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From the Editor

From the pen of Bonnie Bright

When the world seems to be falling apart all around us, depth psychology provides perspectives and tools that can help us make some sense of things, even in some small way. Through the study of the unconscious, we can often get a glimpse of patterns at work, or underlying aspects that help us gain a new understanding of how we are truly supported by something larger—how the boundaries and attachments of our ego selves can soften and give way to soul, which sustains us.

In many ways, depth psychology can be seen as the great unifier. When applying a depth lens to virtually any topic, we begin to peel aside the layers to understand what lies beneath, and the voices at the margins begin to be heard.

In this issue of Depth Insights, we encounter a variety of topics which, when we apply a depth psychological lens, we begin to understand at a deeper layer. Several of these seven compelling essays build on the authors’ personal experiences in order to truly explore the many ways soul reveals itself in our lives and in the collective. Others offer a broad academic view that integrate philosophy or systems science with depth psychology to further enrich the lens by which we might perceive soul at work in the world.

In the first essay, Monica Dragosz explores our relationship with nature through her own riveting accounts of a sense of participation mystique in a series of close encounters with animals in “Stories of Longing: Beaver, Bear, Wolf.”

Lisa Schouw takes on the topic of grief in the face of the impending death of her...
My childhood was enriched by the raw wilderness I was surrounded by. The mountains, valleys, creeks, rivers, lakes, rocks, trees, and even the howling winds of southern Alberta all seemed alive and magical to me. Wild animals in particular invoked my curiosity and captured my imagination. Those I did see in the flesh were cherished moments, and when confined to the indoors, I would read about wild animals in our science encyclopedias. It is only in retrospect that it has struck me as ironic that I pursued a career path working with people, the many years of socialization having impressed upon me the notion that animals and people are entirely separate entities in this sprawling world. Amongst therapist friends, I have felt like an outlier in my rapture with nature, and particularly in my affinity with animals. But the enchantment persisted, and after some years of becoming more established in my career working with people, my general interest in animals returned full force and included a new fascination with the notion that we could possibly communicate with them on some level.

Since stumbling upon the book *Living in the Borderland: The Evolution of Consciousness and The Challenge of Healing Trauma* (2005), by Jungian Analyst Jerome S. Bernstein, I now acknowledge that perhaps I am speaking to all of this from the place that Bernstein has dubbed *borderland consciousness*. According to Bernstein, borderland consciousness is a state of being for those who regularly experience the *transrational* aspects of life, often within the context of a compellingly strong relationship to the natural world. Bernstein defines transrational reality as “objective nonpersonal, nonrational phenomena occurring in the natural universe, information and experience that does not readily fit into standard cause and effect logical structure” (p. 11).

Furthermore, these experiences—historically unquestioned and commonplace within indigenous cultures—are not only more *real* to the borderland individual than those of the mundane, human-created world, they are regarded as sacred, in spite of the sense of isolation created by this orientation in the context of modern Western life. Bernstein feels that those who fit the profile of the borderland personality have been called to carry an imperative for cultural transformation. With this in mind, I can discern my own journey in the stories that follow as that of one who is attempting to reconcile what connections already exist, let alone what are possible, between the human and more-than-human world.1

Stories of Longing: Beaver, Bear, Wolf
By Monica Dragosz

*Because people become fascinated with pictures and words, and wind up forgetting the Language of the World.*
-Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

Several years ago, I had read an online article about a woman who performs Reiki, a Japanese method of healing work that focuses on channeling energy through touch, on injured wildlife. With this in mind, I went for a walk in the river valley behind my home.

I spot a beaver in the river and stop to watch it. I think of the article I just read and, feeling playful and ready to experiment, I crouch down and put my hands up, with the intent of offering the beaver some “good vibes”. Astonishingly, it lifts out of the water and begins walking up the bank toward me. It is coming closer and closer. I inch myself quietly toward a full sitting position behind tall grasses. The beaver is now a mere few metres away from me. At one point, it actually sees me, and startles, its body lurching back a bit. But after a moment it continues toward me, creeping quietly, as though it is certain I have not seen it. It is now stalking me. Eventually, it comes to sit right beside me, no more than three feet from my left side. We look at each other for what seems like an impossibly long time—probably a full 30 seconds. There is a fleeting moment of anxiety for me. We are on the same level, and I can see the formidable teeth that earn them their title as engineers of the landscape, and I recall a recent story about the death of a man in Belarus whose artery was severed by a beaver he harassed into having his picture taken with. But ultimately, any fear on my part is overshadowed by utter curiosity and wonder. Eventually, the beaver continues on its path up the hill,
Stories of Longing: Beaver, Bear, Wolf

Padding along gently, stopping once to look back at me with some wonderment in its eyes.

In the years since, I have told a handful of people about this encounter, and found myself feeling it was important to somehow convey the depth of what I saw beaming back at me from beaver’s eyes. But I struggled with this, and was only able to reduce that essence down to what I perceived as a mixture of awe and sadness. When I recall those moments with beaver, I am often still deeply moved—swept up in an experience of loss that I cannot even fully name or comprehend.

Bear

Around the same time in my life, I had been visiting the community I grew up in for the first time in many years. It was an early summer evening and I planned to visit a friend who was staying in a cabin just off the main highway through town.

I park my car in the area designated for visitors and start on foot up the narrow gravel road toward the cabin. A black bear appears out of the brush several yards in front of me, strolling out into the middle of the gravel road and plodding down, its head facing away from me. It is smallish, probably a juvenile. My shock seems ironic, as it is more a result of the relaxed appearance of the bear. After all, preparing for bear encounters means assessing the level of tension that follows after you have surprised and/or stumbled upon one another, and preparing for the sudden aggression that could follow.

There is none of this here – this bear is simply getting right busy with the business of lounging. I go to my textbook knowledge of what to do when faced with a bear, and begin talking in a low, calm voice, thinking it is still a good idea to alert it to my presence and thereby avoid surprising it. Its head twists around to look in my direction. Then it stands up, wheels around, and begins a casual, yet almost eager saunter toward me. Almost stubbornly, I am thinking of all I have ever learned about bear safety and the importance of “keeping them wild,” and combined with the obvious flash of instinctive fear, I make a quick decision that it will not be a good idea to allow it to come too close to me. I begin waving my arms slowly in the air, start backing up, and continue speaking, this time saying, “no, no, no”…

The bear stops, and I slowly back up all the way around a bend in the road, to the point where we are no longer in each other’s view. I then turn around and begin a forward motion back to my car. Meters from my car door, I turn around to see if it resumed its advance. At that exact moment, its head pops out from around the bend, and our eyes meet for one last look.

“As I stand alone in the middle of the meadow, a wolf appears some distance away. It is watching me, head hanging somewhat low”

Wolf

I have had an imaginal relationship to this animal for many years now. At a time in my life when my psychic world was intensifying, my dreams became more frequent and more vivid. The pinnacle was a dream in which I was being both followed and led by wolves. The dream was more or less forgotten until I was bombarded with the felt sense that wolf was to be a guiding entity in my life while in a sitting meditation a couple of weeks later. Shamanic practitioners I would later meet picked up on my connection to “wolf medicine” prior to me saying anything of what I had already experienced.

Regardless of whether one favors or sees as compatible shamanic notions of otherworldly communication versus Jungian concepts of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, wolves, with their needs for both independence and strong relationship connections, were highly relatable for me. Their presence in my psychic landscape was further solidified when, on a solitary outing on my 40th birthday, I saw my first ever, wild, free-roaming wolf, just meters away from the place I stopped my car to observe. I watched it stroll nonchalantly past me with wide-eyed wonder. But even more intimate encounters were yet to come, and it started several months ago, with another wolf dream.

I find myself in a large open meadow, ringed by an evergreen forest. It is dusk and the whole scene is darkened. As I stand alone in the middle of the meadow, a wolf appears some distance away. It is watching me, head hanging somewhat low. It maintains a slow, deliberate walk, watching me as it goes, circling around me, slow and steady. It is gradually closing the distance between us, coming closer with each round it makes. Soon, it is right in front of me. I ask myself if this is really ok, or if I am in danger. I realize I have a choice to make between fleeing and surrendering. I decide to remain still for now. The wolf then inches its head forward while maintaining eye contact with me, and gently takes my hand in its mouth. I can feel its teeth gently grazing against my skin. I succumb to my fear, and wake up with a faint sound coming from the back of my throat. I am trying to scream, but can’t.

Once fully awakened, I felt both regretful and a little ashamed. At around the same time, I was introduced to Stephen Aizenstat’s notion of “dream tending.” Aizenstat (2009) advocates “psychic reciprocity” between “the dreamer and the beings that reach out to communicate through dreams,” in which we abandon analysis in favor of an exploration based upon sensory awareness and patient listening (p. 262). Aizenstat’s diversion away from a focus on dreams as primarily a reflection of the human psyche, and toward a closer examination of “nature’s point of view” was monumentally resonant for me (p. 263), so it suddenly seemed as though the kinship I felt with this animal had been completely self-serving and therefore pathetically inauthentic. It was a troubling confirmation that, in my moment of succumbing to fear instead of choosing wonder, I had somehow let wolf down.

Paul Shephard (1993) has stated that kinship “is the transcendent issue of maturity because of the necessary equilibrium between likeness and difference” (p. 297). I was able to grow and heal in various ways in having wolf’s qualities (similarities) mirrored to me, but fearfully withdrew as soon as I was confronted with the differences (safe to
say that my human acquaintances don’t “shake hands” with their teeth). My
dreamtime reaction seemed all the more
ironic given that in recent times I have
joined others in advocating for better
treatment of wolves on the local
landscape, where myths perpetuated
justify their treatment as nothing more
than vermin outside of provincial and
national park boundaries. This endeavor
has entailed educating myself even
further about what wolves are and what
they are not, so that I can disabuse
others of notions they still may hold
about the existence of the Big Bad Wolf.

If Aizenstat’s theory is worth
heeding, then perhaps this dream (never
mind all the others) was not just about
me, and I had declined to fully hear wolf,
and to participate in wolf’s story. What
was wolf asking of me? I attempted to
exercise “patient listening” but surpris-
ingly came up with little that resonated
with my sensory recall. So I vowed to
myself that should a similar opportunity
present itself again, in a dream or
otherwise, that I would do it differently.

A few months later, I was on an
extended exploration of northwestern
British Columbia, and visiting the Nisg’a
Memorial Lava Bed Provincial Park, at a
spot about 150 km from coastal waters of
the Pacific Ocean. At least 250 years ago,
there was a volcanic eruption that wiped
out a couple of Nisg’a villages, killing
about 2000 people. My friend and I were
walking through the wide open valley of
the Nass River, filled in by the lava beds
and ringed by lush coastal mountains,
and found ourselves separating, to each
be with our own private experience of a
place where the sacredness of the life-
death cycle lingers in both the earth and
the air. I had tobacco with me and let the
wind take it out of my open hand as an
offering to the many souls who lived and
died here. This accomplished, I sat down
cross-legged on the hardened and
blackened lava to contemplate a giant
cottonwood tree directly across from me
that suggested the presence of the
mighty Nass River, just out of view.

To my left, about 20 feet northwest
of where I sit, a wolf appears. Just simply
appears, far from the cover of the forest.
She walks with her head hanging low,
keeping a slow but deliberate pace, and

studying me as she goes. Looks away
briefly, but keeps looking back. She is
steadily arcing around me, now angling

toward my southeast. For my part, there
is momentary shock and that fleeting and
now familiar moment of uncertainty,
followed by a sliver of fear. It occurs to
me to stand up, thinking I should at least
try to make myself a little less vulnerable
while I gage her intent. As I gently get to
my feet, it so quickly becomes apparent
that she has no predatory intent – just
simple curiosity.

“My friend and I...found
ourselves separating, to
each be with our
own private experience
of a place where the
sacredness of the
life-death cycle
lingers in both the
earth and the air”

Fear instantaneously dissolves and I
resolve to say yes this time. I am speaking
to her, soft and friendly. I turn my body to
stay in alignment with her as she moves
around me. When she reaches my east
side, we are face to face, and she stops.
We gaze at each other for several
seconds. I find myself wondering if she
might decide to stay a while. But she
turns and continues a relaxed trot to the
southeast. With the least amount of
volume as possible, I call for my friend’s
attention, not wanting either to startle
the other. Once I have successfully alerted
my friend to the presence of the wolf, we
meet in our shared awe and turn to
watch the wolf as she moves further
away. Losing sight of her momentarily,
we re-locate her sitting perched on a
high, jagged piece of lava, watching us
for another few seconds. She then stands,
turns, and disappears.²

Otherness

The ongoing persecution of gray
wolves in many parts of the world is a
searing illustration of the kind of shadow
projection we are capable of heaping
onto wild animals in general and large
carnivores in particular. But the

“othering” of animals more commonly
occurs in much more passive forms (such
as in my own small example). Where
animals are concerned, both depth
psychology and new age shamanic views
are at risk of perpetuating a symbolic
relational style with animals that, to use
the words of Paul Shepherd (1993), is
“too easily characterized as archetypal
and too casually dismissed as imagina-
tion” (p. 280). Symbolism can slide into
objectification and therefore has
consequences for how animals and their
“rights” are regarded.

I have witnessed animals being
regarded as the benign “other” repeated-
ly in the mountains near my home,
when people step out of their cars a few
short paces to stand next to a bull elk, all
the while failing to notice the animal
much at all, as they are busy lining up a
selfie that they will presumably later post
on social media. Paul Shepherd may have
viewed this as a transhistorical expression
of love for animals that has been
perverted by modern society (Fisher,
2013). I have been around many sham-
ically inclined people who, in spite of
their great zeal for speaking about and
identifying with their power animal or
totem animal, appear thoroughly discon-
nected and unaware of the realities faced
by the animals that live alongside us. The
canversations rarely ever include the
recognition that flesh-and-blood wolf is
suffering needlessly and senselessly at
the hands of humans, flesh-and-blood
eagle keeps getting caught in barbed wire
fences, and flesh-and-blood bear has
nowhere left to go.

As ecopsychologist Andy Fisher
(2013) states, when non-human life is
excluded and somehow made alien, it is
inevitabily destroyed. Being congruent
with our oft expressed values of the
rights of animals to co-exist with us
would mean not only shedding our strong
shadow projections of animals such as
wolf, but enhancing our appreciation of
them in general beyond that of a self-
serving form of symbolism. In discussing
historical use of animal masks, Shepherd
(1993) indicates that contained within the
practice was both the recognition that we
are at once both animal and human, and
from this we can derive that “flesh and
appearance mean more to our identity
than ideology, that incarnation, not ideas

<Back to TOC
or heaven, is what life and death are all about” (p. 297). This would entail that we hold space for the full expression of otherness of animals in the world, while allowing ourselves to be nourished by the awareness of our proximity, our kinship.

**It’s the Cows**

Susan Rowland (2009) frames the borderland experience as a reminder of the relationship between Western alienation from nature and colonialism, and the modern manifestation of it as a “marginalization of those whose psyche resists the hegemonic styles of rational consciousness” (p. 78).

