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**Discovering the Secrets of God's Gardens  
Resurrection as New Creation (Gen 2:4b-3:24;  
Jn 20:1-18)**

One of the most heavily laden with symbolism texts in the Old Testament is the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4b-3:24), sometimes referred to by Bible scholars as the Myth of Paradise, the stress being on this literary genre being set apart by its specificity as compared to other myths of the ancient cultures. Within the New Testament, the greatest number of symbols appears in the Johannine texts, particularly in the Apocalypse and the Gospel. Certain symbols are anchored down in the consciousness of many cultures for which they serve as archetypes. They are identified by their commonality. Other symbols can only really be understood in the environment and mentality in which they are anchored due to having formed there. The Yahwist story of the Garden of Eden, covering the creation of the first people, their initial happiness and their consequent fall into sin, contains – constructed out of symbols – motifs and themes that appear also, though in a different form, in the Johannine narration regarding the open tomb (Jn 20:1-18). This coincidence of motifs and themes may modify the interpretation of the Evangelist's story.<sup>1</sup>

In this sketch we will focus mainly upon the following motifs and themes that appear in both stories: the motif of the garden and the gardener, the theme of searching and the associated motif of the name, the theme of knowing and seeing (visual perception), the motif of heavenly beings and the associated motif of the swords, God's prohibition or the motif of the covered body.

It is not the aim of this article to determine whether this coincidence (of motifs and themes) is accidental or if it due to the theological assumptions and content of both stories or if it due to the conscious intentions of the Evangelist. We will only focus upon showing how the meaning of the motifs appearing in the story of the Garden of Eden might modify the interpretation of the story of the open tomb. With

<sup>1</sup> A terminological issue is that of the need to distinguish the motif from the theme. In literature studies a motif is a theme of one of the smallest part of literary work; definition from: S. Sierotwinski, *Słownik terminów literackich. Teoria i nauki pomocnicze literatury*, Wrocław etc. 1986<sup>4</sup>, 149. A theme is either a fully developed single motif or a complex of associated motifs.

the aim of dealing with the topic systematically, discussing the individual motifs and themes, we will first consider their meaning in the Yahwist text and then in the Gospel of John, taking into account the conclusions drawn from the analysis in the first section.<sup>2</sup> In conclusion, apart from a short summary and general comparison, we will also indicate the scope for future research into the topic presented.

## 1. God's flowering garden

The symbol of the garden appears often in the literature of the Ancient Middle East as well as in the works of the Ancient Greeks and properly understanding it may make it easier to read the Biblical story of Eden. The construction or digging of graves within gardens took place in Egypt during the age of the New Kingdom. There is evidence for this both within texts and in tomb painting which show that the Egyptians, who were fond of gardens, wanted to rest after death under the shade of trees they, themselves, planted.<sup>3</sup> Anka, who lived at the beginning of the New Kingdom era (1567-1085 B.C.), was depicted with his wife in front of a garden filled with 28 types of plants. The Egyptian fondness for gardens as well as their habit of burying in them their dead is shown by the tomb painting known as the Garden of Rehmire, originally from the Theban necropolis and currently in the British Museum.<sup>4</sup> The garden's owner, written about in a text from the eighteenth dynasty, expresses the hope that after death he'll be able "to walk through the garden in the west, to rest under its sycamores and to wonder at its extensive and beautiful cultivated area". The Egyptians believed that the dead continue their lives in gardens, in plenty and security. Among the Sumerian texts found in Nippur in Babylon at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a manuscript containing the myth, which has been given the name "Enki and Ninhursag". The myth describes a place called Dilmun, a place of pleasure in which neither illness nor death are known. In the text, Dilmun is presented both as a region and as a city.<sup>5</sup> In latter

<sup>2</sup> Accepting the principle *Sitz im Leben* when discussing individual motifs it turns out to be useful to look at the texts of the ancient world. These might be objects, events, situations or experiences. A complex of interrelated motifs or a fully developed motif constitute a theme.

<sup>3</sup> On the epitaphs from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the hopes of eternal happiness of the deceased were often depicted in the form of a garden of paradise. This motif is obviously taken from the Bible and not from ancient Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this topic see the voice "Garden" in G. Racht, *Dictionnaire de la civilisation égyptienne*, Paris 1968, 249-250.

<sup>5</sup> At first Dilmun lacked water but, thanks to Enki, the Goddess of water, the problem was solved. The virtues of Dilmun are described in detail by S.N. Kramer in the introduction to the English translation of the text contained in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, published by J.R. Pritchard, Princeton 1969<sup>3</sup>, 37-38.

times, the Babylonians called Dilmun “The Land of the Living” – the place in which it was thought that immortality is the norm:<sup>6</sup>

“In Dilmun, the raven utters no cries, The ittidu-bird utters not the cry of the ittidu-bird, The lion kills not, The wolf snatches not the lamb, [...] The sick-eyed says not ‘I am sick-eyed,’ The sick-headed [says] not ‘I am sick-headed,’ Its old woman (says) not ‘I am an old woman,’ Its old man (says) not ‘I am an old man,’”<sup>7</sup>

The ancient inhabitants of the Middle East were enthusiastic about gardening. They possessed extraordinary knowledge on the topic and a fine aesthetic sense. The kings of Babylon and Assyria competed with one another in planting gardens with ever new kinds of tress; the gardens being famed far beyond the borders of the individual states.<sup>8</sup> Babylonian shrines were usually surrounded by gardens, due to the idea that they were inhabited by gods. The ancient Epic of Gilgamesh describes the journey of the eponymous hero, accompanied by his friend, Enkidu. When they approach the seat of the gods: “they beheld the cedar mountain, abode of the gods, Throne-seat of Irmini. From the face of the mountain the cedars raise aloft their luxuriance. Good is their shade, full of delight.”<sup>9</sup>

The seat of the goddess Irmini, identified with Ishtar, is, therefore, a verdant garden.<sup>10</sup> It’s pointing out that the motif of the garden was brought into the epic, which deals with the search for immortality, by the eponymous hero. This immortality is to be granted by a mysterious plant of which Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh.<sup>11</sup>

Ancient beliefs that the garden is the place where gods dwell or at least where their presence is felt and a place of immortality were transferred onto the pages of the Bible. Due to the phonetic sound of the Hebraic name ‘Eden’ (עֵדֵן) both the translator of the Septuagint as well as that of the Vulgate see in it a reference to the concept of pleasure.<sup>12</sup> The translator into Greek writes of *paradeisos tes trufes* (Gen

<sup>6</sup> “Certain similarities between this Sumerian notion of an earthly paradise and the biblical Eden emerge and some scholars therefore conclude that the Genesis account is dependent upon the Sumerian. But an equally possible explanation is that both accounts refer to a real place, the Sumerian version having collected mythological accretions in the course of transmission” (T.C. Mitchell, “Eden, Garden of”, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, I, Leicester 1998<sup>5</sup>, 408-410).

