For Charles Nodier the dream world had incised itself into his life and had acted upon all aspects of it. It enabled him to communicate with other species, the dead, and past civilizations as well as to anticipate future events. In his short story *La Fée aux miettes* (1832), the dream became the transformer of reality into illusion, the *rite de passage* into a world where an alchemical drama was enacted. Under the guise of specific individuals and events, it is the collective domain that is at issue in *La Fée aux miettes*: two cosmic principles, the universal male and female forces as they participate, symbolically, in a *hieros gamos*, the alchemical formula for the sacred marriage of sun and moon.

*La Fée aux miettes* opens as the carpenter Michel, interned in the Glasgow "lunatic" asylum, narrates the events of his life. Orphaned at an early age, he is brought up by his uncle, a carpenter, at Granville in Normandy. A solitary lad, he makes friends with a tiny old lady whom the children of the district call the Fée aux Miettes (Crumb Fairy) because she lives on the crumbs given her. She claims to be a descendant of Belkiss (another name for the Queen of Sheba), and her goal in life is to settle in Greenock, where she owns a house. Michel gives her enough money to pay for her trip. After his uncle's departure for the sea, Michel's life-style changes. The money he earns as a carpenter he gives away to the needy. He becomes destitute; but miraculously, he finds seven louis his uncle has sewn into the buttons of his jacket and these save him from starvation. Out of gratitude he goes on a pilgrimage to Mont-Saint-Michel. On his way he saves someone (whom he later discovers is the Crumb Fairy) from sinking into quicksand. They become engaged. Since she has lost all of her possessions he gives her his louis. He then hears that his uncle, who is now considered insane, claims to be the superintendent of Princess Belkiss's palace. Michel goes in search of him and leaves on the ship *The Queen of Sheba*; but the ship sinks. Once again Michel saves the Crumb Fairy, who has followed him secretly. In return she gives him a diamond-studded medallion with a portrait of the Queen of Sheba, who, she asserts, is really herself when young and beautiful. Michel eventually lands on the Scottish coast and meets the charming Folly Girlfree. Since no rooms are available at the inn, he must share one with
the bailiff. That night he has a nightmare and in the morning is found with the bailiff's wallet in one hand, a dagger in the other, and the dead bailiff beside him. He is arrested. His lawyer pleads insanity, but Michel is found guilty and sentenced to death. A letter arrives: Michel must choose between the portrait on the medallion and the diamond frame. He chooses the portrait and the judge receives the frame. However, unless a girl consents to marry him, Michel must die. Folly offers herself, but Michel refuses because he is already affianced and wants to keep his vow to the Crumb Fairy. He prefers to die, Michel maintains, rather than break his engagement. Then the Crumb Fairy arrives and releases him from his vow. Michel is found innocent, and the bailiff is found very much alive.

The story now switches to Greenock. Michel and the Crumb Fairy are living together in blissful contentment: by day she is a wizened old woman and by night she comes to him as the beautiful Belkiss. Their union is complete. Only one cloud emerges on the horizon: unless her husband finds the mandrake, the miraculous plant that will return her youth to her, the Crumb Fairy will die within a year. Michel leaves in search of the mandrake and finds it at an herbalist's shop in Glasgow. It is at this point that he is interned in the lunatic asylum. In an epilogue Michel returns to Belkiss, and they live happily ever after.

It is within the framework of insanity that Nodier broaches the cosmic problem of the hieros gamos, or marriage of sun and moon. In conventional alchemical practice the sun is considered the male principle and represents spirit, order, and illumination, the purest and highest thinking processes known to man. The moon, on the other hand, is viewed as feminine, fickle, dark, enigmatic, and therefore frequently dangerous. In La Fée aux miettes, interestingly enough, the situation is reversed. The sun becomes the feminine force, a composite of two anima figures: the ancient and wizened Crumb Fairy, who represents wisdom in its most active form; and the passive Belkiss, who emerges at night and represents passion. They are the regulators of Michel's life.

