AFTERWORD

Author's Afterword Ancestral Visitations Notes

AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

I

I consider this novella as an 'exercise in writing' which took my fancy many years ago when I found myself in my early twenties unemployed for several months after my first sojourn to Europe in early 1982 including a short stay in Cyprus the country of my parents. While I waited for the Department of Education to give me the final approval to teach (I had in the previous year qualified to become a visual art teacher) I came across some old faded pencil literary scribbling from years before which I had written down while sitting in the back of the classroom during whatever high school lessons bored me (usually mathematics ¹); as I and some other school friends were very much into Tolkien's Lord of the Rings – in my youth I read it four times 2 - and so naturally enough I made several attempts at writing my own 'epic'. However, none of this literary endeavour came to any fruition. Nevertheless, when I found these old notes I was motivated to try and do 'something' with them. At the time the scapegoating 'dole bludger'³ myth was seemingly at its height – being stoked by a Federal LNP government (although one has since dismally discovered that there were those from the ALP who also shared a similar prejudice)³ to irresponsibly shift blame away from its own economic sins to the most powerless who were disproportionately suffering from them - I as well found it curious to irrationally feel 'guilty' to be out of work when it was not my fault that the state education department was being so bureaucratically slow in organising my final approval to teach. For just a few of the months of the lengthy period when I was denied the opportunity to begin earning an income through casual teaching I received unemployment benefits and in such a malevolent social climate I shall never forget the dirty looks and surly behaviour of one particular young male clerk as I lined up with many other unfortunates at a crowded social security office in Belmore which is a suburb in a lowereconomic area of Sydney. ⁴ I also recall how one time while waiting in this dilapidated cream coloured sitting room I had looked around me to see how so many of the other unemployed appeared to be unskilled workers (usually migrants who many had the additional cultural burden of not being fluent English speakers), and who at the time always seemed to be among the first to be 'jettisoned' during any economic downturn.

Π

Thus the issue of the state and the individual remains a relevant central theme in this attempt at writing. I was, and remain, aware that this work follows an anti-utopian literary tradition which includes elements of Swift's satirical *Gulliver's Travels*; Butler's *Erewhon* and modern twentieth century novels such as Huxley's *Brave New World*; Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*¹ as well as *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1924); it is said this Russian gem actually had an important influence on George Orwell. (I also feel inclined to place Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* within this dystopian literary tradition and while it is not a novel *The Rebel* which is a collection of essays by Albert Camus also comes to mind).²

III

Certainly, generally speaking governments and their policies always need to be critically queried and when found wanting must be rectified especially when for any reason they lean more so to social coercion rather than showing a greater commitment to social conscience.¹ From the novella it may be ascertained that human corruption knows no bounds and from this literary piece it maybe surmised one of its common variants - among many - is the use of religion as a tool of social control by the state especially to dehumanize its enemies so they are publicly perceived as criminals rather than as victims; yet, with such political misuse of any heinous 'divine judgement' towards those who 'transgress' against state will (in order while here on earth to 'justify' any state punishment) in mind I have still chosen to also explore the possibility of a loving 'Supreme Being' so as as to be somewhat even handed towards such theological supposition which may give the reader the opportunity to further extend his or her own reasoning on this age-old religious question regarding the very existence of a 'Supreme Being' and as well for such an omnipotent divinity to actually be a loving one. Thus perhaps, by having such 'mortal speculation' on this grand issue in the novella that more or less has even left as open-ended the good potential of any actual spiritual moral reality as true so as to be enabled against what is evil – or immoral – to use what maybe seen by some as a less loaded polarizing descriptor - there is from a reader's point of view far more scope for the human mind to 'philosophically breathe'.

IV

After perusing those first attempts at serious writing I finally accomplished my original task of finishing a 'literary piece' after many years of 'forced labour' in 1993. (As it is since completing this novella I have launched new efforts at 'serious writing' such as the inevitable attempt at 'The Great Australian Novel').¹

I wish to apologize for the rather dark military emphasis in this novella which can be unquestionably seen as a legacy from those school boy notations from which I originally worked on; after all, uninformed as to the actual horrific realities of war the spectacular battle scenes in *Lord of the Rings* were always preferred and one can find them echoed in the battering ram scene in The Front Gate. Although - rather pensively for the writer - a bleak and cynical mood prevails over much of the novella, to perhaps give it a haunting quality or even an aridly nihilistic psychological overlay there is actually meant to be a hopeful message amidst such totalitarian despair dealing in part with the noble and inspirational aspects of human resistance and human liberty that are apparent in humanity's character and can come to the fore.

