1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

A resolution test chart featuring several groups of horizontal and vertical lines of varying thicknesses. Each group is accompanied by a numerical value indicating the resolution. The values include 1.0, 1.1, 1.25, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2, 3.6, 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, 5.6, 6.3, 7.1, 8.0, 9.0, 10, 11.2, 12.5, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22.5, 25, 28, 32, 36, 40, 45, 50, 56, 63, 71, 80, 90, 100, 112, 125, 140, 160, 180, 200, 225, 250, 280, 320, 360, 400, 450, 500, 560, 630, 710, 800, 900, 1000, 1120, 1250, 1400, 1600, 1800, 2000, 2250, 2500, 2800, 3200, 3600, 4000, 4500, 5000, 5600, 6300, 7100, 8000, 9000, 10000.

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THE EROS OF JAMES MERRILL'S
THE CHANGING LIGHT AT SANDOVER

by

CRAIG A. POILE, B.J., B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
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"The Eros of James Merrill's
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submitted by Craig A. Poile, B.J., B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chairman, Department of English

Carleton University

Abstract

This thesis examines James Merrill's The Changing Light at Sandover as the product of a creative order of love best described as Eros. The first section of the trilogy, The Book of Ephraim, explores the self through elements of memory, perception and poetic composition. Mirabell's Books of Number, the second part, uses an examination of number and matter to expand the poet's understanding of a larger world. The final book, Scripts for the Pageant, presents a series of lessons that illuminate the angelic or ideal potential in human life. By following the rejuvenating pattern of Eros, the poet acquires a comic vision that embraces reality in all its facets.

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Legend

- AQ - "James Merrill at Home: An Interview." Arizona
Quarterly. 38:19-36
- CL - The Changing Light at Sandover
- FN - From the First Nine
- R - Recitative
- L - Letter from Merrill, 24 September, 1991

Chapter 1

Poetry of Love, Loss and Replenishment

I may already be part god Asleep awake
some afterglow as of a buried heaven
keeps flickering through me I may even
learn to love it Eros for your sake
(FN 160)

In James Merrill's "From the Cupola," the power of love comes close to tangibility but never takes material form. The protagonist, a New England spinster, connects with Eros her lover only where "the mouths behind [their] faces kiss" (FN 152). Their romance is a drama played out in the mind. Merrill transforms Eros from this kind of mental phantom into an active force in his trilogy, The Changing Light at Sandover, where the creative power of love aids in the exploration of the self and the spiritual realm. The manifestation of love surpasses the bounds of human feeling and emerges as a shaping and ordering pattern that permeates the narrative of the poem. In this lyric to his companion of twenty-five years, Merrill employs the qualities of a primordial Eros as the foundation of this spiritual project and proposes that "to love is to found a religion with a fallible God" (AO 30).

As its central action, The Changing Light links "magical places real or invented" (R 7) to bridge the

boundary between the inner and outer worlds that Merrill's verse delineates in "From the Cupola." The narrative connects with the spiritual realm through the medium of a Ouija board used as both parlour game and oracle. The board allows JM and DJ, the personae of Merrill and his companion David Jackson, to speak to the inhabitants of an unseen world and communicate with the dead. Heaven, they discover, exists in "THE SURROUND OF THE LIVING" (CL 59) and is home to human and non-human voices, including the sensual Ephraim, the bat-like Mirabell, the "higher" powers of angels and nature. By sharing their experience as "subjects in a vast/Investigation" (CL 19), JM and DJ become "soulmates by the poem's end" (L).

The partners' rapport forms the basic structure of the bridge between worlds and creates an "easy, unreproachful" (CL 72) environment for consultation of the higher powers. Merrill makes it clear that without Jackson there would be no poem. The presiding Eros draws on the talents of both partners. The poet explains:

According to Mirabell, David is the subconscious shaper of the message itself, the "Hand," as they call him. Of the two of us, he's the spokesman for human nature, while I'm the "Scribe," the one in whose words and images the message gets expressed. This would be a fairly rough distinction, but enough to show that the transcripts as they stand could never have come into being without him. I wonder if the trilogy shouldn't have been signed with both our names -- or simply 'by DJ, as told to JM'? (R 68)

This project is the "folie à deux" described by a

psychotherapist in an early section of The Changing Light. He suggests the "mutual madness" may be a method to connect with the unconscious, which is the seat of the true self according to Carl Jung. JM's therapist asks: "Can you find no simpler ways/To sound each other's depths of spirit . . ."? (CL 30). However, JM dismisses the possibility of reducing the project to the caprice of lovers' infatuation soon after the analyst's remarks. The point, he concludes, "[w]as never to forego, in favor of/Plain dull proof, the marvelous nightly pudding" (CL 32).

The collaboration of JM and DJ is only one mediating structure at work in this trilogy. Messages and events recounted by JM undergo a further translation into a variety of verse, creating a more objective form which, "[f]ar from denying temperament, indeed/[flings] it like caution to the winds, like seed" (CL 19). Merrill's narrative follows a self-revising strategy, shifting fluidly through past and present and from place to place. As with the partnership at the board, the techniques and structures allow Merrill the intellectual distance to create a verse "sufficiently/Imbued with otherness" (CL 89) and reproduce effects of perception, time and memory. The Ouija messages, which match the narrative in their equivocal and sometimes misleading manner, create room for doubt at every revelation. Perpetual puzzlement drives the project onward through question-and-answer sessions and the revision of earlier revelations. The

overall sense of unity in The Changing Light is found in the processes of the poem, not the content. By capturing the movement of creative energy, Merrill's poetic project employs the ubiquitous shaping power of Eros to "improve the line[,]/In every sense, for life" (CL 91).

In regard to defining Eros in The Changing Light, the influence of Hellenism in Merrill's work suggests a return to the roots of pre-Christian philosophy. Merrill and Jackson's selection of Athens for their second residence in 1959 indicates this philosophical shift may have been supported by a physical move. Merrill says: "We wanted to learn Greek and we also wanted to learn Greece, and the turn of mind that made a Greek" (R 63). Merrill's work has an affinity with a world where science and art were a single body of knowledge and gods were familiar figures who expressed psychological realities. Eros was the name the early Greeks gave the primordial force shaping the universe. One of the earliest messages received from the board, "SAPPHO BLAKE & DEMOCRITUS/SANG WITH A SINGLE VOICE" (CL 178), signals an ongoing urge to reunite strands of knowledge and experience that have been severed by history. To achieve this, the poem evokes the civilization that established a vocabulary of love for Western civilization.

In The Changing Light, the patterns of combination and regeneration, which are best collected under the term Eros, are not just "help" but the foundation of the work. Ephraim

explains: "DEVOTION TO EACH OTHER" is "THE MAIN IMPETUS" (CL 59). How this impetus based on love relates to civilization and specifically the work of the poet is revealed in Mirabell. The greater pattern forming from the process of writing and other cultural activity, JM learns, is "V" work, which is "GUIDED BY HIGHER COLLABORATION" (CL 162). Within this scheme, Eros becomes the force striving for renewal and refinement of life through the narrative. Merrill's positing of Eros as an ancient, ever-present force shares elements of pre-Socratic conceptions of deity. Hesiod named Eros as the force which brought order and harmony out of Chaos when he was creating his natural theology in verse. In his story of the original event that brought Earth and Heaven together, the engendering action was personified as Eros (Jaeger 15).

Merrill's spiritual exploration is not, however, a revival of an outmoded religion but a project to revise, rejuvenate and nourish a personal system of belief. When discussing his unconscious use of mythical and religious structures in his early poetry, Merrill says he "must have some kind of awful religious streak just under the surface" (R 44). He continues: "I've had to conclude that these buried meanings help. Without something like them, one ends up writing light verse about love affairs" (R 44). Through the synthesizing processes of Eros, Merrill unites themes in a single vision where love is "BOTH THE MOULD & THE/CLAY" (CL 59).

A voice from the board calls Merrill's poetry "chronicles of love and loss" (CL 176), a useful summation considering the centrality of these two subjects in his work. In an article written for the New York Review of Books, he cites an early story of loss found in a brief entry in his diary: "Silver springs -- heavenly colors and swell fish" (R 7). He suggests that the phrase is a subliminal sign of the twelve-year-old trying to reunite the "ladylike gush and regular guy terseness" (R 7) that characterized his parents' failed marriage. Born in 1926, this son of a successful New York financier and his second wife balanced life's losses by discovering "loves" that would influence and inspire his work. A multilingual Prussian governess taught him at an early age to see the world through layers of language. Taken to the opera when he was eleven, he later wrote that

[t]he point thereafter was to arrange for one's own chills and fever, passions and betrayals, Chiefly in order to make song of them. (FN 207)

His lifelong study of literature has included works by Wallace Stevens, Dante, W.B. Yeats, Henry James and Marcel Proust, the subject of his honours thesis at Amherst College. His travels have taken him to the Orient, the Southwest United States and the Middle East, but his primary residence is in Stonington, Connecticut, where the majority of The Changing Light takes place.

Merrill's experiments with literary form include two

plays produced in New York in the 1950s. He published a first novel, The Seraglio, in 1957 and a second, The (Diblos) Notebook, in 1965. While his eleven books of poetry form the core of his work and have earned him the National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize, he says the plays left him "on fresh terms with language" (R 51). The novels contain earlier attempts at employing the Ouija material, the experiences of his Greek travels and self-revising narrative. Divine Comedies, his seventh book of poetry, was published in 1976 and included The Book of Ephraim, the first installment of the trilogy. Two additional volumes, Mirabell: Books of Number and Scripts for the Pageant, followed in 1978 and 1980. Merrill says the trilogy departs from his earlier work because of "the unprecedented way in which the material came . . . like what a friend, or stranger, might say over a telephone" (R 49). The collected trilogy was published in 1982 with the coda "The Higher Keys." Merrill is still writing and published his most recent collection, The Inner Room, in 1988, which includes poetry, a short play and prose writing.

Criticism of Merrill's poetry in periodicals and books increased in the 1980s with the completion of the trilogy. New work included two collections of articles and general overviews of his work by Ross Labrie, Judith Moffett and Steven Yenser. In recent years, articles have illuminated a variety of themes in Merrill's work, including alchemy, the

use of music, apocalyptic visions and psychology in the trilogy. Even before The Changing Light was published, critics recognized Merrill's skill in creating poetry centred on love. In her review of Braving the Elements, Helen Vendler notes that Merrill's "single best subject -- love -- has found a way of expressing itself masked and unmasked at once, instead of hiding almost mummified in swathings of secrecy" (205-06). Similar praise comes from Robert von Hallberg, who in his survey of American poetry from 1945-80 calls Merrill "a love poet, perhaps the best of this era" (116). The conclusion that Ephraim is "at heart a sustained love poem to David Jackson" (175) also emerges in Moffett's study. However, the critical unanimity of the primacy of love in Merrill's work limits itself to examining veiled references to romantic relationships, Oedipal themes and the traditional address to the beloved. In this way, critical response has restricted the theme of love's power in the verse to the specific relationships between characters and autobiographical elements. Because Merrill includes few references of this kind, criticism to date has given scant attention to love as a primary force in the poetry.

A larger field of study, including the narrative devices in the poem, reveals the Eros of The Changing Light is an expansive force which moves more than the human heart. By tracing the presence of an elemental and dynamic form of

Eros, its representation and role in the writing of poetry and experience become the "theme/Whose steady light shone back . . . from every/Least detail exposed to it" (CL 3). The god called upon in The Changing Light is love in a mask, its power to transform and nourish the central unifying subject of the poem. Focusing on the psyche, this thesis traces the poet's use of verse to explore the self and the world around him. Psychological realities such as the interplay of perception and imagination in the conscious and unconscious mind become tangible in the translation to verse. Rather than situating the trilogy within a tradition of love poetry, this study examines the parallel development of an idea of love within a single mind and a creative work.

The trilogy flourishes in the reverberation of the creative and shaping force of Eros that moves through worlds both secular and spiritual, on a "vast (or tiny) scale" (CL 126), until the only question is how far this power can be employed. While the narrative revolves around a parlour game, far more is at stake in the successful mediation of the worlds joined by the board. In Mirabell, the demand for poems of science takes the exploration to the powers that live in the stuff of chemistry and biology, not the abstract world where most poetry is comfortably at home. Poetic composition, which in Ephraim provides a virtuoso illustration of how love conquers all, faces the hard stumbling block of matter in Mirabell. The creatures at the

board "ARE NOT EVIL BUT IMPATIENT" (CL 113). The poet and his partner cannot dismiss them as morally wrong; yet they find it hard to welcome this brusque and alien disposition. One of the human spirits warns JM that knee-jerk sarcasm "WILL GET YOU NOWHERE" (CL 134), and the development of the necessary skills begins. "ALL THINGS ARE DONE HERE IF YOU HAVE TECHNIQUE" (CL 104), the pair are told, a reminder that within the salon dialogue are the manners and diplomacy that can bring about the fruitful fusion of the worlds inhabited by Mirabell and the poet. The poem chronicles a drama between an incredible power and mortal frailty which parallels the dynamics of modern life on the elemental and personal level. Destruction at the atomic level has grave implications for life on earth; similarly, the lessons in balancing mind and matter have implications for the future of JM and DJ's household.

Beyond Mirabell and the poems of science is the abstract world where matter is reconciled to mind and a vision of "paradise" becomes possible through the imagination. Scripts for the Pageant chronicles a spiritual journey illuminated by the light the voices of Mirabell say "will neither/Hurt nor kill but permeate its breather" (CL 138). Taking its tone from a light that has changed to silver, the third book reflects a refinement and purity the poet grasps in the rhythms of combination, destruction and replenishment found in Eros. These "higher keys" employ the

imaginative power of the human mind to express immutable patterns. From playful hedonism to divine ceremony, the trials of JM and DJ create the understanding and knowledge needed to base their household on an all-embracing order of love. In his poem, "Clearing the Title," Merrill calls The Changing Light "folur poem" (FN 358). His description underscores the accumulated experience that has been ordered into a strong structure:

. . . It's signed JM, but grew
From life together, grain by coral grain.
(FN 358)

Chapter 2

Measuring the Heights of Self

So, in a sense, all these figures [in the trilogy] are our creation, or mankind's. The powers they represent are real -- as, say, gravity is "real" -- but they'd be invisible, inconceivable, if they'd never passed through our heads and clothed themselves out of the costume box they found there. (R 68)

The Book of Ephraim continues Merrill's chronicles of love and loss on a stage employing the disguises and properties found in character, memory and experience. Twenty-six sections, one for each letter of the alphabet, create a verse narrative incorporating numerous rhyme schemes and meters, transcriptions from the board (distinguished by capital letters), quotations from other writers and the dialogue of JM and DJ. In this way, writing poetry can be considered a model of the mind perceiving and interpreting reality by recalling, for example, excerpts and allusions to other texts. Merrill claims: "In our day resonance has become, thanks to Freud and Jung, more the property of the unconscious than a conscious manipulation of the body of literature" (R 10). These materials in the psyche, whether original or part of literary tradition,

compose a journey of personal discovery during "a Thousand and One Evenings Spent/With David Jackson at the Ouija Board" (CL 4).