Michel is the moon figure, the "lunatic" (from the French lune) who not only incorporates certain aspects of the feminine personality (purity, tenderness, gentleness) but also is under its dominion. He functions only as a reflection, not an instigator, of the two anima figures and has no identity of his own; he is what psychologists term a "medium" personality, that is, he is influenced by outside events, by feelings and sensations generated by others. Physically he is male, psychologically he is female. As a composite of male and female characteristics, he may be referred to as androgynous, one of the most archaic, archetypal images known—a being that existed, according to Platonic and Kabbalistic belief, before the two sexes came into being.

Androgynism is also found in the symbol of the mandrake, the plant that
Michel cultivates in the lunatic asylum and that is mentioned at the beginning and end of \textit{La Fée aux miettes}.\textsuperscript{2} The mandrake, an age-old plant, is associated with both poisonous and healing properties. Theophrastus saw it as half man and half woman because its roots resembled human form and it was self-reproductive. It was also likened to the human being because it was said to scream when uprooted from the ground. The metaphysician Eliphas Lévi was convinced that the first men on earth to walk were "giant mandrakes." Joan of Arc, it was said, traveled with a mandrake hidden under her breast, and it was this plant that gave her the power to foretell the future and to command armies. The mandrake image in \textit{La Fée aux miettes} symbolizes what alchemists would call the philosopher's stone—the elixir of life or the \textit{élan vital}. The philosopher's stone was supposed to bring about the spiritual recreation of man; psychologically, a rebirth within the psyche. To achieve such a goal, the alchemists had to transform the imperfect (imbalanced) into the perfect (harmonious)—a reblending of nature, a reforming of matter, a reshuffling of inner contents. The mandrake, as the philosopher's stone, belongs to the world of absolutes; it is, therefore, inimical to life, the very antithesis of its energetic process that is based on opposition and acausality. To conceive of the reality of the mandrake or the philosopher's stone is an attempt to shy away from the workaday world, to escape into an Eden-like atmosphere, or to regress into an infantile state.

The mandrake, given narcotic values—by Hippocrates among others—was capable of prolonging Michel's beautiful fantasy world. Hence it was fitting that he should cultivate the plant in the lunatic asylum, the implications here being that only in the protected atmosphere of the asylum, where people live out their illusions, can the mandrake—the symbol of utopia and perfection—flourish.

As an androgyne, Michel, serving to illustrate an inability to identify completely with either sex, is an in-between. He is the antithesis of the masculine hero type (Roland, Bayard, David) and resembles more fully the effeminate romantic figures (René, Adolphe, Obermann) peopling the literary scene in nineteenth-century Europe. Michel's lack of sexual identity is apparent in the moon-and-sun imagery, which is the heart of the tale. In archaic times these astral bodies were personified, and each took on the personality traits and sexual configuration of gods and goddesses.

Before the moon came to be identified with women (after the advent of patriarchal societies, such as that of Egypt), the sun was female and was known to the ancient Sabbaean worshippers in Yemen as the goddess Shams. She was the all-powerful force that regulated cosmic activity. With the advent of patriarchal civilizations, however, the woman yielded her power to the man and became associated with the moon, whereas male qualities were attributed to the sun. Psychologically, such a change in religious power mirrored a
concomitant trend within the human psyche: while the male figures were in the ascendance and becoming identified with the sun (the most powerful force on earth), female forms were relegated to what was considered a lesser sphere, the moon. But the female element was still a potent force. Counting, for example, was based on the rhythmic life of the moon. This astral body also stood for love and fertility. It caused rain, storms, floods, and tidal waves, and therefore influenced nature's growth power. Moon goddesses of antiquity (Ishtar, Hathor, Artemis) were regulators of life on earth and were instrumental in the continuation of the great death-rebirth cycles by playing the prime role in the dismemberment mysteries (Zagreus, Penteus, Orpheus, Osiris).

Neither political, economic, social, nor psychological conditions remain fixed. Just as flux exists in the universe, so it is present in all phases of life; in the sexual sphere the power struggle between the male and female principles pursued its course throughout the ages. At one period in time, one force dominates while the other struggles for recognition; at another, the reverse is true. In nineteenth-century France the rigid patriarchal system was giving way to matriarchal forces. This change of emphasis is translated in Nodier's tale in the sun and moon imagery (and in the protagonists with which each of these astral bodies is identified).