It was the resistance of one of Bernstein’s own patients that was pivotal in the eventual formation of his borderland theory. A female patient he called Hannah, with a lengthy history of sexual abuse and subsequent psychotherapy, was relating her distress over having found herself driving behind a truck carrying two cows that she felt must have been on their way to slaughter. Bernstein (2005) relates how one of their sessions unfolded:

I pursued the standard approach of suggesting that she was projecting onto the cows, i.e., how she saw her life circumstances in the plight of these cows. She went along with me for a time. But then she protested in frustration: “But it’s the cows!” I pointed out to her that her response was an identification with animals she experienced as abused. She acknowledged the truth of my interpretations. She began to talk about all the animals in the world that only existed as domesticated beings, and their sadness. And again she burst out: “But it’s the cows!” After that last protest — by now at the end of the session — I became aware in myself of Hannah’s distress and her identification with the plight of these cows. And I also became aware of a different feeling in the room. The feeling was attached to Hannah, yet it was separate from her. It seemed of a different dimension. It was a new experience for me. (p. 7)

Hannah’s visceral experience allowed her to be able to ground into her own truth, and that of the cows, in the face of psychotherapeutic authority. And Bernstein was also able to tap into his own felt sense that alerted him to the very real presence of something unable to be explained or dismissed by the subject-object split prevalent in modern psychology. In his book, Bernstein acknowledges that his own discovery of borderland consciousness arose from the tandem influences of his clinical practice and his exposure to Navajo medicine and religion.

"Longing is the word that I searched for every time I remembered the encounter with the beaver, and attempted to describe in words the look in its eyes as it looked at me"

Joanna Macy, author, Buddhist scholar, and environmental activist, has long been critical of mainstream analytic psychology’s tendency to view expressions of despair about the state of the world as an indicator of intrapsychic conflict and a “private neurosis” (Macy & Brown, 1998, p. 31); she has repeatedly asserted that feeling pain for the world is a healthy, realistic, and legitimate response that requires both attention and expression.3 So within depth psychology, it is significant that Bernstein (2005) came to understand that, for those he calls Borderlanders, they are personally experiencing and living out “the split from nature on which the western ego, as we know it, has been built”, and as such, “they feel (not feel about) the extinction of species, they feel (not feel about) the plight of animals...” (p. 9). For the borderland individual, as was/is the case for indigenous cultures, there is no separation between what is real (material) and what is sacred.

**Longing**

In all of the encounters I have related, there was a fleeting moment of trepidation, but it was overshadowed by wonder and awe. I imagine that the basic ingredients of awe, wonder, and fear are nearly always present for people encountering a wild animal rarely seen, particularly large carnivores, but that the ratio of awe to fear might differ for each person depending on their socialization, conditioning, and experiences. Yet our capacity for awe seems as inbred and instinctual as fear is, a notion I recognize as similar to E.O. Wilson’s (1993) biophilia hypothesis, which proposes that human beings possess an innate emotional affiliation toward other living beings.

Another way of expressing the biophilia hypothesis would be to say that longing to know the Other is a part of our own inbred, though sometimes dormant instincts. And if, as Aizenstat and many other depth/eco psychologists say, psyche and world are commingled, then I wonder if longing to know an Other is actually an experience shared across species. I owe this recognition of longing to Craig Childs (2007), an author and naturalist. In reading his story of an encounter with a sea lion in his book The Animal Dialogues: Uncommon Encounters in the Wild, the following passage leapt out at me:

I remained cramped at the fire, looking over at a sea lion that was quick and capable in the water, washing back and forth, closer and farther away. I could see its ears, two small rolls of leather laid to the sides of its head. I saw no zoological necessity for it to remain so long in front of our fire. It had to be curious. I thought it must be like us in some way, driven by longing. (p. 257)

“Longing” is the word that I searched for every time I remembered the encounter with the beaver, and attempted to describe in words the look in its eyes as it looked at me. My own vague sense of what I was seeing and my self-doubt was fed somewhat by our scientific and technological epoch, in which many are quick to condemn any anthropomorphization of animals as ludicrous, unscientific, and childish. Childs is clearly a naturalist, and interweaves a great deal of scientific and factual
knowledge into the narratives of his own encounters, yet seems to leave room for another type of story to emerge—one from the animals themselves. Canadian author Barbara Gowdy (2008) provides the basis for her 1998 novel, *The White Bone*, by arguing that the ethological research that confirms that animals possess emotions and consciousness means that animals likely also have stories ("An Elephant’s Story").

For me, all this is support for my own perception that, in their encounters with me, beaver, bear, and wolf, may have been experiencing their own longing. And for those who still think that I may be caught in my own projection, it may be worthwhile to consider that Marc Bekoff, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado, has been doing research and publishing his findings on animal behavior and emotions for many years now. Bekoff (2007) proposes that anthropomorphism is actually a complex phenomenon, and that our urge to impart emotions to animals may often reflect an accurate way of knowing that is in fact necessary in making ethical decisions where animals are concerned.

In spite of his conviction in *biophilia*, Wilson (1993) opts out of the endeavor of arguing for the “rights” of animals per se, contending that the notion of rights can be a philosophical rabbit hole.

While I can appreciate his viewpoint, I am nonetheless encouraged when I see Aizenstat (2009) noting that human “dreamers” who open themselves up to an exchange with the “living image” of their dreams may be moved to take action on their behalf, which he calls “archetypal activism” (p. 262). I am hopeful about the possibility that eco/depth psychology can possibly engage in a productive anthropomorphism that would serve as an antidote to self-serving and complacent relationships to animals. Perhaps these intertwined fields can even follow indigenous worldviews into muddled debates about “animal rights” and environmental ethics.

**Epilogue: True Love**

When I hear that my local provincial government, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, supports inhumane wolf bounties as an “effective management tool,” I have a visceral, embodied reaction. Like Hannah, I do not want my empathy somehow reduced to a purely intrapsychic phenomenon. In the midst of my endeavors in wolf advocacy, I resist giving any voice to my totemic relationship with wolf. Giving in to the symbolic viewpoint can seduce us away from the reality of their suffering.

Instead, I recognize my experiences as a call to something beyond my Self, my own lifeworld. I know that I have been exceedingly enriched by every one of these encounters; as Barbara Gowdy (n.d.) has said, “You look into the eye of a mammal or bird and you see that alien intelligence sizing you up. It’s thrilling.” (para. 3). It has indeed been thrilling in the humidity that it has offered. So perhaps I was called by the animals in those moments – for acknowledgement, to carry the message of their request for co-existence, for kinship. Maybe—like us—they are able to know more of themselves by knowing more of us.

Depth psychology offers many ways to interpret my experiences of *participation mystique*, however, what I choose to carry forth is a call for reciprocity in our relating to animals that is nourished by the awareness that their fleshy existence in the world is indeed sacred. They offer us yet another opportunity to engage with a world psyche that holds up a mirror and points the way toward greater psychospiritual maturity, contained within which is the awareness that we are just one part of the web of life.

The poet David Whyte has said that his poem, “The True Love,” is a testament to that which calls us out of our proverbial boat, and that this can be a person, a new life, or some deep part of ourselves (in Kaeton, n.d.). I apply his words to the story between wolf and me:

...and I think of the story of the storm, and everyone waking and seeing the distant yet familiar figure far across the water calling to them, and how we are all preparing for that abrupt waking, and that calling, and that moment we have to say yes, except it will not come so grandly, so Biblically, but more subtly and intimately in the face of the one you know you have to love....

I am profoundly grateful for the gift of that moment on the lava beds of the Nass Valley, in which I received another opportunity to stretch my human limits, and to say a more resounding yes to the more-than-human world. Pivotal as that moment was, I cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that saying yes means that I will keep trying to see, hear, and feel the Other, in a wordless language—as much as is humanly possible.

**Endnotes**


2 Though I understand the convenience, simplicity, and even necessity of referring to animals as “it” in ordinary discourse, I have often wondered about the extent to which it contributes to their objectification. As my own relating to wolf became increasingly intimate, I decided to assign a gender to the wolf I encountered on the lava beds, I chose ‘she’ because I believe that the historical persecution of wolves, when viewed through the symbolic aspect, mirrors an attack on the archetypal feminine.

3 I heard these sentiments expressed directly from Joanna Macy more than once during a workshop in Banff, Alberta, in 2009, and am aware it has been an integral part of her message.

4 David Whyte’s poem “The True Love” was originally published within his 1997 book, *The House of Belonging*.

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Monica Dragosz is a psychotherapist living in the foothills of southern Alberta, Canada, and practicing in Calgary. Her interests lie in trauma-informed therapy, bringing a somatic/embodied focus to work with clients, and integrating cross-cultural shamanic principles into psychotherapy. Her lifelong love of wild places and wildlife has also evolved into an interest in ecopsychology as a culture-making project.

Poetry

Childhood in the North
By Edward Tick

Soon after I learned my first words –
“mother,” “father,” “when” and “where” –
I strung them together like colored ribbons
making the tail of a fluttering kite.

Where is my father? I asked.
He is a soldier, she said.
When, Mother will he come home?
Go out with the other children, she said,
and watch for a man with a backpack
dusty and tired from his long walk home.

We played beneath the old banyan tree
where all roads I knew joined as one.
I hid from my friends, scratched faces in the dirt,
waddled with ducks and looked down lanes.

Finally one day beneath a burning sun
the man with the backpack came.
I ran to him, grabbed his leg, held tight.
Where is your home? his gentle voice asked.
He was gone so long he must have forgotten.

We hobbled together, me with a father,
he like a man with a wooden leg.
He pried and pleaded but I would not let go.
Mother had to peel me off
like the skin of an unripe fruit.

I watched his backpack bouncing
as he disappeared down the long road.
Mother cried and begged forgiveness.
She said she had teased me, said she had lied,
she said many soldiers died.
It was then that I learned and have never forgotten
the pain with no answer in the little word “why?”
Poetry

**Structure**
By Donald Carlson

The inverted cathedral of light
spreads its tracery over us
in an elation of downward-pointed spires
Enclosing us in tall radiance
of afternoon just as our shadows
have grown attenuated
When this crashing down of light
corners me why does entrapment
feel like release?

Poetry

**Too Costly**
by Bonnie Scot
(Adapted from *Journal of a Solitude: June 15th* by May Sarton)

But I am surely at the thin edge
Of exhaustion these days
In a state
Where even joy becomes
Too costly
Where only dark and sleep
Are welcome
How does one rest?

Do it by not hurrying
By not allowing pressure to build
Do it one step at a time
As if climbing out
Of the deepest
Well
The Space Between Breaths: An Exploration of Grief and Final Threshold Rituals

By Lisa Schouw

It is winter. The clouds are dark and thick in the late afternoon sky. I am standing in the doorway between my mother’s bedroom and her lounge room. My mother is lying asleep in a hospital bed with her back towards me; my nine-year-old son is playing on the lounge room floor with his knights and castles. We three are caught in a shared moment, though profoundly different in its aspect. My mother, dying of pancreatic cancer, will be gone within two months; my son, lost in the world of childhood enchantment, is acting out a timeless battle of chivalry and courage, while I am caught for a moment between the world of the living and the world of the dying.

Most of us have experienced a moment when an event or seemingly chance occurrence happens and our lives are changed irrevocably—be it simply standing in a doorway, a sudden accident, the chance meeting of a lover to be, the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one. In her thoughtful poem, Silence, Australian poet Judith Wright (1955) evoked the power that is contained within that moment between breaths:

The silence between this and the next breath, That might be – is not yet – death.

Barely six months after the sudden death of my father, my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The contrast between my father’s passing, which happened over only a few days, and my mother’s, which unfolded over several months, profoundly affected my subsequent grieving process. With hindsight, I sense that my father’s death prepared me for what followed with my mother as I could honor his passing each day as I tended to her.

Stanley Keleman (1985) wrote that “we are always dying a bit, always giving things up, always having things taken away,” (p. 25). During those tender days in which I accompanied first my father and then my mother on their journey toward death, I experienced many “little dyings.” In the final weeks of her life, my mother asked, “Will you dance with me?” And so, as mother and daughter we danced to a song from my childhood and from our homeland of Africa. “This will be the last time I ever dance,” she said. “I am glad it is with you.”

Archetypal psychologist James Hillman (1989) argued that soul refers to “the deepening of events into experiences” (p. 21). He believed the significance of soul makes possible in our capacity to love and in our religious concerns is derived from its unique relationship with death. In his play, Never Sang for My Father, Robert Anderson observed that, “Death ends a life, but not a relationship, which struggles on in the survivor’s mind, seeking some resolution which it may never find,” (as cited in McGoldrick, 1995, p. 127).

“Grieving is simultaneously a deeply personal and a universal human experience that reveals itself over time”

Watershed events such as the death of a family member are what pioneer and founder of Family and Systemic Therapy, Murray Bowen, called nodal events, which “can have an effect for many generations to come” (as cited in Gilbert, 2004, p. 80). My mother was four years old when her father died, and yet she still spoke of her formative loss in the final months of her life; how it affected her mother, brother, and herself in different ways, and how her own dying might mark my son and me into the future.

For the last nine years, I have migrated through the cycles of grief passing through what J. William Worden (2009) calls the “tasks of mourning” (p. 39). Each of these formative loops has been accompanied by rituals of leave-taking as I have moved into the matrilineal position in my family, experienced my own unexpected courage in the face of the unavoidable deaths of much ones, and finally reengaged with the transformational process of moving towards the meaning and focus of my own life through my creative practices.

Writer and Buddhist philosopher Matthieu Ricard suggested that “the spiritual journey is like travelling from valley to valley: crossing each mountain pass reveals a more magnificent landscape than the one before” (as cited in Follmi, 2003, p. 56). Here there is a pattern of highs and lows, with a progression from one landscape to another as life unfolds in ever-richer forms. This notion of movement suggests that there is no going back. We must let go and leave much behind.

Grieving is simultaneously a deeply personal and a universal human experience that reveals itself over time. Across cultures, humans have created myths and their accompanying rituals to guide us through the difficult thresholds of transformation. In his groundbreaking book, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell (2008) offered that “it has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward” (p. 2). Rites of passage such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death are differentiated by formal ceremonies that function to make the whole community “visible to itself as an imperishable living unit” (p. 331). Rituals give form and shape outside of logic, within the realm of imaginings. They provide a means by which we can manifest our humanity—and some would say—our soul. If soul is revealed in attachment, love, and community as Thomas Moore (1992) writes in The Care of the Soul, then arguably it may also represent the essence of what it is to be human.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1989) observed that rituals provide “an answer and reaction to the action of God upon man” (p. 253). Here the perform-
ance of rituals is an action performed in the service of meaning. The word ritual comes from the Sanskrit rīta, meaning “truth or order.” It relates to the physical order of the universe and is manifest in the way “the sun and moon pursue their daily journeys across the sky” (Britannica, 2016, n.p.). Another aspect of this concept is encapsulated in the moral law of the world and the concept of sacrifice. In the Vedic tradition, it is essential that the performance of sacrifices to the gods be conducted in the proper way, to ensure the continuance of the natural order of things.