Merrill begins his love poem to David Jackson with Ephraim, which Vendler calls "a hymn to history and a meditation on memory -- personal history and personal memory" (213). This focus indicates how the Eros at work in The Changing Light differs from the simple emotional or physical attachment predominant in literature about love. Present both in the workings of the other world contacted through the board and quotidian events, the activity of Eros is ubiquitous in JM's life and work. Through its patterns, the poet finds new value for personal experience in the creative activity of the imagination. Thus, Merrill says that in poetry "[t]he means -- imagery, tone and so forth -- can be as personal as you like, so long as the end is not to express personality" (R 39).

This chapter considers how Ephraim gives voice and form to the otherness Merrill seeks to know through his recording of experience. As the narrative progresses, this other takes on many forms but is consistently a presence the poet seeks to know or desires, whether he senses it as part of his own being or an external element. In this striving, JM tempers individual and subjective perceptions by seeing the impersonal flow of Eros at work in himself and the world. The "net of loose talk tightening to verse" (CL 85) traces

the urge that JM says "draws us/To, and insulates us from, the absolute" (CL 84). Poetic construction, multiple forms of the self and messages from the board create a mirror where life can be seen "through that craze/Of its own creation/Into another life" (CL 42). In addition to form, this section looks at the character of Ephraim, who personifies the activity of a ubiquitous power in a shape that is both genial to the poet and tied to the unseen world. Finally, this chapter looks at the use of fictional characters, negative capability and reincarnation to illustrate dramatically the interplay of facets of self.

Eros is the conduit for JM's creative project. Its synthesizing power moves and orders both individual life and the larger world, making any process of self-discovery a simultaneous delineation of an external order. Merrill explains: "Total, clear-eyed immersion in one's own little world produces . . . an excellent likeness of the universe" (R 39). While the narrative ties itself closely to the personal life of JM and DJ, its fragmented, polyphonic structure creates a balancing infusion of unconscious or unseen forces. During a visit at the board, the spirit of Wallace Stevens tells JM:

A SCRIBE SITS BY YOU CONSTANTLY THESE DAYS
DOING WHAT HE MUST TO INTERWEAVE
YOUR LINES WITH MEANINGS YOU CANNOT CONCEIVE
(CL 72)

For Merrill to improve the line for life means bringing the vitality of Eros to the poetic line, thus strengthening the

dialogue between the conscious and unconscious mind while harmonizing the self and the external world.

The form of the narrative is its pathway to spiritual exploration and a means to harness unseen power. The opening verse of The Changing Light discusses how JM planned to write a novel about his Ouija experiences using "[t]he baldest prose/Reportage" (CL 3). However, he ends the project and abandons the "shoe" of prose in favour of verse where "the feet went bare" (CL 4). JM's struggles with literary conventions are ended by "[b]lind/Promptings" (CL 4) that redirect the narrative into a more dynamic structure. Through the emphasis on form, Merrill's preoccupation with style and the "incarnation and withdrawal of/A god" (CL 3) are interdependent projects. In an earlier poem Merrill says: "[F]orm's what affirms" (FN 132). In The Changing Light, form and inspiration are found in the patterns of Eros.

The unwilling directions taken by the forces of the unseen world parallel the poet's exploration of the vicissitudes of memory and the limitations of intelligence. JM finds a degree of blindness can be a key to understanding his own psyche. During a visit to a friend in hospital with a terminal stroke, he notes that "[w]hat light there was fell sideways from a mind/Half dark" (CL 63). The comment could apply equally to himself or the patient. Like the distillation of memory, where what is lost is no longer

known, Ephraim chronicles lives which are disturbed by events but retain a sense of completeness. After a burglary at their home, JM says: "Nothing we can recollect is missing" (CL 91). In these events, Merrill illustrates how partial blindness and forgetfulness allow unconscious elements to shape perception. In much the same way, his ordering of life through verse brings with it the influence of literary tradition and convention that pre-exist the individual artist.

Just as the Ouija board messages bring a foreign, yet vital urge to bear on the lives of JM and DJ, the poetic process translates personal life into established forms and helps bring about a "ritual effacement of the ego" (R 21). JM says that "[t]he twinklings of/Insight hurt or elude the naked eye, [with] no/Metrical lens to focus them" (CL 85). This awareness of mediating perception in turn reflects the creative process and life itself. The page becomes "[t]hat one surface to be truly scratched --/A new day's quota of shortsighted prose" (CL 46). The world of verse, however small and myopic, captures the activity of Eros by ordering light and dark characteristics of reality. JM says the verse "so mirrors,/So embodies up to now some guiding force,/ [which] can't simply be written off" (CL 85).

Perceiving the action of Eros and incorporating it into verse becomes the primary way for the poet to know the self. The narrative of Ephraim achieves this internal exploration

by combining and ordering multiple aspects of personality found in JM's memory and the characters he creates. For example, JM says his mother is present in the verse "[t]hroughout, [in the] the breath drawn after every line" (CL 84). Merrill employs these involuntary and unconscious influences in an attempt to grasp feeling which "[r]emains beyond [his] power to say outright" (CL 84). Uncovering the elemental components of the self through poetry refocuses his vision. The resulting fluidity, which he likens to "[s]yntax reversing her binoculars" (CL 82), teaches him not to "labour images till they yield a subject" (CL 76). He finds revelation of the self as of the larger world is not an act of will but lies inherent in accrued knowledge and experience.

To foster self-knowledge, Eros engenders forms that bridge seemingly disparate worlds, including the divisions within the self. JM recounts how a flash of lightning, suggesting "the naked current" (CL 84) of Eros, forged the "dull red mazes caked with slime" (CL 75) of Venice into "[a] window fiery-mild, whose walked-through frame/ Everything else at sunset, hinged upon" (CL 77). Worlds come together on the bridge in Venice, much like the window hinge in JM and DJ's dining room, which sits between the reflecting window and the gathered company of humans and spirits. The facets of Venice are encapsulated for JM in a quotation from Proust that opens section "V": "Venise,

pavane, nirvana, vice" (CL 75). In its fluid, dancing, perfect, divine and immoral character, the city becomes another lens for JM and brings him into dialogue with his nineteen-year-old nephew Wendell, who is Ephraim's representative on earth. The encounter traces another creative merger, guiding "Wendell's theme (this world's grim truths) around/To [JM's] (his otherworldly guardian)" (CL 82). The technique creates a synthesis in form comparable to the operatic works JM evokes at the end of the section. Alteration of themes brings together the voice of the young artist, who rejects human nature, and the one of the mature poet striving for the refinement of the individual self. JM says of the act of composition: "[F]ew had found/A cleaner use for power" (CL 81).

In addition to ordering experience, writing poetry gives form to the immaterial and generates deeper understanding by supplanting conscious thought processes. The real and imagined surroundings of JM's life, including Ephraim, other characters and objects as domestic as a geranium blossom, become a way to know hidden facets of the self. By encountering these reflections and extensions, JM considers buried desires and past experiences in an objective form. Their reintegration into his consciousness brings self-knowledge. In the same way, the mirror JM and DJ use to be seen by Ephraim gives an internal reflectiveness a substantial form. The result is a creative interplay of

thought and material reality. Using a variant of William Carlos Williams' philosophy of poetry, Merrill explains:

No thoughts, then, but in things? True enough, so long as the notorious phrase argues not for the suppression of thought but for its oneness with whatever in the world -- pine woods, spider, cigarette -- gave rise to it. Turn the phrase around, you arrive no less at truth; no things but in thoughts. Was the apricot any more real without a mind to consider it, whether this poet's or that starving goat's? We'll never know. (R 109)

Poetic vision allows perceiving and versifying to become a way of constructing a consciousness based on the relatedness found in love.

Merrill's attempt to attune his perceptions to rhythms found in the larger world halts any retreat into a purely intellectual realm. Recalling his experience with his Greek lover Strato and the life of his cat Maisie, JM recognizes the older meaning of "animal," which is "of the soul" (CL 53). A similar recognition of the self outside present consciousness surfaces in his exploration of time. The chronological transformation of the self emerges in a passage in which JM remarks: "So Time has -- but who needs that nom de plume? I've --/We've modulated" (CL 85). In the interplay of these selves, he encounters the other within himself. Recognizing and exploiting this multiplicity allows the individual psyche to play out the creative development engendered by Eros within its own structures.

The synthesizing aspects of Eros in Ephraim ultimately achieve regeneration by creating new forms. Its patterns

move the verse impulsively through loss and death to new vitality. JM writes:

-- Oh but my foot has gone to sleep! Gingerly
 I prod it: painful, slow, hilarious twinges
 Of reawakening, recirculation;
 Pulsars intuiting the universe once
 } More, this net of loose talk tightening to verse,

 And verse once more revolving between poles --
 Gassy expansion and succinct collapse --
 Till Heaven is all peppered with black holes,
 Vanishing points for the superfluous
 Matter elided (just in time perhaps)
 By the conclusion of a passage thus . . .
 (CL 85-6)

In this "awakening," getting new blood into the "foot," whether the verse form or the poet's, is characterized by hilarity. The lines capture what Suzanne Langer characterizes as the comic rhythm where "the exhibition of vitality rises to a breaking point, to mirth and laughter" (135). This current akin to both Eros and comedy moves inert substance such as the petrified image of Venice and revives its spent material. Dead material is consumed or contained in the flux of "[g]assy expansion and succinct collapse" (CL 86). In the individual life, an analogous pattern emerges in the refinement found in the collapse and expansion of the self as it follows larger rhythms.

Within Merrill's scheme, the self that is motionless is estranged from the vital rhythms of love and life. Walking in Venice before a lightning storm, JM perceives a spiritual ossification in the "monumental 'I' of stone" (CL 75) and the "scented drivel of undying/Love and regret" (CL 75).

While these superannuated features are part of the city,
their description suggests an interior landscape as well:

A whole heavenly city
Sinking, titanic ego mussel-blue
Abulge in gleaming nets of nerve, of pressures
Unregistered by the barometer
Stuck between Show and Showers. (CL 75)

In the subsequent transformation, "lightning strikes the set" (CL 76) and creates a "[g]laze soaking inward as it came to mind" (CL 77). JM projects his feeling into the landscape, where it is charged and travels back "[v]itrified in metamorphosis" (CL 77). The storm makes time, place and psyche lucid, much as glass takes shape in the blower's forge, and prefigures the chemical transformations to come in Mirabell and Scripts for the Pageant.

The Ouija board revelations usher JM and DJ into a landscape less genial than the cultural splendor of Venice. Ephraim describes a reincarnation process wherein some souls return to the next "vein-tangled snare" (CL 17) on earth while others remain in a nine-stage bureaucracy. This bureaucracy consists of patrons who attend to the souls of the dead before they are drawn back to life by "the tough/Tendrils of unquestioning love" (CL 17). These seemingly arbitrary aspects of Eros puzzle the pair who live "for art and love" (CL 31). JM comments: "We were not tough-/Or literal-minded, or unduly patient/With those who were" (CL 31). The impersonality inherent in the system is underscored when JM and DJ learn they will be separated

after death. Although they are initially chagrined by "the prospect/Of an eternity without [each] other" (CL 25), they soon accept the system that gives voice to "the dim wish of lives to drift apart" (CL 25). Personal concerns, along with "[m]anners, motives, idiom and theme" (CL 16), are not the concern of the bureaucracy of patrons. JM finds "[a]ll sense of play, in fact, [is] quite lost on them" (CL 16). The revelations demand a comic sensibility which "does not insist upon life's conforming to [one's] own special requirements but consents to take [life] on the terms of its own created actuality" (Scott 94).

As the envoy of Eros who brings personality and presence to the unseen forces of the other world, Ephraim confounds disparities of sensibility. Through his often humorous and sometimes challenging tone, he combines the light and dark sides of experience in a single genial character. Following the "lullaby/of awfulness" (CL 6) uttered by a spirit dying in a warehouse fire, Ephraim arrives as a "new and urgent power" (CL 6). Initially he maintains a challenging and devilish tone and unsettles JM and DJ by proposing a bargain for their souls. Once they agree to follow his direction, the "armchair revel" (CL 9) takes on a more sober dimension and a more urbane Ephraim, "like an experienced guide" (CL 9), begins the men's education and takes them "groping towards some higher level" (CL 19). JM describes the indirection characteristic of the

spirit: "As it flowed on, his stream-of-consciousness/
Deepened" (CL 9).

Ephraim's history marks him as an irreplaceable key to the exploration chronicled by the trilogy. JM and DJ realize that Ephraim borrows heavily from their experience and knowledge, making his messages "twice as entertaining, twice as wise/As either of its mediums" (CL 7). However, "[t]he pill beneath his sugar" (CL 15) of salon chatter is the critical voice that has "the edge of over nineteen hundred/Years to improve [its] temper" (CL 16). As "a Greek Jew/Born AD 8 at Xanthos" (CL 8), Ephraim is a product of two of the races that have shaped Western civilization. Previous incarnations as a slave in Caligula's court and an inhabitant of Versailles have placed him at the highest spheres of social life, prompting him to quip that the education of JM and DJ has skipped "THE DULL CLASSROOM [and] DONE IT ALL AT THE SALON LEVEL" (CL 72). Ephraim's experience at court is reflected in his ability to educate through conversation and mannerly confrontation and allows him to intuit the questions JM and DJ lack "the wit to ask" (CL 9). By making sure his verbal arrows are "feathered by head-turning flattery" (CL 15), Ephraim becomes an ideal link to primordial powers for JM and DJ.

A fifty-year-old JM is able to see what his younger self was unaware of when the sessions with Ephraim began. The project allows him "to do the homework/Fiction had

optimistically assigned/To adolescence" (CL 15). He continues:

TAKE our teacher told us
FROM SENSUAL PLEASURE ONLY WHAT WILL NOT
DURING IT BE EVEN PARTLY SPOILED
BY FEAR OF LOSING TOO MUCH This was the tone
We trusted most, a smiling Hellenistic
Lightness from beyond the grave. (CL 15)

Trust allows more play in the narrative and the completion of "homework" (CL 50), a word that describes both the creation of a household with DJ and an education for JM. The spirit's influence expands the range of the partners' discussions. JM discovers that "[s]ooner or later one touches upon matters that are all the realer for not being easily talked about" (R 36). He admits: "We've wanted/ Consuming passions; these refine instead" (CL 50). Through the instruction and repartee of their familiar, JM and DJ discuss matters large and small that illuminate life in its fullness.