<sup>7</sup> After J.S. Synowiec, *Na początku. Wybrane zagadnienia Piecioksięgu*, Warszawa 1987, 178. It’s worth noting that Mesopotamian mythical stories also present gardens as the abodes of Gods.

<sup>8</sup> W. Chrostowski, *Ogród Eden. Zapoznane świadectwo asyryjskiej diaspory* (Rozprawy i studia biblijne 1), Warszawa 1996, 80-81.

<sup>9</sup> After: *Gilgamesz - Powiesc starobabilonska*, trans. J. Wittlin, Warszawa 1986, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Similarly luxuriant is the garden of Siduri, mentioned in Gilgamesh, being said to have contained a tree full of grapes, extraordinary fruit and precious stones.

<sup>11</sup> *Gilgamesz - Powiesc starobabilonska*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> A similar state of happiness and pleasure is mentioned in the Sumerian epic about King Enmerkar. During his times snakes, scorpions, hyena, lions and wolves did not exist (all animals which for the Sumerians symbolised evil), while all people honoured the God Enlil with one voice; B. Jacobs-Horing, “גן gan”, in W. Kohlhammer - G.J. Botterweck - H. Ringgren (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, II, Stuttgart 1978, 157.

3:24), while St. Hieronymus chose the term *paradisum voluptatis* (Gen 2:15).<sup>13</sup> Many experts think, however, that Eden is not a proper name but a common noun taken either directly from the Sumerian *edin*, which means “a plain”, or through Accadian, in which this noun has the form *edinu*. This would mean the noun indicated that the garden was located in a flat area.<sup>14</sup> The translation of the Hebraic *eden* into the Greek *paradeisos* in LXX is the equivalent of granting the Greek term religious meaning.<sup>15</sup>

In the Old Testament, Eden is thought of as a garden in which it is God, himself, who is the gardener. This is shown by the analysis of elements of the Book of Genesis and the Book of Ezekiel.<sup>16</sup> It suffices to recall Gen 2:8 where the Yahwist states that it was God who planted the Garden of Eden. Apart from that, the phrase “Yahweh’s garden” (Gen 13:10) turns up in Ezekiel as “God’s Garden” (Ezek 31:8) and the phrase “God’s garden”, as it would be understood by the ancient Canaanites, indicates who cultivates the garden,<sup>17</sup> in this case this being God, himself. It is also worth noting that the phrase “Yahweh’s garden” is used as synonymous with Eden in Isaiah 51:3: “Her [Zion’s] deserts He [the Lord] shall make like Eden, her wasteland like the garden of the Lord [Yahweh]”.

The fact that Yahweh places a man in the Garden of Eden, seen through the prism of the garden as being the place of residence of gods, takes on a meaning that has great theological implications: “Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and he placed there the man whom he had formed” (Gen 2:8). Man’s residence in the garden indicates harmony between Yahweh and man; the keeping of God’s laws by man and, to a certain degree, man’s participation in God’s life. This motif was emphasised by mention of God’s walk in the garden of Paradise (Gen 3:8). Other parts of the Old Testament (particularly parts of the Book of Genesis and the Book of Isaiah) also show the garden as a place of connection between man and God.<sup>18</sup> The motif of the garden used by the Yahwist in Gen 2:4b-3:24 has several meanings, of which two are the most significant: the garden as the place of where God is resident, where his presence is made evident, as the garden as linked

<sup>13</sup> The idea of a beautiful orchard was reinforced for the Israelite by the name Eden. The word *Eden* we can find an echo of the Hebrew word ‘*eden*, ‘delight’; see Jacobs-Horing, “גן *gan*”, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell, “Eden, Garden of”, 408.

<sup>15</sup> The noun *paradeisos* was taken from the Old Persian word *paridaida*, which means a garden, without any implication of it being inhabited by Gods.

<sup>16</sup> A detailed analysis of the motif of the garden in the Book of Genesis and the Book of Ezekiel was carried out by Chrostowski in *Ogród Eden*.

<sup>17</sup> Jacobs-Horing, “גן *gan*”, 157.

<sup>18</sup> Of the valley by the banks of the Jordan it was written: “Looking round, Lot saw all the Jordan plain, irrigated everywhere – this was before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah-like the garden of Yahweh or the land of Egypt, as far as Zoar” (Gen 13:10). A similar motif was used by Isaias to stress God’s compassion (Is 51:3 cited above) as well as God’s justice (“For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth her seed to shoot forth: so shall the Lord God make justice to spring forth, and praise before all the nations.” Is 61:11).

to the idea of human immortality. Both these meanings turn out to be significant in the analysis of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel.

