Everyone knows of the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, but fragments of their story exist in diverse sources, and I have never seen them woven together. Here is their story, told to bring out the mystical meaning

The trappings of the King Arthur story are medieval, but it is much older, reaching back to the roots of Celtic religion. The story of Excalibur, the marvellous sword that comes from the lake and is ritually thrown back into the lake echoes the devotional practice of throwing swords, shields, spears, chariot wheels, cauldrons and jewels into lakes. The Round Table is an image of the Sun-king surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac that comes out of the much earlier stone circle-building cultures of Northern Europe. Behind this imagery lies a belief in the role of the Sun-god in the history of the cosmos. King Arthur is his champion and Merlin its high priest. A sense of cosmic history is carried in the belief that both Merlin and Arthur do not die but sleep, and will return at critical times. Merlin flits in and out of the Arthur legends like Noah in the narratives of the Old Testament, and does not seem bound by the normal constraints of time and place.

The idea of a miraculous cup or bowl is universal. We find it in the ancient Hindu *soma* and the Persian *homa* – the draught of immortality - in the communion cup. In the Japanese tea ceremony there is a sense that the humble cup, infused with the spirit of *wabi* is the humble soul, poor in spirit and open to receive the pouring of holy enlightenment. But the immediate antecedents of the grail legend in the Arthur stories are obviously Celtic. One of the earliest surviving sources for stories of Arthur *The Spoils of Anwfn* – Welsh for ‘Underworld’ - features a cauldron of plenty.

Arthur was a great bear of a man – and when our story starts, a bear with a sore head. Merlin advised him it was time he married. When Arthur agreed, Merlin asked if he had anyone in mind?

Arthur stroked his beard. Yes, he remembered a very beautiful young princess he had once seen, the daughter of a neighbouring king. ‘The fairest lady that I know living or yet that ever I could find.’ Arthur had once been feted at that king’s castle after he had helped defend it from foreign invaders. A wonderful evening, he remembered her shy, sidelong glances, how her hair fell forward and she’d looked at him from underneath it.

Merlin shook his head and longer, whiter beard. He knew something of the heartaches of love. He warned Arthur how dangerous it would be to choose a beautiful girl so much younger than himself. It was a long time, Merlin reminded him, since he had been the strapping young man who had pulled the sword from the stone or defeated the giant Ritho who had made himself a cloak out of the beard of all the other kings he had slain.

Arthur sent a messenger asking his friend for his daughter’s hand. As part of Guinevere’s dowry, her father happily offered a magnificent round table, designed to accommodate twelve knights. Arthur had long been contemplating a fellowship of knights. Fellows of different qualities would work together towards the same aim.

Now who to send to escort Guinevere? Arthur decided on Lancelot of the Lake. Lancelot had arrived at Camelot at the age of eighteen. He was rumoured to have fairy blood – like a much later chivalric hero, Richard the Lionheart. No-one could beat Lancelot in combat or a joust. He had no Achilles heel, it seemed.

He was like a son to Arthur. The apple of his eye.

The moment Lancelot and Guinevere set eyes on each other they fell in love. Behold, thou art fair, she thought. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, thy neck is like a tower. They rode back in silence. Guinevere’s father owed everything to Arthur. Arthur was a great man – and her father had promised she would marry him.

Lancelot owed everything to Arthur too – and had sworn to obey high ideals. The ceremony of tapping on the shoulder with a sword, by which a man is knighted, recalls the initiation ceremonies of the Mystery Schools of the ancient world. Becoming a knight meant acquiring a conscious spiritual power.

There was a magnificent wedding at the Abbey. Kings and queens came from all over the world. Everyone said how beautiful the young queen was – perhaps the most beautiful woman in the world. At the wedding feast the round table was used for the first time, and Arthur instituted the fellowship of the round table with Gwain, Kay, Bedevere and Lancelot among the twelve knights. It was Guinevere who stepped forward to give Lancelot the sword that symbolized his initiation. The knights would defend the country, purge it of dragons, robbers and other forces of evil that lurked both in the countryside and within themselves.

They swore to try to be pure of heart. Someone remembered an old saying ‘My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure’, and they all laughed heartily and drank a loyal toast. Thinking about his love for Guinevere, Lancelot laughed a little less whole-heartedly than the others. Arthur noticed he looked lost in thought, but then his attention was diverted by a dancing bear.

