

The Gods: A Drama From the Coptic of IAO SABAO

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In the blackness of infinite space are stars, Aldebaran, Gemini, Orion, Cor Leonis, accurately represented.

In the foreground is the top of a lemon-colored, luminous globe, around which is a set of darker rings, tilted at an angle of some 10 to 15 degrees sideways to the horizontal. Left, a tall man of green skin, clothed in a vast mantle of scarlet, with gold embroideries like flames; his right leg swings constantly in space upon the rim of the Ring. Left centre, a boy of bluish violet skin, clad fantastically in light yellow rays, plays upon the flute. Right, a woman, tawny orange, lies folded in her cloak of blue, which is adorned like the fan of a peacock.

Above, throned upon the globe, sits a man of immense size; his hair, his beard, his robe, his skin, are vast and snowy. The hair is rayed like a crown; the beard covers his whole body. His eyes, lost in the vastness of his face, are inky black. His name is Aoth; that of the man, Arogogorobrao; of the woman, Assalonai; of the boy, Atheleberseth.

Upon this scene the curtain rises. There is a long silence, while Arogogorobrao swings his leg.

Atheleberseth plays idly on the flute two or three short snatches, as in a mood of boredom.

ASSALONAI (*as if summing a long consideration, shaking her head slowly*): No. *A pause.*

AROGOGOROBRAO (*shrugs his shoulders heavily, then drops his head between them*): No. *A pause.*
How much — ah — Time — did you say had passed?

AS.: Eighty-eight thousand, three hundred and sixty-three millions, five hundred and twelve thousand and forty-two aeons — of aeons.

AR.: I still do not understand. But it is very little.

AS.: Before me there was no Time at all?

AR.: No. *A pause.* It was very peaceful.

AS.: I cannot understand what it can have been. There was no motion?

AR.: Of course not. It was all Now.

AS.: Yet nothing has happened, ever since I came, and Time began.

AR.: Only the journey of that comet by which you measure this time of yours.

AS. (*brightly*): Oh, yes! Every billion times it comes back it changes color a little; I count that one Wink. And a billion Winks make a Flash, and a billion Flashes make a Spark, and a billion Sparks make an Aeon.

AR.: It is clever. Yes. It is clever. But I do not see the use of it.

AS.: But, see! How useful it is now! Now that Atheleberseth has come.

AR.: But it does not explain how he has come — or why.

AS.: No.

AR. (*very sadly*): No. *A pause.* I do not understand even why you came — bringing Time.

AS.: No. *He* does not know?

AR.: No. *He* was asleep even in the Now.

AS.: *He* has never stirred. What is that — “asleep”?

AR.: In the Now one either knows or knows not. Aoth knew not. I knew.

AS.: But —

AR.: You think that I am a dream of Aoth? It may be.

AS.: And shall we not sleep again?

AR.: Who may say — after that strange thing that came to us last Aeon?

AS. (*enthusiastic*): That rushing sleep!

AR.: And we woke up to find Atheleberseth and his flute.

AS.: Then only did we speak.

AR.: He gave us our names. He gave — Him — His name.

AS.: I do not think these are the true names. (*Atheleberseth plays a short tune upon his flute, dancing.*)

AR.: Names cannot be true. Silence is truth — perhaps. This Time of yours is all a lie. It means that things change. And true things cannot change.

ATHELEBERSETH: Oh, tra-la-la! There was a foolish word. Change is itself truth. I am sorry I invented speech — or that I bestowed it on these elder gods — these beings without intelligence or experience.

AR.: Boy, you do not understand that the secret of Wisdom is in knowing nothing, in saying nothing, and, above all, in doing nothing.

ATH.: True, since you broke silence then to say a foolish thing.

AR.: Ay, you are but the fruit of a great curse.

AS.: Nay, he amuses me. He is dear, he is delicate. I love his mirth, his music.

AR.: It does not matter. Aoth will wake.

ATH.: Not he!

AR.: He will wake. He will see what he has done — us. And he will pass his hand over his brow — and we shall be as if we had never been.

ATH.: How could that be? We are.

AR. (*with a contemptuous little laugh*): We are only the dreams of Aoth. What has been is not. What is no more was not. There is no substance, save only in the Now.

ATH.: Then it doesn't matter what we do?

AR.: No. Not in the Silence, the Now, the Truth.

ATH.: Then I will have a wonderful time! I will set fire to the beard of Aoth!

AR. (*grimly*): You would wake Him — and an End of your time!

AS.: What is End?

AR.: All would be Now — but we should be Not.

ATH.: I don't believe it. It is all change. Change changes. Change cannot cease to change. (*He plays the flute.*)

AR.: Play not so loud!

ATH. (*alarmed*): Is there really a danger?

AR.: For you, perhaps. It might be as fatal as if one should pronounce IAO backwards. But I should not find an end. All this time is terrible to me.

ATH.: All that is out of date. Assalonai is delighted.

AS: Are you sorry that I came?

AR.: No —

(*A pause.*)

Yes.

(*A pause.*)

It is contrary to Truth, to Silence. I am sorry.

ATH. (*with a trill upon the flute*): I am glad. I am going to play games.

AR.: What are "games"?

ATH.: See! You know nothing! I mean to make this old Ring spin. After all, you are responsible. You made Assalonai; you made me.

AR.: I was lonely in the Now. I must have thought. I see that it was wrong. I have set a star in motion. Who can say what may come of it?

ATH.: Oh, tra-la-la! Mother, let us play a game!

AS. (*smiling and shaking her head*): I do not know any games. I love; that is all I know.

ATH.: You invented this game Time.

AR.: A fearful thing! Something evil will come of it.

AS.: Why should not good come of it?

AR.: I have told you. It was "good" in the Now —

(*A pause.*)

But I did not know it. So I thought. Alas!

ATH.: Oh, come! let us play a game!

(*Silence.*)

Then I must have a sister to play with.

AR.: Already he plots evil.

AS.: Surely that is harmless enough.

AR.: I tell you that you do not know; you do not understand.

AS.: Oh! but you fear without reason.

AR. (*with bitter contempt*): Reason! I had Wisdom — until I thought.

ATH.: Come, she shall be all made of music.

(He plays upon the flute. From the Ring, beneath his feet, arises Barraio, a black hunchbacked dwarf, with a hooked nose, a hanging jaw, a single, bloodshot eye. She is dressed in rags of rusty red. Atheleberseth screams with laughter as he sees her; Assalonai shudders in disgust; Arogorobrao nods his head, as if that which he had foreseen had come to pass. Barraio performs a dance of ever-increasing obscenity, which delights Atheleberseth as much as it disgusts the others. Presently she kisses him on the mouth. He is nauseated, and throws her back with a gesture of violent repulsion. She, screaming with laughter, produces, from her rags, a terrestrial globe.)

ATHELEBERSETH (*in surprise and horror*): Oh!

ASSALONAI (*in agony*): Ah!

ARAGOGOROBRAO (*with hissing intake of the breath*): Ih!

AOTH raises His hand, and draws it across His brow. Darkness. It clears for one blinding flash as He opens His eye. He is alone.

(*Curtain.*)