Ephraim addresses both the consuming passions of an active life and the coldness Merrill often associates with retrospection and self-knowledge. The spirit challenges his "[i]gnorant and lazy" (CL 15) pupils by narrating the hedonism of the games at Capri "to tease [their] shyness" (CL 15). After observing them in the mirror-like waters of a sandbar, he saucily praises their bodies and their wit. Ephraim also introduces topics surrounding the domestic affairs of JM and DJ, including their childlessness, the haunting possibility of nuclear destruction and their

irreverent attitude towards the "GREAT GENETIC GOD" (CL 19). Merrill discusses the vitality of exploring issues through the board that would otherwise be neglected in his first Ouija poem, "Voices from the Other World":

Because, once looked at lit
By the cold reflections of the dead
Risen extinct but irresistible,
Our lives have never seemed more full, more real,
Nor the full moon more quick to chill.
(FN 67)

Similarly, their familiar's exploration of life in its entirety does not move solely through solar light and laughter but also captures a sober lunar glow.

Ephraim's personality suggests the emerging Eros is a force which moves impulsively into all areas of life and brings these parts into a mutual order. In his spirited romp among the "[p]owers of lightness, darkness, [and other] powers that be" (CL 54), he can be at times "too much the courtier living for pleasure" (CL 23) and can lead JM and DJ "to stride roughshod/Past angels all agape" (CL 19). His attitude, which seems incongruous in a system built on matters of life and death, often surpasses the understanding of the pair at the board. Good-hearted exchange breaks down while discussing the case of George Bernard Shaw, a vegetarian, now a patron to an earth-bound soul. JM balks when Ephraim tells the story of how Shaw "ONCE HAD TO CLAIM/A FINE BROTH OF A BOY COOKED OVER FLAME" (CL 17). JM records his reaction and, in capital letters, the spirit's reply:

This was the tone we trusted not one bit.
 Must everything be witty? AH MY DEARS
 I AM NOT LAUGHING I WILL SIMPLY NOT SHED TEARS
 (CL 17)

Despite their objections, Ephraim's comic acceptance prevails as the pair become acclimatized to his method of instruction.

Ephraim's gaffes may also reflect elements JM and DJ dislike in themselves. Their attempt "[t]o sound each other's depths of spirit" (CL 30) makes note of both the negative and positive aspects of their lives. While he praises their "kind hearts, good sense, [and] imagination" (CL 15), he also says they bring to mind the "orgy-fodder in CAPRICES" (CL 15). Confrontation and acceptance of these traits are part of their attempt to capture a self-understanding that has eluded them. JM elaborates:

Despite our insights . . . we fall
 Back on the greater coziness of being
 Seen by him, and by that very seeing
 Forgiven for the spectacles we've made
 Of everything, ourselves, the world, the mud
 Gullies skipped over, rut on trickling rut,
 All in the name of life. Life? Shh. En route.
 (CL 38)

JM's therapist may be right in suggesting that Ephraim may be a symptom of the guilt felt by "sons who have not sired a child" (CL 30). However, the rhythm of Eros overcomes these mental blockages and allows a new vitality to emerge. More exactly, Ephraim is not a product of suppressed guilt but a creative means to surpass it.

A large part of Ephraim's utility is attached to his

ineffability. The power he represents remains unseen, just as the life he brings is constantly "[e]n route" (CL 38). JM's "effort to survey/The arteries of Ephraim's influence" (CL 66) ends with more questions. JM says:

If he had blacked out reason (or vice versa)
On first sight, we instinctively avoided
Facing the eclipse with the naked eye.
. . . . we charily observed
Either that his memory was spotty
(Whose wouldn't be, after two thousand years?)
Or that his lights and darks were a projection
Of what already burned, at some obscure
Level or another, in our skulls. (CL 31)

Through Ephraim, unconscious contents of the mind enter the conscious realm, but the result is a synthesis and not an effacement of either aspect. Ephraim's unseen world is understandably "fraught with tantrums, cloudy thinking,/ Blind spots" (CL 66). To deny temperament would deny the aspects of the internal and external world which cannot be grasped through pure rationality.

Ephraim begins the pattern of revision, reversal and transformation that characterizes The Changing Light as a whole. Just as Ephraim is a composite character drawn from the collective psyche of JM and DJ, Merrill's poetry draws on the storehouse of poetic tradition in its variety of forms and voices. When faced with the notion of an "unbridgeable split between light and serious verse" (R 28) posed by an interviewer, Merrill replies: "Aren't we used by now to the light poem that has dark touches and the serious poem shot through with lighter ones?" (R 28). Further, he

says humour can be used by the poet to avoid sounding oracular. "Heaven" (CL 66) as glimpsed through the witty Ephraim shares the human dimensions Merrill finds in Wallace Stevens' poetry. Merrill says: "For all the philosophy that intrudes in and between the lines, Stevens' poetry is a body of work that is man-sized" (R 28). In Ephraim, the spirit of Eros expresses itself through a human scale of domestic life and self-reflection along with the concomitant shifts in tone and form.

As part of his exploration, JM returns to the characters who map out the "plus and minus . . . [v]ital to the psychic current's flow" (CL 35) in the unfinished novel. JM connects his prose endeavour to the present narrative when he asks:

If we are characters
As now and then strikes us, in some superplot
Of Ephraim's, isn't it our prerogative
To run away with its author? (CL 38)

In this light, JM and DJ are no less subject to a narrative flow than the fictional and spiritual figures. The characters of the novel, in turn, are a constellation of JM and part of the thousand "twinkling point[s]" (CL 32) of his poetry. Incorporating the fragments of the novel builds a bridge between the novel's "orphaned form" (CL 3) and the thriving verse project much as JM reflects on his present existence using past selves.

The novel supplies over a half-dozen "characters/Human and otherwise" (CL 3) created by JM to help answer

"[q]uestions one simply cannot face in person" (CL 68). JM says the character called Sergei is based on himself, while Ephraim translates into the character named Eros, who shares Ephraim's link to the primordial powers. In a fragment from the novel, Eros says: "Trace me back to some loud, shallow, chill,/Underlying motive's overspill" (CL 33). Unlike Ephraim, the other-worldly spirit of the novel never distances himself from a role as "a slitherer/Tombless, untamed" (CL 70). In the character of Eros, JM deletes the lighter aspects which balance Ephraim's personality for dramatic effect. He admits this translation was not the "step towards reality" (CL 66) he took it for at the time.

Strained communication between the characters, who are prototypes or "old selves" of JM and Ephraim, underscores the failure of the novel. The fictional situation suggests a time when erotic impulses were estranged from the poet's more aesthetic "[o]rderings of experience" (CL 69). Eros and Sergei have interactive, perhaps even interdependent, personalities which stop short of the "perfected flow" (CL 66) JM wanted to create through the novel. In a confrontation in a mirror, the spirit speaks of "[i]ms diametrically proposed" (CL 69) with "[u]nrelenting fluency" (CL 70). Sergei is told by his nemesis: "Admit we have/Designs on the same backwardly emerging/Notion rich in dream-deposits" (CL 69). In response, the soon-to-be superannuated Sergei "[steels] himself to move beyond [the

spirit's] range" (CL 70). The novel's description of an antithetical relationship between the two only leads towards the end of a book that will never be written; their opposition is unresolved in that form. Sergei is abandoned and unnamed in JM's summary of the end of the novel: "Exeunt severally the forces joined/By Eros" (CL 71). However, the opposition of an introspective figure and his sensual alter ego continues more successfully in JM and Ephraim.

A lukewarm character like Sergei, a heated-up version of Ephraim and anima-like projections such as the demonic Johanna expand the range of JM's self-examination. The interplay of these selves real and imagined exemplifies the opportunity for self-knowledge found in Eros. Merrill illustrates this method of learning in a passage written to Sergei, his persona in the novel. Sergei's distance from the present narrative inspires JM to address a clipped blossom, a "slip" taken from the self, placed in a glass of water. A dialogue between plant and poet juxtaposes two philosophies of life. While the plant "unthinkingly lives on" (CL 68), JM's says that "short of never to be born,/Best is an early, painless death" (CL 68). In his discussion of Sergei, the poet recognizes both small deaths taking place in the self and an unceasing vitality in the world around him.

JM expresses regret at the loss of past versions of himself. His yearning for the roots of his personality, some of which "look stronger, [while] some have died" (CL 68),

contrasts sharply with the deracinated bloom which does not pine "to join a riot of kin out on the terrace" (CL 68). JM says the creation of the character of Sergei began with a glimpse of an unidentified old man seen some twenty years before from a window at his home in Stonington. Thus, the label of "scion and spit" (CL 68) belongs to Sergei in relation to the stranger and also to Merrill as the male heir in his family. He finds impersonal forms tend to lead back to intensely personal, if generally evaded, themes. The poet recognizes his capacity for acceptance by following the example of the flower and his own offshoot in the form of Sergei. JM asks: "Live on -- is that the message?" (CL 68). The imaginative identification of the poet with the character and the blossom effaces the tragedy of severance with a revised self. "[T]he wraith of withered pink" (CL 71) he crumbles absentmindedly marks the end of both Sergei, an "old self in a new form" (CL 68), and the geranium blossom.

The expanding process of Eros brings a greater intensity to the lights and darks of the poem, refining a philosophy of life through a meditation on a simple object and reworking the relatively superficial treatment of character in the novel into a part of JM's enlightening introspection. In a further heightening, the engagements at the board with their "charm" and "levity" (CL 72) are balanced by JM's encounter with life's aspect as "a death's-head to be faced" (CL 41). In section "L" (as in life),

Ephraim leads JM through the steps leading up to his death in a former incarnation. Through this character, a boy named Rufus, Merrill simultaneously discusses the processes of maturation and death. Part of the drama is the beloved, in this case a character named Peter, who is called Rufus's "GREAT HAPPINESS" (CL 43). Love for Peter takes the boy out of "private school" (CL 43) and triggers the demise of an innocent self. Ephraim's exercise, an Eros-like combination, derives greater understanding by employing a buried past and present anxiety. Rather than a loss, this "death" becomes a lesson in the role of destruction in life. JM is left holding "what he loathes/And loves, the dead self dressed in his own clothes" (CL 49).

A sharp alteration in the tone of the narrative, what Northrop Frye calls "the point of ritual death" (156), places JM's experience within the traditional comic pattern where the protagonist comes within sight of death before the story ends in happiness and health. Merrill discusses this movement in Mirabell when JM contemplates taking further instruction from the other world. He asks DJ: "Why couldn't the whole adventure,/as before [with Ephraim], just graze peril on its outward/curve to insight?" (CL 111). While the action takes place at the salon level, the matters are still ones of life and death. In Frye's words, the narrative moves "toward a deliverance from something which, if absurd, is by no means invariably harmless" (155). With his characteristic

wit, the light-hearted Ephraim underscores this element of potential tragedy in his story of the final flood of souls, which he says could be either "A GREAT GLORY OR A GREAT PUDDLE" (CL 60).

In its movement between worlds of life and death, the comic pattern shares the synthesizing impulse of Eros. Merrill says that in his work "[t]he unities of home and world, and world and page, [are] observed through the very act of transition from one to the other" (R 7). As a result, JM and DJ's lives "never seemed more full, more real" (FN 67), than within the grander scheme played out between the world of the living and Ephraim's realm. This collision and eventual synthesis of worlds in The Changing Light illustrate another aspect of Frye's analysis of comedy and the pattern of Eros. Among the "phases" he outlines in his study of comic structure is the victory of the green or fertile world over the one of winter. He also says comic resolution can be marked by the triumph of an upper world of order in a battle against a lower world of confusion. Through its pursuit of new life and order, the Eros of The Changing Light creates an analogous structure on many levels, including verse and the domestic lives of JM and DJ.

The revelations from the unseen world generate the most spectacular passages of Ephraim, but the central focus remains the home of JM and DJ and its evocation of Eros. The intensive exploration which began with the "FORTUNATE

CONJUNCTION" (CL 15) of two lovers at the board leads in turn to a transformation of the relationship itself. Through the other world, JM encounters the "tough tendril" (CL 17) of love and a process of reincarnation that turns the experience of souls through life, death and rebirth into lessons on how to live. What before the encounters at the board had been unseen and unheard emerges to create a wider vision of reality. "WE ARE IN A/SYSTEM OF SUCH SILENT BUT URGENT MOTIVES" (CL 59), says Ephraim in his long address in section "Q." The connection between the spirits of his realm and the earth-bound souls "IS A SILENT LOVE" (CL 59). Ephraim emerges from the attraction between the two men, then moves them towards a larger harmony beyond their individual wills. Through the board, JM and DJ "MOVE WITH THE CURRENT & DEVOTION BECOMES AN ELEMENT OF ITS OWN FORCE" (CL 60).

Vital to this movement within a lovers' relationship is the balance, what could be colloquially called "give-and-take," that leads to combination, generation and unity. The example of DJ's parents, "two old people at each other's gnarled,/Loveless mercy" (CL 88), shows JM another facet of a bond he has seen primarily in emotional terms. His recounting of the couple's conflicts ends with an image of them "serenely holding hands" (CL 88) after the "detergent and the atrocity/Fight it out in silence" (CL 88). In these perceptions of love, JM learns how one becomes

"sufficiently/Imbued with otherness" (CL 89). The lover stands alone in this knowledge; yet the presence of the other is more intrinsic than ever before. JM concludes:

And here was I, or what was left of me.
Feared and rejoiced in, chafed against, held
cheap,
A strangeness that was us, and was not, had
All the same allowed for its description,
And so brought at least me these spells of odd,
Self-effacing balance. (CL 89)

Poetry creates a form where otherness can be balanced with the demands of consciousness. While the poem chronicles JM and DJ's life together, "limbs thickening/For better and worse in one another's shade" (CL 41), the chief alteration is in the self after the current of Eros has brought destruction and creation.

Once this level of self-knowledge has been reached, Ephraim and the Eros he embodies lose usefulness. His ordering of the couple's devotion also takes part in the process of "[g]lassy expansion and succinct collapse" (CL 85). The link evolves and withers, creates sensation and understanding, even as life moves through cycles of death and regeneration. JM concludes:

We've reached a
Stage through him that he will never himself
reach.
Back underground he sinks, a stream, the latest
Recurrent figure out of mythology
To lend his young beauty to a living grave
In order that Earth bloom another season.
(CL 85)

Ephraim has been translated into "things that go/Without saying" (CL 85), his youthful desire for exploration in

every direction giving way to the "autumnal, mild" (CL 85) character acquired by JM and DJ. Like Spenser's description of paradise, quoted in section "Q," the poem is a place of both endings and beginnings: "There is continuall spring, and harvest there/Continuall, both meeting in one time" (CL 62). Comic structure prevails over the possibility of tragedy, taking on a pattern "which is not a complete organic development reaching a foregone, inevitable conclusion, but is episodic, restoring a lost balance, and implying a new future" (Langer 127). The withdrawal of Ephraim resolves the opening section of The Changing Light and propels Merrill into the search for a form of love which accommodates his growing self-awareness.