Later there was a moment of surprise when a white hart suddenly ran through the assembled guests pursued by six black hunting hounds and a white female hound, which bit its flank. The hart leaped high out of the window and escaped.

It was a lawless time, and there would be other, more unpleasant surprises. Early one morning shortly after the marriage Guinevere had wandered off on her own and was picking flowers in a meadow, when suddenly the ground seemed to shake and there was a sound like thunder. She looked up to see a black bearded, dark-faced man with wild eyes. He had suddenly appeared as if from nowhere and now he scooped her up into his great black chariot with one sweep of his muscular hairy arm.

The maids ran off in alarm and found Sir Lancelot, washing his beloved white stallion in stream. He leapt onto his horse and sped off in the direction they were pointing. He rode his horse as hard as he could, but he could find no trace or trail of the chariot.

Eventually he arrived in a strange, mountainous land, and stopped to ask a damsel sitting by a holy well by the side of the road. She said that, yes, she had seen a tall and powerful knight called Maleagant abducting a young woman in a chariot pass that way. Maleagant was the son of the King of Gorre, she said. She was sure he was taking her to his father’s dark and gloomy castle. The damsel warned Lancelot that no foreigner who had entered that domain had ever returned.

He spurred his horse forward again. He rode so hard that eventually and suddenly his horse dropped down dead. Lancelot was sitting forlornly by the side of the road, his shield hanging round his neck, wondering how he would ever reach or find the castle, when a humpbacked, pot-bellied dwarf road by on a horse and cart. The dwarf had been collecting firewood in the forest.

“Dwarf, for God’s sake,” he cried out. “Have you seen the Queen pass by here?”

The scowling dwarf did not reply but gestured to Sir Lancelot to join him on the cart. The knight stood, but then hesitated. He was thinking to himself that this shabby, broken down-cart with its peeling paint was not the high ideal of chivalry by which he had sworn to live. In those days to travel on the back of a horse and cart was a ride of shame, commonly used to transport criminals, so that they could be mocked and the crowd could throw things at them as they were dragged through the streets, sometimes to the gallows.

Then Lancelot’s love for Guinevere prompted him and he climbed aboard. ‘What can I do?’ he thought. ‘I am engaged in nothing less than the quest for Queen Guinevere.’

At midday the horse and cart reached the next town. Astolat was a beautiful, prosperous place and the people jeered at Lancelot, taunting him for his ignoble mode of transport. Bordering the town was a meadow and abutting it was a tower. From a high window Lancelot was spotted by the young daughter of the local lord. She was working on her loom, weaving a tapestry as fine as a web when she heard the clang of his armour. She saw his noble bearing. She had never seen such a beautiful young man before.

Elaine sent out valets to fetch him in and take care of his armour. Others fetched towels and basins and lit candles. She ordered a sumptuous supper for him. Elaine and her father took him in, and when he said that he must continue his quest, gave him a fresh horse and lance.

Elaine accompanied him a short way beyond the town. Along the way she spotted a comb lying in the grass next to a stone basin. Lancelot leapt down to retrieve it. “I can’t remember seeing a comb as beautiful as this,’” he said.

Elaine laughed. “May I have it?” she said.

“Why are you laughing?”

 “I am as sure as I’ve ever been sure of anything that this comb belongs to the Queen. Look, those are strands of her hair.” It was true. Lancelot looked and saw hairs woven around the teeth of the comb. Gold refined a hundred times would be darker, he thought. He knew he was on the right path.

Elaine saw the look in his eyes and she was sad.

As they parted company Lancelot gave Elaine the comb and she offered him her favour to wear on his shield, a red sleeve embroidered with pearls. He agreed to wear it on his shield the next time he fought in a tournament. ‘What harm?’ he thought. ‘She’s only a child’.

“May this day be a happy one for you!” Elaine called after him as he rode off at a gallop.

Perhaps he would learn to love her in time?

Lancelot rode on until early evening, when he found the great squat, ugly castle that the damsel by the well had told him about. Surely, this was where Guinevere was being held captive. He gazed at the black, deadly river that raged fiercely around the castle walls. He could see that anything that fell into it would almost certainly be lost. The only way across seemed to be a very narrow metal bridge. It was as long as two spears and stuck in the mud of bank at one end and the stone wall of the castle at the other. It was bridge as sharp as sword. ‘Getting across it is going to as easy as stopping the birds from singing or re-entering my mother’s womb’, he thought.

