

HEINRICH ZIMMER

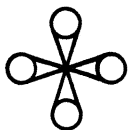


THE KING AND THE CORPSE



Edited by
JOSEPH CAMPBELL

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HEINRICH ZIMMER

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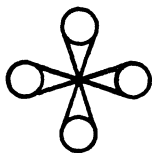
THE ART OF INDIAN ASIA
Its Mythology and Transformations
IN TWO VOLUMES
(BOLLINGEN SERIES XXXIX)

HEINRICH ZIMMER

THE KING AND THE CORPSE

*TALES OF THE SOUL'S
CONQUEST OF EVIL*

EDITED BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL



BOLLINGEN SERIES XI

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

At the time of his sudden death, in the spring of 1943, Dr. Zimmer was still working on the material for the present volume. All of the tales were represented in more than one version, some in English, some in German. The manuscript margins carried many jottings; three chapters had been published in earlier forms, in Europe and India; and there were outlines for projected augmentations. None were in a final state. Nevertheless, the moment the editor put his hand to them—co-ordinating the scattered jottings, amplifying the narratives from the original sources, and revising on the basis of numerous conversations with Dr. Zimmer himself during the months just preceding his death—the book came to life, arranged itself, and developed in what now seems the one inevitable way.

For advice and assistance in this task, my thanks are given to Mrs. Peter Geiger and Mrs. Margaret Wing. The late Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy generously read the galleys, offered valuable suggestions, and supplied a few supplementary notes to complete the references. The latter appear in bracketed footnotes, with his initials.

For the earlier versions, the reader is referred to the following publications: *Die kulturelle Bedeutung der komplexen Psychologie*, edited by the Psychological Club of Zurich, Verlag Julius Springer, Berlin, 1935, "Die Geschichte vom indischen König mit dem Leichnam"; Heinrich Zimmer, *Weisheit Indiens*, L. C. Wittich Verlag, Darmstadt, 1938, "Abu Kasems Pantoffeln," "Die Geschichte vom indischen König mit dem Leichnam"; *Prabuddha Bharata*, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas, Sept.-Dec., 1938, "The Story of the Indian King and the Corpse"; *Corona*, Zweimonatsschrift, edited by Martin H. Bodmer, Verlag der Corona, Zurich, 1936, "Abu Kasems Pantoffeln," 1939, "Merlin."

J. C.

New York City, September 9, 1947

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THE DILETTANTE AMONG SYMBOLS

STORY-TELLING has been, through the ages, both a serious business and a lighthearted diversion. Year in, year out, tales are conceived, committed to writing, devoured, forgotten. What becomes of them? A few survive, and these, like a scattering of seeds, are blown across the generations, propagating new tales and furnishing spiritual nourishment to many peoples. Most of our own literary inheritance has come to us in this way, from remote epochs, from distant, strange corners of the world. Each new poet adds something of the substance of his own imagination, and the seeds are nourished back to life. Their germinative power is perennial, only waiting to be touched. And so, though from time to time varieties may seem to have died out, one day they reappear, putting forth their characteristic shoots again, as fresh and green as before.

The traditional tale and the subjects akin to it have been discussed exhaustively from the points of view of the anthropologist, historian, literary scholar, and poet, but the psychologist has had surprisingly little to say—though he has his own valid claim to a voice in this symposium. Psychology throws an X-ray into the symbolic images of the folk tradition, bringing vital structural elements to light that were formerly in darkness. The only difficulty is that the interpretation of the disclosed forms cannot be reduced to a dependable system. For true symbols have something illimitable about them. They are inexhaustible in their

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suggestive and instructive power. Hence the scientist, the scientific psychologist, feels himself on very dangerous, very uncertain and ambiguous ground when he ventures into the field of folklore interpretation. The discoverable contents of the widely distributed images keep changing before his eyes in unceasing permutations, as the cultural settings change throughout the world and in the course of history. The meanings have to be constantly reread, understood afresh. And it is anything but an orderly work—this affair of interpreting the always unpredicted and astonishing metamorphoses. No systematist who greatly valued his reputation would willingly throw himself open to the risk of the adventure. It must, therefore, remain to the reckless dilettante. Hence the following book.

The dilettante—Italian *dilettante* (present participle of the verb *dilettare*, “to take delight in”)—is one who takes delight (*diletto*) in something. The following essays are for those who take delight in symbols, like conversing with them, and enjoy living with them continually in mind.