Rites offer a means through which communities and individuals can embody their cultural myths. These myths serve to awaken and support a sense of awe before the mystery of being (Young, 2005). They add a cosmological dimension to human life, which matches the lived experience, knowledge, and mentality of a given culture, while still allowing attention to be given to mystery or the unknown. This dimension shines a light on the order of the cosmos and ultimately our place in it. The Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter, and the Hopi Sun Dance all “employ the ritual art of remembrance” (Houston, 1987, p. 102).

Each society has a specific moral order, including ethical laws and social roles. A sociological function in response to social group, place, climate, and culture forms a third function of mythology (Young, 2005). An example of this would be the Navaho, whose spiritual life is guided by directions and prescriptions received from Spider Woman for walking what they call “the pollen path” (Houston, 1987, p. 102).

Ultimately, myths offer a way of teaching us how to live through all the stages of life with integrity as they provide a framework for psychological growth. In the final stage of life this movement impels us forward and our ability to embody its expression in our lives is where the psychological element, encapsulated in Campbell’s fourth function of mythology (Young, 2005), is at its most potent. It is within the soul’s last journey that the adventure of the hero reaches its most elaborate and significant development. Campbell (2008) described this final crossing as a return to the “pristine knowledge of the world-creative divinity” (p. 317).

A Doorway to Another Time

I have a heady mix of Nordic blood running through my veins as my ancestors came from the barren and often frozen lands of Northern Europe, so in acknowledgement of this ancestral link, I turn now to an ancient ritual of death that has the threshold symbol of the doorway at its centre. In the period 780-1070 C.E., the Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes were collectively known as the Vikings (Holland, 1980, p. xiv). After the death of a chieftain, they would act out this need for healing time by conducting a richly complicated ceremony that served to ease the loss of the man, while also connecting the tribe to the world of their Gods and all that awaited the chieftain in the afterlife. Possibly one of the functions of the ceremony was to wipe out the human sufferer as an individual and to illuminate the “cosmological circumstance” at play (Campbell, 1972, p. 59).

“Ultimately, myths offer a way of teaching us how to live through all the stages of life with integrity as they provide a framework for psychological growth”

From his eyewitness account in 926 C.E., Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan (as cited in Smyser, 1965, n.p.) described the rituals that marked the ceremony. The body was interred for 10 days, while new clothes for the chieftain’s journey to the afterworld were sewn. A female shaman, known as the angel of death and who acted as a representative of the Nordic god Freyr, oversaw the ceremony as mistress of war and death, love, lust, and fertility.

A thrall girl (or bond-maid) volunteered to accompany the chieftain, and during her final days, had intercourse with all the men of the tribe as a gift for the chieftain and a guarantee of tribal fertility. There was an implicit acknowledgement in this act of an ongoing exchange between the world of the living and that of the dead: a belief that the actions of the tribe would have a direct impact on their chieftain’s journey.

The orientation process to the new stage of life is reflected in the rituals enacted before the death of a loved one, immediately following and also in subsequent remembrance rituals. To understand the grieving process fully, Worden (2009) suggested that the meaning of attachment must be included, and that an individual’s way of mourning is connected to the behavioural responses that make up part of “re-establishing a relationship with the ‘lost object’” (p. 15). Perhaps it was through the completion of detailed and allotted tasks that the Vikings began to adapt to the loss of their chieftain, through a process that required “confrontation with and restructuring of thoughts about the deceased” (p. 39) and with a world that had changed.

On the tenth day, the disinterred chieftain was placed in his longship, which was a symbol of the cycle of birth, life, and death (Holland, 1980, p. 197). The body was surrounded with intoxicating drinks, food, a stringed instrument, and all his weaponry. These everyday objects and possessions form part of identity and in the context of death they can be seen as “transitional objects” performing the function of holding on, and later letting go (Gibson, 2008, p. 16). Interestingly, in the Viking rite, the objects were sent with the chieftain rather than being kept with the living as we might do today.

It can be argued that the display of the body, along with animals and artifacts, may have been a construction of a temporary and idealized image of the dead to be remembered by the mourners, “not through its endurance and permanence, but through its brief visibility and subsequent destruction” (Kuchler, as cited in Williams, 2004, p. 11).

A decapitated horse was cut to pieces, the parts arranged around the body, along with a dog, a hen, and a rooster. Each of these gifts is “endowed with living, healing, magic power” (Jung 1958/1978, p. 104, para. 76) and symbolized aspects of a bountiful life and the difficulties that awaited the chieftain on his journey to Valhalla, the great Hall presided over by the Norse god Odin. It

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was in this Hall that dead warriors spent their days fighting and their nights feasting while they waited for Ragnarok, the battle at the end of time.

It is said that there are 540 doors in Valhalla, and in the late afternoon of the tenth day, the thrall girl was tied to something that looked like a doorframe. Heavily intoxicated, she would be lifted three times by men from the tribe and would tell of what she saw through the doorway into the afterworld. In this last stage of the ceremony, the relatives of the dead chieftain arrived and the ship would be set afame.

This final threshold crossing is present in the mythological image of an open door; the space between breaths, where we catch a glimpse of our current place in time and that which lies beyond. The movement through the doorway enacted within the Viking ceremony symbolizes an enduring connection between the chieftain, the tribe, their Gods, and those yet to pass over the threshold.

As I stood in the doorway between my mother and my son, I had to let go of her corporal life and turn to face a world forever changed by her absence. If, as Keleman (1985) suggests, “living with dying is learning about the transformation arising from your turning points,” (p. 26), then my grieving has indeed been a series of turning points in life; points that have confirmed the strength of the relationships in my family, increased my acceptance of loss, reaffirmed my joy and hope, and above all, made me live the life that I have left more fully, for as Daniel Levinson (1996) argues, “a life is, above all, about the engagement of a person in the world” (p. 3).

A Creative Response – Don’t Look Back

As an artist and clinical psychotherapist, I do not separate the stimuli of the outer world from my inner creative life, for they are intertwined in ways that are mysterious and unknowable. So, as a final parting ritual between myself and you, the reader, I offer you an original song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfQD9E4DSRY

I was just beginning my immersion in the world of Campbell’s myths when I attended a wake held in the late afternoon of a hot Australian summer.

We gathered under the tall gum trees at a place where the river meets the ocean. From these encounters came “Don’t Look Back” (Schow, 2014):

At the close of the day
We will wait at the water’s edge
And the arrow will fly
To light your way

These first lines echo an eternal rhythm as we stood in a circle beneath gently-falling summer rain, marking the passing of a human life. We were enacting an ancient ritual deep in the heart of suburban Australia that mirrored a similar circle variously drawn by the Pawnee priest in Northern Kansas and Southern Nebraska to represent a nest, the dwelling place of the people, and the kinship group, clan, and tribe (Campbell, 2008, p. 34). As each person spoke it was as if we were laying down beacons to mark out the trajectory of a life.

_“This final threshold crossing is present in the mythological image of an open door; the space between breaths, where we catch a glimpse of our current place in time and that which lies beyond”_

An arrow’s journey is sure and true, and the energy of its flight dies away as it reaches its target. By beginning the song this way, both the metaphysical and the cosmological functions of myth are evoked (Young, 2005, p. 4). We are connected to mystery and our natural place in the rhythm of life. This is mirrored in the last ceremony of the Viking rite, conducted as the sun was ending a cycle.

“The true symbol does not merely point to something else. It contains in itself a structure, which awakens our consciousness to a new awareness of the inner meaning of life and of reality itself,” (Merton, as cited in Campbell, 1972, p. 265). The mythological symbol of water is ubiquitous. It can be a means of traveling from this world to the next as in the Styx, one of the rivers of the ancient Greek’s underworld. It is represented in _aqua permanens_, the “water of life of the alchemists and of the ancient pre-Christian world” (Campbell, 2002, p. 182), or the _Rio Abajo Rio_, “the river beneath the river which flows and flows into our lives” (Estes, 1992, p. 298). The water’s edge is an “emblematic mythic place, where life and history flow by, the eternal streaming of the Tao” (Houston, 1996, p. 2). It is the place I go to whenever my soul needs replenishment or reconnection to the cosmos.

In her poem, _Silence_, Judith Wright (1955) makes the connection between the creative-divinity and the eternal waters:

_Silence is the rock where I shall stand._
_Oh, when I strike it with my hand_ 
_May the artesian waters spring_ 
_From that dark source I long to find._

The word _Hallelujah_ appears in the Hebrew bible and Christian hymns as a call to praise God or in praise of God. Throughout Canadian poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen’s composition “Hallelujah” (1984), we experience that many different hallelujahs exist; an ecstatic cry of sexual release, a yearning for a forgotten God, a bitter accusation, or an entreaty for salvation. In the last verse of my song, I have used it as a call to the angels, asking for them to perform the task of carrying the loved one away safely:

At the close of the day
_We will sing hallelujah_ 
_As the angels come_ 
_To carry you away_ 
_As the trumpets sound_ 
_And the night birds sing_ 
_We will gather together_ 
_To guide you home._

The trumpets sounding resonate with the music of the heavens, while the night birds’ song evokes the lore of the messengers of the night. For the Ancient Greeks, the owl was associated with their goddess Athena, a symbol of higher wisdom, while the Pawnee hold the birds as a symbol of protection.

The construct of a hymn, “Don’t Look Back,” completes the circle by returning to the water symbol in the final chorus. There is a suggestion that the veil between the two worlds is opening, and that to look back would be to break the
spell or destroy that which is unfathomable. Here, also the image of the Viking longship is recalled, and perhaps even the arrival of something bountiful:

Don’t look back  
As the veil grows thin  
For all is well  
As your ship comes in  
For the last goodbye

In a thought provoking essay published in Psychosomatic Medicine, George Engel (1961) observes that “the loss of a loved one is psychologically traumatic to the same extent that being severely wounded or burned is psychologically traumatic” (as cited in Worden, 2009, p. 16). Engel argues that, “just as healing is necessary in the physiological realm, a period of time is likewise needed to return the mourner to a similar state of psychological equilibrium” p. 16).

Through the restorative rituals of grieving and creativity, I continue to experience a deeply personal and universal unfolding which connects me to the enduring living unit of all humanity. As Sogyal Rinpoche (2002) offers, “Don’t let us half die with our loved ones, then; let us try to live after they have gone, with greater fervor” (p. 314), for all is well.

References


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Sandplay—The Practice of the Image Moving Psyche and Symbol in Sand

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Art by Terry McMaster

"Fragment of Shamanic Birth"
Acrylic on Paper

"Boat of the Dream" also appears on the cover of this issue of Depth Insights, Summer 2017
Acrylic on Paper
Leslie Nolan

"Thank you for Sending Me an Angel"
Acrylic on Paper

About the Artist
Terry McMaster is a painter, photographer, psychotherapist, teacher and researcher. He explores dreams, stories, histories, images and people’s inner process. He’s an addiction therapist, assisting people into recovery from chemical dependence. He’s kept 40 years of his own dream journals, and assists others with their dreams. He researches 18th century New England gravestone designs.

Terry’s work, "Boat of the Dream," also appears on the cover of this issue of Depth Insights.

Terry writes:
My paintings are acrylic on paper, varying from 5”x7” to 3’x5’. They are created from the unconscious process within me. I just paint and intend no specific outcome. Shamanic and animal images often emerge.
It might not be particularly surprising to hear a person claim they experienced a spiritual awakening at a religious conference. A newcomer attending a Buddhist conference might experience a taste of Buddha-mind. A Christian might attend a Christian conference and have an experience of Christ awakening in their heart; the pagan a mystical union with nature; a Muslim the overwhelming glory of Allah; a bhakti yogi the awakening of kundalini in the spine, and so on. Newcomers to a religious tradition occasionally have initiatory spiritual experiences, and long-time believers from time-to-time experience a revelatory deepening of practice. This is one of the things that keeps religions going—the experience of the numinous. Traditionally, we expect such experiences to occur within the container of a particular tradition, a particular belief system, or a particular practice.

The spiritual awakening I had in 2009 was not confined to any particular containing tradition, and yet, it was decidedly religious in character. It instilled in me a deep love and appreciation for religion, in clear distinction to the sometimes vague “spirituality” that seems to be in vogue these days. This paradoxical awakening happened at a religious conference that boasted not one faith, but dozens—all of them, in fact.

In 2009, I attended the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne, Australia, a gathering of the faith traditions of planet Earth. The stated aims of this gathering included listening, dialogue, and collaboration in meeting the great challenges facing our planet: war, poverty, and environmental devastation. Perhaps a surprise for those who hold the myth that religions are somehow at odds with each other, the Parliament is not only peaceful, but a model for constructive dialog across divergent worldviews. No one is there to proselytize, to convert, or to prove their tradition’s superiority; rather, they come to share, to listen, to become enriched by difference and celebrate diversity, and above all, to find common ground in the great work of healing our suffering world.

I was overwhelmed by images, sounds, art and music, ideas, conversations with strangers, and for lack of a better word—worldviews. Every day, I passed through a dozen different worldviews. My imagination on fire, reconfiguring the human and the divine—first one way, and then another. It was thrilling and dizzying and exhausting, but it was also deeply nourishing food for the soul.

When one is assaulted by such abundance, such diversity, it can be hard to make sense of it in the moment. It may be tempting to close down and insist on experiencing all of it through the old, entrenched worldview with which one entered the field. To some degree, of course, this is inevitable. And on the other hand, to open fully—to let each and every one of those worlds live and breathe—threatens to overwhelm, like an immersion in the infinite. I remember a few moments when from the chaotic abundance, a unifying moment emerged. The immense and multi-dimensional threads underlying it all came together in a startling moment of clarity: Ah this! This is the all of it!—All real, all true, even in its contradictions, so incredibly beautiful!

There were several moments when I caught a glimpse of this numinous thing I allude to but can never fully describe with words. Towards the end of the conference, I paused in the middle of the convention center, and looked out at the thousands of diverse souls around me. And I saw something: pervading the crowd, hovering in the air above, a living aura of luminescence, like divine light: the ecstasy of the shamans and the merciful grace of
the holy spirit, the love-making of Shiva and Shakti creating the universe anew. It was the love of Christ, and the joy of bhakti, unceasing creativity and ancient wisdom. It was the pure and empty void of Buddhism. It was extremely simple, palpable—just one thing—and it was incredibly, endlessly, and unfathomably complex in its manifestations.

And I saw that each of us at that conference and each tradition throughout history had seen this thing—each in unique manifestation, each with unique consequence—the source from which the stories spring; the heart of the world; the kernel of truth in all religions, no matter how contradictory their earthly trappings.

In the end I feel helpless but to describe it with the words that my early Christian upbringing gave me. I saw in that moment the glory of creation; the love and the light of God. And in the next breath, I recall the words of the Russian composer and mystic, Alexander Scriabin:

The ardor of the instant gives birth to eternity, 
Lights the depths of space, 
Infinity Breathes with Worlds.