The moon has been endowed with many characteristics. Said to be responsible for outer disturbances (e.g., storms and tidal waves), it also supposedly includes chaos within the mind, arousing turmoil, generating overactivity, and causing many people to go insane. It is the moon that radiates an eerie light in darkness, that dulls illumination, thus becoming the instigator of vision. The ancient moon goddesses Cybele and Hecate were named Antea, defined as "the sender of nocturnal visions." Museos, the Muse-Man, Hecate's son, was also called "the son of the moon." The moon has also inspired magic, understanding, ecstasy, and intuitive insights—those forces emanating from the darkest and most archaic regions within man.

In alchemy, silver is associated with the moon. Although a pure and high metal within the hierarchy of metals and chemicals, it is neither as dazzling nor as perfect as gold (associated with the sun) and thus illuminates only partially. Fantasy, fear, and the dream are born in such penumbra. It is here too, in the silvery aspects of the moon, that intuitive forces reside within man: that which shines at night in darkness. Hence the moon is identified with poets. It is subdued and enigmatic and arouses the ineffable and intangible entity—the creative element in man.

Michel is such a "moon man." He is not a thinking power and functions solely in the realm of feeling and intuition. Fantasies and strange ideas are forever aroused within him and always in opposition to the orderly, logical, and rational domain lauded by society. Nodier describes him as having compassion and love, both physically and spiritually and in terms of the moon. Michel is
“pale,” his eyes have the “transparency” and liquid “gaze” of a person from whom the fire of “an astral body” had been “eclipsed” (p. 181); his world is bathed in darkness; it is ambiguous, lost in the illusions of the imaginary world. Like the moon, Michel stands solitary in the vast expanse of blackness surrounding him.

To become a moon man requires a long period of gestation. According to alchemical tradition—and Nodier believed in this concept—a *rite de passage* has to be endured before a higher spiritual state of consciousness can come into being. Unlike the eighteenth-century rationalists, who believed reason to be the supreme form of consciousness, Nodier, in accord with the alchemists, was convinced that the realm of logic alone could not lead to greater knowledge. Higher consciousness was to be found in “obscure movements,” in the variety of impulses buried in man’s being, in his intuitions. It is no wonder that the Gnostics associated the moon with the divine Sophia, who symbolized “the fallible aspects of God.” In ancient days moon people were considered the spokesmen of the gods, the possessors of some divine power. One listened to their statements and prognostications with awe and fear. Moon-thinking, it was believed, opened new insights and fresh orientations.

Michel is capable of divining and understanding more deeply than the so-called rational person: “Les lunatiques . . . occuperaient selon moi le degré le plus élevé de l’échelle qui sépare notre planète de son satellite” (p. 176). It is from this superior vantage point that moon people are able to communicate with supreme intelligences, those that remain incomprehensible and unknown to the normal human being: “il est absurde d’en conclure que leurs idées manquent de sens et de lucidité, parce qu’elles appartiennent à un ordre de sensations et raisonnements qui est tout à fait inaccessible à notre éducation et à nos habitudes” (p. 179). The insane are free from the constrictive time-space limitations imposed upon the ordinary individual and are therefore capable of embedding their thoughts into cosmic spheres of influence, thereby gaining greater wisdom from their peregrinations: “et qui empêche que cet état indéfinissable de l’esprit, que l’ignorance appelle folie, ne le conduise à son tour à la suprême sagesse par quelque route contenue qui n’est pas encore marquée dans la carte grossière de vos sciences imparfaites?” (p. 310).

A price must be paid for divining cosmic secrets. The collective sphere in which the lunatic lives divests him of all identity. Solitude and an inability to communicate with others result. Michel, for example, could not fall in love with a flesh-and-blood woman. He lived exclusively in a world of fantasy; as he himself confessed, his entire life was filled with dreams and caprices from the moment he became involved with the Crumb Fairy.

Michel, the moon man, functioned relatively well in the everyday world as a carpenter. It was his attitude toward women that was out of the ordinary. His mother having died shortly after his birth, he had been deprived of maternal
warmth and had never learned to relate to the female principle. Hence he could never consider the woman as an individual and friend but saw her instead as a transpersonal, mythological, or spiritual creature to whom he could turn for solace and comfort. In this respect Michel was a true lunatic; under the influence of the moon he lived in a perpetual dream, acquiring insights and perceptions in this vast and, according to Nodier, superior world. The profound knowledge he acquired, however, was not compatible with conventional social order. Michel was attuned only to the cosmic field—to transcendent values—to the All.