These conclusions cast a new light upon the Johannine story of the open tomb (Jn 20:1-18). According to St. John the Evangelist, Jesus' tomb was set in a garden (Jn 19:41). The picture of the garden within ancient Middle Eastern culture sketched above should be added to the symbolism of the garden within Hellenic culture. In the mythological literature of ancient Greece the motif of the garden is linked not just to the idea of eternal life but also with the idea of resurrection. The plants grown in vases, baskets and flowerpots were reminders of the resurrection of Adonis.<sup>19</sup> They were even called "the Gardens of Adonis". The myth of Adonis came from Syria but was transmitted to ancient Greece.<sup>20</sup> Adonis' striking beauty brought him the adoration of Aphrodite and Persephone. In order to decide their resulting dispute, the Goddesses turned to Zeus who in turn decided that Adonis was to spend one third of the year with Aphrodite, one third with Persephone and the remaining part of the year in a place of his own desiring.<sup>21</sup> However, Adonis was attacked by a bull sent by the jealous Ares who was the lover of the Goddess of love.<sup>22</sup> Upon hitting the ground, Adonis' blood turned into anemones, which flowers briefly in the spring, whereas the blood of Aphrodite, who was cut by thorns as she ran to help her lover, turned white roses red.<sup>23</sup> The roots of the Greek cult of Adonis come from Phoenician beliefs whose centre was ancient Byblos. The previously mentioned Ishtar, known also as Astarte, was worshipped there as was her lover Baalot (or Tammuz). Baalat in turn died and was resurrected. The myth travelled to Greece most probably through Cyprus with the name Adonis being a reminder of the Phoenician roots as it most probably comes from the Phoenician word "Adon" (Lord).<sup>24</sup> So, it is worth noting that in the Greek culture the symbol of the garden was also intimately tied to the idea of immortality.

This is much the same as in the New Testament. There, the motif of the garden is used by John in the Book of Revelation. The garden, together with the tree of life, is in this book the sign of the eternal joy of the saved ones who live together with God: "And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month: the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:1-2). It

<sup>19</sup> W. Kopalinski, *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, Kraków 1996<sup>5</sup>, 17.

<sup>20</sup> The Adonis myth has its roots in the cult of Astarte; D. Sacks, *Encyclopedia of the Ancient Greek World*, New York 1995, 12.

<sup>21</sup> According to another version, Adonis was to spend half of the year with the Goddess of the underground and the Goddess of love; see Sacks, *Encyclopedia of the Ancient Greek World*, 12-13.

<sup>22</sup> According to other versions of the myth, Ares himself turned into the bull. Yet other stories put in Ares' place Apollo or Artemis.

<sup>23</sup> J. Schmidt, *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*, Paris 1985, 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> Compare with Hebraic "Adonai" ("My Lord").

is easy to see in these words a reference to the Old Testament tradition of the Garden of Paradise. This leads us to ask: Is it also the case with the Johannine story of the open tomb?

Werner Lemke, observing that it was the ancient tradition to bury kings in tombs set within gardens (2Kings 21:18 and 26), thinks that Jesus' burial in the garden might be used as an indirect and symbolic reference to his kingly dignity.<sup>25</sup> Developing this line of thought, it might be possible to understand allegorically the appearance of the resurrected Christ to Mary Magdalene in the guise of a gardener as a reference to Eden in which God walked among the trees. This allegory can not, of course, be a direct argument for Christ's godhood but it can indicate that the garden is the place where God's power is made manifest. In this event this power manifested itself through the resurrection.<sup>26</sup>

The particular time at which the woman arrives at Jesus' tomb may also lead to associations with the garden of Paradise. Mary Magdalene to the tomb "cometh early, when it was yet dark" (Jn 20:1). According to some exegetical scholars, this may be a reference to Eden's location: "God planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (Gen 2:8). These scholars think that "in the east" means much the same as "where the sun rises" and in this sense it symbolises awakening life. The day's life begins with the coming of the sun from the east, the first people were called to life by God in Eden in the east; and, finally, at sunrise Mary Magdalene discovered Jesus' empty tomb, the sign of his new life.<sup>27</sup>

The setting of Jesus' tomb in the garden does not only belong to the literary level of the Johannine story but is anchored in the historical level. This does not hinder the symbolic reading of this location. This detail, read as a symbol, shows the garden – just like in the story of Paradise – as the place where God's presence is evident, in this case manifested through Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection itself contains within it the idea of immortality, closely tied to the ancient symbolism

<sup>25</sup> W.E. Lemke, "Ogród", in P. Achtemeier (ed.), *Encyklopedia biblijna*, trans. Z. Kosciuk, Warszawa 1999, 866.

<sup>26</sup> Continuing, the garden in the Old Testament, as was shown above, has a metaphorical and symbolic meaning – it is the place where God's presence is made manifest and the place of immortality. In the Canticle however the symbol of the garden refers to the beloved to whom the lover comes (Sg 4:12; compare 5:1; 6:2). J.L. Ska identifies the beloved in the Canticle with Mary Magdalene who meets Jesus in the garden. John 20 and Canticle 3 describe two very similar experiences, even using the same terminology. Mary Magdalene searches for Jesus in the morning just as does the beloved in the Canticle but she does not find him. Mary meets two angels, the beloved meets guards. In both cases a short dialog eventuates between the woman and the individuals she has just met. The detailed allegory means: the garden is the Church, Jesus is the gardener who is leading the Church, and Mary Magdalene is symbolic of those who belong to the Church (this is why she is identified with the garden in the Canticle).

<sup>27</sup> P. Perkins notes that the stress upon the early hour recalls Johannine symbolism of light; "John", in R.E. Brown - J.A. Fitzmyer - R.E. Murphy (ed.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, London 1994<sup>4</sup>, 983.

of the garden. In this way, the Johannine view of the garden fits perfectly into the mental milieu of his times.

## 2. Seeking and knowing

A detailed analysis of the phrase “to know good and evil” (Gen 3:5 and 22) leads to the conclusion that in the story it means “to know everything”<sup>28</sup> In the first occurrence (Gen 3:5) the phrase is spoken by the serpent, which is planning to delude man, in the second (Gen 3:22) it takes on an ironic meaning when spoken by God; in both cases, however, it is strictly tied to the fall into sin. Man’s new status, subsequent to his sin, was accented in the text through the use of the Hebraic particle *we-attah*, which introduces a new theme into the story.<sup>29</sup> The consequence of “knowing good and evil” was not the expected result of becoming God’s equal (nor possessing eternal life) but suffering, shame, the feeling of powerlessness and the inevitability of death. The punishment for man’s deed in the light of Gen 2:16-17 isn’t just death but also the knowledge that it is inevitable. In this way the motif of knowing is tied in the story with the motif of death. Exegetical scholars see a certain note of irony in the Yahwist’s story: instead of the hoped for “knowledge of good and evil” the first parents “knew that they were naked” (Gen 3:7), with the nakedness being linked here with the idea of powerlessness and the lack of any effective protection against suffering.

