

## Riddles of Procreation

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“Of” in my title is meant in a double sense: riddles whose subject is procreation and the sense of a riddle in procreation itself. By “riddle,” I mean not so much a folk-riddle as a literary riddle, but a literary riddle defined more widely than the great folklorist, Archer Taylor, defined it. “Literary riddles,” he wrote, are “riddles composed by conscious literary artists.”<sup>1</sup> I want to extend the term to include riddles embedded in literary works, as well as new troping on riddles. That is, I want to consider riddle (and enigma) as a literary critic, not as a folklorist. This means considering when and how riddles are poetry and their puzzles are tropes. In the matter of procreation, a further question arises: whether riddles themselves may be troped as procreation in the way that poetry is sometimes troped as procreation. This exploration of the relations among riddle (and enigma), procreation and poetry proceeds as follows.

First, some riddles on the subject of procreation are examined, including an old one whose answer is “writing.” Most examples, however (and they go back centuries), involve procreation in both question and answer, and a surprising number turn on implications of unnatural birth. Incest riddles, like the well-known one in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, form a class by themselves. Questions of procreation lie behind the famous riddle of the Sphinx, memorably reread in a sonnet by Borges. The underlying question of how riddles are related to poetry is cogently addressed by the late Israeli poet, Dan Pagis, whose argument I would only modify by adding the term “enigma.” Finally, it is worth noting how the riddle form itself tropes the birth process, and, for all that, something of the process of writing.

There are riddles whose question concerns procreation and whose answer is writing, and they go back over 2500 years. Sappho—or so Athenaeus records in his symposium, *Doctors at Dinner* (the *Δειπνοσοφισταί*

[*Deipnosophistai*] or *The Learned Banquet*)—propounded the following riddle: “There is a feminine being which keeps its babes safe beneath its bosom; they, though voiceless, raise a cry sonorous over the waves of the sea and across all the dry land, reaching what mortals they desire, and they may hear even when they are not there; but their sense of hearing is dull.” One riddlee, a male, suggests that the answer is the state (as mother) and her politicians (as babes). Sappho tells him not to talk nonsense. “The feminine being,” she says, “is an epistle [the word ἐπιστολή is feminine in Greek], the babes within her are the letters it carries round; they, though voiceless, talk to whom they desire when far away; yet if another happen to be standing near when it is read, he will not hear.” If this is the earliest troping of poetry as procreation, then it first came from a female writer.<sup>2</sup> Goethe translated the version from the Greek Anthology in 1826:

Es gibt ein weiblich Wesen,  
 Im Busen trägt es Kinder,  
 Geboren stumm, doch schwatzhaft,  
 Die über Erd' und Meere  
 Nach Lust sich unterhalten,  
 Und aller Welt verständlich,  
 Nur nicht dem nahen Hörer  
 Im mindesten vernehmlich.<sup>3</sup>

Just here, parenthetically, we might ask the question whether the trope of poetry as procreation sounds the same from a male as from a female writer. Very occasionally, a female who has given birth finds herself bemused at figurative uses of a trope she has experienced literally.<sup>4</sup>

A similar riddle to Sappho's is offered by John Smith in *The Mystery of Rhetoric Unveiled* (1657): “*Cadmus* his daughters fram'd *Nilotis* quill, Whilst *Sepia* doth from *Cnidian* knot distill.” This over-ingenious riddle, which is neater in Latin, translates as: “He writes love-letters in Greek.” (Cadmus is inventor of the alphabet, the pen comes from reeds of the Nile, and so on.)<sup>5</sup>

But this type of riddle—a riddle where the question involves procreation, and the answer is writing—is not at all widespread, whereas riddles whose question and answer both involve procreation are quite common.

The best-known example for over ten centuries must surely have been the riddle in the standard Latin primer by Donatus. Enigma, says Donatus in the section on tropes and schemes in his *Ars maior* or *secunda*, is one of the seven species of allegory.<sup>6</sup> He defines it as follows, and his example, which uses the trope of procreation, became standard:

Aenigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum, ut mater me genuit, eadem mox gignitur ex me.