‘But I have faith in God that he will protect me to the end’ He divested himself of his armour. Then he began to pull himself across with his bare hands, which were cut to ribbons, as were his knees and his feet, but his agony was sweet to him because of love for Guinevere.

Watching his slow progress with a grim expression was the King of Gorre. The king knew that only a man with no evil in his nature could cross that bridge – and he also knew that man with no evil in his nature would be hard to defeat. He summoned his son, Malageant, who was keeping Guinevere prisoner, and advised him to make peace deliver the Queen into the stranger’s hands straight away.

Malageant was furious: “I am not a hermit to be so compassionate and charitable. I have no desire to be honourable. No,” he smiled. “Let me be cruel.’

So the king, went to greet Sir Lancelot with foreboding. He offered him ointment for his hands and feet, and hospitality for two or three weeks while his wounds healed.

Lancelot refused. He had come to fight. It was a matter of honour. But because the king had treated him honourably he would agree to wait until morning.

Before dawn the king again tried to persuade his son to cede.

“I will not take your advice on this, father. If I gave in, I’d deserve to be torn apart by wild horses. He is seeking honour, he is seeking glory – and so am I.”

Word had spread and when morning came the castle square was packed with barons, knights and ladies. The two knights were led in on good strong horses, then as the squires stood aside, both knight spurred on forward so fast and so violently that each lance pierced the other’s shield, causing the lance to splinter and sparks to fly off. The horses crashed together with a sound like thunder, reins snapping and both men fell to the earth. But both sprang up again and rushed at each other head on like wild boars, swinging great blows with their steel swords, trimming each others’ helmets and causing blood to spurt. The fight raged on, neither side seeming to gain the upper hand and until Lancelot began to feel his wounds from the bridge. It was hard to deal out blows with all your strength when your hand felt the agony of every twist and turn, every vibration. But then Lancelot saw Guinevere looking down at him from a window in the tower and his self-belief flooded back. Soon he was driving Malageant backwards, this way and that.

His father saw he was in danger of being killed, and asked Guinevere to intervene and ask Lancelot to spare him

“I had a mortal hatred of your son,” she said “.. but to please you, Sire, I am quite willing Sir Lancelot should spare him.’

The voice of my beloved! Hearing her Lancelot stood back, and the king stood between them. Meleagant was choking with rage and shame. “Stand aside! Let us fight! By meddling you shame and dishonour me.” His face was white and his eyes wild.

Eventually Malageant agreed to a proposal that his father suggested, that he would allow Guinevere to leave with Lancelot, if Lancelot would agree to fight him again in a year. Honour would be satisfied.

Then the king led Lancelot over to the tower to meet Guinevere. “Lady, here is Sir Lancelot come to see you.”

Guinevere looked coldly: “I am not pleased to see him.”

“Come now, he has risked his life to serve you!”

“Then he has wasted his time.”

Lancelot knew then how deeply he had insulted her by riding to her rescue on a horse and cart. This was not the high ideal of chivalry he had sworn to live by, nor the ideal of love that was in his heart. He followed her with his eyes as she haughtily left the room.

It was a sad, uneasy and silent procession that returned to Camelot, but King Arthur was so overjoyed to see Guinevere again that he did not notice that anything amiss. He announced a grand tournament to celebrate her return. Great wooden stands were built for the spectators with temporary thrones for Arthur and Guinevere in pride of place. The field where the mock battle was to be fought was surrounded for miles around with tents and pavilions belonging to lords, barons and knights who had come from far and wide. More than a hundred knights took part in the battle. A great thicket of lances, pennants and banners assembled in equal numbers at either end of the field, until Arthur gave the signal. Then came thunder of hooves, the sound of lances splintering as if a whole forest were being felled and sparks flew from metal smiting metal.

Guinevere was looking anxiously for Lancelot, because she still loved him even if fear of their love had led her to treat him distantly. Lancelot had made himself scarce in the days before the tournament, and Guinevere had found herself missing him terribly, but now she saw that in the middle of the fray there was one knight who rode harder than the others, fighting like a madman and leaving many a saddle empty. All the ladies of the court were talking about him, wondering who he could be?