Religious Pluralism as an Image of God

As I reflect on this experience, six years older and wiser, I am far more agnostic about such matters, but also ardently and perhaps strangely pro-religious. I am hesitant to guess about what it all means, what ineffable reality might lie beyond the play of phenomena in human experience and psychology. But there are things that I cannot deny: that vision of beauty, of goodness, of integration was among the most important moments of my life. For all its sins and failings, I have seen what religion can be: the container for humans to experience the divine. And even if we conceive of that divine as something wholly inside of us, it is nevertheless a path to the best within us. Religion is as much a part of our humanity as art or music, science or math, economics or family. It is part and parcel of what we are.

And yet I remain steadfastly resistant—perhaps even obstinate—to the notion that I am supposed to pick just one. Many would criticize this as a form of spiritual immaturity, and I admit that is a fair criticism. I recall the story of the man who dug a hundred holes for water and never found it, whereas if he had just committed to one hole and kept digging, the water would have emerged. There’s definitely something to this story: that the fruits of spiritual commitment are born after a long and committed walk down a particular path. But for the remainder of this paper, I am going to explore a different interpretation: that engagement with religious pluralism can be seen as a spiritual path and practice in itself.

"Religion is as much a part of our humanity as art or music, science or math, economics or family. It is part and parcel of what we are"

To be clear, I offer this premise as something distinct from the “spiritual but not religious” outlook that is gaining popularity in contemporary American culture. I am resistant to this notion because to me, a spirituality that rejects religion outright seems to be rejecting specificity. “Spiritual but not religious” seems to me almost a loss of the ground, a retreat to abstraction, like saying one likes stories but not sentences; music but not melodies. No doubt such a retreat is often engendered by a spiritual wounding from overbearing and abusive religious institutions—and in that regard I am deeply sympathetic.

But religion itself, on the whole, is beyond any institution, or even the sum of institutions. It is culture, art and story, practice and fantasy. Religion is among the great collective creations of humanity. So when I speak of engaged pluralism as spiritual path and practice, I mean it as a decidedly religious form of spirituality.

Carl Gustav Jung was the psychologist of his generation most prone to engage in matters spiritual and religious. Jung was fascinated by the powerful effect of religious experience, and the way religious images and symbols appeared and worked in the psyche. But, as a loyal follower of Immanuel Kant, the luminary philosopher who questioned the human ability to directly perceive ultimate reality, Jung remained cautious in his explorations of religious metaphysics. Rather than emphasize the nature of God per se, he explored the workings of the “god-image”—that is, the particular image and story that contained the notion of the divine within the human psyche. Such images were diverse, showing up in different ways in different cultures, and, Jung posited, they were capable of evolution as humanity became more conscious.

As Jungian Analyst Murray Stein (2014) explains it, “None of these [images], however, are full expressions of the Ground of Being, of Divinity itself. They are humanly generated images based upon emotionally convincing numinous experiences, and the mythopoetic and theological imagination” (p. 18). By focusing on the psychological god-image, Jung was not denying the existence of a genuine divinity. In fact, he was quite fascinated by divinity. Nevertheless, he believed the role of psychology was to look at the images that expressed or contained the divine, rather than speculate on theological matters beyond the psyche. These psychologically

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meaningful images contain and express a divinity that humanity’s present state of consciousness may be ill-equipped to apprehend fully. If God is beyond us, the god-images tell us where we are.

Stein’s description of “humanly generated images based on emotionally convincing numinous experiences,” suggests how my experience of the Parliament as recounted above might constitute a “god-image” in the Jungian sense. Rudolf Otto (1958) coined the term “numinosity” to describe the irreducible experience of the sacred or holy. Certainly, my experience was both profoundly numinous and emotionally convincing. And though the experience was complex and laden with meanings, I can still call it a manifest psychic image, because it appeared to my consciousness as an integrated totality, a unity of meaning with manifold aspects. To press forward with an additional gloss of interpretation of that particular vision of unity, I would say that it fits with two potential “god-images” that I find meaningful: God as Artist, and God as Emergence. I will proceed to take up each of these images in turn.

**Pluralism as Creation Image**

On par with my early Christian upbringing, my adolescent image of God was powerfully influenced by the writing of creativity guru Julia Cameron. She introduced me to the notion that engagement with human creativity is essentially a spiritual experience. I was sixteen when I first read *The Artists Way* (1992) in which Cameron posits: “We routinely refer to God as the creator but seldom see creator as the literal term for artist” (p. 18). Cameron bases much of her approach to cultivating creativity on the premise that every creative act is essentially a participation in the ongoing work of the Great Creator. “We are ourselves creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.… Creativity is God’s gift to us. Using our Creativity is our gift back to God” (p. 19). This is in many ways a radical departure from the more orthodox image of creator-god I received in my childhood. Sitting in the church pews as a boy, “creator” seemed to mean “owner” or “ruler.” But Cameron offered me a different image of God: a creative artist, creating the universe itself as an infinite act of love and joy. So when I speak of the image of God the “creator” now, it is this more expansive conception to which I refer.

“I do not need to know the ultimate answers or demand metaphysical certainties: the injunction is only to listen with an open heart. In this image, we are witnessing the birth of God in the soul of humanity”

When I imagine this God, who revels in creativity, I see quite clearly that one worldview, one religion, would never be enough. Such a God would surely delight in manifold religions, infinite worlds, with divinity inhabiting each but confined to none. Male or female, immanent or transcendent, mono or poly, rational or ecstatic, formed or formless—all polarities derived from a common source of infinite complexity, beyond the comprehension of the human mind, but offering us a thousand glimpses to the numinous beyond.

This god-image is the progenitor of religious diversity, both the source of our religions, and the outcome of them. And so to engage actively with the religious totality, to experience multiple traditions and images and worlds, in itself becomes an act of worship. I walk the path of the creator God by delighting in countless containers that have been made to hold the divine. Each one expands my awareness of the source; I do not have to choose, only to engage each unique manifestation with an honest heart.

**Pluralism as Emergence**

The second god image—a related if perhaps more secular account—implies seeing religious pluralism in an evolutionary perspective. Mythologist Patrick Mahaffey (2014) offers a philosophical definition of pluralism as “a theoretical perspective that accepts the validity of differing worldviews and that proposes how they can coexist without threatening one another” (p. 21). He ties the project of pluralism to the larger problem of post-modernity: “the recognition that no single narrative or theory, either religious or secular, can adequately understand the complexity of human lives and cultures” (p. 22). This marks a move toward epistemic humility on the one hand, with a good faith attempt at integration and harmony through discourse on the other. The negative aspects of religion—fundamentalism, intolerance, undifferentiated and uncritical thinking—are supplanted at the outset by an integrative project that honors the particular, celebrates the diverse, and seeks greater harmony for the greater good.

So how does interreligious civic discourse become a numinous image of God? I cannot say that it must become so, only that I experienced it in that way—that in seeing these people come together from all around the world, sharing and listening; honoring the specificity of tradition and also celebrating the diversity of forms; overcoming differences in the name of the common good—this was humanity at its best. And in seeing humanity at its best, I caught a glimpse of the numinous,
the divine at work amidst the chaos and confusion of our world. This divinity is not given, like the image of the creator-god. Rather it emerges in the course of history, human progress, and the evolution of consciousness. It is similar to what Hegel imagined in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807/1977), but not so conceptually constrained or culturally defined. Where Hegel saw a linear line of progress, here emerges a sphere—and perhaps even that is too simple a model.

I find it helpful to view this process in the light of complexity theory, whereby scientists have begun to measure the phenomenon of order emerging from chaos. According to computer scientist Melanie Mitchell (2009), a complex system can be defined as “a system in which larger networks of components with no central control and simple rules of operation give rise to complex collective behavior, sophisticated information processing, and adaptation via learning or evolution” (p. 13). In short we see something emerge from its constituent parts that is very much more than the sum of those parts, and in such a way that looking at the parts themselves could never predict the behavior of the whole. Common examples of complex systems include insect colonies, weather patterns, economies, and the human brain. Throughout the world of academia there is growing interest in connections between complexity science and human sociocultural systems in general, making it a topic of interest to anthropologists, and thus to the study of religion.

This emergent order from chaos evokes the image of creation *ex nihilo,* something emerges where before there was nothing. When I saw in my mind’s eye that holy luminescence over the Parliament, it was an image of divinity emerging from the chaos of the mundane. Whether or not this divinity exists “objectively” as a timeless state beyond our human world is almost beside the point. We do not yet know what the divine is; rather, we watch it emerge as the best within us and between us. The images and stories contained in the religious traditions of...
the world are now no longer in conflict. They come together; they
differentiate and integrate.
Something beautiful emerges from nothing. A world of peace, compas-
sion, and prosperity is born from an ethos of fundamental respect for
each other’s stories and experiences. We do not need to know the ultimate
answers or demand metaphysical certainties: the injunction is only to
listen with an open heart. In this image, we are witnessing the birth of
God in the soul of humanity.

An Agnostic’s Lament

I understand my identification as
an agnostic not as a failure to choose
so much as an acknowledgment of
human limitation in a vast and
complex universe. It can, in fact, be a
principled position—even a spiritual
one. The divine is manifold and
mysterious, and ultimately beyond
human language and cognition. In the
face of uncertainty, the stories and
philosophies we create, like our art,
music, and literature, are a celebra-
tion of our humanity. To honor many
stories is an acknowledgment of the
great, often confusing cosmic context
within which humanity makes its way.

I often feel alone in this perspec-
tive. There is a natural pressure from
social groups to conform, and to hold
out can mean experiencing loneliness.
Religious folks gently pressure me to
commit to a single tradition, while the
“spiritual but not religious” crowd
often use “religion” as if it were a
slur. Even worse, the militant atheists
and scientific materialists seem to see
only religion’s shadow, and want to
strike it from the Earth altogether. I
am sympathetic to all these perspec-
tives; I appreciate them. But each
seems to my eyes a singular facet of a
greater truth, and to go over entirely
into one of these worldviews feels
like a collapse of the totality into a
mere aspect of itself. Ironically, my
inclusive agnostic stance often leaves
me on the outside, gazing into the
cosmos alone.

This is all the more reason that
interfaith gatherings such as the
Parliament awaken such inspiration in
me: the greater context of divergent
beliefs becomes manifest. The myriad
forms fall into harmony, and yet that
harmony could not exist without the
myriad forms. In those moments a
palpable common humanity emerges,
and I remember what it means to be
alive on this planet, and what it
means to be human. In this place,
agnosticism is not a stance of doubt,
but a deep declaration of reverence
for that from which all names arise.

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Poetry

Black Bellied Moon
by Richard Russell

there
is
a rose, growing
inside
the
moon’s own belly,
with
eyes
of
silver,
and
wings
of
maple leaf and gold,
she
will give birth before Winter’s Ending,
let us
go
out into the courtyard,
to
rejoice,
and
pick plums,
let us,
build stars with
the
children,
and
create heavens,
with
soft handfuls,
of
rainbow colored snow.
Art by Peter Cameron

"Everywhen at Lake Mungo", 2017
Oil on Linen, 122x122 cm.

Peter Cameron writes:

"We see and hear what we are open to noticing"
—Jerome S. Bernstein

The painting results from substantial relationship with this ancient lake in the old Willandra system. The Lachlan river ceased flowing out here some 18,500 years ago. Incredible climatic fluctuations over the millennia have affected the very existence of all species of fauna and flora including the megafauna. The Muthi Muthi people work profoundly with this knowledge.

Though elements of this living land move relentlessly, sentient memories of all forms live on. Much remains hidden in layers of consciousness, like the countless ancient human cremations and burials. I’ve been shown human sites which are 120,000 years old. Here the past has dominion over the present. Often, time collapses altogether. This is a tender, personal and collective living museum. Temenos like in its focus and locus, it is itself a massive creation story.

We come as guests into the integrity of this crucible of a place. If we listen carefully, the stories unfold. Painting ‘en plein air’ enables direct contact.

About the Artist

Land is an inescapable condition of life, the prime material of our origins and destiny. It’s often in the relationships between earthly elements that we can find the possibilities of body, soul and spirit. The connections are the fabric of life itself.

It’s through painting that Peter learns about listening and perception. For him, it’s an exploration and a questioning of all things interior and exterior, including processes of imagination.

Peter is largely self taught and has been painting, drawing and sculpting most of his life. With many group shows and about 20 solo shows, his works are collected privately and by various public institutions. He lives in Sydney, Australia.

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How Jungian Psychology, Brain Research, Quantum Physics, and Systems Science Lead to Pansystemology and Depth Psychology

By Nicole de Bavelaere

The attempt to live according to the notion that the fragments are really separate is, in essence, what has led to the growing series of extremely urgent crises that is confronting us today.
—David Bohm (Quantum Physicist)

Like other German-speaking scientists of his time, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst C. G. Jung (1875-1961) wished to establish psychology as a scientific field. He had in mind to find “a description of nature integrating both physis and psyche” (Meier, 2001, p. 176). To reach his goal, he had to solve the duality of unobservable mind versus measurable matter. This problem still halts both science and psychology on the threshold of a new paradigm shift and limits our interpretation of the psyche to an exclusive by-product of biological processes. As we will see, a new approach, pansystemology, offers a solution.

American physicist and philosopher of science T. S. Kuhn qualified psychology of pre-science because its paradigm, or general theory, is not final nor strictly defined (cited in Eysenck, 2009, p. 10). Psyche cannot be directly measured thus the field which studies it has no fixed boundaries. However, pre-science does not exclude science and does not imply pseudo-science. Quite the contrary. Psychology, firmly based on science, remains open to new insights which might emerge from the outskirts of the present scientific model. Psychology has thus the power to exchange with many sciences such as biology, neurology, sociology and notably system science. This explains why the founder of General Systems Theory, Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1965), argued that system science can address problems highlighted by psychology. Modelled on a “mechanistic universe,” sciences have the tendency to sideline “regulation, organization, goal-directedness, hierarchical order and wholeness” (p. 3).

This openness of psychology is one reason why from 1909 to 1913, Jung regularly invited Albert Einstein to dine at his home. Einstein urged him to find a scientific way, a formula, which would integrate the reality of the psyche into the scientific model. With Wolfgang Pauli, the well-known quantum physicist and father of the neutrinos theory, Jung tried to do this as they met and assiduously corresponded between 1932 and 1958 (Meier, 2001). Pauli also turned to his fellow quantum physicist William Heisenberg. In Pauli’s words, they tried to “find a new language that could make the hidden dimension in nature accessible to the intellect...neutral with respect to the distinction between psyche and matter” (p. xii). They did not succeed.

“Because individuals share the same brain organization, their creations can reflect this hidden frame, this invisible order, and its laws”

The primary cause of this failure is the impossibility for a solely analytic model to accept that the physical world might only be a part and expression of a wider psyche instead of the other way around. However, this changed thanks to a hypothesis created by Einstein’s protégé, David Bohm (1980), that quanta follow an invisible implicate order which organizes them. This hypothesis not only led Bohm to rewrite quantum physics; in 2015, researchers discovered physical evidence to support it (Yen & Gao, 2015).