He goes on to explain the little riddle:

cum significet aquam in glaciem concrecere et ex eadem rursus effluere. (Enigma is a statement that is obscure because of some hidden resemblance of things, for example, "My mother bore me, and soon was born of me," which means that water grows into ice, and then grows back out of it.)<sup>7</sup>

This illustrative example of the ice-water riddle was repeated and repeated in grammars, rhetorical handbooks, and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> The Old English riddle poem whose answer is an iceberg includes a variation, spoken by the iceberg *in propria persona* from inside its own riddle:

The monster came sailing, wondrous along the wave; it called out in its comeliness to the land from the ship; loud was its din; its laughter was terrible, dreadful on earth; its edges were sharp. It was malignantly cruel, not easily brought to battle but fierce in the fighting; it stove in the ship's sides, relentless and ravaging. It bound it with a baleful charm; it spoke with cunning of its own nature: "My mother is of the dearest race of maidens, she is my daughter grown to greatness, as it is known to men, to people among the folk, that she shall stand with joy on the earth in all lands."<sup>9</sup>

George Puttenham also used it, some twelve hundred years after Donatus, in his 1589 *The Arte of English Poesie* (Book III, chap. xviii): "We dissemble againe under covert and darke speaches, when we speake by way of riddle (*Enigma*) of which the sence can hardly be picked out, but by the parties owne assoile, as he that said:

It is my mother well I wot,  
And yet the daughter that I begot.

Meaning by it the ise which is made of frozen water, the same being molten by the sunne or fire, makes water againe."<sup>10</sup> A riddle of procreation was thus part of the common learning among those who read Latin.

Readers of Puttenham, incidentally, would also associate tropes of procreation with "covert and dark intendments" or "covert and darke speaches," things that take place, so to speak, under the covers.<sup>11</sup> (The joke is well known from the sparring of Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*.) All the more so when Puttenham goes on to offer a riddle with a double sense, the more obvious answer being indecent.<sup>12</sup> "Some other naughtie body," says Puttenham with a straight face, "would peradventure have construed it not halfe so mannerly. The riddle is pretie but that it holdes too much of the Cachemphaton or foule speach and may be drawn to a reprobate sence." Henry Peacham, in his *Garden of Eloquence*, is more straightforward: "The Caution. In this figure regard ought to be had, that the similitudes be not unfit, strange, or unchast. If they be . . . unchast or uncleane, they make it odious, by leading of the minde to undecent things, of which sort there be many of our English riddles."<sup>13</sup> Rude riddles mostly have to do with sexual activity rather than procreation, though one example has as its two answers: a loaf of bread and a pregnant woman.<sup>14</sup> Folklorists are familiar with this favorite type,<sup>15</sup> whose focus and function are different from the transformations of the ice-water riddle. Double-answered rude riddles aim to make the riddlee blush.

Other riddles than the well-known ice-water riddle use tropes of procreation. Peacham offers this one: "I consume my mother that bare me I eat up my nurse that fed me, then I die leaving them all blind that saw me. Meant of the flame of a candle, which when it hath consumed both waxe and waeke [wick], goeth out, leaving them in the darke which saw by it" (*ibid.*). As with the ice-water riddle, a normal procreative process is made to sound unnatural, until a simple answer solves everything. These are all metamorphoses of common elements, water and fire, commonly observed. Yet, like human procreation, whose workings are also well known, some sense of enigma lingers about the water and fire riddles. It is curious, even mysterious, to watch these transformations of matter. One of the oldest Western riddles is of this type: "Who becomes pregnant without conceiving? Who becomes fat without eating?" Answer: clouds.