The sun principle is incarnated in the Crumb Fairy and Belkiss, or Michel’s unconscious inner attitude toward women. The ancient Crumb Fairy is a supraterrestrial, spiritual power. She stands for what Michel had lacked in his life: the positive mother figure, the wise, understanding, gentle, loving, and tender being. “Mon affection pour toi,” she says to Michel, “est plus vive que l’affection d’une mère, mais elle en a la chasteté” (p. 280). Due to the Crumb Fairy, Michel experiences love and security. Since he was twelve years old, she had inspired feelings “de vénération tendre et de soumission presque religieuse qui tendait à un autre ordre d’idées et de sentiments” (p. 193). She was Michel’s “guardian angel” during his school years and helped him and his friends with their studies. She is a miracle worker, in other words, the helping mother type; and this role she plays throughout his life, or at least as long as he needs her: “J’ai eu le bonheur de te servir quelquefois de mon expérience et de mes conseils, et tu n’es pas encore arrivé au point de t’en passer toujours” (p. 200). No matter how kind or solicitous a mother may be, such a helping attitude, if prolonged for too long, becomes destructive. It prevents growth, which results from a confrontation with the realities of the world. Examples of possessive mothers have existed since antiquity: Cybele and Attis, Ishtar and Tammuz—each of these young men died after an unsuccessful attempt to win independence from his overwhelming mother-influence.

A price must be paid for everything in life—even for kindness. The Crumb Fairy extracts her pound of flesh: the golden louis to return to her home in Greenock; a second gift in gold when she claims to have been divested of all she owned; a choice she forces on Michel during his trial (the portrait of Belkiss on the medallion or the diamond frame). These tests are all part of the initiation ritual required of Michel to become a moon man. He passes the tests, which means, in psychological terms, that he will remain under the dominion of the Crumb Fairy, that is, his relationship with her must lead to a condition of stasis. Michel’s withdrawal from the existential world and submission to the dictates of the Crumb Fairy represent a regression into an archaic and infantile realm: the serenity and security of a paradisiac state. The Crumb Fairy undermined the very foundations of Michel’s personality, or he permitted such a disintegration of his ego because of his own fallibility. The ego, defined as the center of
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consciousness, stands as a mediating force between the inner and outer worlds. Its function is to adapt to both. In Michel’s case the ego had lost its power and gradually found itself incapable of acting outside of the fantasy world. Why should he battle out his existence on an external level when all was taken care of so beautifully in his inner domain?

The loss of his ego made him helpless and childlike; thus, he had to be forever cared for and guided. It is significant that, at the end of the story, the Crumb Fairy’s home is compared to a doll’s house. He lives protected and content in all ways: “Le bonheur, c’est de n’avoir rien à se reprocher” (p. 290). Conflicts are gone, as are feelings of guilt, rebellion, and chaos—all of those irritating, frustrating, yet growth-provoking qualities. Michel will never ascend to superior knowledge (either spiritual or terrestrial) because he is caught in a vise: he is prisoner of his inner domain, not master of it. A world in which the dynamic qualities of opposition and energy—those life-giving forces—are absent is a dead one.