The meaning of the term “to know good and evil” (*tob wa-ra’*) is easier to understand by returning to the Epic of Gilgamesh. It contains a story of a sacred harlot from Uruk who is sent by Ishtar to beguile Enkidu who was a shepherd of great ability. When, after six days of ecstasy, Enkidu realised that his flocks had gone missing, “He turned back, he sat at the harlot’s feet. The harlot was looking at his expression, And he listened attentively to what the harlot said. The harlot spoke to him, to Enkidu, ‘You have become wise Enkidu, you have become like a god.’”<sup>30</sup> The problem of knowing good and evil also turns up in the mythical story of Adapa. The God Anu who appears there has many of the traits of the Hebrew God Yahweh. Anu asks Adapa, the son of the God Ea: “Why did Ea reveal to mortals matters of the heavens and the earth?” Anu thinks that Adapa knows too much – living on the earth among mortal beings but possessing godlike knowledge. To radically alter this internal discord, Anu decides to grant Adapa with immortality and to include him among heavenly beings. In conclusion, the motif of knowledge in the story of the garden of Paradise, seen through the prism of the other ancient

<sup>28</sup> Chrostowski, *Ogród Eden*, 108-109.

<sup>29</sup> J.W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies 35), Atlanta 1993, 48.

<sup>30</sup> After Chrostowski, *Ogród Eden*, 109.

Middle Eastern stories, indicates that the hopes of the first parents “to know good and evil”, in other words “to know everything” ended up leading them to know and experience suffering, whose final form is death.

The “knowledge of good and evil” leads the first human couple to discover nakedness and the fear and, in turn, leads them to seek a hiding place (“... I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” Gen 3:10). In this situation, God begins to search for man. The theme of searching contained in the story is made up of a few motifs among which, apart from the actual action of seeking, appears the motif of the name. Calling to the first man, God says: “Adam, where art thou?” (Gen 3:9 LXX)<sup>31</sup> In the ancient Jewish world the choice of name was particularly significant. It was believed that the name influences a person’s fate, in a way determining it. The name’s etymology was often used to attempt to guess what the future held for a newborn. This was the case among all the Semitic peoples. An Egyptian legend tells of the Goddess Isida which, before she agreed to heal the God Ra, who had been bitten by a snake, demanded that he reveal to her his name as it was meant to be the source of his power.<sup>32</sup> The Old Testament contains names whose meaning mirrors the actual historical situations.<sup>33</sup> In Israel’s earlier history theophoric names were used more commonly. Biblical onomasty contains about forty names which refer to Godly parentage, containing the morpheme *ab* (father). Apart from personal names, references to God as the Father are avoided in Israel (the only exceptions appear to be Ps 2:7; 89:27; 1Ch 28:6).<sup>34</sup> In the story of the garden of Paradise the author links the motif of the name with the motif of searching: God, shown in the role of the gardener and owner of the garden, is searching for man and calling him by his name.

Both the elements (searching and name) return in the narration about the open tomb. Mary Magdalene by all evangelists’ accounts is present both at Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and at the tomb in the morning of resurrection (see Matt 27:56.61;

<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that when St. John in his Gospel cites from the Old Testament he generally uses the Septuagint rather than the Hebraic text.

<sup>32</sup> H. Daniel-Rops, *La vie quotidienne en Palestine au Temps de Jésus*, Paris 1961, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Eve – “with the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man” (Gen 4:1); Samuel – God listened (1Sam 1:20); Gershom - foreigner (Ex 2:22). The actual circumstances of the birth is provided by the name Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:25-26). Sometimes names were chosen that were names of animals (Rachel - sheep, Deborah - bee, Caleb - dog, Nahash - snake) or of plants (Tamar - palm, Elon - oak, Zetan - olive). This was done if, for example, during birth the mother looked at an animal or a plant or if some animals trait was being symbolically referred to (for example, the bee symbolised industriousness). Of greatest significance were theophoric names in which (often in an abbreviated form) appeared God’s name. Examples of these are: Nathan, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jerubbal or Jesus; U. Szwarc, “Dzieci i ich wychowanie w Starym Testamencie”, in G. Witaszek (ed.), *Zycie społeczne w Biblii*, Lublin 1998, 234-235.

<sup>34</sup> For the theophory of names which stress God’s parentage see A. Tronina, “Ojcostwo Boga w świetle onomastyki izraelskiej”, in W. Chrostowski (ed.), *Stworzył Bóg człowieka na swój obraz. Księga Pamiątkowa dla Biskupa Profesora Mariana Golebiewskiego w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, Warszawa 2002, 418-427.



28:1; Mk 15:40.47; 16,1; Lk 24:10; Jn 19:25; 20:1.11-18). However, only John describes in detail the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. Her presence in the three key moments of the paschal passing of Jesus from death to life – witness the death, the funeral and the grave in which the body was laid – is fundamental to confirm the truth about Resurrection and new life of Jesus. As the person, who saw both the Jesus' death and his funeral, she can be worthy of belief as a witness of his resurrection from the dead. Convinced about which of the tombs wherein Jesus' body was laid after his death, she can testify that this was just the tomb, which was empty on "the first day after challah." It is unquestionable and cannot be confused.<sup>35</sup>