Now, many other macroscopic quantum phenomena bring Bohm’s hypothesis into full scientific acceptance. After all, the ancestors of chemists—alchemists—incorporated their manipulations into a universal gnosia. They viewed matter as a product of a psyche submitted to time and space rather than the other way around. A similar paradigm allowed Jung to declare that everything is psyche; Einstein, that everything is energy; and Bohm, that an implicate order, a type of field, organizes matter. This trajectory is worth pursuing.

The implicate order is thus the blueprint, a supportive, invisible and universal language of nature. Its hidden frame is etched by the organisation of physical structures, such as the human brain, to allow the expression of precise functions. Because individuals share the same brain organization, their creations can reflect this hidden frame, this invisible order, and its laws. This can be verified in three stages. First, we need to find a model which fits the description of the implicate order: the Taoist model. Then, we need to see if it fits with human brain structures and functions and if its phases agree with their development, maturation and specific uses by genders. Pansystemology develops this as the LIFE model, in perfect harmony with the brain. Finally, we need to find the frame of this model in sacred texts and art across the globe. In agreement with this, the model is present in the Pentateuch and its connected religions, in Taoism, in the concept of Maat of ancient Egypt, in alchemy, in legends, and in art.

Pansystemology (pan as in universal model and systemology as in system science) is the study and application of this model on which the fabric of nature, as well as the different worlds of human expression (physical, emotional, conceptual and social), are built. Pansystemology was presented at Trento University in 2015 at the UNESCO-endorsed First Conference on Anticipation (system science).

In harmony with the Tao and other traditions, and with brain research results, pansystemology offers to study and apply the LIFE model, which is the physical and psychological expression of Bohm’s blueprint. Nature and humans, including their physical attributes are fractal mirrors of Bohm’s implicate order,
this master blueprint. Fractals include the idea of detailed patterns, but also of internal function repeating itself. Hence, Nature is an image of this order with attributes that can either be inhibited or manifested. This also goes for human beings, in line with Jung’s (1954) idea of the “Imago Dei,” the “God-image” in man. The human brain unconsciously expresses this model.

The mainstream positivist-type scientists frowned upon the idea of an Unus Mundus as put forward by Jung, of reality in which the physical is a result of a primordial invisible reality (Roth, 2011) or ordering structure (Bohm, 1980). They see this as an attempt to resuscitate vitalism, though it is not actually the case. Vitalism was chiefly interested in the difference between living and non-living, and it failed in its definitions. Analytic science is best adapted to understand what is measurable.

However, as theoretical biologist Robert Rosen (1991) argues, the processes of life are not wholly explicable by the current laws of physics and chemistry. Darwinism and the identification of DNA gave an almost fatal blow to a more holistic approach to life (William, 2003). New developments in epigenetics (Lipton, 2015), as well as research into quantum physics and human brain neurobiology, tend to suggest the possibility of an entelechy principle (Driesch, 1912); of an unaccounted-for element, a field, and laws other than mechanical or chemical ones, that direct growth and life. The ideas of French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who, fifty years before Darwin, viewed evolution in its cooperative and dynamic elements, are now starting to make more sense. Indeed, the notion that we are at the sole mercy of our genetic inheritance is erroneous. Only 2% of illnesses have a single gene cause (Lipton, 2015). Epigenetics, with its environmental and psychological features, is now the new frontier (Roth, 2014).

With Bohm’s implicate order, evolution is a movement in nature which tends toward a perfect mirroring and expression of this primordial order under the constraints of time and space. It should be considered a guiding principle of epigenetics even if only hypothetically. Bohm (1980) himself boldly defined the manifested world as an explicate order.

He went so far as to work with neurosurgeon Karl H. Pribram on the description of quantum minds. This hypothesis also opens the door to a different comprehension of what the psyche might be.

Recent neurobiological studies on the brain have focused on the capacity of brain oscillations to switch different genes on or off (Gu & Spitzer, 1995). Research on the practice of meditation shows that we can modify the type of oscillations our brain manifests. Similarly, research has demonstrated that cocaine users can inhibit cocaine cues (Volkow et al., 2010). With the prevailing scientific dogma, it is impossible for brains afflicted by Alzheimer’s disease, stroke, or severe hydrocephaly to function normally.

However, the literature is teeming with cases attesting to the contrary. For example, Mortimer (1997, cited in Bialystok et al. 2007) says that between 10% and 40% of the brain autopsies he performed exposed damages exceeding criteria for Alzheimer’s disease (AD) with patients showing no sign of cognitive impairment before their death. In the same vein, 636 senior participants followed cognitive tests regularly before their deaths. In post-mortem brain analysis, 12% of those presenting Alzheimer’s disease or infarcts hallmarks belonged to cognitively healthy participants (Tyas, Snowdon, Desrosiers, Riley, & Markesbery, 2007). If we consider the psyche as a sole product of brain structure processes, this is impossible.

A recent brain study found that thoughts exist even in the case of clinically deceased patients (Parnia et al., 2014). We also know that in some cases when a lesion occurs, functions can use structures not meant for them (Goldberg, 2009). That “structure determines function” and not the other way around, however, is a fundamental tenet of biology. These cases and others illustrate that affected brain structures do not always prevent the expression of functions (Lorber, 1970s; Tyas et al., 2007). Jung’s (1952) definition of the brain allows these observations. He saw it as a “decoder, which would have the function to transform the tension or the relative infinite intensity of the psyche [archetypal world] in us unto perceptible frequencies” (p. 97).
Einstein (1920) suggested that his model—which dislodged vitalism—did not dismiss ether, the bearer of the vitalist fifth element (named the “Ka” by ancient Egyptians, “Chi” by the Chinese, or the ‘soul’ by Christians). His model, in fact, implied that the apparently void space between atoms has physical properties. He argued, “The special theory of relativity does not compel us to deny ether” (p. 9). He also noted that “Newton’s mechanics was shaken by the experiments with b-rays and rapid cathode rays” (p. 7).

Logician, mathematician, and philosopher Kurt Gödel (1931), who received the Albert Einstein Award in 1951, demonstrated that any strict axiomatic system of arithmetic would inevitably leave some arithmetical truths unprovable, thus incomplete. Formal axiomatic reasoning cannot render the whole reality or the essence of a complete knowledge (what we incorrectly liken to science). This observation figures prominently in the theoretical argument from biologist Robert Rosen. A computing model cannot completely describe complex living systems (Rosen, 1991). Hence we need a broader model to better understand life and psyche without the need to dismiss the model used for measurable matter.

We must admit that although incomplete, the analytical point of view allowed prodigious advancements in technology and improved the living conditions for many. After rapid material expansion, alas, ignoring the profound psychological reality of humans generates an explosion of problems, from the degradation of the environment to the proliferation of mental illnesses. In any given year, close to 18.8 million Americans aged 18 and older will suffer from a depressive disorder (roughly 10%). Of this number, half suffer from a major depressive disorder. Twice as many women than men will suffer from it (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 1998). Depressive disorders are also appearing earlier in life. The average age of onset of this illness was 29 years old in 1996. Recent statistics rates it at just 14.5 years (Klerman, Weissman, 1998; NIMH, 2011). One on five adult suffers from an affective disorder (Regier, D.A.; Narrow, W.E.; Rae D.S.; et al., 1993). Worldwide, major depressive disorders rose by 37% between 1990 and 2010 (Murray et al., 2012).

The analytic tool can only grasp and accept as reality what has space and time coordinates. Within this limit, the individual lives in a sealed box of matter; he is a mere object at the mercy of other objects. As Heisenberg (1974) observed, “Where no guiding ideals are left to point the way, the scale of values disappears and with it the meaning of our deeds and sufferings, and at the end can lie only negation and despair. Religion is, therefore, the foundation of ethics, and ethics the presupposition of life” (p. 219). Together, psychology and pansystemology have the power to shine a light on religion.

Science dismisses psyche as it seems vaguely connected and limited to emotions and thus contrary to the logical and analytical, hence scientific, method. New brain research confirms, however, that cognition is bathed and unconsciously influenced by emotionality (Damasio, 1995). Pure objectivity is impossible. Jung (1963) says that we perceive “the intellect as a faculty which can think and stand outside of oneself. Thanks to this, we pretend to create a kind of objective Archimedes point outside of the earth, from which the intellect has somehow the capability to be by itself” (p. 31).[My translation from French]

Students and the general public often ignore that the scientific point of view of reality is in part theoretical and always a work-in-progress. We are led to believe that only what is accepted by mainstream science is real.

Von Bertalanffy, as well as Jung, rejected the trend of behaviorists to see in human actions the single expression of drives and motivation of an animal nature. Of course, we may limit people through abuse, education, and consumerism in such a way that they fall victim to their instincts and are hindered in their normal psychological evolution or from realizing their full potential. It is a two-way street.

For Von Bertalanffy, as for Jung and many others, human nature has traits which we cannot find in laboratory rats. He referred to the behaviorists’ tendency as “zoomorphism.” He saw Freudian psychoanalysis under the same light. Humans are driven by symbols he advanced. The world of publicity seems to attest to this. Developmental psychologist Charlotte Bühler, who knew von Bertalanffy, as well as the works of C. G. Jung, had similar views on the importance of the symbolic world for humans. Both she and Jung, among others, developed stage theory: physical and psychological growth in humans follow a predictable sequence of phases. Pansystemology develops neuroscientist Paul D. MacLean’s (1998) evolutionary triune brain into a pentane brain (five evolutionary phases) with the aid of LIFE inspired by the Taoist model.

One of the differences between Jung and Freud lies here. Their beliefs in how best to free people of their
psychological shackles were irreconcilable. Jung saw that symbolism was essential to individuation, while Freud wanted nothing to do with that concept. To Freud, everything human sprouts uniquely from the libido. Jung (1931) strongly disagreed. Freud thought there was a need to concentrate on, to bring awareness to, and express this aspect, while Jung thought the patient ought to be in touch with symbolism and identity.

Through regulation and inhibition, the LIFE model indicates that with Freud’s theories people are forever imprisoned in the world of the analytical and the R-complex (reptilian brain) aspects with little possibility of breaking their chains. With Jung, a window opens, and there is an opportunity to discern the reality and universality of the Self which can then bring coherence to the whole personality. The frog can become a prince. Brain research confirms this through the fact that of the two regulators of the human brain, one acts without our awareness and is associated with the medial prefrontal cortex and the symbolic world, while the other is conscious and related to the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. The unconscious regulator is the first primordial censor (Bechara et al., 1997, 2000a) and allows decision-making (Bechara et al., 2000), choice of action, and independence of associations owed to reinforced anterior stimulus (Rolls et al., 1994; Rolls, 1996, 2004).

It is similar to a computer instantly applying patterns echoed from the unconscious. It is hypothesized to mediate a phenomenological “feeling of rightness,” dubbed FOR, which allows an immediate appreciation of the appropriateness and accuracy of information, of a response, or of an action (Gilboa & Moscovitch, 2002; Moscovitch & Winocur, 2002). It precedes the conscious, elaborate cognitive verification of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the second regulator. In a first step, it is impermeable to influences from it triggered by familiarity (Page, 2013, 2014). Through the first regulator, we have the ability to help or hinder nature in its quest for expressing the perfect primeval model. Humans have the unique ability to access this world of information through symbols and dreams. Jung would say that in it lies the collective unconscious and archetypal world.

If we follow our hypothesis and experience, dreams might express a diagnosis of the state of the general or particular LIFE. When I experience a “songe”—a word in French which alludes to a dream with a message able to guide me in the present or to hint at the future should I continue along the same path I’m pursuing—I receive information regarding the condition on how well I realize the blueprint. As a confirmation of this hypothesis, structures of the brain active during sleep predominantly include the medial prefrontal cortex (Kryger, 2011) associated with the more holistic unconscious first regulator. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, associated with the second regulator, is silenced during sleep (Muzur, Pace-Schott, & Hobson, 2002).

“By touching the world of archetypes, symbols, and identity, Jung also opened the door to psychosynthesis”

By touching the world of archetypes, symbols, and identity, Jung also opened the door to psychosynthesis. Its founder, Roberto Assagioli was part of the Zurich Freud Society, the group of early psychoanalytical pioneers. The central emphasis of his approach was on the organism’s striving for wholeness, on the human potential for growth and expansion of consciousness. By claiming that psychosynthesis is the result of a healthy integration, Freud indirectly inferred that psychosynthesis should be the goal of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1919). The skeleton of this implicate model lays in all the great traditions, the most accessible to us being the Chinese model of five elements and the similar Indian Ayurveda model. Medical experience and observation confirmed both over a span of at least 2,000 years. Regarding the Tao, Jung had this to say:

You are aware, of course, that Taoism formulates psychological principles which are of a very universal nature. As a matter of fact, they are so all-embracing that they are, as far as they go, applicable to any part of humanity. (in Ellenberger, 1975, pp. 559-560)

I witnessed the application in medicine (in biomedical cybernetics) of this model drawn from Taoism from 1989 to 2014 via approximately 10,000 patients. I saw how it could help individuals regain balance physically. I believe it would do the same psychologically. My last three books discuss these hypothesis, findings, and the first developments of this approach into psychology: pansystemology. This model is the language Pauli and Jung were seeking. Science, which is interested chiefly in the world of the second brain regulator and which is a tool to comprehend the “what” and the “how,” cannot encompass psyche, which is a subject: a “who” interested in “why.” This function belongs to psychology and to the first brain regulator.

If depth psychology were to study this model and develop it further, I believe that Jung’s dream of bridging the world of symbolism and psyche with the physical world into a holistic—thus-coherent reality would be fully realized. Then the path toward freedom from an incoherent and dualistic vision of mind/matter would be cleared. From hygiene, which drove us away from constant physical scourgis, we could embrace emotional hygiene. We would be much closer to “know thyself” and, in my opinion, of becoming what Jung named Homo Tonus: A Complete Human.

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Pansystemology and Depth Psychology

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Nicole de Bavelaere

Blue
by Alinda Lord

blue.
depth. deep.
midnight.
as i reach to touch,
the velvet sky percolates
between my fingers
and slides over skin like the stain of ink.

oh, slowly.
it is too much
to behold all at once.
i breath it,
this midnight
this deep
blue.

and feel it permeate
penetrate
vital

making its home inside me.

explicit incomparable blueness.
as it pulses its existence
i absorb its vibrancy with senses
straining with wonder.
i am part of this sky.
it has touched my center
and stopped time.
i am midnight velvet
inked blue.
depth sky.

and all the while
in this expanse of deep-hued rhythms,
overhead, and
just about there,
hangs simply
a brilliant
blue-tinged
moon.
i know. i know
it is
the thumbprint
of an unknown god.

Nicole de Bavelaere (author Ariane Page) is a member of the ISSS (international society for systems science) and of BPS (British Psychological Society). As she pursues her Master in Psychology, she seeks to develop a new field, pansystemology, which integrates results from brain studies into a systemic approach of Jungian psychology.
On Romanticism in Jung’s Psychology: 
A Reflection on The Passion of the Western Mind by Richard Tarnas

By Ronald L. Boyer

This essay began as a paper for a doctoral course taught by systematic theologian and philosopher, Fr. Edward Krasevac, a priest and professor at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California. The method consisted of close reading and textual analysis, class dialogue, and reflexivity on the history of Western thought described in The Passion of the Western Mind, by Richard Tarnas. In this brief reflective paper, I address the following questions posed by Krasevac (2015): “Has the book helped you understand the lineage of your own mindset? In what ways?”