Can it be him? she thought.

Then there was a sea-change. Several knights decided to move against this unknown knight in unison. They rushed him and a lance managed to penetrate Lancelot’s shield and plunged into his breastplate. Lancelot fell heavily to the ground a good many yards behind his horse. There was a cry from the watching crowd.

Another knight immediately dismounted, and pulled the wounded, half-fainting knight from the field.

“Who is that?” Guinevere asked the ladies of the court.

“Sir Lavaine of Astelot,” said one. “The brother of Elaine, the Lady of Astelot whose favour the unknown knight is wearing.”

With a stab to the heart Guinevere looked and saw a red sleeve decorated with pearls on the shield of the unseated knight. My love has been untrue, she thought. She wished then that she had not been fearful, had not spurned him.

When the heralds blew their trumpets to mark the end of the battle, the two knights had disappeared. Like Guinevere, Arthur had wondered if the unknown knight had been Lancelot. Guinevere had not borne Arthur a son and Lancelot reminded the old king of his younger self, and now he feared that Lancelot, wounded, had gone off somewhere to die.

Meanwhile Evaine had managed to prop Lancelot up on his horse again so that he managed to stay seated until they reached the shelter of some woods. Then he slid painfully to the ground.

The point of a lance was stuck in his side, its splintered pole protruding, and when Evaine pulled it out, blood streamed onto the mossy floor of the wood. Lancelot let out a great cry that made Evaine think his friend was dying. At that moment a hermit came by. He helped staunch the flow of blood then they carried the unconscious form of Lancelot to his cave.

The hermit looked after Lancelot for many days, coaxing him back to health and life. Evaine rode to fetch his sister, and she came quickly with food and fresh linen.

Lancelot had a dream. He was riding through a vast, dense forest of petrified trees. It was late evening when he came across a small country church. He tried to enter. The door was locked, but seeing a window set into the sloping roof he climbed up and looked down inside. He saw a plain altar with a candlestick on it, seven candles gently glowing. On the altar there were also twelve loaves of bread and a golden dish.

Lancelot suddenly felt very tired. He descended and, divesting himself of his armour, lay down beside a stone cross in the clearing in front of the church.

In the middle of the night he awoke to see two knights arrive and a man on foot in front of the church. The men and horses were surrounded by a golden glow. One of the knights was slumped in the saddle and looked badly wounded. His horse was being led by a man in long white robes and with a long white beard. Lancelot saw the two knights open the doors to the church with ease, and he arose to follow them. He saw them approach the altar. He saw that the dish was now translucent and shining with light like the sun, and it appeared too to be hovering over the altar stone.

 He stepped forward to join them in front of the alter, but he was tugged back by the old man with the white beard – and awoke to find himself lying in front of the cross in the clearing. The old man, whom he now recognized as Merlin was shaking his shoulder...

“I’ve had the strangest dream,” said Lancelot.

“No,” said Merlin “This is the dream – and that was reality.”

And Lancelot woke again and found himself in the cave with the hermit, who was baking bread in a stone oven. He remembered he had not seen Merlin for many years, and wished he could see him again and ask his advice.

***[Note:*** *One of Lucifer’s titles before his fall had been ‘the angel of the crown’ and there is an old German poem called the Wartburg War in which St Michael knocks an emerald out of his crown. It falls, to earth, is lost and then crafted to become the Holy Grail. The emerald is the stone of Venus as the Lucifer is the angel of that planet. The emerald on Lucifer’s forehead is reminiscent of the Third Eye of Shiva, and is a clue to understanding the Holy Grail and the mission of Arthur’s knights. The Third Eye, as we have seen, is the organ of spiritual vision that was lost in the Fall into matter. In seeking to find the Grail, Lancelot and the other knights are trying to rediscover this spiritual vision. Merlin tells them that only a knight who is totally pure in heart may succeed in his quest – pure, that is, of the animal desires that had been introduced into humanity by Lucifer. A knight who had purified himself in that would way would ready for the transformation - the transformation of his very physical substance – that the Grail would bring.*

*Lancelot was the greatest of Arthur’s knights, but whether or not he would be worthy to lift the Holy Gail would depend on the choices he made.]*

When Lancelot was well enough to move, Elaine and Evaine took him back to their father’s castle. Elaine sang to him. They played chess and later rode together. This should have been a very happy time for Elaine who was more than ever in love, but she could see Lancelot just looked on her as a kid, and could see, too, how his eyes shone when he talked about Guinevere.