This is a semitic riddle recorded on a Babylonian tablet.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Athenaeus tropes on day and night as giving birth, one to another (*The Learned Banquet* x.451-52)—not a transformation of matter but mysterious enough for all its familiarity. Similarly the well-known riddle, “Un père a douze fils, chacun d’eux en a trente, moitié blancs, moitié noirs,” which has as an answer: the year, the months, the days, the nights.”<sup>17</sup>

Riddles have been connected with the production of harvest, hence with vegetable procreation, from the time of the Pentateuch. Peacham classifies under Enigma the Egyptian dream-riddles in Genesis, which makes Joseph one of the earliest riddle-masters, earlier even than the pre-eminent riddle-master of the Hebrew Scriptures, Solomon. “This figure although it be full of obscuritie, and darknesse yet it is found in the sacred Scriptures both in speech and in visions, the dreames of Pharaos chiefe Butler, and chiefe Baker, and also Pharaos owne dreames were Aenigmatical, whose significations Joseph expounded” (*The Garden of Eloquence*, s.v. Aenigma). Anthropologists record that riddles are sometimes asked at the time of harvest, to help ensure a bountiful crop.<sup>18</sup> Dan Pagis also records a riddle answered by Yehuda Halevi: “What dies, cast upon the earth, is buried naked among men, / Yet lives again from in its grave, bears children, all emerging clad?” The answer is a seed, a grain of wheat: “the seed revives, sprouts, even bears many like itself and only afterward is buried, or sown. Moreover, it is buried naked, unlike human burial practice, yet its offspring are born clothed (in chaff, within the new wheat)” (*ibid.*). Variations of the trope are common among the poets, and well known to us, for example, from Whitman, who also associates the trope with writing in the beautiful sixth section of “Song of Myself”:

A child said *What is the grass?* . . .  
 . . . I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.  
 Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic. . . .  
 And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves. . . .  
 O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,  
 And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

Whitman’s troping is beneficent, but, as far as I can make out, most riddles about procreation turn on questions of unnatural procreation, whether

merely puzzling or ludicrously impossible or mildly spooky or monstrous and repugnant. The ice-water riddle and similar types set up a spectral possibility of procreation gone awry, and then dispel the mini-nightmare. Some biblical riddles are of this type, where the normal human procreative process is made to sound unnatural. "Who was born before his father and died before his mother?" Answer: Abel.<sup>19</sup> Similarly with the Alsatian riddle, "Wer gestorben und nit geboren sey?" Answer: Adam and Eve.

Sometimes the nightmare is not dispelled, as in the riddles whose answer is incest. One of the best known is the riddle from the romance of Apollonius of Tyre that Shakespeare uses in *Pericles*:

I am no viper, yet I feed  
 On mother's flesh which did me breed.  
 I sought a husband, in which labour  
 I found that kindness in a father.  
 He's father, son, and husband mild;  
 I mother, wife—and yet his child.  
 How may they be, and yet in two,  
 As you will live, resolve it you. (*Pericles* I.i.64-71)

In Shakespeare's play, this is what folklorists call a neck-riddle, that is, a riddle in which the stake is your own life. Pericles answers it obliquely, thus saving his life and endangering it all at once. The riddle frame for this play (already framed by Gower) invites us to attend particularly to questions of sexual knowledge and procreation in the main plot. An illicit and murderous father-daughter relation frames a miraculously redemptive father-daughter plot. A sense of impossible riddle informs the moving recognition scene between Marina and Pericles, the scene that so affected T. S. Eliot. The whole matter of lawful and unlawful procreation, even more of natural and unnatural procreation, is implicit throughout Shakespeare's play.

The riddle form itself has been associated with incest. As the folklorist, Roger D. Abrahams, notes, "Many commentators have referred to the relationship of the context of riddles with the 'incest-motive.' This seems especially appropriate in an understanding of the boundary-breaking activity of riddling, for nothing could confuse cultural categories more than the licensing of incest . . ." He quotes Claude Lévi-Strauss: "like

the solved riddle, incest brings together terms meant to remain separate: the son is joined with the mother, the brother with the sister, in the same way as the answer succeeds, against all expectations, in rejoining the question.” But as Abrahams says, Lévi-Strauss is arguing “by analogy, not homology.”<sup>20</sup> Abrahams, incidentally, suggests a procreative theme for neck-riddles, which, he argues, may have a common ancestor: “Because . . . [several neck-riddle types] all involve animal sacrifice and an untimely ripping a living creature from the womb of the dead in a caesarian operation, it is tempting to relate the three to a common ancestor . . . . Perhaps ultimately all of the international neck-riddles are related through commonality of theme: self-sacrifice by a female loved one as a means of defeating the forces of death” (10).