The moment we abandon this dilettante attitude toward the images of folklore and myth and begin to feel certain about their proper interpretation (as professional comprehenders, handling the tool of an infallible method), we deprive ourselves of the quickening contact, the demonic and inspiring assault that is the effect of their intrinsic virtue. We forfeit our proper humility and open-mindedness before the unknown, and refuse to be instructed—refuse to be shown what has never yet quite been told either to us or to anybody else. And we attempt, instead, to classify the contents of the dark message under heads and categories already known. This prevents the emergence of any new meaning or fresh understanding. The fairy tale, the childlike legend (i.e., the message bearer) is methodically regarded as too lowly to merit our submission, both the tale itself and those zones of our nature that respond to it being comparatively unadult.

Yet it would have been through the interaction of that outer and this inner innocence that the fertilizing power of the symbol might have been activated and the hidden content disclosed.

The method—or, rather, habit—of reducing the unfamiliar to the well-known is an old, old way to intellectual frustration. Sterilizing dogmatism is the result, tightly enwrapped in a mental self-satisfaction, a secure conviction of superiority. Whenever we refuse to be knocked off our feet (either violently or gently) by some telling new conception precipitated from the depths of our imagination by the impact of an ageless symbol, we are cheating ourselves of the fruit of an encounter with the wisdom of the millenniums. Failing in the attitude of acceptance, we do not receive; the boon of converse with the gods is denied us. We are not to be flooded, like the soil of Egypt, by the divine, fructifying waters of the Nile.

It is because they are alive, potent to revive themselves, and capable of an ever-renewed, unpredictable yet self-consistent effectiveness in the range of human destiny, that the images of folklore and myth defy every attempt we make at systematization. They are not corpselike, but implike. With a sudden laugh and quick shift of place they mock the specialist who imagines he has got them pinned to his chart. What they demand of us is not the monologue of a coroner's report, but the dialogue of a living conversation. And just as the hero of the key story of the following series (a noble and brave king who finds himself conversing with the implike inhabitant of what he had taken to be a mere dead body hanging from a tree) is brought to a heightened consciousness of himself through his humiliating exchange of words and rescued from a disgraceful, completely odious death, so too may we be instructed, rescued perhaps, and even spiritually transformed, if we will but humble ourselves enough to converse on equal terms with the apparently moribund di-

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vinities and folk-figures that are hanging, multitudinous, from the prodigious tree of the past.

The psychological approach to the enigma of the symbol, the design to extract from it the secret of its depth, cannot but fail, if the searching intelligence refuses to acquiesce to the chance of being taught something by the living aspect of the object under its attention. Anatomization, systematization, and classification are all well enough, but these do not elicit conversation from the specimen. The psychological investigator must be ready to set his method aside and sit down for an extended chat. Then, perhaps, he will find that he has no further taste or use for his method. This is the mode of the dilettante, as distinguished from the technique of the more stately gentleman of scientific decorum.

What characterizes the dilettante is his delight in the always preliminary nature of his never-to-be-culminated understanding. But this, finally, is the only proper attitude before the figures that have come down to us from the remote past, whether in the monumental epics of Homer and Vyāsa or in the charming little wonder stories of the folk tradition. They are the everlasting oracles of life. They have to be questioned and consulted anew, with every age, each age approaching them with its own variety of ignorance and understanding, its own set of problems, and its own inevitable questions. For the life patterns that we of to-day have to weave are not the same as those of any other day; the threads to be manipulated and the knots to be disentangled differ greatly from those of the past. The replies already given, therefore, cannot be made to serve us. The powers have to be consulted again directly—again, again, and again. Our primary task is to learn, not so much what they are said to have said, as how to approach them, evoke fresh speech from them, and understand that speech.

In the face of such an assignment, we must all remain dilet-

tantes, whether we like it or not. Some of us—scholarly specialists—tend to favor certain very definite, and consequently limited, methods of interpretation, admitting only these within the pale of our authoritative influence. Other interpreters champion zealously this or that esoteric line of tradition, regarding it as the one true clue, and its special cluster of symbols as the unique, all-comprehensive, and self-sufficient oracle of being. But such rigidities can only bind us to what we already know and are, rivet us to a single aspect of the symbolization. By such stern and constant faiths we cut ourselves off from the infinitudes of inspiration that are alive within the symbolic forms. And so, even the methodical interpreters are no more than amateurs in the end. Whether relying, as scientists, upon strict philological, historical, and comparative methods, or piously following, as initiates, the secret, oracular teachings of some self-styled esoteric tradition, they must remain, ultimately, mere beginners, hardly beyond the starting point in the unending task of fathoming the dark pool of meaning.

