, heaven, the “pure light” (Baudelaire).

Literature is always linked to the difference low/high perceived as a hierarchical order of subordination or as the law of filiation. It is always a question of pulling out from the earth's gravitational heaviness, which becomes here a psychological heaviness, of being liberated from the opaque and heavy blocks of the unconscious and madness, by a movement of restoration that lightens and enlightens the mind and assigns to the mind, a diaphanous serenity, peace, calm, and tranquility.

Madness is that block of psychological heaviness whose action consists in losing the reality of the unconscious “fallen from an obscure disaster” (Mallarmé, *Poésies*).<sup>3</sup> This loss of reality imposes the hallucination, the delirium, the fantasy. The hallucinatory and delirious imaginary depends therefore upon the loss of the reality of the unconscious caused by the block of madness that persists to exceed it, to overflow it.

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<sup>3</sup> By the “reality of the unconscious” we mean the configuration of unsolvable psychological conflicts that exhaust the self's energy and make life impossible.

### (3) That Which Necessitates the Movement of Sublimation



*Courtesy Miro*

The movement of difference, of sublimation, is triggered by the necessity to escape from a threat, a danger, a vertiginous disorder, a feverish agitation, a staggered word, a broken respiration, an invincible tension, an anxiety that bites. Incessantly we swirl around a black hole, an emptiness. Incessantly we are attracted by a chthonic abyss, that of not-being, of non-existence, of the impossibility to be and to exist.

It is a process of implosion and collapse characterized by the power of compulsive desire, by the power of an implacable fate which will impose the block of madness, its heaviness, its structure generating the loss of reality. And such a block is taken by the process of destruction, which is that of excluding the reality of the unconscious, touching therefore the unspeakable abyss of the monster— voracious animal of prey and “melancholic spider “(Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*).

(4)

## The Writer and Conflict



Courtesy Odilon Redon

For Balzac, the movement of sublimation is triggered by an implacable tension that precipitates a depressive and distressing fall, and it is precisely this experience that causes, similar to salvation, “the passion of all humanity to be elevated, to go up”. That conflicting tension imposes a disgust for life here, down on Earth. “Life disgusts me and an irresistible nostalgia pushes me to Heaven” (*Seraphita*). The tension is at the same time an obstacle and a support to the elevation toward heaven. The flight is therefore a leap out of the tension, producer of hate.

The resistance to the flight can come from the prohibition of the mother, who preserves her inalienable possession. Thus, in Goethe’s second *Faust*, the mother of the genius looks at him with anxiety. While she encourages him to bounce on the ground or rebound, she forbids him to fly toward heaven. “You can bounce and still bounce according to your desire, but watch out not to fly. The free flight is forbidden to you,” she tells her son.

For Gérard de Nerval, existence is an unresolved division between lightness and heaviness. “All my existence seems to be consumed in ascending and descending” (*Aurelia*).

We touch emptiness and we believe we can escape. We believe to be elevated beyond emptiness, we believe “to evade the void”, as Nodier puts it (*Rêveries*), and float with aethereal lightness. Thus, at first the elevation that generates Heaven is an evasion, an escape, a violent exit that imagines to dissolve, to pulverize, to destroy the psychical heaviness or abolish its *topos*, which is the hard block of madness (Novalis). For Rilke, beyond the strange interior landscape, opens the invisible and unspeakable heaven, the space of flight. “There where no path has been traced we will fly” (*Poèmes Français*). Shelley perceives flight as an enjoyment “without body”; he conceives the “transport of enjoyment that envelops him as an atmosphere of light” (*The Witch of Atlas*). Baudelaire touches on the complaint of the eye regarded as a substitute for the lost vision. He is haunted by the “pure light” that “the mortal eyes in their entire splendor are nothing more than obscure and plaintive mirrors”. (*Les fleurs du mal, Spleen et idéal*).