Chapter 3

At the Heart of Matter

THE ELDER FACTS IN LIVERY OF FABLE
HAVE JOINED THE DANCE FOR FACT IS IS IS FABLE:
THIS IS OUR GIFT FROM MIRABELL MY DEARS (CL 263)

In the final section of Mirabell's Books of Number, a conclusive connection between the world of myth and the one of fact embodied in the language of science marks the ongoing unifying and generative activity of Eros. The poet W.H. Auden, who rejects from beyond the grave the "RITUAL AND DIFFY MORAL STRICTURES" (CL 164) that guided his poetry in later years, announces a new alignment of the factual and material. The poet, seen as Merrill's senior, recognizes that the "ELDER FACTS" (CL 263) contained in matter are emerging in Merrill's poetic exploration of "THE ONWARD DANCE OF THINGS" (CL 161). The love that interweaves seemingly disparate elements of existence and rejuvenates

JM's creative vision further expands into a world expressed in the language of number, formula and scientific knowledge.

Mirabell opens with voices from the board demanding "POEMS OF SCIENCE" (CL 109). In the pursuit of such a project, JM lives in fear of potential "[o]bfuscation" and "boredom" (CL 109) in a discipline alien to him. Reading through "a biophysichemical/Textbook" (CL 110), he finds in science a language which is "[s]o old, original, so radically/Open yet impervious to change" (CL 110). As the narrative progresses, common strands in human love and empirical knowledge emerge through the activities of alteration and combination found in Eros. Other-worldly voices testify to the link between literature and science, noting, for example, that "THE BIBLE IS A CODE OF BLURRD/BUT ODDLY ACCURATE BIOHISTORICAL DATA" (CL 187). The alignment of human feeling with myth, manners and the objectivity of number further develops the ordering of Eros.

This chapter examines the effects of a world of matter expressed through number and formula on the experiences of JM and DJ. Through these sessions at the board, "ALL LIFE & ITS WORKINGS" (CL 108), including the realities of biology and chemistry, present methods of order that can be used to capture experience and refine perception. By reaching into a larger reality, the human or mortal tendency to create subjective illusions is countered by an older, immutable order. Secondly, this section considers how instinct,

feeling and transformation of the self come to be understood by the poet through the language of modern genetics, musical motifs and alchemical symbolism. Finally, this chapter looks at JM's attempt to discover order in the fabric of myth. By seeing the common threads of fiction and fact, JM confronts his doubt and learns "HOW TO SEE PAST LONE/AUTONOMY TO POWERS BEHIND THE THRONE" (CL 262). By following the activity of Eros into this seemingly alien world, Merrill uncovers a primordial order that lies behind creativity and life in the world at large.

The events of Mirabell take place over a single summer JM and DJ spend at Stonington. Unlike the twenty-five years of experience drawn on to compose Ephraim, the sequel follows a distinct chronology that begins with the initial request by the creatures said to resemble "limber, leotarded, blue-eyed bats" (CL 98) and ends with the arrival of the angel Michael. The creatures demand that JM prepare for the "SCIENTIFIC OR ARTISTIC BREAKTHRU" (CL 108) predicted by Ephraim. The central figure of the sessions that follow is Mirabell, one of the bat creatures who are assigned to deliver information to the humans at the board. Both "batwing angels and/Inside the atom" (CL 122), the creatures continue the revelation of "inhuman" forces at work in the psyche first seen in the blind spots and lapses of memory found in Ephraim. Through Mirabell, this power, sometimes called mind, becomes part of the developing design

of Eros.

Both poet and messengers find collaboration difficult at first. "DO NOT SCORN/OUR POOR LYRISM" [sic] (CL 116), say the bat creatures early in the poem; JM describes the world of science as a "maze/Of meanings to be stumbled through blindfolded" (CL 110). To bring these worlds into mutual order requires Eros and its ability to combine and refocus information into more fruitful forms. The motifs of dance, colour and music, combined with those of number and formula, create a blending of languages and meaning within the verse. The interplay of the partners at the board, which generates a kind of grace, finds expression in these patterns and compositions. "YOU ARE THE CRYSTAL" (CL 127) and "YR FIELD IS . . . A KIND OF ANCHOR POINT OF HEAVEN" (CL 257), DJ and JM are told.

In the first book of the poem, JM discovers composition is a "clean" use of power and follows the pattern of Eros by perceiving unity in imaginative combinations and forms. This process touches on less benign materials during a session at the board at Los Alamos. The encounter with messengers heralding "new formulae of megadeath" (CL 55) at the site of nuclear experiments gets little attention from the partners and spirits at the board. JM says: "Our instinct first is to deplore, and second/To think no more of" (CL 33) the destruction of the atom. The disruptive voices return in section "U." The title refers to the conversation in the

section about the unconscious, an equally volatile source of energy. After the "MIRROR [goes] BLACK" (CL 73), the assembled group lets the session pass without further inquiry "[b]y mutual accord" (CL 73). However, any hopes of further avoiding these voices and the nuclear issue dissolve when JM is enlisted to be the conduit of the bat creatures' message. They say a "scribe" is needed because "MANS IGNORANCE FEARS THE POWER [they] ARE" (CL 113). As indicated by the goal of the bat creatures in their research lab, where souls are processed after death, "THE NEW SOUL MUST BE FASHIOND/MORE RESISTANT TO THE ATOMIC ACID & TO THE/FATIGUES & ABRASIONS OF THOUGHT" (CL 185). In the tales from the lab, Mirabell establishes a new perspective on mortal existence that helps the partners understand the role of instinctual urges and fears in human life.

With the arrival of the bat creatures, the discourse on number joins the "profusion" (CL 31) of languages of The Changing Light, "[a]ny one of which . . . /Lit up the system it conceived" (CL 31). JM is told "to measure/[his] own pyramid" (CL 127) and that "[n]umerals 1 through 0 will POINT THE WAY" (CL 127). The bat-creatures make language an equivalent of architectural form: "MANS TERMITE PALACE BEEHIVE ANTHILL PYRAMID . . . IS LANGUAGE" (CL 118). Like these structures, formula, metaphor and musical notation hold the "VIBRANT RINGING LIGHT" (CL 239) produced by the cultural activity of humankind. The voices contend that the

"REVEALD MONOTHEISM OF TODAY" (CL 239) is found in science, poetry and music. Through their combination in Merrill's poetry, these "RITES OF LANGUAGE" (CL 239) will "RENOVATE THE HOUSE OF MAN" (CL 239). The message of the bat creatures echoes the single voice from the board that spoke of "GODS LIGHT" (CL 178) in the "IST YEAR OF [JM and DJ's] LOVE" (CL 265). While JM says the pair were not "ripe/For that [message] yet" (CL 178), their partnership gave birth to this impulse to intuit the shapes and activity of a unifying order from its beginning.

In Mirabell, number becomes a device to speak of matter and meaning simultaneously. While Ephraim took the alphabet for its structure, this second book is structured in tens, employing the numerals found on the Ouija board as section titles with ten sub-sections in most. The final lessons of the book are a countdown from ten to one to match their "INDUCTIVE NATURE" (CL 252), which moves from the multiplicity of "POOR INVALID PARTICULAR[s]" to the singularity of "DIVINE CONCEPT RADIATING/HEALTH" (CL 252). In the verse itself, human voices talk in pentameter while Mirabell and his race use fourteen-syllable lines of "SKITTERY" (CL 240) syllabics. The trio who dominated the "schoolroom" of Ephraim are joined by two of the recent dead: Maria Mitsotáki, a friend of JM and DJ's from Athens, and W.H. Auden, who is usually called Wystan. Ephraim becomes a peripheral voice, making Mirabell a fifth primary

voice in the ongoing dialogue where the number five is a central motif. Thus, the organization of number adds the resonance of objective and quantitative language to personal and abstract material.

The meaning inherent in number, revealed by the messages from the board and the activities of the poet, creates an additional set of metaphors for the emerging pattern of Eros leading to transformation and unity. Five becomes the motif for the "V" work in the research lab, the site where select souls are processed for use in improvements in the racial strain. Among the other fives in the poem are the five immortal human souls and the five that results from the addition of the digits of "14," a number sacred to the bat creatures. The five participants at the board personify "A VERY UNION OF THE ELEMENTS" (CL 159), making their interplay both a continuation of the salon dialogue and a representation of "THE ONWARD DANCE OF THINGS" (CL 161) the poem emulates. Wystan, who is aligned with the earth element and thus called "a mine of sense" (CL 129), speaks of imaginative transformation as a kind of equation. He asks:

SHD WE NOT THINK ABOUT
THE IMAGINATION? IF MM [Maria] & I
IMAGINE YOU, YOU US, & WHERE THE POWERS
CRISSCROSS WE ALL IMAGINE 741
& THEN TRANSFORM HIM! (CL 159)

Much as alchemists saw the squaring of the circle as an analogue to unifying the elements, the four characters take

part in a circular, dance-like dialogue which creates dramatic effects.

The action of regeneration also remains part of the activity of the Eros in Mirabell and a revealed property of number. JM senses an approaching renewal in the first section of Mirabell when "[i]t would seem all roads/Return . . . to the cell marked GO" (CL 98). Later JM says the first word of each section suggests its number. Section five begins: "Go on, dear Peacock" (CL 185) with "Go" approximating the Japanese word for "five." Likewise, the "V" work carried out by the five immortal souls, which is always written as the Roman numeral "five," phonetically means "life" in French. Translation causes number to reveal its properties through language; quantity betrays a vital quality or, in Mirabell's words, "WORK GUIDED BY HIGHER COLLABORATION" (CL 162). This is the all-embracing order cultivated by the research lab which does not discriminate between the stuff of substance and thought. Mirabell says of the light of the imagination: "IT IS REAL [.] ALL IS REAL [.] THE UNREAL I KNOW NOTHING OF" (CL 174). The power of love at work in the poem does not dissolve in Mirabell's unfeeling world but instead develops bonds based on meaning rooted in common structures found in number, myth and manners.

Mirabell lacks Ephraim's gift for innuendo and erotic preoccupations, but he is similarly linked to emotional

attachment and the qualities of the partners. JM says he springs from "the crossroads of . . . four affections" (CL 173). In an effort to define his character better, he tells JM and DJ: "MAKE OF ME THE PROCESS SOMEWHERE /OPERATING BETWEEN TREE & PULP & PAGE & POEM" (CL 173). His metaphor deftly foregrounds poetry as a physical object made of printed words on a page and encourages his students at the board to consider their own existence as beings of quantities as well as qualities. Like Eros, Mirabell fosters activity leading to new knowledge and transformation. He says that DJ represents a similar element of process as "THE SHAPING HAND OF NATURE" (CL 159), who works within the water, earth, air and fire represented by the other players. In addition, DJ wields his "HAND'S WATTAGE" (CL 142), much as the bat creatures are associated with atomic power and fire, while JM's airy affinities are with "MIND & ABSTRACTION" (CL 164). The partners find in their batty friend their "VERY HEARTH OF HEARTS" (CL 162), a voice that speaks from the research lab or the material buried in their genes.

Merrill taps meanings associated with number as fluidly as he makes allusion to works of literature or music. For example, he creates a metaphor for the force behind DJ's hand by speaking of the elements and the five primary characters as the planes of a solid form. He observes: "The Elements, with Nature as the hidden/Fifth face, come to

compose a pyramid . . ." (CL 164). The poem, like this five-planed structure, finds its base in the unseen, just as JM says DJ's place at his side is "beyond words" (CL 515), again crediting him as a shaping force beyond language. To complete the connections, language is described as a pyramid by the bat creatures. By translating the social configuration of lover and friends to a stable geometrical form, it evokes a larger order of meaning as well as an arrangement as a community of feeling.

By employing the qualities of number, the narrative of Mirabell gains the complicity of the formulaic world of mind for Merrill's exploration. Through Eros, a force of necessity more powerful than what it brings into being (Jaeger 17), the poet accepts "that gift of tongues at matter's core" (CL 160) and achieves an unwilled encounter with the building blocks of the self and the world. The attuned perception found in Ephraim re-emerges in the numerical motif of two zeros found in rock formations at Avebury, which share the form of the symbol of infinity and the name of "OO" the bat creatures give themselves. Picturing these twinned circles as lenses in a telescope, Merrill describes a continuum that confounds subjectivity. Like Eros, this process bridges worlds real and imagined, internal and external. He explains:

. . . Take a look
Through them (it all depends which way) and see
Now vastness and impersonality
Brought near, now our own selves reduced to
specks. (CL 174)

This fluidity of focus encourages perception of the world unencumbered by the illusions and feelings generated by the conscious self. Once this vision has been employed, JM finds that "anything worth having's had both ways" (CL 174); in an Eros-like combination, the personal and the impersonal are joined and ordered in "crystalline/Reversibility" (CL 174).

The fruitful interplay of the worlds of number and poetry is most vividly illustrated in the changes in Mirabell. After he has become a peacock, the creature speaks with "a new worldliness" (CL 166) and retells "Book One's grand/Black-and-white allegory" (CL 166). JM observes: "Our peacock . . . more and more/Embellishes his text with metaphor" (CL 173). His race's fall becomes a grand tale of atomic mutation, inter-racial wars and Babel-like structures that attempt to overcome earthly constraints. The creature's "[l]ately won detachment" (CL 166) distinguishes him from his race, which has "NEVER EXPRESSED A THING" (CL 172). This shift comes when JM and DJ find "[f]ear and doubt put by" (CL 166), a development that suggests that this new guide helps them face deep-seated troubles in a fabulous form.

Mirabell's book centres on the attempt to see what fear and doubt have pre-empted in the conscious realm. As in Ephraim, the poet's eye moving into the external world, in this case specifically the stuff of matter, exemplifies the

activity of Eros. In Book 4, JM looks at a sick elm tree and finds that his "feeling lifts unharmed into a sphere/Littler, perhaps safer" (CL 172). The elm tree, like the mirrors, gems and bodies of water of Ephraim, where spirits "see" JM and DJ, is a vehicle for self-knowledge. However, this poetic self-reflection takes on new dimensions in the engagement with the bat creatures. In Mirabell, the mirror's surface is "IMPENETRABLE FROM THE MOMENT [the OO] APPEAR" (CL 120). JM discovers what he and DJ are exploring is not the reflecting surface but the blank space behind it. He says: "With new eyes we confront the mirror,/Look beyond ourselves" (CL 249). The messengers from the other world form a "permeable impasse" (CL 249), which penetrates "the old personal silver" (CL 249) of self-absorbed contemplation. JM confronts the black void beyond the comfort of finding meaning solely in the consciousness. The partners must recognize this void and realize its place in themselves.

Association with the god Mercury and his traditional link with the underworld also ties the messengers to a darker side of reality already given a name by Western culture. Robert Morse, a Stonington neighbour, asks: "Is Heaven's interface/What your new friends tactfully don't call Hell?" (CL 256). First appearing perched on the mirror frame, Mirabell seems to be the envoy from the "SONS OF CAIN" (CL 114) that speak from "THE VOID FILLD" (CL 174).