As to the underlying somewhat 'boyhood influence' in this novella it has come through in other ways such as the train hijack in Part II which was drawn from old-time WWII movies such as *Von Ryan's Express*. While the platoon of soldiers introduced in The Encirclement is nominally reminiscent of the war weary retreating German soldiers fighting on the Russian Front in the movie *Cross of Iron*.

The First General in the novella reminds me of the grim but cunning leading Spanish conquistador in Werner Herzog's brilliant film *Aguirre the Wrath of God* which is about the ruthless search for a South American El Dorado. While many years ago at Sydney's State Mitchell Library looking for the title of this movie – as I had forgotten it and the internet was still in its infancy – I finally came across the International Dictionary of Films and Film Directors. I found a quote which spoke of this film as being relentless in its vivid focus on filthiness, sickness, and brutal cruelty. Thus what is also implied is that there is a 'bestiality' that lies just below the surface of our so called standards of civilization.

Another cultural derivative involves conversations between the two main characters in Part III ² as it is somewhat reminiscent of the discussions to be found Aloyshka and Shukhov in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day In The Life of Ivan Denisovich*. I hasten to add that I am conscious of other derivative influences in this early work and so would also like to remark that Armistice Day is a strong reference – amongst other things – to the Midnight Oil song of the same title by this modern day Australian rock music band (which is well known for its political advocacy).

Some of the remarks made by the old man in Part Three come by my readings in my early twenties of Paul Tournier's writings. ³ I understood him to be an elderly gentle French-Swiss doctor whose practice was in Geneva. A Christian physician who insightfully had a holistic view of the human psyche; noting on many occasions that the physical ailments of his patients were often associated with a spiritual or emotional trauma.

The incident in the forest in The March was inspired by an incredible event I saw at the Stonehenge Rock Festival in 1982 held in the days preceding the summer solstice (which is observed by the Druid community wearing their robes and thongs on the dawn of the actual day). I saw a young hippie couple exchange their wedding vows at Stonehenge itself (they were actually standing with the marriage celebrant on one of the fallen ancient stone pillars) and the large crowd of 'multi-coloured' dressed people who witnessed the ceremony (which seemed to be a blend of Eastern rituals – I think predominantly Buddhist) – perhaps a

few hundred individuals – all went into a wild noisy state of divine ecstatic frenzy when their chants for the sun to emerge from behind the clouds were finally answered. Assuming my memory is serving me correctly the marriage celebrant was a wizened, bearded guy with long red hair wearing frazzled denim shorts, bare-chested and being in his late thirties; I shall never forget the intense look in his eyes as he encouraged the crowd to wildly raise their arms and shout & chant at the sky.

The street scene in A Question of Balance is based on a personal memory of a fantastic night scene in New Delhi next to the main railway station; (it was in India at Varanasi that I saw a naked male corpse floating down the Ganges while I was on a small boat for the day viewing the never ending funeral pyres where the many dead are honourably cremated and where the many living bathe themselves in this majestic holy river. I was told by a guide he was a low caste 'untouchable'; I could not help but think all humans deserve a proper, respectful sending off by their fellow human beings into the next world - no matter their earthy caste and whoever that man was he is still worthy to be mentioned and remembered now after so much time.

The factory workers in their work place hells may remind one of Blake's 'Satanic mills' or of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.

The story about the origin of the English language at the end of The Old Man is a little anti-English folktale which my now late father told me when I was a child. The 'tanks' in The Front Gate may remind some readers of the Martian machines in H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*.

Furthermore, the human underworld in this novella did not seem so implausible to me during the time of writing for I remember reading in the very dim past an obscure newspaper article about an archaeological team discovering humanmade underground tunnels paved with stones 'somewhere in Eurasia'. I have also heard of old legends such as in Ancient Sumeria that speak of blacksmiths working in underground caves but I do not know too much about the veracity of these tales to make further comment. The only modern tale I am aware of with subterranean creatures is a Hollywood B-grade B&W movie called *The Slime People* which a horror movie compere – of many, many years ago – named Deadly Ernest shown one Friday night and which dealt with frog-like upstanding subterranean men with spears who under the cover of a strange fog attacked L.A.

