Daimonic Imagination
Daimonic Imagination:
Uncanny Intelligence

Edited by

Angela Voss and William Rowlandson
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These essays originated in a conference on “Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence” held at the University of Kent in May 2011. This venture should be seen in the longer perspective of a body of studies and teaching undertaken at Kent, hosted originally as a module in the pioneering MA programme in the Study of Mysticism and Religious Experience. Its further development from September 2006 occurred around the MA in the Cultural Study of Cosmology and Divination, concurrently with a popular and successful undergraduate module. The brief life of this unusual and creative project, running somewhat widdershins to the mainstream concerns of the modern academy, was extended in the Centre for the Study of Myth, host to the current conference. The 2011 Conference is the fourth such gathering, and this collection the fourth in a series of essays drawn from, or directly inspired by, each conference. The previous publications are Angela Voss & Jean Hinson Lall (2007) eds, The Imaginal Cosmos: Astrology, Divination and the Sacred (Canterbury: University of Kent); Angela Voss & Patrick Curry (2008) eds, Seeing with Different Eyes: Essays on Astrology and Divination (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press) and Patrick Curry (2010) ed., Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium (Farnham: Ashgate). Taken together, these collections in all their scintillating and sometimes confounding diversity are a treasure-trove for imaginative exploration and for scholarship in a primary domain of human experience that too often finds itself diminished or ignored. Our thanks are richly deserved by the many individuals who have carried this inspiration with their friendship and their thinking, and we also thank those who have offered material support, especially the Sophia Trust and the Urania Trust, with whose help so much has been done. With the current collection, special thanks are due to William Rowlandson and the Centre for the Study of Myth, for taking up the banner. It would not be fitting to end without an acknowledgment of the achievement of Angela Voss, whose determination and untiring vision have been essential in blazing a trail of imagination through all our work at Kent.

Geoffrey Cornelius
This collection of essays has arisen from a conference held at the University of Kent in May 2011, under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of Myth. It was dedicated to the inter-disciplinary exploration of the daimonic imagination—inspired creativity, extraordinary encounters and nonrational ways of knowing—in historical, literary and contemporary contexts. The conference generated a huge response from established academics, research students, practitioners of esoteric disciplines and creative artists. From the original forty-two speakers, twenty-three are represented here (plus three additional contributions) and their chapters demonstrate an exciting variety of approaches to an epistemologically challenging field of investigation.

Many religious and esoteric traditions talk of a “divine spark” or transcendent power in the human soul, sometimes described as the fount of intuitive insight and creative genius and sometimes as a guiding or protective power. This intelligent “other” is often considered to be an autonomous god, spirit, angel, muse or daimon, or alternatively understood as an aspect of the human imagination or “unconscious” in a Jungian sense. From the artist to the diviner, from the monk to the medium, a sense of communication with this other order of reality is commonly attested; this may take the form of an inner voice, a flash of intuition, a psychic or clairvoyant vision, “channelled” information, spirit-possession and even telephone or email conversations. Art and literature abound with images of this divine or cosmic intelligence, which we also see embodied in the “little folk” of folk tales and the “alien” of science-fiction. In a vast array of “new-age” practices, encounters with spirit beings via shamanic journeying, meditation, hypnosis techniques or psychedelic trips are often cultivated for healing purposes. Mystics in religious traditions speak of awareness of higher intelligences—angels, devas, jinn for example—or of one supreme intelligence, whilst in the secular sphere, the increase in interest in mediumship over the past decade or so attests to the undying conviction that the bridge between human and nonhuman worlds may be crossed, even resulting in the full materialisation of spirit beings within the séance environment.

In this volume, we are not concerned with proving or disproving the existence of such beings in any objective sense, and indeed several of the
Introduction

authors here point to the impossibility of such an aim. Rather, we are concerned with the many ways that this “numinous other” is portrayed and experienced, and how it informs, and has always informed, human experience. In this, we are taking a unique approach to the subject, whilst drawing threads from the various fields within which nonhuman reality and its inhabitants are studied—such as theology and religious studies, anthropology, history, classics, literature, esoteric philosophy and cultural studies. It would be impossible to include a relevant literature review drawn from all these disciplines, but we should perhaps just draw attention to those explorers (and critics) of the daimonic realms past and present whose work has inspired our discussions at the Centre for Myth Studies—Plato, Plotinus, Dante, Marsilio Ficino, Emanuel Swedenborg, Immanuel Kant, William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Frederic Myers, William James, Carl Jung, Rudolf Steiner, Henry Corbin, James Hillman, Stan Grof, Jorge Luis Borges, Patrick Harpur, Jeffrey Kripal, Terence McKenna, and others.

The essays in this book spread a wide net over the ocean of daimonic phenomena. The variety of methodologies and approaches is deliberately extreme, multi-faceted and interdisciplinary, for the daimonic in its very nature defies categorisation and transcends the limitations of one single mode of academic discourse. This is not to imply that traditional approaches have nothing to say—indeed the historically informative study and the literary critique are essential starting points for further ontological and epistemological questions arising from phenomenological or experiential viewpoints. We have structured the collection to reflect such a methodological journey, and in so doing it is our intention to expand the remit of scholarship when confronted with material that challenges accepted post-Enlightenment positivist and materialist assumptions about the nature of reality. The enthusiasm generated by the conference at Kent was testament to the determination emerging at the present time—from both researchers and practitioners—not to let existing paradigms of knowledge suppress or deny a priori the acknowledgement in all cultures of human interaction with nonphysical consciousness/es.

The overall question which was addressed by the conference, and which is addressed by the majority of the contributors to this volume, is that of the nature of this consciousness in terms of its intrinsic or extrinsic relation to the human mind. They ask, can the “entities” encountered in a dream, vision or spiritual journey be considered as fully embodied—as real—as the creatures in the material world, or should they be firmly relegated to the realm of the fantastical imagination, the “unconscious” mind or the hallucination? But even this question is inevitably tied to the
assumptions of a Cartesian world-view, in which subject and object are clearly separated. For several of our authors, it becomes clear that in fact this is the wrong question to ask of the daimon, for the answer can only be “yes” to both lines of enquiry. It is not surprising, then, that for many contributors the work of the French historian of religion Henry Corbin is seminal and authoritative in its delineation of the mundus imaginalis, an intermediate world between matter and spirit. In this place—accessed through the “active” imagination or altered states of consciousness—spiritual intelligence becomes clothed in sense-perceptible images which are experienced as vibrant, alive and even more “real” than ordinary reality.

The origins of the idea that there is a mode of perception available to human beings which transcends discursive and analytical thinking are found in Platonic epistemology, and are fundamental to Western esoteric traditions. According to Plato, this “intuitive intellect” has direct apprehension of spiritual or noetic reality, which the rational mind can then process, interpret and analyse. In fact, the rational mind simply cannot grasp the totality of such a gnostic insight and if it tries to do so will inevitably reduce it to its own parameters of vision, often with a lofty disparagement of its validity. Interestingly, modern neuroscience has reached the same conclusions with regard to the function of the brain hemispheres, in that the legitimate role of the right hemisphere is now understood to be that of “master” to the left’s “emissary.”1 In the light of this metaphor, many of the chapters here suggest ways of pushing the boundaries of research methods to include imaginal, performative and experiential insights which can then be processed and appraised in the light of scientific, psychological and metaphysical frameworks. Anthropological, phenomenological and ethnographic research, for example, provides a set of tools for the intrepid explorer of psychedelic realms to reflect on their own encounters and to muse on the ontological status of nonphysical entities from first-hand experience. Rachel, Luke and Cardin suggest that future research must rely as much on mystical and metaphysical premises as psychological ones, and Rachel goes so far as to make the radical suggestion that taking nonphysical reality seriously would have profound implications for the origin of the human race. Thus for many contributors, the willingness boldly to challenge cultural assumptions in search of the daimonic is not only permitted but essential for a fully holistic appraisal, whether this is through psychedelics, performance and creative projects, auto-ethnography, spiritualism,

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shamanic journeying or a broader appeal to take seriously the pre-modern conception of the human being’s place in a sacred cosmos.

Perhaps most importantly of all, many of the essays in this book call for a return to the metaphoric or symbolic to create a paradigm-shift away from the deadening literalism of our modern age. In so doing, the question of whether the alien is a physically real being from a physically real outer space or simply an empty creation of science-fiction is no longer central. Instead, such a being may be seen as a culturally-specific archetype, an entity who may be encountered—as fully embodied—in a dimension of consciousness which simply cannot be subject to analysis by the rational mind. As Andy Letcher has pointed out:

The prevailing cultural discourses, however, do not make this [middle position] easy. Anyone who, say, stands up and proclaims the existence of hives of self-transforming machine elves in a parallel dimension to ours is likely to meet with a cynical and derisive response. Culture can only tolerate elves and faerie denizens if they are bound firmly into film, the pages of fiction—children’s, sci-fi, fantasy or the knowing conceit of magic realism—or the symbolic language of the unconscious, where the ridiculous possibility of their actual physical existence need never be raised. As [Robert] Graves noted, the dirty synthetic world has asserted itself as the sole factual truth.

Why is the power of the imagination to recognise—to know—nonphysical beings so disregarded in our Western culture? The answer lies deep in the roots of the Enlightenment schism of religion and science, where all that cannot be “known” through empirical observation or logical deduction is relegated to either superstition or supernature, the “faith” of spiritual sensibility being set in opposition to the certainty of human reason. As Corbin laments throughout his work, the potency of the imaginal realm as an interface between gods and men has become reduced to the product of mere human invention, with no substance, no authenticity and certainly no “truth”.

Many of the researchers in this volume are indeed pioneers, but they stand on the backs of such visionaries as Myers, James, Steiner and Jung, all of whom called for a more integrative approach to spiritual matters and a willingness to suspend disbelief in the possibility of higher, or deeper, intelligence. Furthermore, each author, in revealing a different aspect of the daimon, also reveals something about themselves and their relationship to their inner genius. For some, a strictly conventional approach to their

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material, an impersonal evaluation of data, is the chosen mode—inspired perhaps by the daimonic muse of solid historical or literary critical research. For others, it is important to engage sympathetically with their material and let it reveal something of itself to the reader, whilst still others overtly challenge the accepted model by drawing on their own experiences and insights or offering auto-biographical narratives as research. The reader is thus deliberately led to consider for him or herself the distinctions between varying kinds of discourse, and whether any one approach is sufficient to do justice to the multi-faceted, paradoxical and Mercurial nature of daimonic experience. In the end, he or she may agree with Myers, who concluded as long ago as 1903:

Now it is that we feel the difficulty of being definite without being trivial; how little of earthly memory persists; how little of heavenly experience can be expressed in terms of earth; how long and arduous must be the way, how many must be the experiments, and how many the failures before any systemised body of new truth can be established. But a sound beginning has been made, and whatever may be possible hereafter need not be wasted on a fresh start.3

It has taken a long time to build on Myers’ “sound beginning,” but we hope that now the time is ripe for an integration of imagination and critical thinking within academic research which will break new ground and begin to reveal ways of healing the antagonisms so often aroused by the subject of paranormal, “occult” or nonrational experience.

Angela Voss and William Rowlandson, January 2013

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PART I

DAIMONIC HISTORY
The genesis of parthenogenesis: how I got here

“The daughter becomes identical with the mother.” This statement by Erich Neumann,¹ providing what may well be the key to the mystery of the cult of Demeter and Persephone in antiquity, haunted me for months as I wrote my master’s thesis on these two goddesses of central Sicily. There was a depth to it, fascinating and unplumbable, that kept me traveling ever further inward.

I remember standing in my brother’s apartment in Brooklyn, New York, in January 2001 when I received the insight that was the starting point of this research. I had been reading Sicilian scholar Anna Maria Corradini’s book Meteres: Il Mito del Matriarchato in Sicilia (Mothers: The Myth of Matriarchy in Sicily). Corradini stated for me what seemed a sudden and profound truth: the Demeter-Persephone mystery was, at core, a female only mystery. Stripping off the layers that the Greeks had added on through the violent intrusion of Hades and other male gods into the story, she suggested that Demeter was a pre-Hellenic parthenogenetic goddess who produced the natural world—and her daughter, Persephone—spontaneously out of her own body.²

Parthenogenesis. Self-conception. Virgin birth. Mothers and identical daughters. As I stood in my brother’s small office, I had the strange sensation of a foreign thought suddenly illuminating my mind: were holy

¹ Neumann: 309.
² Corradini: 12-14; 81-83.
women of ancient Greece once engaged in attempting to conceive children miraculously?

Since that time, shards of a Greek history seeming to link women and divine birth have continuously presented themselves to me, glinting through obscure passages in ancient texts and in the prose of unsuspecting contemporary scholars. I have collected these pieces, and in my books *The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece* and *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity*, I have assembled them. It is a vessel that may still have many missing parts, but one that begins to reveal an integral form and shape, nonetheless. I share some of the key pieces in this chapter.

During the course of this research I have come to realise there have been so many artefacts staring at us for two thousand years that it is truly stunning no one has put them together before as evidence of possible female cultic practice.3 Practically all of the legendary heroes who came to head the great genealogical tribes of early Greece, as well as various historical political and spiritual leaders and a handful of humans turned divine were all said to have been born of mortal women through sexual union with gods. Not only were Heracles, Perseus, Theseus, and a host of other legendary heroes associated with divine birth stories, but so were historical figures such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Alexander the Great. In certain corners of the Graeco-Roman world, it was believed that miraculous conception could occur through the influence of snakes and celestial rays of light. The healing cult of Asclepius held that women could be impregnated with supernatural assistance—a belief that was the basis for the entire nearby Egyptian civilization. The *basilinna*, the “queen archon” of classical Athens, was even attested to conduct a secret and presumably sexual rite with the god Dionysus every year. Are such stories and practices—and many, many more—to be dismissed as mere remnants of mythology—that is, fiction—alone? Or do they point to something important about the actual beliefs and rites of ancient Greece?

I argue for the latter. In doing so, I offer what amounts to a radical reinterpretation of ancient Greek religion, one that suggests that priestly women—and the figure of the “holy virgin”—may have been considered far more central to the founding of Greek civilization than previously

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3 The literature that has come the closest proposes the existence of the *hieros gamos*, or rite of sacred marriage, in ancient West Asia and the ancient Mediterranean world. According to some scholars, the sacred marriage was a ritual act of sexual intercourse between a king and priestess as a means of guaranteeing abundance and fertility for the people. This idea has itself received its share of critique (see Nissinen and Uro). The present work in part reframes the sacred marriage concept by considering women’s agency in it, a much-neglected theme.
understood. Specifically, I make the case that certain specialised priestesshoods in ancient Greece may have endeavoured to conceive children in various non-ordinary ways as an elevated form of spiritual practice. The intended purpose of this practice was to give birth to a hero or heroine, gifted spiritual leader, or what was considered to be a supernatural being—an individual who, it was thought, could not enter into the human stream through the “normal” sexual channels. This miraculously-born individual was considered a special soul capable of benefitting humanity significantly in some way, or of heralding or reinforcing particular value systems for the human race.

I have discovered that attempting to produce offspring through various asexual and/or magical methods was thought to be a specialised sacerdotal activity for women. Although some Greek writers, such as Herodotus, were reportedly sceptical about women’s capacity for virgin birth, there were many who apparently believed it was possible—including some in the highest intellectual echelons, such as certain followers of Pythagoras and Plato. Throughout my works, I demonstrate that Greeks who believed in the reality of such a phenomenon held miraculous conception and birthing of a child to be the most advanced form of magico-spiritual achievement possible. At its best, divine birthing was considered a feat that could transport the human race to a new level of functioning and awareness through the influence of the incarnated individual. The evidence shows that the purported birth of a specially conceived child was thought to result in the apotheosis, or actual divinisation of the priestess herself—a “promotion” from human to goddess—and led to her corresponding veneration. Similarly, the child of this conception was considered to be of a divine nature and likewise the focus of worship.

To be clear, my task is not to argue whether birth through miraculous means is or ever was possible. Neither is it to argue whether any assumed practice by women in ancient Greece to conceive and give birth miraculously to a special category of children was successful or not. Rather, my intention is to present and analyse a vast array of information from history, legend, and myth suggesting that groups of priestly women in ancient Greece who at the very least attempted divine birth as a spiritual discipline and who were believed at the time to have been successful may have formally existed. In doing so, I bring into relief an aspect of Greek religion that has been obscured in the patriarchal era through the relegation of divine birth stories to the status of quaint and frivolous fables.

It is also important to note that in presenting evidence for the existence of what I am calling divine birth priestesshoods in Greece, my aim is not to make a scientific case that parthenogenesis—that is, conception and
birth without the participation of the male—ever may have existed as a method intended to eclipse sexual procreation and do away with men. Nor is it to suggest that parthenogenesis should be explored as a means of doing so in future. I discuss parthenogenesis in the religious context only, as a possible spiritual practice that would have had a specialised purpose.

For this work, I approach ancient and secondary texts and iconography using a number of methodologies, which, given the provocative nature of what is being proposed, deserve some attention. I first and foremost utilise a feminist hermeneutical approach. That is, I recast written records applying what Schüssler Fiorenza calls “a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion that understands texts as ideological articulations of men expressing, as well as maintaining, patriarchal historical conditions.” Moreover, I follow Barbara Goff’s approach of reading texts “against the grain,” or reading them “for other than their ostensible significance” in order to recover where and how historical women may have had agency and autonomy in an attempt to create a more complete and accurate picture of the ancient Greek priestesshood.

Another methodological approach I employ is neo-euhemerism. That is, I look to mythology and legends as sources of important clues about historical events and actual ancient cultural and cultic practices. The term neo-euhemerism derives from the name of the fourth century BCE writer Euhemerus, who, by investigating the actions and places of birth and burial of the divinities of popular religion, claimed the gods were simply deified human beings, great heroes who were revered because they had benefited mankind in some important way. His rationalising method of interpreting Greek myths, known as classical euhemerism, was revived in the nineteenth century by scholars such as Spencer. In more recent works, Nilsson, for example, argues that the Greek epics originated in the aristocratic society of Bronze Age Mycenaean culture, reflected the deeds of historical men, and described contemporary events while mixing mythical and folktale elements. Harrison similarly assumes that myth reflects broad historical contours of Greek and pre-Greek culture. Farnell, too, throughout his classic five-volume work Cults of the Greek States, conjectures that various myths may have been indicators of actual custom and ritual.

The intuitive flash I received that wintry New York day in January 2001—that specialised women in ancient Greece may have participated

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4 For a summary of current scientific thinking on parthenogenesis, see Rigoglioso 2009: 205-209.
5 Schüssler Fiorenza: 60.
6 Goff: 25.
actively in attempts to produce children parthenogenetically as part of a
spiritual calling—stimulated me to approach my research on ancient Greek
history and religion in new ways. In my studies, I began to notice data that
seemed to cluster around and verify this idea, which inspired me to seek
out supporting information more actively. As I made sense of the data I
was collecting, further and unanticipated patterns began to emerge. New
insights were sparked which subsequently stimulated ever new cycles of
mining ancient texts and secondary literature in search of validating
details. The process thus was both deductive and inductive.

I soon discerned in the ancient literature that there was more than one
method by which women were credited with achieving divine birth. A
theoretical structure began to emerge that seemed to allow the data to
speak in the most coherent way possible. In this chapter I present that
structure—what I am calling a taxonomy of divine birth priestesshoods.

The role of trance and virginity in divine birth practice

Before proceeding with the taxonomy, I should note that regardless of the
type of reproductive method attempted, the practice as a whole most likely
required that the priestess enter a profound non-ordinary state of
consciousness, or “trance” state. This finds support in Lezzi-Haftner, who
similarly theorises that such a state was part of the hieros gamos, or sacred
sexual union, that purportedly took place between the historical basilinna
and the god Dionysus. She bases this on her interpretation of images on
ancient ceramics thought to portray the basilinna (or possibly her mythic
prototype, Ariadne) in a ritualised “drowsy” or “sleep” state waiting for
her union with the god.7 I contend it is indeed only through a hypnagogic
state that a priestess would have been thought capable of fully accessing
her special skills as well as the spiritual forces believed necessary to guide
her in this most extraordinary of activities.

Iamblichus describes various ways in which the spiritual adept was
thought to enter into non-ordinary states of consciousness in the ancient
world, which included what he calls “potions.”8 His remarks are echoed by
Lewis, former London School of Economics anthropology professor, who
mentions “psychotropic alkaloids,”9 or what are today known as
entheogens. This term, introduced into the English language by Ruck et al.,
derives from entheos, which in Greek means “full of the god,” “inspired,” or
“possessed,” and connotes a state in which both the practitioner was “in the

7 Lezzi-Haftner 1988a, b.
8 Iamblichus: 1.3.
god” and the god was “in the practitioner.” Entheos, then, anciently referred to a state of “oneness” with the deity, and an entheogen is thus a substance (usually plant-based in the ancient world) thought to engender such a state. I suggest that whilst engaging in a meditative state may have been enough for some divine birth priestesses to enter what was believed to be the requisite spiritual condition for their task, imbibing entheogens may have been a particularly effective means of doing so. In The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece, I point to literary evidence attesting to the presence of one entheogenic plant, asterion (cannabis), in connection with the cult of Hera at Argos, and the probable use of various entheogenic compounds by the prophetesses of Apollo at Delphi.12

Another important preliminary point is that it appears that in many, but not all, cases, virginity, that is, abstinence from sexual intercourse with men, was thought to have been a biological and spiritual precondition necessary to render non-ordinary conception possible. Greek myths and legends of women conceiving the children of gods indicate that such women were generally virgins in the younger years of their lives. Some seem to have been dedicated virgins from the time of menarche or earlier. I discuss the virginity requirement in ancient Greek priestesshoods more fully in The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece.13

A taxonomy of divine birth priestesshoods

I now turn to the taxonomy. In exploring Greek myths and history, I have discerned what appear to have been a number of different non-ordinary ways by which women were thought to conceive divine or divinely endowed children. I suggest that the method used depended on the ontological framework with which the particular cult that the priestess served viewed the universe. Thus, in general, gynocentric (female/goddess-centred) theologies corresponded with priestesshoods in which women attempted to mimic the ultimate parthenogenetic capacity of the creator goddess in generating divine children. Androcentric (male/god-centred) theologies corresponded with...
with priestesshoods in which non-ordinary reproduction was thought possible through the sexual union of the priestess with a god.

The first category in my proposed taxonomy of divine birth priestesshoods is what I am calling the pure parthenogenetic priestesshood. I propose that this priestesshood was dedicated to attempting conception without the participation of a male in any form whatsoever—either human or divine. I subdivide this priestesshood into two further categories: pure daughter-bearing parthenogenetic priestesshoods and pure son-bearing parthenogenetic priestesshoods.

I hypothesise that this priestesshood was dedicated to producing female offspring only, and that it marked the original and first stage of the practice, carried out when social structures were matriarchal. This would have been a period well prior to the advent of the Olympian cults, when various Greek goddesses, among them Ge/Gaia, Athena, Artemis and Hera, were conceived of as creator divinities who generated cosmos, earth, and all life without male consorts—that is, they were virgin mothers.

Given my theory that priestesses patterned themselves after their goddesses, I submit that one class of sacerdotal women of this time consisted of virgins whose holy reproductive rituals were aimed at generating the spontaneous meiosis of their ova. This type of activity would have corresponded with biological parthenogenesis in the animal and insect world. There, given that progeny conceived parthenogenetically share the same genetic material as their mothers, such offspring are generally female. On the symbolic level, the parthenogenetic creation of the human daughter would have been understood as a process whereby the mother essentially “replicated” herself. The holy daughter born in this unusual way would have been seen as an earthly manifestation of the Great Goddess, and the mother would have been thought to achieve divinity herself for having accomplished the birth of such a being. That is, in being able to generate life spontaneously from her body in the manner of the goddess, she was thought to become the living embodiment of the goddess. We can think of the parthenogenetic mother and daughter “goddesses” as “twins,” a motif that I suggest formed the basis of the earliest layer of the cult of the mother-daughter goddesses Demeter and Persephone.

I propose that with the development of patriarchy and the increasing domination of cultural institutions by men, the male god came into theological ascendance. Pure parthenogenesis at this secondary stage was

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14 Jerry L. Hall, ViaGene Fertility director, personal communication, August 19, 2004. One important exception is the honeybee.
modified to bring in a child who served as a human manifestation of this male god. Thus we have the creation of what I am calling the pure son-bearing parthenogenetic priestesshood.

The “birth of the divine son,” I contend, was considered a special kind of numinous event that expressed, to borrow Neumann’s words, “the miracle of the male’s containment in the female.” The priestess was now exalted for having incarnated one “other than” herself, yet still without the benefit of a male fecundator, a feat that may have been seen as even more challenging than bringing in a female. The male holy child—an expression of the newly ascendant male godhead—was rendered “king,” and was expected to agree to a ritual death in order to benefit humanity. His death served, in the words of Pindar, as “requital for ancient wrong” (penthos); that is, it was believed to release the community from negativity associated with the transgressions of their living and deceased members. In undergoing this ordeal, the miraculously born individual was thought to be apotheosised on the ontological level—that is, to achieve godhead—which resulted in his subsequently being worshipped as a divinity.

Although a detailed analysis of parthenogenetic themes in Gnostic texts is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to mention here one Gnostic passage that contains a stunning testament to the existence of an ancient esoteric belief in women’s capacity for pure parthenogenesis in a religious context. The passage appears in The Revelation [or Apocalypse] of Adam, the last tractate of Nag Hammadi Codex V. It describes one of the means by which “the illuminator of knowledge,” the salvific figure known as Seth (of whom Jesus was considered by some to be a manifestation), was thought to have been brought to humanity:

[F]rom the nine muses one separated. She came to a high mountain and spent some time seated there, so that she desired her own body in order to become androgynous. She fulfilled her desire and became pregnant from her desire. He [the illuminator] was born. The angels who were over the desire nourished him. And he received glory there and power […] 18

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16 Neumann: 309.
17 The fragment is preserved in Plato: “For from whomsoever Persephone shall accept requital for ancient wrong, the souls of these she restores in the ninth year to the upper sun again; from them arise glorious kings and men of splendid might and surpassing wisdom, and for all remaining time are they called holy heroes amongst mankind” (Plato Meno 81b). I contend this references the sacrificial death and apotheosis of divinely born children that I am positing here.
18 In Barnstone and Meyer: 186-87.
The text, ascribed to the end of the first or beginning of the first centuries CE, contains the most direct ancient reference I have located to date of an episode of pure parthenogenetic conception. The excerpt even affirms the method by which the woman supposedly achieved this feat: by “sitting on a mountain” for some time, that is, through a non-ordinary state of consciousness likely brought about through an extended period of meditation. The identification of the female as a “muse” suggests a priestly connection the Greek tradition, where muses and nymphs, as I explain throughout my works, were related figures frequently associated with divine birth stories. Although the child believed to have arisen from this particular miraculous conception was male, it is not unreasonable to suggest that such a self-generative mechanism would have been considered a valid method of producing holy female children, as well.

Evidence in Greek cult for pure daughter-bearing and son-bearing parthenogenetic priestesshoods, as well as of their sequential emergence, hypothesised above, is otherwise mainly suggestive. In my books, I discuss myths that may point to the existence of pure parthenogenetic priestesshoods of the daughter-bearing kind in relationship to the cults of Ge/Gaia, particularly at the earliest days of the oracular cults at Dodona and Delphi. The story of Hera’s parthenogenetic birthing of Ares, Typhon, and Hephaestus, may be an allusion to son-bearing parthenogenesis. The mystical formula recited by the high priest at the conclusion of the Eleusinian Mysteries—“Brimo has given birth to Brimos!”—an expression that may have referred to the birth of the divine male child, also may be an allusion to the latter.19

As patriarchy continued to develop, male and female deities came to be conceived of in sexual relationship to one another. This phenomenon finds expression in myths such as that of the goddess Cybele and her fecundating consort Attis in Phrygia. Still later, as patriarchy eclipsed matriarchy nearly completely as the dominant social form, the universal deity came to be seen as primarily male, sometimes with shadow female attendants who assisted in the generative process in a much reduced and passive role. This is expressed in myths of deities such as Zeus and Hera.

This transition marked what I propose was a concomitant shift to what I term the hieros gamos, that is, “sacred marriage” divine birth priestesshood. In the condition of the hieros gamos, a woman was thought to conceive a child as the result of “sexual intercourse” with a male supernatural entity or god, and without the involvement of a human male. The numerous stories of unions between women and gods in Greek mythology and legend indicate that this form of hieros gamos became the most

19 For a discussion of this feature of the Eleusinian Mysteries see Harrison: 562-64.
widespread method for achieving what was believed to be miraculous birth in the incipient days of Greek culture. The women involved are depicted as either mortals or “nymphs.” Mortal women who engaged in such unions were generally honoured as “heroines,” a status that afforded them divine honours upon their death. The term nymph referred to a low-level female divinity, generally a nature spirit. Many such nymphs were also honoured in cult. I believe there is evidence that “heroine” or “nymph” status in fact was a posthumous cultic marker for the priestess who was believed to have borne the child of a god.

The influence of patriarchy on the divine birth cult of this era can be seen in the fact that women’s supposed unions with gods nearly always resulted in the production of male figures who promoted the patriarchal values of the Greek state and of Zeus-centred Olympian religion. Often these purported children grew to become founders of a lineage or city-state—that is, they were “heroes,” which means they were generally warriors in service to the patriarchy. Indeed, such male figures were seen to be the very incarnations of the patriarchal Olympian gods themselves. Speaking of the phenomenon of father/son divine pairs a bit further afield in Phrygia, Ramsay illuminates this phenomenon, noting, “the father and the son […] are merely complementary forms of the single ultimate form of the divinity as male,” and “the character and personality of the God-father and God-son pass into one another in such a way in the divine tale or drama, that no clear line can be drawn to separate them.”²⁰ We see this exemplified, for example, in the story of Heracles, the supposed son of Zeus by the mortal woman Alcmene.²¹ The rare female progenies of purported hieros gamos couplings are often depicted as themselves later engaging in hieros gamos unions with gods, indicating that they may have been considered part of hereditary lineages of divine birth priestesses.

Stories of unions between mortals/”nymphs” and gods also frequently express a common theme: the encounter with the god was often considered a violation or rape. Sometimes the union was also violently opposed by the “goddess” to whom the priestess was in service—frequently Athena, Artemis, or Hera, who I argue were originally considered parthenogenetic beings themselves. That is, union with male gods was strictly forbidden from the perspective of the old order. Yet such stories occurred in liminal contexts in which the goddess had already become subsumed into the Olympian pantheon, no longer as an independent parthenogenetic being, but as a daughter or wife of the new male creator god, Zeus. I thus suggest these stories indicate a time of transition and conflict during which

²⁰ Ramsay: 1.34, 1.40.
²¹ Rigoglioso 2009: 126.
priestesses from the pure parthenogenetic tradition may have been pressured into performing hieros gamos in order to produce what was believed to be the holy progeny who would advance the cause of Zeus and the other male gods. It was a pressure that at times these priestesses apparently vehemently resisted.

But there was, in some cases, ambivalence. The stories hint that engaging in hieros gamos with a god was thought to be a profoundly pleasurable sexual experience, one that many priestesses may have had trouble resisting. Moreover, great social status seems to have accrued to women considered to be the mothers of heroes born miraculously, as evidenced by the fact that frequently virgin mothers served as the eponyms of city-states and of topographical features such as springs and mountains. Thus the period of transition to hieros gamos divine birth seems to have been a time of confusion, conflict, and broken virginal vows to virgin goddesses.

In hieros gamos stories, I have discerned a secondary non-ordinary reproductive process whereby the priestess engaged in what was believed to be sacred union with a god using a human male as a “surrogate” for the male deity. As in all phases, this no doubt was thought to take place when both the male and female actors were in a profound trance state such that the deity was believed to manifest and impregnate the priestess through the body of the human male. Under such conditions, the child was still considered the progeny of the god rather than the man, yet this development allowed for the securing of the lineage through the paternal line. I propose that a number of Greek myths I discuss in which priestesses were said to have had intercourse simultaneously with a “god” and a mortal in the same night are indicative of this practice.

Support for this idea also can be found in one book of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Testament of Reuben. This work, which dates to the second or third century CE, explains how it is thought that angelic beings known as “the Watchers” could copulate with human women and beget children:

As [the Watchers] continued looking at the women, they were filled with desire for them and perpetrated the act in their minds. Then they were transformed into human males, and while the women were cohabitating with their husbands they appeared to them. Since the women’s minds were filled with lust for these apparitions, they gave birth to giants. For the Watchers were disclosed to them as being as high as the heavens.22

22 Collins: 266.
Although this work is mainly Jewish and Christian in nature, it is useful to the present argument in that it affirms the existence of an esoteric belief in antiquity that women could be “visited” in the trance state by male beings who possessed the power to impregnate them. What is described here is the mechanism by which this was thought to take place: the male beings “mentally” transformed themselves into the images of human males and inserted themselves into the women’s erotic fantasies activated during intercourse. It is these incorporeal beings, not the human males, who were understood to be the “true” fathers of children conceived in this way. This suggests that such beings were also understood to insert themselves into the precise physical substances exchanged during the conception process.23

Hieros gamos by surrogate fully put the practice of divine birth under the control of the patriarchy, as it placed the benefits associated with claims of divine birth in the male lineage. That is, in the earlier condition of hieros gamos divine birth, when no human male was involved, the prestige presumably would have rested with the purported mother alone. In this new situation, however, the divine child was arrogated to the sphere of a male “father.” The mother involved was thereby also made the property of this male. Moreover, the new arrangement guaranteed the retention of privileges associated with the “divine child” even if somehow the human performers believed they had failed in their mission to evoke the god. In other words, even if the male actor believed he had not been able to incorporate the god during sexual union—which would mean that the child was merely humanly, not divinely conceived—the claim of divine impregnation would have been maintained. Thus both the male surrogate and his male progeny would still have enjoyed sacred status and its associated political privileges.

Divine birth as an erotic act

My reflections on this material have led me to conjecture that, in their essence, all types of attempted pure parthenogenesis and hieros gamos divine birth must have been considered to be profoundly erotic experiences. I posit that in the case of pure parthenogenesis, conception was thought to be a condition achieved through the most true form of entheos possible: the literal becoming as one with the goddess. This, I contend, was thought to be a powerful sensual/sexual experience in which

23 For evidence that Egyptian queen mothers similarly engaged in hieros gamos by surrogate to conceive pharaohs, see Rigoglioso 2007: 70-94.
the woman aligned herself with what was arguably considered to be the ontologically sexual nature of cosmos itself. I will even go so far as to speculate that the orgasm was considered the critical event thought to instigate the meiosis of the woman’s ovum.

We find evidence for this line of reasoning in the aforementioned excerpt from the Gnostic Revelation of Adam. There we see affirmation of an ancient belief that women’s practice of pure parthenogenesis involved a highly erotic component. As we will recall from that tractate, the woman who sat on the mountain to conceive the saviour entered a state in which she “desired her own body in order to become androgynous.” The text goes on to tell us that “[s]he fulfilled her desire and became pregnant from her desire.” In other words, it is indeed autoerotic desire that is the critical element believed to create the condition in which parthenogenetic conception could occur. But what is described here is much more than mere masturbation. Rather, the process is one whereby the woman must become as one with the generative power of the universe, as I suggested above: as the text conveys this, she must “become androgynous.” That process, according to the author of this description, involves the “fulfilling” of desire—the experience of sexual ecstasy.

In cases of hieros gamos divine birth, the idea of impregnation by a god implies some form of sexual contact between human female and divine male, as the numerous myths to be explored make plain. Anthropologically, the intensely sexual nature of women priestesses’ relationships in situations of so-called “spirit possession” by male deities has been amply attested across a wide array of cultures in contemporary times, for example, Lewis. Quoting Ernest Jones, he writes, “the notion that sexual intercourse can occur between mortals and supernatural beings is one of the most widespread of human beliefs.” As to hieros gamos by surrogate, in which an actual human male may have been involved, the erotic element is clear.

Thus I am proposing that divine conception, far from having been considered a non-erotic act, may have been thought to include an embodied dimension, indeed, in which spirit and matter, human and divine, sexuality and the sacred were thought to be related and interacted in ways that are, by and large, no longer considered possible or viable outside of certain esoteric circles. In this way, my argument may provide new theoretical avenues for resolving the spirit/body dualism more fully than before. Rather than emphasizing restrictive and polarised ideas of

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24 In Barnstone and Meyer: 187.
25 Lewis: 57-64. More recently, Donald Tyson has written of his own purported sexual encounters with disembodied entities, which he describes as intensely erotic.
sexuality, then, this study may in fact lead to more expansive ideas about the nature of sexuality and the erotic capacities of women.

