PART ONE
CREATION
There are two fundamental models of conceiving the origin of the world, an intransitive and a transitive one. The intransitive model views the origin of the world as a spontaneous growth, developing all of itself out of a primordial chaos or matter, mostly water. The transitive model takes the world to be the object of a constructive activity of a creator. In what follows, I shall refer to the intransitive model by the term “cosmogony” and to the transitive one by the term “creation”. To us, creation, the transitive model, is the more familiar one, since it is shared by the three monotheistic religions, biblical and rabbinical Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In ancient Egypt, the two models combine and interact in a rather complex manner. The first cosmogonic impulse is generally represented as a spontaneous process. Out of the primordial waters, a god arises. His name, Atum, signifies “non-being” and “complete being”; it is a typical example of what Sigmund Freud called “der Gegensinn der Urworte”, the contrarious meanings of primal terms. The cosmogonical moment is when Atum turns from non-being into being, adopting in the act the shape of the sun and emitting, according to Egyptian conceptions, air and fire, i.e. the god of air, Shu, and the goddess of fire, Tefnut. From then on, the process of creation or cosmogony continues in the “biomorphic” form of begetting and giving birth and unfolds in four generations. This is the famous cosmogony of Heliopolis which, in Egypt, holds the place of a Great Tradition, all other cosmogonies and creation accounts (of which there are a great many) being just variations of and commentaries on this basic conception. Shu-air and Tefnut-fire beget Geb-earth and Nut-heaven, who in turn gives birth to

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1 Freud 2000, 227–34, a short article published in 1910 and based upon K. Abel, Über den Gegensinn der Urworte, 1884, which in its turn is dependent mostly upon Ancient Egyptian examples.