As a Jungian scholar, with a graduate degree in depth psychology, my primary perspective and interpretive approach is informed by the theories and methodologies of Carl Gustav Jung and the emerging analytical-scholarly literature created by Jungian and neo-Jungian analysts, as well as scholars in other disciplines significantly influenced by Jung’s writings. These latter scholars include, for example, Joseph Campbell (comparative mythology/literary mythology), Mircea Eliade (history of religion), and Northrop Frye (myth-criticism or archetypal literary theory), among others.

The question of understanding the “lineage of my mindset” as a Jungian struck a deep chord, addressing as it does a broader criticism aimed at Jungian scholarship as a whole: a perceived lack of intellectual rigor on the part of Jungians, at least from the perspective of the mainstream Academy in North America. As students of Jung, presumably hoping to be taken seriously by the Academy (where Jung’s theories are still viewed on the margins of respectability), we might begin by better understanding the role of Jung’s depth psychology within the philosophical lineage of Western thought.

Findings and Discussion

In The Passion of the Western Mind, Richard Tarnas addressed this perceived deficiency in Jungian scholarship by situating the contributions of depth psychology within the intellectual and philosophical heritage of the Western world-view. Despite Jung’s status as a highly original thinker, his ideas hardly occur in a vacuum, embedded as they are within a historical context and influenced as he was by previous thinkers from Plato to Kant and Nietzsche.

"As students of Jung, presumably hoping to be taken seriously by the Academy, we might begin by better understanding the role of Jung’s depth psychology within the philosophical lineage of Western thought"

Within the broader Jungian community, as I’ve observed, this inattention to Jung’s intellectual heritage and influences results in the perceived lack of a solid philosophical basis and context for Jung’s analytical theories and methods. On a very specific level—not possible in Tarnas’ sweeping overview of more than two millennia of Western thought—a philosophical basis for Jung’s archetypal theories might be found, one example being in the “philosophy of symbolic forms” authored by neo-Kantian German Idealist, Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer’s important theories first appeared in English in his now classic work, Language and Myth (1946/1953), which explored philosophically the human capacity for metaphor and symbolic thought and the evolution of myth and language as two stems sprouting from the same historical root. As philosopher and translator Susanne K. Langer said of Cassirer, his theory of knowledge “became a theory of mental activity, which gave as minute and scholarly attention to the forms of feeling and imagination as to the categories of sense perception and logic” (Langer, vii, in Cassirer, 1946/1953).

While Tarnas (1991) only briefly referred to Cassirer’s work in his “chronology” of key Western philosophical milestones, Cassirer’s emphasis on feeling and imagination, as we shall see, makes him, along with Jung, an heir to Romanticism in Western thought. Tarnas’ summary of the most influential philosophers and ideas of Western thought thus provides an insightful historical and conceptual frame for understanding the evolving legacy of depth psychology placed within the history of Western ideas and long-standing debates about the nature of reality and truth.

Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Two Streams of Thought and Culture

Tarnas (1991) placed depth psychology—especially Jungian psychology—in the historical tradition of Romanticism, and, ironically, the reaction of Romanticism against the “positivist side of Kant” (p. 371), a thinker deeply admired by Jung. As Tarnas indicated, two streams of culture emerged from the Renaissance, “two temperaments or general approaches to human existence characteristic of the Western mind” (p. 366). One stream of thought emerged in the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, and “stressed rationality, empirical science, and a skeptical secularism.” The other stream, its polar complement, expressed those aspects of human experience suppressed by the Enlightenment’s spirit of rationalism. This Romantic temperament found expression in the works of Rousseau, Goethe, Schiller, and German Romanticism, and fully emerged during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Today, the influence of Romanticism remains a potent force in Western ideation and culture, a vital tradition that includes Blake and Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron, Keats and Holderlin, and Emerson and Whitman.
among others, including their successors among our contemporaries.

**Competing forms of humanism.** In spite of notable similarities in the ideas of both traditions, including the privileging of *humanism*, several major distinctions are worth noting. The Romantics, according to Tarnas (1991), “perceived the world as a unitary organism rather than an atomistic machine, exalted the ineffability of inspiration rather than the enlightenment of reason, and affirmed the inexhaustible drama of human life rather than the calm predictability of static abstractions” (p. 367). As Tarnas asserted, the character and aims of the autonomous human self are distinctly different in the two temperaments, an idea discussed at length by Theodore Roszak (1973) in *Where the Wasteland Ends*. The Enlightenment’s intellectual heroes are Newton, Franklin, and Einstein; the Romantic heroes are Goethe, Beethoven, and Nietzsche. Briefly stated, “Bacon’s utopia,” said Tarnas, “was not Blake’s.”

This distinction is evident, for example, in their differing conceptions of nature. “Rather than the distilled object of sober analysis,” Tarnas (1991) observed, “nature for the Romantics was that which the human soul strove to enter and unite with in an overcoming of the existential dichotomy, and the revelation they sought was not of mechanical law but of spiritual essence” (p. 367). Nature, for Wordsworth and the Romantics, was not the machine-model favored by the emerging scientific paradigm. Wordsworth “saw nature as ensouled with spiritual meaning and beauty.” Schiller, for another example, “considered the impersonal mechanism of science a poor substitute for the Greek deities who had animated nature for the ancients.”

**Romanticism and the turn to interiority.** Another important distinction between the Enlightenment and Romantic sensibilities is evident in their contrasting views of human awareness and the phenomena of consciousness. For Romantics like Blake and Novalis, Melville and Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche and Baudelaire, the interest in consciousness was fueled by a newly intensified sense of self-awareness and a “focus on the complex nature of the human self” in which “emotion and the imagination, rather than reason and perception, were of prime importance.”

> "Another important distinction between the Enlightenment and Romantic sensibilities is evident in their contrasting views of human awareness and the phenomena of consciousness.”

The modern eye was turned inward to discern the shadows of existence. To explore the mysteries of interiority, of moods and motives, love and desire, fear and angst, inner conflicts and contradictions, memories and dreams, to “experience ... incommunicable states of consciousness ... [to] plumb the depths of the human soul, to bring the unconscious into consciousness ... such were the imperatives of Romantic introspection” (Tarnas, 1991, p. 368).

> Here Romanticism laid the poetic, theoretical groundwork for depth psychology: “Imagination and feeling now joined sense and reason to render a deeper understanding of the world” (p. 369).

**Nietzsche’s radical interpretivist perspective.** Additionally, Nietzsche, who exerted a profound influence on both Freud and Jung, introduced a radical skepticism and relativism to the truth-claims of both science and religion. Nietzsche wrote, “Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—‘There are only facts’—I would say: Facts are precisely what there are not, *only interpretations* [emphasis added]” (Nietzsche, as cited in Tarnas, 1991, p. 370). In contrast to the truth-claims of positivism in Locke and Hume, Nietzsche advocated a radical interpretivist perspective, or rather a plurality of interpretive perspectives, more or less equal in their truth-claims, in which no certain fixed point of authority—neither philosophical (as in Plato), religious (the Christian doctrines throughout the Middle Ages), nor scientific (from Copernicus forward)—provided an incontestable authority from which the truth might be validated. In doing so, Nietzsche became arguably the most influential *deconstructionist* philosopher of modernity (since Kant), and the first truly *post-modern* philosopher.

In Nietzsche, Tarnas (1991) observed, the philosopher became a poet. Nietzsche raised philosophy to the level of art, a heritage carried forward by the existentialist thinker and novelist Albert Camus (1951/1991) in his important philosophical work, *The Rebel*, including his essays on Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, there was no basis for assertion of absolute “Truth.” “Truth,” Tarnas (1991) observed, speaking of Nietzsche, “was not something one proved or disproved; it was something one *created*” (p. 371). This conception of the world, for Nietzsche and Romanticism in general, was not discoverable in abstract reason or validation of *facts*, but as an “expression of ... beauty and imaginative power.” In short, Romanticism advanced a new *epistemology*, beyond the limits established by Hume, Locke, and the positivist side of Kant, defining new “standards and values for human knowledge.”

**The Double-Truth Epistemology of Science and the Humanities**

Out of this distinction between Enlightenment rationalism and the compensatory Romantic poetics of the
imagination arose a double-truth epistemological approach, Tarnas (1991) observed, expressed in the division between science and the humanities. In this approach, there is scientific truth on the one hand, based on empiricism and measurement, and artistic truth on the other, not provable using the scientific quantified methods of research, but accessible through qualitative methods of learning. Scientific truth emerged as distinct from that of the arts and humanities, including religion. In this view, a novel conception of God emerged, not the God of Christian literalism and dogma nor that of Deism, but a God of mysticism, a “numinous creative force within nature” (p. 373). And art (e.g., music, literature, painting) took on an almost religious quality for the Romantics, the pursuit of beauty for its own sake in a soulless, mechanical world. With this emerged a new importance of the novel, of creative quest and imaginative discipline, in the works of authors from Stendhal to Hermann Hesse. Through such literature, the broad phenomenology of human experience entered the philosophies of Bergson, Husserl, and Heidegger. “Reality,” asserted Tarnas, again alluding to Nietzsche, “was not to be copied, but to be invented” (p. 374).

Because of the incompatibility of the rationalistic and Romantic temperaments, a complex bifurcation emerged. Allied against the sterility of science, “romantic poets, religious mystics, idealist philosophers, and countercultural psychedelicists” claimed the existence of realities beyond the material and argued for “an ontology of human consciousness” (Tarnas, 1991, p. 375). Romanticism, said Tarnas, continued to inform the inner culture in the arts and literature, as well as religious and metaphysical vision, while science dictated the outer reality of cosmology:

The faith-reason division of the medieval era and the religion-science division of the early modern era had become one of subject-object, inner-outer, man-world, humanities-science. A new form of double truth universe was now established. (p. 376)

On Romanticism in Jung’s Psychology

Depth Psychology’s Promise of a New Synthesis

According to Tarnas (1991), thinkers like Goethe and Hegel attempted a new synthesis; so did Carl G. Jung. As the modern era moved into later stages, “Romanticism would reengage the modern mind from another field altogether... a new focus on the psyche” as a source of meaning and identity in a world devoid of stable values. The Romantically-influenced science discovered its most enduring, seminal influence in the “depth psychology of Freud and Jung, both deeply influenced by the stream of German Romanticism that flowed from Goethe through Nietzsche” (p. 384). Freud continued the Copernican revolution that removed humanity from the center of the cosmos, as well as the revolutionary thought of Darwin, who relegated human nature to the level of nature (i.e., as a biological animal), observations first posited by philosopher Jacob Needleman (1965/1976) in A Sense of the Cosmos. With Freud, humans were no longer masters even in their own house, particularly given the influence of unconscious, irrational factors in human thought and behavior.

Freud and Jung were both medical psychologists, social scientists laboring to establish psychoanalysis as a legitimate science, but returning to mythology—not understood as an objective scientific picture of the external cosmos or world, but rather as phenomena representative of the otherwise inaccessible unconscious structures of the human psyche. If Freud was more the Enlightenment scientist, the inheritance of Romanticism became more explicit in Jung’s psychology, particularly Jung’s discovery of the collective unconscious and his theory of psychological archetypes that goes back to Plato, dressed now in new human-centric forms. Jung’s archetypes, that is, widely recurring symbolic forms, returned in a sense to the formalism of Plato’s archetypes, but on another level entirely, as expressions of the shadowy side of the human psyche. Jung’s discoveries:

radically extended psychology’s range of interest and insight. Religious experience, artistic creativity, esoteric systems, and the mythological imagination were now analyzed in nonreductive terms strongly reminiscent of the Neoplatonic Renaissance and Romanticism....Freud and Jung’s depth psychology thus offered a fruitful middle ground between science and the humanities... sensitive to the many dimensions of human experience... yet striving for empirical rigor. (p. 384)

This, in broad strokes, summarizes the Jungian mindset—a primary theoretical and practical lens for my work—rooted in the emergence of Romanticism as a necessary counter to the sterility of scientific rationalism and the increasingly meaningless world emerging out of the Enlightenment. In short, as Tarnas (1991) concluded, “The modern psyche appeared to require the services of depth psychology with increasing urgency” to address the widespread alienation and related social and cultural phenomena characteristic of an increasingly secular and scientific age. In the form of Jung’s depth psychology, “a new faith for modern man, a path for the healing of the soul bringing regeneration and rebirth” (p. 387) arose.

Furthermore, according to Jung, this path leads potentially to a condition of psychic wholeness or individuation by way of a transformative psychological process mirrored in the recurrent mythopoetic imagery of dreams, religion, and art. However suspect Jung’s psychology may be within the mainstream scientific Academy, given the dominance of behaviorism, pockets of receptivity are clearly emerging, as Susan Rowland (2010) indicated, for a Jungian hermeneutic within the arts and humanities.
Conclusion

In Jung’s humanism—his conceptions of an ensouled nature and of God as an image of Self, his focus on interiority and the unconscious, his valuing of feeling, creativity, and imagination, etc.—Jung proved himself a modern heir to Romanticism. In his independence from and deconstruction of the inherited truth-claims and dogmatic authorities of formal philosophy, organized religion, and scientific rationalism, Jung positioned his theories and methods as an important perspective in the ongoing post-modern dialogue, the salient characteristics of which will be discussed in Part II of this reflection on The Passion of the Western Mind.

References


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The Goddess and the Moonflowers

Heidi in Ruins

Art
by Sydney Solis

The Goddess and the Moonflowers
When I ask you, Wind, what you are trying to tell me, a single bird twitters in the cypress blacker than the mountain’s silhouette, stones rolling in the nearby surf clash like knucklebones of long-dead sailors, dogs barking from inside the shadows grate the skin of night, and the Dipper widens and tilts to pour more darkness over the sleeping earth.
The Art of Facing Darkness: A Metal Musician’s Quest for Wholeness

By Colin E. Davis

“We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.” —C. G. Jung

I’ve always been a bit squeamish and never attracted to grotesqueness, but at the same time, I’ve had a certain propensity for looking at the dark side of human nature. This began in my early teenage years when I was naturally attracted to the darker music in my mother’s record collection. I found something eerily mysterious about the lyrics and minor tonalities of songs like “The End” by The Doors, or “Paint it Black” from The Rolling Stones. At first this attraction was unquestioned, but over time I began to ask myself why I was interested in this particular type of artistic expression. This question persisted and was the partial impetus behind a journey into psychic darkness that would unfold slowly over the next 30 years.

My attraction to dark music continued as I took up a musical career, following in the footsteps of my mother’s father who was a New Orleans jazz clarinetist. Like him, I assembled bands and toured the world out of a love for musical performance—the main difference being the style of music I chose, which was extreme death metal. This form of artistic expression was conspicuously unquestioned by my parents, but probably questioned by others around me. I now understand this aspect of my life to be the beginning of a life long journey into the shadow side of human nature, including my own darkness. This investigation would ultimately result in the healing of psychological wounds that this art form was first helping me to express.