**Bibliography**


In modern historiography it is often stated that in the ancient Greek world the snake embodied the soul of the departed. Martin Nilsson believes the snake is the only animal in antiquity that might have played this role—that of soul animal. In his comprehensive book on the early Greek concept of the soul, published in 1983, Jan Bremmer accepted this idea, at least in relation to the archaic Greek world. Nevertheless, as he remarks: “The classical discussions of the snake as the soul of the dead are not satisfactory for the investigation, since they use the term “soul” without reflecting on the relationship between the psyche as the soul of the dead and the snake. If the deceased was normally thought to be represented by the psyche in the underworld, what then was the position of the snake?”

We encounter a similar problem in iconography when there is an explicit psyche or “soul” depicted on a vase. Are we also to understand the snake as a symbol of the dead, or as a “soul animal”? If a relationship existed between the snake and the deceased, or with the realm of dead, it is not clear yet (if it ever will be) what this specific relationship was. The problem consists in defining whether, within the wide frame of the chthonic and funerary symbolism of the snake in the ancient Greek world, it is possible to assume a particular and specific connection between the snake and the soul of the departed. Adopting an iconographical approach, I am going to focus here on a number of vases by the Leagros Group from the end of the sixth century BCE, which

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1 Nilsson 1955.
2 Bremmer: 81.
reflect a momentous passage from the *Iliad*: the dragging of Hector’s corpse by Achilles at Troy. A recurrent iconographical detail in these scenes is Patroclus’ funerary tumulus, very often painted in white, on which a snake is depicted. A third element linked with the tumulus is the *eidolon*. This is a little image the function of which will be discussed below. This group of painters, active in the last decades of the sixth century (520-500 BCE), favoured big vases like *hydriai*, *amphorae* and *kraters*, and were contemporaries of the group already working with the new red-figure technique. These depictions can be divided into two groups: Achilles’ chariot standing still and Achilles’ chariot rushing forwards at full speed.

**The snake at the tomb: Trojan scenes**

A good example of this group is a black-figured Athenian hydria in Munich (figs. 2-1, 2-2). It dates from 510 BCE and illustrates the snake theme on the shoulder of the vase. In the middle of the scene stands Achilles’ chariot facing left, drawn by four horses. The driver, dressed in a long white robe, has already taken his place and is ready to start. Behind the chariot there is a naked body of a dead, bearded man, lying on his back, his arms stretched backwards and his legs lashed to the hub of the wheel: this is Hector’s corpse. Beside him the warrior, Achilles, armed with greaves, shield and helmet, is leaning on his lance. He appears to be looking at the dead man. To the right we find the domed tumulus of Patroclus, painted white, on which a bearded snake coils with mouth wide open. On the tumulus a small *eidolon* is depicted. From the left a winged woman with a herald’s staff enters the scene: she is Iris. The portrayal of the snake is not very different from that of another snake on the same vase, this time on Geryon’s shield.

The next vase is a black-figured *lekythos* in the Museum of Delos also belonging to the Leagros Group. The scheme is very similar but here Iris has come right up to the chariot and with her outstretched hands she seems to address the standing warrior. The empty space between the mound and the horses has been filled up with a little winged *eidolon*.

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3 Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München 1719. *ABV* 361.13; BADN 302008; Friss Johansen: 139, f.48; Latacz et al.: 380; Stähler: 69, n.11.
4 Museum of Delos B6137.546; *ABV* 378.257; BADN 302338; Friss Johansen: 139; Stähler: 69, n.11.
The third vase in this group is a black-figured amphora by the Priam Painter from Vulci now housed in the British Museum (fig. 2-3). In this case we have inscriptions that clarify the scene depicted. The chariot faces left, whilst the charioteer, Automedon, is harnessing the horses and ready

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1 London, BM 1899,0721,3; ABV 330,2; Friss Johansen: 139, fig.49; Stähler: n.10.
to set them in motion. Behind him Achilles, naked and armed with shield, spear, greaves and helmet, bends over Hector’s dead body which is facing upwards. Beyond these figures there is a funerary mound, painted white, on which there is a beardless snake looking down at the corpse in a manner that echoes Achilles’ gaze. On the mound there is an inscription that names the dead body as Hector. Above it hovers Patroclus’ little *eidolon*, armed and wingless, also identified by the corresponding inscription.

Fig. 2-3 Athenian amphora

The second group of representations, more numerous, shows Achilles in his chariot at full speed. The principal images show the chariot, Achilles, Hector’s corpse, the mound, the snake and the *eidolon*. I will not present a detailed iconographical description of the vases here as the pattern is similar throughout except for some additional features that appear in some of them.

The following vases belong to this group: a *lekythos* in the Metropolitan Museum of New York⁶ showing the chariot being drawn by four horses

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⁶ Friss Johansen: 265 n.18n; Stähler: 69, n.5; Vermeule: 38, fig.6.
galloping at full speed to the right, a *lekythos* in the Louvre by the Diosphos Painter, a black-figured *lekythos* in Naples and a neck-amphora from Vulci in the British Museum (fig. 2-4). On a *lekythos* from the Hope Collection in Cambridge, also by the Leagros Group, the snake is absent and an additional figure, a fallen warrior lying beneath the horses, has been included in the scene—a feature taken from battle scenes. On a black-figured neck-amphora from Berlin, the scene has already developed and Achilles is oddly running towards the chariot. Some of these vases also show discrepancies in the location of the iconographical elements, which are sometimes displaced in order to fill up the empty space of the vase.

Fig. 2-4 Neck amphora from Vulci

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7 Paris, Louvre Ca601; Friss Johansen: 147, 265, n.180; Stähler: 68, n.7.  
8 *ABV* 378.259; BADN 302339; Friss Johansen: 144, 265, n.18k; Stähler: 68, n.4.  
9 London, BM B239; *ABV* 371.147; BADN 302142; Friss Johansen: 144, 26, n.18f; Stähler: 68, n.1.  
10 Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum GR2.1955; *ABV* 378.259; BADN 302340; Friss Johansen: 146-147, 265, 18i; Stähler: 68, n.3.  
11 Berlin, Antikensammlung F1867, *ABV* 371.148; Friss Johansen: 147, 265, 18g; Stähler: 68, n.2; Grabow: 151 (K98).
A well-preserved hydria in Boston (fig. 2-5) is important because it brings two different episodes from the *Iliad* into a single impossible moment, the passage in book 22, 405ff., in which Priam and Hekabe witness the dragging of their son’s body from the Dardanian Gate, and the episode a little later in the poem, when Iris comes rushing into the scene towards Achilles carrying a message from Zeus. The vase also depicts the motif we are analysing as to the right of the scene we find a big white tumulus with a snake, and the *psyche* on top of it.

![Fig. 2-5 Black-figure hydria](image)

Finally, a vase in Münster is worthy of mention because it repeats the same pattern, although the snake in the tumulus has now disappeared and in its place is a lion. Over the tumulus hovers Patroclus’ soul, identified by the inscription “Psyche”.

**The psyche**

At this point, it is useful to consider what the *psyche* represents and its significance in the Homeric poems, in order to better understand the images. To this end, I follow the research of Stähler, Pfeifer and Bremmer. The inscription “psyche” that usually stands next to the tomb in

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12 Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 63.473, published by Vermeule: 34-52; Friss Johansen: 150, 265, 18h; Stähler: 69, n.15; Shapiro: 30-32.

13 Münster, Archäologisches Museum der Universität, 565.
these vases refers to a small figure and identifies it as the soul of Patroclus which is armed as he was when alive. In the Homeric Poems, the psyche is the soul of the dead in the sense of “spirit of death” (totenseele) or even “apparition” (seeelengespenst) or “living corpse” (lebender leichman) and, according to Bremmer’s research, it derives from the liberated soul of the living. That is to say, the soul of the living would eventually become the soul of the dead, the psyche, made visible through the eidolon, which consists of a small image that adopts the features of the deceased while still alive. The soul of the dead no longer has the characteristics and psychological traits, the thymos, noos and menos, of the soul of the living. Instead it is much more like a ghost closely related to the corpse, a daseinform that endures after death.

In the Homeric Poems, after death this soul goes immediately to Hades. However, until the burial, or more specifically, until the destruction of the body through fire, there are still some ties between the psyche and the living, and that is why Patroclus can appear in front of Achilles or Elpenor can beg Odysseus for a burial. With the destruction of the body, this link is destroyed and souls will forever remain in Hades as powerless shades of what they once were.

The differences between the Homeric text and the vases are evident. The tymbos signals that the burial has already taken place but the psyche is still present at the tomb, in a clear opposition to the Homeric account. This fact has puzzled scholars and has been explained in the light of both pre- and post-Homeric traditions. This belief—the endurance of the soul at the tomb—is to be found in the tragedies of Aeschylus, when Darius’ ghost appears, or in the emotive scene when Orestes and Electra call upon their murdered father’s soul. A passage in Plato makes Stähler think that the belief in the endurance of the psyche in the tomb is an old folktale. According to Rohde, the belief in the ghost in the tomb would have been more primitive than the belief in Hades, although in Homeric times this idea had already diminished in popularity. Therefore the vases depicting a Homeric scene would offer a glimpse into a popular belief not recorded in the literary sources. However, what could be a problem if approached from the sole point of view of philology or history of religion is not really such if we approach it from the angle of iconography. In this way, it is not

14 Bremmer: 73.
15 Bremmer: 74.
16 Aeschylus, Persians 681ff.
17 Plato, Phaedrus 81.c-d.
18 Stähler: 26.
19 Stähler: 30.
difficult to find a probable reason for the depiction of Patroclus’ psyche in the form of an eidolon next to the tomb; it is there to receive Achilles’ honours, i.e. Hector’s corpse. The eidola appear in the scene because, through them, the painter confirms and makes visible the fact that the ghost accepts the tributes that are being paid to him. It is also useful to remember that the soul usually lingers on for a while near the tomb, since it does not begin an afterlife immediately after death and there is some delay in its transition. Only after the completion of the funerary rites did it enter Hades forever. Significantly, Bremmer alludes to the vases as an example of this idea. However, if we are to understand that the eidolon is the visual depiction of the soul of the dead, what then is the snake?

**Other vases with snakes and tombs**

In addition to the vases where the snake appears on Patroclus’ tomb, there are some other works that repeat a similar pattern and which can throw light on the meaning attached to the serpent in this field of Greek religion.

Also by the Leagros Group we have a black-figured hydria now housed in Berlin, which is worth mentioning (fig. 2-6). The scene depicts the moment before the sacrifice of Polyxene by Neoptolemos at Achilles’ tomb. To the left, there are four horses surrounded by three warriors, two of them armed with spear and shield. Next to them, Polyxene raises her left hand to her cheek in sorrow while she is being carried by Neoptolemos to her destiny. In front of her there is a high funerary tomb, painted white. Above it flies the eidolon. Two more elements are also related to the tumulus: the snake and, this time, a dog. The snake, hissing, raises its head up as if observing and in thanks for the offering that is about to take place. The dog is also looking up, as if it is about to jump. The vase is interesting because it introduces another problem that is relevant for our research and one which will be addressed later, namely, the dimension of reality which the animals depicted on the vase are intended to occupy.

Painted on a tomb in Nîmes, behind a charioteer with a Boeotian shield on a hydria, again by the Leagros Group, we see a snake, with another one portrayed on a small fragment of a cup from the Athenian agora, probably from the second quarter of the fifth century BCE, on which can be seen what appears to be the end of the coil of a snake. Unfortunately, the fragmentary condition of the piece does not allow us to reconstruct the scene further.

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20 Bremmer: 92.
21 *ABV* 363.37; BADN 302032.
22 Athens, Agora Museum, P22326; BADN 25257.
Fig. 2-6 Black-figure hydria

The same iconography appears on a black-figured lekythos dated to 480-470 BCE in Naples (fig. 2-7). Here the tomb takes the form of a mound with a conical baetyl on top. A woman is approaching a bearded hoplite who has drawn his sword and is moving towards the tomb. To the right we find a second hoplite and a bearded man leaning on a stick. Jane Harrison could not see any mythological sense in the image and suggests “that some ceremony is being enacted at a tomb between two men, and presumably the ceremony is of the nature of a pact ratified by an oath”. Prag, and before him, Jacobsthal, did see a mythological story here, that of Orestes and Electra at the tomb of Agamemnon. The scene would reflect the moment that Electra urges her brother on to dedicate his sword to the spirit of their father and to proceed with their revenge. Although there are some problems with this identification, relevant for us is the presence of the tomb mound and the snake painted on it.

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23 Drawing after Harrison: 228.
24 Harrison: 229.
25 Prag: 56.
Fig. 2-7 Drawing of a black-figured lekythos

Besides the mythological realm, there are various other depictions of tombs and snakes. One appears on a famous *kantharos* (a one-handled type of vase in an Etruscan shape) by the Perizoma Group in Paris, which also dates from the end of the sixth century (fig. 2-8).\(^{26}\) It is one of the very few extant representations of the rite of “the third day” or *ekphora*, when, before sunrise on the third day after death, the dead are carried to the grave in a quiet procession. This time the parade is accompanied by a warrior dance that may reflect a custom of the Etruscans, for whose tombs these vases were intended.\(^{27}\) The dead man, who is completely covered up to his head, is being taken to the tomb, which is marked on the vase by the quadrangular shaped mound. On the white painting, a snake and a little tree have been added. There is also an oval shape thought to depict the air hole for the cremation of the body inside the mound. This vase forms a group of three together with another two one-handled *kantharoi*,\(^ {28}\) all of which come from Etruscan sites.

The snake only appears in the piece reproduced here. On the second *kantharos*, housed in Paris,\(^ {29}\) a hedgehog replaces the snake and is flanked by plants, whilst a mule cart carries the dead. On the *kantharos* in Basel,

\(^{26}\) Paris, Cabinet des Medailles 353; *ABV* 346.7; BADN 301934; Kurtz and Boardman: 145, pl.35.

\(^{27}\) Shapiro: 320.

\(^{28}\) One is in Basel (Market, Munzen und Medaillen a.G., Xxxx0641641, BADN 641). The second one is in Paris (Cabinet des Medailles, 355; BADN 301935); Grabow: 148, K97; Kurtz and Boardman: 145, pl.36.

\(^{29}\) Paris, Cabinet des Medailles 355.
two *eidola* hover over the tomb, both winged and dressed. The *tymbos* adopts an oval shape and some plants can be seen painted on it.

![Image of kantharos](image)

**Fig. 2-8** One-handled class kantharos

There is one more vase that repeats a similar iconography: a black-figured *loutrophoros* in Athens by the Sappho Painter, dated to 450 BCE (fig. 2-9). On the neck of the vase two women stand by a grave mound topped by a vase of the same typology, while the body of the vase shows the coffin being lowered into the ground. On the mound painted on the neck four flying *eidola* and a snake are depicted.

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30 Athens, NM Cc688; BADN 480; Kurtz and Boardman: 145, pl.36; Harrison: 219, fig.4; Peifer: 158, Abb.13; Kurtz: 321, fig.4a.

Finding a meaning for the snake at the tomb

Taking into account all these examples I will now try to place the snake within the context of these vases and suggest a possible reason for its presence at the tomb. Despite the differences in the various narrations, the snake and the tomb are unifying aspects throughout all of them.

From an iconographical point of view, the snake is of a considerable size. It is depicted as both bearded and beardless and, on four occasions, it looks in the same direction as the flying *eidolon*. Typically, it raises its body and opens its mouth in a heraldic position that does not differ much from the portrayal of other snakes in scenes on the same vase (for example on the hydria in München, 1719). Nobody in the scene seems to be aware of their existence: both the *eidolon* and the snake seem to be silent spectators of the action, extra narrative signs used by the vase painter; as mentioned above, the presence of the *eidolon* would mark the acceptance of the honours by the dead. This also applies to the other vases from the Leagros Group. On the amphora by the Priam Painter (BM 99.7-21.3) there is a curious feature. Both the *eidolon* and the snake look calmly in the same direction as Achilles, towards Hector’s body, forming a quiet and solemn centripetal composition. When we look at other vases such as the Athenian *loutrophoros* one has the feeling that the painter is trying to
show what, to his mind, would be inside the tomb, that is the flying *eidola* and a snake.

As noted above, one of the problems we face when interpreting these vases is the intended degree of reality of the snakes depicted on them, i.e. their “status”. Are they intended as a real aspect of the contemporary *tumuli*, recording the actual paintings on the tomb or sculptures placed nearby, or are they the painter’s interpretation of what he thought was inside the tomb, as it would seem in the Athenian *loutrophoros*? Another possibility would be to see the snake as a sign used by the painter for purposes of identification, taking advantage of the wide funerary symbolism available, in order to make it clear that the tumulus was actually a tomb. The snake then becomes simply one visual element, albeit a meaningful one. Let us assess these possibilities.

**The snake reflecting the contents of the tomb**

Peifer says about the loutrophoros in Athens that “on the tomb the painter has painted what, to his mind, there was inside” (i.e., the snake and the *eidola*).\(^{32}\) He understands both depictions as symbols of the dead. In his opinion, the dual nature of Greek beliefs on death would come together here. The soul of the departed as a snake is an idea that seems to derive from belief in a household snake, which can be traced back as far as the Minoan world. In Crete, snakes could be seen around the hearths, where they gathered, attracted by the warmth, as they still do today.\(^{33}\) They were usually harmless and came to be perceived as good for the house whose prosperity was associated with them. It was forbidden to kill them and they were fed with sprinkled breadcrumbs, honey or a libation of milk. Later, they may have been seen as related to an ancestor of the householder who returned to the house to bring prosperity, although this development is not certain.\(^{34}\)

However, the literary sources linking the snake and the dead come much later and are mostly rooted in Roman traditions. For example, Pliny the Elder reports the following: “We find it stated by many authors, that a serpent is produced from the spinal marrow of a man. Many creatures, in fact, among the quadrupeds even, have a secret and mysterious origin.”\(^{35}\)

In another important passage, Plutarch explains that after the death of the King of Sparta, Cleomenes III (235-222 BCE), a huge snake appeared,

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\(^{32}\) Peifer: 158; Harrison: 219.

\(^{33}\) Egli: 21ff.

\(^{34}\) Nilsson 1949: 328-329.

\(^{35}\) Pliny: X, 86, 67. The same belief is found in Ovid: XV, 389.
coiling itself about his body, which was taken as a sign that the man was of a superior nature and beloved by the gods. This idea was refuted by the wise men who explained that putrefying bodies produce several kinds of insects and worms. In antiquity, people believed in spontaneous generation and it was thought that these maggots formed naturally from rotting meat. Aelian also refers to the belief that the marrow changes into a snake, and he highlights the concept of morality by affirming that it is only the marrow of bad men which allows these creatures to grow as a punishment for their bad actions. Therefore, there would seem to be a relationship between the snake and the soul of the departed, or, more specifically, with its rotting body, with the corpse.

In our vases, it seems clear that what is being equated with the psyche of the dead is the small figure, the *eidolon*, sometimes expressly labelled as *psyche*. Sometimes the inscription *Patroklos* also appears. I do not think that two *psychai* are intended here, and hence I would rule out the hypothesis that on these vases the snake necessarily represents the soul of the dead.

**The snake outside the tomb**

Grabow thinks that the snakes on the vases must not be taken as mere artistic licence but as images of real snakes. She interprets the lion on the vase in Münster as a statue at the tomb. The role of lions as guardians of temples and doors is well known and they also appear in the Attic world as protectors of the dead, guaranteeing the impregnable nature of the burial place. Chronologically, this work would be the last of the series of vases that depict the dragging of Hector’s body and the first that substitutes the snake for the lion (a statue, to Grabow’s mind). Therefore, she thinks that before that date, the snake was charged with the guardian role. She believes that, although there are no preserved remains, snakes could have been used in the figurative painting of the tumulus to signal the inviolability of the area.

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36 Aelian: I, 51.
37 Grabow: 156
38 Grabow: 156.
Funerary earth mounds were quite common in archaic Attica, located above both inhumation and cremation graves, and were normally crowned by vases or sculpture. They were covered and protected by plaster, which also functioned as a means of retaining the shape of the mound. These tombs are very likely to have received plaques painted by leading artists of the day with scenes of the laying out of the dead and lamentation. Some of them have been found, although not in situ.

Animals also seem to have been used to mark the tombs, at least in Athens—among them are bulls, dogs, eagles and lions. Lions are seen as markers from 600 BCE, according to Boardman and Kurtz. They were chosen specially for the communal tombs of those killed in battle and they are also often referred to in epitaphs. A lion was placed as a guardian of the tomb of the fallen Greeks who fought at Thermopiles, and a lion also surmounted Leonidas’ tomb. But contrary to what might be expected the snakes do not appear as tomb monuments. They are undoubtedly related to the dead and their realm but do not seem to have been regarded appropriate for individual monuments.

This is surprising because this animal was charged with a very important role as a “guardian of the sacred” in the ancient Greek world, one which is attested by numerous myths and images. This belief derives from the acute sense of sight of a particular kind of ophidian referred to as drakon. From earliest times these animals—thought to be sleepless—were considered the most suitable ones for watching over treasured possessions, and their love for gold is found in the folklore of many different peoples, from India to the tiniest villages in Galicia, northwest Spain. This is the reason why the objects or places which were most cherished by Greek heroes or gods—such as the Golden Fleece, Golden Apples, the Delphic Oracle—were guarded by these animals and why even the fate of the most important Greek polis, Athens, depended on the lust of this uncanny reptile. Likewise, many Indo-European creation myths feature snakes as miserly creatures, holding the primeval waters and avoiding the creation of the world. They are usually reluctant to move and align themselves with the lazy, old and sleepy gods who gave birth to the world long ago and who are now being disturbed by active young gods who desire to move the world or creation forward.

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39 Kurtz and Boardman: 79ff.
40 Kurtz and Boardman: 82ff.
41 Kurtz and Boardman: 239.
42 Rodríguez 2010.
43 Rodríguez 2008.
Conclusion

Where do all these remarks leave us with regard to our vases? Taking the above into consideration, my feeling is that it is not possible to conclude that the snake depicted in the tumulus is meant to embody the soul of the departed, but rather that it is a visual sign, a marker, used by the vase painter to clarify that what it is being illustrated on the vase is a tomb. It is indeed one of the most suitable animals to be depicted in the tumuli, in the same way that it was extensively figured in the fountain houses (mainly on the pediments) of contemporary hydrias by, for example, the Antimenes Painter. Decorative as it may be, it was not without significance, and its very meaning and multifaceted nature within Greek culture confirms my assumption. The snake, due to its behaviour and elemental biological characteristics, is steeped in associations. Some of its features and all the beliefs and superstitions derived from them relate it to the underworld and the earth, but not specifically as the embodiment of the soul. The sacredness perceived in it has to do with the aspects of the earth we hold as sacred, such as the eternal repetition of life in an endless and everlasting regeneration. The earth is that “which has always been there”, the first creation to come into existence after chaos in Hesiod’s Theogony—and this role is also transferred to the snake. It is autochthonous; it is “inside” and confronts the new gods, the “outsiders”. The earth, the homeland, becomes the centre and reference for the Greek citizen, a fundamental key in various political discourses of autochthony. Also the snake was always before; it stands for the earth and chthonian knowledge in many initiation myths—such as the Python at Delphi or Ladon, or the sleepless snake in the Garden of the Hesperides. Various earthly monsters—such as the Giants, or Typhon—were always painted in the form of snakes, but so was the famous Kekrops, the culture-hero ancestor of the Athenians who was born from the Earth and had a serpent’s tail instead of legs. In the same way, the snake was often linked to many gods, acting as an epiphany, theophany or hierophany of the divine entity that circumscribed their “field of action” without being the exact symbol of any of them. The relationship between snake and gods is a strange one that we can only summarise here by saying that, somehow, when gods became men, when they were uprooted, the snake still remained to reinforce and nuance a specific way of being and acting, and a very specific aspect of sacredness. It became evident that, in the end, the anthropomorphism and the rationality that so strongly oppose the symbolic way of thinking could not live up to the Greeks’ expectations. As a chthonic being, the serpent is undoubtedly related to the funerary world but more as a guardian animal.
or as an element of initiation, bound to a knowledge of a mystic-chthonic kind (as on the famous Sotadean cup in London) than as a symbol of the soul of the departed. It is a daimonic intermediary to the underworld. The soul of the dead does not seem to have been specifically depicted as a snake and when the psyche appears on vases, it is clearly represented by the image of the eidolon and usually labelled.

A similar problem arises again on a very heterogeneous group of vases from the archaic period on which the snake appears in the surroundings of a tomb or almost springing from a recently murdered body. These vases deserve a detailed study that exceeds the aims of this work but which would undoubtedly complement the case studies I have presented. That research would lead us to another slippery slope involving the souls of the dead: namely the relationship between the soul, the snake and the Erinys, which is a complex area of investigation and not easy to ascertain given our current level of knowledge.

I am nonetheless aware that in trying to establish all these subtle divisions I may have drawn an artificial and awkward line in one of the most confusing and unintelligible fields of Greek religion, i.e. the beliefs concerning the underworld, by making the same mistake that Jane Harrison so openly and vehemently criticised more than a century ago.

But I am also conscious that our discipline has evolved greatly and that old ideas can and must be assessed and contested from different points of view. To my mind, it is all about reaching a middle ground between opposite trends of thought, between the positivist approach to the Greek culture, which hinders the understanding of anything that is not explicitly stated within it, and the more spiritual, human trends which aim to uncover what lays behind the visible reality, for example Jungian theories about combat myths. We sometimes forget that the subjects we analyse are not objective facts at all; they spring from a human mind that was, and is, constantly changing. All is a shifting kaleidoscope, not always easy to encompass within our modern/rational categories of thought. This is why we must apply other methodologies to the study of the snake symbolism in the ancient Greek world, and must read between lines and be imaginative, to be able to reach a point where the serpent is not taken for granted, but without forgetting, too, the special difficulty of the subject for the Greek world, whose art was far from being symbolic.

44 The snake usually prevents but may also allow the acquisition of the aletheia, or mystic knowledge.
45 See Islle Johnston.
46 “There is no greater bar to the understanding of mythology than our modern habit of clear analytic thought” (Harrison: 211).
One must be aware of the danger of drifting into an excessive symbolic interpretation of Greek art, while simultaneously paying attention to the complex net of meanings signified by the snake, meanings that might, or might not, have been consciously intended by the artist. In this regard, the snake has always given food for thought and the iconography of the serpent with the tumulus also offers suggestive insights into the Greek beliefs concerning death and rebirth (as in the Sotadean cup mentioned above), and visually links two domed structures of the utmost importance for the human being: the womb and the tomb.

The snake also then has a role to play as far as human fertility is concerned: as a universal phallic symbol it is deeply bonded to women’s fertility and it is only after being touched by snakes in dreams that a number of women affected by long-term infertility could eventually conceive in the sacred space of the Asclepeian sanctuaries. Likewise, some of the most reputed men of antiquity—among them, Alexander and Augustus—were reportedly born from snakes. One of them, according to Nicander, stole the plant of immortality from men.47 The snake also has a healing power, the pharmakon, i.e. the venom when used in the right dosage. It has seen the beginning and the end, for it is the snake that encircles the world; it is sapientissima—and therefore involved in mantic activities; for only snakes and gods can overcome death.48 The serpent works as a daimonic intermediary to the underworld.

Thus, the iconography of the snake on the tomb is also the visual image of the greatest of mysteries, the mystery of life and death. By looking at the tomb, we have accessed an alternative reality; we have been brought to the unintelligible. The symbol makes sense now.

**Bibliography**


Beazley Archive Database, www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/index.htm

(accessed November 2012).


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48 Rodríguez Pérez 2011: passim.
—. (2008) Serpientes, dioses y heroes. El combate contra el monstruo en el arte y la literatura griega antigua (León: Universidad de León).
Between the eighth century BCE and fourth century CE, the cult of the Kabeiroi1 flourished as a collective of deities or daimons in the eastern Mediterranean.2 The mysteries of the cult are something of an enigma in antiquity, and there is a pronounced lack of clear information regarding the function and identity of these daimons.3 However it is clear that they were a group of masculine divinities with characteristics that varied according

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1 Transliteration of the Greek names where both “C” and “K” could be used: This paper will use “K” (Kabeiroi, Kouretes, etc.) as standard, except in those instances where “C” is the dominant translation (Cassandra, Circe, etc). The Kabeiroi can also be transliterated as Kabiroi, Cabeiri, Cabeiroi or Cabiri; and Kabeiros as Kabiros, Cabeiros or Cabiros. Daimon can also be translated as daemon. Kabeiroi/Kabeiros and daimon will be used throughout, although quotations will preserve their spellings.

2 The function of daimon/daimons in the context of Greek religion is complicated; although many scholars use the term as an alternative to theoi or gods (i.e. Blakely), others consider the daimon to be an occult force without physical form or cult (Wilford: 217; Burkert: 179-181). For the purposes of this paper, the concept that the daimon can be a god will be used.

3 Bowden: 49. Blakely’s study considers the metallurgical evidence pertaining to five separate (but interconnected) groups of daimons, including the Kabeiroi; the study “reveals the permeability of the daimonic types, the variability of their relationship to metallurgy, and the wealth of other thematic, ritual and iconographic associations, including jealousy, magic and deformity. These serve various purposes, responding to the literary genres, authorial intent, and artistic conventions in which they function.”
to geographic location. There were numerous cult centres with the most important being found at Thebes in Boeotia (central Greece), and the Greek islands of Lemnos and Samothrace. At Samothrace (and probably Lemnos) it appears that they were responsible for providing adherents with protection from danger, particularly at sea.\(^4\) In Thebes the focus seems to have centred on fertility and viticulture on the basis of the votive offerings found there.\(^5\) The sanctuaries themselves were founded relatively early; Lemnos and Samothrace probably originated in the eighth or seventh centuries BCE.\(^6\) Thebes is harder to date but is probably contemporary with the other sanctuaries, although the first evidence of cult buildings there is from the late sixth century BCE.\(^7\) The cult expanded dramatically in the Hellenistic period (beginning during the late fourth century BCE), with sanctuaries, votives and other evidence of worship appearing across the eastern Mediterranean and even as far as India.\(^8\)

The evidence which does exist for the worship of the Kabeiroi is somewhat limited and often conflicting. However, the sanctuary at Thebes is known for a unique pottery type known as Kabeiric Ware (c. 450-275 BCE), which frequently offers caricatures and parodies of everyday life and mythology. Gods, demi-gods, daimons and heroes are all presented in a grotesque fashion, but this practice of parodying the divine does not extend to the Kabeiroi themselves. Instead, the Kabeiroi often appear as “normal”, with realistic human features and physiques, in scenes which display other figures as caricatures. Evidence from other sites elsewhere in the Greek world also indicates a lack of humour in their depictions. Yet they are frequently described in secondary literature as being gods of comic appearance, which appears to be derived from occasional descriptions in the ancient texts. The question arises as to why these deities are believed to be comic, yet are exempt from being depicted in comedic fashion at their own cult centres.

\(^4\) Bowden: 66-67.
\(^5\) Bedigan 2008a: 43.
\(^6\) Blakely: 33; Kalogeropoulou: 192, 195.
\(^7\) Schachter: 112-113, 136.
\(^8\) Cole: 5; Lehmann and Spitle 1964: 132; Lewis: 95 no.209.
Who were the Kabeiroi?

One of the major difficulties when dealing with the Kabeiroi is that of determining the identity of these deities and why they were worshipped. Both ancient and modern authors have had difficulty in separating the gods into specific groups. The Kabeiroi appear to belong to a subset of the main Greek pantheon which comprises a significant number of male

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9 Map generated using data supplied from Pleiades ©K. M. Bedigan 2012.
10 Schefold describes the Kabeiroi as "godlings" (1992: passim), whereas elsewhere the Kabeiroi appear to be both attendants to more powerful gods or are high-ranking divinities in their own right (Burkert: 281-285).
pairs and groups.\textsuperscript{11} The terms Kabeiroi, Kouretes, Korybantes, Dioskouroi, Anakes, Boy Lords, Theoi Megaloi, Daktyloi, and others are often used interchangeably, leading to confusion about their exact identities.\textsuperscript{12} Within this wider group, the Kabeiroi are most closely linked to the Dioskouroi, as well as to the Theoi Megaloi (literally translated as “Great Gods”) and the Samothracian Theoi (the “Samothracian Gods”, or the Great Gods of Samothrace). However, the connection between the Kabeiroi and the Samothracian deities has been the subject of considerable debate.

Hemberg used etymological analysis to suggest that the titles Kabeiroi, Theoi Megaloi and Samothracian Theoi were synonymous.\textsuperscript{13} When this argument was proposed, the Kabeiroi were believed to be of Semitic (Afro-Asiatic) origin, with the term K\textsuperscript{a}bir being translated as “Mighty One”.\textsuperscript{14} This appears to be a logical interpretation when we compare the concept of a “Great God” with a “Mighty One”. More recently Beekes has suggested that the origin of the name Kabeiroi is Anatolian and this appears more convincing, especially in view of evidence suggesting a close association between the cult and north-western Asia Minor.\textsuperscript{15} If multiple deities, all with some similarity of function, used the same honorific title it would explain how authors, both ancient and modern, identified them as a single entity or group. A list of deities and groups associated with the title is provided by Hemberg,\textsuperscript{16} and ranges from Cyclopes and Harpies to nymphs and the Dioskouroi; this would support the idea of Theoi Megaloi being a general description rather than a specific name. If groups of deities were given the title “Great Gods” as an honorific, then it would not be unexpected for the Theoi Megaloi to be equated with those divinities that had previously enjoyed the title.

The relationship between the Kabeiroi and Samothracian Theoi is therefore difficult to explain. Burkert asserted that the two cults are very different, but acknowledges that many later sources believed otherwise.\textsuperscript{17} Mnaseas gives the names of the Samothracian Theoi as Axieros, Axiokersos and Axiokersa.\textsuperscript{18} Elsewhere, to confuse matters further, these

\textsuperscript{11} Cole: 2; Bedigan 2008a: 40; Bowden: 53.
\textsuperscript{12} Hemberg: 17; Cole: 1-4; Blakely: 2; Bowden: 61-62, 64.
\textsuperscript{13} Hemberg: 22.
\textsuperscript{14} Grant: 59. There are other hypotheses regarding the origin of the name Kabeiroi; see Hemberg: 318-25 and Beekes: 468-469.
\textsuperscript{15} Beekes: 465-477; Bowden: 62; Strabo, Geography, 10.3.21 (“Now it has so happened that the Cabeiri are most honoured in Imbros and Lemnos, but they are also honoured in separate cities in the Troad”).
\textsuperscript{16} Hemberg: 17.
\textsuperscript{17} Burkert: 283; Schachter, 2003: 112.
\textsuperscript{18} Burkert: 283.
names, along with Kadmilos, are attributed to the deities of the Kabeiric site at Thebes.\textsuperscript{19} It would seem likely that this is a misattribution, as it is in fact clear that these names are only used in connection with Samothrace. There is certainly some relationship between the two cults,\textsuperscript{20} which cannot be explained by dismissing them as misinterpretations of the historical and archaeological record. More recent research also tends to point to a single cult, rather than the Samothracian Theoi being worshipped as completely separate entities.\textsuperscript{21} However, the evidence for this is limited. At present there is only one inscription which refers to the Kabeiroi being worshipped at Samothrace.\textsuperscript{22} There is the possibility that some of the votives at Ilion (north-western Asia Minor) demonstrate shared characteristics between the two cults,\textsuperscript{23} and there are also the cult centres of the Kabeiroi, the Dioskouroi and the Samothracian Theoi which share a single site on Delos.\textsuperscript{24}

If we accept the Kabeiroi (and the various related cults/deities) as a distinct group, it remains apparent that the origin and identities of these deities is complicated. This difficulty is heightened by the seeming reluctance to speak of these gods (and others who are worshipped as part of mysteries) for fear of divine retribution, as related by Pausanias.\textsuperscript{25} The variability in the nature of the Kabeiroi is impressive, with variations in what they represent, their genealogical connections, the reason for their worship and their actual numbers. The available evidence indicates that

\textsuperscript{19} Schoder: 103.  
\textsuperscript{20} Schachter: 109.  
\textsuperscript{21} Blakely: 16-17.  
\textsuperscript{22} Dimitrova: 83-90, no.39. This Attic inscription for an initiate of Samothrace refers to the individual witnessing “the doubly sacred light of the Kabiros of Samothrace.” This refers to a singular deity, however, the reference to “doubly” has been interpreted by Dimitrova (88) to mean that they are referring to two Kabeiroi in a more poetic fashion. Further discussion of the singular/plural use of Kabeiros/Kabeiroi can be found in Dimitrova (87-88).  
\textsuperscript{23} Lawall: 95.  
\textsuperscript{24} Hemberg: 140-153.  
\textsuperscript{25} Pausanias, \textit{Guide to Greece}, 9.25.5: “The curse of the Kabeiroi is irremovable. […] Some private individuals at Naupaktos had the audacity to re-enact the celebrations of Thebes; it was not long before they paid the penalty. When some men from Xerxes’ army were left behind in Boeotia under Mardonius, some of them entered the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi, maybe in the expectation of great wealth but I think largely out of contempt of religion. At that moment they went out of their minds; they perished by jumping from the cliffs and into the sea. When Alexander won his battle […] some Macedonians went into the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi since it was on enemy territory; they were blasted to death by the thunder and lightning of heaven.”
the Kabeiroi could be represented as a group of masculine deities whose function and background differed according to the needs of the community in which the cult was situated. This variation may also account for the difficulties in attribution, for different gods with the same function have often been assimilated in the same way as gods with identical or similar names, and have subsequently been grouped together regardless of the reasons why they were being worshipped.