St. John shows the quest and recognition of the resurrected Jesus by Mary Magdalene as a process. Gradual recognition of the "gardener's" identity for the evangelist becomes a paradigm of the believer's journey that leads from the sorrow of loss to paschal joy. The scene of the revelation of Jesus to Mary Magdalene was composed with great care (Jn 20:11-18). One can distinguish in it the following elements: Mary cries at the tomb (Jn 20:11.13.15); Mary sees Jesus but she perceives him as a gardener (Jn 20:14); Jesus calls Mary by her first name (Jn 20:15); then Mary recognizes Jesus (Jn 20:16). This transition from the state of sorrow to the state of joy, and from unawareness to Jesus' recognition is shown on the basis of a model of changing Mary's position in front of Jesus (who she does not initially recognize) and in the presence of the tomb itself<sup>36</sup>. The change is of great importance. At first, Mary Magdalene is in front of the tomb; she bends over to look into the tomb and discovers that the tomb is empty. One can suppose that the absence of Jesus' body is for her the cause of even greater sorrow and terror than the death itself of her Lord. A moment later Jesus appears in a scene but not in front of Mary, yet behind her. After the dialogue with the angels (Jn 20:12-13), Mary "turned round and saw Jesus standing there but she did not realise that it was Jesus" (Jn 20:14). This term suggests that, at least, she had turned her face towards Jesus, because a full turn lasts a moment: "Jesus said to her: 'Mary!', and she turned and said to him 'Rabbuni', which means: Teacher" (Jn 20:16). Just now Mary is standing face to face with Jesus, what one can also infer from the words of demand (Jn 20:17).

While turning her face towards Jesus, Mary Magdalene left behind the empty

<sup>35</sup> The fact of John's revelation of Mary Magdalene as a witness of the empty tomb came as a bit of a surprise, because it is a well-known fact that in first century Jewish culture, a woman's evidence did not have any legal value. However, the evangelists give weight to the fact that it just these women who first noticed the empty tomb. The disciples were absent; none of them take part in all three aforementioned moments – the death, the burial and finding the tomb without Jesus' body. It was women's evidence that became the "foundation -stone" of paschal faith. The fact that the evangelists do not look for men-witnesses (because men were not present) emphasizes the historicity of the event.

<sup>36</sup> Some exegetes slightly facetiously call the change "Mary Magdalene's true conversion".

tomb. So she found herself in a position opposite to the initial one. That change indicates a new beginning in her life: the death is already behind her whereas in front of her there is the wellspring of eternal life, the Resurrected Jesus. John provided symbolism which reflects a motif of the change of the position of Mary's body, her turning away from the tomb – the symbol of death: turning with a face toward Jesus, bringer of life and resurrection. This motif includes one more truth; the mention in it of the woman's twofold "urning round" is essential (Jn 20:14.16). If after making a twofold turning, the position of her body changed about 180 degrees (U- turn), it means that the first turning was most likely only a turn of her head towards the "gardener", whereas the whole body still remained opposite the tomb. Such a turning was not enough to recognise Jesus. There is a need of a complete leaving behind – the tomb, the sin and the death in order to entirely recognise the resurrected Jesus. Beginning a new life is possible only after a complete break with the old.<sup>37</sup> Looking at Jesus means leaving "behind a back" (is the expression "behind one's back"?) death and the sin.

Changing the position of the woman's body towards the following configuration: Jesus – Mary Magdalene – open tomb, is also indicated in John's narration by the usage of different verbs standing for "see". Mary Magdalene in different way "sees" within the described episode. When she is standing opposite the tomb, she "sees" two angels in white (Jn 20:12); when she turns around she "sees" Jesus, but she does not recognise him (Jn 20:14); but when at Jesus' commend she goes to his disciples and informs them: "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20:18). This time the evangelist uses another verb and also different substantival terminology: It is said about Jesus no more, but the Christological title "Lord" appears. The changing of verbs standing for vision and some nouns indicating the Resurrected emphasizes a newness introduced by Jesus' cognition. The *novum* of man's situation after breaking God's prohibition in the garden of Paradise was also shown by using terminology connected to the sense of perception; Yahwist remarks: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked" (Gen 3:7). In the case of Mary Magdalene, that recognition is not only confined to identification of Jesus' but engulfs also his resurrection, so the fundamental moment, which is a key to appropriate cognition of the whole work of redemption made by paschal mystery .

Another common motif puts together both narrations: in John's narration the motif of cognition of the Resurrection is combined with the motif of the name. Mary recognises Jesus, when He calls her by name. In the story of Book of Genesis God turns to a man: Adam "where are you" (Gen 3:9). It is proper in this place to take another similarity into consideration. Linguistic research carried by George R. Beasley-Murray proved that Thomas' declaration, that belongs to the nearest

<sup>37</sup> J.L. Ska, *L'argilla, la danza e il giardino. Saggi di antropologia biblica* (Quaderni di Comaldoli), Bologna 2000, 53-55.

context of discussed pericope, “My Lord and my God” (*ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*; Jn 20:28) is almost identical to Yahwist God’s definition, used in Gen 2:4b-3:24: *Jahwe Elohim* (compare with 2:4b.8.15.16.18.19; 3:1.8-bis.13.14.21.22.23). LXX defines Hebraic *Jahwe Elohim* by *kyrios ho theos*. Yahwist God’s definition and John’s definition of the Resurrected Jesus are almost identical.

### 3. Angels and Cherubim

The stay of the first couple in Paradise ends with their being driven out and the setting of a watch guard over it gates: the Lord God “placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). The author of the story of Genesis combines two distinct motifs: cherubim and flaming sword. The Hebrew term “cherub” etymologically reaches Accadian *karibu*, which means an intercessory deity<sup>38</sup>. As a result, cherubim were placed over entrances to some palaces and temples and were to guard an access to them. The Bible describes Cherubim as guarding the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple in Jerusalem<sup>39</sup>. There are similar motifs in Gen 3:24. In the language of theology, the Hebrew term was used with reference to a group of spiritual beings, situated in the hierarchy of beings between man and God.