Delight, on the other hand, sets free in us the creative intuition, permits it to be stirred to life by contact with the fascinating script of the old symbolic tales and figures. Undaunted then by the criticism of the methodologists (whose censure is largely inspired by what amounts to a chronic agoraphobia: morbid dread before the virtual infinity that is continually opening out from the cryptic traits of the expressive picture writing which it is their profession to regard) we may permit ourselves to give vent to whatever series of creative reactions happens to be suggested to our imaginative understanding. We can never exhaust the depths—of that we may be certain; but then neither can anyone else. And a cupped handful of the fresh waters of life is sweeter than a whole reservoir of dogma, piped and guaranteed.

“Abundance is scooped from abundance, yet abundance remains.” So runs a fine old saying of the Upanishads of India. The

original reference was to the idea that the fullness of our universe—vast in space, and with its myriad of whirling, glowing spheres, teeming with the hosts of living things—proceeds from a superabundant source of transcendent substance and potential energy: the abundance of this world is scooped from that abundance of eternal being, and yet, since the supernatural potential cannot be diminished, no matter how great the donation it pours forth, abundance remains. But all true symbols, all mythical images, refer to this idea, one way or another, and are themselves endowed with the miraculous property of that inexhaustibility. With every draft drawn from them by our imaginative understanding, a universe of meaning is disclosed to the mind; and this is a fullness indeed, yet further fullnesses remain. No matter what the reading accessible to our present vision, it cannot be final. It can be only a preliminary glimpse. And we should regard it as an inspiration and a stimulation, not as a final definition precluding further insights and differing approaches.

The following essays, therefore, do not pretend to be more than examples of how to converse with the fascinating figures of folklore and myth. The book is a conversation primer, a reader for beginners, an introduction to the grammar of a cryptic but readily enjoyed, pictorial script. And since, with respect to this science of interpreting symbols, even the advanced reader must inevitably discover, time and again, that he is still but a beginner, the following essays are intended also for him. The *diletto*, the delight, that he can experience in rereading the well-known symbols of life (the proportion of his delight to his quarrelsome righteousness) will represent the degree to which his lifelong contact with them has imbued him with their abundances of nature and the spirit. The true *dilettante* will be always ready to begin anew. And it will be in him that the wonderful seeds from the past will strike their roots and marvelously grow.

PART I

ABU KASEM'S SLIPPERS

WHO knows the story of Abu Kasem and his slippers? The slippers were as famous—yea, proverbial—in the Bagdad of his time as the great miser and money-grubber himself. Everybody regarded them as the visible sign of his unpalatable greed. For Abu Kasem was rich and tried to hide the fact; and even the shabbiest beggar in town would have been ashamed to be caught dead in such slippers as he wore—they were so shingled with bits and pieces. A thorn in the flesh and an old story to every cobbler in Bagdad, they became at last a byword on the tongues of the populace. Anybody wishing a term to express the preposterous would bring them in.

Attired in these miserable things—which were inseparable from his public character—the celebrated businessman would go shuffling through the bazaar. One day he struck a singularly fortunate bargain: a huge consignment of little crystal bottles that he managed to buy for a song. Then a few days later he capped the deal by purchasing a large supply of attar of roses from a bankrupt perfume merchant. The combination made a really good business stroke, and was much discussed in the bazaar. Anybody else would have celebrated the occasion in the usual way, with a little banquet for a few business acquaintances. Abu Kasem, however, was prompted to do something for himself. He decided to pay a visit to the public baths, a place where he had not been seen for quite some time.

In the anteroom, where the clothes and shoes are left, he met

an acquaintance, who took him aside and delivered him a lecture on the state of his slippers. He had just set these down, and everyone could see how impossible they were. His friend spoke with great concern about making himself the laughing-stock of the town; such a clever businessman should be able to afford a pair of decent slippers. Abu Kasem studied the monstrosities of which he had grown so fond. Then he said: "I have been considering the matter for many years; but they are really not so worn that I cannot use them." Whereupon the two, undressed as they were, went in to bathe.

While the miser was enjoying his rare treat, the Cadi of Bagdad also arrived to take a bath. Abu Kasem finished before the exalted one, and returned to the changing room to dress. But where were his slippers? They had disappeared, and in their place, or almost in their place, was a different pair—beautiful, shiny, apparently brand-new. Might these be a surprise present from that friend, who could no longer bear to see his wealthier acquaintance going around in worn-out shreds, and wished to ingratiate himself with a prosperous man by a delicate attention? Whatever the explanation, Abu Kasem drew them on. They would save him the trouble of shopping and bargaining for a new pair. Reflecting thus, and with conscience clear, he quit the baths.