In terms of appearance, the evidence is equally confusing, varying from apparent perfection to deformity. This assumption of deformed physique appears to be derived from the description presented by Herodotus:

Thus too he [Cambyses II, King of Persia] entered the temple of Hephaestus and jeered at the image there [...] I will describe it for anyone who has not seen these figures: it is the likeness of a dwarf. Also he entered the temple of the Kabeiroi, into which no one may enter save the priest; the images here he even burnt, with bitter mockery. These also are like the images of Hephaestus, and said to be his sons."

Curiously, there are no other references to caricature or deformity of the Kabeiroi in the ancient literature. Herodotus is the only source for this and must be regarded as dubious given his equation of Hephaestus and his family with their Egyptian equivalents. However, there is the sense from some of the literature that these deities had a humorous side. A surviving fragment of the lost play Kabeiroi by Aeschylus, detailing part of the adventure of Jason and the Argonauts, refers to either the consumption or manufacture of alcohol: “[The Kabeiroi] playfully threatened [to make the house] run short of vinegar”. It has been suggested that the former is the more likely interpretation; that the deities joke that they shall drink all the

27 Herodotus, Histories, 3.31. This description in fact probably refers to the Egyptian god Ptah and his sons, who were equated with Hephaestus and his sons (and the Kabeiroi), and who were represented by these dwarfish figures (Blakely: 44).
28 Herodotus Histories 3.31; see also Blakely: 44.
29 Aeschylus, Kabeiroi, frag 97 (see 109 fn.1) from Plutarch’s Table Talk, 2.1 (“So if he that has an excellent vintage should complain of Aeschylus’s Cabeiri for making him want vinegar, as they had jocosely threatened”). Of the other two surviving fragments, a second (frag.96) also refers to wine—“That there shall never be a dearth of jars, either of wine or of water, in <this/your> wealthy home.” While both quotations are said to come from the play, they appear to be derived from separate contexts as the rhythm is different; frag.97 is iambic, frag.96 anapaests (Sommerstein, 109 fn.1). See also Smyth: 413 frag.49 (97).
available wine and resort to drinking vinegar. This work was criticised for the depiction of Jason and the Argonauts on stage drunk—a shocking scene in a tragic play. The implication here is that the audience knew that the rituals or festivals for this cult involved the consumption of alcohol. The shock merely came from the realisation that the crew of the Argo drank too much!

The cults in Greece and Asia Minor

In total, there appear to be approximately a hundred locations which have connections to the Kabeiroi, the Theoi Megaloi or the Samothracian Theoi. These connections vary from known sanctuaries to passing references in the extant texts. If we include sites with links to other connected deities, including as the Dioskouroi or the Anakes, the list would be far larger. However, the physical evidence is limited and there are only a few sites with useful iconographic material.

On the basis of the available evidence, there are four main categories of Kabeiroi. These four versions each represent the Kabeiroi in a different light and it is interesting to note that the sanctuaries and other sites identified do not necessarily adhere to just one of the following models. This suggests that although there may have been a common origin, there was also a degree of individual development. The founding dates indicated for the three centres at Thebes, Lemnos and Samothrace would certainly support the theory that these particular sanctuaries evolved first.

30 Alternatively, they may be joking that since they will drink all the wine, there will be nothing left to turn into vinegar (see Smyth, 413).

31 Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, 10.428F. “I venture to assert that even Aeschylus erred in this; for he, and not, as some declare, Euripides, was the first to introduce the spectacle of drunken men into tragedy. In *The Cabiri*, namely, he represents Jason and his companions as drunk.” See also Sommerstein: 108.

32 See Bedigan 2008a: 411-457 for the complete gazetteer. Although it should be noted that site no. 45, the potential sanctuary at Lesbos, is incorrect; the source used to identify this site was misreported, and the archaeology described in fact refers to the sanctuary at Lemnos (Compare Blackman:112 with Kazianis: 853).

33 Of the three contenders, either Lemnos or Samothrace could claim to be the first, though most suggest that Lemnos is the earlier sanctuary, c. seventh century BCE (Blakely: 33). However, others propose that the sanctuary on Samothrace was established prior to the colonisation of the island by Greek settlers in c. 700 BCE, which would make it the first of the cult centres (Kalogeropoulou: 192, 195). The origins of the Theban cult are more difficult to place. For the earliest period we must rely on the bronze and lead figurines whose dating has been called into question (Roesch: 135-151). They can actually be traced to the tenth century BCE,
1. Theban Type: Kabeiroi consist of a father-son duo, complying with the Boeotian preference for male pairs. Names can vary. The focus of the cult is similar to those of Dionysus, both in terms of iconography and activity, with the emphasis on fertility (animal, human and agricultural) and viticulture.

2. Lemnian Type: Kabeiroi consist of three brothers, nominally the sons of Hephaestus and the nymph Kabeiro. No names are given for the brothers, although the title karkinoi (crabs) may have applied. The focus of the cult is closely related to Hephaestus, so has an emphasis on metal working. Archaeological and literary evidence would also imply a connection with viticulture.

3. Samothracian Type: Kabeiroi are unspecified, but possibly number from two to four. If there are four deities, the non-Hellenic names are given as Axieros, Axiokersos, Axiokersa and Kadmilos. The Greek equivalents are Demeter, Hades, Persephone and Hermes. Most of the votives and inscriptions intimate that the cult was popular with seafarers, as the majority offer thanks for protection and rescue at sea.

4. Thessalonikian Type: A single adult male, known as Kabeiros, patron of fertility and the vintage. This evidence is much later in date (Roman period). Like the Kabeiroi found on Lemnos, the god Kabeiros is similar to Hephaestus.

which would therefore place Thebes considerably before Lemnos or Samothrace. Unfortunately no further research as to the dating of the metal figurines has taken place.

References:
34 Schachter: 112.
36 Blakely: 16.
37 Archontidou et al: 11.
38 Blakely: 37.
39 Archontidou et al.: 11.
40 Aeschylus, Kabeiroi, frag.97.
41 Burkert: 283.
42 Burkert: 283.
43 See Cole for a full interpretation of the Samothracian cult participants and their dedications.
44 Edson: 188-189.
46 Blakely: 34-35, figs.4-5.
Humour in the cult

Whether it really be such a bad thing to laugh when worshipping a god?47

There is a sense that religious occasions require a certain dignity, and that ridicule or laughter would be somehow impious. However, festivals and other celebrations are fundamental to ancient cults, and good humour and high spirits do not appear to have been out of place on such occasions. The lubrication of religious events through the use of alcohol was typical of many ancient Greek cults, and this is well documented for the Kabeiroi.48 The archaeological evidence for those Kabeiric cult centres which have been excavated certainly strongly supports the conclusion that the consumption of wine was part of the ritual, for drinking vessels are found in significant numbers, along with other drinking paraphernalia at the Kabeiric sites.49

The actual components of the Kabeiric festivals are undocumented, although Clement of Alexandria describes the initiation rituals of other contemporary mystery cults, which appear to have ritualised the revelation of sacred artefacts and knowledge.50 If we assume that the festivals follow these conventions, it would seem likely that theatrical presentations of the mythology, sacrifice and feasting would feature in them.51 We gain a sense that humour was important when we consider the iconographic evidence from Thebes (see below), but there are also occasional references to it in the literature. The aforementioned Aeschylean production of the Kabeiroi which appears to add what would usually be classed as a comic or satyric element to a tragic play is one such example. There is also the rare verb παραπαίξειν (parapaizein), used in an inscription from Lemnos.52 The term literally means “to play alongside”, in this case alongside the god. Normally this is a phrase used in connection with Dionysus, a natural companion to humour and good spirits. The appearance of it in connection with the Lemnian Kabeiroi would imply similar associations.

48 See Bedigan: 2008b.
49 For Thebes, see Bedigan: 2008a and 2008b; For Lemnos and Samothrace, see Bedigan 2008a: 324-327; Sommerstein: 109.
50 Clement of Alexandria, Exhortation to the Greeks, 2.14 on the cult of Cybele and Attis: “I ate from the drum; I drank from the cymbal; I carried the sacred dish; I stole into the bridal chamber”, and 2.17 on the cult of Demeter and Kore/Persephone at Eleusis: “I fasted; I drank the draught; I took from the chest; having done my task, I placed in the basket, and from the basket into the chest.”
51 Zaidman and Pantel: 137; Bell: 94; Lehmann: 38-39; Burkert: 75-77, 286.
52 Follet: 32-34; Halliwell: 20 fn.45.
That mystery cults could incorporate humour into their rituals can also be seen at Eleusis, in the cult of Demeter and Kore/Persephone. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, laughter is represented as a key aspect of life. In the *Hymn*, Persephone is abducted by Hades and as a result Demeter goes into mourning and searches the earth in vain for her lost daughter. Her wandering path leads her to Eleusis, where she is welcomed by the daughters of the king and queen (Keleos and Metaneira) of Eleusis, who invite her into their home. Demeter’s physical and mental well-being, severely damaged by events earlier in the poem, are improved by the comic antics of the servant Iambe, for prior to this point she refuses to smile or laugh. Iambe’s bawdy and perhaps sexually explicit jokes help the goddess to start living again, she begins to smile, eat and drink once more. The moral of the work is that laughter is essential for a healthy life, even for a goddess.

**The Kabeiric vases from Thebes**

The main body of evidence which supports the use of humour and parody within the Kabeiric cult can be seen in the ceramics from the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi at Thebes. The Kabeiric Ware pottery from this cult centre is known for its grotesque and caricatured representations of gods, heroes and men. The scenes vary from mythological stories, to more ordinary depictions of everyday life or religious activities.

Dating from between 450 to 275 BCE, this black-figure pottery is rather unique within the world of Greek ceramics, especially in terms of the style, form and singular provenance of the ware. The artistic similarities to depictions of Dionysus are important, and it would appear that Kabeiric Ware had adopted the motifs from this particular cult. The predominance of Dionysus-like figures and attributes associated with him

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54 Sælid Gilhus: 33-34; Agha-Jaffar: 82. For the full story, see *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.
56 *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, lines 200-205: “Averse to laughter, and refusing food and drink, Demeter sat wasting with longing for her deep-girded daughter—until the moment when shrewd Iambe resorted to mocking her and with many jests moved the sacred mistress to smile, to laugh, and to life her spirits in benevolence. Thereafter, indeed, Iambe was pleasing to the goddess in spirit.”
57 Of the approximately three hundred Kabeiric Ware vases, less than twenty have confirmed provenances outside the sanctuary (see Bedigan 2008a: 178, 195, 204, 395).
(maenads, satyrs, wine, general festivity) suggest that during the earlier phases of Kabeiric ware (c.400-375 BCE), he was the more important deity at Thebes. The subsequent rise and dominance of Kabeiros indicates a switch in cultic practice, with the latter surpassing the former in numbers of representations on vessels. This switch also meant that Kabeiros took on elements of Dionysus (in terms of identity and iconography) but these were adapted and added to, leading to an iconography that is highly specific to the sanctuary.

Fig. 3-2 The Judgement of Paris, scene from a Kabeiric Skyphos (drinking cup) by the Mystes Painter, late fifth-second quarter of the fourth century BCE. Top: Hera (labelled), Aphrodite, Hermes. Bottom: two unnamed female figures (Artemis and Athena?).

58 Paris, Alexandros “A”. Image from Wolters and Bruns, pl.37.2-3; for further information on this vase see Wolters and Bruns: 109 M18; Braun and Haevernick: 65 no.366; Bedigan 2008a: Catalogue 1 (A), no.94.
The gods are a popular topic for the Kabeiric vases, and particular stories are favoured. There appears to be a preference for those connected to the Trojan War and the subsequent journey home (Figure 3-2). There are also scenes from local mythology, including the Theban heroes Kadmos and Herakles. Gods and goddesses and heroes and heroines are frequently caricatured. Pot-bellies, spindly limbs, grotesque and protruding facial features, distorted genitalia and aged countenances contrive to portray these mythical figures in a decidedly un-godlike and un-heroic light (see Appendix for an index of figures depicted).59

An exception is made, however, for the two Kabeiric deities Kabeiros and Pais, for none of the caricatured images include parodies of these daimons. This appears to be a clear and conscious decision as there are instances where all the other figures in a scene are parodied, but the two Kabeiric gods are shown in an idealised manner (fig. 3-3).

Fig. 3-3 Fragments of a Skypos (drinking cup) by the Kabir Painter c. late fourth century BCE. The scene depicts Kabeiros and Pais to the right, at the left stand Mitos, Krateia and Protalos. A second fragment, showing Saty[ra] may be from same vase.60

60 Image from Wolters and Bruns, pl.5; for further information on this vase see Wolters & Bruns: 43 no.53, 96K, pl. 44:1; Braun and Haevernck: 62 no.302, pl.22.1-2; Bedigan 2008a: Catalogue 1 (A), no.120. Nitos, Krateia and Protalos are
Kabeiric iconography from the wider Greek world

Unlike the ceramic corpus from Thebes, the material from the other Kabeiric sites in terms of iconography is relatively disparate. There is no assemblage comparable to Kabeiric Ware but there is other evidence which can be considered, primarily coins and sculpture. What becomes clear is that the appearance of the divinities is remarkably similar despite differences in location or association, an idea corroborated by Blakely. However, Blakely’s premise is that this related identity is one which is deformed or grotesque, as a result of a genetic trait inherited from the supposed father of the Kabeiroi, Hephaestus, on the island of Lemnos. In fact, as with the vases from Thebes, this material shows a clear lack of parody or caricature. All the figures of the Kabeiroi from other Kabeiric sites are depicted in a realistic form with no distortion of either visage or physique.

If we consider the numismatic evidence from the other sites, some clear trends are apparent. The coins show a clear correlation in the manner of depiction of these deities. Influences from other gods, namely the iconographic motifs or identifiers, are very obvious; the connection between the Kabeiroi/Kabeiros and Dionysus has already been mentioned in relation to the vases. Generally, the numismatic iconography features two distinctive representations of the Kabeiroi. Firstly, the figure can be seen as a bearded mature male, often shown with a pointed hat and wreath, and secondly, as a youthful beardless figure. The juxtaposition of the images is interesting, as is the fact that both can be seen on the coinage from a single city (Birytis). This suggests that there are at least two Kabeiroi recognised—one mature, the other young—an interesting parallel to the father-son pairing at Thebes. The other significant manner of depicting the Kabeiroi is drawn from iconography associated with the Dioskouroi, the twin sons of Zeus: twinned youthful figures, horses and double stars frequently appear and are all closely associated with the characters which appear in the myths relating to the origin of mankind, representing the first man, woman and child respectively (Bedigan 2008a: 288).

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61 Blakely: 32.
62 Blakely: 37 (Lemnos), 42 (Thebes).
63 Wroth 1894: 40 no.1, 41 no.8; von Fritz and Gaebler: 11 no.139, 12 no.156, 14 no.190.
64 Wroth 1886: 124-126, no.13; Wroth 1894: 166 nos 98-99; Jameson: no.31; Head: 892; Hemberg: 254 (see also fn.50).
65 Wroth 1894: 40 no.1, pl.8.1, 41 no.8, pl.8.5.
Dioskouroi. Coinage from a number of cities follows these iconographic conventions. Horsemen connected to the Dioskouroi/Kabeiroi are seen on coins from Kleitor and Kallatis; and twinned figures are found on coins from Pergamum and Istros. The city of Tomis also drew on the attributes of the Dioskouroi for their coinage.

The sculptural evidence is more limited. An un-provenanced relief from Larymna in Boeotia, tentatively connected to the cult, has a scene remarkably similar to a possible ram sacrifice on one of the coins featuring a Kabeiric divinity from Kyzikos. The Lebadeia relief, like the one from Larymna, has similarities to the iconographic styles from elsewhere. In this instance, a vase from the Theban Kabeirion has a possible parodied initiation scene corresponding to this relief. Both vase and relief have a single figure who is completely robed from head to toe, disguising its gender.

Conclusions

The assertion that the iconography of the Kabeiric cult is overwhelmingly pygmy-like and grotesque seems unfounded. On the basis of the archaeological material, the figures are very clearly undistorted and instead reflect the ideals of the human form during this period. Whilst the statues to whom Herodotus refers show caricatured or grotesque elements, there is also the very strong possibility that these figures are not Kabeiroi. In fact, they are the Egyptian equivalent of the Kabeiroi, and have simply been “translated” into the Greek, in much the same way that Ammon is often identified as Zeus in the Greek sources. Alternatively there seems to be a long-standing tradition of presenting Kabeiros as a

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67 Kallatis and Istros are both located in the ancient region of Thrace (modern Bulgaria), Kleitor and Pergamum are included in fig. 1-1. Kleitor: Gardner: pl.33.9; Kallatis: Pick: 109 no.281 pl.2.9; Pergamum: Wroth: 117 no.47 pl.24.5; Istros: Pick: no.405 pl.2.20.
68 The coins from Tomis (modern Constantia, Bulgaria) have a variety of motifs on the obverse, including paired horses (Pick: pl. 5.8, pl.5.10; Pick and Regling: 644 no.2452, 646 no.2461), bells (Pick: pl.5.11, pl.5.20; Pick and Regling: 649 no.2470, 663 no.2525), horsemen (Pick, pl. 6.28; Pick and Regling, 692 no.2659) and reclining figures (Pick, pl.7.11; Pick and Regling, 806 no.3125).
69 von Fritze and Gaebler: 14 no.190, pl.6.2; Rodenwaldt: pl.27.
70 Wolters and Bruns: 106 M2, pls 33.3, 53.5; Karouzou: 73 inv. no.3942; Braun and Haevernick: 62 no.292.
71 Blakely: 17.
well-proportioned male in a similar manner to depictions of Dionysus or those of the traditional representations of Greek heroes.

The iconography remains, however, a curiosity. There are unfortunately no real explanations as to why certain figures on the Kabeiric Ware vases are executed in a comedic fashion. The depictions of the Kabeiroi may tie in with the perception of the cult in antiquity. The Kabeiric cult may have offered protection, or even salvation—opportunities unlikely to have been viewed as trivially comic, and indeed the serious nature of the cult is reflected in the literature. Those who acted impiously against the cult felt the retribution of the gods.73

The parodied examples may be reflective of theatrical elements, either actual performances at the sanctuary or adaptations of Athenian and Corinthian iconography. If we remember that the majority of the vessels were designed for use within a relaxed and festive setting, their comic nature becomes very easy to explain. There is little difference between a Kabeiric Ware Skyphos and a Kylix (both types of drinking cup) from elsewhere that has been decorated to appear like a grotesque mask, or one that has a frightening monster or a sexual or comic scene on the interior that is only revealed once all the liquid has been consumed.74 The humour may also relate to the participants and their physical appearance; the grotesque dancers from other Greek vases have been described as “mortal worshippers in the costume of daemons.”75 Their presence encourages laughter rather than sombre recollection of religious events.76 Parodying the cult itself would surely appeal to the participants, perhaps as something of an “insider” joke.

73 See fn.26.
74 For a clear discussion of drinking cup types, see Kanowski.
75 Smith: 27.
76 Smith: 31, 152.
### Appendix

**Table 3-1. Gods, heroes and other mythological figures identified on the Kabeiric vases from Thebes (uncertain attributions are recorded in brackets).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God, Hero or Mythological Figure</th>
<th>Total of Images</th>
<th>Parodied (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acheloüs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>A river and water god from whom all seas, rivers and springs derived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achilles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Greek hero. Son of Peleus and Thetis. Educated by Chiron. Fought and died at Troy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphrodite</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Goddess of love, fertility, sex and sexuality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Artemis)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(Yes)</td>
<td>Virgin goddess of the wild and the hunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athena</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Virgin goddess of knowledge, crafts and war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Titan. Held up the sky and the heavens on his shoulders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boreas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The North Wind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiron</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Centaur. Educated Achilles, Asclepius and Jason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sorceress. Attempted to enchant Odysseus, later aided him in his journey home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eros</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>God of love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Trojan Hero. Son of Priam and Hecuba of Troy. Fought at Troy, killed by Achilles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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77 Data is compiled from Wolters, Wolters and Bruns, Seeberg, Webster, Braun and Haevernick, Sabetai. Descriptions of the deities and heroes are from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*; for the story of Kerkyon, see Pausanias 1.39.3
### Parodying the Divine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God Hero or Mythological Figure</th>
<th>Total of Images</th>
<th>Parodied (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hera</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Goddess of marriage and motherhood. Queen of the gods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herakles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Greek hero. Son of Zeus and Alcmene. Performed the Twelve Labours. After death, ascended to Olympus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The Messenger. God of abundance, fertility and prosperity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jardanos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>King of Lydia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KABEIROS</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
<td>Elder of the Theban Kabeiroi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadmos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Greek hero. Founder of Thebes. Defeated a dragon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kephalos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mythical hunter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerkyon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Bandit who waylaid strangers and killed them. Killed by Theseus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minotaur</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Half-man, half-bull. Son of Pasiphaë and a bull. Lived in the Labyrinth of Crete. Killed by Theseus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menelaus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Greek hero. King of Sparta. Husband of Helen. Fought at Troy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odysseus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Greek hero. King of Ithaca. Fought at Troy. Creator of the Trojan Horse. Known for his adventures on his journey home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogre/Ogress</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mythical monster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omphale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Queen of Lydia. Owned Herakles as a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAIS</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>NO</strong></td>
<td>Younger of the Theban Kabeiroi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The goat god, protector of shepherds and their flocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peleus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Father of Achilles. Gifted immortality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>King of Troy during the Trojan War. Killed by Neoptolemus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Prometheus)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(Yes)</td>
<td>Divine figure. Stole fire for the gods. Was punished for this crime (eagle pecking out his liver daily) until rescued from this torment by Herakles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


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CHAPTER FOUR
OF COSMOCRATORS AND COSMIC GODS:
THE PLACE OF THE ARCHONS IN DE MYSTERIIS
CHRISTOPHER A. PLAISANCE

In the second chapter of De mysteriis,¹ Iamblichus (c.245-325 CE) quotes his interlocutor, Porphyry (234-c.305 CE), as having asked: “what is the sign of the presence of a god, an angel, an archangel, a daimon, or of some archon or a soul”?² With this query, Iamblichus launches into an exhaustive discourse detailing the epiphanies of the aforementioned beings. When discussing the ρείττονα γενή (“superior classes”), Iamblichus had previously restricted his discourse to the four groups known to so many of the Platonists before him—θεοί (“gods”), δαίμονες (“daimons”), ἥρωες (“heroes”), and ψυχαὶ ἄχρατοι (“pure souls”).³ Yet, his response to Porphyry’s question includes ἀρχάγγελος (“archangels”), ἀγγελος (“angels”), and two varieties of ἀρχόντος (“archons”). Although angels

¹ The book announces its title as Ἀβάμμωνος διδασκάλου πρὸς τὴν Πορφυρίου πρὸς Ἀωεβὼ ἐπιστολὴν ἀπόκρισις καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀπορημάτων λύσεις (The Reply of the Master Abamon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo, and the Solutions to the Questions it Contains), but was retitled by its Renaissance translator, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) as De mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaorum, Assyriorum. Since that time, it is most often referred to simply as De mysteriis, and it is this convention which this paper follows.
² Iamblichus 2003 (henceforth Dm) II.3.70: “ἐπιζητεῖς γὰρ τί τὸ γνώρισμα θεοῦ παρουσίας ἀγγέλου ἢ ἀρχαγγέλου ἢ δαίμονος ἢ τινος ἀρχόντος ἢ ψυχῆς”. Also, as a note, while all translations of sentences and paragraphs from De mysteriis come from the Clarke edition, translations of individual words and small phrases are largely gleaned from Liddell and Scott.
³ Dm I.3.8-9. “Ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς ἐστὶ μοι λόγος πρὸς σὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν συνεπομένων θεοὶς κρειττάνων γενέων, δαιμόνων νημίκαι καὶ ἄρχων ἀρχάντων” (“And I make the same argument to you also as regards the superior classes of being which follow upon the gods, I mean the daemons and heroes and pure souls”).
were mentioned by Porphyry⁴ and several Middle Platonists,⁵ the inclusion of archons in neoplatonic hierolgy is uniquely Iamblichean. What then is the nature of these archons? Thus far, studies of Iamblichus have neglected to deal with the issue of the archons in a thorough manner. The secondary literature that does mention them relegates them either to footnotes or a paragraph at most. This paper’s purpose is to remedy this gap in scholarship and to explore the origin of the idea and the resulting role of the archons in De mysteriis. In particular, I will argue that the scholarly interpretation of both archontic classes as being below the heroes in the hierarchy of the superior classes⁶ is incorrect, and that it can be demonstrated that the cosmic archons are not only ontologically prior to the daimons but are also identical with the visible gods.

The term ἄρχων has the meaning of “ruler, or lord”, and was used throughout the Hellenic and Hellenistic worlds to denote the chief magistrate of a municipality.⁷ While the simple meaning of “ruler” is carried forward in all instances of the term’s appearance in hierologies of antiquity, to discern with more precision what exactly it meant to Iamblichus, an understanding of the sources and traditions on which he drew is necessary. Apart from the influence of his teacher, Porphyry—and by extension, Plotinus (c.204-270 CE) and the whole lineage of Platonists before him—Iamblichus’ principle influences seem to have been the Hermetic and Gnostic religions that flourished throughout the Hellenistic world, and the Chaldean Oracles.⁸ For this reason, a brief chronological doxography of the archons will be presented prior to a detailed examination of Iamblichus’ archonology.

The term bound up with the archons since the second century CE, κοσμοκράτωρ (“lord, or ruler, of the world”), was used to denote the

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⁴ Augustine of Hippo, De civitate Dei, X.9: Porphyry “discernat a daemonibus angelos, aeria loca esse daemonum, aetheria uel empyria disserens angelorum” (“distinguishes angels from demons, asserting that the habitation of the later is in the air, while the former dwell in the ether and empyrean”).
⁶ Dillon 1-68 (51) in Iamblichus 2009a; Shaw 79. Dillon established this model of Iamblichus’ hierarchy, which has since become the standard interpretation (as seen in Shaw).
⁷ Iamblichus 2009b: I.2.9, VI.1.1-4. It is in this sense that we see the term used in two of Iamblichus’ letters, as a general term for ruler.
planets as the rulers of the cosmos.\(^9\) The ultimate origin of the idea of the planets being ruling powers lies in late Babylonian astral religion, which began influencing Hellenic cosmology and theology well before the emergence of Platonic metaphysics.\(^{10}\) However, as Iamblichus’ sources all share a more recent origin in Plato’s (c.428-c.347 BCE) cosmogony in *Timaeus*, it is there that we begin. *Timaeus* presents a story in which the world is shaped from unformed, elemental matter\(^{11}\) by a wholly benevolent demiurge.\(^{12}\) Throughout this process, the ontological order of creation that emerges is an emanative process leading from νοῦς (“intellect”) to ψῡχή (“soul”) to σῶμα (“body”).\(^{13}\) In the course of this ordering, the seven planets were shaped, so that time and motion could be generated.\(^{14}\) The planets formed the lower grouping of a class of gods which Plato describes as both ὁρατῶν (“visible”) and γεννητῶν (“generated”).\(^{15}\) The higher group, the ogdoadic gods of the fixed stars, are described as relatively immobile in comparison to the wandering planetary gods. This is owed to the former being ontologically closer to the atemporal perfection of the demiurge; the latter, being further removed, are more mobile.\(^{16}\) These visible gods form a class of divine beings which, from Plato onward, was conceived of as being distinct from the noetic gods.\(^{17}\) Beneath the gods, Plato positioned the daimons,\(^{18}\) who were seen as an intermediary class of beings who acted as envoys of the gods, conveying sacrifices from mankind upwards and messages from the gods downwards.\(^{19}\)

The transitional Middle Platonic period which bridged the gap between Plato and Plotinus gave rise to several interesting ideas which would become integral to Iamblichus’ archonology. First among these was a cementing of the identification between the visible gods of *Timaeus* with

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\(^{9}\) Dillon 227-403 (275-276) in Iamblichus 2009a. Dillon notes that “as a title of the planets, κοσμοκράτωρ does not seem to be attested earlier than Vettius Valens (second century CE)”.

\(^{10}\) Majercik, “Introduction” 11; Lewy: 423; Dodds: 263-273 (272).

\(^{11}\) Plato, *Timaeus* (CW 1224-1291) 30a-b, 32.

\(^{12}\) Plato, *Timaeus* 29e.

\(^{13}\) Plato, *Timaeus* 30b.

\(^{14}\) Plato, *Timaeus* 38c.

\(^{15}\) Plato, *Timaeus* 40d.

\(^{16}\) Plato, *Timaeus* 40; *Laws* (CW 1318-1616) VII.821.

\(^{17}\) Plato, *Phaedrus* (CW 506-556) 247a. Plato mentions certain “δώδεκα […] θεοὶ ἄρχοντες” (“twelve ruling gods”) that serve under Zeus, these being the noetic gods who are closest to the demiurge.

\(^{18}\) Plato, *Timaeus*, 40d.

\(^{19}\) Plato, *Symposium* (CW 457-505) 202d-203a.
Of Cosmocrators and Cosmic Gods

Apart from the Platonic gods and daimons, Middle Platonism introduced a much greater degree of differentiation within the continuum connecting man to the gods. Although the specific classes varied between philosophers, we see models which include archangels and angels, as well as good and evil daimons and pure souls. Second, was the idea that there were several demiurges who were responsible for shaping different levels of the universe. Of some interest is Harpocration’s (second century CE) denomination of the secondary demiurge as Ἄρχων. Dillon sees the potential for a Gnostic influence here, as the only prior occurrences of the term in Platonism are Plato’s aforementioned references to the θεοὶ ἄρχοντες (ff. 17 above). Lastly, the Middle Platonic foundation of what Dillon terms the “underworld” of Platonism—whose denizens include Gnosticism, Hermetism, and the Chaldean Oracles—will occupy us presently.

At the turn of the first millennium, Gnosticism emerged from the Middle Platonic underworld as a view of religious Platonism turned on its head. Sharing in common with Platonism the notion of a universe consisting of a series of emanations descending from the divine to the material, Gnosticism diverges in its fundamentally anticosmic orientation. Whereas Timaeus’ demiurge is a benevolent figure whose shaping of the cosmos is an expression of the natural order, the Gnostic demiurge is an evil deity, and his creation—the cosmos—is a material prison keeping the pneumatic soul trapped in flesh, apart from God. In turn, while the

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22 Dillon 1996: 27, 169-170, 191. For our purposes, the most important of these demiurges is the one governing the sublunar realm. Dillon notes that the identification of either the sublunar demiurge himself or the entire region beneath the moon with Hades was widespread, being found in the works of Xenocrates (c.396-c.314 BCE), Philo (20 BCE-50 CE), and Plutarch (c. 46-120 CE). Hades, in his role as the sublunar demiurge, was concerned with the functions surrounding dissolution and generation. As Iamblichus would adopt this distinction, and since one class of his archons is responsible for governing the sublunar sphere, this is an important turning point to note.
25 For Gnosticism as an essentially Platonic movement, see Pearson: 55-72. For specific connections between Gnosticism and Middle Platonism, see Turner: 9-64.
26 Van den Broek: 1-120 (9).
27 Good: 291-295. As a play on the depiction of humanity as a reflection of God in Genesis I: 26-27, Gnostic theology (in “The Prayer of the Apostle Paul”) tells the same tale through a glass darkly: “the human being is formed by lesser beings, the
planetary deities in Platonism were intrinsically good beings,28 “the Gnostics considered the planets and the signs of the zodiac as evil powers, which the soul on its way back to its origin could pass only if it had true gnosis”.29 Also, with the Gnostic turn, a terminological shift occurred; rather than referring to the planets as gods, we see this replaced by terms such as ἐξουσίαι (“powers”), cosmocrators, and the ubiquitous archons.30 The archons are presented as hylic and sarcic mirrors of their pneumatic counterparts above,31 which is a far cry from Plato’s visible gods having been made from fire.32 The archons are explicitly identified with planets.33 The seven “forces of the seven heavens” are the children of the hylic demiurge, Yaldabaoth, who in Gnostic theology functions as a material shadow of the true God above the veil.34 The cosmological region governed by these seven archons was known as the hebdomad (from ἑβδομάς,”seven”), above which was the ogdoad—a region ontologically prior to and inaccessible by the archons.

At the same time, Hermetists in Alexandria were developing a Platonic theology that, like the Gnostics, gave soteriological primacy to γνῶσις material (or hylic) archons (or rulers) who seek to mould it in their image and thus keep it imprisoned in matter. However, a higher god, in this text identified as ‘psychic’ (or having to do with soul), unbeknownst to the archons, implants a divine spark in the human creature. Once this dormant element is awakened, the human recalls its true origins and sees beyond material life to recall its true home, that is, ‘what no angel-eye has seen, and no archon-ear has heard’. The prayer thus functions to remind the speaker of his or her (divine) origins”. This twisted version of Genesis is further explicated in “The Hypostasis of the Archons” in Robinson 161-169.

28 Through their participation in and ontological closeness to the εἶδος of the Good.
30 Gilhus: 37. Gilhus notes that in addition to the synonymity expressed in Gnostic texts, this terminological trinity occurs early on in Ephesians 6:12 (KJV): “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities [ἀρχάς] against powers [ἐξουσίαις], against the rulers of the darkness of this world [κοσμοκράτορας], against spiritual wickedness in high places”.
31 Gilhus: 9-10. For the history of animal-headed figures in Gnostic myth, see Ameisenowa: 21-45.
32 Plato, Timaeus, 40a.
33 Iranaeus 1907: 1.30.9; and Iranaeus 1834: 1.30.9. Iranaeus (second century CE), tells us that the Gnostics “maintain, moreover, that the holy Hebdomad is the seven stars which they call planets”, reinforcing the Gnostic identity between the archons and the planets: “Sancum autem hebdomadam septem stellas, quas dicit planetas, esse volunt”.
34 “The Origin of the World (II, 5 and XIII, 2)”, in Robinson 100-102; 170-189.
("knowledge"). In typical Middle Platonic fashion, Hermetic theology presents an emanative hierarchy of God, a demiurge, and seven planetary powers—who, similar to the Gnostics, were generally described as ruling powers, διοικηταί ("governors, or administrators") and ἄρχοντες, rather than gods. The Sun was identified with the demiurge, and the surrounding cosmic bodies were instruments with which he crafted the world. The planetary governors were depicted as administering mankind’s fate, and shaping man in their nature—as a microcosm—an act which is explicitly described as being done out of love. Other texts in the Hermetica describe the planetary beings as gods, but the identity between the seven rulers of the early chapters and the planets is clear. Further Hermetic references to the seven planetary beings can be found in the so-called "Mithras Liturgy" of the Greek Magical Papyri, which describes them in a manner more similar to the Gnostic archons—having animal heads—than the fiery spheres of Timaeus.

During the second century CE, the book that would, next to Timaeus, exert the greatest influence on Iamblichus was written: The Chaldean Oracles. The Oracles were not "Chaldean" in the literal sense, but were named thus so as to convey an “oriental” sense of mystique—a rhetorical device that was common in Hellenistic wisdom literature.