The sword – as just as the garden – is an oft-repeated symbol in ancient literature. The symbol of the flashing sword, which existed in Sumerian traditions and ancient Semitic myths, is considerably developed in Genesis. It refers to a representation of lightning, over which the God is in control. Analysis of the Ps 104:3c-4 points that appear in it, both the motifs used by the author of Genesis in 3:24: “He rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants”. Biblical exegetes identify messengers with cherubim (similarly in Ps 18:11), yet the participle “flashing” in Gen 3,24 is derived from the same root as a noun “flash” in Ps 104:4. So, in biblical tradition, cherubim act not only as guards but also as messengers, exactly just as angels. However, the motif of sword appears in the Old Testament not only as symbolic representation of thunder and lightning but also as symbol of God’s punishment<sup>40</sup>. In the words of Lord’s prophet concerning Egypt, Jeremiah proclaims: “But that day belongs to the Lord Almighty, a day

<sup>38</sup> According to W. Kopalinski it is an angel of high status in angelic choir; see “Cherubin”, in *Slownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, Kraków 1996, 148.

<sup>39</sup> Compare with Ex 25:18.22; 26:1.31; 36:8.35; 37:7-9; 1Kgs 6:27.29; 7:32.35; 8:7.

<sup>40</sup> In Greek tradition the motif of sword was linked to the idea of revenge of the ruler: Damocles, who was a flatterer on a court of Syracuse tyrant, Dionysus I Older (405-367 B.C.) was invited by the ruler for a treat during which he was to taste the sweetness of ruling. He was placed in the seat, over which on horsehair was hang bare sword as a symbol of thread niggling human life; see W. Kopalinski, “Damokles”, in *Slownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, 192.

of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes. The sword will devour till it is satisfied, till it has quenched its thirst with blood. For the Lord Almighty, will offer sacrifice in the land of the north by the River Euphrates” (Jer 46:10). The sword – put in the hands of the Babylonians – served also as a symbol of God’s anger over Israel: “Sword, sword! It was sharpened and polished. I have stationed the sword for slaughter all of their gates, It is made to flash like lightning<sup>41</sup>. [...] O sword, slash to the right, then to the left, wherever your blade is turned” (Ezek 21:14-16). Mesopotamian deities were presented with weapon in a hand. Ashur venerated there, was presented with a dagger, Shamash though was in possession of a sword, which forked itself in the shape of flames. However, the Hebrews to defend monotheism, de-deified pagan deities, depriving them of divine attributes and being reduced to the state of servants of the Lord. The motif of the sword in Gen 3:24 serves as an agent emphasizing final loss of immortality. A man without access to the tree of life had to die. The same truth is presented in the Epic of Gilgamesh but in a different way. The hero, after his journeys in search for the herb of immortality, returns to his native town, where he is expected by death.<sup>42</sup> And this poem finishes by making one aware of the truth that immortality is out of man’s reach; likewise the story of Bible. The necessity of death is inevitable and is characterized by universalism because it concerns all people without exception. This truth is emphasized by the image of cherubim whose swords guarded the gate to paradise. Its significance seems clear: the state of original happiness was lost and a close relationship with God if not broken entirely then was strongly stretched.

Israelites believed that God rules over the universe with the help of heavenly beings. In the Hebrew Bible the term of heavenly beings is often connected to the duties done by them. Ordinary messengers were denominated by the verb *malak*, that is, “angel”;<sup>43</sup> if they function as guards the expression *cherubim* is used.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned above, in reality, the etymology of the word indicates beings guarding people or holy places. The role of cherubim as guards has been already presented but showing cherubim as guards of the tombs is no stranger to the mentality of the Middle East. Discoveries from Gebal (Gr. Byblos), bear fitness to it. Those discoveries are connected with Ahiram’s sarcophagus from Phoenicia dates from around 1000 B.C.<sup>45</sup> At both sides of a throne presented on the sarcophagus winged cherubim were placed.

In Johannine narration regarding the open tomb the motif of heavenly beings

<sup>41</sup> Take into account that in this context the motif of the sword and lightning appears together.

<sup>42</sup> *Gilgamesz - Powiesc starobabilonska*, 80.

<sup>43</sup> S.A. Meier, “Aniolowie”, in B.M. Metzger - M.D. Coogan (ed.), *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, Polish edition W. Chrostowski, trans. J. Marzecki, Warszawa 1996, 14.

<sup>44</sup> D.G. Burke, “Cheruby”, in Metzger - Coogan (ed.), *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, 82.

<sup>45</sup> R.K. Harrison, “Cherubim”, in J.D. Douglas (ed.), *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, I, Leicester 1998<sup>5</sup>, 264.

appears, too: “Mary Magdalene [...] saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot” (v. 12). It is difficult to say beyond a doubt, if their appearance has something to do with the guard by the tomb. However, it is safe to say that angels in John are shown in the role of God’s messengers but their role is only confined to the question though: “Woman, why are you crying?” (v. 13).<sup>46</sup> It is difficult not to get the impression that here we also have to do with inversion of threads: in Book of Genesis cherubim, who – as pointed above, perform functions of guards and messengers – guard the closed paradise; in Johannine narration angels proclaim opening of Jesus’ tomb and at the same time the way leading to re-establish the lost relation with God. Unlike heavenly cherubim, the angels do not have any swords as they guard Jesus’ tomb. One can find a parallel between the two narrations. The motif of sword appears in John in the so-called, closer context of the narration discussed, namely in the scene of the capture of Jesus in the Olive Garden. At that time Jesus says to Peter: “Put your sword away” (Jn 18:11). From the above facts it can be concluded that: cherubs blocked the entrance to the Biblical paradise with the swords, implying that it is the place where God resides; angels do not have any swords in front of Jesus’ tomb, because the way leading to God is open again.

#### 4. God’s prohibition

From among other motifs linking the story of Eden with the pericope about the open tomb, it is worth to be attentive to the appearance in them of the prohibition and the motif of revelling the body. Putting the man in the Garden of Eden, the Lord God said to him: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden: but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen 2:16b-17). This ban, repeated deceitfully by a serpent in the form of a question, gains specific completion in the mouth of the first woman: “about fruit from the tree, that is in the middle of the garden, God did say: “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die” (Gen 3:5). This addition is of great importance with regard to resulted from it implications of theological nature. The translator of LXX uses in this case the verb *hupto*. The same verb is used by Jesus, when he talks to Mary Magdalene: “Do not hold to me” (*me mou haptou*; Jn 20:17). Apart from multiplicity of possible interpretations of these Jesus’ words, we may draw a following conclusion: in the garden of Paradise breaking of God’s prohibition put death on man. In the case of Mary Magdalene, obedience to Jesus’ command, opens us to accepting a new life ensuing from Resurrection.