For Blake, it is not simply a question of an escape or an evasion but rather a struggle between heavy Earth and light heaven, a struggle between the reptile that crawls on the earth, coils, whistles, and injects its venom and, the bird that flies in the profound azure. The movement of restoration and elevation is incessantly deviated. The cosmological and ontological cut between the earth and the heaven is never certain. The heaven of Blake is stormy, and this uncertain heaven, this uncertain difference Earth and heaven is doubled by an obsession, namely that of the pure “Energy” of the body taken as an “eternal delight ” (*Méssages*). Thus, “Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.”

## (5) The Unsurpassable Heaviness According to Edgar Allan Poe

Two periods of time are necessary to generate heaven: the time of evasion up to the point of attaining an imaginary lightness and the time of conflict, of confrontation “always exposed to the spleen, to the fall in the night, to the heaviness” (Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal, Spleen et idéal*). But for Novalis, we touch a heterogeneous time influenced by the power of repetition during which we cannot extract ourselves from the immemorial heaviness that “prevents us from escaping to the Heaven” (*Hymnes à la nuit*).<sup>4</sup> The fall, therefore, is not the failure or the breakdown of elevation, the interruption of the movement of sublimation: Rather, the fall is an improbable restoration by an unsurpassable heaviness.

With Edgar Allan Poe, we have the fall into the space of silence, of night, of decadence, of destruction, similar to the interminable fall into the bottomless infinite. “A horrible vertigo oppresses me at the simple idea of the infinite of descent” (*Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*) he writes. And then the movement of the fall is immobilized, is frozen up to the “madness of a memory which is agitated within the abominable” (*A Descent into the Maelstrom*). “Everything becomes heavy, everything falls, nothing can fly. We touch at the cryptic inertia, at the space of devastation, of desolation, of prostrate depression. It is “a dense melancholy, deep, incurable, hanging everywhere and penetrating everything” (*The Fall of the House of Usher*), that is to say, “a mortal weight crushes us. . . . In this depression all things seem oppressed and prostrated” (*Shadow*). If we believe we can escape this psychological heaviness by pulverizing it in order to elevate to the high, it is with this height that we feel especially lost, especially captive of the heaviness. As Milosz writes “I am lost up in the high within the desired Nothing” (*La confession de Lemuel*).

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<sup>4</sup> When the Self excludes the reality of the unconscious, the unconscious is indirectly repeated through the symptom. This, then is the power of repetition.

According to Poe, with the melancholic collapse, the heaven is tormented, becomes black, tenebrous, threatening: the storm growls, the tempest spreads, heaven darkens in a furious crash. Penetrated by lightning, it is like the howl of a devouring monster. We are tormented by a turmoil that the curse of silence calms.

## **(6) Nietzsche: The Question of the Abyssal Descent and the Celestial Ascent**

*You must carry a chaos within you in order to give birth to a dancing star.*

—Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

With Nietzsche we have the subversion of the difference low/high, expressed by the movement of elevation. It is no longer a question of evading that which is threatening, of being elevated toward the high in an attempt to dissolve or forget that which necessitates the sublimation. It is neither a question of the conflicting division between low and high, between elevation and fall according to a sequence of cycles of fall and elevation, between spleen and ideal (Blake, Baudelaire), nor the question of the lethal immobility that blocks all possibility of fall and elevation (Poe). For Nietzsche the restoration is always precipitated and hence the elevation toward heaven is condemned to fall. It is not, therefore a question of restoration or elevation, of the opposition low/high. Instead of immobilizing a fall, which renders heaviness unsurpassable, it is a question of increasingly descending up to the point of desiring the forces of fate, which are the forces of the unconscious.

What Nietzsche discovers is the paradoxical, unsupportable simultaneity of the descent toward the abyss and the ascent toward the summit. The ascension to the summit is not the elevation toward the high by restoring what is here, down: it is the same thing as the descent toward the abyss. Thus ascending ceases to be escaping from the power of the abyssal

unconscious, which exhausts the vibrating forces of the intensively energetic body and determines the “will to death and nothingness of the sick. “ As Nietzsche writes “ Don’t escape from your selves. You who ascend” (*Saint Janvier*)