35 Van den Broek: 1. Also, for historical connections between Hermetism and Gnosticism, see Quispel: 46.1, 1-19.
36 Copenhaver, Hermetica I.9.
37 Stobaei Hermetica in Scott, 380-533 (XXIV.2).
38 Stobaei Hermetica XVI.18.
40 Stobaei Hermetica I.12, I.16.
41 Stobaei Hermetica V.3, X.7
42 Copenhaver: 93-260 (105).
43 "The Mithras Liturgy" in Betz: IV.475-829 (IV.674-79). "προέρχονται δὲ καὶ ἕτεροι θεοὶ ταύρων μελάνων πρόσωπα ἔχοντες ἐν περιζώμασιν λινοῖς κατέχοντες διαδήματα χρύσεα, οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ καλούμενοι πολοκράτορες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ" ("There also come forth another seven gods, who have the faces of black bulls, in linen/loincloths, and in possession of seven golden diadems. They are the so-called Pole Lords of heaven"). Linss (8) suggests that these "Pole Lords" are "the stars of the constellation of the Great Bear". However, Copenhaver (105) specifically identifies them as "the five planets and two great luminaries known to the ancients: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn".
44 Gilhus: 50. “In the iconographical representations of the archons (gems, amulets), Ialdabaoth, Jao, etc. are portrayed with animal faces but with human bodies (though sometimes with snakes for legs)".
46 Majercik: 1; see Burns: 158-179.
the *Oracles* was a series of concentric circles, composed of the intelligible empyrean, the ethereal realm of the fixed stars and planets, and the material sphere which contained the sublunar region and the Earth. This triadic structure was organised by three gods: the Monad, Demiurge, and Hekate. It was further administered by three tiers of intermediary beings: the iynges (ιυγξ), synoches (συνοχεῖς), and teletarchs (τελετάρχαι), the latter of whose origins are identical with the planetary archons and cosmocrators described previously. However, the teletarchs were not exclusively relegated to planetary roles; the material teletarchs, for instance, were associated with the moon and were thought to govern the sublunar realm. The *Oracles* further describe the world as populated by various species of terrestrial, atmospheric, and aquatic daimons. Regarding the teletarchs, Majercik notes that an important distinction must be made between the “Chaldean” and Gnostic systems in that the teletarchs are “benign, even helpful figures, who aid the ascent of the soul”, and that “the Chaldean system maintains a more positive, monistic view of creation”.

The next major influence on Iamblichus was the neoplatonic patriarch, Plotinus. Plotinian cosmology set the stage for all further neoplatonic systems with its four-tiered emanative hierarchy descending from τὸ ἕν (“the One”), through intellect and soul, to φύσις (“nature”). In a similar fashion to the Middle Platonists and the *Oracles*, Plotinus viewed the material world to be the domain of Hades. Like those of the Platonic tradition before him, he considered the stars and planets to be visible gods, beneath whom—in the sublunar sphere—existed hosts of aerial daimons who bridged the gap between mankind and the gods. This model was carried forward by Plotinus’ student, Porphyry, with very few modifications. Porphyry explicitly identified the planets as visible gods, as in the *Timaeus*, and similarly conceived of a daimonic continuum existing between the worlds.

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47 Majercik: 16-17.
49 Majercik: 10-11.
50 Majercik: 12, 18. It is also important to note that the *Oracles* follow the Middle Platonic equation of the material world with Hades. 51 Majercik: fr. 80, 90, 91, 216. 52 Majercik: fr. 216. 53 Majercik: fr. 91, 92, 216. 54 Majercik: 17-18. 55 Remes: 53-58. 56 Lepajo: 7-16 (10). 57 Plotinus, *The Enneads*, II.9.8, III.4.6. 58 Plotinus, *The Enneads*, III.5.6, IV.4.43, IX.7.6.
between the human and divine realms. He saw the superlunary cosmic realms as being under the governance of the visible gods, and the sublunary sphere as being the purview of the daimons. In a break from Plotinus, however, Porphyry’s hierological plenum also included angels (see fn.4 above) as well as malevolent daimons. Another point of differentiation was Porphyry’s doctrine that the planetary powers emanated in lineal descent, with Saturn receiving its power from the ogdoad, Jupiter from Saturn, and so on down to the Moon. One position that both Porphyry and Plotinus, however, held in common was a strong stance against the Gnostic maligning of the planetary gods.

It was against this backdrop of diverse strains of thought that Iamblichus composed De mysteriis. The metaphysical foundation upon which De mysteriis rests is an expansion of Plotinus’. Above the noetic realm, rather than the simplicity of Plotinus’ τὸ ἕν, Iamblichus postulates a παντελῶς ἄρρητον (“ineffable absolute”), from which emanates ὁ ἁπλῶς ἕν (“the simplex one”), which then produces the dyad of πέρας (“limit”) and τὸ ἄπειρον (“the unlimited”), from which finally emanates τὸ ἕν ὄν (“the one existent”). The existent one is further identified with Αἰών (“Aeon”), an eternal counterpart of the temporality which manifests in the psychic realm. The noetic realm was similarly complexified. In a metaphysical move that is characteristic of Iamblichus, rather than postulate a new entity to govern the noetic sphere, Iamblichus takes the least entity of the preceding level and makes it the greatest of the following emanation. The ruling principle of the noetic is thus τὸ ἕν ὄν, who is the first element of a triad whose remaining constituents are ζωή (“life”) and νοῦς; all three of which are encompassed by the noetic demiurge. The following noeric realm, like the noetic, participates in the hypostasis directly above: in this case, νοῦς, which is at this level conceived of as a monadic soul who “is set above all the souls in the cosmos” and is “the transcendent source of both the Soul of the Cosmos and the individual souls”. It also contains Χρόνος (“Time”)—who is a lower reflection of Aeon—as well as spatial

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63 Edwards: 88-100; Plotinus, Enneads, II.9.
64 Dillon, in Iamblichus 2009a: 29-33.
66 Dillon, in Iamblichus 2009a: 39.
extension. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the realm of material nature. This sphere encompassed the visible cosmos, and the sublunar dominion of Hades.

Iamblichus saw each of the realms as governed by one ruler. Aeon ruled the noetic, Helios, the noeric and the visible sun, the sensible cosmos. Each ruler was the vertical emanation of the one prior, and acted “as a mean between the two realms”. Aeon descends from the ineffable absolute and is a mean between the realms of the henadic and noetic realms; Helios from Aeon, who is then a mean between the noetic and noeric; and the visible sun from Helios, who bridges the noeric and the sensible. From each of these gods come a series of horizontal emanations, which is the root of Iamblichus’ theory of different divine classes. From the One emanate the henads, from Aeon, the noetic gods, from Helios, the noeric gods and from the visible sun, the planetary gods. Furthermore, the grouping of planetary gods would necessarily be the group which contained the sublunar demiurge, a being responsible for the production of change and generation in the material realm below the moon. Since Iamblichus’ theories treat the least of one class as the greatest being among the realm below, the sublunar demiurge is identified as the moon, the planetary god which is closest to the Earth.

Although modern reconstructions of Iamblichus’ theology admit the four classes described above, De mysteriis seems to concern itself primarily with two classes of gods, described as αἰσθητοῖς θεοῖς σώματι ἔχουσιν (“sensible, or perceptible, gods who have bodies”) and ἀσώματοι θεοὶ (“unembodied, or incorporeal, gods”). The first, lower, class is further identified as the οὐρανίος θεοὺς (“celestial, or heavenly, gods”), ὕλαίους (“material”) gods, ἐγκοσμίων θεῶν (“cosmic, or encosmic,
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gods"),78 ἐμφανεῖς θεοὶ ("visible gods"),79 and περικοσμίων ("cosmic") gods.80 The second, higher, class is described as ἄλος ("immaterial"),81 ἀσωμάτου ("incorporeal"),82 ἀφανῶν θεῶν ("invisible gods"),83 νοητοὶ ("noetic"),84 and ἐπερκοσμίων ("hypercosmic").85 The distinction between the material and immaterial gods is such that the material gods embrace matter, presiding over it, and are responsible for its ordering and the phenomena that arise within it; whereas the immaterial gods are exempt from the constrains of matter, rising above it.86 The visible gods are linked to the invisible gods by virtue of ontological dependence.87 Between these two classes of gods, the "whole government of existent things both throughout the whole heaven and cosmos, and over all the invisible powers of the universe" occurs.88

In De anima, and in De mysteriis prior to answering Porphyry’s query about the archons, Iamblichus followed suit with his Middle Platonic predecessors and described the superior classes that bridge the gap between the gods and mankind as consisting of angels, daimons, heroes, and pure souls.89 The pure souls are specifically identified as the least of the superior classes,90 while the heroes are described as “just above the level of souls” and the daimons as “more immediately dependent upon the race of gods […] though far inferior to it”.91 Furthermore, both daimons

78 Dm V.20.227-8.
79 Dm I.20.60.
80 Dm V.20.227-8.
81 Dm V.14.217.
82 Dm V.20.227-8.
83 Dm I.20.62.
84 Dm I.20.60.
85 Dm V.20.227-8.
86 Dm I.14.217.
87 Dm I.20.61-2. Furthermore, this relationship is defined as one of envelopment. Like Russian dolls, Iamblichus describes the noetic gods as surrounding the planets. In this way, the hypercosmic gods exist in the noetic realm as such, but by mounting the planetary bodies descend into the cosmos as visible gods. Dm I.17.50-1, I.19.57-61.
88 Dm I.20.63: “Οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐμφανεῖς τε καὶ ἀφανεῖς θεοὶ τὴν ἄλον ἐν ἑαυτοῖς συνελήφασι κυβέρνησιν τῶν ὄντων κατὰ πάντα τε τὸν ὁφανήν καὶ κόσμον καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἀφανεῖς ἐν τῷ ποιντι δυνάμεις ὄλας”.
89 Iamblichus 2002: VI.27, VIII.40.
90 Dm I.10.34, 36.
91 Dm I.5.16: “ἐφεξεστέραν μὲν τῆς τῶν ψυχῶν τάξεως, τήν τῶν ἡρώων ἐπιτεταγμένην […] τῆς δὲ τῶν θεῶν ἐξηρτημένην τὴν τῶν δαιμόνων, μακρὸ ὁ τινι καταδεστέραν αὐτῆς.”
and heroes are identified as πνεύματα ("pneumatic beings"). Daimons and heroes are functionally differentiated, with the latter being the "generative and creative powers of the gods in the furthest extremity of their emanations" and the former being responsible for the elevation of worthy souls. Angels are identified as existing above daimons and below gods, serving a function connected to the soul’s theurgic ascent. Iamblichus, in the Theologumena Arithmetica, identifies the angelic and archangelic classes as specifically being intermediaries between the planetary gods and mankind. Finamore notes that among these intermediaries, “the visible gods and angels do not make the descent” into the sublunary realm of generation, “while daemons, heroes, and purified souls do”; and that “Iamblichus later adds archangels and cosmic archons to the list of non-descending souls and hylic archons to the list of souls that make the descent into generation.”

It is here that our discussion of the place of the archons in Iamblichus’ hierarchy can begin. In accord with the Gnostic and Hermetic views of the archons forming a single class of beings, Porphyry’s query does not distinguish between different archontic types. Iamblichus’ response, however, delineates two classes. The higher type are described as cosmocrators, who “govern the elements beneath the moon (τὰ ὑπὸ σελήνην στοιχεῖα διοικοῦντες). Their role is further outlined as being ἡγεμονικά ("hegemonic, or administrative"), and ἐὰν περὶ τὸν κόσμον

92 Dm II.3.73.
93 Dm II.1.67: “Δέχον τοῖνος δαίμονας μὲν κατὰ τὰς γεννητικὰς καὶ δημιουργικὰς τῶν θεῶν δυνάμεις ἐν τῇ πορρωτάτῳ τῆς προοδός ἀποτελευτῆσαι καὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων διαμερισμῶν παράγεσθαι”.
94 Dm II.2.69.
95 Iamblichus 1862: II.43-4; and Iamblichus 1988: VII.43-4. Iamblichus describes each of the “heavenly spheres” as an ἀγέλας ("flock"), and that “the heavenly bodies and spirits which are outstanding in each of these flocks are likewise called angels and archangels”; these ἄγελος are identified with ἄγγελος by virtue of the “insertion of the lost ‘g’” ("ἐπειδὴ καὶ Βαβυλωνίων οἱ δοχιμώτατοι καὶ Οστάωης καὶ Ζωροάστρης ἁγέλας κυρίως καλοῦσι τὰς ἀστρικὰς σφαίρας, ἦτοι παρ’ ὅσον τελέος ἄργων περὶ τὸ κέντρον μόναι παρὰ τὰ σωματικὰ μεγέθη ή ἀπὸ τὸν σύνδεσμον πως καὶ συναγωγὸς καταπείδευσθαι παρ’ αὐτῶν τὸν φυσικὸν λόγον, ἄς ἄγελος κατὰ παραμπώσιν δὲ τὸ γάμμα ἐσθρημένος ἡγέλων διὸ καὶ τοὺς καθ’ ἐκάστην τοῖς ἐξάρχοντας ἀστέρας καὶ δαίμονας ὁμοίως ἢ ἐξάρχοντας προαγαπεῖται, ὅπερ εἰσίν ἐπὶ τὸν ἄρθρον, ὥστε ἡγελία κατὰ τοῦτο ἐνέμωται ἢ ἐξοδόμης").
96 Finamore 2010: 132 (129).
97 Dm II.3.71.
98 Dm II.3.72.
ἐνεξουσιάζουσιν (“in authority over, or around, the cosmos”). The lower archons τῆς ὕλης προεστηκότες (“preside, or are set, over matter”) and are described as περίγειος (“over, or around, the earth”) and ἐνυλοι (“immersed in matter”). Early modern editions of De mysteriis, such as Taylor and Wilder’s, as well as Finamore’s work, contain annotations specifically identifying the archontic cosmocrators with the planets (i.e. the visible gods)—an identification which would place them above the daimons in the emanative hierarchy. However, modern commentators, such as Dillon and Shaw, place both archontic classes below the daimons and heroes. Although earlier Hermetic and Gnostic sources and later Neoplatonists such as Proclus (412-485 CE) identified the cosmocrators as the planetary gods, the Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell edition of De mysteriis notes that Iamblichus “seems to imply a broader category of being” when using the term, and that his cosmic archons are somehow distinct from the planetary gods. It is this question that I seek to clarify: What is the correct place of the archons? Do both categories belong below the Moon, or can an identity between the cosmocrators and the cosmic gods be demonstrated?

To begin, any passages in De mysteriis that directly compare the archons to other superior classes must be identified. Speaking of Iamblichus’ delineation of the epiphanies of the superior classes, Clarke notes the similarities between the cosmic archons and the angelic classes,

99 Dm II.3.71.
100 Dm II.3.71.
101 Dm II.8.87.
102 Dm II.3.72. It is also worth specifically mentioning that Iamblichus—like Plato, the Hermetists, Plotinus, and Porphyry—does not consider matter to be evil, but rather that it is an imperfect receptacle of the One. So, the negatively phrased descriptions of the hylic archons and daimons say nothing about the evilness of the matter within which they are immersed, but rather that their immersion clouds their ability to be as divinely perfect as those higher powers from which they emanate.
103 Iamblichus 1821: ff. 86.
104 Iamblichus 1911: ff. 92.
105 Finamore, 1985: 116: “Iamblichus certainly accepted astrology into his own system. See De Myst. IX.4. His very acceptance of the cosmocrators (i.e., the planets in their capacity of ruling over human lives) is further proof”.
106 Dillon, in Iamblichus 2009a: 51.
107 Shaw: 79.
108 Proclus: 140: “But the planets are called the Governors of the world, (κοσμοκρατορες) and are allotted a total power”.
109 Dm ff. 122.
110 Dm ff. 483.
111 Dm II.3.70-II.9.90.
and between the hylic archons and the daimons. However, she then tells us that the “superiority of the cosmic archons is defined only in relation to their inferior hylic counterparts, never in relation to other orders, indeed no direct comparison is made between the archontic and any other order”, while “daemons, heroes and souls are, by contrast, frequently compared with each other”. This does not appear to be borne out by the text. In the first epiphany, the hylic archons are characterised as “more imperfect than archangels”. More important is a later reference which explicitly establishes the ontological priority of the cosmocrators over the daimons, which clearly distinguishes the cosmic archons as being superior to, and in governance over, the daimons—and by extension, the heroes and pure souls as well.

While no further direct comparisons are found, much evidence can be gleaned by comparing the descriptions of the archontic epiphanies with those of the other superior classes, and by drawing on references to cosmocrators and hegemons in other writings of Iamblichus. Just prior to the epiphanic descriptions, Iamblichus tells us that the daimonic nature is περικοσμίων, and that their role is one of “finishing and completing encosmic natures, and it exercises oversight on each thing coming into existence.” Having previously identified the higher archons as governing the cosmos, this passage supports the encosmic daimons as being under the rule of the cosmic archons. In terms of appearance, those of the cosmic archons are described as ποικίλα (“varied”), but διακεκοσμημένα (“ordered, or arrayed”), which seems to place them midway between the gods, who appear as μονοειδῆ (“uniform”) and the daimons who simply show a ποικίλα appearance.

In further regard to appearances, the cosmic archons are described as ἀναλλοίωτα (“unchanging”), which is far closer to the appearances of the

112 Clarke 2001: 110.
113 Clarke 2001: 110.
114 Dm II.3.71.
115 Dm IX.9.284: “Ἀεὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ θεουργικῇ τάξι ἐν τῶν ἑπερεχόντων τὰ δεύτερα κολεύεται καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν δαιμόνων εἰς κοινός ἄρμαν τῶν περὶ τὴν γένεσιν κοσμοκρατῶν καταπέμπει τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δαίμονας ἑκάστους” (“For it is always the case, in the theurgic hierarchy, that secondary entities are summoned through the intermedicy of their superiors; and in the case of the daemons, then, the single common leader of the cosmocrators in the realm of generation sends down to the individual recipients their personal daemons”).
116 Dm II.2.68: “ἀπεργαστιγὴν μὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν δαμάσκην καὶ τελεσιουργὸν τῶν περιλοσμίων φύσεων καὶ ἀποπλημοτικὴν τῆς καθ’ ἕκαστον τῶν γεγομένων ἐπιστασίας”.
117 Dm II.3.71.
gods as παντελῶς ἀμετάβλητα ("absolutely unchangeable"), and the angelic classes who are "very close to those of the gods" (πλησιάζοντα τοῖς τῶν θεῶν"), than it is to the daimons, who appear to take on different forms at different times—a feature shared with the hylic archons, whose forms display ἀλλοιοῦται πολιεῖ ὁσμῶν ("changes of many kinds").

Furthermore, the καταπληκτικὰ ("amazing, or striking") appearance of the cosmic archons is closer to the benign shining (κρηστὰ τῇ ὠψε ἐλλάμπει) of the gods, and βλασφημά ("solemn") and ἥμερα ("gentle") forms of the archangels and angels, than the φοβερά ("frightening") visage of the daimons, which bears more similarity to the βλατερά ("harmful") and λυπηρά ("painful") epiphanies of the hylic archons. Lastly, τάξις ("order") and ἠρεμία ("tranquillity") are shown to be the characteristic attitudes of the gods and angelic classes, while ταραχή ("disorder") is the hallmark of the daimons. In this same epiphanic sequence, the cosmic archons are shown as μονίμως ἑστῶτα ἐν αὐτοῖς ("abiding steadfastly in themselves"), akin to the higher classes, while the hylic archons are θορυβώδη ("turbulent, or uproarious"), in sympathy with the daimons.

Regarding the size of the superior classes in their epiphanies, the gods are described as being so large that they "sometimes hide the entire heaven, both sun and moon" (οὐρανὸν ὅλον ἐνίοτε ἀποκρύπτειν καὶ τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην), with the archangels, angels and daimons each described as smaller and more divided in turn. In contrast, the cosmic archons are depicted as μεγάλα ("big, or large") and ὑπέρογκα ("of excessive bulk"), making them closer to the tremendous gods than either the greatly divided and small daimons or the hylic archons, who are characterised by ἀλαζονεία ("false pretension, or imposture"). And, indeed, the fact that gods are described not as the planets, but as being larger than them would seem to indicate that the gods being spoken of in the epiphanies are not of the visible genus. Speaking of the clarity of the various epiphanies, Iamblichus tells us that those of the gods "are seen more clearly than truth itself" (οὐκοῦν ἐν μὲν ταῖς τῶν θεῶν αὐτοψίαις ἐναργέστερα καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας ὁρᾶται τὰ θέαμα); those of the archangels are ἀληθινὰ ("true") and τέλεια ("perfect"); and those of the angels are similar, but somewhat inferior. In comparison, the cosmic archons are ἐναργῆ ("vivid, or clear"), which is closer to the higher classes.

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118 Dm II.3.72.
119 Dm II.3.71.
120 Dm II.3.72-3.
121 Dm II.4.75-76.
than the ἀμυδρὰ ("dim, faint, or obscure") epiphanies of the daimons, or the identically described ἀμυδρά images of the hylic archons.  

The degrees of light through which the epiphanies are presented vary in intensity. The light of the gods is described as flashing "brighter than light" (φωτὸς πλέον ἀστράπτει), that of the archangels as ὑπερφυοῦς ("supernatural"), and that of the angels as simply φωτεινὰ ("bright"). The light of the cosmocrators, described as a καθαρώτερον ("pure, or clean") fire, which certainly seems to be of a higher order than the διαφαίνουσι ("smouldering") fire of the daimons, the σύμμικτον ἀπὸ πλειόνων ("diversely blended") fire of the heroes, or the fire of the hylic archons which is mixed from ἀνομοίων ("dissimilar") and ἐναντίων ("opposite") components. Iamblichus’ expanded description of the epiphanic flame is also telling, with the διαφαίνουσι ("diaphanous, or transparent") fire of the cosmic archons bearing more similarity to the ἄτομον ("indivisible") and ἀφθεγκτον ("soundless, or inexpressible") fire of the gods, the ἀμέριστον ("undivided") fire of the archangels, and even the διῃρημένον ("divided") fire of the angels than to the further μερισμοῦ ("divided") and expressible fire of the daimons, and the σκοτωδέστερον ("dark, or murky") fire of the hylic archons. Lastly, regarding the epiphanic fire’s stability, that of the cosmocrators is characterised by ἠρεμαῖον ("stillness"), which is more in line with the πάντῃ σταθερόν ("wholly stable") fire of the gods and that of the archangels—which μέτοχον ἡρεμίας ("partakes in rest")—than the ἄστατόν ("unresting, or never standing still") fire of the daimons, the πλέον ὀξύρροπον ("more quickly turning") fire of the heroes, the ταραχῶδες ("turmoil") of the hylic archons’ fire, or even the μονίμως κινούμενον ("permanently moving") fire of the angels. Additionally, the description of the epiphanic fire of the gods as decidedly οὐ περικοσμίως ("not cosmic") indicates their hypercosmic nature, which necessarily relegates that which is cosmic to the higher archons.

Dealing with the purity and stability of the epiphanies of the superior classes, Iamblichus begins by describing that of the gods as ὑπερλαμπρον ("brilliant") and remaining fixed in itself (ἐν αὑτῷ μονίμως ἱδρυμένον), and distinguishes the archangels and angels from them by increasing degrees of being "based in something else" (ἐν ἑτέρῳ δίδου). His description of the cosmic archons as μένουσιν ὡςαύτως τὸ κοσμικὸν ὑπερ ἐξίχνων ἐμφαίνοντες ("remaining in the same state, showing forth their

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122 Dm II.4.76-77.  
123 Dm II.4.77.  
124 Dm II.4.78-79.  
125 Dm II.4.79.  
126 Dm II.4.78.
cosmic nature”) bears more similarity to the higher classes than to the daimons who exhibit an κίνησιν ἀστάτως ("unresting, or unsteady movement") according to that of the cosmos and are ἀτμοὶ περικόσμιοι συμμίγνυνται ("commingled with cosmic vapours"), the heroes who are γενεσιουργοὶ πνευμάτων συστάσεις ἀνακεράννυνται ("mixed with the generative accumulations of pneumatic auras") by which they are moved, or the hylic archons who are ὑλικῶν ἱχώρων ἀνάμεστοι ("filled with material fluids"). There are several more epiphanic classifications in De mysteriis, but those that remain are less than clear in relating the archons—cosmic or hylic—to the other superior classes.

Further evidence towards both the positioning of the cosmic archons above the daimons and their identification with the planetary gods can be found outside the epiphanies. At one point in De mysteriis, Iamblichus notes that the heavenly gods govern the οὐρανίου σώματος ("body of the heavens"), a function which seems to be the very definition of a cosmocrator. In another passage, Iamblichus specifically identified the sun (ἥλιον) and moon (σελήνην) as οὐρανὸν gods; and, since the sun is the source of all heavenly and cosmic order, these visible gods are seen to function identically with the cosmocrators. Later, the same cosmic gods are described as responsible for the ordering of the elements within the cosmos, a function which Iamblichus has already identified as belonging to the cosmic archons. In his commentaries on Timaeus, Iamblichus enumerates seven cosmocrators, which is a clear identification with the planetary gods. In his commentary on this passage, Dillon notes that the cosmocrators “must here be identified with the planets who are thus credited with administering the elements (whether material or daemonic) of the physical world”—a passage which, again, necessitates an identification of the planets with the cosmic archons. In yet another passage from De mysteriis, Iamblichus describes ἡγεμόωες (a term previously identified as a title of the cosmic archons), who are contrasted with noetic gods in the same manner he has contrasted the visible and invisible gods throughout, as being responsible for the creation of the visible world—which indicates unity between the visible gods and

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127 Dm II.4.79-80.
128 Dm V.2.200.
129 Dm VI.5.246.
130 Dm VIII.8.271.
131 Dm V.20.227.
132 Dm II.3.72.
133 Iamblichus 2009: fr.11.
cosmocrators. Lastly, it appears that while daimons can either appear as κακῶν (“evil”) or ἀγαθῶν (“good”), cosmocrators appear wholly benevolent, which necessarily places them ontologically closer to the source of goodness: ὁ παντελῶς ἄρητον.

All of this makes, I believe, a convincing case both as to the placement of the cosmic archons above the daimons in the hierarchy of superior classes, and towards the identity between the visible gods and the cosmocrators in De mysteriis. Still, two questions linger. First, what are the “gods” of the epiphanies? And second, what is to be made of the hylic archons? The answer to the former seems clear now: if the cosmocrators are the visible gods, then the gods of the epiphanies must be the invisible classes. To the latter, I advance the theory that the hylic archons are a further hypostasis of the gods. As we have seen, the term ἄρχων was, prior to Iamblichus, used to refer to the visible gods as both cosmic and hylic, as noted above. As the cosmic realm is superlunary and the hylic is sublunar, it stands to reason that a ruling being operating at the cosmic level would be distinguished from one governing at a hylic level. Thus, I propose that just as the cosmocrators are a hypostasis of the noeric gods, so the hylic archons are the next hypostasis down from the planetary gods. I would venture that Iamblichus was less than pleased with the conflation of the super and sublunar realms in the forms of the Hermetic and Gnostic archons. When questioned directly about them, he made a distinction that would more appropriately fit his nuanced vision of the world. There are hints around this idea in De mysteriis, such as Iamblichus’ remarks that “neither is it the case that the gods are confined to certain parts of the cosmos, nor is the earthly realm devoid of them”; the note that the lowest genus of αὐτάρκειας θεοῦ is φυσικόν (“physical”); and the mention that there are such things as ἐνυδρίοι (“aquatic”) and ἀέριοι (“aerial”) gods. There are further mentions of visible gods who descend into the realm of generation, which is the hylic world below the moon—the domain of the hylic archons.

Furthermore, there exists in Iamblichus’ commentary on the Timaeus a possible reference to the descent from planetary to material gods. In this passage, Iamblichus identifies the twelve Olympians as the hypercosmic

135 Dm VIII.3.263.
136 Dm IV.7.190.
137 Dm II.6.82-3, II.9.89-90.
138 Dm I.8.28-9.
139 Dm III.28.169.
140 Dm I.9.30.
141 Dm I.18.53-4.
gods, but then describes a series of twenty-one ἡγεμόνων ("rulers") from which forty-two θεῶν γενεσιουργῶν ("creating gods") who were allotted to elements emanate, as well as thirty-six δεκαδαρχῶν ("decadarchs, or decan-rulers") from whom descend seventy-two further beings. Dillon’s commentary on this verse notes that while it is difficult to completely distinguish Iamblichus’ views from those of Proclus in this passage, it is probable that Iamblichus did distinguish between different genera of super and sublunar gods. Furthermore, Dillon speculates that, since “21 is 7 x 3”, the groups of twenty-one and forty-two hegemons are powers whose dominion is described as “influence from each of the seven planets extending into each of the three elements […] fire, air and water, which extend in consecutive layers beneath the moon and the earth”, making them the governors “of each planetary influence in each sublunar element”. In this way, we can see a plenary continuum existing between the wholly planetary cosmocrators and the wholly elemental hylic archons.

If, then, we are to expand the genera of gods to include henadic, noetic, noeric, cosmic, and material classes, where does this leave the other superiors? What seems most reasonable is an assignation of the archangels to the noeric gods, the angels to the cosmic gods, and the daimons to the hylic gods. The heroes, being more concerned with the soul’s ascent than the demiurgic process of emanation, would not necessarily be connected as envoys to a specific divine hypostasis. I see support for this proposed model in the aforementioned link that Iamblichus made between the angels and the planets (ff. 93 above), as well as Finamore’s mention of “angels of the sun” who “guide the solar rays”. The epiphanies, too,

142 Iamblichus 2009: fr.79.
143 Dillon, in Iamblichus 2009a: 369. It is also worth noting that it is here that Dillon specifically identifies the planetary gods as cosmocrators.
144 Dillon, in Iamblichus 2009a: 369.
145 It should be noted that under such a model, even though the archangelic, angelic, and daimonic powers would operate at the levels respective of three different divine emanations, this would not, say, place the angels above the hylic archons in the hierarchy. For, as Iamblichus details in Dm I.20.62, visibility (which is the hallmark of descent) does not make the visible gods any less than daimons: “τὸ γὰρ θεῖον, ἕποι ποι’ ἄν ἤν’ ἐρ’ ἔχει τὰς ἰσορροπημένας ἀνάλυσιν. Οὐκ’ ἄν ἐμφανές ἄν ἐς ἐπάραξεν ἀπαθίνον, κἂν τοῦ ἄκρων,b ἄν’ ἀφικόμενον ὀστήν ἐπάραξεν ἀπαθίνον, κἂν παρά ἄκρω ἐπάραξεν, τὸν ἄσκοπου βασιλέως ἀναθεμάτων” (“The divine no matter where it may be and what its assigned role, retains the same power and dominance over what is subordinate to it. So even if it is visible, it nonetheless exercises rule over the invisible daemons, and even if it is assigned to earth, it still rules over the daemons of the air”).
146 Finamore 1985: 139.
would seem to bolster this argument, with the archangels consistently being described as just inferior to the noeric gods, and the daimons in almost identical terms as the hylic archons. The picture that seems to emerge, then, is one of a hierarchy of gods that descend into the very elements of the material world and, at each level of emanation, have specific envoys with which they interact with human souls. This is, to be sure, a somewhat speculative exegesis, but is one that I believe is the most adequate solution to the problems posed by the archons.

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CHAPTER FIVE

“SHOWETH HERSELF ALL NAKED”:
MADIMI IN JOHN DEE’S
CONVERSATIONS WITH SPIRITS

STEPHANIE SPOTO

Introduction

Ioan Couliano wrote that “the whole power of Magic is founded on Eros”,¹ and Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal both make the connection between the erotic and the occult, noting that both have “in effect, been repressed, made to hide” and that this hiddenness contributes to the mystery of the esoteric and the erotic: “[in] some real sense, sex is the secret par excellence”.² Often occult ritual involves the transgression of social mores, locating and enacting cultural taboos in order to transcend the boundaries which are traditionally constrictive. The erotic and the sexual then become a tool through which to experience the breaking of mundane bonds and to experience something other. However, when the religious system in which the occult practitioner is operating forbids such trespasses, their performances introduce questions and anxieties which can complicate the perception of these practices. This is especially true of Renaissance occult philosophers who attempt to mediate between the constraints of Christian morality and the demands of ritual.

This chapter investigates the introduction of eroticism and sexuality into the practical occultism of John Dee and Edward Kelley in the late sixteenth century, looking at instances where the orthodox barriers which normally divide religion and the erotic are breached, and where John Dee engages in what is essentially sex magic. This becomes even more complicated when contextualised within the western European occult

¹ Couliano: 87.
² Hanegraaff & Kripal: x, xi.
traditions, including hermetic and gnostic customs which viewed the “material world, and the body in particular, [as posing] a constant threat to the soul, because it tends to absorb it and make it forget its heavenly origin,” a view which was often in line with contemporary religious philosophy, and which would cause confusion for scholars attempting to understand Dee’s occult exercises in the context of his devout Christian faith. After first outlining Dee’s occult philosophy and its development, this chapter then goes on to examine the intrusion of eroticism into Dee’s angelic conversations, perhaps the strangest aspect of his career. This section is largely focused on the figure of Madimi—a central character in their occult exercises, Madimi was a female spirit who introduced the doctrine of marital cross-matching into the practices of Dee and Kelly.

The chapter then moves to look at how various researchers in the twentieth century have interpreted the more sexual aspects of Dee’s occultism. The vitriolic and emotive responses to these instances of eroticism in the angelic conversations point to the anxiety which is present in both biographers’ and scholars’ account of his work, perpetuating the idea that sensuality does not belong in the magic of John Dee. This essay argues that eroticism was a common, though occulted, aspect of magic throughout the Renaissance, and that the inclusion of sexuality—though it may initially seem discordant with his philosophy—is not incompatible when viewed in the context of his occult thought.

**John Dee as Elizabethan magus**

John Dee is “Elizabethan England’s most highly regarded natural philosopher”, and was “involved in the whole spectrum of Renaissance scholarship”, according to Peter French’s Introduction to his book devoted to this Elizabethan scholar, where he claims that Dee was Elizabethan England’s great Magus. John Dee’s wide-ranging and deep erudition gained him favour with Queen Elizabeth I, who appointed him her Royal Astrologer and counsellor “on certain matters of state and scientific importance”. As court astrologer, he advised Elizabeth on the significance of a comet in 1577, and was given the task of reforming the Julian calendar in 1583. In return, Elizabeth promised to keep Dee safe from anyone who would want to harm him because of his reputation.

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3 Van den Broek: 3.
4 Harkness 1999: 1; Feingold: 545-559.
6 French: 1.
which placed him as the “odd one out” amongst the “officially sponsored humanist education provided at universities”\textsuperscript{8}. Perhaps more important than either court astrologer or counsellor to the Queen was Dee’s role as a natural and occult philosopher. To the English Humanist movement, with its dry focus on grammar, Dee’s “Hermetic Platonism, with its magic and mysticism, seemed subversive”,\textsuperscript{9} but although his occult philosophies challenged contemporary university teaching, he was still in high demand for his vast learning and was solicited by Louvain, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. Though he was sought after by universities, “and already the author of learned books, what more could his heart desire? The answer has tragic implications. He desired universal knowledge. […] The middle-aged scholar could not reconcile himself to human limitations, and was ever trying to transcend them”.\textsuperscript{10}

Louvain was his university of choice, and he travelled there in 1548 where he acquired a reputation of having “learning quite beyond his years”.\textsuperscript{11} Crucially, until twelve years before John Dee arrived, Louvain had been the home and refuge of the occult philosopher, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, whose occultism—though only beginning to gain popularity in England—was already being studied by the students, and Dee had the opportunity to immerse himself in his philosophy. French sees Dee’s thought as so saturated with Renaissance Hermeticism and occultism that it would be impossible to understand him without first comprehending his sources, with which he had a remarkable familiarity. Like his ideological predecessors, he supports the antiquity-theory of Hermes as a contemporary of Moses, and was not only “entirely within the Hermetic movement so prevalent during the sixteenth century, but he was one of its most extreme adherents”.\textsuperscript{12}

Like his continental antecedents, Dee placed ultimate authority in the importance of hierarchy. Chains of command assert their weight in every aspect of Dee’s philosophy; at the top of this ladder is God, wisdom, knowledge as \textit{gnosis}, and the magus must climb his way upwards by understanding the nature of the higher spheres: “By the joining of such natural things that exist separately in the universe, in their differing fashions, and by the activating of other things placed somewhat higher, seminally, in nature, more wonderful things can be performed truly and

\textsuperscript{8} French: 7.
\textsuperscript{9} French: 22.
\textsuperscript{10} Bulter: 162.
\textsuperscript{11} Fell-Smith: 9.
\textsuperscript{12} French: 68, 125.
naturally, without violence to faith in God or injury to the Christian religion, than any mortal might be able to believe.”