V

Notably, as to the main central character who originally pivots the narrative from the outset: there should be enough ambiguity about him both in his physical demeanour and real identity to remain open to various literary, theological, psychological, philosophical, political, spiritual and perhaps even cosmic or psychic quantum like explorations and interpretations. Nevertheless, in regards to his overbearing malevolence one may wish to view this 'bruised, marked beast' as a sort of 'fallen angel'. At the grave risk of this comment sounding like an excuse this haunting character is an enigma even to the author and thus is perhaps one reason as to why his actual physical features are not really too well described except for his tall height and that it maybe ascertained he is in very good bodily condition and along with also seemingly being 'ageless' he remains nameless; only to be labelled as: 'messiah' due to his public persona (whereby there are many in this underworld which he has entered into who have come to sincerely perceive him not as a Machiavellian personification of evil or a demonic 'prince of darkness' but rather as a 'prince of light' with nearly all of those in the subterranean military expedition that ascends to the surface world willing to blindly follow him even unto their deaths.¹

Certainly, this 'alien' of the human condition does come across as a sort 'super being' (or 'supra-being') who knows only to lead (obviously there is an enormous ego there that would never abide to being led). There is also some sort of masterful 'other worldly' presence about him which attracts awe and respect from most mere mortals; although those two cynical scholars ³ seem to remain always overtly unimpressed by him.

Stephen maybe positively seen as an 'every-person' representative of the *whole* human race rather than in any other way as although he specifically belongs to a privileged society from a continental region that historically vows itself to be globally masterful over other human societies he has over time finally chosen to reject such human exceptionalism² in order to not also sacrificially fight *against* human tyranny but to also triumphantly fight *for* human liberty.⁴

As it is, the central pivot of the novella changes over to Stephen who chooses to no longer place his trust in some 'saviour' - either religious or political - and to trust in the end in only his own clearing human conscience (as it redemptively emerges from the dark abyss it had entered into when he originally became a naïve – vet still willing – recruit to fascism; not 'cleared' for one can never be absolutely sure in one's own lifetime of having ever reached some 'perfect moral point'...one always has to be on one's guard to any ongoing human prejudice and this 'fluid' human principle can also apply to a whole nation including those that see themselves as mature liberal democracies as there is always need to further improve and build on the social advances that have been gained for to rest on 'one's laurels' will only end up inviting the ominous possibility of democratic stagnation or even much worse). Although he also suffers a cruel death one may wish to discern it is for the right noble reasons whether that be in service to his own individual sense of what it means to be a human being or for some 'higher truth' - or 'just cause' as earlier implied - such as for well founded abstracts as 'justice' and 'freedom' (...rather than inversely for injustice and slavery).

In any case, it is certain the rights and the wrongs of the fate of Stephen and even of other characters in the novella are open to debate.

One should also mention that it maybe thought as improbable that someone in Wehrmacht and especially in the SS would have turned on the Nazi regime the way the novella character Stephen did and to actually directly fight against it as a partisan.¹ However, in recent research the author has come across Falk Harnak who was a German soldier who in 1943 would end up fighting with left wing partisans in Greece.² Harnak who had some association with the Munich based anti-Nazi White Rose ³ would earlier in 1943 be caught up in a Gestapo round up of this anti-Nazi resistance movement. Yet, of the fourteen members caught Harnak would turn out to be the lone survivor partly due to a 'lack of evidence' although it is thought Harnak had escaped execution by the 'People's Court' and released as it was hoped that he would inadvertently lead the Gestapo to other underground resistance members. However, this did not happen and instead Harnak who in Germany was in the regular Wehrmacht was re-assigned to the 999 Penal Battalion⁵ serving in Greece. As it is penal battalions were noted for their high casualty rates due to the often highly dangerous combat situations such officially considered 'expendable soldiers' found themselves in; yet, a still much living, breathing Harnak was eventually to be re-arrested anyway so as to be sent to a concentration camp but after being forewarned by a sympathetic officer Harnak would duly avoid such a harsh, foreboding fate and link up with a local partisan group with whom he previously had had some initial dialogue with by way of local villagers. ⁶ Notably, the 999 Penal Battalion which had many recalcitrant soldiers who'd otherwise be political prisoners presumably had a significant number of deserters who would end up fighting against occupying forces in this Balkan theatre of the war.