When the judge returned, there was a scene. His slaves hunted high and low, but could not find his slippers. In their place was a disgusting pair of tattered objects, which everyone immediately recognized as the well-known footgear of Abu Kasem. The judge breathed out fire and brimstone, sent for the culprit and locked him up—the court servant actually found the missing property on the miser's feet. And it cost the old fellow plenty to pry himself loose from the clutches of the law; for the court knew as well as everyone else how rich he was. But at least he got his dear old slippers back again.

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Sad and sorry, Abu Kasem returned home, and in a fit of temper threw his treasures out of the window. They fell with a splash into the Tigris, which crept muddily past his house. A few days later, a group of river fishermen thought they had caught a particularly heavy fish, but when they hauled in, what did they behold but the celebrated slippers of the miser? The hobnails (one of Abu Kasem's ideas on economy) had ripped several gaps in the net, and the men were, of course, enraged. They hurled the muddy, soggy objects through an open window. The window happened to be Abu Kasem's. Sailing through the air, his returning possessions landed with a crash on the table where he had set out in rows those precious crystal bottles, so cheaply bought—still more precious now because of the valuable attar of roses with which he had filled them, ready for sale. The glittering, perfumed magnificence was swept to the floor, and lay there, a dripping mass of glassy fragments, mixed with mud.

The narrator from whom we receive the story could not bring himself to describe the extent of the miser's grief. "Those wretched slippers," Abu Kasem cried (and this is all that we are told), "they shall do me no further harm." And so saying, he took up a shovel, went quickly and quietly into his garden, and dug a hole there in order to bury the things. But it so happened that Abu Kasem's neighbor was watching—naturally deeply interested in all that went on in the rich man's house next door; and he, as so often is the case with neighbors, had no particular reason to wish him well. "That old miser has servants enough," he said to himself, "yet he goes out and personally digs a hole. He must have a treasure buried there. Why, of course! It's obvious!" And so the neighbor hustled off to the governor's palace and informed against Abu Kasem; because anything that a treasure seeker finds belongs by law to the Caliph, the earth and all that is hidden in it being the property

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of the ruler of the faithful. Abu Kasem, therefore, was called up before the governor, and his story, that he had only dug up the earth to bury an old pair of slippers, made everybody laugh uproariously. Had a guilty man ever accused himself more glaringly? The more the notorious miser insisted, the more incredible his story became and the guiltier he seemed. In sentencing him, the governor took the buried treasure into account, and, thunderstruck, Abu Kasem heard the amount of his fine.

He was desperate. He cursed the wretched slippers up and down. But how was he to get rid of them? The only thing was to get them somehow out of town. So he made a pilgrimage into the country and dropped them into a pond, far away. When they sank into its mirrored depths he took a deep breath. At last they were gone. But surely the devil must have had a hand in it; for the pond was a reservoir that fed the town's water supply, and the slippers swirled to the mouth of the pipe and stopped it up. The guards came to repair the damage, found the slippers, and recognizing them—as indeed who would not?—reported Abu Kasem to the governor for befouling the town's water supply; and so there he sat in jail again. He was punished with a fine far greater than the last. What could he do? He paid. And he got his dear old slippers back; for the tax collector wants nothing that does not belong to him.

They had done enough damage. This time he was going to get even with them, so that they should play him no more tricks. He decided to burn them. But they were still wet, so he put them out on the balcony to dry. A dog on the balcony next door saw the funny-looking things, became interested, jumped over, and snatched a slipper. But while he was playing with it, he let it fall down to the street. The wretched thing spun through the air from a considerable height and landed on the head of a woman who was passing by. She, as it happened, was pregnant. The sudden shock and the force of the blow brought on a miscarriage,

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Her husband ran to the judge and demanded damages from the rich old miser. Abu Kasem was almost out of his mind, but he was forced to pay.

Before he tottered home from the court, a broken man, he raised the unlucky slippers solemnly aloft, and cried with an earnestness that all but reduced the judge to hysterics: "My lord, these slippers are the fateful cause of all my sufferings. These cursed things have reduced me to beggary. Deign to command that I shall never again be held responsible for the evils they will most certainly continue to bring upon my head." And the Oriental narrator closes with the following moral: The Cadi could not reject the plea, and Abu Kasem had learned, at enormous cost, the evil that can come of not changing one's slippers often enough.¹

But now, is that really the one thought to be gleaned from this celebrated tale? It is certainly a trivial counsel—not to become a slave to avarice. Should not something have been said about the mysterious vagaries of the fate that always brought the slippers back to their rightful owner? Some point would seem to lie in this malicious repetition of the same event, and in the crescendo with which the fiendish articles affect the whole nature of their bewitched owner. And is there not some point, also, in the remarkable intertwining of all the people and things that play into the hands of chance in this affair—neighbors, dog, officials and regulations of all kinds, public baths and water systems—making it possible for chance to do its work, and tie more