He uses Agrippa’s model of three-layered magic: at the lowest level was natural magic which did not violate the laws of nature, but was a beginner’s level, in which the aspiring magus could learn to develop his occult practices. Here magic was “a natural philosophy providing for powers and correspondences, that can be manipulated, and an ethos that sought to understand and capture and control the powers and processes of nature.” Only the most skilled and daring magicians moved from natural magic (and the second layer of astrological or celestial magic), and operated through the highest level of magic, theological or ceremonial magic, because of the threat of coming in contact with chthonic, or non-angelic, spirits. However, this must be the final step of the philosopher as the occult correspondences of theological magic “were seen as paths to the divine and the spiritual ascent of the magus”.

Just as the occult philosopher could climb upwards, so divine knowledge could be passed down through the spheres. In his Preface to Euclid Dee explains his astrology as neoplatonic: “Astrology, which reasonably demonstrates the operations and the effects of the natural beams of light, and secret influence of the planets and fixed stars in every element and Elemental Body, at all times in any Horizon assigned.” He goes on to describe in Propaedeumata Aphoristica how the stars operate according to neoplatonic cosmology, which depends on the Hermetic premise of “as above, so below”. The superlunar spheres are divine bodies and “superior organisms through which God channelled his powers”. Angels drink in the divine light directly from the first sphere, God or “the One”, which is the ultimate source of divine knowledge, then man experiences this divine light through “the intermediary symbol of the sun”. This model helped to promote the idea of the heliocentric, or Copernican, universe; previously, the Hermetic philosopher imagined a geocentric universe, surrounded by spheres of the other elements, within the circular spheres of the moon, stars, sun, angels, and above and around them all, God.

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14 Clulee: 29-30.
15 Clulee: 29-30.
16 Dee 1986a: 37.
17 French: 91.
19 French: 89.
Dee, along with his European counterparts, embraced the Jewish mystical tradition of Cabala, especially in its Christian form as developed by Johannes Reuchlin and Agrippa. Dee's library contained more Hebraic materials than any other library in England during the period, and many of the works were annotated showing his studious attention to the material. In his interpretations of the Cabala, he connected it with Pythagorean doctrines, "and this led him to transform Cabala in a mathematical discipline that drew on both Pythagorean numerology and Euclidean geometry." But his interest in Cabala was centred on its practical magic, and his numerology seemed focused on the angelic names, for he believed that saying them would give him command over the angels—his Tabula Bonum Angelorum Invocationes was concerned expressly with discovering the names and hierarchies of angels and spirits. He used talismans to attract angelic forces, and sought out the forty-two letter name of God in the Cabala. Though he concerned himself with demonology and the names of spirits, he connected cabalist demonic operations "with the celestial hierarchies of pseudo-Dionysus, thereby cloaking unorthodox demonic magic with the approval of a respectable Christian authority", though he assigned planets to each of the angels, thereby furthering the fusion between angelic hierarchies and astrology.

Probably the most bizarre aspect of John Dee's career is his long and intense dedication to his angelic conversations, a series of what he calls "exercises" or "actions." Dee had begun to attempt contact with angels by 1581, and possibly as early as the later 1560s. He was already interested in angelic magic during his most ambitious scientific works of 1569 and 1570, and had begun scrying (the practice of using reflective surfaces to obtain psychic visions) and crystal magic during the writing of his preface to Euclid; this suggests that he "saw no fundamental division between natural philosophy and spiritualism". His conversations conformed to a sixteenth century thought pattern that believed that God communicated, through his intermediary angels of the middle spheres, to

20 Harkness 1999: 162.
21 Clucas 2006a: 15.
24 French: 88.
25 Reed: 179; French: 88; Turner: 102.
26 Clucas 2006b: 239.
select individuals, and Dee writes in his Diaries, “[I] have been desirous to have help in my philosophical studies through the company and information of the blessed angels of God”. 

Though his preferred method of celestial contact was through scrying, Dee did not scry himself, but hired a scryer. He had a series of scryers of varying degrees of ability, but it was only when he met Edward Kelley in March 1582 that his angelic experiments really yielded results. Edward Kelley (sometimes called Edward Talbot, and this change in name is often assumed to be the result of him hiding from his shady past) would gaze into a stone or mirror and act as the medium of communication between Dee and the spirits. Although Dee probably knew of Kelley’s rather dubious background and history, “it seems to have little influence on his assessment of the seer’s clairvoyant abilities”. 

It is difficult to know whether or not Dee believed himself to possess supernatural powers, since he always relied on the aid of a scryer to communicate with the spirits. But he did on occasion record witnessing them first hand, on the fourth of July 1583, Dee wrote that: “as [Edward Kelley] was looking earnestly on them, a spiritual creature did part the book on the outside of the parchment cover, divers times, and once would have taken it out of his hands. Divers times I heard the strokes myself.” 

Dee’s desire to make direct contact with the spirits is important if understood from a hermetic perspective, for the closer Dee moves towards the angels and their knowledge, the higher up the neoplatonic ladder he climbs as a result. While most contemporary scrying had a financial motivation—locating stolen goods or lost items—Dee used scrying as a means to attain mystical knowledge. In 1582, the angel Hagonel promises Dee that he will have power over “all spirits inhabiting within the earth”, and a year later Uriel speaks tantalizingly about a book:

> The book containeth three kinds of knowledge:
>  - The knowledge of God truly.
>  - The number and doings of his angels perfectly.
>  - The beginning and ending of Nature substantially.

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29 Harkness 1999: 5.
31 Turner: 23.
32 Fell-Smith: 59, 88.
35 Dee 1986b: 41, 32.
It is easy to see how hints like these could be torturous for the would-be grand magus. The ultimate goal of John Dee’s science and magic was to understand God’s creative genius. He saw his angelic conversations as part of the magical hierarchy laid out by Agrippa, whose natural philosophy also laid the foundations for Dee’s natural magic. But his ever-increasing efforts with the conversations suggest that Dee “had entered into a period of intellectual crisis so profound that he began to doubt whether the information he could find in his books could really help him to achieve certain knowledge”. With the transmission of divine knowledge via the celestial spheres, the human soul can move up or down, for as God’s divine light filters downwards through the angels and stars, so the devout philosopher can climb upwards towards wisdom. Dee moved variously along both pathways, sometimes devoting his energies to his studies and sometimes trying to receive “top-down” divine revelation. French suggests that “through intense inner contemplation leading to direct mystical contact with the divine mens, he may have learned the Gnostic secrets”. But his increasing attention towards his angelic experiments suggests that he was dissatisfied with what these meditations were revealing to him. He began to turn his attention towards the lost primordial language, or the lingua adamica, that was supposedly the language Adam used to name all the animals and created things. His long career in alchemy, in search for the philosopher’s stone which would grant its possessor immortality, is even more revealing once he begins to call it “Adam’s stone”. It seems as though Dee desired to restore man to his previous prelapsarian state, when he could be in direct contact with the divine. His desire was so intense that “he not only abandoned his scientific experiments, but also neglected his humanist philological caution and overlooked the serious warnings against angel magic to be found even in the works of his favourite occult authors”.

**Erotic magic and the fear of the demonic**

Although Dee’s supposed intentions focused on dealing with purely angelic spirits, he seems to have often been in contact with devils,

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36 Szönyi 2006a: 209.
38 French: 177.
40 Cavallaro: 162.
41 Szönyi 2006a: 218.
miscellaneous spirits and dubious half-human beasts. Certainly, his magic bordered on the demonic; Reeds points out that Dee’s *Book of Soyga* emphasises the magical aspects of writing liturgical phrases backwards—for example, the “pater noster” (the Lord’s Prayer) became “retson retap”.42 Regarding the use of permissive or black metal, György Szönyi writes that Dee and Kelley “must have tried out the ‘illicit’ methods at their disposal”.43 Translations of the black magic found in editions of the *Key of Solomon*, which circulated from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, could have found their way into Dee’s magic,44 and indeed a comparison between Dee’s “Sigil of Ameth” and the Solomonic “Great Pentacle” from the seventeenth century Italian manuscript *Clavicolo di Salomone Re d’Israel figlio de David* allows for the possibility that Dee had been influenced by earlier editions of this censored text.45

The issue of the presence of the demonic within experiments in spirit-communication presents a problem for any Christian occult practitioner, and Dee never seemed willing to deal with its obvious existence in his magic, except to remove blame from himself as the pure philosopher who was not the object of the demons’ magnetic attraction to his experiments. Certain stars could be considered evil because of their “heavy” influence, which could often propel men towards wickedness; however, according to Dee the evil is already present within human nature and can only be amplified by the stars’ influences. Dee writes in his *Aphorism CXII* that “certain of the constellations are sometimes so far called maleficient as they pour their energy upon corrupt nature of badly disposed matter […]. But the constellations themselves do no harm”.46 Barnabas Saul, one of Dee’s early scryers, had a criminal record and elicited distrust from Dee, who recorded in his diary that there was an evil spirit that sought Saul’s death because he was “accursed”.47

The descriptions of their demonic encounters and of the demons’ visible characteristics seem to follow a theme. On 4 July 1583, Dee writes that fourteen demons appear “of divers evil-favoured shapes: some like monkeys, some like dogs, some very hairy monstrous men, &c. They seemed to scratch each other in the face”; and earlier that year, on 23 March after a demon appeared he vanished as if he had “been a bunch of

42 Reeds: 179.
43 Szönyi 2006b: 81-82.
44 Szönyi 2006b: 80.
45 Solomon; Dee 1986b: 79.
46 Dee 1978: 189.
feathers pulled in pieces". The demons that come during the angelic summons appear to be half-humanoid, half-animal. While Dee was in London, Kelley had used the stone without his employer’s guidance, and saw an evil spirit in the disguise of an angel “that there appeared one very much like unto our good friend”, a good spirit or angel who had been guiding them through the lingua adamiaca. However, when this spirit was forced to tell the truth “his outward beautiful apparel seemed to go off, and his body appeared hairy, and he confessed that he was an illuder”, and had therefore been not a good spirit, or angel, but had been a demon disguised in “beautiful apparel”.

Another interesting non-angelic experience occurred in April 1583, when Kelley was assaulted by demons which looked like “labouring men, having spades in their hands and hair hanging about their ears”, and who were attacking Dee and Kelley. It is interesting to imagine (as Dee describes) Kelley pointing to where they are flying and Dee swinging an axe into the invisible air in the direction towards which Kelley is motioning. They only leave when Dee brandishes a cross.

The conjuring of demons in the form of animals is relatively easy to explain if we turn to a history of anthropomorphic legends and shape-shifting creatures, but the “labouring men” with spades are more baffling, unless we imagine a great cosmic hierarchy, the scala naturae, in which every being on every level strives to move upwards towards the divine. Animals in the upper spheres, such as birds, were seen to inhabit a more pure environment than the animals in the lower spheres, such as dogs and other creatures which tread on the ground. In this sense, the lower animals and the labouring men are not so out of place within Dee’s angelic conversations, as they are situated lower on the celestial hierarchy than Dee, who sees himself as a great occultist, welcome at the court of Queen Elizabeth. These demonic encounters weighed heavily on Dee’s mind, though he tried to explain them away by the negative influences of his less than admirable scryer. As he moved deeper into the occult studies of scrying and the angelic conversations, he began to be troubled by nightmares of screeching owls, further suggesting the connection between the demonic and the animal.

Edward Kelley was not as enthusiastic about the angelic conversations as Dee, and often claimed that they were a waste of time. Dee and Kelley had very different motivations, however, and whereas Dee was interested in knowledge, Kelley was interested in monetary reward and wanted to

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devote time to alchemy and the transmutation of base matter into gold. Kelley repeatedly tried to influence Dee away from the angelic experiments by pointing out that most of the spirits that they had contacted were evil, and that they should not be dabbling in demonic magic—an interesting concern, considering Kelley’s past. Nevertheless, Kelley’s anxieties surrounding the demonic seemed not be centred on the animal or the labourer, but on the feminine demon and demonic sexuality.

During the angelic experiments, Dee and Kelley came into contact with many spirits and angels, but some of them had recurring appearances throughout Dee’s diaries—a very notable one being Madimi. She was a spirit who often appeared during Dee’s scrying sessions, and she would give information regarding important visiting diplomats and foreign affairs. When she first began to appear in May 1583 she is described as “a pretty girl of seven or nine years of age”, who is “child-like” and a “pretty maiden”. Dee reaffirms Madimi’s youth and innocence throughout the following months, and in June writes that Madimi “appeared as before like a young girl”. However, as the years go on, and the angelic conversations continue, Madimi’s role as the innocent, benevolent spirit changes drastically. In 1587 Kelley describes Madimi’s appearance in the stone, exposing herself “in a very filthy order”, while the other spirits continue to manifest “in that most disorderly and filthy manner”. On 18 April 1587, all the other spirits move away, and only Madimi remains, when she then “openeth all her apparell, and showeth herself all naked; and showeth her shame also”. Here, something remarkable has happened within the angelic conversations with the sudden exposure of Madimi’s sexuality. It is possible that she “aged” along with the years, starting at age nine in 1583 and turning thirteen in 1587, and her transition from innocence to adolescence is marked by a change in the methods of the angelic experiments. Madimi orders Dee and Kelley to share their wives, what Dee would refer to as marital cross-matching. And on 20 May 1587, shortly after the new marital doctrine is introduced, Kelley sees someone he called the Green Woman who commands of them:

The fourth hour after dinner, repair here again. And whatsoever you shall read out of this book, receive it kneeling upon your knees: and see that you suffer no creature female to enter within this place: neither shall the things that shall be opened unto you be revealed unto your wives, or unto any

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51 Parry: 196.
The spirits demand that in order for Dee to continue in his occult pursuits of divine knowledge, he would, essentially, have to engage in sex magic. These new commands on the part of the spirits, and Dee’s acceptance of them, have often been regarded by scholars as an embarrassment, but his compliance demonstrates just how far Dee was willing to go in his zealous pursuit of knowledge. This quest is illustrated in a contemporary rendering of the Key of Solomon, where the magus achieves absolute wisdom: “And when I comprehended the speech which was made unto me, I understood that in me was the knowledge of all creatures, both things which are in the heavens and things which are beneath the heavens; and I saw that all the writings and wisdom of this present age were vain and futile, and that no man was perfect.” Both Dee and Kelley seemed reluctant to submit to the new cross-marital doctrine, and Dee questioned the spirits as to their exact meaning, hoping that perhaps they meant a more metaphorical sharing. The command was issued so suddenly, and was so out of the norm from the previous expeditions into the adamic lingua and numerology, that it seems that it can only be explained by Kelley’s aversion to the angelic experiments, claiming that they were a waste of time. Dee noted that Kelley had repeatedly said that he thought they should not deal with the spirits any longer, and that he had long thought that they were evil. However, when Kelley’s pleas (based on the supposed wickedness of the spirits) were ignored, he must have pushed the issue even further. Dee’s diaries “attest to his fidelity as well as the abstinence he practised as a means to attain the spiritual purity necessary for those in search of higher mysteries”, and an important factor in remaining pure was abstaining “with great and thorough continence during the space of nine days from sensual pleasures” and “from all things unlawful, and from every kind of impiety, wickedness, or immodesty, as well of body as of soul”. Evidence from Dee’s diaries—where he kept scrupulous records of dates and times of sexual intercourse, and his wife’s menstruation—points to his awareness of these restrictions when practising magic, as he does not appear at any point to engage in sexual activity.

55 Solomon: 12.  
56 Parry: 197-198.  
57 Deacon: 203-204.  
59 Feingold: 550-551.  
60 Solomon: 14, 79.
within nine days of beginning a new angelic exercise. Kelley, knowing Dee, could have invented the commands, never expecting him to go through with it. Very disappointed at the turn in Dee’s angelic events, E. M. Butler wrote in 1948 that “[between] them, he and his ‘skryer’ had also initiated a new kind of necromancy, imbued with [a] peculiar blend of holiness, phoneyness and feeble-mindedness”.62

Though it may seem strange that Dee accepted the new doctrine which sexualised their magic, he was well aware of the complications surrounding female demons and there were hints of sexual magic in his symbol of the Monas, which Dee used in his diaries to indicate interlocking “to suggest their conjunction and generative faculty”. At the top is “Luna Exalted”, and Dee writes in his Monas Hieroglyphica: “It is therefore clearly confirmed that the whole magistry depends upon the Sun and the Moon. Thrice Great Hermes has repeatedly told us in affirming that the Sun is its father and the Moon is its mother: and we know truly that the red earth (terra lemnia) is nourished by the rays of the Moon and the Sun which exercise a singular influence upon it.”64 Kelley’s own alchemical writings developed from theories which were heavy in sexual metaphor, where sexual union grew out of “the common and universal matter” which “is called Chaos”—alchemy works with the wetness and dryness of opposing principles, and Kelley maintained that “all teaching that changes Mercury is false and vain, for this is the original sperm of metals, and its moisture must not be dried up”.65 And though they seemed willing to include sexual symbolism in their alchemical and Hermetic philosophies, when it came to feminine spirits, Dee was more anxious. In 1583, when he comes in contact with Galvah, a female spirit, he writes that “Tritemius sayeth that never any good angel was read to have appeared in female form”. Galvah reassures him that angels are “neither man nor woman. Therefore may those that are the eternal ministers of God in his proportion of sanctification take unto them the bodies of them both”.66 In 1968, Richard Deacon shared this same discomfort and annoyance around the introduction of female spirits, and when remarking on the language of the “angels” that Dee encounters he says: “The vagueness of the angelic pronouncements sometimes irritated Dee; the

61 Fenton: 209.
62 Butler: 172.
63 French: 79 fig. 14.
64 Dee 1947: 18.
65 Kelley: 8, 22.
angels seemed to have all the unpredictability of the female species, whether they were of the male or female sex, and they had the habit of orating at great length in often incomprehensible language.\textsuperscript{67} The elite occultism of Dee’s time was a male-dominated endeavour with male scryers, magicians and spirits, and deviation from this masculine ideal threatened chaos. Robert Burton wrote that devils and demons would propagate with witches and wicked women, thereby creating new generations of demons, and also that female demons would lure men into unholy unions, suggesting that women’s ravenous sexuality caused the continuation of evil.\textsuperscript{68} In the Key of Solomon, the “Guide of these Demons is Ashtaroth or Astarte, the impure Venus of the Syrians, whom they represent with the head of an ass or of a bull, and the breasts of a woman”, further connecting feminine sexuality, the bestial and the demonic.

Women were not allowed in the realm of elite occult practice, and—along with animals and labourers—were represented by demons. The occult magic of Dee and the continental philosophers engaged in a strict hierarchy which placed man above animal and woman, and the learned philosopher above the labourer; any attempt to corrupt this hierarchy threw the philosopher’s world into disorder. These hierarchies were maintained in the journey “upwards”, whilst the aspiring gnostic simultaneously tried to keep the uninitiated from progressing heavenwards. When Dee began publishing his research, he became worried that it would open the upper rungs of the ladder to those unworthy of it: “Oh God! Pardon me if I have sinned against Thy Majesty in revealing such a great mystery in my writings which all may read, but I believe that only those who are truly worthy will understand.”\textsuperscript{70}

In this sense, the animal demonic and the feminine demonic are bound together and are perhaps inseparable when examining Dee’s conversations with angels. While it is tempting, given the anxiety about animals and humans in this context, to look at these transformations from a Deleuzian becoming-animal/becoming-woman perspective, I think there is something more going on here. As the animal and the woman both represent lower forms than the higher man, especially the educated occult philosopher, perhaps these manifestations of women and animals are the demonic threat to Dee’s pious reaching towards the heavens, and towards a transcendence of his human self into the higher spheres of the divine. Man’s unique

\textsuperscript{67} Deacon: 128.
\textsuperscript{68} Burton: 150-153.
\textsuperscript{69} Solomon: 111.
\textsuperscript{70} Dee 1947: 29.
position, straddling both the realms of the flesh and the spiritual, allowed for him to move up or down the celestial ladder towards or away from God. Aristotle notes that within this scala naturae there are liminal creatures which appear to belong to two different categories: men—who might move upwards—but also women, who are sensual, mundane, and in communion with animals. 71 Anxiety surrounding the feminine and the animal in Dee’s rituals then exposes the vulnerability of the magician to influences which would weigh heavily on him, like the negative influence of the stars, hindering him from progressing in gnostic insight. Engagement with the feminine would have been an engagement with the earthly, the physical, and the flesh to the detriment of the soul, thus incorporating female bodies into this quest for ascension complicates readings of early modern religious philosophy.

Understanding the theological background of Dee’s philosophy raises interesting questions when trying to interpret the eroticism present in much of his theoretical and practical occultism. However, since the occult practitioner may expend immense energy attempting to control the objects lower down on the scala naturae, then it is possible that ascension from the mundane can only occur through an abandonment of the worldly. Dee’s abandonment of worldly goods and pleasures is in line with this abandonment of his prized possession, his wife. Only after he relinquishes this final object from his guarded collection can he be truly be free from the earthly, the mundane, and the sensual. Perhaps instead of looking at it as engaging in sex magic with a multitude of sexual partners, it was this abandonment of the earthly that put this practice in line with the philosophers he so much admired. If, as Ioan Couliano says, magic is founded on the power of eroticism, 72 then the use of sexuality in Dee’s angelic conversations should not be seen as an abnormality in his esoteric philosophy, but as an essential part of his attempt to reach the divine.

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CHAPTER SIX
BURKE’S AESTHETICS OF THE SPIRIT
SIMON WILSON

If we are to address the question of inspiration by the “numinous other” or the daimon, we have to take the spiritual realm seriously. That is, we have to accept the reality of a plane of existence unconditioned by material, emotional, psychic, social or other factors. If we deny its reality it may disappear from our view altogether. The consequences of such a denial could only be an impasse which serves to restrict research and block insight. One could equally and more accurately say that it would lead to the construction of a wall of rationality around our authentic selves and thus prevent truly transformative forces from breaking in, thus selling us heinously short as human beings.

If, then, we are to understand how the “numinous other” is conveyed and depicted, how its voice is heard, how it informs and has always informed human experience, we need an approach which takes into account our true and essential nature as humans. That nature is primarily spiritual and secondarily physical and psychic, a tripartite model which can be traced back, at least, to St Paul, who, in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, refers to our “spirit and soul and body”.¹ In this understanding “body” refers to the facts of our physical existence, while “soul” is, in the words of one writer, “the nexus of thoughts, emotions and desires that occupy most of our inner lives”.² It describes our “natural”, every-day consciousness and emotions. The spirit, finally, is our immortal, unconditioned and divine part, our essential reality. It is from God and exists always in God. Body, soul and spirit form a complex unity in which the body is the vehicle for the soul and the soul vehicle for the spirit. Most of us, however, live as if the spirit did not exist, and mistake our world of emotions, thoughts and desires for reality. Then the body and soul

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:23.
² Smoley: 20.
effectively occlude the spirit: we drown in the material or are suffocated by the psychic. However, when the spirit is given its due place in the triad, its glow envelopes the body and soul, as a bulb is completely surrounded by the light it radiates. When that happens the spirit is revealed to be the true vehicle of soma and psyche, and, importantly, to be unconfined by them.

We therefore need an approach which takes into consideration not only the elements of our being but also their proper relation to one another. Daimons may play an important role here. They are intermediaries or messengers between the spirit in and around us and the rest of our being, our every-day somatically and psychically conditioned selves. In a familiar passage from Plato we read: “Everything that is daimonic is intermediate between god and mortal. Interpreting and conveying the wishes of men to gods and the will of gods to men, it stands between the two and fills the gap [...]”3 Like the angels on the ladder witnessed by Jacob, daimons descend and ascend, reconciling, on the one hand, the material and the psychic—the world, if you like—with, on the other, the eternal and divine. Daimons thus give form to the divine source; they are aspects, that is, of God. Such personifications are necessary for us, living in the world of material and mental form as we do. We respond to them because they are individuated, while at the same time they partake of divine truth much more intimately than we do.

Their very existence, however, also serves to underline how distant we are from the divine. If we were closer, we would not need them. Therein lies a danger if we pay too much attention to daimons as such: their undoubted fascination and charisma may blind us to the fact that, if I may be permitted to put it in such terms, they are “only” bearers of the message and not the message itself. To mistake them for the Real itself could indeed entail a kind of idolatry, separating us from our true spiritual self instead of linking us to it. That this is a hazard inherent in a daimon is demonstrated by the very etymology of the term itself: as Jean Gebser has written, the root of the word “daimon” “is revealing: it is “da-” and has in Sanskrit, as dayate, the sense “he divides, cuts off”. The related Greek verb daimōnai, Gebser goes on, “means not only ‘divide’ but ‘cut into bits, take to pieces, tear to pieces, tear limb from limb’” [zerteilen, zerlegen, zerreißen, zerfleischen].4 Daimons can only reveal to us the promptings of the spirit if we can, as it were, see through them; otherwise they only serve to cut us off from our true birthright.

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3 Plato: Symposium 202d-203a (Dodds: 37).
4 Gebser: 159 (translation mine).
I do not of course wish to be understood as arguing against interest in the daimonic. I merely intend to alter the focus a little. There is another approach which, I believe, avoids daimonic pitfalls. It addresses our full nature as human beings, and accounts for inspiration as well as the effects of inspired art. It does so by cutting out the daimonic middleman and describing the sudden flooding of being by the divine. It is to be found in the field of aesthetics, and is called the sublime.

Now, I have to say that this is by no means a straightforward claim to make, and seems at first sight to be considerably more problematic than the discourse on daimons. For example, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has argued that “our use of the term ‘aesthetic’ forbids us […] to speak of art as pertaining to the ‘higher things of life’ or the immortal part of us”. If “daimon” is a Greek word, so is “aesthetics”, and Coomaraswamy reminds us that the “Greek original of the word ‘aesthetic’ means perception by the senses”, and that the term implies that art “is evoked by, and has for its end to express and again evoke, emotions”.

Aesthetics, in Coomaraswamy’s view, is concerned solely with fleeting sensations and passions or with the shifting surface of appearances. It would seem therefore to trap us more securely than any daimon in the somatic and psychic. We can, however, rescue at least one category of aesthetics from this crushing rejection. For in the theory of the sublime we can find an account of human nature which returns us to the traditional complex unity of body, soul and spirit. One could indeed say that it describes the embodiment and ensoulment of the spirit (or, more accurately, the enspiritment of the body and soul).

The sublime was central to aesthetic discourse in the eighteenth century. Its influence can be traced back to the re-discovery of a first or second-century treatise On the Sublime attributed to Longinus. One critic has summarised the qualities generally associated with the sublime as: “[…] wildness, grandeur, and overwhelming power which, in a flash of intensity, could ravish the soul with a sudden transport of thought or

5 Coomaraswamy: 40.
7 Longinus was unusual among classical authors in his emphasis on art as an expression of an author’s strong emotions (see Abrams: 72-74, 132-133). According to Longinus one of the two innate characteristics necessary for the sublime artist was “vehement and inspired passion” (Longinus: 71) (the other being “the power of forming great conceptions” [Longinus: 71]). As such, his ideas fitted firmly into eighteenth-century sensationalism. Burke, however, goes well beyond these somatic and psychic effects.
feeling”.

It was discussed in many eighteenth-century works but the single most influential account in the English language was certainly Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; second, revised edition 1759), in which we find the following description of the term: whatever “operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime”. “Indeed,” Burke writes, “terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime”.

We are still on the level of body and soul here, the merely “natural” level to which Coomaraswamy condemns all of aesthetics. And, indeed, Burke’s aesthetics are traditionally understood to belong firmly to this sphere. Vanessa L. Ryan has written, for example, that “Burke presents an empirical view of aesthetic taste based on sensations and on our physiological responses to them”.

The physical and psychic effects of the sublime are, however, for Burke, merely the necessary beginning of a cathartic process which can result in a kind of resurrection of the body here and now, in which it and the soul are transformed by spirit. To understand how that may work, we have to follow Burke through the stages of the process. He describes how the sublime revivifies us both physically and psychically:

[...] as a due exercise is essential to the coarse muscular parts of the constitution, and that without this rousing they become languid, and diseased, the very same rule holds with regard to those finer parts we have mentioned [i.e. the “finer and more delicate organs, on which, and by which, the imagination, and perhaps the other mental powers act”]; to have them in proper order, they must be shaken and worked to a proper degree.

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8 Morris: 1.
9 Burke: 86.
10 Burke: 102.
11 Ryan: 269. The historical moment of the sublime and aesthetics in general also seems to imply that Burke’s sublime belongs to this discourse. The term “aesthetics” itself was coined by Alexander Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century, and is a product of an age in which materialist theories of human identity and perception were beginning to predominate. John Locke famously saw the mind as a *tabula rasa*, its conceptions determined largely by brute sense impressions. All imagination could do was to sort, combine and recombine these ideas, like a sort of mental file clerk. David Hartley described sensations and their resultant ideas—indeed the very mind itself—as species of vibrations in the material of the body.
12 Burke: 164-165.
The sublime works through our constitution to bring about a radical re-arranging of both the body and the soul, shaking and breaking them up, to subsequently re-establish healthy order. Physical and psychic blockages are removed, so that life can flow again:

[…] if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance [sic], they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility [sic] tinged with terror […].13

The sublime describes, in fact, how we feel when the body and soul are revitalised and their disorder, disarray and confusion are healed. It is a kind of salutary terror, which produces a feeling perhaps best described as calm, yet delighted awe. Burke, however, moves beyond the natural man to address the spiritual effects of the sublime. He does this by turning to the presence of the divine in the psyche of the individual experiencing the sublime. God, in fact, is central to the sublime, though Burke is wary of mentioning Him in a context which may be understood as trivialising the divine. He writes: “I purposely avoided when I first considered this subject, to introduce the idea of that great and tremendous being [i.e. God], as an example in an argument so light as this; though it frequently occurred to me, not as an objection to, but as a strong confirmation of my notions on this matter.”14 Indeed, he finds that the sublime is the foremost and the most characteristic aspect of God when we encounter Him directly, as full human beings, unfiltered by abstract reasoning:

Some reflection, some comparing is necessary to satisfy us of his wisdom, his justice, and his goodness; to be struck with his power, it is only necessary that we should open our eyes. But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him.15

Burke’s words seem at first unsettling. When encountering God and His manifestations we are blanked out, or at best contract to a mere point. Crushed, as it were, we seem to lose all freedom, and become a little oppressed scrap, a fearful remnant. Burke, however, is referring to the annihilation of our merely natural self, of a self produced by a body and soul which are themselves largely determined by matter and the world.

13 Burke: 165.
14 Burke: 110.
15 Burke: 111.
That self is erased only to be replaced by our highest self—the spiritual self. This becomes clear when Burke, writing of the sublime experience at its most elevated, indicates that “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other […]”\textsuperscript{16} The imagination is, in this case, so filled by the divine—unfiltered by reasoning or abstraction—that nothing else is present to it. The idea of God, that is, when utterly experienced in its fullness and present in the soul of an individual, is completely different in quality and essence from all ideas which result from sense impressions or abstract reasoning. It frees us from ideas passively determined through our senses and from conditioning of any kind. The divine then permeates us, body and soul, and we recall our true nature. What is important here is that it is fully experienced. To fully experience something is to fully live it, not merely to entertain an idea for pleasure. It then radiates through one’s whole being. The “idea” of God then ceases to be an idea and becomes an enfleshed reality within and without us. The sublime, in other words, is what it “feels” like to incarnate the divine.

The “ordinary” sublime, then, produces two things: physical and psychic revitalisation. But in the sublime encounter with God—the “divine” sublime—three things happen simultaneously. The fleshly fibres of the body are subjected to health-giving exercise, strengthening and enlivening the frame. The soul is revitalised, re-ordered and healed. But if we are capable of fully experiencing the sublime which has its origin in God, then our imagination is filled with Him. Our divine, spiritual self floods us, body and soul, liberating us from our material and mechanical aspects.\textsuperscript{17} We can understand this event as a kind of resurrection of the body, here and now. The natural body drops away but the spiritual body takes its place. Sublime catharsis is a transformation of the self through the body and soul, so that they are placed under the dominion of the spirit right now, in this life. We thus become fully enfleshed and ensouled spirits.

\textsuperscript{16} Burke: 101.
\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Weiskel, indeed, argued that a “humanistic sublime is an oxymoron” (Weiskel: 3). However, his influential work on the sublime constitutes, as Ronald Paulson argued, a perfect example of what Paulson called “the human sublime,” by which he meant the “naturalizing, or arguably travestying, [of] the sublime encounter […] between man and the most sublime of all objects, God. The supernatural force is revealed […] to be a participant in a domestic power struggle.” (Paulson: 427) Weiskel’s Freudian reading of Burke leads him to argue that “the ‘imminent danger’ to which we are exposed and from which we are then released in the sublime moment is an unconscious fantasy of parricide” (Weiskel: 92). Thus Weiskel protects himself from the divine.
Burke’s sublime describes the effect works of art may have on us—and the effects of other things such as buildings or landscapes, or, to select a few words at random from Burke’s contents table, of “obscurity,” “power,” “vastness,” “infinity” or “magnificence.” All of these occasions of the sublime are essentially manifestations or symbols of the divine presence. In the sublime moment the world and its phenomena become a revelation of God, the Real shimmers through the relative. As St Paul writes, “[…] the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead […]” Or the opening lines of Psalm 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” The cosmos itself, that is, becomes daimonic, proclaiming, in all its diversity, the One. It is these moments which inspire—which fill—the creative artist, and he or she then becomes a living incarnation of the divine presence, a local manifestation of the spirit, a bearer of a supra-human message. He or she becomes a daimon. This of course is an evanescent state, not a permanent condition. Artists, for example, are generally not saints, and few indeed are embodiments of divine reality. Their somatic and psychic parts continue to predominate, and, as personalities, they may be unremarkable. But “the wind bloweth where it listeth” and the sublime can strike at any moment, leaving one, temporarily at least, daimonic. Perhaps artists are people who can hear the blowing of the wind more acutely than others. Any such theurgic moment cannot help but leave a faint residue or colouring behind in the individual, with inevitable salutary effects.

Just as the sublime may be occasioned, for example, by a landscape, the works of the sublime artist may not, on the surface at least, be “about” God: they do not comprise a description of God or of divine works. To expect that would be to mistake the surface or form for the spirit. It would be pure idolatry. Sublime works are icons, not idols, behind which the divine presence exerts a kind of pressure, an underlying intimation. There can be infinite variations in ostensible subject matter or style. Burke, admittedly, concentrates on the high poetry of a Virgil or a Milton, but the sublime can equally be present in satire, irony or farce. A sublime work, in fact, is unlikely to comply with classical rules of form, as defined by human reason. A poem or play, for instance, may express as fully as possible divine reality, but it will also display certain ambiguities or contradictions, as the infinite cannot be squeezed perfectly into the finite

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18 Burke: 58.
19 Romans 1: 20.
20 John 3: 8.
receptacle of human language. But if a work effectively transfers the spark of sublime inspiration to the reader or onlooker, then he or she too will bear that spark, if they are open to it. They too can become daimonic.

It is significant that the discourse on the sublime came so much to the fore in the eighteenth century. It constituted a kind of saving grace in the Age of Reason. Banished from science and philosophy, increasingly absent from theology and the Church, the spirit re-emerged, first in aesthetics, and then, with a short delay, in art itself. The work of Blake or Wordsworth is testimony to the new responsibility felt by artists as potential bearers of light and truth in a benighted and deluded age.

