

Paradigm Explorer



The Scientific & Medical Network

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Medicine Needs Healing

theology at Notre Dame University. He is the author of hundreds of articles and several books on theology and philosophy, as well as a translator of the New Testament. He obviously has a profound understanding of early Christian gnosticism. Kenogaia lays out gnostic teachings in the form of a compelling story and makes those teachings accessible to all “who have ears to hear.” Prince Oriens quotes liberally from the Gospel of Thomas and other gnostic texts.

The Hymn of the Pearl tells of the quest of a prince from the East to recover a pearl from a noisy serpent in Egypt, and to bring it home. The prince ends up in an inn, where, under the influence of heavy food and drink, he falls into a deathlike stupor. In Kenogaia, our heroes are captured - through eating drugged confectionary, and then imprisoned. However, Michael and Laura remain awake and are able to awaken Prince Oriens. The rulers that hold them captive are all powerful, and it is only with the help of magical jewels brought by Oriens from the real world, that those rulers can be challenged, and that Oriens can continue his search for his sister.

To avoid more spoilers, I can only add that the climax of the story involves gnostic themes such as the Harrowing of Hell, the liberation of Sophia – a central theme of the gnostic text Pistis Sophia, the origin of evil and the ultimate redemption of the cosmos. Those are difficult themes that all philosophers struggle with. Secular philosophers admit that the world is broken, that it lacks integrity, but insist that it can be repaired through social action. Most religions generally reject the notion that all souls can be saved, and would consign many to eternal punishment. David Bentley Hart rejects this view in his book, *That All Shall Be Saved*, much criticised by Christian theologians. Kenogaia also emphasises universal salvation. He also presents the vision of an atemporal fall, where the origin of evil lies in a cosmic catastrophe that predates human beings and where human beings are more the victims rather than the cause of evil.



Kenogaia also contemplates the end of all things, the final resolution of the catastrophe in which we find ourselves. When Jesus’s disciples ask him, in the Gospel of Thomas, how the world will end, He replies, “Have you considered the beginning that you inquire about the end? For where the beginning is, there shall be the end. Blessed is he who shall stand at the beginning, and he shall know the end and shall not taste death.” Hart’s vision of the Pleroma, a condition of blessedness experienced in the real world, forms the conclusion of this Gnostic tale.

WISDOM IN LIFE AND DEATH

David Lorimer

TALKING WITH ANGEL

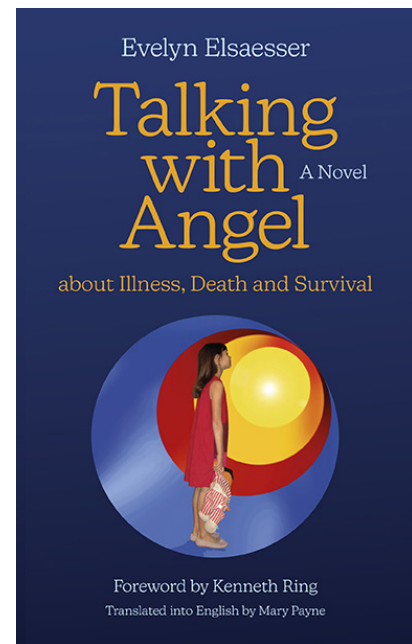
Evelyn Elsaesser (SMN), Foreword by Kenneth Ring PhD

Round Fire Books (John Hunt)
2023, 174 pp., £12.99, p/b – ISBN 978-1-80341-330-3

I reviewed the first edition of this book in No 89 in 2005 and the review which follows substantially reprints my observations nearly 20 years on. Evelyn Elsaesser is an independent researcher and author in the field of death-related experiences, notably NDEs and ADCs (after death communications). She is the project leader of an international team investigating the phenomenology and impact of spontaneous ADCs with the largest ever survey in the field – see <https://www.adcrp.org/>.

In this book, she distils her accumulated insight and experience, translating it into narrative form as the unfolding story of a young girl fighting leukaemia. The book is written in the first-person from inside the experience of the girl, and it makes for gripping reading. The only other book that it calls to mind is Tolstoy’s *Death of Ivan Ilyich*, although Ivan does not achieve the wisdom or peace of mind displayed in this book.

The plot is relatively simple, revolving as it does around the progression of the illness. There is the girl’s own experience and that of her parents and carers. The occasionally horrific physical symptoms are graphically depicted and the emotional reactions raw. How does the girl handle this and how does it affect those around her? So-called normal life recedes into the background as the girl confronts the likelihood, then the reality of her impending death. This is the cue for the first wisdom track in the form of inner dialogues with her favourite doll Angel, who explains that death is a change of form rather than extinction. Her understanding starts to shift as she realises that the ordeal of illness and suffering can be turned into a profound lesson in living, and that one still has the choice of whether or not to trust the unfolding process of life. Fighting against the illness requires the mobilisation of all the positive forces of willpower, hope, courage and trust. It is a tall order for anyone, especially a young girl on the point of losing her future, but it carries the authentic ring of truth.



Other sick children add their voices. One of them, James, is especially sceptical of religious answers, but then he has a profound NDE which transforms his attitude, root and branch. James’s lengthy and detailed description summarises the core aspects of the deep NDE. In itself, his articulate eloquence is somewhat implausible in a person of his age, but it is a literary necessity for the structure of the book. James’s insights reinforce those of Angel, highlighting the centrality of love and other core values, the experience of which changes the course of James’s life and coincides with a miraculous cure of his condition. He knows that the girl understands him, and he becomes her constant companion as her bodily frame inexorably weakens. In a sense, he carries her future forward.

Other visions and dreams indicate the coming transition, and the book ends with the girl seeing her deceased grandmother while moving towards the light. The format is a *tour de force*. The simplicity of the narrative structure provides the vehicle through which spiritual wisdom is formulated and transmitted in an eminently palatable fashion. The reader feels a natural empathy for the girl’s situation, which is ultimately that of every reader of this review. This makes it easier to absorb the insights and engage in the ultimate mystical exercise of dying before you die, remembering that a subtle aspect of ourselves remains a silent witness of the drama of human life. Once you read this book you will understand why it is such a gift that can be passed on to those in need.

THE SEARCH FOR OUR TRUE SELF

Darlene Martin

IMMORTAL DIAMOND

Richard Rohr

Jossey-Bass, 2013, 304 pp., \$19.95, p/b – ISBN 978-1-118303-59-7