I was initiated into metal music as a young adolescent by neighborhood friends. It began with classic British heavy metal bands such as Black Sabbath and Judas Priest. Over time, as I became more involved in music as a guitar player, I acquired tastes for even darker and heavier bands like Metallica and Slayer, and from there, even more extreme bands. By the time I was 25, I was listening to bands called Morbid Angel, Pestilence, and Death. My own band at the time was called Entropy, which spawned the band Vile that received much of my attention over the next decade. During this time, I worked as an audio engineer producing and engineering records for other bands that played the same style.

The lyrics and art that were a part of extreme metal were often intolerable to me. They graphically poetized the most horrific aspects of human nature: war and psychopathic violence, sexual abuse, and even cannibalism are common subject matters in the genre. The first time I heard the band Death, I had a dream where I witnessed an ethereal landscape of bloody human innards! I had no rational attraction to the subject matter that this form of music dealt with, but I was very attracted to the tonality and rhythm of the genre. I was creatively challenged by the technical requirements, and as I came to learn, I was emotionally resonating with the sounds of this music.

About 15 years ago, my focus on musicianship began to wane, and a new focus towards inner development picked up. As I became more comfortable with psychological principles, I began to understand more about what this music had been doing for me. As I now understand it, extreme metal music effectively channels masculine psychic energies, especially those with a shadow tint. We might see participation in this form of music as psychic displacement, or even transmutation. Through this music, the musicians and listeners are penetrating and releasing destructive shadow energies before they can reach a level of psychic toxicity.

Equally interesting is the nature and behavior of the fans of metal music in general. In the genre of extreme metal, which encompasses death metal, black metal, and other sub-genres, the great majority of fans are young men. They are often tattooed and frequently wear all black clothing that displays the dark and gory images of their
The Art of Facing Darkness

favorite bands’ album artwork. Women do participate, but in small number.

A regular feature of the concerts is a spontaneous audience-generated ritual called the mosh pit. The mosh pit is an evolution of a prior form known as slam dancing in punk rock circles. It is essentially a tribal dance where the audience members aggressively but respectfully push each other around in a circular formation, synchronized in tempo to the live music. Fans who are bruised in the pit usually see their injuries as a badge of honor.

In the Mircea Eliade’s (1958) book, Rites and Symbols of initiation, he describes the characteristics of indigenous initiation rituals. I have noticed that the extreme metal concert is closely aligned. Participants put themselves into symbolic contact with the archetypal material of death, engage in a ritual dance, tattoo and pierce themselves, wear sacred clothing within a dark sacred space, and honor the gods or dark forces of nature through the on-stage musical shamans.

Interestingly, metal music fans are usually quite kind and often artistically inclined. A great percentage of them are musicians themselves. Underneath the grotesque T-shirts, tattoos, and body piercings are quite normal human beings. They are known to be respectful to others and physical fighting at most types of metal concerts is rare. Each sub-genre of metal has its own artistic and emotional appeal, channeling different energies. Death metal tends to focus on extremely base subjects and is essentially a gory horror movie in musical form. Black metal is very often anti-religious and can feature satanic lyrics. Punk rock, another form of discordant rock and roll serves its audience similarly, but usually focuses on social rebellion.

Bernhard Guenther, a German-born musician who, like myself, focuses part of his studies on understanding human darkness expressed in an interview: “I was very much into heavy music because it helped me to release all the anger, teenage angst and the stuff I was dealing with. Heavy music was never anything negative or bad, it was a healing practice for me to hit the drums as hard as I could. I didn’t realize until later on that this was not so much about making it as a musician, but was about exploring myself and healing myself though music and drumming,” (Guenther, 2015).

Another musician, a very famous one named James Hetfield of the band Metallica, recently stated in an interview:

The thing that bugs me a lot is when people say ‘Now that you’re sober or matured and now that you’ve worked out all your demons, your music is gonna be all soft and flowery.’ I’ll tell you though, if I could have exorcized all those demons I would have. But it’s something you embrace. It’s a part of me and I get to celebrate it in my music. I get to communicate it. I get to use it as a therapy to help my own insanity, and other people do too. So, when you get those like-minded people together in a place and play live, music does something to people. I get to watch people in front of me transform. (Hetfield, 2017)

Metal music forms a passively rebellious lifestyle that bonds the fans and musicians together in honor of personal and archetypal darkness

Like these musicians, I also came to figure out how music and live concerts are therapy for displacing psychic energy. Metal and extreme metal music fans appear to serve the greater culture uniquely. Within the greater musical community, they are a micro-culture that has organically developed a method for dealing with the effects of trauma and culturally repressed shadow material. Metal fans in general, and especially extreme metal fans, are highly put off by traditional religious and cultural values and are often suffering from the abuses of punitive upbringing or generally difficult childhoods. My own conversations with metal fans over the course of 25 years has proven this out for me.

Surely, there are many rebellious outlets for young men suffering from the trauma of their early childhoods, but the metal music community is one that deals with the situation through artistic expression, and does so in a way that channels exceedingly dark shadow contents. Metal music fans see themselves as cultural outsiders and they take refuge in their micro culture that accepts everyone equally. Metal music forms a passively rebellious lifestyle that bonds the fans and musicians together in honor of personal and archetypal darkness.

The fact that metal and extreme metal are cultural refuges for outsiders has always been clear to me, but what has been much more intriguing is the connection between the particular motifs of this music and that of the shadow of the human psyche—especially the male psyche. The work of the late Jungian psychologist, Robert L. Moore, and his polar modeling of the four major male archetypes of King, Warrior, Magician and Lover helped me understand this connection more clearly (Moore & Gillette, 1990).

In Moore’s model, the Warrior, when imbalanced in the psyche, may develop an active shadow Sadist, or a passive shadow Masochist. The King archetype manifests imbalance similarly, as an active Tyrant or a passive Weakling. These particular shadow patterns happen to inspire a great percentage of the lyrics and artwork associated with extreme metal music. Other shadow manifestations are also represented in this form of art, but appear to be combined with King or Warrior shadow representations. In general, metal music across the board is a form of art that specifically addresses the psychic sources of personal and archetypal evil.

For me, playing and listening to this music mitigated my own destructive energies, but it did not integrate them enough. Extreme metal music culture is indeed a ritual method for shadow work, as it brings the most denied aspects of our nature into the light through art, but I found that it’s not a substitute for shadow work in the context of what C. G. Jung called “individuation.” Jung’s individuation process, which mirrors western esoteric alchemy, puts emphasis on shadow work and the need to integrate the most repulsive human thoughts, feelings and impulses.

After 25 years of metal culture participation, I eventually had to take the next step and traverse human darkness through deep inner work. My own
Art was once displacing for me. I have music metal darkness that the psychological processes—especially shadow work, and to the mapping of the shadow through an archetypal and systems-based approach. Through personal shadow work, especially the processing of old emotional wounds, I have transmuted a great amount of the psychic darkness that the metal music was once only displacing for me. I have no illusions of this work being complete, but the process so far has been documented in a book I authored with my partner, Melissa Mari, titled Shadow Tech (2015).

I believe that alchemy is founded in the archetypal formula for evolution in all life and is present in the development of every living system. All life emerges from darkness, the so-called prima materia, whether that be seen as the cosmos, the sea, the womb, the soil, or our own psychological shadows that must be reordered into new life. Fear of the dark is instinctual, but as Jung pointed out so many times, our genius or highest purpose is always at least partially hidden within our deepest inner darkness, waiting to be excavated and brought into the light for the benefit of ourselves and the entire world.

References

Colin E. Davis is a musician, artist and considers himself a spiritual alchemist. He is the author of Shadow Tech—Cracking the Codes of Personal and Collective Darkness. Along with his partner Melissa Mari, he shares his insights about inner development through music, articles, books and lectures. He resides in California in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Art by Laura Smith

Alchemy Series: Armless Maiden, Return of the Divine Feminine, Alchemy I
Mixed Media: Wood, Oil, Gold Leaf, Oyster Shell, Excavated Frozen German Bisque Doll, Brass Wire

Laura Smith is a dream seeker, offering one-on-one dream consultation to individuals in the US and abroad. She lives in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont with her partner of 19 years raising heritage breed livestock on their 78 acre farm. When she's not wrangling sheep, you can find her painting or writing in her studio, connecting to the healing energy of the earth, or engaged in laughter and general mayhem with her friends and family on various parts of the globe. She regularly blogs about her journey through dreams on the dream blog In Search of Puella and her art work has been has been featured in several publications and ezines including DeLuge Magazine (2011, 2012, 2015 re-launch), Collective Magazine (2014), Still Point Arts Quarterly (2014), ARAS, The Poetry Portal (2014), The Light Ekphrastic (2015) and The Global Question (2016). Find out more about Archetypal Dreamwork with Laura Smith on her website www.archetypaldreamworks.com.
Maree Brogden is a registered Arts Psychotherapist (AThR) and Artist, who has various practice interests, which integrate the depth psychologies, (http://www.depthpsychologyalliance.com/profile/MareeBrogden).

The imagery of the poem, “Fragments & Reflection”, is inspired by an oil pastel drawing (23.4 x 33.1 in, 594 x 841 mm) that was originally rendered by Maree as a part of the work completed for a dissertation of primary research, submitted for her Master of Arts degree in 2006.

In this work, a photograph of the image is transformed into a digital graphic, which is manipulated in response to the subject of a paper written by Maree for presentation at a mental health conference in 2016. The central meaning of the image, of Psyche, is the dual-mind, symbolic of the relationships of self and other, a private and an external life.

Fragments & Reflection
by Maree Brogden

human body dualist
the archetypal form is two
symbolic
authenticity of archaic origins
nucleic
life is the central story
the imagery primitive
it draws light
of modernity lives
the shadowed spirit
is the heart
the source
I rely upon
to stand my ground

it is sometimes
only when I dance in two minds
A Child’s Edenic Dream:  
“Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” in  
The Nutcracker Ballet  
By Mary Ann Bencivengo

This essay offers a mythopoetic, Jungian analysis of the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” from The Nutcracker, a popular ballet by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. First performed in December 1892 in St. Petersburg in Russia, it has since become a beloved Christmas tradition around the world. In the ballet’s Act Two of “Land of the Sweets,” the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” is the embodiment of this ballet’s enchantment.

The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy is one in a series of dances in a dream sequence of Clara, a young girl who is the protagonist in the narrative where each dance represents a holiday treat (coffee, tea, candies, flowers, gifts). The dream takes place within the larger frame of Clara’s waking world experience, making this an envelope story, enveloping the dream as something to hold dear as a teddy bear (or the Nutcracker), or one’s hopes and wishes for the sweet things in life.

While in the ballet the “Nutcracker Suite” dance sequence seems to represent Clara’s tender coming of age and awakening to romance, and while the setting is a lovely Christmas Eve party at the house of her family with plenty of happy guests enjoying laughter, gifts, and sweets, there are also darker themes within this fairy tale ballet: Even for a child in a family with plenty to celebrate that seems to want for nothing, life is not always so sweet. What we see in the ballet is the lighter version of the tale, but what perhaps few in the audience are aware of is that this tale was not always as sugar-coated as the sugar plums.

In its original form, before Tchaikovsky composed ballet music for it, it was a story by E.T.A. Hoffman (1918) entitled The Nutcracker and The Mouse King, a more nightmarish tale. In the original telling Clara experiences an unhappier loss of innocence and sense of sad disconnection from her family, and longs for her place under the sun. She feels her brother who is recklessly violent—who also breaks her toys—is favored by her parents; she feels her parents keep her waiting on a shelf like one of her dolls she is forced to keep up on the shelves. She is growing up, and would like to break free of her home life with her monstrous brother (who in her nightmare seems the Evil Mouse King) and her parents who seem to care little for her feelings. She longs for an Eden, a more paradisiac place on earth to live her life in tune with her desires.

Details to the themes of the story summarized here will unfold in the sections of this paper, described as follows: 1) a young girl’s Edenic longing in the The Nutcracker as highlighted in its “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” 2) analysis of archetypal mythic symbols in the dance; and 3) tales of my daughter’s, granddaughter’s, and my own personal myths (mythopoetic lived experience), as attuned to “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy.”

What we see in the ballet is the lighter version of the tale, but what perhaps few in the audience are aware of is that this tale was not always as sugar-coated as the sugar plums

Edenic Longing

Depth psychologist and mythologist/folklorist Dr. Jonathon Young (2016) described the term “Edenic longing” as an elusive “yearning” for something “just beyond our reach, always to be yearned for, but never quite arrived at,” what “drives our wandering,” and our “mythologizing of life” (Personal Communication, 2016). In German, the word sehnsucht expresses a type of “ardent loving,” “a compelling feeling,” (J. Young, Personal Communication, 2016) not easily translated. This indistinguishable “nostalgia for something” may be of an origin we may not be able to trace or understand, but may be “sometimes imagined as a far-off country—not exactly an earthly landscape we may find—but feels like home” (J. Young, Personal Communication, 2016). Mircea Eliade (1991/1952) called this longing for home “the nostalgia for Paradise” when he wrote:

By this we mean the desire to find oneself always and without effort in the Centre of the World, at the heart of reality; and by a short cut and in a natural manner to transcend the human condition, and to recover the divine condition—as a Christian would say, the condition before the Fall. (p. 55)

Eliade mentioned reality; it is useful to keep in mind that we are viewing a dream and while some do not regard dream material as reality, in a depth psychological frame, we can and do regard dreams as a reality in the psyche’s unconscious or inner reality. When a dream enters our consciousness (such as remembering one), it is perhaps near what C.S. Lewis described of his own experience of longing as “a memory of a memory” (J. Young, Personal Communication, 2016). When Clara journeys in her dream to the Land of the Sweets, she is called to her hero’s adventure to an otherworldly place, where her imagination posits her in what Young has described in regards to Edenic longing as a “life just beyond this one” (Personal Communication 2016).

Sometimes the life just beyond our reach is one of old world charm; perhaps many of us miss our belief in magic. As Marie-Louise von Franz (1995) wrote,
“Magic is full of antique tradition and practices...of the...pagan past” (p. 66). We have our fantasy genre for that—many adults never outgrow their love of Disney. The acclaimed “greatest voice” of the twentieth century, W. B. Yeats (Yeats, 2002, n. p.), saddened by times of change, wrote many a poem to re-invoke Ireland’s pagan fairies and Druids. To quote a book title by Jung, Yeats was a Modern Man in Search of a Soul for the people of his time. Tchaikovsky, in his day, thought he had found it (soul) when he discovered an instrument called the celesta which he felt compelled to use to obtain an ethereal music box tone, which is “a keyboard instrument with a bell like sound,” which at the time was newly invented and mostly unheard (Resnikova, 2016, n. p.).