If the ice-water riddle was for centuries the best-known teaching example of the trope of enigma, the most famous enigma in Western literature must be the Sphinx’s riddle as put to Oedipus. “What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?” This is a riddle turning more on the philosophical problem of identity than on procreation. Yet questions of procreation lurk behind it, and not only in the story that will follow the first success of Oedipus as riddle-master.

For there is another possible answer to the sphinx’s riddle and that is: you yourself, Madam Sphinx. Certainly a hybrid of woman, lion and bird raises questions of legs. Natural creatures walk on four legs (a lion) or two legs (a bird or a woman). But what creature goes naturally on three legs? A three-legged creature, born as such, is a freak of nature or a monster, of the order of the sphinx, four-legged though she be. Like Antiochus in Shakespeare’s play, the sphinx poses a neck-riddle. Like Antiochus, she directs attention away from herself as a possible answer to the riddle. The standard answer to the sphinx’s riddle, “mankind,” works more neatly as answer. But the conjunction of four-footed and two-footed creatures needed to produce a sphinx gives pause. All the more so when the answer, “mankind,” is centred on the cycle of generation. It gives even more pause to compare the two answers, to inquire how much monster is included in humankind. Some such reflection lies behind Borges’ extraordinary sonnet, “Edipo y el Enigma”:

Cuadrúpedo en la aurora, alto en el día  
 Y con tres pies errando por el vano  
 Ámbito de la tarde, así veía  
 La eterna esfinge a su inconstante hermano,  
 El hombre, y con la tarde un hombre vino  
 Qué descifró aterrado en el espejo  
 De la monstruosa imagen, el reflejo  
 De su declinación y su destino.  
 Somos Edipo y de un eterno modo  
 La larga y triple bestia somos, todo  
 Lo que seremos y lo que hemos sido.  
 Nos aniquilaría ver la ingente  
 Forma de nuestro ser; piadosamente  
 Dios nos depara sucesión y olvido.<sup>21</sup>

“Sucesión y olvido”: the contrast is sharp between emptiness, the void of *olvido*, and its contrary, issue or offspring. In Borges’ uncanny retelling, the sphinx’s enigma is not only of identity but also of procreation. Procreation has produced the enigma of ourselves and our mirror images. Procreation also answers the enigma both through birth (the birth of our children) and through death (our own). Yet the answer does not end the enigma: it starts the story all over again.

The association of riddle forms and procreation and also writing—God’s writing this time—is caught by Anthony Hecht in his remarkable poem, “Riddles,” which ends with an *avanti* against any riddle like the enigmatic writing on the wall in the Book of Daniel:

. . . “What do they portend?”  
 Other, please God, than those fiery words for coins  
 That signified to Balshazzar the end  
 Of all his hopes and the issue of his loins.<sup>22</sup>

As Borges reminds us, answers to the great enigmas may themselves be enigmatic. Sphinxes were commonly guardians of the graves of the dead, and their function in part apotropaic. Anthropologists record tribes where riddles are never asked except when there is a corpse in the village (among the Bolang Mongondo, Celebes), and others (in the Aru archipelago) where watchers by an uncoffined corpse expound riddles to each other (Kelso,



770). A remnant of this custom apparently survived in Brittany in the early part of this century. There, Kelso also records, "old men are accustomed to seat themselves on grave-stones and ask each other riddles after the friends of the deceased and the mourners have gone home" (*ibid.*). The great enigmas also often appear to have an apotropaic function, warding off death or monstrosity, including their threat to procreation.