¹ From the *Thamarat ul-Awrak* (Fruits of Leaves) of Ibn Hijjat al-Hamawi. Another rendering into English will be found in H. I. Katibah, *Other Arabian Nights*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1928, "The Shoes of Abu Kasim." Richard F. Burton gives a very much abridged and greatly differing variant of the tale in his *Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, vol. iv, Benares, 1887, pp. 209–217, "How Drummer Abu Kasim became a Kazi," and "The Story of the Kazi and his Slipper." Here we find that, having won release from his slippers, Abu Kasem fared to foreign parts and became himself a Cadi.

tightly the knot of destiny? The moralist has considered only the miser who received his just deserts and the vice that developed into the fate of one who practiced it. He has treated the story as an example of the manner in which one may punish oneself by means of one's favorite bent. But to have made this point, the tale need not have been anywhere near so witty, so profound; there is nothing mysterious about morality. Abu Kasem's relationship to his slippers and his experiences with them are actually very mysterious—as dark, as fateful and full of meaning, as the ring of Polycrates.¹

A chain of malicious accidents, but taken together they combine to form a strange configuration, just right for story-making, and the result is a tale not easily forgotten. This annoyance of the indestructible slippers that cost their owner many times their value, worth nothing in themselves, yet draining him of his fortune, this theme, with its variations, grows to the proportions of a great hieroglyph, or symbol, for which there should be possible many and various interpretations.

Out of a series of mere chances a destiny is spun. Every effort the victim makes to put an end to his difficulty only serves to increase the snowball, until it swells to an avalanche that buries him under its weight. A jokester mixes up the slippers, probably for no better reason than to gloat over the embarrassment of the miser. Chance brings them back under the house from which they had been thrown into the river. Chance hurls them into the midst of the precious bottles. Chance calls the attention of a neighbor to the miser's activity in his garden. Chance swirls the slippers into the water pipe. Chance calls the dog up onto

¹ While King Polycrates, the ruler of Samos, was entertaining the King of Egypt, evidence of his extraordinary good fortune continually came pouring in. The King of Egypt was alarmed and begged Polycrates to sacrifice some valuable thing voluntarily in order to avert the envy of the gods. Polycrates threw his ring into the sea. The next day it was found by the cook in a fish being prepared for the royal dinner. The King of Egypt, terrified, left for home.

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the next-door balcony, and drops one of the slippers on the head of the pregnant woman who happens to be walking past. But what is it that makes these accidents so fateful? Pregnant women are always walking down the street, other people's dogs always love to snatch other people's belongings, water is continually running through pipes, and now and then the pipes get stopped. Mislaid rubbers, exchanged umbrellas: that kind of thing happens every day without any meaningful story growing out of the harmless events. The air is filled with such minute dust particles of fate; they form the atmosphere of life and all its events. Those that made for the calamity of Abu Kasem were a mere handful among thousands.

With Abu Kasem's slippers we walk right into one of the most far-reaching of all questions concerning human life and destiny, one which India was looking straight in the face when she formulated such conceptions as "Karma" and "Māyā." Whatever a human being brings into direct contact with himself out of the mass of whirling atoms of possibilities fuses into a pattern with his own being. In so far as he admits that a thing concerns him it does concern him, and if related to his deepest aims and desires, his fears and the cloudy fabric of his thoughts, it can become an important part of his destiny. And, finally, if he senses it as striking at the roots of his life, that very fact itself is his point of vulnerability. But on the other hand, and by the same token, in so far as one can break loose from one's passions and ideas and thereby become free of oneself, one is released automatically from all the things that appear to be accidental. They are sometimes too meaningful, and at other times have too much the tinge of pertinent wit about them, to deserve the hackneyed name of mere "accident." They are the stuff of fate. And it would constitute a lofty, serene freedom to be released from the natural compulsion to choose from among them—to choose, from among the whirling atoms of mere possibility, something that should

become involved with one as a possible destiny, and even strike perhaps at the root of one's being. There are two mirror worlds, and the human being is between them: the world outside and the one within. They are like two Magdeburg hemispheres, between which the air has been pumped out and whose edges cling together by suction, so that all the king's horses cannot pry them apart. What binds the two externally—inclination, repulsion, intellectual interest—is the reflection of an inner tension, of which we are not readily aware because we are ourselves within ourselves, whether we will or no.