One other German soldier of note in the 999 Penal Battalion and who would not in any case survive the war was August Landmesser who is best known from the famous 1936 photograph as the annoyed looking man with the crossed arms within a large crowd of his fellow workers at a Hamburg naval shipyard who all cheerfully had one of their arms fully outstretched dutifully performing the Nazi salute. ⁸

Curiously in regards to German soldiers resisting their fascist overlords there is also the extraordinary case of the somewhat 'peacenik' known as 'Wedontdothat' from Gunter Grasse's memoir about his time in the Second World War. ⁹ He speaks of a recruit in the Labor Service who in terms of his physical physique was the perfect Nordic specimen having strong so called Aryan features - including the archetypal blue eyes & blonde hair – who could have been used for a Nazi propaganda poster. Yet this youngster who was obedient in doing everything that was asked of him and diligent in every task would always refuse to even hold a rifle. As the rifle was handed to him by the instructor on rifle drill it was always dropped to the ground and he would simply say: "We don't do that." Gunter Grass would state that this fellow was not known for having any religious convictions and his pacifism would hold out even though his fellow recruits – who at first had sympathy for him - would turn against him when any punishment directed at 'Wedontdothat' would be extended to the whole group. Although admired 'Wedontdothat's attitude was also seen as mystifying and nonsensical. Yet, there was sympathy for him when one day 'Wedontdothat' simply officially disappeared and it was guessed that he was taken to a concentration camp. It is not known what eventually happened to 'Wedontdothat' but the worst can be feared.

Although one could also mention in detail the high ranking military personnel that plotted to assassinate Adolf Hitler but failed on July 20, 1944 when he survived the bombing at his Wolf's Lair in East Prussia what can be noted is that much of the resistance who planned what was to be known as 'Operation Valkivre' - and which was to be more than just an assassination but a coup to overthrow the whole Nationalist Socialist regime – is that they did all mainly belong to the officer class. Thus, in terms of such high level German military resistance from a superior cohort that would otherwise be expected to be dutifully loyal to Hitlerism there is Waffen-SS Major Kurt Gerstein who would do what he could to expose the Final Solution. ¹⁰ It seems that Kurt Gerstein joined the SS in 1941 with the conspiratorial aspiration to infiltrate into the deeper secretive recesses of this abysmal organisation which was the Nazi regime and by doing so to understand its inner workings so as to then actually undermine the Third Reich. ¹¹ Yet, rather ironically, Kurt Gerstein would dismally find himself intimately involved in the somewhat precursor 'experimental stage' of the Final Solution - which he claimed to abhor - due to his technical hygiene expertise (here was a man who had apparently invented a water filter for frontline troops and which helped to have his earlier 'waywardness' towards the regime now overlooked) and so he was at Belzec in Poland in August 1942 to witness first hand the gassing of several thousand Jews by motor exhaust fumes. It was a slow process which would lead to the adoption of Zyklon B as the generally preferred lethal option for mass extermination. Kurt Gerstein would then go on to see exterminations at Treblinka. Apparently Kurt Geinstein was guite shocked by all that he had seen and even chose to bury Zyklon B canisters in his possession which he was meant to handover (it is said he claimed these canisters were damaged); and which would lead to one of his even more overt instances of subterfuge: whereby on a train back to Berlin he had a chance encounter with a neutral Swedish diplomat and told him what he saw. Apparently, Kurt Gerstein would go on to tell many others he trusted in Germany of what was happening including the Neimoller family as well as trying through back channels to have the Vatican know of the Nazi genocide program but all with nil results. At the end of the war Kurt Gerstein would hand himself over to the Allies and reveal what he knew about the Final Solution. Initially he was treated well being under sympathetic French jurisdiction at a hotel in Rottweil, Germany where he wrote his famous report in both French and German of all he had witnessed. However, when eventually transferred to a harsh military prison in Paris he no longer had any special privileges as an

'honourable' war prisoner only being seen there as yet another Nazi war criminal. On July 25, 1945 Kurt Gerstein was found hung in his cell. His death was seen as a suicide although it is suspected that other German prisoners had probably killed him.