On the matter of enigma and riddle, I want to note especially the argument made by the Israeli poet, Dan Pagis. Pagis says that what remains when the riddle has been answered is poetry. "Yet, while a riddle that has been solved ceases to be a riddle for the solver, it does continue to exist for him as another kind of poem. In fact, many riddles, especially those founded on paradoxical metaphors, become impressive poems when solved for the very reason that their metaphorical texture is now revealed."<sup>23</sup> He speaks of such processes as generic transformations. Of course, as he points out, many trivial riddles show no such transformation. They are nothing once they are solved, neither a riddle nor poetry. Hence the old Swedish riddle:

When one doesn't know what it is, then it is something;  
but when one knows what it is, then it is nothing.<sup>24</sup>

What is the answer? "A riddle." Hence also Dickinson's lines (#1222):

The Riddle we can guess  
We speedily despise—  
Not anything is stale so long  
As Yesterday's surprise—

Yet Pagis is right. The great uncanny riddles such as the sphinx's riddle do go on generating meaning, just like the tropes of true poetry. I would revise his formulation a little, though. I would say that what remains, when the riddle has been answered, is enigma. All the more so when we recall that enigma itself is a trope, or at least was known as such for centuries to every schoolboy learning his Latin out of Donatus. The terms "riddle" and "enigma" are commonly synonymous, but not always, and, I suggest, not in this context.

In Eliot's "Marina," a sense of enigma rather than riddle prevails, though the epigraph and opening lines cannot but recall riddles, including riddles of incest and death. How can they not, given Shakespeare's play?

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands  
 What water lapping the bow  
 And scent of pine and woodthrush singing through the fog  
 What images return  
 O my daughter.

Only with the fourth line do the questions so modulate that they cease calling for any answer beyond their own wonder and recognition. The riddle and the enigma of procreation meet here, and so do the riddle and enigma of writing.

I made this, I have forgotten  
 And remember. . . .  
 Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own. . . .

Here the immediate referent is a boat; a parallel if distant referent is a daughter; and another parallel is something made, "my speech" (as the unnamed speaker says), a poem (as we might say). The hovering relations between riddle, procreation and writing—and for all that, the dream-landscape, which is Eliot's New England and not Shakespeare's Mediterranean—these relations in the end move beyond even enigma and dissolve into mystery. This last is Eliot's move rather than Shakespeare's. Yet the potential is there in *Pericles*. It is as if Shakespeare had anticipated Dan Pagis and worked out the difference between riddle and enigma in his strange play. Or as if he were toying with an Oedipus plot, with a difference.

So far, I have chiefly been treating riddles on the theme of procreation, but there is another sense in which riddles may be procreative. In Northrop Frye's essay, "Charms and Riddles," as in Andrew Welsh's book, *The Roots of Lyric*, lyric poetry is said to be rooted in early, primitive forms of writing such as riddle or charm. In this sense, poetry itself may be troped as procreation, vegetable procreation. Both Frye and Welsh speak of roots, branches, seeds, etc.,<sup>25</sup> and such tropes are frequent in literary history.

Alastair Fowler, in his study of genres and modes, uses the trope of human procreation: "Poems are made in part from older poems: each is the child (to use Keats' metaphor) of an earlier representative of the genre and may yet be the mother of a subsequent representative."<sup>26</sup> He adds a useful caution. "We need to leave room for polygenesis . . . and for remote influences" (43). In all three critics, we are hearing of poetry itself as procreation. Here, the trope does not concern the travails of the individual writer, but rather the development of forms.

What kind of life do the forms themselves possess? We tend to use inorganic and passive tropes for them. My students automatically call any form "rigid," and I just as automatically forbid that adjective in class, because it smells of *rigor mortis*, whereas forms, like words, have a peculiar life of their own. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot speaks of words as living beings, with a life within the community of words ("where every word is at home, / Taking its place to support the others . . ." [*Little Gidding* V. 220]) So also we might speak of verbal forms as living, growing, dancing and also procreating. I want to argue that the riddle or enigma is one form with a peculiar affinity for the subject of procreation. Perhaps better than any other trope or genre, it can embody in its own workings the process of procreation. Rather than *describing* poetry as procreation, it mimes poetry as procreation. Its very form is poetry as procreation.