However, these reportedly fallen creatures also serve as the "MAGNIFYING LENSES" (CL 174) of the imagination which "FILL THE SCREEN" (CL 174) with the projected information of a divine realm. Their power and knowledge, while gained in part from the souls of the dead, inform the world of the living. Rather than a devil incarnate, the messenger trained in sympathy and love becomes a method to deal with the potential hell found in the void. While matter as personified by the bat creatures contains a threatening darkness, it also holds the "very light stored by our cells" (CL 274), which illuminates the mind. In his messages, Mirabell revises the myth surrounding the world of the dead and acts as an "interface" to an understanding where the realities of substance are known, not feared nor ignored. Mirabell explains: "THE ENLIGHTENED ARE JUST THAT: FREE OF HELLS" (CL 269).

A new mythology develops to approach two forces which loom large in the project: JM's doubt and DJ's fear. Mirabell sees life in terms of "THIS OR THAT IS OR IS NOT" (CL 172) and marvels at how "LIFE ON EARTH IS IMMERSSED IN FEELING, ITS MANNERS/& FORMS" (CL 172). He explains that feeling is rooted in instinct and hampers the realization of human relationships by requiring "LOVE OR BRUTE LUST" (CL 172) for two people to become mates. He adds that human egoism can take on a kind of false virtue because of "FEAR OF ONE ANO' 'ER/BEGOT STRONGLY" (CL 172) in us. The bat

creatures' lack of ethical values counters the bias towards feelings inbred in JM and DJ. By entering the realm of matter, their exploration is coloured by ancient patterns of transformation. Alchemical motifs, for example, capture the "[f]low and crumble, breathe and burn" (CL 159) of interaction and opposition which in turn express patterns of psychological refinement. The elemental rhythms translate the poet, "[h]is pride and purpose, to white ash, baked clay" (CL 160). This metaphoric immolation illustrates the act of creative destruction found in Eros, demonstrated more subtly on the bridge in Venice or in the death of Rufus in Ephraim, and creates an avenue to a more refined and objective bond for the household of JM and DJ.

Mirabell's teachings reveal the psychic patterns akin to Jung's collective unconsciousness in human life. The creature says that "God Biology," usually called God B, the earth's creator and personification of the biosphere, allowed the imprinting of fear "TO REACH/DEEPLY INTO THE SACRED IMAGINATION" (CL 269). This was a step taken to stem an increase in suicides prompted by an overzealous acceptance of death's release into the elements. In a similar move, God B also subtracted our race's "ACCEPTING DENSITY" (CL 202) and a tendency to doubt emerged. The formulation produces inbred hells where "ALL THE PSYCHE'S WOES [are] PUT" (CL 269).

On hearing Maria has become property of the bat

creature's world, ingrained resistance surfaces in JM's "[g]rief" and "horror" (CL 210). As in DJ's conquest of fears before a surgical operation, JM's reaction to hearing Maria's story of losing her human soul during radiation treatments shows the completion of another circuit of Eros. He comments:

This is the point, I later tell DJ,
When Dante would have fainted dead away.
But, cloned with minerals, heartsick, eyes red,
I see no way out but to forge ahead.
(CL 208)

JM's behaviour reflects the lessons of taking part in "V" work and the vital teleology of Eros emerging from these poetic compositions. Recognizing the strengths and weaknesses in his own chemistry, he continues to "forge" (CL 208) the verse that makes acceptance and replenishment possible in its imaginative perceptions of reality, an occupation that also made his relation to properties of "minerals" possible.

The examination of biological realities through mythical structures reveals the patterns needed to "RAISE A SONG TO [the] REAL ORDER [of] MYND AND NATURE WEDDED" (CL 113). Mirabell says that inhuman forces have "ALWAYS SPOKEN THROUGH THE POETS" (CL 114); through JM, these forces are translated into images and structures creating a common language for biology and creative intelligence. In the opening of section 6, Merrill evokes an image of Sarah Bernhardt at the head of a staircase, then makes a seamless

transition to a description of the phosphorous molecule and the spiral of the DNA sequence and its "bit-player beads" (CL 203). The actress becomes the muse inspiring the poet to explore the "theatre in our blood" (CL 203). Noting how "she endured" (CL 203), JM credits her timeless vitality to the "[m]inute intelligences that indwell/The chromosome and educate the cell" (CL 203) where cultural memory resides in ordered sequence. The "3-D Metro map's infernal skeins/And lattices" (CL 203) lead to an apex in the actress reputed to be the greatest of her era. In this way, JM connects the world of science to the same base as culture. Like the two lenses allowing a shifting focus, these personalized excursions into the objective, immutable order in substance make JM and DJ's salon both "a holy and a homely site" (CL 112) and define their lives within the continually expanding flow of Eros.

The correspondence of DNA structure and instinct makes the bat creatures and their formulas more human than they first appear. Participants on either side of the board can claim the other as a manifestation of unseen aspects of themselves, much like the manner in which the unconscious can emerge in puzzling forms in the conscious mind. The creatures tell the humans: "WE ARE U [and] YOU ARE WE [,] EACH OTHERS DREAM" (CL 117). Just as the humans find their "programming" leads to doubts and fears, Mirabell says his race's "VERY FEELINGS WERE FORMULAS" (CL 170) before the

fall. The "FLASHING TRIGONOMETRIES" (CL 136) of their thought patterns echo JM's metaphor of triangulation to measure the self in Ephraim. In this context, the bat creatures are part of an elaborate representation of the "raw forces of mind" (CL 126) inherent in human genetic material or, on a more basic level, the "froth of electrons" (CL 126) wherein the light and dark forces exist in a structured, balanced equation. The OO's story can be seen as "a parable of developments" (CL 125) and their bat form considered an appropriate loan from JM's cultural imprinting. This appropriation of personal and cultural material from conscious and unconscious memory becomes more dramatic in Scripts for the Pageant with the appearance of figures such as Christ, Buddha and Plato. However, the engagement with Mirabell suggests the movement towards a more refined love must first harrow the elemental materials of body and soul before emerging in an ideal realm.

By courting the dark forces, the narrative of Mirabell moves the potential disaster artfully evaded in Ephraim into the foreground. The epigraph by Laura Fermi chronicles a decisive moment in the history of the atomic bomb and the unsettling prospect of humanity using "energy that does not come from the sun" (CL 94). The "atom's need to shield itself" (CL 126) becomes a metaphor both for physical and mythical realities. Talking of safe energy echoes the clean use of power JM finds in composition and applies to a

variety of sources and corresponding shields: the brain and its processing cortex, the atom before fission and the ecosystem of the earth. Possibly the most prevalent and powerful insulation in the poem comes from the other world. Mirabell says: "WE MUST BORROW [--] IS IT AFFECTION? FROM/YR DEAR DEAD & WIND IT ROUND U" (CL 190). JM discovers:

At the core
We are kept from shattering to bits
 By the electron hearts, voices and wits
 Of our dead friends . . . (CL 191)

To use a description of Ephraim, the poem employs forces both "PROTECTIVE AND CONDUCTIVE" (CL 424). This could serve as a paraphrase of the nature of Eros and human love in the trilogy as a whole. In the sphere of human society, creating protective structures to cope with raw powers takes the form of manners. In conversation with an envoy from an alien world, personal issues and eternal matter come together through the diplomacy of the salon.

Ephraim's vibrant character easily enters the partners' lives "WHERE THEIR MINDS SEEK DIVERSION" (CL 195) and never departs far from the cultural referents familiar to them. A common forum for the partners and Mirabell's race emerges less easily. Early encounters with the creatures leave JM frustrated, leading him to demand that they "[s]top shifting ground" (CL 122). Maria reminds him that "THEY HAVE NO MANNERS" (CL 123) and chides him for his characteristic doubt. A subsequent request by the bat creature to be

instructed in human decorum brings a humble response from JM: "We tell you? We who've been/Remote and rude -- but vexed more by our slowness/Than by your discipline" (CL 130). Following these displays of humility and patience, Mirabell is transformed and says that he has "ENTERD A GREAT WORLD" (CL 155). Speaking of a new fullness he feels, the creature asks: "IS IT MANNERS?" (CL 155). With this new capacity, JM says Mirabell will "never be beyond/Our wavelength" (CL 155). Just as it emerges from the contents of memory or the language of number, Eros is visible in the creative interaction made possible by manners.

In The Changing Light, the apparent "wavelength" is the salon-level dialogue which captures the essential rhythm seen in Eros and comedy moving towards new order and life. In his survey, Robert Heilman succinctly points out how manners are

the implicit standard of comedy . . . In the civilized world the central virtue is urbanity, and urbanity, far from being a superficial polish, the artifices that conceal the self, or a labored subordination of honesty to decorum . . . is the gracious conceding of place or position or priority or privilege to others. Such a style, indispensable to social life, is akin to the acceptance that makes comedy possible. The springs of comedy and of a bearable life in the world are all but identical. (126-7)

This employment of manners encourages an orientation of the self in the world that strives for greater objectivity and integration.

This cultivated stance, however, engenders a troubling

current in the narrative. When JM considers his growing alliance with the power of mind found in Mirabell's realm of numbers and fable, he finds his life is taking on the detachment of the courtly wit. He says: "[I]t could be the way/Of our own world, as the fops in Congreve knew/With their strut and plumage" (CL 232). JM says he has been learning of a "battiness [he]/Chose over some maternal Nature's less/Perfectly imagined realm" (CL 232). The limitations of the world of mind emerge in Mirabell's arch claim that "BENIGN NATURE IS LIMITED TO PROFUSION" (CL 229). His criticism of the "SLAPDASH STRUCTURES" (CL 220) supplied to house souls earns him a rebuke from higher powers. As a result, the poet's search for ideal love turns to sovereign nature in Scripts.

While these manners found in matter bring detachment, they do not negate sympathy. In a complementary action to Mirabell's transformation, JM and DJ attempt to free their understanding from the taint of self. When JM complains how little of the material is his own, Wystan tells him to "THINK WHAT A MINOR/PART THE SELF PLAYS IN A WORK OF ART" (CL 262). Likewise, the art of social conduct is one avenue of surpassing the limits of subjectivity in life and love. By meeting the scribe "IN ISOLATION" (CL 155), the voices which "SPEAK FROM WITHIN THE ATOM" (CL 113) develop the capacity to feel. The intimacy of the salon and its decorum allow the encounter of disparate worlds to engender the

figure of Mirabell, an independent entity with new potential. Mirabell says:

I AM A MERE MIXING AGENT WITH MY SUPERIORS
 U WD HAVE LEARNED FASTER BUT NOT IN TURN MADE AS
 WE HAVE
 THIS WORLD OF COURTESY
 Breaking off, the cup strolls round the Board
 As who should take a deep breath before
 speaking:
 NOR WD I HAVE COME TO LOVE U
 (CL 155)

This emotional bond is prepared for when David breaks down into tears at the story of the bat creatures' fall, a reaction they credit to their "15TH CONTACT: SYMPATHY" (CL 134). In this way, manners link the numerical order of the bat-creatures and the emotionally-saturated motivations of the humans at the board. Eros engenders the structures which trigger its evolution into new forms.

In Mirabell, Eros again introduces fresh understanding as the deeper levels of reality enter the narrative and the weave of JM and DJ's lives. Mirabell supplies a remedy to the partners' questioning of the welter of events and information discussed in the seminar in the form of the "NO ACCIDENT CLAUSE" (CL 198). By making RNA an acronym for "Remember No Accident" (CL 196), the peacock expresses the acceptance crucial to a comic vision in scientific terms. JM learns that all "was meant/To happen, and not just the gross event/But its minutest repercussion" (CL 197). This sensibility that contains conflicting meanings or the "self-enacting clause" (CL 197) also includes "instincts" of awe

and doubt identified by Mirabell as a sign of a cloned-in human trait of resistance. Within this scheme, they are informed that "ROME FELL BECAUSE [Christianity] WAS NEEDED" (CL 187) and, on a more personal level, the meeting of JM and DJ is part of a plan. They are told the formula is introduced only to those who have gone through the "GROWING PAINS" (CL 229) of facing nature's law to "MATE [,] PROPOGATE/& DIE" (CL 229). These individuals, it seems, can achieve a measure of acceptance and not lose their productive resistance. In these revelations, Merrill's Eros emerges as a power that recognizes a hierarchy of experience. The creative impulse moves towards greater refinement and objectivity as JM and DJ's sensibility matures.

In "V" work, each life brings with it the potential for access to the realm of the gods and their immutable existence. Mirabell says: "MORTALITY ALLOWS FOR THE DIVINE TRANSLATION" (CL 200). The creature's message supports the opinion of Henrich Zimmer, quoted in section Q of Ephraim: "The powers have to be consulted again directly -- again, again and again" (CL 62). Another bat creature says that "THE GREAT/MIRACLE IS THE REINCARNATION OF THE GODS" (CL 225). The poem's comic structure captures a vital continuity running parallel to human life, carrying on a dialogue with a "balanced rhythm of sentience and emotion, upholding itself amid the changes of material nature" (Langer 127). By

embodying a relatedness at all levels of reality, Eros can be seen as the structure of comedy at an anagogic level. Under its direction, profane desire is elevated to divine pursuits.

When the creative works of mortal life are seen as potential expressions of primordial forces, the self emerges as a facet of a larger reality. Maria says: "TO BE USED HERE IS THE TRUE PARADISE" (CL 198). Like her, the partners at the board must find their paradise as vehicles for greater powers. As scribe and shaping hand, JM and DJ begin to see their lives as a product of their own potential. Rather than a belief in predestination or fate, the "NO ACCIDENT" (CL 198) clause comes from self-knowledge. JM says:

Art --
The tale that all but shapes itself--survives
By feeding on its personages lives.
The stripping process, sort of. What to say?
Our lives led to this. It's the price we pay.
(CL 218)

This stripping process is the steady loss of ego acted out at different points as a masque, a dance or "MUSIC MORE ABSTRACT/THAN METAPHOR" (CL 206). Wystan says the participants in this process are "REDUCED TO ESSENCES" (CL 209) and "JOINED TO INFINITY" (CL 209). In this way, the poetic narrative, like God B, employs "ONE AGENT TO CREATE & DESTROY" (CL 218); verse consumes and refines experience even as metrical shape and order revitalize it.

Watching Maria and Wystan's return to the elements, JM realizes that "the sacred bonds are chemical" (CL 209), not

the mutable constructions of personality and individual consciousness. Imaginative creation has taken him to a level of understanding that recognizes and accepts the void within and beyond the self, the "SHEER EMPTINESS" (CL 152), which the occupants of the other world have seen "SO OFTEN AND SO WELL" (CL 153). The blind spot of Ephraim has actively joined the narrative through the "EMPTINESS PACKD FULL" (CL 140) in the form of the bat creatures. The material drawn from this emptiness, set in the order engendered by Eros, takes the poet to a new level of understanding, however tentative its realization. JM concludes:

Empathy is art.
 Strange, though, to zero in upon the heart
 Of matter only -- when smoke clears -- to find
 Another antechamber of pure mind.
 Knocking on doorlessness, on fictive space,
 Leads to the absurdest loss of face.
(CL 224)

The centrality of the void to a mandala-like wholeness in the psyche appears again in Scripts: "A mirror gleams drilled by a black eye-hole: Diagnostic emblem of the soul" (CL 398).