Abu Kasem has worked on his slippers as grimly and obstinately as on his business and his fortune. He is as attached to their poverty as to his riches. They are the all-concealing mask of his prosperity, its other face. Most significant is the fact that he himself has to take all the necessary steps to get rid of them; he can leave nothing to his servants. That is to say, he cannot be parted from them; they are a fetish, soaked with his demonic possession. They have drawn into themselves all the passion of his life, and that passion is the secret thing from which he cannot break away. Even while he is bent on destroying them, he is passionately bound to them. There is something of the *crime passionnel* about the fierce joy he takes in being alone with them as he puts them to death.

And this passion is mutual; that is the great point of the story. These impish slippers are like two dogs turned loose, who, after a lifetime of companionship with their master, return to him again and again. He thrusts them from him, but they become independent only to find their way back to him. And their very faithfulness develops into a kind of innocent maliciousness. Their spurned devotion takes its revenge for the treachery of Abu Kasem's attempt to divorce himself from them, the faithful guardians of his ruling passion. However one looks at it, such inanimate objects have a living rôle to play. Gradually, and with-

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out our knowing it, they become charged with our own tensions, until finally they become magnetic and set up fields of influence that attract and hold us.

The life accomplishment of a man, his social personality, the contoured mask shielding his inner character: that is the shoes of Abu Kasem. They are the fabric of their owner's conscious personality. More, they are the tangible impulses of his unconscious: the sum total of those desires and achievements in which he parades before himself and the world, and by virtue of which he has become a social personage. They are the life sum for which he has struggled. If they have no such secret meaning, why then are they so motley, so uniquely recognizable; why have they become proverbial and such old and trusted friends? Just as they represent to the world the whole personality of Abu Kasem and his miserliness, so they mean unconsciously to himself his greatest, most consciously cultivated virtue, his merchant's avarice. And all of this has brought the man a long way, but holds more power over him than he supposes. It is not so much that Abu Kasem possesses the virtue (or vice), as that the vice (or virtue) possesses him. It has become a sovereign motive of his being, holding him under its spell. Suddenly his shoes begin to play tricks on him—maliciously, so he thinks. But is it not he who is playing the tricks on himself?

Abu Kasem's mortification is the natural consequence of being forced to drag around with him something that he refused to relinquish at the proper time, a mask, an idea about himself, that should have been shed. He is one of those who will not let themselves pass with the passing of time, but clutch themselves to their own bosom and hoard the self which they themselves have made. They shudder at the thought of the consecutive, periodic deaths that open out, threshold after threshold, as one passes through the rooms of life, and which are life's secret. They cling avidly to what they are—what they were. And then, at last, the

worn-out personality, which should have been molted like the annual plumage of a bird, so adheres that they cannot shake it off, even when it has become for them an exasperation. Their ears were deaf to the hour when it struck, and that was long ago.

In some cultures there are sacramental formulas for putting off the old Adam—initiations, demanding and causing a complete breakup of the existing mold that has bewitched and bound its wearer. He is invested with an entirely new costume, which brings him under the spell of a new magic and opens to him new paths. India, for example, has, at least as an ideal formula, the four sacred ages or stages of life: that of the student or neophyte, that of the householder, that of the hermit, and that of the pilgrim—each with its characteristic costume, means of livelihood, and system of rights and duties. The neophyte, as boy and youth, lives in chastity, submissively follows the guidance of his teacher, and begs his bread. Then, sacramentally advanced into his own household, the man takes a wife and devotes himself to the duty of bringing sons into the world; he works, earns money, governs his household and provides his dependents with food and shelter. Next, he retires to the forest, subsists on the wild food of the wilderness, no longer works, has no domestic ties or duties, and directs his whole attention inward to himself—whereas formerly his duty had been to give of himself for the good of the family, the village, and the guild. Finally, as pilgrim, he quits the forest hermitage and, free from any habitation, homeless, begs his bread as in the days of his youth—but now imparting wisdom, whereas then he received it. Nothing that he ever had, either human companionship or worldly possessions, remains to him any more. All has gone from his hands, as though only loaned to him for a while.

Civilizations like that of India, founded on a cornerstone of magic, help their children through those necessary transformations that men find it so hard to accomplish from within. This

they do by means of undisputed sacraments. The bestowal of the special vestments, implements, signet rings, and crowns, actually re-creates the individual. Changes of food and the re-organization of the outer ceremonial of life make possible certain new things, certain actions and feelings, and prohibit others. They are much like commands issued to a hypnotic subject. The unconscious no longer finds in the external world the thing to which it had so long reacted, but something else; and this rouses within it new responses, so that it breaks from the hardened patterns of its past.

