

The Tower of Song & The School of the Night

“It is because I think there is a way out—a way down and out—that I would speak. Sometimes—most times—I think that the way down and out leads out of the university, out of the academy. But perhaps it is rather that we should recover the academy of earlier days—the Academy of Plato in Athens, the Academy of Ficino in Florence At any rate the point is first of all to find again the mysteries. By which I do not mean simply the sense of wonder—that sense of wonder which is indeed the source of all true philosophy—by mystery I mean secret and occult; therefore unpublishable; therefore outside the university as we know it; but not outside Plato’s Academy or Ficino’s.” ~ N.O Brown, “Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind” (Phi Beta Kappa Speech, Columbia University, May 1960)

How the Gypsy Scholar (student of N.O. Brown)—making his way “down and out” of the university—dreamed about the “School of the Night” and discovered the Tower of Song.

When the Gypsy Scholar was a college undergrad, and finding himself “too long in exile,” he had a dream one night. “In the middle of the night” he dreamed he was among those who participated in that original all-night philosophical conversation and drinking party “way, way, back” in ancient Greece—that Platonic Symposium on the *mysteries of philosophy and love*. “I saw the light of ancient Greece / Towards the One” ~ Van Morrison) And while the dream didn’t specify his role—he may have only been the proverbial fly on the wall—, that he was there in the same philosophical company (the Romantic “Visionary Company” of Eros) was enough to make him remember this “big dream.” Little did the Gypsy Scholar know then that this lucid dream initiated the first step in the process of his quest to discover the whereabouts of what he would later recognize as the that imaginal Tower of Song.

But what he did know, because of the dream (though still through a glass darkly), was that he had entered the academy looking for, longing for, something that no longer existed. Yet, it so powerfully impressed itself upon his imagination that it seemed much more real than the physical universities of his time. This intimation of the immortality of an archetypal image eventually ruptured into his waking world, and he found a fantastic image taking shape in his conscious mind, which was everything that he had hoped to find, but did not find in the university. “What if,” the Gypsy Scholar asked himself, “there could be an alternative academic

institution?” (A postmodern rebirth of the original “Platonic Academy,” or Ficino’s Florentine “Platonic Academy.”) This started his search—at once noetic and erotic—for *PhiloSophia* (as for the young scholar Dante: “*Lady Philosophy has appealed to his intellectual faculties Lady Philosophy has shown him the place of reason as handmaiden to the revelation of Beatrice is to be.*”) But the strange fact was that the disaffiliated undergrad didn’t become the Gypsy Scholar until he defected (after completing two degrees) from the Ivory Tower and spent a long night in that abandoned “Lonely Towr” with Lady Melancholia and eventually moved into that (radio) “tower down the track” (thank you Leonard Cohen!) to commence mixing high, academic culture with low, popular culture—high argument with deep song. (As that Orphic Scholar of the “Joyous Science,” Ralph Waldo Emerson, so wonderfully put it: “I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low.”)

The Gypsy School imagined the Tower of Song as a musekal Night-School of the airwaves (in the universe of the so-called “Romantic Night-World” or “Night-side” of being) and supported by its Musekal-Memorial Library. A (Romantic) Night-School, that is part all-night symposium (“the Party of Eros”), part esoteric university (“the Invisible College”), part museum (“home of the muses”), part asylum-sanctuary (a retreat for the Platonic-Socratic “care of soul”), part literary salon (the Romantic’s “hangout for witty, stimulating conversation generally run by women”), and part anarchist coffee-house (philosophical cafe on radio that offers an offbeat blend of poetry and politics, mysticism and activism; and, with refreshment, “provides informal entertainment”), where you hear the mix of proverbial “Infinite Conversation” & “Unending Melody” (or “Argument & Song”—thank you Mr. Blake!). In this way the Gypsy Scholar could turn to W.B. Yeats for the idea of a “*singing school of the soul*” (with its *soul-music*).

Furthermore, the Gypsy Scholar eventually came up with the concept for this Tower of Song Night-School on radio: Re-Vision Radio, which suggested a very different kind of radio format, an experimental “university of the airwaves” that is designed in an audio-visual way, because the Tower of Song would exist in cyberspace through a website that accompanied the radio medium. This freeform Night-School of the airwaves would honor the Tower of Song as an imaginal place where “the poetic champions compose” (Van Morrison) as Romantic “ringers in the tower” (W. B. Yeats)—a “Dead Poets Society” or neo-Beat “Disembodied School of Poetics.” And because the Tower of Song Night-School is haunted by

song, it's also a kind of "school of rock." However, any philosophical "education" (*paideia*) that happens in the Musekal-Memorial Library is not the conventional one of the traditional academy, but a subversive, counter-educational programme of an "imaginal literacy," of a higher learning that reunites *love and ideas* ("a simultaneous knowing and loving by means of imagining"—thank you Dr. Hillman!)—a soulful learning that harmonizes both the left and the right brain; a Renaissance learning of the art of oratorical eloquence, where the "care of words" is equally "care of soul."

The Tower of Song's Night-School of the Airwaves, then, going back—"way, way back"—to Orphic-Platonic sense of knowledge (lit. wisdom; from the "sense of wonder"), can be sometimes seen (from a certain perspective on a moonlit night) as an esoteric academy of "Pansophia" ("You can call my love Sophia / I call my love Philosophy"—thank you Van Morrison!), or "Invisible College," whose Alma Mater is "Our Dark Lady of the Tower of Song."

Therefore, because the Tower of Song's Night-School of the Airwaves is way out of the ordinary, it's not for everyone, but for the eternal, underground counter-(oc)culture. In fact, it can be understood as being "a broadcasting entity with a wisdom-laden voice from a Logos-mind that speaks to you" (thank you Mr. McKenna!), which is (like Hermann Hesse's "Magic Theater") not for everyone, but for madmen—*Romantic Outsiders*—only!