Love in The Changing Light surpasses its pedestrian manifestation in emotion but remains an extension of the partnership of JM and DJ. Part of the striving to understand comes from the childlessness shared by the participants, which turns them "OUTWARD TO THE LESSONS & THE MYSTERIES" (CL 216). The "timeskip and gadabout" (CL 115) of Ephraim and the "immature" and "supine" (CL 261) text of Mirabell

reflect the presence of something other than a "STRAIGHTFORWARD FRONTAL LOVE" (CL 216). Rather than a directly expressed sentiment, the Eros of the poem is an activity that knows no one direction and is tied to unconscious drives. Like type set for the page, the trail of Eros at times appears "INVERTED & BACKWARD" (CL 216); how to "tell/Up from down" (CL 256) becomes a moot point. The JM who claimed it was too much for the creatures to be "batwing angels and/Inside the atom" (CL 122) has learned to accept this fluidity through perception and understanding engendered by love. JM and DJ find "REDEEMING LOVE/& AWESOME VISION" (CL 133) by discovering "DREAM, FACT & EXPERIENCE [are] ONE" (CL 133).

Despite its ubiquitous influence, the Eros of The Changing Light is rarely discussed directly. However, the evolving philosophy of love is strongly reflected in events and conversations chronicled by the poet. Vendler notes that Merrill's strength lies not in his "worthy observations" about human life as much as "the intimate and solid circumstantiality in which those truths are based" (229). As a result, the struggle for self-knowledge is reflected in the "[i]nnermost [play] of David's" (CL 100), which is acted out in the days leading up to the death of his parents. The other-worldly messages of the recently deceased Chester Kallman become a roundabout lesson on the folly of ignoring all the facets of the self. He comments: "ENTIRE NEGLECTED

SECTIONS OF MY MIND/SOUND ROTTEN WHEN I RAP" (CL 106).

Maria's acceptance of her untimely death by cancer and Wystan's arguments for a diminished role for the self in art also play out aspects of the evolving Eros of the poem. The pattern of creative perception explored by JM through extensions of his self in Ephraim makes the crucial move into the lives around him in Mirabell just as his poetic inquiry takes on the world of matter.

Number and elemental order found in matter are the central motifs of the second book of the poem. However, JM and DJ recognize Mirabell's "encroaching obsolescence" (CL 267) as they become "healed of Number" (CL 267). Ephraim's withdrawal coincided with the passing of a youthful, perhaps willful, sensibility; and, similarly, the success of the lessons of the bat creatures imply another psychological gap has been bridged. In the structure of The Changing Light, the realm of facts has taken on the aspect of an antimasque; but its "RUDE SCENERY/& GUTTERAL STOMPINGS" (CL 263) are set to give way to the drama of the higher powers.

Mirabell's seemingly inaccurate and somewhat hostile attitude to nature turn the narrative to address the question of the muse-like "ancient, ageless woman of the world" (CL 92) heard at the end of Ephraim asking: "Why do you no longer come to me?" (CL 92). The balance and stability of Eros have not yet been perceived in nature, for it has been portrayed as the "IMPATIENT" (CL 247) adversary

of the "V" work carried out by the bat creatures. Mirabell puts it concisely: "MAN WANTS IMMORTALITY & NATURE WANTS MANURE" (CL 229). The project to see "MYND AND NATURE WEDDED" (CL 113) has left the fictive bride and muse waiting at the altar. In Scripts, the poet envisions the ceremony of reconciliation that has been in the making since JM and DJ met.

Chapter 4

Profane Eros, Divine Eros

Always that same old story --
Father Time and Mother Earth,
A marriage on the rocks. (FN 141)

This passage from Merrill's "The Broken Home" discusses a primordial conflict in domestic terms. Using this approach, his personal experience with warring parents casts light on the situation of the human as a child of the gods. For the son caught between warring parents, how everything in existence is "free to shatter,/Change or die" (CL 495) becomes vividly apparent. The individual must deal with elemental strife and inherent duality, what the figure of nature, referred to as Queen Mum in most of Scripts, calls "THE PREHUMAN" (CL 409) in us. Facing this conflict, which precedes their own consciousness, child and poet turn to the peerless, creative power of Eros. Through poetry, the

"bloody tranche de vie" (CL 496) is ordered in all its precariousness. The poet uses his freedom to create a "decent prejudice . . . for the happy ending" (CL 496) and a new wholeness from the shards of the broken home.

Merrill's shifting focus from domestic to larger issues captures the ubiquitous power of Eros, which brings vitality and immediacy to the abstract ideas addressed in the poem. Time and nature as they relate to the lives of JM and DJ are seamlessly incorporated into discussions of human history and creation myths. Merrill says this seemingly roundabout approach is crucial to the poetic process. He says poems

can't deal frontally with such huge, urgent subjects [as time and nature] without sounding grumpy or dated when they should be in their prime. So [his] parents' divorce dramatized on a human scale a subject that couldn't have been handled otherwise. Which is what a "poetic" turn of mind allows for. You don't see eternity except in the grain of sand, or history except at the family dinner table. (R 72)

Through imagination, "THE FERTILE ELEMENT" (CL 293), a layer of poetry and myth can be seen as "the motley/Worn by sober Truth" (CL 501). In the "yes and no" formula he so often encounters at the board, Merrill captures the ability of love to encompass and order strife, whether on the personal or elemental level.

The entrance of the narrative into an idealized world extends and enhances the meaning of the events of Ephraim and Mirabell. This chapter traces the higher development of Eros "on a spiral forever/widening" (CL 111) as seen in the

imaginative power of the human mind. Scripts presents revised structures of revelation reflecting refinements in the psychological reality described in the poem. As its second focus, this section explores the elevated sensibility that creates a new vision of the senses, revitalizes the concept of innocence and re-organizes the hierarchy of the powers of intelligence, time and nature. Through the lessons from the angels and a personification of nature, the third book and the coda of The Changing Light illustrate the ideals and myths of a romantic partnership as it enters its second quarter-century. The final purpose of this chapter is a discussion of this stable order.

The basic structure of Scripts completes the survey of the inscription on the Ouija board. Three sections make up "2 GOLDEN TRAYS OF 'YES' & 'NO' WITH '&'/AS BRIDGE OR BALANCE" (CL 328). Merrill illustrates "the relativity, even the reversibility, of truths" (R 80) using these building blocks of language and the ongoing alteration of subject matter and tone from light to dark and back again. Merrill explains:

I believe the secret [of my delight in writing] lies primarily in the nature of poetry -- and of science too, for that matter -- and that the ability to see both ways at once isn't merely an idiosyncrasy but corresponds to how the world needs to be seen: cheerful and awful, opaque and transparent. The plus and minus signs of a vast, evolving formula. (R 80)

In The Changing Light, the creative urge does not efface the

negative but contains it in the vital rhythm of Eros as expressed in patterns of poetry, music and dance. The "GLORIES" (CL 297) of Scripts come from "BOTH SIDES OF THE MIRROR OF MANKIND" (CL 297) and draw on the "black/Fustian void" (CL 319) in addition to the reflections of conscious intelligence.

A symmetrical cycle of lessons with the angels marks an ongoing progression from "Romance to Ritual" (CL 319) in Scripts. "Yes" chronicles ten lessons with Michael, the angel of light, as the dominant presence. His brother Gabriel, angel of fire and death, is the master of ceremonies for the ten lessons in "No." The middle or bridging section has five lessons. Reflecting the inherent duality of themes and powers, the school "OF ALL/DISCIPLINE HUMAN & HEAVENLY" (CL 318) takes place both in the entrance hall of JM and DJ's home in Athens and the schoolroom at Sandover. In this way, "Real and Ideal study . . . compatibility" (CL 320) where JM and DJ build their life together. JM says he finds it hard to tell the audience from the participants in the other-worldly masque because the light is "flooding auditorium . . . [a]nd stage alike" (CL 319). To underscore this merging of the seen and unseen world, Merrill includes Wystan and Maria's descriptions of the scenes in his transcripts of the lessons.

In the presence of this ubiquitous light, Scripts is the summation and revelation of Eros as the creative

principle of the human mind. The discussion of abstract ideas in Scripts surpasses the ken of Mirabell, who "CANNOT CONCEIVE MAN'S EASY/LEAP ONTO THE OUTSTRETCHED PALM OF GOD" (CL 287). However, the knowledge of substance or "THE GOOD OLD HUMAN DIRT" (CL 300) found in Mirabell results from the movement of Eros within all levels of existence. Wystan says the point of this secular balance to the immutable world is that "TO TOUCH HOME BASE/MAKES POSSIBLE EACH NEW LEAP INTO SPACE" (CL 300). For the poet and his partner, the consuming welter of the world of bodily existence steeped in feeling and instinct leads to psychological refinement suggested by the multiple silver motifs of Scripts. Erich Neumann says that,

in psychic life, it is the heat, the fire of passion, the flame and ardor of emotion that provide the basis of illumination, that is, of an illumined consciousness, which rises from the combustion of the fundamental substance and enhances it. (84)

In The Changing Light, the alchemical transformation of the self found in matter, number and formula generates the vision of a heightened sensual realm and its mythical home in Sandover.

The partners' lessons at a new level of illumination begin with the appearance of Michael, "A MONUMENT TO CIVILIZED/IMAGINATION" and "THE IDEAL/PARENT CONFESSOR LOVER READER FRIEND" (CL 286). His light, most often associated with the sun, generates a series of tableaux, performances and colourful lectures, which celebrate the pleasures of the

mind and human achievement. Michael's effects, in combination with the darker side of existence embodied in Gabriel, transform the schoolroom at Sandover to a ballroom conforming "to an ideal much sunnier, much more silvery" (R 75) than the one in Merrill's childhood home. While Michael's "deep grain" (CL 311) is one with the poet's, Merrill also admits that the images and philosophy are the result of an imaginative power which "kept assuming proportions broader and grander" (R 51) than his. As Eros continues to link worlds, the line between human and angelic, like the one between audience and performers, is blurred.

Elevation to the realm of the angels introduces a revised philosophy of love for the lives that have emerged from the metaphorical hell of Mirabell's book. To personify this refined vision, Eros finds a new emissary from the poet's "PARTS/FOUNDRY FOR OUTDATED FORMS" (CL 380-1). In "&," JM and DJ meet the stylized centaur called Unice or Uni who acts as a courier at Sandover. Merrill says the creature is allied with "something stabler" (L) than the bat-like agents of chaos and feeling. Introducing this new associate, whose name means "moral victory" (CL 382) in Greek, reworks Ephraim's emphasis on devotion to suit the refined human relationships of Scripts. Uni's race, his tale explains, was defeated by its "immortality" and concomitant inability to evolve. As denizens of the spirit world, they are "REPRIEVED

FROM LIFE'S LOSS" (CL 379) and exist with a "FIXED GREEN LOSS" (CL 379). This state of renewal and deprivation corresponds to Uni's position as gatekeeper at "THE NEW CENTER" (CL 380). Thus, this creature fetching and carrying away the spirits JM and DJ wish to talk to embodies a constant relation between seen and unseen worlds.

Simultaneous movement and nearness align Uni with the Eros constantly bridging the worlds of the poem. To illustrate the nature of his race, Uni tells a tale of a young racer who tries to attract a female centaur with his physical feats only to find she is blind. The youth says to her: "YOU/WILL NEED ME NEAR" (CL 394). JM and DJ are told that the lesson is "NOT TO BE VAIN IN LOVE BUT TRUE" (CL 395). While Mirabell studies "THE SEXUAL/MODE OF MAN" (CL 384) found in flesh and formula, Uni says the "MOST FAIR" (CL 384) of his kind were the ones "WHO MERELY DREAMED OF LOVE" (CL 384). In Uni, JM and DJ discover relations between lover and beloved that overstep self-centred feeling or animal attraction in favour of an ideal of constancy.

In the world of Scripts, Wystan and Maria become something more and less than the spirits of deceased friends or mentors. Once the middle lessons are over, the pair reveal they helped in the scripting of Michael's didactic texts. The dissension among the angels follows Michael's precept that "ALL GOOD DISCOURSE MUST, LIKE FORWARD MOTION,/KNOW RESISTANCE" (CL 414). In this way, the angels

tap the spontaneity of the students by using a script calculated "TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF [JM and DJ's] GAME" (CL 414). At the board, Wystan and Maria are inventions of Eros that help the angels travel the "IMAGE-THWARTED PATHS BY WHICH [humans] THINK" (CL 414) and convey to JM and DJ information that is "HOLY/Even in translation" (CL 414). Appropriately, they reveal this role in "&," the section that bridges light and dark. Maria says to JM and DJ: "WE CAMOUFLAGED U AS IN JUNGLE WARFARE/TO INFILTRATE THE INEXPRESSIBLE" (CL 414). These spiritual guides help JM overcome his "chronic shyness/Vis-à-vis 'ideas'" (CL 419) and allow him to enter into a dialogue with an abstract order.

With these creative tools established, the first lesson in "Yes" addresses the concept of guilt that troubles JM. Michael asks for a response to his statement: "THE MOST INNOCENT OF IDEAS IS THE IDEA THAT INNOCENCE IS/DESTROYED BY IDEAS" (CL 321). As scribe to the unseen powers, JM plays the role of a "NULL ZERO CRYING OUT TO BE FILLED IN" (CL 328). When he complains of how hard it is to have ideas while transcribing those of others, Michael replies: "THAT [is] NOT SO INNOCENTLY SAID" (CL 321). JM, it would seem, prefers to avoid ideas in the cause of preserving innocence. By following Eros, he attempts to see reality beyond the limitations of his own perspective. However, these later lessons demand he take a personal stand on the lessons and

lend "WEIGHT TO THE SCALE" (CL 399).

JM and DJ learn that neglecting ideas and their ability to evaluate and guide leads to the "INGENUE'S TRUST IN FEELING" (CL 331) that Wystan likens to "POWER BLAZING ON SHUT LIDS" (CL 331). When the water brother Emmanuel tells of early human civilization heading back to the water to recapture "FISHLIFE, INNOCENT, CALM & DEEP" (CL 326), DJ immediately thinks of the couple's retreat to Stonington to "civilize themselves" (CL 326). Seen through the water angel's story, their move becomes an attempt to revert to the "MIND LAPPED IN WARM/PRIMORDIAL WATERS" (CL 331), which indiscriminately washes away knowledge and with it any cultivated intelligence or morality. In this context, JM's question of "whether innocence/Is lost to guilt or to experience" (CL 322) becomes unimportant. Instead, the lessons focus on how to achieve a new form of chastity in the renewal and knowledge found through Eros.