Therein lies the great value of magic areas of life for the guidance of the soul. The spiritual powers being symbolized as gods and demons, or as images and holy places, the individual is brought into relationship with them through the procedures of the investiture, and then held to them by the new ritual routines. A perfected, unmarred sacramental system of this kind is a mirror world, which catches all of the rays sent up from the depths of the unconscious and presents them as an external reality susceptible to manipulation. The two hemispheres, the inner and the outer, then fit together perfectly. And any considered change of scenery in the tangible sacramental mirror sphere brings about, almost automatically, a corresponding shift in the interior field and point of view.

The gain which the rejection of this magic conditioning has brought to the modern man—our exorcism of all the demons and gods from the world, and the increase therewith in our rationally directed power over the material forces of the earth—is paid for by the loss of this mirror control over the forces of the soul. The man of today is helpless before the magic of his own invisible psyche. It drives him whither it will. And from among the many possibilities of events, it perversely conjures up for him the mirage of a diabolical external reality, without furnishing him with any counter magic, or any real understanding of the

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spell that has befooled him. We are hampered on every hand by insufficient solutions of the great life questions. The result is a no man's land of physical and spiritual suffering, caused by the insoluble in many forms, and made excruciating by the absence of a way out. This, to unsympathetic eyes, can seem amusing, and, in the realm of art, is what produces comedy—works of the kind of our present comedy of Abu Kasem.

Fairy tales and myths usually have a happy ending: the hero slays the dragon, frees the maiden, tames the winged horse, and wins the magic weapon. But in life such heroes are rare. The daily conversations in the bazaar, the gossip of the market place and the law courts, tell us a different tale: in place of the rare miracle of success, there is the common comedy of failure; instead of Perseus conquering the Medusa and saving Andromeda from the sea monster, we have Abu coming along in his miserable slippers. Abu Kasem is certainly the more frequent type in the everyday world. Here there is much more of tragicomedy than of mythological opera. And such gossip as surrounded Abu Kasem all his life, and made him immortal as a comic figure, is the mythology of the everyday. The anecdote as the finished product of gossip corresponds to the myth, even though it never reaches such lofty heights. It shows the comedy of the Gordian knot which only the magic sword of the mythical hero can cleave.

And so—let us change our shoes. If it were only as simple as that! Unfortunately, the old shoes, cherished and lovingly patched for a lifetime, always come back—so the story teaches us—obstinately and persistently, even after we have finally made up our minds to discard them. And even if we take the wings of the morning and fly unto the uttermost parts of the sea, they are there with us. The elements will not accept them, the sea spews them out, the earth refuses to receive them, and before they can be destroyed by fire, they fall through the air to com-

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plete our ruin. Not even the tax collector wants them. Why should anything in the world burden itself with the full-fledged demons of our ego, just because we have at last become uneasy in their presence?

Who is to deliver Abu Kasem from himself? The way he sought deliverance was obviously futile: one does not get rid of one's beloved ego simply by throwing it out of the window when it has begun to play one tricks. In the end, Abu Kasem conjured the judge at least not to hold him responsible for any future deviltries his slippers might play. But the judge only laughed at him. And will not our judge, too, laugh at us? We alone are responsible for this innocent lifelong process of building our own ego. Involuntarily and lovingly we have patched together the shoes that carry us through life; and we shall remain subject, in the end, to their uncontrollable compulsion.

Something of this we already know from having observed the uncontrollable compulsion at work in others—for example, when we have read their unintentional gestures. It is a force that is made manifest all around us, in all kinds of spontaneous expressions: people's handwriting, failures, dreams, and unconscious images. And it has more control over a man than he himself realizes or would have anyone believe—ininitely more than his conscious will. Its ungovernable drives are the demonic horses harnessed to the chariot of our life, the conscious ego being only the driver. So that there is nothing for it but to resign oneself, like Goethe's Egmont, "to hold fast the reins and to steer the wheels clear, now to the left, now to the right, here from a stone, there from a precipice."

Our fate first deposits itself in our lives through our innumerable tiny movements, the scarcely conscious actions and neglects of everyday life; then, through our choices and rejections it gradually thickens, until the solution reaches a saturation point and

is ripe for crystallization. A slight jar, finally, is enough, and what has long been forming as a cloudy liquid, something indefinite, merely holding itself in readiness, is precipitated as a destiny, crystal-clear and hard. In the case of Abu Kasem, it was the genial mood following his successful business deal, a dizziness at the marvelous double stroke by which he had acquired the little crystal bottles and the attar of roses, that raised his opinion of himself and set the wheel of his fate in motion. He felt that things should continue in this way, with little gifts from fortune, pleasant little returns such as his thrifty and industrious life had earned for him. "Look, another one! Why, Abu Kasem, you lucky dog, these luxurious slippers, and brand-new, in place of the old! Perhaps they have come from that critical friend, who could no longer bear to see you going around in your old tatters."