It is doubtful whether most contemporary artists would share this view of their responsibility—and much the same could be said of critics and scholars—which only goes to show how blind and deaf they are to the realm beyond the beguiling enticements of matter, emotions and sensations. Burke, in fact, in addition to the sublime, also describes a view of art which is purely material, and which exists wholly without reference to divine reality. He calls it the beautiful, and it consists of the indulgence of pleasing feelings. It lulls us into a sweet sleep, the sleep of matter and the soul. Burke argues:

\[\text{[\ldots] beauty acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system. There are all the appearances of such a relaxation; and a relaxation somewhat below the natural tone seems to me to be the cause of all positive pleasure. Who is a stranger to that manner of expression so common in all times and in all}\]

21 See Leighton: 20: “The sublime object is celebrated by the incommensurability of the description. Words are lame to undertake the far flights of the sublime \[\ldots\] For Lowth, as for so many eighteenth-century authors, the sublime object comes to be expressed by tactical failures of language compensated by religious faith”. I would not say that faith compensates failures of language, neither that such failures are somehow “tactical,” but rather follow Frithjof Schuon, who, in his discussion of sacred Scriptures, sees the failure as an inevitable result of the pressure of spiritual reality: “The seeming incoherence of these texts [i.e. sacred Scriptures] \[\ldots\] always has the same cause, namely the incommensurable disproportion between the Spirit on the one hand and the limited resources of human language on the other: it is as though the poor and coagulated language of mortal man would break under the formidable pressure of the Heavenly Word into a thousand fragments, or as if God, in order to express a thousand truths, had but a dozen words at his disposal and so was compelled to make use of allusions heavy with meaning, of ellipses, abridgements and symbolical syntheses.” (Schuon: 40-41) I do not mean to imply that sublime writings are direct revelations of divinity on a par with sacred Scripture, but, in their own much more limited way, they are inspired by divine reality.
countries, of being softened, relaxed, enervated, dissolved, melted away by
pleasure?22

What he calls the beautiful consists of a descent into pure sentiment and
pure sensationalism. It occludes the spirit under soft and heavy layers of
physical and emotional flab. It makes us greedy for more emotional food,
lures us into addiction to physical and psychic gratification. We need and
become lost in an endless flood of images, without centre. This
predicament is both a cause and a symptom of the failure of artists and
their audience to acknowledge the reality of the divine.

Such metaphors illuminate the danger of drowning in the quotidian, of
perceiving nothing beyond the sublunary. They may, admittedly, be
somewhat exaggerated. But it seems clear that unless scholars are open to
the reality of the divine—open to the spirit—they will fail to understand
manifestations of the numinous. We have to be prepared to slough off our
every-day selves and to be transformed by the presence of the divine. We
too have to become daimons, however briefly and however lowly.

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22 Burke: 177-178.
In this chapter I discuss how daimonic or uncanny intelligence underpins both psychoanalysis and divination, giving ancient divinatory practices a home in psychoanalysis. This can be seen as linked to the slow revolution in thought brought about by a change in the perception of the cosmos and the deconstruction of the classical world order initiated by Copernicus and Galileo. The discovery of the new planet Uranus in 1781 finally dispelled the symbolic and numerological harmony of the old cosmos and literally brought it to an end, while the long-enduring medieval cosmos became a relic, a “discarded image”, as a new order based on Enlightenment thought emerged. The coincidence of this final disintegration with Kant’s epochal Critique of Pure Reason invites us to

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1 By the term psychoanalysis, I understand the early development of modern dynamic psychiatry and its development into Freud’s psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. I define “divination” as “the universal practice of submitting human desires and volition to guidance from, and an alignment with, an assumed intelligence of the cosmos”. See discussion on this by Cornelius: 2.

2 This was especially the case for astrologers and occultists whose symbolism was based on the traditional Chaldean order of the seven planets, embedded by Ptolemy into the science of late antiquity. The symbolism of a hierarchy of the heavens was integral to the medieval cosmos, both Christian and Islamic. The heliocentrism of Copernicus destroyed Ptolemy’s scientific cosmology but not the symbolism of the heavens, since God can be symbolised by the sun at the centre of the cosmic order. A more radical destruction came with Galileo when the cosmos was re-imagined in terms of material infinity. With the discovery of a new planet, the last defence of the astrologer’s ancient symbolic order was undermined and a new one had to be found. See Hyde 2005.

3 See Lewis, especially ch. 5 “The Heavens”, for the medieval conception of reality as one world.
see 1781 as a symbolic fulcrum between pre and post Enlightenment thought, and the origin of the occult Tarot in the same year indicates a remarkable parallel in occultism.\textsuperscript{4}

Divination as a pure expression of the occult is part of the pre-Enlightenment worldview, in that it assumes what may be broadly characterised as \textit{ unus mundus}, the one world. This is a cosmological and ontotheological unity or fundamental relation of mind and the divine order of reality. There is, of course, not simply one “one world” but rather a range of cultural expressions of the same underlying theme, yet all share the implicit and unquestioned assumption of an intelligible and intelligent cosmos. The rationale of divination is founded in, posits, and interprets this spiritual identity, so in the post-Enlightenment era divination struggled to either reassert the order of pre-modernity or reframe itself within the new ontology. The thought of the Enlightenment is wholly radical in comprehensively overthrowing traditional metaphysics and with it the ontotheological one world in all its forms, leading inexorably to the decline of classical forms of divination and magic, including astrology.\textsuperscript{5} The Enlightenment provided the philosophical grounding for what we now assume to be “normal”, so that the uncanny and the spiritual took on the garb of paranormality. As well as divination, a whole array of phenomena that could not be fitted into an Enlightenment rationale, such as ghosts, spirits and miracles, were marginalised and dismissed as “uncanny”, whilst non-scientific explanations of them were seen as irrational or “occult”.

During the eighteenth century, the idea of an “inner world” began to emerge, distinct from an outside world of nature or society, and this suited perfectly the Enlightenment separation of man and cosmos. The world soul of Plato, with which man’s own soul was entwined, no longer had efficacy, and man’s soul was no longer an integral part of the cosmos but became resident solely \textit{within} the human being. The Greek \textit{psyche}, meaning breath or soul, implied human mind in a cosmic frame, but its derivative \textit{psychology} no longer carries this connotation. Derived from the modern Latin \textit{psychologia} in the sixteenth century, the word did not appear in German until then, and although it had a recorded English usage from 1794, it was not widely used until the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{6} Huxley’s

\textsuperscript{4} Gébelin first published his ideas on the Tarot as divination in 1781 in Paris.

\textsuperscript{5} See Thomas. The social and cultural roots of this decline have been much debated. My own conclusions confirm a key suggestion from Thomas concerning the erosion of faith in the “supernatural” explanations for phenomena in the face of the rapid progress of the “mechanical philosophy”.

\textsuperscript{6} Oxford English Dictionary, entry on “psychology”. See also Williams: 246.
definition in 1879 illustrates the absence of any cosmological reference:
“Psychology is part of the science of life, or biology [...]. As the physiologist inquires into the way in which the so-called “functions” of the body are performed, so the psychologist studies the so-called “functions” of the mind.” 7

The rise of dynamic psychiatry parallels this change in psyche and the forefathers of dynamic psychiatry, Mesmer and Charcot, thought of themselves as part of the new Enlightenment science. 8 In their work we witness the bumpy passage from pre to post Enlightenment thought as they painfully tried to turn the material they worked with into science. We can now see that whatever scientific explanations Mesmer had for cosmic fluid and Charcot had for the hypnotic technique, the phenomena they encountered and their techniques for handling them overlapped with the uncanny world that the Enlightenment had rejected. Mesmer’s fluid, for example, had its precursor in the medieval idea of a one world cosmic fluid, but its objective existence was denied in 1784 by a scientific commission that considered it to be “imagination.” 9

The paranormal dimension of psyche fascinated both psychologist and scientist, and the work of the Society of Psychical Research, founded in 1882, exemplified the strong impetus to bring these phenomena into the remit of science. Psychical researchers following in the footsteps of Myers took on questions of the afterlife and spirit world, and mediumship attracted eminent academics and psychologists. For example, after many years of involvement with the medium Mrs Piper, and despite allegations of fraud, William James considered that the evidence provided by her was his “white crow”, convincing him of the reality of these phenomena. 10 Scientific and psychological researchers were engaged in both empirical psychology and the paranormal, showing the continued entanglement of

7 OED.
8 Ellenberger, especially ch. 2, “The Emergence of Dynamic Psychiatry”, where Mesmer is considered as a “son of the Enlightenment” (62). Although Charcot believed in faith healing, he was also “the foremost neurologist of his time” (90). He owned a “collection of rare old works on witchcraft and possession” but “founded a scientific explanation of demoniacal possession”, seeing it as a form of hysteria (95).
10 Murphy & Ballou, 41, quoting James “If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, it is enough if you prove that one crow is white. My white crow is Mrs Piper.”
the two in the latter years of the nineteenth century.\footnote{See Shamdasani 2003: 4: “Through becoming a science, it was hoped that psychology would be able to solve questions that had vexed thinkers for centuries, and to replace superstition, folk wisdom, and metaphysical speculation with the rule of universal law”.} It has been observed that:

many of the leading psychologists—Freud, Jung, Ferenczi, Bleuler, James, Myers, Janet, Bergson, Stanley Hall, Schrenck-Notzing, Dessoir, Richet and Flournoy—frequented mediums. It is hard today to imagine that some of the most crucial questions of the “new” psychology were played out in the séance, nor how such men could have been so fascinated by the spirits. What took place in the séances enthralled the leading minds of the time, and had a crucial bearing on many of the most significant aspects of twentieth-century psychology, linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, and painting, not to mention psychical research.\footnote{Shamdasani 1994: xi; Flournoy 1899.}

The culmination of engagement yet also the moment of schism for paranormal studies and psychology is demonstrated in Théodore Flournoy’s \textit{From India to the Planet Mars}, recording his experience over several years at séances with the medium Hélène Smith.\footnote{See Flournoy. Hélène Smith’s real name was Élise Muller.} She incarnated dead personages and conversed with them, including an Arabic princess who spoke Sanskrit; but as Flournoy disparagingly pointed out, this princess could not even speak Arabic, her supposed mother tongue. When Hélène later went to Mars, she spoke Martian with the natives.\footnote{See Flournoy, Appendix by Mirielle Citali, “The Making of Martian: The Creation of an Imaginary Language”, 269. Citali discusses the development of the Martian language in the light of the relationship between Hélène and Flournoy.} Flournoy explained Hélène’s world of mediumship in terms of the unconscious mind, describing her reincarnations as a mixture of cryptomnesia and creative imagination, and his work firmly established the psychologisation of mediumship and the “transition from spiritualism to multiple personality”.\footnote{Flournoy: xxxi. Cryptomnesia is subliminal or unconscious memory.} For William James, Flournoy was responsible for “converting psychical research into a respectable science”.\footnote{Flournoy, quoted by Shamdasani 1994: xxvi.}

At the time of its publication in 1899\footnote{In German at the end of 1899, in English in 1900.} \textit{From India to the Planet Mars} had enormous impact, more so than Freud’s \textit{Interpretation of Dreams} with which it is exactly contemporary.\footnote{See Shamdasani 1994: “Encountering Hélène”, xxxi.} Flournoy originally subtitled the work...
A Study of a Case of Somnambulism with Glossolalia. The 1994 edition, edited by Sonu Shamdasani, changes this subtitle to A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages. This change is both surprising and highly significant. Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, belongs to psychical research in that it still retains the question and lingering possibility of discarnate entities beyond the medium’s own mind. On the other hand, Multiple Personality moves the centre of gravity of our concern so that Hélène’s mediumship is seen exclusively in terms of her psyche, her inner world and imagination, and her mediumship is psychologised. Shamdasani explains the subtitle change as the need “to indicate the contemporary contexts that the text reinstates itself within”.19 As far as Shamdasani and most other modern commentators are concerned, the primary context of Flournoy’s work has now become that of psychoanalytic history, not psychical research, and it concerns the function of the individual psyche within the field of psychoanalysis.

Flournoy’s original title identifies Hélène’s mediumship as a type of glossolalia, characterised as having “no I standing at the source of the utterance at the centre of the discourse”,20 and this accords with Hélène’s own insistence that it was not her speaking, not something within her but something other speaking through her—“it comes from somewhere outside herself”.21 However, Flournoy assumes that the “other” speaking at the centre is Hélène’s unconscious, and thus he reduces her glossolalia to unconscious personal content, granting her no other reality. Her reality of India and Mars necessarily becomes a fiction. Hélène concedes that her vision may not actually be of Mars—“she did not hold tenaciously to the distinctly Martian origin of that strange dream,”22—but if a literal visit to Mars was impossible, Mars must be symbolic. Symbolic of what? For Flournoy, it is a symbol of a psychological state, but Hélène places the symbolism within contemporary explanations of mediumship. Flournoy summarises her view that:

there are two methods of explaining this knowledge of a far-off world—namely, communications properly spiritistic (i.e. from spirits to spirits, without material intermediary) the reality of which cannot be held to be doubtful; and clairvoyance, that faculty, or undeniable sixth sense, of mediums which permits them both to see and hear at any distance.23

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19 Shamdasani 1994: Editorial Note. He explores these contexts in his introduction and through an appendix.
21 Shamdasani 1994: 166.
22 Shamdasani 1994: 166.
This shows Hélène to have an awareness of the contemporary debate about mediumship; but despite this evidence, Flournoy still regards her as naïve and gullible. After publication, she felt betrayed and became angry with Flournoy, but the root of her anger is Flournoy’s reduction of the symbolic to the psychological. Hélène has lost her mother tongue in that she speaks Martian, the language of the alien, of the distinctively “other” and non-human, but Flournoy insists that this alien “other” must be the personal unconscious. To Hélène, Flournoy’s explanatory psychology is a “silly and absurd hypothesis of an underlying selfplotting in her, unknown to her”.25

Shamdasani’s new subtitle therefore not only accords with Flournoy’s intention but also with the changing status of mediumship. The modern subtitle locates Hélène’s India and Mars only in psychological terms, and not as India (world) and Mars (cosmos), a symbolic expression in the same way that glossolalia might be a symbolic expression. Psychoanalysis may work with symbolism but it reduces symbols to symptoms of an intrapsychic state, whereas to the medium they are expressions of a transpsychic reality.

The same psychologisation is fundamental to Freud. By 1885 when he published his first psychoanalytic work, *Studies in Hysteria*, he was able to take up psyche as separate from the realm of the uncanny in his attempt to establish a law of the mind and its psychic apparatus, which he objectified in accordance with scientific thought.26 There is persuasive evidence to suggest that Freud has consistently been mistranslated and misunderstood in English, so that his deep meaning of the soul is lost in translation as “mind” or “mental apparatus”. Even with this caveat, for Freud, “soul” still had no religious sense.27 While he accepted some uncanny phenomena such as telepathy and thought transference, these always pertained to the inner world of the individual,28 and he suggested that psychoanalysis and the occult were so different that “collaboration between analysts and

24 Shamdasani reports that after the publication of *From India to the Planet Mars* there was a “bitter and prolonged dispute between Flournoy and Hélène, which ended in a complete disruption”, Shamdasani 1994: xxxii.
26 See Heaton: 27 “Freud invented a procedure and a system that he thought was scientific. As he idealised science so he idealised his ‘discoveries’ about himself. And his followers have idealised him and his ‘discoveries’.
27 Bettelheim: 70-78.
28 See Freud 1921, where he gives several case histories of clients’ experiences with occult phenomena and fortune-telling, especially astrology, and suggests that these are repressed wishes manifesting through thought transference.
occultists has little prospect of being profitable”. He developed his theories and analysis of the unconscious initially through hypnosis, and later through dreams, which he annexed as a key analytic method to reveal the psyche. No matter that dreams had been a major prophetic vehicle since antiquity, it was vital to Freud that the dream pertained to the individual psyche. The dream was internalised and psychologised, overcoming a “one world” philosophy that had understood the possibility of dreams being sent from the gods or some “other” in an intelligent cosmos. Freud suggested that “The pre-scientific view of dreams adopted by the peoples of antiquity was certainly in complete harmony with their view of the universe in general, which led them to project into the external world as though they were realities things which in fact enjoyed reality only within their own minds.”

According to Bettelheim, Freud deliberately chose to title his work Die Traumdeutung (Interpretation of Dreams) in order to be associated with, and to supercede, the deep meaning found in ancient forms of divination and fortune-telling. The German word deutung is mistranslated as interpretation, since German has its own word for interpretation that Freud could have used if he had so wished. By using deutung, derived from both deuten, “to point with a finger at something”, and bedeuten, “what is its sense, what does it mean, what is behind it, what is at the bottom of it”, Freud wished to show that dreams were complex and had many layers. More importantly, Traumdeutung echoes Sterndeutung, the German word for astrology, and for both, deutung carries the sense of divination and prophecy. As Bettelheim observes, Freud wished to move psychoanalysis into the territory that prophecy once occupied.

[to] give the impression that his book dealt with the ancient pseudoscience of dream interpretation and would even evoke associations to that other equally ancient pseudoscience, astrology. The English title gives the impression that Freud presented a definitive treatise on dreams: by failing

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29 Freud 1941 and 1922 in Devereux: 58, also Freud 1915-17.
30 In the first sentence of The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud states that “every dream reveals itself as a psychical structure which has a meaning”, and it is this meaning and structure that he seeks to understand in the personal, inner world of the individual, despite his awareness of dreams being ancient and prophetic. Shamdasani (2003) discusses the psychologisation of the dream (115-120).
31 Freud 1900: 60.
32 Traum = dream, deutung = interpretation.
33 There are three German words for “interpretation”, vis. ausdeutung, interpretation and interpretierung.
34 Bettelheim: 66.
to summon associations to astrology, it does not suggest the parallel between the discovery of the true nature of the universe and the discovery of the true inner world of the soul.  

For Bettelheim, ancient forms of divination such as dream prophecy and astrology are “pseudoscience”, “popular superstitions” and “utter nonsense”, and he implicitly supports Freud’s endeavour through psychoanalysis to establish the “true inner world of the soul”. He cannot envisage that the deep meaning of the soul could and did find valid expression in pre-Enlightenment forms of divination such as dreams and astrology. On the assumption that divination is only prediction, he suggests that Freud’s Traumdeutung turned the beliefs of astrologers and dream interpreters upside down: he showed that through the interpretation of dreams we cannot predict the future but can indeed discover otherwise unknown events of the past. This is the “divining backwards” of von Feuchtersleben, refuting dreams as prophecy and understanding that their purpose is to give information about the self: “As when the sun has gone down, the countless stars, not visible in daytime, appear on the dark ground of the firmament, so, at the call of fancy, the forgotten images of bygone days rise up and show the mind its former shape.”

Psychoanalysis is rooted in identical concerns to those of divination: namely, to address the desires of the soul—but in this “divining backwards”, Bettelheim accepts psychoanalysis as causal and concerned with symptoms, and rejects any purposeful and teleological dimension to the soul’s desires. The individual is not aligned with an intelligent, cosmological “other” because everything ultimately comes from, and returns to, the causal foundation of the individual and his or her psychology.

Through Freud’s psychologisation of the dream and Flournoy’s psychologisation of mediumship, eventually all uncanny intelligence could be appropriated to psychological understanding. This very psychologisation is a post-Enlightenment gesture, reducing one world phenomena to the inner world and personal unconscious of the individual. The image of the world-soul (anima mundi) becomes part of the discarded image of antiquity and no longer has depth of meaning or any ability to cross the subject-object Enlightenment schism. Psychotherapists following in the

35 Bettelheim: 70.
36 Bettelheim: 67.
37 Shamdasani 2003: 112-113. The phrase “divining backwards” is coined by Shamdasani from von Feuchtersleben’s remark on a “common expression” that a dreamer may “divine like a prophet looking backwards”.
38 Von Feuchtersleben 1845, quoted from Shamdasani 2003: 112.
tradition of Jung\textsuperscript{39} have attempted to restore the world-soul through archetypal psychology, and this stands in contrast to the mainstream of psychotherapy, which still privileges the individual’s “inner world”. As James Hillman remarks, “the psyche, the soul, is still only within and between people […] psychotherapy is only working on that ‘inside’ soul. By removing the soul from the world and not recognizing that the soul is also in the world, psychotherapy can’t do its job anymore.”\textsuperscript{40}

At the heart of both psychoanalysis and divination is the use of symbolism, in which one thing represents another. Both are disciplines of the symbolic, assuming that the world of objects is full of hidden meaning, and both observe a world of resemblances that tell us what latent context or content lies beneath surface appearance. As Freud infamously said, sometimes a cigar is only a cigar, but in the world of resemblances, it may also be a phallus. The connection with a pre-Enlightenment world-view has been recognised by analysts themselves, although the Freudian Donald Spence is critical of this use of resemblances in so far as it is rooted in the medieval doctrine of signatures, based on the cosmic sympathy of all things. According to Spence, dream symbols and language, slips of the tongue and so on, are full of disguised meaning, in the same way as the medieval mind understood the doctrine of signatures. The planet Mars is red, it therefore resembles iron and blood, corresponding with war, swords, anger and so on. He believes that “the spread of psychoanalytic theory has brought us back to the middle ages once again.”\textsuperscript{41} He exposes the fact that a symbolic attitude gives both analyst and diviner a common methodology in dealing with patients and clients. Both use symbolism to reveal an unknown, but for the analyst this symbolism is seen as pertaining exclusively to the person and his or her psychic apparatus, interpreted and causally reduced to the person’s unconscious. For the diviner, although the symbolism may be personal, it is necessarily embedded in something broader, with the potential for transpersonal or cosmic meaning, as for example in a prophetic dream.

Following Freud, psychoanalysis reduces the symbol to the level of a semiotic sign, a symptom of underlying causes. By contrast, the diviner looks for purposive and teleological showings that are symbolically

\textsuperscript{39} More than any other psychologist of his era, Jung concerned himself with the science-religion split of pre- and post-Enlightenment thought, and he worked directly with the meeting of divination and psychoanalysis. This is discussed extensively in Hyde 1992 and Hyde forthcoming PhD thesis, \textit{Divination for Modern Time}.

\textsuperscript{40} Hillman & Ventura: 3-4.

\textsuperscript{41} Spence: 55.
“meaningful”. The symbol is therefore taken to be the relatively intelligent and intentional communication of some “other” that “speaks” through it. In astrology, for example, its meaningfulness is created in the visible cosmos itself. In both psychoanalysis and divination, an intentional intelligence is being communicated with or heard, but psychoanalysis has taken over the deep meaning inherent in divination, and rationalises its observation into an objective and scientific—or pseudo-scientific—form. It limits its range of acceptable data and its provenance to the cut-off, individual unconscious, and thus may be seen as an intra-psychic, as opposed to trans-psychic process.

Through Traumdeutung Freud seized the ground from divination and began a process by which psychoanalysis annexed its techniques, so that much of psychoanalysis has become divination-in-disguise. Not only were the dream and spirit worlds psychologised, but many of the techniques used in psychoanalysis are paralleled in the milieu of divination, taken freely from that milieu and then psychologised. These include hypnotism, free association, omens, mythology, transference and counter-transference. Although the techniques of psychoanalysis are quite varied, as are those of divination, what unites them is the seeking of a “sign”, that is, a symbol that expresses truth. Thus the techniques are identifiable the same but what has radically changed is the theory by which they are rationalised. Once this is recognised the disguise becomes flimsy indeed.

The work of Georg Groddeck bears on the question of this disguise. He was “a physician who burst like a storm into the souls of men, penetrating into the depths where all life is one, all boundaries are broken down, and body and mind are fused as one”. Groddeck considered himself to be a “wild analyst” but was accepted by Freud into the analytic fold. As a medical doctor he believed that “the body and mind are a joint thing which harbours an It, a power by which we are lived, while we think we live.”

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42 Ferenczi’s use of “mutual analysis” and his emphasis on the counter transference is of particular relevance. See my discussion on this in my forthcoming PhD thesis, Divination for Modern Time, as well as a discussion on the “one world” position on transference and counter-transference, exemplified by the astrologer William Lilly: “the nearer thy God thou art, the purer shall thy judgment be”, from Lilly’s “Epistle to the Student” (Lilly, 1647).
44 The term “wild analyst” was used disdainfully by the analytic profession as a description of self-taught analysts who had not been “properly” trained in psychoanalytic thought (see Freud 1910). Groddeck called himself a wild analyst in the introduction to his first IPA conference lecture in The Hague in 1920.
Chapter Seven

The It has an autonomous existence that determines everything about a person, with a power over sickness and health:

> The It is the deepest nature and force of the man. It accomplishes everything that happens with and through and in the man, it is responsible for his existence, gives him all his organs and functions, helps him out of the mother’s body into the light of day, does everything which the man appears to do […] finally, when he has lived long enough, it kills him.46

The It is a mysterious life force, and as such it has an eternal spirit and a religious sense. It is teleological and autonomous “and God alone understands it.”47 This religious dimension to the It put Groddeck at variance with Freud and orthodox psychoanalysis and immediately reminds us of the alien “other” which addresses Hélène. Like her, Groddeck is certain that his “other”—the It—is not to be equated with the unconscious (“the word ‘unconscious’ does not signify the same as the word ‘It’”)48 although he acknowledges that “psychoanalysis is for our generation the best way of approaching the It”.49 When he wrote *The Book of The It* in 1921, he retreated for the winter months to his cabin in the Black Forest, to “a little house quite removed from all that is human”.50 Taken as metaphor, this reminds us that the It comes from an alien, other realm, and does not belong to the person. Sending his text soon afterwards to Freud, he found that Freud took the concept of the It, changed it to fit his theory, gave it a new meaning, made it part of his psychic apparatus and published a book about the It a month after Groddeck’s own book. Freud took the same German name, the It, but in English translation this became Latinised to the Id and formed part of his theory of the Ego, Id and Super-ego.51 Freud had thus psychologised the It.

For Groddeck, on the other hand, the It remained mysterious and open, something from the forest, and he tried to give voice to it and practice as a doctor with an awareness that encouraged the It’s healing powers to be set in motion. For him, the understanding and healing of illness involved understanding the symbols presented by the It, for “illness was no longer understandable to him as a mechanical or chemical dysfunction of organs,

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46 Groddeck 1951: 40, collected and translated by Collins from Groddeck’s Berlin lectures in 1926, and from conferences and papers given 1925-1928.
48 Groddeck 1951: 43.
49 Groddeck 1951: 41.
51 Groddeck’s *Book of The It* was published in March 1923. Freud’s *The Ego and the Id* was published in May 1923.
but became a creation, a symbol”. Recognition of this creation was the main task of the physician. An understanding of the symbol-illness did not depend on specialist knowledge or a scientific and objective assessment by a medical professional. Healing was brought about by knowing how to approach the It, because “The It gives up being ill as soon as it is questioned in a way it can answer. It would seem that illness is often only a means of flight from something not understood, and a defence against what is unbearable.” Asked the right question, the It makes itself manifest to those who have eyes to see, and through whichever vehicle is chosen.

I suggest that this is essentially a mode of practical divination. Groddeck is a symbolist who seeks to understand the signs given him and knows how to negotiate the symbol. He looks at that which presents itself because the It “in the simplest things will give some sort of answer, perhaps will tell much, but certainly will never reveal the whole”. This process of question and answer is not only part of a psychoanalytic discourse, the talking cure, it is also the ground of divinatory dialogue in which the questioner submits to a power beyond the individual. It is not enough that this power is exclusively that of the unconscious, pertaining to the inner world of the person. For the diviner, human desires and volition are submitted to guidance from, and an alignment with, an assumed primordial intelligence of the cosmos. Groddeck warns medical men and psychoanalysts: “Do not trust in your own power, but in that of the It! And listen always for its voice.” That Groddeck should think the It has its own voice implies that the dialogue is not human, i.e. not with the patient’s psyche, but with a non-human realm, coming from the same forest as The Book of The It, and it requires a daimonic intelligence that is not capable of being laid out in a textbook. In the unfolding of that dialogue, there is a moment when the question posed is answered, and “that one moment of self-knowledge and of insight into what is human and what divine, is sufficient to obliterate all the sins of the malefactor.”

This is why Groddeck is a wild analyst, because he saw it as the task of the physician or psychoanalyst to dialogue with a mysterious, unknown

53 Groddeck 1951: 45.
54 Groddeck 1951: 52. This is like Parzifal in search of the Holy Grail, who must ask the Fisher King the right question.
55 Groddeck 1951: 52.
56 See fn.1.
57 Groddeck 1951: 89.
58 Groddeck 1951: 179.
force of nature, and to understand its symbols and showings. Putting aside any model of the structure of the psyche, Groddeck’s practice cuts across causal, scientific or relational structures of psychoanalysis and he heeds whatever phenomena are presented to him. Moreover, because each situation in which the It presents its symbol-illness is unique, it becomes impossible to generate an over-arching, all-encompassing theory of psyche, or to express it in a “little drawing” of the Id, as Freud had done.

Groddeck’s attention to signs and omens combines medical science with intuitive knowing. His practice lays bare the roots of psychoanalysis in divination, so it is appropriate to close this chapter with one of his case histories. He describes a female patient with oedema, which he sees as the “result of a non-compensation in heart disease”. He believes that the patient’s heart trouble has been the same for years and tells her that her current oedema must be due to “some disturbance between the action of the heart and the opposition of your organism to this action”. In other words, she is moving against her own heart. Under Groddeck’s treatment her condition improved for three weeks but then for eight days she showed no response or improvement. Since the treatment was the same, Groddeck concluded that its ineffectual nature during the previous eight days must be something to do with him, and he asked the patient what she had against him:

I received the usual reply, the patient had nothing against me. At last, as I remained obstinate in my belief and the patient equally so, I resorted to cunning and asked her, without warning, to repeat one of the Ten Commandments. At once, without stopping to think, she repeated the

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59 Groddeck advises physicians not to interpret disease, because to the patient, the doctor is an enemy as well as a friend: “it is a mistake to interpret […] we should cease analysing, and above all never interpret” (1951: 125). By interpretation, Groddeck means having an explanation for the patient, which is quite different to understanding the showing of a symbol.

60 Freud’s drawing of the Id first appeared in a letter to Groddeck on 17 April 1921, reproduced in Groddeck 1977: 58.

61 Groddeck 1951: 105.
62 Groddeck 1951: 106.
The patient had heard eight days previously that although Groddeck’s first wife was still alive, he had remarried, and even though she knew that he was a Protestant, as a Catholic she considered this to be adulterous. His response is as surprising as it is effective. “I know, then, quite certainly, that you yourself have broken your marriage vow.”64 She then revealed that as a child her parents had refused to let her become a nun, so she had made a secret vow to God to remain a virgin, married to Christ. When she later married, she saw this as a betrayal of her childhood vow, even though in confession a priest had absolved her of any sin because her vow had been made when she was so young. Groddeck advised that she should talk further with the priest privately, outside of the confessional, and on hearing this, almost immediately “she started to urinate, and in such quantities as I have hardly ever experienced.”65 Within hours her weight had dropped five kilograms and within weeks her oedema was cured and she returned home.

What has happened here? In an uncanny move, Groddeck knows what question to ask. He asks his patient to pick a commandment and puts to her the question of adultery. Her subsequent revelation concerning adultery, her profuse urination and weight loss, as well as her speedy recovery, all confirm that “the It gives up being ill as soon as it is questioned in a way it can answer”. But how does Groddeck know that he should ask her about the Ten Commandments, and that through this question the flight from something not understood can be revealed? There is no rationale or analytic theory that directs Groddeck to ask the patient to name one of the Commandments. We could imagine an equivalent case where the diviner/analyst might ask the patient to pick a verse from the Bible, throw the coins of the I Ching or spread the Tarot cards. Like all diviners, Groddeck intuitively decides that divination is called for and in the same instant, intuits the form of divination that is appropriate for the specific situation. In this case, having selected the Ten Commandments, he is able to assign her answer as significant in relation to her illness.

Groddeck’s own explanation is that he “resorted to cunning”; he moves this way when ordinary dialogue has failed. He is at an impasse with the patient, both of them remaining obstinate with each other, and he knows some other language is required if the dialogue with her is to continue.

63 Groddeck 1951: 106.
64 Groddeck 1951: 107.
65 Groddeck 1951: 108.
Cunningly, he sets up another type of dialogue to discourse with the It. This is a move of divination itself, an inspired moment when the diviner is seized to speak from another place, which gives efficacy to his or her words. Groddeck as diviner deals symbolically with whatever comes to him, and his move parallels that of the analyst in the “talking cure”, treating as relevant whatever comes to the analysand’s mind.

Yet as so often in both psychoanalysis and divination—as in life itself—the outcome leaves us with perplexities that are incapable of a final resolution. Groddeck’s healing is not permanent. Six months later her husband reported that the woman had returned to the priest and confessional. The priest had again attempted to reassure her that a vow made as a young girl was not important, but shortly after this confession, she developed severe symptoms and died of dropsy. We must assume that by ignoring Groddeck’s advice and returning to the priest in the confessional, the woman could not forgo her Catholicism and still required divine forgiveness. Groddeck notes that when Christ performed miracle healings in the gospels, he did so through forgiveness of sins. However, as an analyst Groddeck cannot function as a priest and be the one through whom divine forgiveness is possible. Although psychoanalysis cultivates a climate of confession, it remains secular and in its denial of the religious impulse, it has no power of divine forgiveness or salvation. By contrast, divination carries the sacred with it, and in this sense Groddeck’s mystical It is closer to divination and its dialogue with the divine than it is to Freudian psychoanalysis. This case history presented by Groddeck shows an ongoing and unresolved dilemma in the relationship between psychoanalysis, divination and the sacred; a dilemma that we are faced with today just as much as Groddeck was in his day.

Both Groddeck with the It and Hillman with the world-soul attempt in their own way to bridge subject and object, religion and science, and they do not fall prey to pseudo-rationalisation. For Groddeck in the 1920s, psychoanalysis was the best way he could find to approach the It, but we can now see how uncanny intelligence, central to divination, informed the work of the early analysts, and that psychoanalysis can be considered as a truncated, post-Enlightenment remodelling of ancient divinatory method.

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66 Groddeck 195: 83.
67 Groddeck’s deliberate distancing of himself from the occult is in line with Freud’s attempt to keep the new science of psychoanalysis separate from the occult, but it may also be due to Groddeck’s ignorance of occult practices. By the 1920s occult practices had fallen so far into disrepute that they were no longer seen as worthy of investigation by medical men. This applies especially to divination.
Bibliography

Chapter Seven

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This is our research question: Are there gifts of prophecy and divination? The two explanations that are offered by the mechanistic scientific paradigm are that they are the effects of a creative or delusional imagination or fraud. However, if we are to accommodate a wide variety of known phenomena that are experienced by people every day in all cultures and throughout history, it is clear that the hard sciences of the physical universe are inadequate in their epistemologies and conceptual frameworks. The fact that people experience communication with an unseen world that is essentially non-material strongly suggests that the laws of the universe, as we currently understand them, are incomplete. The essential question is one of ontology; that is—do the origins of information, sense impressions and unexplained psychical and physical phenomena have an ontological reality in a dimension that is integrated in some way with our known physical universe? In order to approach this question scientifically it follows that three further questions ought to be tested within an expanded conceptual framework: 1) Is there such a thing as psychic ability? 2) Are there discarnate spirits with which we are able to communicate? 3) Is there a non-material realm where universal information is stored and accessible? In other words, in acts of divination, prophecy, spirit communication and possession, in precognition and psychokinesis, is the receiver or percipient communicating telepathically with other humans, non-corporeal spirit entities, or are they accessing a field of information that is beyond our normal conscious perception?
These important considerations can be explored in far greater detail and complexity than might initially be thought.

According to Geoffrey Cornelius in his introduction to *The Imaginal Cosmos*,¹ there are four main themes that are fundamental for any comprehensive analysis of divination, and he poses the question, “what mode of knowing constitutes divination?”² Cornelius suggests that this question may be approached through the following avenues; art and nature; the conflict between reality and imagination; a model of the cosmos and a world-order; and through an understanding of the sacred. Cornelius’ categorisation is a topic of academic debate and it is useful for placing the work of F. W. H. Myers into a contextual framework. Myers was not concerned with metaphysics, philosophic debate or religious belief systems in his research methodology. He regarded his approach as purely scientific, using rigorous scientific method without any consideration for belief systems, preconceived ideas or assumptions about the nature of man’s consciousness or the universe he inhabits. He attempted to approach his work from a position of what Cornelius has described as “second naivety”, a term which means that although we cannot eradicate what we have come to learn, we can approach new material with an attitude of “not knowing”.³

This is precisely what Myers did when he adopted an approach to his research that was essentially a form of methodological agnosticism, in contrast to what we might call the methodological atheism of mainstream science. Thus Myers’ method, according to Cornelius, falls within the theme of reality and imagination. Frederic Myers was one of the founding fathers of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, and his research was primarily concerned with testing the hypothesis that consciousness survives bodily death and that man has a soul:

> The question for man most momentous of all is whether or no he has an immortal soul; or—to avoid the word immortal, which belongs to the realm of infinities—whether or no his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death. In this direction have always lain the gravest fears, the farthest-reaching hopes, which could either oppress or stimulate mortal minds.⁴

¹ Cornelius 2007.
² Cornelius 2007: ix.
³ Cornelius 2011.
⁴ Myers 1903b: 75.
Initially driven by observations of spontaneous somnambulism and the appearance of apparitions of living persons and the dead and dying, Myers went on to investigate the phenomenology of the communications of spiritualist mediums. His research methods were commensurate with the phenomena he studied; for example, observation, external validation of veridical apparitions, and the accuracy and validity of information conveyed through spiritualist mediums. He was also to use another method—that of experimental hypnotism, which became the central pillar of his methodology and is the subject of this chapter.