The lessons reveal that the human life overcome by disorder is "STRIPT OF IDEA" (CL 333), a condition likened to a primordial mind lacking a capacity for abstraction. "CHAOTIC FEELING" (CL 333) wipes away an individual's resistance to death and brings him or her into contact with Gabriel, the "SHADOW ATOM" (CL 329) and "SLAYER" (CL 329). The dark angel says in these people he sees "THE BLANKEST, MOST UTTER INNOCENCE" as "MORALITY IS SHED" (CL 333). Gabriel breaks down into tears after his plea to be

understood as a creature "BENIGNLY SPARED THE BLINDING WHITE LIGHT" (CL 330) that forms ideas in humans; JM and DJ are left "SEMISEDUCED" (CL 331) by his "raptures of distress" (CL 331), an echo of Auden's description of a song of "human unsuccess" (1979, 83). However, to fit the all-embracing and balanced pattern set in motion by Eros, "the surrender, . . . the forward motion" (CL 331), exemplified by Gabriel's dramatics, must be resisted. "CLOUDY SENTIMENT" (CL 328) only muddies the waters of the stable and fruitful dynamic between dark and light. The angel Michael asks: "DOES [Gabriel's] BLACK TURN GREY?" (CL 331). By discussing suicide, the full implications of JM's fear of ideas and the couple's retreat from civilization come to light. Stripping away an abstract or ideal component that can give life order creates not a virtuous innocence but a destructive one.

Emerging from the discussion of innocence is a dynamic that underpins the evolving philosophy of The Changing Light: balanced dark and light forces separated by matter contain the forward motion of a force like feeling while harnessing its energy. Analogous creative patterns can be seen in the psyche, where the other aids in the definition of the self, and in the mutable world, where "DEATH IS THAT RESISTANT FORCE DEFINING THE FORWARD MOTION/OF LIFE" (CL 410). Accordingly, the "unwilled excursions and ascents" (CL 370) desired by JM and DJ involve them in both "the upward-rippling rungs of fire" and "[t]he outward rippling rings

. . . of water" (CL 370) that are part of this elemental movement. The replenishing interplay is similarly found in the "[t]ricks of the darkroom" (CL 362): the transposition of the realms of the living and the dead; the negative image, which in Ephraim converts a widow to a bride; and x-rays exposing a hidden narrative of a Giorgione painting. In Gabriel's lessons in "No," JM composes an emblem that captures structures of the individual self and the angel's "Grand/Design" (CL 478). He asks:

When we suppose that history's great worm
Turns and turns as it does because of twin
Forces balanced and alert within
Any least atom, are we getting warm? (CL 478)

JM finds that "THERE IS, SIMPLY, NO 'QUARREL' BETWEEN LIGHT & SHADOW" (CL 460). Given a mutual order best characterized as love, these opposed forces become a generative union.

Following this re-ordering process, the discussion in "Yes" aims to end the seemingly exclusive existence of innocence and experience. Not only are questions of guilt set aside, the seemingly antithetical (and subsequently outmoded) concepts are brought to new order in the flow of Eros. JM says (with Maria's response in upper case):

Do we get
The sense of Wystan's "humankind has set
Idea to Innocence?" Set? AS IN 'SET ONE'S MIND TO'
'SET TO MUSIC' 'SET IN MOTION' The word
Evoking in one swoop tenacity,
Harmony, resistance -- (CL 441)

This concept of "set to" answers Michael's question as to how innocence could survive the intrusion of knowledge and

the abstract world of ideas. The angels suggest that idea "WASHED INNOCENCE EVER/CLEANER" (CL 321) or that innocence is "FORMING A NEW IDEA" (CL 321). DJ makes the final connection between the life free of guilt and the rhythm of Eros by suggesting that "[b]y its nature, innocence recurs" (CL 321). Set in a rejuvenating order, the concept gains new currency.

This refinement of sensibility in Scripts also brings a new vision of the sensual. Through Eros, the senses are elevated to the angelic realm and the angels' powers are given earthly dimensions. Lesson nine's "JOYOUS CONGRESS OF THE SENSES" (CL 351) reflects transformation occurring at the "TOPMOST STAGE" (CL 356). The "HABITS & LOVES & LIFETIMES" (CL 357) of the participants, like "THE UPPER CRUST OF A MILLEFEUILLES" (CL 357), are seen in a vibrant order as they are lit in primary colours. During this celebration held on JM and DJ's twenty-fifth anniversary, Kirsten Flagstad visits the board and sings a song by composer Richard Strauss. The motifs of the silver rose of Strauss' opera Rosenkavalier, Queen Elizabeth's silver jubilee and the couple's silver anniversary mark this as a paradise of the creative imagination and perfect love. The angel of light's production, which is "UTTERLY HIS SHOW" (CL 359) without his brothers, matches the poet's vision of the senses composing "A SILENT HARMONY" (CL 358) and the "SILVERY . . . HEAVEN IT IS GIVEN [him] TO WIN" (CL 358).

The scenes of sensuality traversed with Ephraim and the instinctual urges familiarized in Mirabell's company give way to a stage of "pronouncement." Wystan says this realm is like its name "IN THE SENSE OF HAVING . . . A PRONOUNCED FLAIR/FOR THIS OR THAT" (CL 358). At this level, the experience of the senses surpasses the "VULGAR GROPE" (CL 358) encouraged by Ephraim and creates "TOUCHING, SPECTACULAR EMBODIMENTS" (CL 358). Michael's light creates effects that inspire awe in their defeat of secular limitations. Another participant in the congress, Montezuma, says he saw this awe in the faces of the conquering Spaniards when an Aztec-crafted lily made of rock floated in water. In these examples, art and love are forms of pronouncement yielding spiritual effects.

However, the idyllic celebration provided by the angel of light lacks the alternation of light and dark favoured by Eros and followed throughout The Changing Light. Transformation and enlightenment result from more than the light of intelligence. While Michael embodies the conscious self as "a great, great/Glory" (CL 80), the light Gabriel brings to balance "[g]lows with an infra-menace all his own" (CL 321) characteristic of the other. Their interplay captures "THE SHINING/DIMMING PHASES" (CL 462) of nature described by Wystan and what George says is "THE REAL/MOTTO" (CL 479) of the poem: "MAKE IT GLOW!" (CL 479). This mutable light reflects the ongoing development of love in the poem

as both the human desire for "LE ROMAN DE LA ROSE" (CL 404) and the "BLITHELY LOOSENEED CLOTHES" (CL 404) resulting from inbred urges to "PROPAGATE OR DIE" (CL 404). Like the Cranach Venus JM once mistakenly thought was "abstractable from all/The moods and codes of matter" (CL 434), The Changing Light embodies the vitality of Eros by capturing both material and intellectual existence, comparable to what Merrill in our conversations called a "ripeness and form" characteristic of a Greek sensibility.

The "impenetrable feelings . . . tough as any vine" (CL 508) exploited by Gabriel's early performance resurface in "No," only this time their chaotic influence is set to order. While God B instills resistance in humankind to spark creativity, JM finds he and DJ possess a less fruitful magnitude of resistance that is "dumb, wilful, [and] blind" (CL 395). JM's distrust of ideas or abstraction encourages a belief that unmediated emotion creates a viable order for living. JM says:

Well, our faith came to be in Feeling.
Feelings for one another, love, trust, need,
Daily harrowing the mini-hells
They breed -- (CL 426)

As the lessons of the poem show, basing belief on feelings is too constricted and self-absorbed. This undisciplined faith comes under attack in the ongoing thinning process in the poem. For example, Maria tells JM to halt his talk of feelings as "TOO FEW WERE STARS [and] TOO MANY WERE BLACK HOLES" (CL 426).

In the ceremony of transformation carried out by the Queen Mum in the ninth lesson of "No," the figure of feeling, described as an inhuman "[d]eceitful Witch of the Black Forest in the mind" (CL 488), appears and is admonished by nature. Despite her banishment, JM and DJ "STILL SEEM TO HOLD [feeling] DEAR" (CL 488). The creature "[f]lap-flap unrolls" (CL 488) into the light-filled scene like a window blind. When Queen Mum exposes the "PENT-UP RAGE" (CL 488) feeling brings, "the blind rolls shut [and] two mortals melt" (CL 488). Her actions direct JM and DJ to shed the obscurity of feeling and clarify her earlier message: "THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE OF ALL IDEAS IS THAT FEELING SETS IT/RIGHT" (CL 438).

By putting a chaotic force often associated with her own nature in its place, the Queen Mum, the "PSYCHE IN MAN'S MIND" (CL 489), discloses a much more stable character. The rejuvenation seen in Eros and psychic life becomes part of her characterization. The Queen Mum concludes:

. . . O THINK OF ME AND MINE AGAIN
AND IN THE DARKEST HOUR
YOU WILL SPRING UP FRESH IN FLOWER,
FOR SUCH IS NATURE, SUCH THE PSYCHE IN MAN'S MIND:
THE BALM THE SWEET THE KIND. (CL 489)

While feeling creates darkness in the midst of light, nature brings the indwelling light of love that enlightens and renews. Her "[i]nstreaming, overwhelming" (CL 490) radiance arrives again the night after the ninth lesson of "No" in the form of moonlight. In this light, JM finds a new

capacity for belief and "the tallest story [becomes]/ Swallowable" (CL 490).

Scripts reformulates the relationship between the poet and the leader of the "[p]rovocatively, innocently crude" (CL 404) muses, who appear in "&," and patron to Maria, "muse/Of [Merrill's] off-days" (FN 179). Nature's force, "MORE OFTEN/FELT THAN PERSONIFIED" (CL 413), joins DJ, who Mirabell calls "THE SHAPING HAND OF NATURE" (CL 159), as a central power in the poem. Myth makes it possible, in the words of Denis De Rougement, "to become aware at a glance of certain types of constant relations and to disengage these from the welter of everyday appearances" (18). JM's dedicated introspection has uncovered elements of natural order and personified them in an "instantly adorable" (CL 407) figure. However, the initial consideration of this "marriage" of nature and myth shows that it shares the strained relations of the union of "The Broken Home." In Mirabell, while citing his preoccupation with "artifice,/The crust, the mirror meal" (CL 232), JM asks nature: "Will you, whom I married once for real,/Take back your maiden name now, Mrs. Myth?" (CL 233). In Scripts, nature reclaims the rakish poet as her hero, even as JM and DJ glimpse the revision of a youthful love into a more stable, mature form.

Like the power of mind personified in the research lab or od B, nature stimulates the patterns of combination, destruction and regeneration that characterize Eros.

Sparkling the creative urge in the poet are the "ATOMS & PARTICLES OF LIGHT" (CL 408), which his "LOVE, HIS PSYCHE" (CL 408), another reference to nature, places in his mind. Thus, JM finds evidence of his muse internally as well as in the world around him. He is told numerical densities of mind "DO NOT EXCLUDE" (CL 230) the matter of the vegetable and mineral world. The creative imagination does not act on nature but, like Eros, flows within it. However, the Queen Mum points out the frequent neglect of the debt owed to her by the poet, who sees nature "AS HIS PASSION AND TOO OFT HIS WHORE" (CL 485). She says her "DARLING PORTRAITIST" (CL 408) and her "HERO IS A RAKE!" (CL 485).

A "LAST RESOUNDING YES" (CL 489) heard at the pageant held in "No" tips the scales to the affirmative and calms the troubled bond between the human world and nature. Reflecting nature's dynamic mood of "both Yes and No" (CL 484), this event revises the celebration of Michael's "airy way" (CL 484) seen in "Yes." JM describes the scene: "Light is everywhere,/Awaits the words that clothe it -- which we wield" (CL 483). The balanced illumination of mutable and immutable realms creates a scene "CENTERED PROPERLY UPON THE MONARCH" (CL 491) of nature as well as "THE MORTAL, SACRED (& EXPENDABLE) THRONE" (CL 491) where JM and DJ sit. Queen Mum achieves a range of transformations which puts "TO . . . SHAME, BUT GENTLY, LOVINGLY/MICHAEL'S ILLUSIONS" (CL 491). By balancing the bright light of intelligence employed by

Michael with a ritual infusion of Gabriel's "[l]ight like bread, quotidian, severe" (CL 437), she generates a dimension "BEYOND LIFE, HEAVEN, ART" (CL 491).

The pageant transforms the characters of the poem through nature's authority, a powerful embodiment of the activity of Eros. Appropriately it is Maria, who led a life where "MIND [was] ONE WITH MATTER" (CL 527) and wore a "WHOLLY LIFELIKE" (CL 527) mask, who first appears. She is simultaneously a muse, a symbol of chastity and the usually elusive "PLATO UNIFIED" (CL 486) and wholly present. Carried on stage by a unicorn, she is announced as "LOVE, OUR CLEAR-EYED CONSTANCY" (CL 485). Then she leaps to nature's side as a gifted Indian boy, the form Plato will assume in his next life. These are the qualities implied when JM learns she "IS MAMA [nature's] OWN CHILD" (CL 467) and a reincarnation of the philosopher, one of the five immortal human souls. Her role highlights the facets of Eros developed in the poem and reveals that the world of ideas, represented by Plato, rests at the heart of love and life.

Poetry joins the self to the various forms of otherness throughout The Changing Light. Accordingly, nature chooses a poet to testify for the constant bond between lover and his beloved. In another tipping of the scales to the affirmative, the spirit of W.B. Yeats, a presence said to be contained in DJ's hand, emerges to testify for the love between the partners. He reads a poem that concludes:

MAY THE YOUNG SINGER HEARD ABOVE
 THE SPINNING GYRES OF HER TRUE LOVE
 CLOAK THEM IN HEAVEN'S AIRLOOM HARMONIES (CL 486)

Yeats speaks of secular love which is transformed by the artist's ability to dress it in divine "AIRLOOM HARMONIES" (CL 486). His poem parallels JM's discovery of the ideals behind his secular love through the elevation brought about by Eros. For his encapsulation of the relationship between lover and beloved, Queen Mum assigns him to see that DJ will "NOT BE DIVIDED FROM/OUR SCRIBE IN ANY FUTURE SECULUM" (CL 487).

Following the inclination of the poem to turn the tables, reverse images and "evade the cul-de-sac/Of the Whole Point" (CL 454), the finale of "No" becomes "NOT A DEPARTURE BUT A WEDDING PARTY" (CL 513). By breaking a small mirror, JM and DJ mark the end of the roles of Wystan, Maria and George in the masque. In a comic resolution, the superannuated personages of mentor, muse and old friend are released into "MYTH [and] ON INTO LIFE" (CL 516) when the mirror shatters and leaves an "undestroyed heartscape" (CL 517). The passing on of one generation signals the arrival of a refined, silvery world that is the aim of Eros. Accompanying the loss of the trio of characters is a brief vision of an imaginative unity made up of the poem's major motifs, including the centaur and peacock:

Broad wings revolve a horselike form into
 One Creature upward-shining brief as dew,
 Swifter than bubbles in wine, through evening air
 (CL 517)

This form, paired with the "whirling point of Light" (CL 517), presents an image of the relatedness generated by love.