In the way riddle or enigma behaves, in the tropes we use of them, there is a likeness to the birth process. A question is answered (what is the child like? or as in a riddle poem, "What am I? Name me"<sup>27</sup>). Something obscure and in darkness is made clear and brought into the light. Something locked is opened, something hidden is revealed, and so on. These tropes are repeated and repeated in descriptions of how riddles work. Further, the process involves a certain breaking of boundaries, as Lévi-Strauss and Abrahams remark of the riddle form. Scholars who wish to be dramatic will even speak of violence in certain literary forms. Violence is part of childbirth, of course, including violent contrast of feeling, as all mothers know: great pain usually followed by great joy. A riddle is itself like procreation, then, and its answer is like the fruit of procreation. When the mother is delivered of the child, a riddle is solved, but what remains is enigma (or poetry), the human life of a true enigma and the enigma of a human life.

Riddles playing on transformations of matter and energy, and on human and animal procreation, also remind us of the enigma of writing. We may know all the available circumstances—all the scientific or quantifiable answers to riddles of transformation and metamorphosis, of procreation, and of writing. Yet after the answers, there still remains enigma. Freud in the end acknowledged that no analysis of the art of creating imaginative form “will ever make writers of us” (“Der Dichter und das Phantasieren,” 1908, my italics).<sup>28</sup> The power of writers to form fictions, “my *shaping* spirit of Imagination,” as Coleridge called it, remained a true enigma for Freud. When we bear children, even when all the scientific data are available, the shaping power of procreation remains an enigma.<sup>29</sup> So also when we write.

Something of the form of the riddle, whether as simple scheme or as rich enigmatic trope, catches a part of our existence in literary terms. Its own intrinsic metamorphoses, its own lingering mysteries: these trope our most riddling aspects of being, and not least enigmas of creation and of procreation.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Archer Taylor, “The Riddle,” *California Folklore Quarterly* 2 (1943): 143.

<sup>2</sup>Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, trans. Charles Burton Gulick (London: Heinemann, 1927-1941, Loeb ed.) x. 450-51. Athenaeus says he is following Antiphanes. One of the numerous rumours about Sappho says she bore a daughter, while another says she was childless. See *Sappho: A New Translation*, trans. Mary Barnard (Berkeley: U of California P, 1958) 96, whence also the English title, *Doctors at Dinner*.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Flodoard Freih. von Biedermann, *Goethe als Rätseldichter* (Berlin: H. Berthold A.G. Abt. Privatdrucke, 1924) 40.

<sup>4</sup>The chief difference is that publishing a book means the end of labour, and giving birth means the beginning of labour. It was Yeats who memorably connected the labour of childbirth and child-care, the labour of artistic endeavour, and the labour of religious devotion. It was also Yeats who envisioned a state where labour might blossom or dance. See his “Among School Children.”

<sup>5</sup>"*Cadmus* being the first finder out of divers of the Greek Letters, they are by a Metonymie of the Efficient called his Daughters: And *Cadmus* his daughters here by a Catachrestical Metaphor signifie the Greek Letters." *Nilotis* quill: reeds from the Nile. *Sepia*: ink (from a fish whose blood is black as ink). *Cnidus*: a city where Venus was worshipped. John Smith, *The Mystery of Rhetoric Unveiled* (1657), *English Linguistics 1500-1800* (a collection of facsimile reprints), ed. R. C. Alston, no. 205 (Menston: The Scholar Press, 1969) 84-85.

<sup>6</sup>Aristotle called enigma one kind of metaphor (e.g. *Rhetoric* III.ii.12-13), and allegory, as Renaissance specialists know well, is defined as a running metaphor. The association of enigma with metaphor comes over into Latin with Cicero and Quintilian.

<sup>7</sup>Aelius Donatus is said to be the most famous grammarian of the fourth century A.D. and the teacher of Jerome (A.D. 348-420). His *Ars minor* and *Ars maior* or *secunda* may be found in *Grammatici latini ex recensione Henrici Keilii*, ed. Henricus Keil, 8 vols. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1857-80), repr. 1961 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms) 4: 355-66 and 367-402. See 402, on enigma.