Nevertheless she could not help herself from humiliating herself when he was well enough to leave, crying, clutching at him, imploring him to stay.

But Lancelot’s gaze was already fixed on the far horizons. He had remembered what Merlin had said in the early days of the Round Table, that the greatest quest of its knights would be to find the Holy Grail and that the history of the world would turn on this. Lancelot was the greatest of the knights of the Round Table, and he wanted to know if he was one of the two knights he had seen in his vision.

After Lancelot had galloped away, Elaine returned to her bed, heart-broken. Nothing her father or brother could do would win her round. She refused to eat and slowly wasted away. She left instructions to be followed on her death.

One day Guinevere was gazing unhappily out of her window in one of the many towers of the city, feeling that her life was over. ‘How much better if I had held him in my arm just once’, she thought. Then she saw a strange vessel floating on the river down towards Camelot. As it drew closer she could see that in this great black barge was a golden bed, and on it lay a young girl dressed in white, and carrying a lily and a rolled scroll.

There was a commotion below. Others had seen the barge too, and Guinevere went down to find that Arthur had ordered his knights to carry the girl from the barge and lay her out on a table. He asked Gwain to read what was written in the rolled scroll. It was the story of Elaine’s love for Lancelot, who loved another.

Guinevere turned so no-one could see her smile.

A year passed and the time approached for the agreed fight between Lancelot and Maleagant. Guinevere was glad because she knew that now at least she would see Lancelot again. She knew he would never fail to keep this appointment, and she would ask his forgiveness then and they would be together.

But on the day Lancelot did not come, and Melageant strode about the city, boasting that he was the greatest knight in the world and taunting Camelot with the cowardice of its greatest knight. King Arthur was honour bound to abide by the agreement that the winner of the combat should win Queen Guinevere. Malageant took the queen back to his father’s castle.

What the dismayed and bewildered Arthur and Guinevere did not know was that Malageant had set a trap for Lancelot and had been keeping him prisoner in a tower.

But Malageant’s sister had fallen for Lancelot too. Suspecting that her brother was up to no good, she followed his men one day and discovered the tower with its prisoner. Once she was alone she called up to Lancelot, and he threw down the rope he had been given to pull up the barley bread and dirty water that had been his only sustenance. He instructed her to attach a pick axe to it.

So it was that after Guinevere had been newly imprisoned there Lancelot arrived again at the castle of the King of Gorre, where once again he was received politely and honourably by his enemy’s father. The King asked Sir Lancelot to stay the night and promised that if he did so, the dispute would be settled honourably in the morning. He informed him that Queen Guinevere was kept in the same tower as before and that she was unharmed – though he admitted that one her valets had been injured protecting her.

The night was black, without moon or stars. Lancelot stole silently out of his room, over a broken down wall and he came to the tower from where a year earlier his beloved had gazed down at him and given his strength. He climbed up to the window and there the two lovers touched each other for the first time through its bars with the tips of their fingers “Will I never be able to hold you?,” she said.

“It will take more than iron bars to keep me apart from you.” Lancelot’s desire filled him with more than human strength so that he was able to prise them apart and squeeze through. He had nicked the end of one of his fingers on the iron, but that was the last thing he was worried about. Guinevere signalled for him to be quiet. Her wounded valet was lying sleeping by the door.

If Guinevere loved Lancelot a hundred times he enjoyed her a thousand times more – in what the medieval French chronicler Beroul calls ‘the tender jousts of love’. His mouth is most sweet, she thought. His legs are like pillars of marble. My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feedeth among the lilies.

The cock crowed and the sounds people moving about the castle reached them. ‘Set me as a seal upon they heart’, she thought.

Lancelot squeezed back out between the iron bars and pulled them straight again. “Make haste, my beloved” she said.

But when Maleagant paid his captive his usual early morning visit, he spotted the bloodstains that Lancelot’s cut finger had made on Guinevere’s sheets, and seeing, too, her valet lying, still wounded on the floor he put two and two together.

It was the beginning of death. “My father orders me to treat you with all due respect, when no respect us due, when you have been whoring with your servant!”

