

through the painful process of waking up from what Whitman calls “contemptible dreams”:

“Long enough have you dream’d contemptible dreams,
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light
and of every moment of your life”

—*Leaves of Grass*, (1855)

Should he stay or should he grow? John Masten (VII) clinging to his ladder, is ‘allergic’ to climbing or descending; like Buridan’s ass, he’s stuck. The youth isn’t. He’s hacking his way out. But, like any ephebe in transition from childhood to “the fierce order of virility”⁴, he both dreads and desires what he’ll have to do ‘off the map’, beyond the frame, and what it will do to him. No longer nameless, he’ll be known, his cover blown...

cf. *Gunslinger* (1968), the epic poem by Ed Dorn: “it is dangerous to be named / and makes you mortal.” That’s it. That’s what will happen to him. He’ll *die*. As we all will. His exemption will be withdrawn.⁵

“We realize our freedom in the dizziness that is dread,
and make our choice in fear and trembling.”—Kierkegaard

The neophyte in toe-shackles (III) is aghast at his name, i.e. the definition imposed on him by the wheel Nomenclator.⁶ He represents everything the youth is keen to avoid, from blinkered thinking to the living death of a nine-to-five job.

The wheel (VI) has another name: “The High Priestess”. Related to the Great Mother? cf. the song *Kew. Rhone*.—same theme of slaves in thrall to an autocratic matriarch?



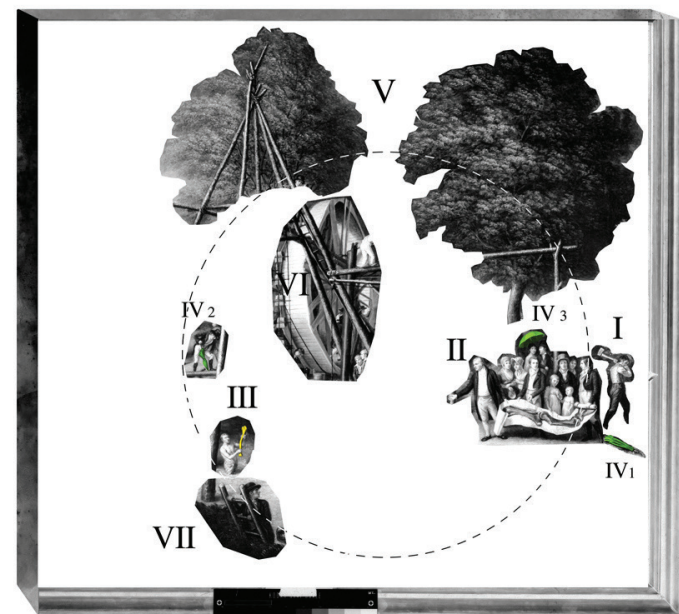
4 Michel Leiris, *Manhood*, (1946)

5 One thing I’ve learned in the years since *Kew. Rhone*: in many cases pessimism is mere laziness which in turn is only (only!) fear. These days I’d be inclined to interpret Peale’s painting as a project not to impose death on the living but to reverse time’s arrow, to bring the dead back to life.

6 cf. “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he

that receiveth it.”—*Revelations*. II. 17.

cf. “...you’ll know what to do, after the Holocaust, after the Aliens come and give us all those GIANT PILLS, and all them machines that’ll run our lives and that BIG WHITE STONE that everybody’s gonna know PERSONALLY in their very own living rooms. That’s the stone that you think you might know and you think might HELP YOU, but BY GOBBS, that’s the stone that’s gonna ruin your VERY LIFE!”
—Dr Philo Drummond, *The Book of the Sub Genius, The Sacred Teachings of J. R. “Bob” Dobbs*, (1983)



By performing a few simple operations on the image we can expose the symbolism, render it more legible. Cropping, encasing, desaturating it, reversing polarities, spotlighting details—reducing it to something more like a map or blueprint.