<sup>8</sup>For references to the ice-water riddle, see Frederick Tupper, *The Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Boston: Ginn, 1910) 147-48.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in Northrop Frye, "Charms and Riddles," *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976) 146-47.

<sup>10</sup>George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936) 188.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. "... what else is your ... allegorie but a duplicitie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke indentments: one while speaking obscurely and in riddle called Aenigma" (chap. vii, "Of Figures and figurative speeches").

<sup>12</sup>"My mother had an old woman in her nurserie, who in the winter nights would put us forth many prety ridles, whereof this is one: 'I have a thing and rough it is / And in the midst a hole Iwis: / There came a yong man with his ginne, / And he put it a handfull in.' The good old Gentlewoman would tell us that were children how it was meant by a furd gloove."

<sup>13</sup>Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence*, 2nd ed. 1593 (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1954), s.v. Aenigma (27-29).

<sup>14</sup>See Richard Wilbur, "The Persistence of Riddles," *Yale Review* 78 (1989): 337.

<sup>15</sup>See the series encountered by the folklorist, Roger D. Abrahams, on the island of Nevis, as recounted in his *Between the Living and the Dead*, FF Communications 225 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1980) 18-19.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in James A. Kelso, "Riddles," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1918) 765-70.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in *Devinettes et énigmes populaires de la France*, ed. Eugène Rolland (Paris, 1877) 1.

<sup>18</sup>See Kelso 770, and Dan Pagis, "Toward a Theory of the Literary Riddle," *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*, ed. Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 98.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Roger D. Abrahams and Alan Deinde, "Riddles," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 134.

<sup>20</sup>Abrahams, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 20-22. He cites Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology II*, trans. Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976) 22-24.

<sup>21</sup>"Edipo y el Enigma," *Jorge Luis Borges: Selected Poems 1923-1967*, ed. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Delacorte, 1972) 190. Translated by John Hollander as "Oedipus and the Enigma" (*ibid.*, 191):

At dawn four-footed, at midday erect,  
 And wandering on three legs in the deserted  
 Spaces of afternoon, thus the eternal  
 Sphinx had envisioned her changing brother  
 Man, and with afternoon there came a person  
 Deciphering, appalled at the monstrous other  
 Presence in the mirror, the reflection  
 Of his decay and of his destiny.  
 We are Oedipus; in some eternal way  
 We are the long and threefold beast as well—  
 All that we will be, all that we have been.  
 It would annihilate us all to see  
 The huge shape of our being; mercifully  
 God offers us issue and oblivion.

<sup>22</sup>Anthony Hecht, "Riddles," *The Transparent Man* (New York: Knopf, 1990) 4.

<sup>23</sup>Pagis 98.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted by Wilbur, "The Persistence of Riddles," 333. Also in Archer Taylor, *The Literary Riddle before 1600* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1948) 4.

<sup>25</sup>Frye, "Charms and Riddles," and Andrew Welsh, *Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978). Frye expands his "botanical analogy" for generic processes into roots (genres of imagery), stems and branches (genres of narrative), the leaf-flower-fruit cycle (genres of structure), and finally seeds or kernels, of which two are riddles and charms (123).

<sup>26</sup>Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 42.

<sup>27</sup>For examples of riddle poems, see the iceberg poem quoted earlier, or some of Dickinson's poems such as "A narrow Fellow in the Grass" (a snake) or "A Route of Evanescence" (a humming-bird).

<sup>28</sup>Sigmund Freud, "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion*, selected by Benjamin Nelson from Freud's *Collected Papers*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 44. The master enigma for Freud appears to have been the primal scene, i.e., origins.

<sup>29</sup>Vladimir Nabokov, recalling the wonder of his newborn son, remarked on "an infant's first journey into the next dimension, the newly established nexus between eye and reachable object, which the career boys in biometrics or in the rat-maze racket think they can explain. . . . the riddle of the initial blossoming of man's mind." From his *Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Knopf, 1999) 233.