Abu Kasem's avarice, puffed up by his momentary good fortune, kicked over the traces a little. It would have insulted his feeling of triumph, and dissipated his lofty mood, to have had to come down to the idea of really putting his hand in his pocket to buy himself a new pair of shoes. He would have been able to find the old slippers in the dressing room, just as the judge's slaves soon found them, had he only troubled to hunt around a little, in the sober but annoying suspicion that someone might have been trying to make a fool of him. Instead, he flattered himself by taking the new ones, a little dizzyed and blinded by the beautiful things; for they really satisfied his unsuspected unconscious impulses. It was a childish act of sweet self-forgetfulness, a momentary lack of self-control; but something was given expression through it, which for a long time had been disregarded. Something that had been quietly growing overwhelmingly powerful was at last given its play, and the particle that swells to an avalanche was set in motion.

The very same net with which Abu Kasem had fished up his

shady gains in the bazaar he had now unconsciously snarled about himself, a net spun of the threads of his own avarice. And so he found himself in a pretty predicament, caught fast in the mesh of himself. What for a long time had been building within, a slowly growing, threatening tension, had unpredictably unloaded itself into the outer world and carried him into the clutches of the law, where he was now left to lash helplessly in a tangle of public mortification, neighborly blackmail, and trouble with the authorities. Abu Kasem's own behavior, his greedy prosperity and his avid hoarding of himself, had long been sharpening the teeth of this machinery and fitting them into place.

According to the Indian formula, man sows his seed and pays no attention to its growth. It sprouts and ripens, and then each must eat of the fruit of his own field. Not only our actions, but also our omissions, become our destiny. Even the things that we have failed to will are reckoned among our intentions and accomplishments, and may develop into events of grave concern. This is the law of Karma. Each becomes his own executioner, each his own victim, and, precisely as in the case of Abu Kasem, each his own fool. The laughter of the judge is the laughter of the devils in hell at the damned, who have uttered their own sentence and burn in their own flames.

The story of Abu Kasem shows how finely woven is the net of Karma, and how tough its delicate threads. Can his ego, whose demons now have him fast in their clutches, free him; can it put itself to death? In his despair, is he not already on the very verge of the recognition that no one can relieve him of his slippers, no power on earth destroy them, but that he must in some way go about getting rid of them nevertheless? If they could only become unessential to him, piece by piece, as they became more valuable to him with every mending! If he could only free

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himself from their motley, patch by patch, until they were nothing but a pair of indifferent rags! ¹

It is told in the tale that the judge could not refuse Abu Kasem his boon, which means that he was no longer to be haunted by his dreadful slippers. The light of his new day, in other words, had begun to dawn. But that light could be rising, ultimately, from no other place but the deep crater of his own interior, which up to now had been shrouding his vision with its cloudy distillations. *Nemo contra diabolum nisi deus ipse*. The far-spun mysterious ego, which he had so painfully woven around himself as his world—the judge, the neighbors, the fishermen, the elements (for even these took part in the play of his secretly beloved ego), the filthy slippers, and his wealth—had been sending him hint after hint. What more could he ask from his external mirror sphere? It had spoken to him in its own way, blow upon blow. The final release, now, would have to come from himself, from within. But how?

It is at such a moment that the hint of a dream can be helpful, or an inkling of insight in response to the oracle of some timeless

¹ Strindberg conceived this way back, in his *inferno* period. He discovered in Swedenborg the conception of the punishment that a man hangs around his own neck, having produced it from his own unconscious, and he knew from experience how uncannily inanimate objects can play their fatal tricks—strange articles, indifferent houses and streets, institutions, and all the rags and tags of the everyday.

As an old man, very tired, Strindberg wrote a fairy story based on the old tale of Abu Kasem's slippers ("Abu Casems Toffler," *Samlade Skrifter*, Del. 51, Stockholm, 1919). But his version does not fulfill the promise of the title. Many essential points have been changed and much that is unessential has crept in. The tattered slippers are not Abu Kasem's own lifework, but were only given to him by the Caliph to prove his avarice. In some of his earlier writings, on the other hand, he had dealt more successfully with this question of the self-engendered destiny—the self-built theater of life, which then comes alive and begins to play with us because its wings and props are expressions of our own inner being. He had presented it as a phase of his own journey into hell in *To Damascus* (1898), where he showed how our material world is produced from the stuff of our own involuntary compulsions—both the fiendish compulsions and the silently helpful.