

MUSHROOMS CONTINUED

suspended in mid-air viewing landscapes of mountains, with camel caravans advancing slowly across the slopes, the mountains rising tier above tier to the very heavens. Three days later, when I repeated the same experience in the same room with the same *curanderas*, instead of mountains I saw river estuaries, pellucid water flowing through an endless expanse of reeds down to a measureless sea, all by the pastel light of a horizontal sun. This time a human figure appeared, a woman in primitive costume, standing and staring across the water, enigmatic, beautiful, like a sculpture except that she breathed and was wearing woven colored garments. It seemed as though I was viewing a world of which I was not a part and with which I could not hope to establish contact. There I was, poised in space, a disembodied eye, invisible, incorporeal, seeing but not seen.

The visions were not blurred or uncertain. They were sharply focused, the lines and colors being so sharp that they seemed more real to me than anything I had ever seen with my own

eyes. I felt that I was now seeing plain, whereas ordinary vision gives us an imperfect view; I was seeing the archetypes, the Platonic ideas, that underlie the imperfect images of everyday life. The thought crossed my mind: could the divine mushrooms be the secret that lay behind the ancient Mysteries? Could the miraculous mobility that I was now enjoying be the explanation for the flying witches that played so important a part in the folklore and fairy tales of northern Europe? These reflections passed through my mind at the very time that I was seeing the visions, for the effect of the mushrooms is to bring about a fission of the spirit, a split in the person, a kind of schizophrenia, with the



ALLAN RICHARDSON eats a mushroom in spite of his pledge to his wife.

rational side continuing to reason and to observe the sensations that the other side is enjoying. The mind is attached as by an elastic cord to the vagrant senses.

Meanwhile the Señora and her daughter were not idle. When our visions were still in the initial phases, we heard the Señora waving her arms rhythmically. She began a low, disconnected humming. Soon the phrases became articulate syllables, each disconnected syllable cutting the darkness sharply. Then by stages the Señora came forth with a full-bodied canticle, sung like very ancient music. It seemed to me at the time like an introit to the Ancient of Days. As the night progressed her daughter spelled her at singing. They sang well, never loud, with authority. What they sang was indescribably tender and moving, fresh, vibrant, rich. I had never realized how sensitive and poetic an instrument the Mixeteco language could be. Perhaps the beauty of the Señora's performance was partly an illusion induced by the mushrooms; if so, the hallucinations are aural as well as visual. Not being musicologists, we know not whether the chants were wholly European or partly indigenous in origin. From time to time the singing would rise to a climax and then suddenly stop, and then the Señora would fling forth spoken words, violent, hot, crisp words that cut the darkness like a knife. This was the mushroom speaking through her, God's words, as the Indians believe, answering the problems that had been posed by the participants. This was the Oracle. At intervals, perhaps every half hour, there was a brief intermission, when the Señora would relax and some would light cigars.

At one point, while the daughter sang, the Señora stood up in the darkness where there was an open space in our room and began a rhythmic dance with clapping or slapping. We do not know exactly how she accomplished her effect. The claps or slaps were always resonant and true. So far as we know, she used no

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