This paper involves some intertwined theories in the arts and humanities regarding embodied states of innocence and experience in the life of a child who readily plumbs the depths of the unconscious as expressed by William Blake, later discussed by poet and Jungian-based writer Robert Bly (1972) in Bly’s book entitled Leaping Poetry (pp. 1-6). Blake believed that in order to be creative we “must become like little children” (Bly, 1972, p. 2), meaning that for adults the world becomes stale whereas children see it anew, with wonder. This correlates to a main premise of Hoffman, who “was rebelling against...The Enlightenment and its emphasis on Rational Philosophy” (NPR Staff, 2012, n. p.) and “believed in reclaiming nature, reclaiming innocence” (NPR Staff, 2012, n. p.). Hoffman, like Blake, expressed the importance of keeping “in touch with the child within us” (NPR Staff, 2012, n. p.) Bly’s notion of what he calls “leaping poetry” is applicable in the arts in general—here I could call it “leaping dance.” Bly stated that good literature/poetry (art) takes leaps into the unconscious and back again (1972, pp. 1-6), the way a child’s imagination does. Bly’s theory is based upon Jung’s Shadow theory. In this tale a child has little freedom to play, to take leaps into her imagination when she would like. What needs to happen manifests in her dreams.

For What the Young Girl Clara Longs

The scene leading to Clara’s dream is this: Her parents throw a party for friends and family at their house, her uncle brings fantastic toys as always which this year for the children includes a nutcracker, the children “go nuts” over it, her brother breaks it, Clara is miserable over her loss, and no one seems to quite commiserate with her, even while though they say it can be fixed. This disrupts her Christmas bliss. In the ballet’s sweet version, this may seem a simple, common enough scenario in the life of a child in which conflicts and accidents happen with siblings; however, in Hoffman’s version, something with darker roots is going on from which the Sugar Plum Fairy’s magical plums will spring.

A broken toy can be devastating to a child. In this situation, her brother has struck a nerve—a complex in Clara’s psychic shadow—wide open, along with the Nutcracker’s mouth. She is sad for the Nutcracker and enraged at her sibling. Regarding anger and the shadow in fairy tales, von Franz wrote “one endures such a conflict until a solution is found. The creative solution would be something unexpected which decides the conflict on another level” (von Franz, 1995, p. 70). The Sugar Plum Fairy is Clara’s inner need, inner reality, inner solution.

Her transcendent dance balances the poles of opposites of this problematic world with the other world of harmonious accord; it is a problem of how to maintain the impossible Edenic perfection obtained in that unworldly level once she awakes back to her daily consciousness on this level.

Meanwhile, Clara’s devastation is symbolized hideously in Hoffman’s version when he describes the “dreadful cracking sound” and the dislocated, hanging jaw of the Nutcracker (Hoffman, n. d./1918, chapter 3, para. 12). Her uncle says he can easily fix it, but Clara cannot so easily fix her anger or angry face. (As children we often are told not to make a mean, angry facial expression or it will freeze like that.) Her parents do seem to favor her brother’s more violent army-war play. She may also be struggling with her own anger, probably like most little girls being told to “be sweet.”

The Sugar Plum Fairy, however, can champion her, can triumph, can fix anything...even restore her Eden before this Fall, much like the elves repair everything on The Isle of Misfit Toys in Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. (See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr6GbKcIC7Y)

This magic of repair is being done in both these tales by mythical beings of diminutive size to which small children can
relate and feel they have some power or control over their fate, and they strongly identify with their toys.

In the original version, Clara cannot often hold her toys because her parents require (order) her to organize (order) them in a precise manner in a glass encased shelf, better suited for expensive keepsakes. After the party, she does not want to put the Nutcracker away—she wants to hold and comfort him in his painful state “as if he were a small child” (Hoffman, n. d./1918, chapter 3, para. 20). Tired of confinement, she wishes for a life of her own liking, making, choosing. In the original tale, Clara dreams her dolls come to life; one asks if they will die there. (See Appendix I, “The Little Elf” poem, which describes the way a child relates to this.)

In the house, remarking they have been too preserved (Hoffman, n. d./1918, chapter 5, para. 9). Clara’s dolls that come to life are, like the doll in the story of “Vasiliisa the Beautiful” (von Franz, 1995, pp. 192-96), symbolic of a young girl’s inner self, inner knowing, inner strength. Clara’s dolls assembled upon the shelf resemble her own life upon a shelf. The dancing Sugar Plum Fairy expresses the self-actualized individuation of these dolls, liberated from their restrictive existence; since Clara identifies with the dolls and their liberation the fairy is also Clara—Jung wrote, “No part of the hero-myth is single in meaning...and all the figures are interchangeable” (Jung, C. G., 1965 p. 390). Clara thus achieves important steps on her path of individuation once she dances her dream. In passages prior to the aforementioned quote by Eliade, he discusses how home and hearth can be that “Center of the World” (Eliade, 1991, p. 54), but Clara, unable to locate that center at home, in her psychic distress, summons The Sugar Plum Fairy from the deep vault of her very being.

Archetypal Mythic Symbols in “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy”

The Sugar Plum Fairy is like a fairy godmother, dancing a numinous spell of contentment on Clara’s behalf. She dances Clara’s mandala in the dream, balances Clara’s mandala in the dream, and restores the child’s Eden. To view and listen to “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy,” visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz_j98APtg (Bolshoi Ballet, 2010). I will refer to minute frames within the video while discussing the dance and the musical composition by Tchaikovsky.

The sugar plum comfits are as comforts of Eden. It may seem simple that Clara’s bitterness turns to sweetness once free to satisfy her sweet tooth in the Land of the Sweets, for comfits with music comfort the savage beast; however, for Clara, the desire for freedom branches beyond a child’s typical complaint of not being allowed to eat all the candy she desires at the party—that is “just” symbolic of everything else. Consciously recognizing what “everything else” is perhaps is not easy for a child; when the Nutcracker...
the tutu spread out like a blanket of snow. There is a huge Yule tree in the background suggesting a sugar plum tree upon which all sorts of candy might grow. As a crystal of snow she could be the “Diamond Body” (Jung, 1990/1959, p. 358).

In the Land of the Sweets, when the Sugar Plum Fairy enters the dream stage, we are beholding a wondrous, numinous secret of the inner workings of the earth. The music fades in as if from a hidden place (minutes 0:09-0:18) announcing the steps of the arrival of the fairy. These same opening steps (minutes 0:09-0:18) also suggest time-keeping movements (a clock) to tell the special time this is, further accentuated by the staccato technique of both the music and the dance steps.

As she then stands as axis mundi, extending one leg to point with the tip of her toes her rhythmed semi-circular steps around herself, she shows she is positioned at the center of the earth. The circle she makes around herself can signify the circumference of the earth and four directions of the compass, claiming her rulership encompasses the vast kingdom of the land’s (earth’s) elements. She has just demonstrated that she “is surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self” (Jung, 1990/1959, p. 357). Jung was fascinated by the three and the four, the circle and the square, and studied mandalas, a Sanskrit word meaning “circle[s]” (Jung, p. 355), which express the “squaring of a circle” (p. 357). When she twirls in a spiral dance (minutes 2:25-2:45) within the four pillars (directions) of the universe, she expresses “everlasting balance and immutable duration” (p. 358) of time and space—she is the spiral dance of life. We are enraptured with a moment of the infinite. All eyes are fixed on her spinning—the audience is transfixed.

While the Morality plays of the Greeks which induce catharsis, and while something that is released must come from inside, from within; here, we have penetrated the veil, to a mysterious realm revealed seemingly outside ourselves. Jung stated,

The work of the artist meets the psychic needs of the society in which he lives....To grasp its meaning, we must allow it to shape us the way it has shaped him. Then we also understand the nature of his primordial experience. He has plunged into the healing and redeeming depths of the collective psyche where man is not lost in the isolation of consciousness and its errors and suffering, but where all men are caught in a common rhythm which allows the individual to communicate his feelings and strivings to mankind as a whole. (Jung, 1972, pp. 104-05.)

Jung (1972) continued, “This re-immersion in the state of participation mystique is the secret of artistic creation” (p. 105).

“Though the glass globe is gone, The Sugar Plum Fairy dancing to the music yet remains. She was released from her glassed-in existence”

My Personal Myth/Lived Experience with the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy”

As a child, I took ballet lessons and loved The Nutcracker Suite, particularly the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy”, as did my mother, who played classical music records, who had speakers wired through the ceiling to another room/level so music would imbue the whole house.

My bedtime in early childhood was one half hour before “lights out.” I kept a stack of books on my nightstand and loved the poems and pondered the beauteous illustrations in The Big Golden Book of Poetry which I felt was the dreamiest book on earth. I adored Eugene Field’s (1949) “The Sugar Plum Tree” (See Appendix II), a bedtime story poem, illustrated by Gertrude Elliot, quite a peppermint twist on the tree of forbidden fruit in the Biblical Garden of Eden tale. I may never know what the forbidden fruit was, but “The Sugar Plum Tree” grows all kinds of candy “in the garden of Shut-Eye Town” (p. 44).

When my daughter was born, a family friend gifted her a musical snow globe in which The Sugar Plum Fairy danced to the song. I would wind it up to wind up the day to play it for my daughter at bedtime. One evening, lyrics to this music occurred to me as if from a muse, which I sang to her for ages. She now sings these lyrics to her daughter, and I do too. This makes me “plum happy”—the word plum once upon a time was used in place of very. The word plum contains a lump of something very special—not just a lump of coal. Below are the silly yet serious—and seriously special—lyrics a muse whispered in my ear (a muse never ceases to amuse):

When the sugar plum fairies come and prance and dance into your dreams at night,
They’ll being gumdrops, cotton candy, they’ll bring lollipops, little treats.
When the sugar plum fairies come and whirl and twirl all through your dreams at night,
They’ll bring chocolates, they’ll bring caramels, they’ll bring peppermints, little sweets.
When the sugar plum fairies come and
Dance and prance all through your dreams tonight,
When the sugar plum fairies come and
Dance and prance and bring good dreams tonight.
(See Appendix II, the poem and illustration of “The Sugar Plum Tree.” These lyrics are basic and do often change—alternate rhyming words include enhance and enchant.)

Like Clara was upset when her brother broke the Nutcracker, my daughter was upset when a little boy broke her sugar plum fairy snow globe at a party we were having. In awe of it, he had picked it up, carrying it over to me and exclaiming “Mary Ann, look!” When I looked, I reacted with fear since it was glass (this same sweet, cute little boy often innocently yet recklessly broke my daughter’s toys) and when I reached to retrieve it before he would break it and possible get cut by glass, he dropped it, and the glass globe broke, and he cried and ran to his mom who was also my
friend. Though the glass globe is gone, The Sugar Plum Fairy dancing to the music yet remains. She was released from her glassed-in existence. Unlike Clara, however, my daughter did not get angry—she just felt a little glum for the fairy of the sugar plums. We three generations still dance to the song too—myself, my daughter Cassie, and her daughter Gracie.

I dedicate this essay to them; they both came into this world singing and dancing.

References


APPENDIX I
The Little Elf*
By John Kendrick Bangs

I met a little Elfman once,

Down where the lilies blow.

I asked him why he was so small,

And why he didn’t grow.

He slightly frowned, and with his eye

He looked me through and through—

“I’m just as big for me,” said he,

“As you are big for you.”

APPENDIX II
The Sugar Plum Tree*
By Eugene Field

Have you ever heard of the Sugar-Plum Tree?

’Tis a marvel of great renown!

It blooms on the shore of the Lollypop sea

In the garden of Shut-Eye Town;

The fruit that it bears is so wondrously sweet

(As those who have tasted it say)

That good little children have only to eat

Of that fruit to be happy next day.

When you’ve got to the tree, you would have a hard time

To capture the fruit which I sing;

The tree is so tall that no person could climb

To the boughs where the sugar-plums swing!

But up in that tree sits a chocolate cat,

And a gingerbread dog prowls below-

And this is the way you contrive to get at

Those sugar-plums tempting you so:

You say but the word to that gingerbread dog

And he barks with such terrible zest

That the chocolate cat is at once all agog,

As her swelling proportions attest.

And the chocolate cat goes cavorting around

From this leafy limb unto that,

And the sugar-plums tumble, of course, to the ground—

Hurrah for that chocolate cat!

There are marshmallows, gumdrops, and peppermint canes,

With stripings of scarlet or gold,

And you carry away of the treasure that rains,

As much as your apron can hold!

So come, little child, cuddle closer to me

In your dainty white nightcap and gown,

And I’ll rock you away to that Sugar-Plum Tree

In the garden of Shut-Eye Town.

*This poem is in the public domain

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Shadow Play
By Roy Rosenblatt

Maya and I wander a trail
her leash taut or slack
measured by the will of her curiosity.
Pulled from soil beneath us,
my eyes sprint ahead

where the trail bends unseen,
thoughts grasping
to know, what is from here,
unknowable. A flushing exhale
surrenders to silence.

Nose to soil, Maya vacuums path scents,
fixates on the wild fluttering of a butterfly
in shadow.
Seeing seamlessly joined with pounce --
once twice three times.

Beneath the canopy of an unformed question,
I wonder about the things that draw us,
the shadows they cast,
and whether my gaze was reply
to the inviting gesture in a wave

by something unseen,
felt in the playfulness of breezes.
Encouraged by the wind, browns and greens
of native plants, a patchwork of swaying
rise into the fullness of their forms,

tier by tier along the contours of hills.
The roofless blue sky
appears more spacious now.

Editor’s Note (Continued from page 2)

mother in a beautifully-written piece, “The Space Between
Breaths: An Exploration of Grief and Final Threshold Rituals.”

In “The Numinosity of Pluralism: Interfaith as Spiritual
Path and Practice,” Jonathan Erickson presents a unifying
expose’ on religious experience and deep questions around
spirituality and religion, based on an examination of his own
experience of spiritual awakening.

Nicole de Bavelaere offers a new model to investigate
how systems science can address problems highlighted by
psychology in this article that explores her revolutionary
notion of pansystemology. “How Jungian Psychology, Brain
Research, Quantum Physics, and Systems Science Lead to
Pansystemology and Depth Psychology” builds on the work of
Einstein’s protégé, David Bohm.

In “On Romanticism in Jung’s Psychology: A Reflection
on The Passion of the Western Mind,” Ron Boyer seeks to
understand the role of Jung’s depth psychology within the
philosophical lineage of Western thought in a reflective essay
based on the iconic book by Richard Tarnas.

In “The Art of Facing Darkness: A Metal Musician’s
Quest for Wholeness,” Colin E. Davis engages his own passion
for heavy metal music and probes its symbolism as a refuge
for cultural outsiders. He employs the late Jungian analyst
Robert Moore’s model for male archetypes in order to
observe the shadow patterns that show up in the genre and
often in the lives of those who love it.

Finally, Mary Ann Bencivengo “A Child’s Edenic Dream:
‘Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy’ in The Nutcracker Ballet”
offers a mythopoetic, Jungian analysis of the popular ballet.

Several numinous pieces of poetry and art round out
this depth psychological offering, including the stunning cover
art and accompanying works by Terry McMaster. It is my
hope that reading this issue might reconnect each of you,
dear readers, with a sense of soul in the world and everyday
life—a respite and touchstone of strength and comfort so
greatly needed in chaotic times.

—Bonnie Bright, Ph.D.
Executive Editor