By the end of Scripts, JM and DJ have found in their experience far more than an elaborate mechanism to deal with "the unpopular [lessons] of middle age" (Vendler 229). Their "education" encapsulates the enlightenment made possible by the dynamic between lover and beloved and the creation of a rich vision of life and love as well as death. Merrill explains:

It seems to me that DJ and JM have become not just mates but soulmates by the poem's end. I'd say . . . that the "revelations" of the poem accomplish this, just as surely as their "folie a deux" (another handy definition of love?) brings the poem into being. (L)

The wedding party illustrates both the simple pairing of two people and the potential in the union. In fact, it becomes a "wedding trio" (CL 516) between the partners and long-estranged nature who closed Ephraim with the question: "Why do you no longer come to me?" (CL 92). Judging from the final speech of God B, the pair have become his surrogate. The presence of nature is implied in the addition of "HERS" to the song of God B heard earlier in the poem, which becomes the final passage of Scripts:

HERS HEAR ME I AND MINE SURVIVE SIGNAL
ME DO YOU WELL I ALONE IN MY NIGHT
HOLD IT BACK HEAR ME BROTHERS I AND MINE (CL 517)

In this case, "IT" is the "RAGING WILL" (CL 393) of the Monitor, a figure from the "DEATH BEYOND DEATH" (CL 397).

Through ritual and ceremony, JM and DJ affirm their ability to forestall utter destruction. Just as language holds back "THE NOTHING WE HAVE FOUND TO SAY/ONLY IN OUR WORST MOMENTS" (CL 461), the pair use the "YEARS OF [their] LIVES & [their] DEVOTIONS" (CL 551) to express the generative Eros found at the crossroads of light and dark.

The "marriage" echoes the ideogrammatic "X" introduced by Gabriel in lesson 8 of "No" and taken up again by God B in lesson 10. In the course of the schoolroom discussion, this "SYMBOL FOR ENIGMA" (CL 474) and "MAN FLOATING" (CL 474) evolves into a doubled figure supported by and drawn to different powers in earth and heaven. This mirrored image stands for "TIME'S MAN BECOME TIME AGAINST MAN" (CL 475) in lesson 10, which does not feature a void like the one found in the tenth lesson of "Yes." JM says the cup, which seems to contain the "[b]lack spaces" (CL 493), "crosses itself" (CL 493) to create what could be "the mark/That cancels, or the letter-writer's kiss" (CL 493). What is basically the meeting of two lines takes on the character of effacement or a lover as "[f]ulcrum and consort to our willowy &" (CL 494). These speculations unite different themes and motifs of The Changing Light, including another five found in the quincunx form of "X." The distressing trip into the "BLACKNESS OF THE GLASS" (CL 361) featured in the tenth lesson of "Yes" has become imaginatively manageable in a composition that gives both "PAUSE AND HOPE" (CL 493).

In this symbol of containment, Scripts creates a tentative but substantial defeat of the Monitor, the force that JM and DJ feel when the "very 'able strains/Obscurely toward oblivion" (CL 398). Affirmation found in poetic form, ceremony and myth withstands "THE CHALLENGE TO THE MAGICIAN'S ACT, THE RAGE TO PROVE IT/WAS, IS, ALL DONE BY MIRRORS" (CL 476). JM is no stranger to this kind of destruction as he at one point proposes to reduce vibrant characters like Mirabell or Uni to "a hieroglyph of chalk" (CL 461). Wystan chides his "REDUCTIVE REASONING" (CL 462) and says such an effacement would "MAKE TIME FLOW BACK" (CL 462). This activity opposes Eros and the immolation of spent matter and soul material that leads to the kind of renewal seen in JM's vision of Venice and the alchemical motifs of Mirabell's book. On a grander scale, Gabriel explains that when time unravels rather than being cleanly consumed, "SAND RUNS UP" (CL 448) in the hourglass and the distortion creates the murderous souls of people like Caligula and Hitler. Their "VIRULENT STRAIN" (CL 451) carries out the thinning process of selection and regeneration encouraged by nature. It is the potential for apocalypse "BEFORE GABRIEL AND HIS LORD/BROTHERS BRING US THE FIRE IN THE HEARTH,/THE WELCOME MORN, THE SMELL OF EARTH" (CL 451).

While usually associated with black forces, the Monitor has an alter ego in Michael's realm as the "UNREPULSED LIGHT" (CL 447) or "THE WHITE OF MIND/UNLIMITED" (CL 447)

that obliterates imagination. On one level, it represents the power of subjective illusions generated by the unenlightened self. Wystan says this "NEGATIVE OR 'EYE' OF BLACK" is also "AMORAL" (CL 457), suggesting indiscriminate destruction similar to the chaos which plagues the mind of a suicidal person. Gabriel makes no distinction between black or white in his message: "OF ALL DESTRUCTIVE IDEAS THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE IS THE IDEA OF/DESTRUCTION" (CL 438). To be constructive, primordial forces, whether in light or dark form, must be channelled productively through the creative synthesis and ordering found in the ceremonies and myths shaped by Eros. In JM and DJ's achievement of a bond that combines real and ideal through the impulses of Eros, they are free to shatter the mirror of reflection and find not destruction but unity.

The coda of The Changing Light allows both a rounding off of the poet's story and a reiteration of themes of continuity and renewal. Robert Polito says that the final section enacts "a circular 'ending' that eternally returns the changed poet and reader to the 'beginning' of the poem for a fresh look at the changing light" (37). JM says the central story of the coda, Robert Morse's return to life, saves the narrative from the time-worn structures of "the tyrant Three,/Ménage à trois, synthesis, trilogy" (CL 530). The coda also counters the hard-line position taken by the higher powers on curbing human reproduction, a rebuke to

nature's fecundity. Merrill explains:

[O]ne reason I like the epilogue is because up until then there's this feeling that the fewer children there are the better . . . [in the coda there] is this flood of tenderness from the angels and Queen Mum towards this little child born in Minnesota. That made me breathe a bit easier when it came. (AQ 33)

In this final movement, Eros displays its abundance by escaping attempts to contain its activity and reaffirms regeneration as its ultimate end.

"REVELATION'S CONSTANT PROCESS" (CL 555) again takes on the imagery of alchemical transformation in its description of Robert Morse's rebirth as a child prodigy. The effects of the angels' visits to the womb are illustrated in a painted portrait of Robert on display at Sandover. As the developing child gains senses, the painting sheds its image until a "pinch of dry, used color dusts the floor" (CL 539). After the final visit, "[f]aint sanguine plots a newly primed expanse" (CL 539) of the canvas. This shift in perspective from an imaginative world to earthly concerns also emerges in the circumstances surrounding the reading of the poem set at the conclusion of the coda. Preparing for the event, JM faces his "worst fear -- that, written for the dead,/This poem [will] leave a living reader cold" (CL 559). However, the reading allows the coda to end with a festive communion of worlds seen and unseen. JM stands before DJ, a grief-stricken friend and an audience of literary personalities assembled on "the other side." Eros and the poet derive

power from the dead and their tradition, but their final activity tends toward the living; and it is "[f]or their ears" (CL 560), the living audience, JM reads.

The ongoing changes at Sandover reflect how Eros has allowed JM and DJ to surpass their fears and guilt. The hedge, which Merrill says represents "barriers of the self" (R 56), disappears in the coda, making the comings and goings of spirits simpler. In these changes, JM recognizes the intrinsically mutable process of divine translation and psychological development. He comments:

No, henceforth we'll be more and more alone.
Uni, our Peacock, Ephraim -- each of these
We have by imperceptible degrees
. . . What to say? Not tired of. Outgrown?
(CL 540)

Through fluctuations of tone and revisions, The Changing Light avoids becoming a "[c]ompost of language -- action gone to seed,/Buried in idiom" (CL 425), the fate of the texts of orthodox Christianity and Auden's "DIFFY MORAL STRICTURES" (CL 164).

Conversation with Robert further illuminates facets of self and their place in the expansive order of Eros. Recounting his death, he speaks of a shattering or dissolving of his self that leaves him in a state of "NO FEELINGS" (CL 498). He experiences "FAINT/UNCONNECTED DAUBS OF THOUGHT LIKE PAINT" (CL 498), which come together in a single thought. Once his image of the "SELF [is] WHOLE" (CL 498), he is taken by "A POWER NOTHING IMPEDES" (CL 498) to

the lit figures of the participants dead and alive at the board. Robert says the light there is

LIKE A STAR WE ENTER
TO FIND OURSELVES. IF IT'S THE LIGHT OF LOVE
ALL ELSE IS HEDGING (CL 499)

In this message, JM says their friend has "lit/Our blind spot up" (CL 499), exposing the "screen/Of self which forms between God and His creature" (CL 499). As the poem has shown, the hedge or screen is navigated and known through the power of Eros.

By seeing himself in this "LIGHT OF LOVE" (CL 499), the JM of the later parts of the poem separates the "I from the I/Who shook those bars" (CL 496) at the time of his parents' divorce. The bars, at one level, are his juvenile helplessness, but for an older JM they take the more immediate form of blockages in communication between the self and the larger world. "Poetic justice" (CL 496), an extension of the creative flow of Eros, enables him to free himself and turn the bars from "iron to sunlight" (CL 496). Merrill expresses it this way:

Seen at a certain distance, the issue of profane versus divine comes to be that of the self versus the selfless. This isn't something one has any control over; one can't evidently will it, much as one might long to get beyond some of those barriers of the self. (R 56)

By mediating his will through DJ, the board and poetry, JM discovers a divine light which escapes the extremes of dark and light. In surpassing the "[p]itiless gaze shining forth" (CL 496) of the affronted child and the "singularity [and]

10000 COLONY ROAD S. BURNINGWELL, WY 82207, USA
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dark gullet" (CL 499) of the ego, JM finds grace in the multi-faceted and changing light of Eros.

Other-worldly light arrives at the board with Ephraim, but its source is the "BLAZING CALM ELATE INTELLIGENCE" (CL 287) of Michael. Following this clue, the discussion makes a grand movement to wholeness by revealing that Ephraim is a character played by Michael, a revision that parallels the elevation of the earthly bond of JM and DJ by the higher powers. Ephraim and Michael, a "SET OF TWINS" (CL 551), embody the real and ideal, or profane and sacred, dimensions of love. The angel of light asks: "DEAR SCRIBE, WOULD YOU/HAVE WANTED LESS THAN THIS RESONANCE?" (CL 551). With a musical precision, Merrill's final questioning of the indwelling powers finds potential divinity of the self rooted in erotic love. Michael says he lets down his mask "FOR LOVE" (CL 551), once again crediting the unnamed, unseen activity of Eros with a development of deeper knowledge of the self.

Psychological refinement gained through life with DJ and poetry brings JM back to the ballroom of the broken home to find it transformed. JM reflects on this process in the poem's final scene:

For affection's
Poorest object, set in perfect light
By happenstance, grows irreplaceable,
And whether in time a room, a romance,
Fails us or redeems us will have followed
As an extension of our "feel" for call them
Immaterials . . . (CL 556-7)

This dynamic mix of hazard and ideal lies behind all of the dazzling effects of The Changing Light. By submitting to powers outside the will and developing a capacity to see beyond the self, Merrill chronicles the activity of Eros as the divine capacity in the human mind.

Chapter 5

Building Arcadia

[In Dante's Comedy there] is no rift, as in conventional allegory, between action and interpretation, physical and moral, "low" and "high." All is of a piece. It is a mystic's view of the world, if you like. It is also a scientist's. (R 93)

Merrill's comment on the structure that earned Dante "an extraordinary universal smile" (R 93) also describes the scope of The Changing Light. In my conversations with Merrill he spoke of his fascination with the "gross disparities of scale" (CL 173), sudden reversals and revelations found in the poem. Through the creative imagination, the poem surpasses the "rifts" and allows dynamic effects such as resonance between the grave message of an apparent divinity and a witticism of the salon. When

asked if he had taken irreverence to new heights, Merrill replied: "There's no harm in that, is there?" Far from harm, the poet may have captured what Auden called "the gift of double focus," a "magic lamp" that if used right "[c]an be a sesame to light" (1968, 104).

Merrill's most dynamic achievement rests in re-establishing a common ground for empirical and spiritual disciplines in the creativity of Eros. Drawing on the traditions from his "corner of the library" (R 56), the poet reaches beyond the limitations of his craft while at the same time creating "a broad view" (R 56) of science. He suggests the result "might conceivably interest a trained scientist more than it does [him] -- someone who couldn't otherwise see the forest for the trees" (R 56). What Merrill may dismiss as "wishful thinking" (R 56), that the telescoping effects of poetry can end the isolation between kindred facets of human knowledge, actually comes to fruition in his successful employment of the language and properties of science. Merrill's belief that the "only lifeline to science . . . has to be the imagination" (CL 57) reflects the magnitude of the opportunity for creativity and understanding proposed by the poem. Like Stevens before him, Merrill turns to the imagination "in parlous times" (CL 66) to create the resistance that celebrates human limitations and allows a glimpse of an anagogic reality. The ascent through love shown in the trilogy seldom questions what

purpose the lessons serve other than the ambiguous assignment to "BUILD ARCADIA" (CL 149). However, The Changing Light captures a wider existence in its concern with nuclear power and overpopulation.

An American heritage remains intact in Merrill's work amid the geographic shifts and relative neglect of domestic politics. In his survey of what he terms the "personal epic" in American poetry, Thomas Gardner says Merrill "finds himself embracing something different from the self -- [Walt] Whitman calls it 'the creation' -- in order to find words for the alien, unsayable depths" (170). In another extrapolation of this current, Robert Martin says the erotic material of Whitman's poetry creates

an important way-station on the path to the abolition of distinctions of age, class, beauty, and gender. Whitman loves all being and will love and be loved by all being. It is perhaps at this juncture that the implications of his perspective become most revolutionary. (20)

By dealing with dark and light powers through the order of Eros, Merrill creates a similar method of seeking otherness and employing the inherent creativity of love.

By illustrating this democratic concern in a consideration of the "powers that be" (CL 54), Merrill revisits Whitman's visceral expression with a psychological precision. Merrill's achievement, to use his own evaluation of Proust, is not one "of style but of memory, therefore within even the common man's power to duplicate" (R 82). Thus, Merrill's apparent estrangement from the domestic

scene does little to remove him from the tradition of the American long poem. Like his roundabout approach to ideas, it is through personal experience the poet returns to the issues faced by his precursors. The poet's own life gives the "elemental processes . . . fresh ways of being seen" (R 68) which are discovered at the "point of withdrawl" (AQ 21) at Stonington. In Greece, Merrill found "a world on a surprisingly small human scale compared to the great American world of business, technology, and political machines" (AQ 20). Merrill's devotion to love generates a story of a child of the new world who discovers an old world sensibility and is left with a sense of "immaterials, the real right angle,/The golden section . . . at the heart of structure" (CL 557).

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