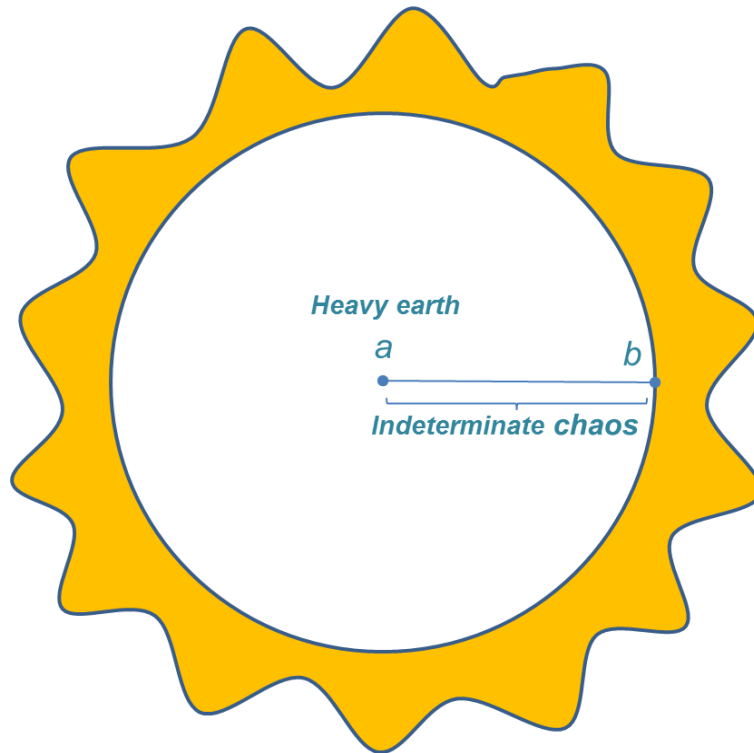
The “will to active power” affirms a power for intensive life and enters into an irreconcilable conflict with the “will to reactive power”, which incessantly exhausts and destroys everything that is alive. “It is the slope that is terrible. The slope from where the glance precipitates within the void and the hand stretches out toward the summit. It is there where the vertigo of the double will grabs the heart” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra, On the Wisdom of Men*). The issue of such a struggle is the mutation that a “wild wisdom” specifies. “May everything heavy become light, everybody become a dancer, every spirit become a bird” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra, The Seven Seas*). The struggle implies an affirmation of life negating everything that destroys, blocks, obstructs the body’s power of intensively energetic life. What is fought is the turbulence of the raging sea, the inanimate desert earth, the heartbreaking complaint of the melancholy, the sanguinary voluptuousness of an implacable cruelty. Now the more we approach and recede from the reality of the unconscious, the more we ascend toward the summit, the more we awake the divine desire, the deployment of its power of intensively energetic life, the fluid consistency and solar respiration of its singular body. “The ice is here; the solitude is enormous—but look with what tranquility everything rests on light! Look how we freely breathe!”(*Ecce Homo*).

We reach here the abyss, the genealogical event of the reality of the unconscious, and the psychical emergence requires to lose, to abandon, what we hold fiercely. “Throw in the abyss what is the most heavy. . . . Divine is the art of forgetting. . . . Everything which seemed in the past as heavy has submerged within the clear blue abyss of forgetfulness.” (*Poésies*). It is by the sudden lightning, by the stroke of the violent fire that brings about awakening, that we ascend toward the summit. “Suddenly, a terrible luminous lightning ascends from the abyss to

the Heaven. . . . O Heaven extending beyond me, clear Heaven, deep Heaven, abyss of light! In contemplating you, I thrill of divine desires" (*Zarathustra, Before the Rise of the Sun*).

The affirmation of heaven is that which tears apart because it doesn't yet explain how the massive block of the unconscious is structured, nor what generates the abyss. The block of petrification has been attained by Nietzsche but not yet crushed: it is only thrown in the air. In that way, Zarathustra hears the voice of the demon of heaviness, who reminds him of an unavoidable fall: "O Zarathustra stone of wisdom! You have been launched in air, but every stone must fall." According to the ascent that descends, and the descent that ascends, according to the movement that is intensified or exacerbated, that which structures the fatal forces of the unconscious, is murmured, similar to the birth of words up to now unspeakable. "O joy...My abyss speaks. I returned to the light, my last depth" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra, The Convalescent*).