<sup>46</sup> According to Ex 25:18-19, two cherubim were standing at the ends of the cover.

## 5. Coverings from skin and abandoned garments

Driving the first parents out from the Garden of Eden, the Lord took care of them, giving coverings of body to them: “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). The previous traditional interpretation of the verse pointed out that it was human nakedness and disgrace that motivated the God to do that. However, analysis of other biblical texts, talking about nakedness, shows that it does not have much in common with sexuality, but it expresses the state of human powerlessness and defencelessness.<sup>47</sup> The blessing of the Garden of Eden,<sup>48</sup> the original and lost gift God had given us is replaced with another, that is, coverings from skin symbolising protection from God.<sup>49</sup> The unfaithfulness of man to the God did not shatter the faithfulness of God to a man.

The motif of covering the body also exists, but in a different way, in the narration about the open tomb. Analysis of funeral customs in Palestine in the 1st century A.D. shows that burial vestments, namely, the shroud and cloth, especially that with which the head of the dead was wrapped, served for concrete goals. In Jesus’ time, after a corpse was anointed, it was wrapped in a shroud, the face was covered with *sudarion*, and the legs and arms were tied with a band. The preparation process for the funeral appeared as follows: along the burial shroud, the body of the deceased was placed lengthways, then the corpse was covered with the second part of the shroud, and after that, bands were tied crosswise. A separate cloth was prepared with which to wrap the head of the dead person. The head wrapping, apart from the fact that it prevented the jaw from dropping, had the symbolic meaning: it meant that the dead definitely departed the world of the living and that the departure was irreversible. Knowledge of those customs holds specific meaning in John’s narration about an empty tomb. For example, when Simon Peter entered the tomb, he saw “the strips of linen lying there as well as the burial cloth that had been around [Jesus’] head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen” (Jn 20:6b-7).<sup>50</sup> The reading of John’s reference to the cloth is connected to the symbolism of the garment: separating the shroud from the cloth means that the state of Jesus’ death was not decisive. The main intention of wrapping the dead in a shroud and a cloth was to protect the corpus against the early onset of the effect of decay after death<sup>51</sup>. Taking into account this protective function, the analogy of this practice, the covering from the skins with which God dressed the man after

<sup>47</sup> J. Magonet, “The Themes of Genesis 2-3”, in P. Morris - D. Sawyer (ed.), *A Walk in the Garden. Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden* (JSOT SS 136), Sheffield 1992, 48.

<sup>48</sup> M. Lurker, *Wörterbuch biblischer Bilder und Symbole*, München 1987, 136.

<sup>49</sup> See monograph, E. Haulotte, *Symbolique du vêtement selon la Bible*, Paris 1966.

<sup>50</sup> H. Latham, *The Risen Master*, Cambridge 1901, 29-56; M. Balagué, “La prueba de la Resurrección (John 20, 6-7)”, *EstBib* 25 (1966) 169-192; K. Bornhäuser, *Die Leidens- und Auferstehungsgeschichte Jesu*, Gütersloh 1947, 140-141.

<sup>51</sup> Similarly, bodies were anointed, and even the shroud was sprinkled with oil.

driving him from the paradise, becomes to a certain extent visible. The fact that Jesus' burial garments were abandoned means that the protection of the body is no longer needed because the dead is not in the state of death but has returned to life. In the Garden of Eden, Adam lost his immortality and therefore God covered his nakedness, and so He did not leave the first man totally unprotected; now the new Adam, Christ, returns to life; as a consequence he left behind his burial garments. They are not needed any longer since there is no body to protect. We have here also to deal with the inversion of threads.

## Conclusion

The Yahwist's narrative about Garden of Eden and fall of man (Gen 2:4b-3:24) contains motifs and threads, that also appears in John's story, describing events at the open tomb (Jn 20:1-18). The functioning of these motifs and threads in the mentality of ancient Near East allows one to indicate their main meaning in both texts and causes, so that in the light of them the interpretation of the Resurrection of our Lord can be enriched by symbolic implications. This abbreviated combination of identical and similar motifs and threads in the shown narrations, presents itself as follows.

1. The motif of a garden: Near-Eastern and Greek literature describes a garden as the place where the God's presence manifests itself and the place of immortality. The Yahwist shows Eden as the place of residence of God and the first human couple was endowed with immortality. The "Beloved disciple" gives weight to the fact that Jesus defeated the death in the garden, in which his tomb was situated.

2. God in the role of a gardener: The Yahwist looks at God as a Gardener, who not only planted a garden in Eden, but also used to walk among the trees of the garden. But, on the contrary, Mary Magdalene, before recognising the Resurrected, at first perceives him to be the gardener, thus the one who "grows" and takes care of life.

3. The motif of cognition: the first parents, wanting "to know good and evil" (to know everything), contravene the order of God and, as a result of this, "they recognize their nakedness". Finally, anxiety for "recognition" leads them to the recognition of suffering and the necessity of death. The similar and, yet, reversed theme, appears in the story about the open tomb. Mary Magdalene being aware of the death of Jesus, at first does not recognize the Resuscitated in the Gardener. However, after a certain time, she learns the truth of the Resurrection and its consequences.

4. The theme of vision: a woman in paradise "saw" the fruit of the tree of the recognition of good and evil as good for eating. On eating the fruit both parents had their eyes open and they recognized their nakedness. Their vision leads to sin and to the disclosure of its consequences, death in particular. Magdalene "sees" the open grave and the man who, in her opinion, seems to be a gardener. After a certain

time she recognizes him as the Resuscitated. So her visual perception leads to the disclosure of victory over sin and death.

5. The theme of search: in the Garden of Paradise, after the sin, God sets out in search of the man who has hidden himself from him. In the garden of the tomb, Mary Magdalene is searching for Jesus' body. So, in John's narration the theme of search is reversed in relation to the Yahwist narrative.