The King of Gorre and Lancelot arrived, drawn by the sound of Maleagant’s raging.

When Guinevere protested her innocence, the king said sadly that he did not believe her. Lancelot swore that Guinevere was telling the truth – she had not had sex with her servant. The king’s judgment was that the matter should be settled by trial by combat. Lancelot and Maleagant swore a solemn oath and prayed that whoever was telling the truth would win and that whoever was lying would die.

They fought for the second time. After their first clash their horses fled riderless over the hills, and they traded blows so that both helmets were crushed and both felt cold steel on the flesh of their arms. Then Lancelot dealt Malageant such a blow to the face that his nose guard was bent back, knocking three teeth into his mouth. Malageant came at him maddened by pain and rage, and Lancelot brought his sword down from on high so that it clove Maleagant’s head in two.

So it came about that Sir Lancelot was able to bring Guinevere safely to Camelot for a third time, and on the surface order and justice were restored. But unable to look Arthur in the eye, Lancelot did not stay in Camelot, travelling first to his castle Joyous Guard and then the home of his childhood in France.

At first Arthur refused to believe the rumours about his wife and Lancelot. They were being spread principally by Mordred, Arthur’s nephew. He was keen to undermine Arthur so that he could succeed him on the throne.

 Then when eventually Arthur travelled to France to confront Lancelot, Mordred abducted Guinevere.

Arthur returned immediately to England and a civil war began between his army and that of his nephew. The armies clashed in a final battle. In the same way that having Krishna on your side had made Arjuna’s army invincible, the mere presence of Lancelot at Arthur’s side had always enabled him to carry all before him. But now without Lancelot and, besides, with only a band of ageing knights, Arthur was not able to inflict a decisive defeat Mordred. The battle raged the whole day, backwards and forwards. Finally as evening fell and death was thinning out the armies on either side, Arthur and Mordred found themselves facing each other. As Mordred charged at the old man with his sword the king ran him through with his spear. Feeling the darkness descend in front of his eyes, Mordred pressed himself further forward along the spear and dealt Arthur a mortal blow to the head. It shattered his helmet and opened up his scalp down to the brain.

As Arthur lay dying he called upon an elderly Bedevere to throw Excalibur into the Lake. When Bedevere returned, Arthur asked him what he had seen. ‘Nothing” replied the elderly knight. “You are lying. You did not do it. Go now, throw the sword into the Lake”. This time Bedevere threw his own sword into the Lake. Again, when he returned to dying king and Arthur asked him what he had seen, Sir Bedevere had to admit that he had seen nothing. Arthur was now angry, and he made Bedevere swear faithfully to obey him. And when Bedevere threw Excalibur into the middle of the Lake an arm extended out of the water, down to the elbow. It caught the sword and held it aloft, waving it three times before disappearing. The great wounded bear was able to die, knowing that in this respect at least, the right thing had been done.

It was time for the old bear to hibernate.

When Guinevere heard that Arthur was dead she fled. Then as darkness and chaos descended on the land and the kingdom broke up, she retreated to Glastonbury Abbey. It is said that Lancelot visited her there once, but despite his entreaties she had no wish to break her holy vows or return with him to France. He now knew he would never succeed in the quest to find the Holy Grail. He lived a quiet, hermit-like existence until his death - which came about in the following manner. One day Lancelot was deep in the forest, and feeling tired a long way form the cave where he lived, he lay down to sleep beside a tree. A passing huntsman shot him, mistaking his feet for the ears of a deer.

**(Caution: There is a legendry story that Merlin was the son of Satan. He plotted to ruin a noble family, killing them off one by one until only a daughter remained. One night she forgot to cross herself before she went to sleep and Satan came to her in the form of a dragon. In time she gave birth to a hairy child she called Merlin. His supernatural parentage gave him the power of prophecy and many other supernatural powers, but he confronted his father by using them for the good)**

*Note: We live in a paradoxical world, a world of opposites yanked together – so they can be hard to distinguish and we are driven down into situations that test us. Great physical beauty is an example of this. Beauty can make us happy. It seems to show us the Creation as it could, should be, an idealized life, good life. \it can charge us with a sense of purpose and meaning and lead us to a feeling of being at home in the world. The language of human love and the ecstasy in physical love that beauty may inspire can be very like a mystical experience and bring many of the same benefits BUT*