Myers’ methods collectively, and in particular with the development of his experimental hypnosis, led him to postulate a model of consciousness that extends far beyond what we call normal conscious awareness. His model of mind became a significant influence on the development of the ideas and models of many other theorists including William James, Pierre Janet and Carl Jung, and he is now recognised as the first to describe effectively the psychological unconscious. On Myers’ contribution to psychology, William James wrote in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

> I cannot but think that the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science is the discovery, first made in 1886, that, in certain subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but in addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs. I call this the most important step forward because, unlike the other advances which psychology has made, this discovery has revealed to us an entirely unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of human nature. No other step forward which psychology has made can proffer any such claim as this. In particular, this discovery of a consciousness existing beyond the field, or subliminally as Mr. Myers terms it, casts light on many phenomena of religious biography.8

To explain the hidden dimensions of consciousness, Myers named his model *The Subliminal Self*.9 Unfortunately his model of mind that acknowledges the possibility of a spiritual dimension has been forgotten or neglected in the wake of the more popular atheistic concept of the

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5 See Gurney, Myers and Podmore.
6 Myers 1890.
7 Crabtree 1993; 2009: 302.
8 James 1902: 233.
9 Myers 1903a: 30.
unconscious proposed by Freud\textsuperscript{10} and the behaviourist school of John B. Watson.

Frederic Myers used the term “automatisms” to provide the link between a range of psychic phenomena, and argued that automatic writing was just one phenomenon among many others including hallucinations, flashes of inspiration, creative genius, obsessions and compulsive behaviour, pathological dissociation (hysteria) and double personality. William James referred to this collectivisation of similar facets as “a great simplification” that places hallucination and impulses under the common theme of “sensory and motor automatisms”.\textsuperscript{11} Subjectively, automatisms emerge into consciousness through visualisation, an automatic motor impulse, or other sense impressions as though from a source other than the subject, and become manifest from beyond the conscious will. Myers’ hypothesis openly challenged the scientific consensus that automatisms are the automatic reactions of a stimulated nervous system and that all human thought, feelings and behaviour are dependent on and originate in the brain. W. Carpenter, for example, identified this process as “unconscious cerebration”.\textsuperscript{12} Myers did not dismiss the theory altogether, but argued that it was incomplete insofar as it was not able to explain a wide variety of human experiences such as automatic writing, animal magnetism and information received through clairvoyance. He suggested that in addition to the accepted view that the nervous system does respond to stimuli in an automatic fashion, there is also some form of intelligence, whether from within the unconscious or from an external source, that is finding a way to impress upon the conscious self.\textsuperscript{13}

Myers’ principle task of scientific exploration into these phenomena was to determine whether the vision, message or automatic act is a creation of the imagination or volition of the subject or whether it has a source that is external to the subject. The guiding light that showed Myers and his colleagues the way forward was the observation that subjects who experienced these phenomena had a tendency to enter into an altered state of consciousness, the most noticeable being what Myers called the “sleep-waking” state,\textsuperscript{14} or what we would now call sleep-walking. Altered states are also associated with mystical and religious experiences,\textsuperscript{15} pathological

\textsuperscript{10} Breuer and Freud 1895.
\textsuperscript{11} James 1998: 234.
\textsuperscript{12} Carpenter 1855: 607.
\textsuperscript{13} Myers 1903a: 1675.
\textsuperscript{14} Myers 1903b: 115.
\textsuperscript{15} Kroger 1977: 122-127.
dissociation,\textsuperscript{16} day-dreaming and absorption,\textsuperscript{17} positive and negative spirit possession,\textsuperscript{18} shamanic journeying and soul loss,\textsuperscript{19} remote viewing\textsuperscript{20} and clairvoyance.\textsuperscript{21} The altered state hypothesis was what motivated Myers and his colleagues to use it as their experimental method. According to Moseby’s medical dictionary, an altered state of consciousness (ASC) is:

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\ldots \text{any state of awareness that differs from the normal awareness of a conscious person. Altered states of consciousness have been achieved, especially in Eastern cultures, by many individuals using various techniques, such as long fasting, deep breathing, whirling, and chanting. Researchers now recognise that such practices can affect the chemistry of the body and help induce the desired state. Experiments suggest that telepathy, mystical experiences, clairvoyance, and other altered states of consciousness may be subconscious capabilities in most individuals and can be used to improve health and fight disease.}\textsuperscript{22}
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It is important to note that Moseby’s definition is medical, and as such includes a non-specific reference to experiments that suggest that mystical experiences and clairvoyance may be subconscious capabilities. This is precisely the hypothesis that William James, Frederic Myers and Pierre Janet tested during their experiments one hundred years ago by using and observing subjects who experienced altered states. It is unfortunate that the momentum of these experiments was not maintained into the twentieth century. Instead the fashions of mainstream science favoured the theories of behaviourism and Freudian psychoanalysis, and modern research into telepathy, ESP, precognition and psychokinesis came under the new concept of “psi”, a term introduced by Thouless and Wiesner for all these types of paranormal phenomena. Any effect that science is unable to explain in such phenomena has become known as the “psi effect”.\textsuperscript{23}

To the present day, very few researchers in the currently disconnected fields of psychological research employ the conceptual framework and scientific methods that Myers and his colleagues found so fruitful and productive. One notable exception is Gary Schwartz, who conducted experiments with mediums in afterlife experiments for three years.\textsuperscript{24}

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\textsuperscript{16} Janet: 676.
\textsuperscript{17} Heap, Brown & Oakley: 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Crabtree 1985: 66-114.
\textsuperscript{19} Villoldo.
\textsuperscript{20} Targ.
\textsuperscript{21} Myers 1903a: 345.
\textsuperscript{22} Moseby et al.: 47.
\textsuperscript{23} See Radin.
\textsuperscript{24} Schwartz 2001, 2002.
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Schwartz’ experiments supported the hypothesis that mediums can communicate with discarnate entities, and that this can be replicated using rigorous scientific methods.

Myers proposed that all psychical phenomena are connected on a continuum, that there is no such thing as supernatural or paranormal, for all is natural and normal: “If nature is to be intelligible to our minds she must be continuous; her action must be uniformitarian and not catastrophic.” He therefore advocated a new expanded naturalism that could accommodate such phenomena: “The only line of demarcation that science can draw is between things which can, or which cannot, be cognised by our existing faculties, a line that is by no means permanent and immovable. On the contrary, it is the continual work of science to render that which is incognisable cognisable, that which is imperceptible perceptible.”

Modern science still needs to expand its conceptualisations in order to accommodate what may be termed anomalous experiences into a unified frame of reference. In keeping with Myers’ assertion that the term “automatisms” connects several related concepts into one conceptual framework, the terms altered state, trance, dissociation and hypnosis can all be included into the same framework for experimental purposes. In other words altered state, dissociation, trance and hypnosis are all essentially the same thing. What is different about them are the methods and techniques of induction, i.e. deliberate or spontaneous, disciplined or undisciplined, trauma-related, etc. Modern researchers into the phenomenology of hypnosis have tried to arrive at a theory to explain it as a unique psychological phenomenon, but have only succeeded in describing a very wide range of specific hypnotic phenomena. In their intention to find evidence to support their own specific hypotheses these modern researchers are missing the point altogether with regard to the fundamental nature of consciousness as postulated by Myers.

For example, Michael Heap and colleagues provide an excellent example of finely tuned scientific application to hypnosis research with no regard for the spiritual nature of what it is they are investigating. The index to their work includes just one reference to the word religious and none at all to spiritual or mystical. The one reference reads as follows: “The idea of a trance state that endows the subject with unusual characteristics and abilities has a long history outside of hypnosis and is

25 Myers 1895: 22.
26 Myers 1881: 103.
27 Kroger: 26-32.
common to many religious and quasi-religious practices”. This quotation makes a clear and unambiguous differentiation between religious trance states and hypnosis by the use of the words outside of. Their conceptual framework is built on the foundation of epiphenomenalism, which states that consciousness is produced by and is dependent on the physical brain. However, research by Ericksonian hypnotist Ernst Rossi (1986) and cellular biologist Bruce Lipton (2010) has uncovered new insights into the relationship between mind and body that challenge this assumption, which in turn are supported by quantum theory from a variety of theorists. Thus it is becoming apparent that scientific enquiry is slowly becoming engaged in a paradigm shift in learning how to explore the fundamental nature of consciousness. The interesting thing about this paradigm shift is that it seems to be driven by the physical sciences of biology and quantum theory rather than by psychology.

Of all the methods he used, hypnosis is the one which produced the most significant results for Myers, and the one that he recommended all psychologists use in their investigations into the nature of mind, consciousness and personality; and yet, it is still the most unused, misunderstood and misrepresented method in mainstream psychology. Myers writes:

First among our experimental methods I must speak of hypnotism. We see here the influence exercised by suggestion and self-suggestion on higher types of faculty, supernormal as well as normal, on character, on personality. It is on this side, indeed that the outlook is the most deeply interesting. Man is in course of evolution; and the most pregnant hint which these nascent experiments have yet given him is that it may be in his power to hasten his own evolution in ways previously unknown.

Myers was not content to explain hypnosis merely as the power of suggestion, and wanted to gather evidence that suggestion was not an adequate enough explanation for all hypnotic phenomena. His initial quest for answers was via the investigation of the concept of a “community of sensation” which was prompted by Mesmer’s theory of animal magnetism. Myers postulated that Mesmer’s theory of the magnetic force that was responsible for the unseen interaction between magnetiser and magnetised (hypnotist and subject) was incorrect and that the connection was psychological rather than physical.

29 Targ, Pfeiffer, Mack & et al., McTaggart, Schwartz et al., 2002; Samanta-Laughton, Rosenblum & Kuttner.
30 Myers 1903b: 29.
This series of experiments conducted with Edmund Gurney demonstrated that a hypnotised subject experienced taste and touch sensations that were transmitted from a third party—the agent. In these experiments the agent was given a strong-tasting substance to taste and the hypnotised subject reported the taste sensation he received. Similar experiments were conducted with the transmission of physical sensations such as pinching a part of the body. These experiments demonstrated clearly that there was something invisible and intangible between the hypnotist and the hypnotised, but it remained unclear as to the nature of the connection. In modern hypnosis research and clinical practice this connection is considered to be a “psychological rapport”, although it remains within the theoretical domain of expectation and suggestion despite Myers’ findings. Myers was not totally satisfied with the outcome of his experiments and continued to look for methods that would bypass any influence of expectation or the power of suggestion that was beyond dispute. His solution lay in the concept of hypnosis at a distance:

The evidence for telepathy—for psychical influence from a distance—has grown to goodly proportions, for a new form of experiment has been found possible from which the influence of suggestion can be entirely excluded. It has now, as I shall presently try to show, been actually proved that the hypnotic trance can be induced from a distance so great, and with precautions so complete, that telepathy or some similar supernormal influence is the only efficient cause which can be conceived.

Myers cites several examples of telepathic hypnosis in his many contributions to the journals of the Society for Psychical Research which he encapsulates in his classic work *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* of 1903. Psychology historian Adam Crabtree cites several examples of telepathic hypnosis from his research into the history of hypnosis in *From Mesmer to Freud* that go back to Mesmer’s disciple the Marquis de Puységur. The phenomenon has also been reported by surgeons John Elliotson in London (1843) and James Esdaile in India (1846).

Modern theories of hypnosis, being predominantly based on the power of suggestion, cannot explain the hypnotic power of silent hand passes (mesmeric technique), neither can they explain hypnosis at a distance,

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31 In my own thesis I posit an argument that Mesmer was right to a certain extent in his theory of a physical influence between magnetiser and magnetised, and that this theory can be applied to such spiritual healing practices such as Reiki and related techniques.

32 Kroger 1977: 12.

33 Myers 1903b: 140.
whereas telepathy, although not a complete explanation, does open an alternative avenue of enquiry. To ignore the importance of telepathic hypnosis will mislead the student of hypnotic phenomena as Myers’ experiments testify, and it is important that the evidence for hypnosis at a distance is presented in order to support the argument that hypnosis is a gateway to a vast array of psychological and spiritual domains.

However, mainstream psychology and parapsychology seem to limit their exploration by using those scientific methods that they feel most comfortable with, namely: direct observation, instrumentation and psychometric testing for quantitative research methodologies, and interviewing for the qualitative. None of these methods can possibly explore those hidden dimensions of human experience that can be reached by accessing altered states of consciousness. In a word, *trance* should be the tool of choice for all researchers into unexplained human phenomena.

The scientific evidence to support the hypothesis that the conscious intention of one person can influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of another without their conscious knowledge has enormous and far-reaching implications that are far too complex to expound upon here. However, it is my contention that this one concept is the key to explain the varied phenomena associated with uninvited spirit possession by earthbound souls of the deceased and non-human discarnates. What is needed is to re-open a line of enquiry that Myers identified one hundred years ago when he wrote:

> Now it is that we feel the difficulty of being definite without being trivial; how little of earthly memory persists; how little of heavenly experience can be expressed in terms of earth; how long and arduous must be the way, how many must be the experiments, and how many the failures before any systemised body of new truth can be established. But a sound beginning has been made, and whatever may be possible hereafter need not be wasted on a fresh start.\(^{34}\)

Despite its importance in the scientific study of the mind, none of the contemporary researchers into hypnotic phenomena that I have spoken to are even aware of the concept of telepathic hypnosis. Whereas Myers identified hypnosis as an experimental method that opens a doorway to a multitude of mysteries, in contrast modern researchers are attempting to understand the nature of the doorway itself instead of venturing through it. The modern philosopher of science Erwin Laszlo, on the subject of scientific specialisation writes:

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\(^{34}\) Myers 1903b: 406
The unfortunate consequence of such speciality barriers is that knowledge, instead of being pursued in depth and integrated in breadth, is pursued in depth in isolation. Rather than getting a continuous and coherent picture, we are getting fragments—remarkably detailed but isolated patterns. We are drilling holes in the wall of mystery that we call nature and reality on many locations, and we carry out delicate analyses on each of the sites. But it is only now that we are beginning to realise the need for connecting the probes with one another and gaining some coherent insight into what is there.35

Connecting the probes, as Laszlo puts it, is precisely what Frederic Myers did when he included clairvoyance and all related phenomena within a single conceptual framework that could be explored with hypnosis. He advocated that all human mental experience should be seen on a continuum and that nothing ought to be regarded as supernatural or paranormal. Myers repeatedly emphasised that such unseen environments must somehow be fundamentally continuous and interrelated with the one we know through our sensory perception: “If an unseen world exists […] we must in some sense be in it”.36

The neglect by modern psychology researchers of the fundamental nature of consciousness can only maintain the gulf between mainstream scientific enquiry and religious, mystical and spiritual experience. It is time that this gap was closed by collaboration between disciplines and with the tools that we already have at our disposal. All we have to do is to use them. David Luke (2011) evaluates the effects of the hallucinogenic molecule dimethyltryptamine (DMT) and the perception of discarnate entities by participants’ reports that there are three hypotheses to explain the phenomena: hallucination, the transpersonal and the other-world hypothesis. He makes the observation that without a scientific approach the debate concerning the ontological status of perceived entities remains wide open. This offers an excellent opportunity for collaboration using Myers’ scientific method.

It has long been established that there is a direct correlation between emotional and visual sensory perception and brain chemistry, 37 and Myers argued that correlation does not imply causation.38 It is my own contention that DMT will be detected in the brains of persons visualising discarnate entities who have not been administered with it, due to the fact the DMT is

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35 Laszlo: 2.
36 Myers 1891: 634.
37 Gauld: 262.
38 Myers 1891:635.
a substance that is manufactured in the human brain. An explanation for similarities in the nature of perceived entities between those given DMT and those who have not could be provided by the model of consciousness suggested by Myers. By applying Myers’ model it may be hypothesised that the mind operates at an energetic frequency that corresponds with the electro-magnetic frequency of the brain. When a person enters into an altered state of consciousness the electro-magnetic frequency of the brain will alter accordingly. When the mind reaches a frequency that enables it to connect with those energetic frequencies that exist beyond our normal waking consciousness, it triggers a corresponding change in frequency in the brain that provides the senses with a visual representation of whatever it is that the mind has encountered. An experimental design to test this hypothesis would mean taking two groups of participants, one who has been administered with DMT and the other who has not. Those who have not been administered with DMT would need to be either natural somnambulists or adept at entering altered states. It would be an essential prerequisite that both groups are naive of any previous experiences of entity encounters and of the objective of the experiment, in order to avoid possible contamination from expectation or implied suggestion. Accurate descriptions of the visualisation of the entities encountered by both groups would then be compared for differences and similarities, and a positive correlation in descriptions between the two groups would imply two possibilities: firstly that consciousness can enter into a realm that is in parallel with our own at a different energy frequency, and secondly that it could support the ontological status of such entities that exist there.

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PART II

DAIMONIC LITERATURE
CHAPTER NINE

DEFINITIVE DEMONS:
FRANKENSTEIN AND DRACULA
AS ULTIMATE REPRESENTATIONS
OF THE “MONSTROUS OTHER”

VERED WEISS

The daimonic imagination is one of the vital creative forces propelling the exploration of human identity. In order to investigate the construction of individual and collective identities, literature all over the world has produced devices that allow the imagination to run wild with regard to fears and desires otherwise suppressed by social apparatuses. The awesome powers of the human soul have been embodied in a plethora of monstrosities—from the hybrid creatures and giants in the ancient epic of Gilgamesh to contemporary cinematic depictions of aliens, the world is full of monstrous expressions of fears as well as dreams of greatness. Artists and writers have utilised these manifestations of monstrosity in order to explore and expand the limits of the human mind, specifically its ability to create individual and collective identities and encompass complex “Otherness”.

The modern era has introduced new fears and challenges to the human mind and imagination, and the apparent demise of religious explanations has resulted in a literary exploration of the dark aspects of the human psyche together with social phobias as part of a language of horror. One of the most notable ways modernity has attempted to come into terms with the daimonic imagination is through the Gothic literary tradition. Relying upon ancient myths, the Gothic arose at a particular time in Europe and especially in Britain, as a response to fears induced by socio-economic changes. Depictions of the monstrous “other” were used in order to explore various fears—notably xenophobia—within the crises of modernity.
Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1898) explore these fears through allegorical monstrous manifestations. *Frankenstein*, the narrative of the monster composed of exhumed body parts, introduced the prototypical modern monstrous Other as a rejected creature forever roaming the earth in search of home and kinship; and *Dracula* is the well-known novel about an Eastern European aristocratic vampire who contrives to colonise and devour the population of England. *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* are the most renowned Gothic texts because they offer quintessential modern depictions of the monstrous “Other” which is simultaneously an adaptation of old myths of the monster and an embodiment of modern fears.

The “monstrous Other”

Before we commence a literary overview, we need to define the terms “monstrous” and “Other” in order to understand their conflation as the “monstrous Other”. The “monster” is found in every known nation—all cultures have some variation of a creature that embodies fears and outlines the borders and boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable. The etymological roots of the word “monster” as something or someone to be shown, or as a warning against the wrongdoings of humanity, elucidate the monstrous as the signifier (and later symbol) of the boundaries of the socially acceptable and unacceptable. Often the monster is located on the entrances to temples in order to guard knowledge both sacred and profane, legitimate and rejected (for example, the gorgon and sphinx). Its etymological roots thus reveal that the “monstrous” pertains to fear, knowledge, location, social structure and social transgression. The monster is the delineator of the socially acceptable.

Yet before one can appreciate concepts of social acceptance as well as individual or collective social “Otherness”, one has to differentiate between the “self” and the “Other”. Jacques Lacan’s concept of the “Other” is a part of the conceptualisation of the various stages the infant undergoes in the construction of the “self”; and which has been, since its articulation, attributed to the idea of the creation of the “self” in relation to the social “Other”. According to Lacanian theory, the infant reaches a certain “mirror stage”, in which it is capable of distinguishing his/her self in relation to the caretaker, and can thus construct, or begin to construct, the comprehension of a separate identity. The Lacanian “Other” as the

1 From the Latin *monstrare* from which derive the French *montrer* and English “demonstrate”.

2 Baldick: 110.
signifier of that which constitutes our “self” in relation to society refers to the evolution of the mirror stage: “in this moment in which the mirror stage comes to an end inaugurates by the identification with the imago of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy […] the dialectic that will henceforth link the I to socially elaborated situations”. This stage is crucial for the construction of the individual identity and is also a stage that collective identities undergo. The literary explorations of monsters serve to unpack the complexities of the collective identity as these are perceived and constructed, as opposed to the images of the socially construed “Other”.

The zombie and the vampire

While David Gilmore asserts that monsters are found in every culture and at all periods, and indeed that they “arise with civilisation—with human self-consciousness”, the most prevalent in contemporary Western culture are variations on Wollstonecraft Shelley’s zombie-like creature and Stoker’s vampire. Gilmore asserts the importance of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* adding that “much has been written about these two avatars of monsterhood”, and suggests that “like other monsters before and after, both examples of modern monsterdom are morphological hybrids breaching recognised boundaries. The Frankenstein monster is a composite being mixing the dead and the living, and Dracula is a cross between human and animal (bat mostly, but sometimes a wolf)”. Gilmore further suggests that like other historical monsters “both are large in size. Although no giant, Dracula is represented in the novel and films as a tall man when in human form”. Additionally, according to Gilmore, “both are capable of bloody violence against innocents, conceived in each case as inflicting bloody mutilation or eating human flesh. Dracula sucks the blood of his victims, shrivelling and depleting them, while Frankenstein, although he does not eat human, uses his powerful arms to rip people apart.” These two monsters engage with the fear of death and the unknown, and their unstable identities produce strikingly uncanny beings that are simultaneously both alive and dead, and yet neither dead nor alive.

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4 Gilmore: 5.
5 Gilmore: 63.
7 Gilmore: 63.
8 Gilmore: 63-64.
The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definition of a zombie: “In the West Indies and southern states of America, a soulless corpse said to have been revived by witchcraft; formerly, the name of a snake-deity in voodoo cults of or deriving from West Africa and Haiti”. Two questions regarding Frankenstein’s creation then arise: first, whether a creature comprised of several body parts and constructed through science rather than witchcraft qualifies as a corpse; and second, whether this creature has a soul.

There is a continual debate about whether or not the creature is, in fact, a zombie. Addressing adaptations of Frankenstein, H. L. Malchow suggests that:

[i]n the change from the highly articulate monster of Shelley’s creation into the mute horror pursued by villagers, the manufactured zombie with a deformed and criminal brain, is another later interpretation, reflecting perhaps the craniological and neurological concerns of mid-nineteenth century science, as well as the requirements of stage and film sensationalism.\(^9\)

Nevertheless, the creature has in many cases become almost synonymous with zombie.\(^10\) The basic idea of the dead walking lingers as the kernel of horror, but while the zombie is a walking dead, the vampire is “un-dead”. The mythical vampire is a “preternatural being of a malignant nature (in the original and usual form of the belief, a reanimated corpse), supposed to seek nourishment, or do harm, by sucking the blood of sleeping persons; a man or woman abnormally endowed with similar habits”.\(^11\) Though the myth of the vampire, like the monster, is as ancient as humanity itself, there are nevertheless local historical socio-political reasons for “outbreaks” of particular versions of it. One might regard the Biblical prohibition of blood consumption as a caveat against the possibility of vampirism.\(^12\) In Ireland there was a widespread legend of the “vampire-king”, and Bob Curran suggests that Stoker may have been familiar with this story.\(^13\) One of the first adaptations of the vampire myth in English literature is John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), which inspired Stoker’s

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\(^9\) Malchow: 126.
\(^10\) Morton & Raschke: 77.
\(^11\) OED. The vampire does not necessarily require sharp canine teeth and a foul rotting body, but can describe “a person of a malignant and loathsome character, esp. one who preys ruthlessly upon others; a vile and cruel exactor” (OED).
\(^12\) Leviticus 17: 12.
\(^13\) Curran: 15.
Chapter Nine

Dracula, depicting Count Dracula as the monster that wishes to feed on humanity.14

The vampire in Stoker’s narrative is based on the historical character Vlad III Dracul, Voivod or Prince of Wallachia, better known as Vlad the Impaler (Vlad Tepes) or simply Dracula.15 The historical Vlad’s “blood-soaked struggle against Ottoman Turks, Hungarians and his own nobility had passed into legend even within his lifetime”16 and served to augment the ferocity of the fictional vampire.17 Ironically, while the historical Vlad was a fierce fighter for the cross and the Orthodox Church, a descendent member of the Order of the Dragon,18 and a devout Christian who had fought the Turks as he tried to repel the Ottoman Empire,19 the fictional Count Dracula has an aversion to the cross.20

14 Olerenshaw: 158.
15 Ackeroyd: 22.
16 Ackeroyd: 22.
17 Ackeroyd suggests that Stoker had made certain mistakes regarding the region and Dracula’s rule, such as his ethnic origin (22). Nevertheless, the region does suffer from nationalistic unease due to ethnic diversity. Stoker chose to base the character of the vampire on Vlad who “was undoubtedly a tyrant, capable of great violence and cruelty, for whom the end justified the means. Yet he was also a patriot and freedom-fighter [who] worked long and hard to defend Christendom against the apparently irresistible force of resurgent Islam under the sultans of the Ottoman Empire” (22). This religio-nationalist trait of the real Vlad echoes in the fictional Dracula, who reminisces about the old days and battles with nostalgia (Stoker 32-3). Towards the end of Vlad’s life he was subjected to a campaign of slander that blackened his name (Ackeroyd: 22) and when Stoker encountered the name of Vlad the Impaler it was linked to black magic and cruelty. Eventually, he was a prisoner in his own home until he was killed, whereupon his head was severed, preserved and sent to the sultan (Ackeroyd: 24). This might be the source of the myth of the cutting off of the head of the vampire.
18 The Order of the Dragon was a chivalric order for the nobility founded in 1408, fashioned after the military orders of the Crusades.
19 Ackeroyd: 23.
20 The connection between the vampire and the figure of the anti-Semite Jew has been duly acknowledged by scholars such as Judith Halberstam, who notes that the vampire, “with his peculiar physique, his parasitical desires, his aversion to the cross and to all the trappings of Christianity, his blood-sucking attacks, and his avaricious relation to money resemble[s] stereotypical anti-Semite nineteenth-century representations of the Jew” (Halberstam: 86). Moreover, “connections in the narrative between blood and gold, race and sex, sexuality and ethnicity confirmed [the] sense that the anti-Semite Jew and Stoker’s vampire [bear] more than a family resemblance” (Halberstam: 86). Like the literary vampire, the anti-Semitic Jew embodied the ignoble, greedy, cowardly “other” that was attempting to penetrate England, and the fear of the invasion—both racial and financial—by
Historical contextualisation

David Gilmore suggests that whilst the “Age of Enlightenment”, may have attempted to maintain the non-existence of monsters (in literature as well as in reality) it in fact led to extensive witch hunts. According to Gilmore, the late eighteenth century saw the revival of imaginary beasts and monstrosities “spurred to some degree by scientific discoveries such as galvanism and electromagnetism”. By the Victorian era both mythic and scientific genres had been circulating for a while.

Although this era is technically located during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), the essence of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) could very well be located within the Victorian literary frame. Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) falls within the timeline; yet Stoker was not English but Irish and so one might question the adequacy of placing his novel in the same Victorian category. Nonetheless, Dracula was published in the United Kingdom, and Ireland was a colony at the time. These novels are essentially Victorian since they relate to certain social reconfigurations that occurred during this era, exploring them via the novelistic Gothic genre which was widely successful. During this period, the United Kingdom witnessed several crucial cultural and socio-political moments and processes that were to have a great impact upon modern history and literature. One of the most important of these was the abolition of slavery in 1833, which was the result of a long process that involved political conflict and public debate regarding human rights. Frankenstein and Dracula raise these social and racial anxieties as well as echoes of the debate between reason and religion. In addition, concerns regarding the effects of the industrial revolution, which led to social mobility within the United Kingdom as the middle classes began to gain shape, were complemented by concerns about the encounter with the “Other” they were colonising.

Both Frankenstein and Dracula have been read as social critiques. Frankenstein’s creature may be perceived as the nameless Other that embodies a multitude of nineteenth-century horrors such as the fear of the lower classes, the Eastern invasion, and the colonised “Other”. The Jews, who were running away to England to escape the Tsar’s persecutions during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gave rise to a wave of xenophobia, which found its way into the pages of literature. The fear of the vampire can thus be seen as the literary manifestation of the repulsion of the Jew.

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21 Gilmore: 63.
22 Gilmore: 63.
Frankenstein constructs the creature in order to prove his scientific ability. He does so outside of England, using body parts which are not necessarily British. This could be read as a critique of the Imperialist endeavour that tried to impose Western science upon “the Other”. Likewise, the monster in *Dracula* comes to devour the British population, and can be read as the allegorical manifestation of the fears of the repercussions of the imperialist enterprise.24

Adriana Craciun examines the “unique consolidation of governmental, political, and publishing forces [that] significantly shaped the conditions of authoring and publishing exploration narratives in the first half of the nineteenth century”,25 suggesting that Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was in part addressing a “post-Napoleonic climate of nationalistic hubris”.26 Reading the text within a postcolonial discourse, Andrew Smith and William Hughes suggest that “Enlightenment subjectively generates its own opposite, in such a way that the subject is precariously defined through historically contingent (and therefore provisional) oppositions”;27 and therefore these oppositions dissolve into a “model of collapse [that] underpins that process in which the colonising subject is displayed in its confrontation with racial otherness, an otherness that is both strange, distanced and exotic, and yet the site upon which racial, psychological, and sexual anxieties are projected”.28 As John Bugg notes, “Shelley’s novel has long been linked to questions of race and empire”29 as Shelley “studies the crucial relationship between language, alterity, and empire”.30 *Frankenstein* thus allows for various kinds of social critique to operate under the guise of the Gothic novel.

In addition to readings as a critique of imperialism, *Dracula* has been subjected to nationalistic readings. At the time Stoker was writing, Ireland was considered a “metropolitan colony” of the British Empire, and as Joseph Valente claims ‘the Irish people found themselves at once agent and object, participant-victims, of Britain’s far-flung imperial mission”.31 Valente suggests Stoker was using the Gothic in order to represent “a

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24 In addition to the initial allegorical role of the monstrous as an embodiment of the fears of the “Eastern invasion”, the monster represents the fears of linguistic adaptation that might lead to cultural and eventual racial assimilation.
26 Craciun 437.
27 Smith & Hughes: 2.
28 Smith & Hughes: 2.
29 Bugg: 656.
30 Bugg: 656.
31 Valente: 632.
structurally determined ambivalence, even skepticism, towards the racial distinctions, social hierarchies, and political assumptions that inform the Anglo-Protestant literary heritage." Moreover, Stoker utilised the Gothic novel in order to condemn the subservient situation of the Irish and criticise the imperialistic enterprise. Yet Bruce Stewart argues that "a nationalist interpretation of such a text as Dracula is by its very nature apt to affirm its own convictions, turning the novel into an allegory of the landlord-tenant relations; and this is done without regard to alternative readings of the same text, often involving reference to the same subtending historical experience." Stewart cautions against allegorical nationalistic interpretations of the novel, saying that "[i]f Dracula is an allegory of Irish historical events, it is surely more likely to be based on a reaction to the climate of terror engendered by Land League agitation than to the legacy of resentments caused by colonial dispossession—though perhaps both of these are necessary ingredients in its uniquely successful amalgam of loathing and desire". Stewart also warns against interpretations "according to which Stoker’s aristocratic vampire is unequivocally identified with the despised Irish landlords, thus turning the novel into a covert political confession on the part of the Protestant ascendancy" because he claims these analyses "suggest the novel has been co-opted for rhetorical purposes remote from Stoker’s original intentions".

Along with these post-colonial and nationalist issues within the Empire, the echoes of the French revolution resounded across the channel, resulting in tremendous fears. The Gothic served "as a metaphor with which some contemporaries in England tried to come to terms with what was happening across the Channel in the 1790s". The Gothic was "born" with the French revolution, and as M. H. Abrams asserts, "[m]uch writing of the period, whether imaginative or didactic, in verse or in prose, dealt with or reflected the pressing social, economic, religious and intellectual issues and problems of that era." The rise of the novel, and more specifically the rise of the Gothic novel, was the literary response to the socio-political changes taking place during the Victorian era. New fears were voiced through the allegorical use of Gothic elements, and these

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32 Valente: 634.
33 Stewart: 240.
34 Stewart: 247.
35 Stewart: 255.
36 Stewart: 255.
37 Paulson: 534.
38 Wright: 63.
39 Abrams: 225.
are represented in both *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* through the encounter with the monstrous “Other”.

**Educational evaluations**

Bram Stoker (1847-1912) was born in Ireland to a Baptist family, and attended Trinity College, Dublin where he studied mathematics. He wrote several novels as well as theatre criticism. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851) was home-schooled, and profoundly influenced by many ideas that were circulating at the time regarding race, gender and social acceptance. She was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous author of the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which was a response to Edmund Burke’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). She was familiar with Burke’s work, including *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which explored concepts of “terror”, “horror”, and “the sublime”, suggesting that terror is the kernel of the sublime, and that we experience pleasure in fear when it is presented at a sufficient distance.

The various philosophical, political and economical influences M. A. Goldberg detects in Shelley’s novel (for example, Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, Jean Jacque Rousseau, Thomas Paine and, of course, William Godwin, Mary’s father, and Percy Shelley, who was to be her husband) are indeed present in the themes and focalisations of *Frankenstein*. In addition to the basic sociability of humanity articulated in these thinkers’ writings, which for the most part relates to the practical and utilitarian factors of social existence, *Frankenstein* presents an allegory of the inherent tendencies humanity has of “Othering” as a modus operandi, as a means of defining and creating the self. These ideas would later take shape via the works of Freud and Lacan.

In 1832 Percy Shelley published a review of *Frankenstein*, suggesting it be read as an allegory of seclusion: “Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Require affection with scorn;—let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind,—divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations—

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40 The full title of the former is: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*; and the full title of the later is *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

41 Later she and Percy Shelley would subject themselves to a self-imposed exile in Europe in order to escape the scandals relating to their relationship.

42 See Goldberg.
malevolence and selfishness”.\(^{43}\) This perspective on the novel was unusual at the time, as it highlights the social allegory regarding processes of “Othering”.

As Berthold Schoene-Harwood asserts, many critics suggest that “Shelley’s greatest achievement resides in her novel’s allegorical multifacetedness which renders references of an intimately personal nature part of a larger historical metaphor that accentuates the universal applicability of Frankenstein as a moral fable”.\(^{44}\) Schoene-Harwood also suggests that the social importance of Shelley’s allegory is that while the novel borrows Promethean and Biblical motifs, it presents a different problematic as “Walton and Frankenstein both sin, not against self or God, but against the moral and social order”.\(^{45}\) This criticism is the continuation of Percy Shelley’s earlier observation which locates the novel in its rightful place as social critique.

Drawing an analogy between the monster and Frankenstein, Daniel Cottom suggests that “the parable of Frankenstein” is that “in seeking to represent himself, man makes himself a monster. Or, to put it in other words: Frankenstein’s monster images the monstrous nature of representation”.\(^{46}\) Frankenstein offers a complex allegory of the nineteenth century British relationship to the displaced and silenced “Other”, and as Jerold E. Hogle suggests, the creature is also “displaced” in respect of language.\(^{47}\) These questions regarding the linguistic inscription of the limits and boundaries of the human being are explored in Dracula as well; Count Dracula himself acknowledges the importance of linguistic absorption in order to blend in the London crowds like a predator using camouflage.