6. The theme of the name: while searching for the man, God calls him by his name ("Adam, where are you?"). In response to this call, the man leaves his hiding-place and then the truth of his sin is recognized. Jesus calls Mary Magdalene – the woman searching for Him – by her name ("Mary!") and then she recognizes the truth of Resurrection.

7. The theme of garments: having driven away the first parents God endowed them with leather garments, which were to protect their bodies. The funerary garments of Jesus are left in the open tomb because they are no longer useful. They do not cover the dead body, which they were to eventually protect. So again, we see reversed themes between two narratives.

8. The theme of heavenly beings: the entrance to the closed paradise is guarded by cherubim who were stationed on guard by God in front of Eden to protect access to the tree of life. In front of the open tomb of Jesus there are two angels who by their presence itself announce that the way to life is open again.

9. The theme of swords: cherubim in front of Eden gates are equipped with swords, which symbolize God's punishment over the man. Angels, near the tomb of Jesus, abandoned their swords because man's sin has already been expiated by the Passion of Jesus, and by his Death and Resurrection.

10. God's prohibition: the breaking of God's prohibition not to eat from the tree of recognition of right and wrong brought death to the man. Mary Magdalene's acting in obedience to Jesus' interdiction ("Do not touch Me!") gives the prospect of life ensuing from the Resurrection.

11. God's name: in his narrative, the Yahwist calls God by the name "Jahweh Elohim" which means God. In the nearest context of John's narration about the open tomb, the evangelist wrote down the confession of Thomas: "My Lord and my God".

The above mentioned contributions to the interpretation of John's narrative about the open tomb in the light of the Yahwist narrative about the Garden of Paradise, for the time being, remain a temporary "working" hypothesis which requires further detailed analyses. It is possible to point out a few essential directions that seem to be the basis of conducting such analyses. The above themes and plots existing in John's and the Yahwist narrations have been presented in connection with their importance for the culture of the Middle East and partly for Greek culture: it seems advisable to study the presence of these symbols in Qumran literature (especially in angelology). Connections between John's work and Genesis, and at



least the so-called biblical prehistory should be studied with great care. If in the prologue John consciously refers to the first sentences of Genesis, which are the first description of creation, we cannot rule out that at the end of his work he equally consciously refers to events from the Garden of Paradise. Rabbis creating Mishnah liked to play on words. In the rabbinic tradition there is a generally accepted saying: "How can the desert be turned into garden? It can be done by the word". *Midbar* ("desert") is changed by *dabar* ("word"). It is widely known that Mishnah codifies a tradition that is earlier than the time of its birth. If John knew this tradition about the desert and the word which turns this desert into garden, he consciously said it about the word that had been in the beginning (1:1) and about John Baptist who had come out into the desert (1:7-8, see 1:23) in order to prepare the way for the narrative that takes place in the garden.

In 1936 a famous essay by Gerhard von Rad was published. It was intitled "Das theologische Problem des alttestamentlichen Schöpfungsglaubens."<sup>52</sup> The author claimed that the creation theology that is included in the Old Testament had been created chronologically after the initial revelation of the salutary acts of God Yahweh. This theology is inseparable from soteriology.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the biblical theology of creation demands a soteriological perspective. Against such a background, interpretation of the narrative about the empty tomb, which confirms the fact of the Resurrection, thus creating the nucleus of the salvation and redemption theology, can be enriched by conclusions ensuing from the creation theology. Resurrection lies at the basis of The New Testament (especially Paul's) "new creation" theology.<sup>54</sup> It cannot be asserted with utmost certainty that, in describing the events

<sup>52</sup> ZAW 66 (1936) 138-147; "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation", in *The Problem of Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E.W.C. Dicken, New York 1966, 131-143.

<sup>53</sup> P. Ricoeur, "Sur l'exégèse de Genèse 1,1-2,4a", in Id., *Exégèse et herméneutique*, Paris 1971, 69.

<sup>54</sup> Along this line, the ideas of P. Ricoeur's can be placed and included in the article that is intitled "Przemyslec Stworzenie". In this article the writer interprets creation and the events in the Garden of Eden as a tragedy of separation: the creative act itself is radical separation between the Creator and his creation; subsequently, consent to eating from all trees of the Garden (ch. 2:16) cut oneself off from the prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (ch. 2:17); naming the animals is an act of spacious' separation (ch. 2:20); another act of separation is constituted by feminine creation and separation of man and woman expressed in the scene of taking the bone out from Adam's side (ch. 2:22); the culmination of the separation tragedy is a committed sin an the consequent expulsion of Adam and Eve from the paradise. Communion with God becomes seriously weakened at the time. In this perspective, the Resurrection is treated as an act as opposed to separation, since it leads to new relationship with God and consequently between the whole creation and the Creator. The figurativeness of a destruction of the wall which separated the human from God, expressed in John's narration in the open grave symbolism, returns on the pages of the New Testament in other scenes, too. It is worth mentioning here about the tearing of the Temple's curtain at Jesus' death (Matthew 15:38), as well as putting an accent by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews on the fact that Jesus suffered outside the city (Heb 13:12); see "Przemyslec Stworzenie", in A. LaCocque - P. Ricoeur, *Myslec biblijnie* (Teologia zywa), trans. E. Mukoid, M. Tarnowska, Kraków 2003, 60-61.

at the empty tomb, John borrowed inspiration from the Yahwist's story about the first people's fall and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

It is difficult to say whether one should attribute the existence of the same or similar motifs and threads in both narrations to the conscious editorial endeavor of the Gospel author or whether it is the result of the existence of the same symbols of identical or similar meaning in the mentality of the ancient Semitic world (though not solely). It is a fact that such motives and threads appear both in the Book of Genesis 2:4b-3:24, and in John's narration about the open tomb and in the christophany. This fact makes that the last scenes of the Gospel of an adored disciple are read in a key of the story about Garden of Eden and the first people decay can gain in expression and in practice, is given a new interpretation.

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