VII

As to the SS and death camps one should encounter Vassily Grossman's account of Treblinka¹ which due to the forensic accuracy of the unimaginable atrocities that were described was even given public airing at the post-war trials of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg. To read how dogs were let loose on naked human beings to have their bodies sayaged as they were about to enter and die in the gas chamber. To have guards smirking at their victims who still did not really know what yet awaited them on arrival at a train station 'camouflaged' as being a normal arrival point to fully 'blind' these victims with such a meticulous deceit to orchestrate their full co-operation to their own harrowing end. To think that these fateful souls had only assumed they were going to simply have yet another 'normalized' abnormal day of dehumanization and abuse under the devious, malicious eye of their barbarian keepers for who could imagine even in their worst nightmare what was truly in store...? For such grotesque cruelty and mass annihilation to become a daily occurrence not only at Treblinka but throughout the Nazi occupied territories. To even read of those few occasional brave men and women who could see beyond the deception to then individually fight back against those who had whips and even with their bare hands against their captors while approaching the massive concrete block that guaranteed only death; to die anyway but at least by doing so with some struggle against the human demons who had damned them and not so frightfully meekly. To resist, even if it was so little. Apparently it was after the defeat of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad that Himmler ordered that the bodies of those who had suffered such ghastly deaths be burnt rather than buried so as to hide any evidence of this crazed industrial scale genocide for even then it was thought by such high ranking members of the Nazi elite that the war may possibly be lost. As for Treblinka which was 100 kilometres from Warsaw from whose ghetto over two hundred and sixty-five thousand Jews would be sent to their deaths between July and September 1942 (followed by hundreds of thousands of other victims deported from other parts of Europe) there would be a revolt on August 2, 1943 by a resistance group made up of prisoners who set fire to the camp destroying much of its infrastructure and with over 300 rebels escaping. 200 were caught and killed but the camp which had liquidated maybe up to nearly a million people by then could not function as murderously intended anymore so would be closed down. As one surviving escapee would say: "Hell has been burnt!" However, hades as devised by the SS was still relentlessly going on in Auschwitz and many other death camps and would re-appear in other awful ways as shown in the Russian movie Come and See (1985)² famously known for its unrelenting realism and has SS madmen (apparently based on the worse convicted criminal

recruits which made up the gruesome 'Dirlewanger Brigade'³ or 'Black Hunters' as it was also ominously known whose barbarism was so frightfully sadistic even other *SS* units were appalled) in Belarus viciously rounding up fearful villagers into a large wooden church to then burn it down. These fanatical militiamen laugh hysterically with joy as the many innocents die. The piercing, panic riddled screams of hundreds of men, women and children arousing only hateful disdain rather than pity. The steely, scuffed up German helmets with their typical extending outward ridge along their bottom edges seem magnified from some film angles so as to help give this whole apocalyptic massacre scene a historical sense of a medieval hell as vividly depicted by Hieronymus Bosch. The horror is graphic.

VII

Many years have passed since finishing this novella and I have only tinkered with it a little; ironing out any inconsistencies which seemed obvious to me; as well as adding a few sentences where it was felt there was a need for further information. However, I think it is best to leave the general form of the writing as it is as it represents a particular epoch in my own 'creative excursion'; (please excuse the pretentious resonance in this statement); the reader can judge for him or herself as to the quality of the prose. However, somewhat in the spirit of Pasternek's *Dr Zhivago* there are a few poems included in the novella and I would like to mention that these, including the one at the beginning of the book, were written by me in my late teens.¹



Auschwitz

The Overall Cyclical Structure of the Novella

In my own terms I have attempted to be experimental in my approach to the overall structure of the novella¹ (which also has a symbolic aspect), exploring a 'cyclical vision' which has included subordinating the characters and the plot to the central themes (or ideas) within the novella. For instance: the confined deadly space of the final scene in the book is meant to hark back to the closed world of the cavern in the beginning of the novella.

The novel 'revolves' around two circles – one representing the 'messiah' and the other Stephen – which overlap when these two main characters meet to briefly form a 'Venn diagram' during their crossover association.

A Reflection On The Novella's Dystopian Setting With An Alternative Historical World.