*Light - heaven*



*Light - heavn*

figure1. The spherical mass of the universe is represented by a one-dimensional sphere that has at the center **a** the earth and at the extreme circumference **b** the heaven. The maximum distance and difference separating earth and heaven is the indeterminate chaos (void) **ab**.

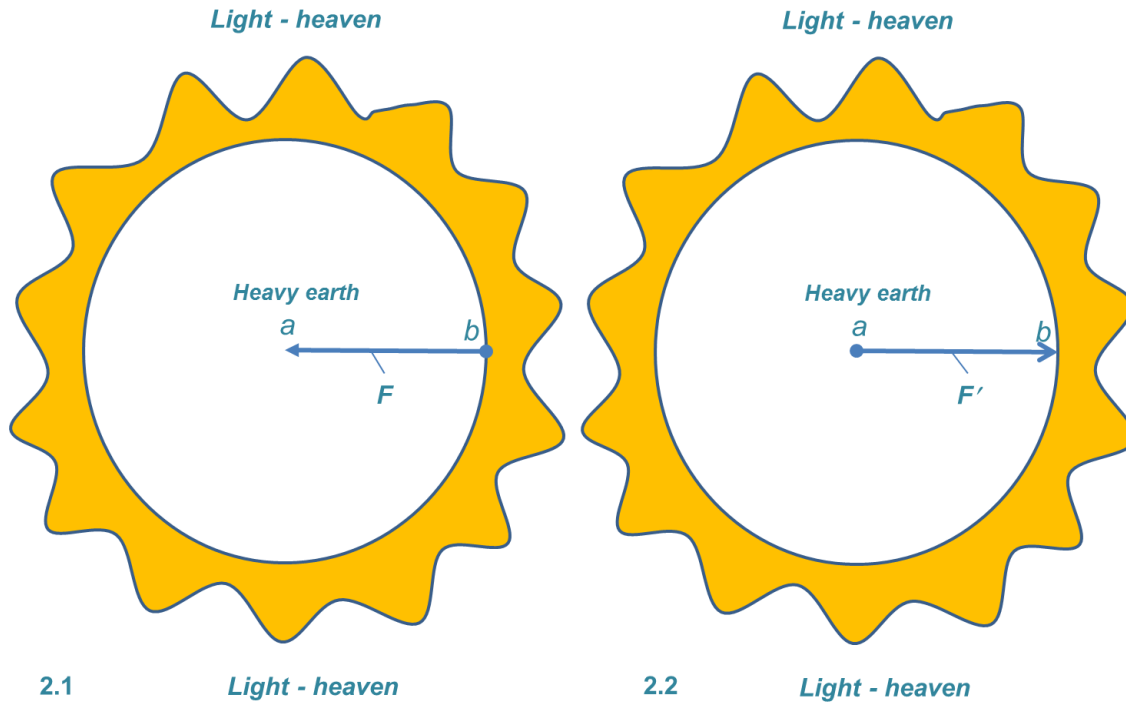


figure 2. The arrows indicate the directions of accelerations due to forces as well as the forces themselves.

figure 2.1 The individual earth at the center **a** exerts a force of gravity **F** on heaven (totality of bodies) at the circumference **b**. Because of this force, heaven accelerates toward the earth. The force **F** is a centripetal or attractive force relative to the corruptible individual earth at the center **a**. The acceleration due to gravity we call *fall, corruption or regression*.

figure 2.2 Heaven (totality of bodies) at the circumference **b** exerts an equal and opposite force **F'** on the individual earth at the center **a**. Because of this reaction force, the earth accelerates away from itself and toward heaven. The force **F'** is seen as a centripetal or attractive force called gravity relative to incorruptible heaven at **b** and as a centrifugal or repulsive force called antigravity relative to corruptible Earth at **a**. The recessional acceleration due to antigravity we call *elevation, sublimation or progression (restoration)*.

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