Belkiss (the beautiful, sparkling, and youthful side of the Crumb Fairy, the Queen of Sheba) is also a symbolic representation of an archaic sun figure. She appears only after Michel passes the first stage of the initiation process: from son-mother motif to son-lover. In Arab legends, many of which Nodier had read, Sheba is known under the name Nilqis or Balqis (Balkis). Sheba came from the sun-drenched land of Yemen and followed the oldest religion known to man: the Sabbaean cult that adored the supreme cosmic force—the sun. Michel describes the “divine Belkiss” in terms of the solar disk and calls her “la Princesse du Midi.” For Michel she is pure sunlight. When Michel’s passion is aroused, Belkiss is transformed into fire: “Je sentis que la chaleur de son baiser versait des torrents de flammes dans mes veines . . . ma vue se voila d’un nuage de sang et de feu” (p. 234). When she appeared to Michel at night, she was radiant light, a celestial illumination around whom “tous les flambeaux s’allumèrent à la fois” (p. 306); a diamond, “souveraine de tous les royaumes inconnus de l’Orient et du Midi, héritière de l’anneau, du sceptre et de la couronne de Salomon” (p. 239). Since Belkiss is transformed into a fire figure, she radiates sparks as powerful as the solar conflagration and becomes a dangerous force. Like Circe she has the power to entice, hypnotize, mesmerize, and eventually destroy. Michel will become the passive instrument, victimized by her sway. Men who have difficulty relating to women on certain levels frequently succumb to them; Venus, for example, destroyed those who did not fall under her dominion. Michel rejected the flesh-and-blood woman, the charming Folly Girlfree, and became progressively engulfed in Belkiss’s image, eventually drowning in it. Like the novitiate who loses himself in prayer, the mystic in contemplation, and the artist in his creative endeavor, so Michel, suggested Nodier, became united with his sublime collective figure—Belkiss, or the Queen of Sheba, who took on the traits of the Virgin Mary—the
woman in front of whose image he knelt, whose “mysterious voice” spoke to his soul. Like Dante’s Beatrice, Belkiss was Michel’s spiritual bride, as Mary became the bride of God and the Queen of Heaven.

By day Michel conversed with the wise Crumb Fairy; his nights were devoted to Belkiss. His existence revolved around these formidable powers—the eternal feminine as symbolized in the solar principle. The hieros gamos between Michel and the dual anima figures brought about a symbolic union between sun and moon; hence Michel may be looked upon as a “heavenly lover,” the “bridegroom of the soul.”

The third force, earth (or matter), which would have solidified the union between the solar and lunar principles, is missing. Michel rejected the terrestrial sphere in the form of Folly Girifree. Although he liked her and found her kind and gentle, she did not “live in the same region” that he did, he told her. His bond with her could never have been “sacred.” Moreover, his heart could know “no love for any earthly creature.” Even though the hieros gamos between sun and moon as personified by the protagonists occurred, only a duality emerged. The third force, manifestation, which would have given balance to the union, had been rejected. The hieros gamos as experienced in La Fée aux miettes is therefore one-sided. It describes a cosmic union that could never, by its very limitations, lead to spiritual regeneration. Because the earth principle is lacking, a conflict of opposites, generating the growth process, has been dissipated. Michel’s rejection of the existential domain led to vegetation and incarceration in the insane asylum. No rebirth was possible under such circumstances, only a prolonged condition of stasis.

What is of utmost interest in La Fée aux miettes is the exigency felt by Nodier to unify what was divided in the hieros gamos. That an androgynous figure such as Michel pervaded the literary scene answered a need among the people—to rectify an imbalance on the contemporary social structure—to reshuffle the system. The society that both Nodier and his protagonist rejected was based on rigid patriarchal tradition, a system in which reason, logic, and rational attitudes prevailed: characteristics personified by the masculine sun principle. The world of feeling, tenderness, understanding, and Eros had been neglected: qualities embodied in the female moon principle. For sensitive people such as Nodier and the German and French romantics, the dichotomy between these two ways of life grew until it became a gaping wound. The soul, or anima, got lost amid the stiff, unbending clarity of consciousness. La Fée aux miettes delineated in symbolic terms the necessity of rehabilitating certain aspects of the female principle—those long-neglected characteristics of warmth, tenderness, and compassion.

2. Gustave Le Rouge, in his Mandragore Magique, wrote that according to Laurens Catelan (1568–1647), this root was "virile sperm." Rabbinic tradition claimed that the mandrake grew in the garden of Eden at the foot of the tree of knowledge. Shakespeare speaks of this plant in Anthony and Cleopatra: "Give me to drink mandragora." That the plant shrieked when touched is referred to in Romeo and Juliet: "And shrieks like mandrake torn out of earth, that living mortals, hearing them, run mad." Machiavelli's The Mandragora tells of the plant's erotic powers that aroused men to sexual delights.


6. As there are three forces in the universe (God, nature, man) in alchemical tradition, which are manifested in three chemicals (sulfur, salt, mercury), so man is divided into spirit, body, and soul. Michel's relationships could also have consisted of a triumvirate, each an analogy of the other, had the third force been acceptable to him.