Along with the dystopian underworld in the first third of the novella as to why it then continues with its dystopian theme set in an alternative history WWII Europe which remains occupied by Nazi Germany is due to a cov realisation that the author had in 1982 while travelling mainly in western Europe including crossing East Germany to go to West/East Berlin¹ when the Iron Curtain and Berlin Wall still both existed - and which would have him come to such a 'road to Damascus' awakening of how (i) for most Eastern Europeans who back then lived under Russian occupation from 1945 onwards that the Second World War had not yet really ended ² and (ii) how such an Eastern European perspective of the Second World War did not seem fully acknowledged by a seemingly self-obsessed West. Thus developed an interest to recalibrate in the novella the history of this major war which would have the West possibly facing many more years - at least well beyond 1945 - of occupation by a still ruthlessly strong invader in order to prompt one to deliberately perceive the discordant reality that remained for the peoples of Eastern Europe who then only faced living under a different invasive foreign totalitarian power when the truly liberated peoples of western Europe celebrated (and rightly so) the full demise of another previously invasive foreign totalitarian power on May 7, 1945.³

ANCESTRAL VISITATIONS

It is believed the ancestors referred to in the text accompanying the *Creation of the World* etching illustration - which is at the end of this section - always come and visit the earth during this major Balinese festival.

It should be noted that on the other side of the world in Guatemala there is a village near Antigua where the local Mayans fly kites over the graves of their loved ones passing messages to their visiting ancestors on the Day of the Dead which is held on All Souls Day on November 1st.

Thus the notion of ancestors or gods visiting the earth seems to be a universal spiritual religious theme and in the west there is in 'apocalypse theology' the notion of the return of Christ; while in Judaism the Messiah is yet to come.

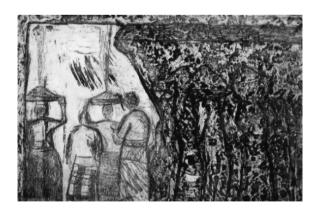
It seems some religious symbols also share universal spiritual importance: it is intriguing to see that while the writhing Rainbow Serpent who formed the features of the world is the pre-eminent creation 'totem' of the Aboriginal Dreamtime (or 'Creation Time') the serpent is also a major totem for the Mayan Indians. The Mayans astutely observe how the serpent can form the shape of a circle which represents the cosmos and that it can also take the shape of a square which represents humanity; thus in a perfect order of the universe the square in a subordinate but harmonious fashion fits nicely within the circle.

In the Judaic-Christian tradition the serpent is also of major significance, though it was eventually used to represent Satan.¹

The theme of ancestral visitation on a political level includes the Latin American example of the sad, tragic murderous history of Indian exploitation and massacre which - after Columbus's initial discovery of the so called New World - involved the arrival of Cortes to the Aztec Empire - coincidentally in the very year that the Aztecs were expecting the return of the friendly deity of humankind Quetzacoal - for it was briefly wrongly presumed that Cortes was he and this initial belief aided his small Spanish army with its modern weapons along with their local allies to defeat the might of Montezuma. It could be said Cortes was rather a false messiah who well represented the Aztec jaguar god of darkness Tezcapiloca. This savage introduction to European colonialism - a 'cancer' which has scourged the world – typifies what has bitterly happened over the centuries to many lands within the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australia; with this in mind the search for national independence and the issue of dying for a just society has remained a political constant everywhere in the twentieth century and beyond especially so in parts of the third world such as Latin America and the other lands already mentioned. However, to get back more directly to the political theme of ancestral visitation in the context of a Divine-Human visiting the earth it should be considered that in regards to Christianity - with its messianic foundation and with the adoption of this original Middle Eastern religion by the Roman Empire - is what is

revealed, perhaps, in this particular western religious tradition, is perhaps in the western mind the first conscious synthesis between the spiritual and the political so as to maintain as well as unify imperial power (however, I'm sure there are other earlier instances).

Finally, such are the contradictory nuances of our human impulses and with them the relationship that exist between the gods and humanity (and of an apparent general human need of them also in mind)² there is the remark by Petronius in his 1st century work *Satyricon* which could be dwelled upon by which he states that it was first by way of fear that the gods were introduced into this world.³



'The Creation of the World.' sepia on cream paper. 6" X 4". copperplate. Ubud. Bali.