The allegorical possibilities Dracula has to offer have been explored as “a Freudian projection of sexual anxieties, a perverted archetype, or a fin-de-siècle fantasy [and] an allegory of Ireland’s social, political, and cultural upheavals at the end of the nineteenth century”.\(^{48}\) Ingelbien asserts that “For some, Count Dracula represents the Protestant Ascendancy in terminal decline”\(^{49}\) and that it would be erroneous to “assume that the novel as a whole possesses a single, comprehensive allegorical intent”.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{43}\) Quoted in Schoene-Harwood: 21.
\(^{44}\) Schoene-Harwood: 8.
\(^{45}\) Schoene-Harwood: 24.
\(^{46}\) Cottom: 60.
\(^{47}\) Hogle: 221.
\(^{48}\) Ingelbien 1089.
\(^{49}\) Ingelbien 1089.
\(^{50}\) Ingelbien 1089. Ingelbien proposes that “conflicting readings may also result from a failure to recognize that Stoker was ultimately after things other than
Psychoanalytical approaches

Maggie Kilgour suggests that psychoanalysis is “a late gothic story which has emerged to help explain a twentieth-century experience of paradoxical detachment from and fear of others and the past”, 51 and according to David Gilmore, most critics agree that “imaginary monsters provide a convenient pictorial metaphor for human qualities that have to be repudiated, externalised, and defeated, the most important of which are aggression and sexual sadism, that is, id forces”. 52 However, he emphasises that “for most people monsters are sources of identification and awe as well as of horror, and they serve also as vehicles for the expiation of guilt as well as aggression: there is a strong sense in which the monster is an incarnation of the urge for self-punishment and a unified metaphor for both sadism and victimisation”. 53 Furthermore, Gilmore claims that “whatever else it is, the monster is a cannibal fantasy”. 54 Gilmore explains that for Freud cannibalistic urges at the oral stage were not only destructive, “because they were also an attempt to incorporate the beloved maternal figure as part of the nascent self in order to gain possession and control over the external world and to make up for inevitable loss of the comforting object”. 55 Gilmore continues to explain the psychological framework of the monster thus:

[...the same time it gives vent to infantile oral aggression, the violent monster of the imagination also embodies the sadistic parent that murderous transgression with dismemberment. In this light, we may see the cannibal component of the monster, which, as an inevitable mental aspect, implies being torn asunder in order to be consumed, as a manifestation of Oedipal guilt and castration anxiety displaced onto the body. Thus the monster derives its incredible psychic power from its ability to unite different forces and opposed processes within the unconscious. One may label the monster the primary universal and multivalent symbol of the human psyche: it conflates the entire rage of conflicts comprising the unconscious. 56]

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51 Kilgour: 108.
52 Gilmore: 4.
53 Gilmore: 4-5.
54 Gilmore: 180.
55 Gilmore: 181.
56 Gilmore: 184.
Both Stoker’s vampire and Shelley’s creature are such aggressive devouring monsters.

_Frankenstein_ and _Dracula_ have triggered a multitude of psychoanalytical readings, as they lend themselves to an interpretation of the monster as the projection of suppressed or displaced fears and desires. Anne Mellor suggests that Frankenstein is “our culture’s most penetrating literary analysis of the psychology of modern ‘scientific’ man, of the dangers inherent in scientific research, and of the horrifying but predictable consequences of an uncontrolled technological exploitation of nature and the female”.\(^{57}\) Mellor suggests that the creature in _Frankenstein_ undergoes a cognitive mirror stage by which it becomes aware of itself.\(^{58}\)

For Robert Olorenshaw, Frankenstein’s creature is not a “typical Lacanian subject”\(^{59}\), and is “unnarratable”.\(^{60}\) It therefore “cannot cross over from an order determined by the specular to an order determined by language, that is, the creature cannot be recognised, identified or circulated as proper name in the discourse of the ‘Other’ because the creature is unnameable.”\(^{61}\) Olorenshaw contends that the creature is excluded from the symbolic order of language because it cannot be contained in the narrative; however, the creature is a fictional creation, and therefore its “order of language” is literary, not the “real” order.\(^{62}\) There are tensions between the literary and the literal or, in Lacanian terminology, the symbolic and the real.\(^{63}\) After its education, the creature comprehends that it is excluded from both the symbolic and real orders because it is “the unnameable”.\(^{64}\) The ultimate “Other” cannot participate, penetrate or become a part of the symbolic order.

In a comprehensible world each creature has its place; in the real world— in the Lacanian sense—the world is full of misplaced, dislocated and homeless beings. Thus, as a concept that relinquishes binary logic “the geography of the monster is an imperilling expanse, and therefore always a contested cultural space”.\(^{65}\) Language is where the monstrous is inscribed upon the symbolic aspect of the psyche, and the appropriation of the monstrous into language disarms it of its unstable essence.

\(^{57}\) Mellor: 9.
\(^{58}\) Mellor: 9.
\(^{59}\) Olorenshaw: 167.
\(^{60}\) Olorenshaw: 167.
\(^{61}\) Olorenshaw: 167.
\(^{62}\) Olorenshaw: 167.
\(^{63}\) Olorenshaw: 167.
\(^{64}\) Olorenshaw: 167.
\(^{65}\) Cohen: 7.
Fred Botting offers one of the most comprehensive criticisms of *Frankenstein*, suggesting that the various readings along psychoanalytical lines create a monstrous critical corpus that breeds “critical monsters”.

These “critical monsters” destabilise and deconstruct the novel. Readings of the text as “transgressive” or indefinite function as reiterations of the paradigms and structures, such as psychoanalysis and literary analysis, which resided outside the novel. While Botting’s readings of the novel as dualistic, inherently contradictory and inexplicable restate the options of literary criticism as plausible, his conclusion that the text refuses to offer “a final presentation of the meaning” offers a never-ending spiral pattern as the real form and structure of the novel. Thus, it seems that by attributing to the novel endless possible and plausible meanings, Botting simultaneously resolves its conundrum whilst leaving it open for future discussions.

**Gender studies**

In the second half of the twentieth century the increased interest in gender studies has produced a rich body of research that investigates the gender load and sexual complexities of the vampire and zombie-like creature. The vampire has a long tradition of sensuality and sexuality, and one finds both female and male vampire characters (for example, the female vampires in Stoker’s novel and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s 1872 *Carmilla*). The vampire is seductive even while it is repulsive, negotiating the death-drive and sexual desire simultaneously. Stoker’s Count Dracula is male, and seduces the innocent women of England. The creature in Shelley’s novel is perceived as male, yet bears none of the seductive qualities of the vampire.

In 1985 Gyatari Chakravotry Spivak offered a feminist reading of the text within a post-colonial discourse, forging the way for a plethora of gender related readings. Later Spivak argued that in *Frankenstein* the discursive field of imperialism does not produce unquestioned ideological correlates for the narrative structuring along oppositions of gender or race. Spivak suggests that “Shelley differentiates the Other [and] works at Caliban/Ariel distinction”, identifying this as the crux of the novel’s political significance. She proposes that the end of the narrative allows for inconclusiveness regarding “the dynamic nineteenth-century topos of

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66 Botting: 3.
67 Botting: 4.
68 Botting: 3-5.
69 Spivak 1995: 56.
70 Spivak 1995: 60.
feminism-in-imperialism” as both the monster and the “English lady” are permitted a place outside of the narrative.

Denis L. White suggests that monsters are usually male, and that in Dracula “the vampire’s threat is more of seduction than of death [and] in Frankenstein the villagers seem to fear not so much a murderer as a child molester. The horror-producing element in such occurrences is the simultaneous presence of both a desire to gratify and the fear of losing control of the id—a fear that the id will become one’s whole personality”.

Frankenstein’s creature is perceived as a sexual threat, and as vampires are perceived as bisexual, Dracula has been read as an exploration of the relationship between desire and gender in Victorian society, and more specifically as a subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes. The uncertainty regarding the monsters’ sexuality and gender location lends them an even more terrifying essence as they threaten the stable binary division and socially allocated gender roles.

Conclusion

Since their publication Frankenstein and Dracula have stirred the imagination and produced an extensive body of criticism. The exposé of criticism offered here is partial and can only offer a glimpse of the vast areas of study that have engaged with these remarkable texts. From the psychoanalytical and deconstructionist to the didactic and the post-colonial approaches, the texts lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. Though the socio-historical circumstances leading to their creation were specific, the universal moral queries offered by both novels appeal to readers across time and space.

The daimonic imagination that found a literary embodiment in Frankenstein and Dracula demands continual attention. From the media franchise Resident Evil to television series like True Blood, and, of course, the Twilight saga, contemporary popular culture is replete with creatures that scare even while they fascinate. These particular kind of horror stories are the quintessential “monstrous Other” because they embody our fears and desire for death alongside our fears of the social “Other”. These two fears are basic motivators, as one pertains to our primal need to belong as the most crucial survival need, and the other is the fear of death. As long

72 White: 10.
73 Craciun: 545.
74 Stevenson: 145.
75 Craft: 108.
as one is driven by these primal desires literature and art will produce and reproduce the myths of these demons that define our individual and collective identities.

**Bibliography**


In his introduction to *Religion and Hume’s Legacy*, D. Z. Phillips writes that “No serious philosopher of religion can ignore Hume’s arguments”.¹ Hume’s thinking not only has a great deal to contribute to discussions of religion, but also (because of his emphasis on experience) to wider discussions of uncanny or numinous experiences. As provocative as Hume’s insights were to philosophers of religion, his sceptical philosophy opens a series of discussions about experience which would be carried on in Scottish literature into the twentieth century. Hume argues that all we know about the world is derived solely from our individual experience of it. Direct sensory experience he calls “impressions”, while reflections upon that experience are termed “ideas”:²

By the term *impression*, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensation or movements.²

Thus, for Hume, direct sensory experience is more intense and more immediate than the secondary reflections upon experience. Ideas seem rather paltry things, the “less lively” shadows of real events. For Hume, the “creative power of the mind” “amounts to no more than the faculty of

¹ Phillips: xv.
² Hume: 13.
compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience”. On the basis of these claims about the superior intensity of experience, Hume casts a sceptical eye over our capacity to know for certain how the world works. He criticises the notion of cause and effect, which he claims is based not on knowledge of cause-and-effect, but only on the appearance of two events or objects together, writing that “All belief or matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object, present to the memory or senses, and a customary conjunction between that and some other object”. Rather than knowing that A causes B, therefore, the human observer only sees A and assumes from past experience that B will follow. Hume makes this point clearer by arguing that “that the sun will not rise to-morrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise.”

It is indeed conceivable that the sun might not rise tomorrow, and so we cannot dismiss the proposition that it will not on the grounds that it is unintelligible. Rather, Hume argues that the “customary conjunction” that dominates our thinking about matters of fact gives us grounds for believing it will. In Hume’s epistemological system, we expect that the sun will rise tomorrow not because its not-rising is impossible, but because there is “a customary conjunction” between the dawn and a certain time of day.

It has sometimes been forgotten, Terence Penelhum argues, that Hume is a systematic philosopher. Penelhum’s explanation is that this omission happens “merely because philosophy students are always encouraged to read him in anthologised bits”. Nevertheless, Hume’s philosophy is a system, and we must understand the epistemological basis of Hume’s criticism of religion and miracles. Hume’s emphasis on experience, and his scepticism, are of a piece with his famous condemnation of metaphysics at the end of the Enquiry: “If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

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3 Hume: 13.
4 Hume: 32, 33.
5 Hume: 18.
6 Penelhum: 272.
7 Hume: 120.
Sceptical Scepticism 163

For Hume, any work that does not begin with a consideration of actual experience is worthless: worse, perhaps, it can lead people into error. On the Humean bonfire, though, we should find not only works of metaphysics, but also, given his criticism of miracles in the *Enquiry*, a great many of the texts of established religion. Hume’s criticism of miracles is found in a chapter described as “unequivocally the most controversial thing Hume ever wrote”, and “some of the most frightening logic assembled in one short essay”.\(^8\) Kant famously claimed that Hume’s work roused him from “dogmatic slumber”, and collections and monographs on Hume and religion continue to be published: *Religion and Hume’s Legacy* edited by Phillips and Tessin, and Penelhum’s *Themes in Hume* are two modern examples of a large body of critical literature.\(^9\)

In short, Hume’s criticism of miracles is that he doubts any have occurred or even *could* occur. He writes that: “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”\(^10\) As the philosopher who bases all of his beliefs about the working of the world on experience, Hume is arguing that the unchangeable nature of the world as experienced makes miracles so unlikely as to be nearly impossible. Perhaps to make his point clearer by way of analogy, or perhaps simply to initiate a controversy with Christian divines, Hume attacks the possibility of resurrection thus:

> When any one tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.\(^11\)

To an extent superfluous (since he has already denied the likelihood of *any* miracle actually occurring) the above adds an important point to Hume’s critique. It is the greater likelihood of deceit in the report of a miracle that leads Hume to discount all such reports. So far, in dealing with reported miracles, Hume’s scepticism is consistent with his epistemology: if

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\(^8\) Price: 91-2.  
\(^9\) Kant: 9.  
\(^10\) Hume: 83.  
\(^11\) Hume: 83.
experience has universally shown, for example, that people once dead remain so, we really should not trust someone who claims to have seen a resurrection. Were we to experience such an event ourselves, however, Hume is of considerably less help. If the sceptic should consider himself deceived, Hume’s system leaves him no epistemological ground on which to stand. If he assumes he is deceived, he must deny a part of his experience, contra Hume; if he is told that he is deceived, he must submit his experience to the testimony of others, also contra Hume.

Such a gap does not disprove Hume’s scepticism, as it does not challenge the assertion that it is unjustifiable to ignore the regularity of our own experience when considering the report of miracles which we have not directly experienced. Rather, there is an interesting epistemological gap in Hume’s theory regarding the direct experience of the miraculous or the uncanny. Purely because of his emphasis on the importance of experience, Hume’s theory can be read in a way that allows for direct experience of miracles or the uncanny, even if reporting such experiences to others remains a process fraught with scepticism.

This element of Hume’s thought has not been best explored in works of philosophy, however, but in literature. The creative work of Scottish writers since Hume has consistently explored the uncanny, and harnessed the tension between scepticism and experiences which seem to defy scepticism. The elements of Hume’s *Enquiry* (psychological emphasis, attention to subjective experience, empirical description of the senses) are also the elements of psychological fiction. We can read Hume’s epistemology as a scheme in which doubt is aimed at historically-attested and institutionally-approved miracles, but which, in its emphasis on individual experience, allows for personal experience of the uncanny or numinous.

The ways in which Scottish writers grappled with the sceptical and psychological elements of Hume’s thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shed light on the concept of an Enlightenment which occurred once, leaving a disillusioned world, and furthermore the depiction of unusual psychological states becomes a privileged approach to the experience of the numinous. With its eminent figures (as well as Hume, for example, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid and Adam Ferguson) Scotland is seen as a home of Enlightenment thought, but given the simultaneous interest in the uncanny in Scottish culture, it should be understood that Enlightenment and the uncanny need not be irreconcilable foes.
Hogg and Stevenson: The nineteenth century

John Herdman has written that “the double is a central Romantic image” found in two of the most famous Scottish literary explorations of the uncanny in the nineteenth century: Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. For Herdman, the double is linked with “the complex history of moral duality in the Western Christian tradition”. He reads the double as a moral image in literature, and argues that in the Enlightenment era, it became associated with “the primitive, the savage and the untamed in the human spirit”, and that “The savage of the unconscious housed within the European breast became associated with evil because of the threat it posed to the values of rationalism, to the ideals of progress and human perfectibility.”

Whilst focusing on the double as a symbol of moral duality allows Herdman to link the writers he studies (which include Hogg and Stevenson) to the lengthy Christian tradition, it also means that he makes no account of the impact of the epistemological questions surrounding the miraculous or the uncanny in the nineteenth century. The events of both Hogg’s and Stevenson’s novels are sometimes miraculous, but the advent of thinkers like Hume is a vital distinguishing feature between Hogg’s and Stevenson’s world and the long history of Christian thought. It is essential to grasp the way in which both are responding to the epistemological problems surrounding experience of the uncanny that lie dormant in Hume’s thinking. The central narrative of James Hogg’s novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is that of Robert Wringhim. A young Calvinist, Wringhim becomes convinced that he is one of the predestined elect, and proceeds to kill his brother, mother and a girl whom he has seduced, before killing himself. In this, he is prompted by a mysterious, shape-shifting figure called Gil-Martin, who, it is suggested, is the devil. Alone, this would be only a fantastic tale, but Hogg chooses to create a conflict between Enlightenment scepticism by including, around Wringhim’s narrative, the notes of an Editor. These notes are dispassionate, reasoned, and calmly balanced in contrast to Wringhim’s tale of madness and religious mania. Wringhim is not doubled only by Gil-Martin: the Editor’s tale is also a double of Wringhim’s life.

While Gil-Martin has uncanny powers that allow him, among other things, to shape-shift, Wringhim’s narrative seems to the Editor to be too

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12 Herdman: x.
13 Herdman: 4.
14 Herdman: 11-12.
uncanny to merit belief. He writes that he considers Wringhim’s narrative: “a religious PARABLE, showing the danger of self-righteousness”. For the Editor, Wringhim’s confession is “a thing so extraordinary, so unprecedented, and so far out of the common course of human events, that if there were not hundreds of living witnesses to attest the truth of it, I would not bid any rational being believe it”. His language here is that of the Humean sceptic: whereas Hume referred to miracles violating “unalterable experience[s]” of nature, the editor writes about the “common course of human events”. Hogg, though, seems to mock the Editor by making him over-confident in his scepticism. The Editor cannot, for example, explain where Robert’s ability to follow his brother wherever he goes comes from, nor does he explain elements of the narrative which support a supernatural interpretation of this ability. He also tries to explain a vision of Wringhim’s face before his brother as follows: “he soon perceived the cause of the phenomenon, and that it proceeded from the rays of the sun from a pure unclouded morning sky striking upon this dense vapour which refracted them.”

He strikes an optimistic, enlightened note, arguing that “the better all the works of nature are understood, the more they will be ever admired”. Yet when we hear of the discussion about the event between George and a friend, George rejects the explanation that it was a trick of the light: “George could not swallow this, for he had seen his own shadow on the cloud, and, instead of approaching to aught like his own figure, he perceived nothing but a halo of glory round a point of the cloud, that was whiter and purer than the rest.” The Editor can be read as forcing Enlightenment assumptions onto the story he is telling, representing a kind of doctrinaire scepticism that defeats its own ends by severing its link with experience. This leads to discrepancies between the Editor’s comments and the evidence that he (and the reader) has before him. Similar discrepancies are to be found between the Editor’s scepticism and an eye-witness account of the murder of Wringhim’s brother. The Editor is told:

Now, note me well: I saw him [a character, Thomas Drummond] going eastward in his tartans and bonnet, and the gilded hilt of his claymore glittering in the moon; and, at the very same time, I saw two men, the one

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15 Hogg: 65.
16 Hogg: 29.
17 Hogg: 29.
18 Hogg: 34.
The witness then claims that Drummond and the other figure are identical; Wringly’s narrative explains that Gil-Martin has assumed the appearance of Drummond in order to help assassinate Wringly’s brother George. The witness appears to paraphrase Hume: “We have nothing on earth but our senses to depend on”, but the Editor never tries to explain how the witness, who was not alone in seeing the double, was misled by her senses. These discrepancies occur at the same location where Humean scepticism begins to fail: direct experience of the uncanny. The Editor is convinced that his witnesses must be deceived, yet his conviction is but a “less lively” idea in conflict with the other’s direct “impression” of the uncanny. There is little chance of reconciliation between the two narratives: Hogg’s novel contains, though it cannot blend, the uncanny and the sceptic.

In Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde the uncanny proceeds not from religious mania, but from science itself. Herdman claims that by the time Jekyll and Hyde was written the double was in “decline” as a literary device: “The problem for a late nineteenth-century writer such as Stevenson attempting a version of the supernatural double was that the loss of confident belief in any spiritual reality outside the human psyche had robbed him of a concrete figure through which to articulate the psychological-spiritual nuances to which he aspired to give form.”21 If we look at Jekyll and Hyde as an attempt to explore and give form to epistemological issues surrounding the experience of the uncanny, Jekyll and Hyde is less an example of the decline of the double as a continuation. Jekyll and his double represent good and evil, but they also represent differing modes of knowing. Shut away in his study, Jekyll is emblematic of the reclusive thinker, whereas Hyde, prowling the streets, symbolises immediate experience. In Humean terms, the difference between Jekyll and Hyde is the difference between ideas and impressions, and as with Hume’s system, where impressions are more intense than ideas, meditative Jekyll eventually becomes the “less lively” counterpart of his demonic other.22 Jekyll himself writes a description of the human psyche that echoes Hume’s denial that there is a continued personal identity in the subject: “Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the

19 Hogg: 51.
20 Hogg: 56.
21 Herdman: 132.
22 Hume: 13.
same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.”

For Jekyll, there is only the world of experience, infinitely changeable and forever changing, a world totally out of keeping with his life in the study and his polite middle-class friends—but the very atmosphere in which a Hyde thrives.

The same type of opposition between experience and thought is discussed by Linda Dryden in *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles*, where she writes that “Duality is more than a psychological condition: it is a factor of late nineteenth-century metropolitan life that can be identified in the physical geography of the city as well as in the individual existence.”

Hyde is both emblematic of this geographical duality and the denizen of its terrifying half. He is at once the inhabitant of the dark streets, and the symbol of the threats to civilisation that Victorian society perceived as arising from them. More importantly, however, Hyde is the vehicle which Henry Jekyll uses to descend into these depths. He is the explorer who experiences urban darkness, the creation of a more timid Victorian mind who fears to make such journeys. In these respects, *Jekyll and Hyde* is an exploration of the legacy bequeathed by the late eighteenth-century Enlightenment to late nineteenth-century literature. Whereas Hogg’s Editor is shown as being unable to use scientific and sceptical explanations to iron out inexplicable elements of his narrative, Dr Jekyll confronts his friends with supernatural science, what he calls “transcendental medicine.”

One of those friends, Dr Lanyon, is accused of having “derided [his] superiors” by being sceptical about Jekyll’s experiments. Lanyon, like Hogg’s Editor, is the representative of Enlightenment scepticism confronted with a numinous experience, the transformation of Hyde back into Jekyll: “I had sprung to my feet and leaped back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror. “O God!” I screamed [...] for there before my eyes—pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death—there stood Henry Jekyll!”

Herdman seems to have misplaced his pessimism when he writes of *Jekyll and Hyde* as an example of the double in decline. Stevenson depicts the same epistemological problems as Hogg in *Confessions*, but the

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23 Stevenson: 61.
24 Dryden: 18.
25 Stevenson: 58.
26 Stevenson: 58.
27 Stevenson: 59.
depiction is more complicated by virtue of the advances in science made between the publication of the two novels. There is for Stevenson a fantastic element to science: Jekyll’s research has left the world of the comfortably rational behind and is pushing against the borders of the uncanny. This intensifies the problems for the reader in discerning which parts of the tale are unreliable. It is conceivable, after all, that some drug taken could alter someone’s physical appearance, or certain compounds affect one’s behaviour. There is even a seemingly scientific explanation for Jekyll’s inability to replicate the experiment: “I am now persuaded that my first supply was impure, and that it was unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught”.

There are also remarkable similarities in the formal qualities of both books: Hogg has two conflicting viewpoints; Stevenson has a narrator’s, Doctor Lanyon’s, and Jekyll’s own account of events. As with Confessions, the reader is faced with the task of comparing testimony surrounding uncanny events and trying to discern what grain of truth, if any, lies behind it. As with Gil-Martin, Hyde seems to embody immorality, license, and eventual madness, harking back to the tradition of moral duality Herdman locates in Christianity. Stevenson’s innovation is to make science, and not magic, the means of access to the uncanny, linking numinous experience and scientific enquiry in a way which would be explored in greater depth during the twentieth century.

**Twentieth century: the uncanny and modern psychology**

Herdman locates the decline of the double as a literary device in the rise of psychological understandings of duality. “In the early nineteenth century,” Herdman writes: “there was no sense of cleavage between literary and scientific psychology. The appearance of matter from the void, and evolution from the merely material through the organic to the animate and spiritual, was a commonplace of Romantic science, and the process of human growth from unconsciousness to consciousness was often viewed as an analogous process.”

Although in reality Freud as well as Jung built on Romantic psychology with only slight modifications, the debt was often not recognised and sometimes not fully acknowledged, and as science became marked off as a domain of ‘fact’ which was seen as distinct from, and even alien to, the

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28 Stevenson: 75.
29 Herdman: 153.
subjectivity of literature, the abstraction of metaphysics and the mythology of religion.\(^{30}\)

Herdman’s comments seem to do little justice to either the extraordinary profusion of psychoanalysis-influenced literature, or the ways in which Freud and Jung’s works were situated on the borderline of the literary, with the emphasis on case narratives and innovative language.

The growth of psychoanalysis does not so much destroy the double as colonise it. Whereas the duality Herdman describes in the nineteenth century is a moral one (the split between good and evil) the psychoanalytic duality is the conscious and unconscious. Elements of this duality are already present in Stevenson, as Hyde has the kind of irrationality and impulsiveness that is associated with the unconscious. In terms of epistemology, the notion of Jekyll’s descent into Hyde in order to attain experience and knowledge finds an analogue in the less explosive descent of the analyst into the unconscious of the analysand in order to recover their experiences. Importantly, Freud and Jung also dissipate much of the destabilising force of the uncanny by furnishing rational psychological explanations for uncanny or numinous occurrences.

As with the other texts discussed here, the literature responding to Freud’s and Jung’s writing on the uncanny or numinous concentrated not on the philosophical or psychological questions of the day, but rather on the models of experience described within. Although Freud and Jung had offered rational explanations for uncanny or numinous experiences, writers seemed more interested in depicting the uncanny or numinous moment itself.

Depictions of such moments were a major concern of Neil M. Gunn, and are to be found throughout his work. In his novel *The Serpent*, an atheist free-thinker in the Humean mode clashes with his religious father in a conflict which evokes Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*; but in his autobiography, *The Atom of Delight*, he is concerned with seeking out numinous and uncanny experiences. Gunn’s work embodies the impact of Hume’s epistemology on thinking about the uncanny. *The Serpent* shows the same scepticism surrounding the claims of established religions that Hume shows in his attack on the story of the resurrection of Jesus, yet Gunn elsewhere engages in in-depth explorations of uncanny or numinous phenomena.

In *The Serpent*, Gunn’s description of the father of the main character, Tom, directly evokes Freud’s account in *Totem and Taboo* of the emergence of the idea of God from the image of the father: “There was a

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\(^{30}\) Herdman: 154.
shuffling of feet in the doorway. Tom turned and saw his father before him. The grey face, the grey beard, the blazing eyes, the silent pursuing face—it had come at last. The power of the father created in the image of God. The tribal power, the unearthly power.”

For Gunn established religion (here, Church of Scotland Protestantism) is a result of psychological forces which have been adequately explained by Freud: an explanation which also undermines the claims about the nature of the world made by Christianity. Elsewhere, however, Gunn criticised Freud as an incomplete theorist, writing that: “I am not disputing [Freud’s] analysis in any way, not so far as it has gone. I have neither the experience nor the knowledge to do so, nor any particularly desire, and indeed accept it with, I hope, some elementary understanding. But I am submitting that it is not the whole, the invariable picture.”

In *The Atom of Delight*, Gunn shows an interest in other parts of “the whole […] picture”, discussing Zen, for example, and an uncanny incident where the young Gunn shoots a hat off someone’s head with an arrow-shot he describes as “miraculous”. The word here is interesting, as is his later claim that:

determinism, as a rational process, cannot be wise before the event if the event embraced the exercise of non-rational factors, including those incalculable upsurges from the Unconscious, or from the intromissions of archetypes in the Collective Unconscious, not to mention ongoings in weird realms where perceptions are extra-sensory in a way that would have shaken Hume to his Edinburgh roots and may yet produce another kind of smile on the face of a physicist.

For Gunn, scientific insights (his examples here are advances in physics in the first half of the twentieth century) are progressing by way of uncanny or numinous insights into the workings of the universe. This process is depicted in Gunn’s novel *Highland River*, where the main character, a scientist, thinks back to an uncanny experience earlier in his life where (spotting a salmon) “all his ancestors came at him”. This experience shapes his later life: “the small boy sticking his toe in the mire of the drowned earth becomes one with the grown-up scientist watching that same earth from an astronomical point above it.”

In a more complete form than in *Jekyll and Hyde*, Gunn blends the uncanny and

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31 Gunn 1943: 151.
32 Gunn 1954: 89.
33 Gunn 1954: 134-40, 143.
34 Gunn 1954: 289.
35 Gunn 1937: 11.
36 Gunn 1937: 159.
numinous with scientific investigation, until a boy’s uncanny experience of hunting a salmon becomes the key to his later life hunting among sub-atomic particles.

The advent of psychoanalysis posed important problems for the depiction of the numinous. Freud and Jung alike explain numinous phenomena as responses to psychological needs, and furnish rational explanations for them. The surprising, disquieting, experience of the uncanny or numinous no longer arises from the external world, but in the hands of a writer such as Gunn the actual experience can still be a valuable part of fiction. A rich tradition ends with psychoanalysis: the numinous which arises from the world to ridicule the Enlightenment voices of Hogg’s editor and Doctor Lanyon retreats within the human head.

**Conclusion: contrariety**

In her essay “Contrariety in Hume” Catherine Kemp argues that inexplicable events are central to Hume’s thinking on the development of our beliefs about the world. She writes that:

The principle of causation is nothing except as it establishes specific relations between son and father, or sword prick and pain. The specificity of these relations gives us our particular universe, with laws and order peculiar to it. We owe the development of these particular relations not only to the principles of habit and custom but also to the particular regularities and anomalies of our actual encounters with the phenomena. The emergence of a specific causal relation, its refinement, and its distinction from the alternate relation that forms when the first fails all depend vitally on the particular uniformities and non-uniformities in our experience.37

Kemp is worth quoting at this length for a number of reasons. First, her argument makes clear that Hume’s scepticism does not only have the effect of casting doubt on reported miracles, but instead makes experience the foundation of all belief. Second, she highlights that the uniformity of experience is no more important to the genesis of belief than inexplicable experiences. Third, Kemp’s reading of Hume’s thinking on experience is compatible with modern understandings of epistemology and scientific change, such as Thomas S. Kuhn’s book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

In a way, the treatment of numinous or uncanny experience in Scottish literature as described here evolves so as to end in alignment with Kemp’s

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37 Kemp: 64.
reading of Hume. For Hogg in The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, the clash of testimony is central. This is analogous to Hume’s arguments in “On Miracles” against belief in reported miracles. Hogg’s novel is filled with epistemological traps: instances where the reader cannot resolve contradiction between the Editor and Wringhim. One can either believe the Editor’s sceptical account, or Wringhim’s fabulous narrative. In the novel, there is no formal trace of the idea that a healthy respect for the uncanny may actually help rational enquiry.

The link between science and the uncanny is made in Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Stevenson depicts Jekyll as achieving his uncanny transformation into Hyde through scientific practice. Stevenson’s novel is still in many respects a fantasy, but it depicts a similar relationship between science and the uncanny explored in more depth in the twentieth century.

Twentieth century writers like Neil Gunn recognised that often changes in scientific knowledge occurred because of attempts to integrate uncanny experiences within the existing body of scientific work. His generation also lived through profound changes in what Kuhn calls “paradigms”: the rules which govern scientific enquiry at any one time. In Highland River, Gunn dramatises this process: Kenn is a physicist at a time when physics is being radically redefined. The uncanny is appropriate because, as Gunn depicts, Kenn’s early uncanny experiences are key to his future career as a scientist.

There is a common tendency to consider the numinous or uncanny as opposed to rational or scientific understandings of the world. Hume’s philosophy makes that opposition untenable by making experience central to knowledge. As Kemp argues, Hume recognises that uncanny experiences do not overthrow our rational beliefs about the world, but instead refine them. Where it forgets itself, scepticism can impose a priori rules upon experience, and act thus as a limiting factor in our understanding of the world. When scepticism strips away such limitations by reinstating the primacy of experience, it provides reliable philosophical ground for both scientific understandings of the world and the uncanny.

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Most of Yeats’ production, from poems to essays on literary criticism and philosophical works, has been characterised by the presence of the daimonic, which, as an invisible hand, has helped the writer to give shape to all his thoughts. From a careful reading of some of Yeats’ works, in particular *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917) and *A Vision* (1925), it seems possible to explore the growth and development of the daimon, and to trace, among its protean manifestations, a common underlying theme. The phenomenon of the daimon is a difficult one to address, yet it provides a way for Yeats to systematise his work. Order and structure become his ultimate dream, and he relentlessly attempts to organise his thoughts and experiences in order to unmask the ambivalent and equivocal, and constellate his ideas into a structured wholeness and unity.

**The mythical daimon**

Yeats’ early approaches to the daimon were made possible through the incorporation of myth into his work. By mythologising his poems and essays, he managed to encapsulate the figure of the daimon, and, subsequently, to understand its function and meaning. In the essay *At Stratford-on-Avon*, composed in May 1901, he claimed that: “The Greeks considered that myths are the activities of the daimons, and that the daimons shaped our characters and our lives. I have often had the fancy that there is some one myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought.”

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1 The first edition of *A Vision* is dated 1925 and it is commonly known as *Vision A*; the second edition was published in 1937, and it is often referred to as *Vision B*.

Another early account of the daimon can be found in an essay on Verlaine which Yeats wrote in 1895. Towards the end of the essay, Yeats described Verlaine as a daimonic man:

No matter what he talked of, there was in his voice, in his face, or in his words, something of the ‘voluminous tenderness’ which Mr. Bain has called, I believe, ‘the basis of all immorality’ and of the joyous serenity and untroubled perception of those who commune with spiritual ideas. One felt always that he was a great temperament, the servant of a great daimon, and fancied, as one listened to his vehement sentences that his temperament, his daimon, had been made uncontrollable that he might live the life needful for its perfect expression in art, and yet escape the bonfire.3

It seems possible to argue that Yeats’ first notions and ideas about the daimon were developed through his study of the ancient Greek philosophers. The association of the daimon with temperament indeed contains clear allusions to Heraclitus’ famous fragment 119, “A man’s character is his fate”, which Yeats read and marked, together with other fragments, in his copy translated by John Burnet.4 According to James Olney, Heraclitus provided what Yeats would have defined as “sources of an alternative cosmology, both in literature and in his experimental work of magic and psychical research”; the symbols of the gyres in A Vision, for instance, which Yeats received through the automatic writing developed from the communications between his wife and the so-called Instructors, were mainly grounded in the pre-Socratic tradition: “To me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings, or persons, which die each other’s life, live each other’s death. That is true of life and death themselves. Two cones (or whirls) the apex of each in the other’s base.”5 The idea of a constant change with an alternation of endless conflicting opposites—epitomised by another recurrent Heraclitus’ fragment: “Immortal mortals, mortal immortals, living the others’ death and dying the others’ life”—permeates the entire collection of Yeats’ works and leads him to a mature formulation of a key concept of his philosophy: the antinomies. From Heraclitus in particular, Yeats understood that everything was in a state of flux and reality was a development through contradictions and opposing vicissitudes which needed to be attuned to each other.7 Besides shaping his antinomic view of

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3 Yeats 1896: 117,118.
4 Olney: 90, 93.
5 Raine: 46.
6 Wade: 918.
7 Moore: 336.
the world, the pre-Socratic philosopher probably instilled in him the idea of the daimon as an *alter ego*, as a tutelary spirit “attached to its opposite on earth”.

I am inclined to believe that Yeats understood Verlaine as a symbol of the daimonic process in the artist. Using the Heraclitean symbolism, Yeats could have argued that the daimonic flowed in the artist like the ever-shifting essence of the water of a river. Yeats was still far from the more sophisticated symbolism and terminology which he would demonstrate in later works (*Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Swedenborg, Mediums and Desolate Places and A Vision*). However, at the time of the Essay on Verlaine, in 1895, he was already doing what the so-called Instructors would tell him to do much later, namely analysing “man’s character” (his daimon) and treating it as a hypostasis (like Heraclitus’ *logos*).

Yeats’ daimonic doctrine was not limited to Heraclitus’ influence. It would be inappropriate not to consider that Yeats’ notion of the daimon derives from at least two other Greeks philosophers that he studied: Plato and Plotinus. The Platonic and neoplatonic traditions seem to shape and underpin Yeats’ understanding of the myth of the daimon after Heraclitus. This time the daimon is not treated as an opposing *alter ego*, but as an agent that is perceived from within. The daimon seems to undergo a process of internalisation, which is magnificently recounted in The *Myth of Er* at the end of Plato’s *Republic*, in the *Timaeus*, where every soul is given a daimon that becomes its “individualizing, divinifying, and immortalizing partner”, and in the *Enneads*, where “it is fitting that Plotinus should have been the first philosopher to meet his daimon face to face”.

From Plato’s dialogues in particular, Yeats assimilated the tension between philosophica knowledge and poetic inspiration. In *Ion*, Plato portrayed the poet as a passive entity, who, possessed by divine madness, became nothing but a mouthpiece of the gods. In *Phaedrus* he opposed the passive reaction of the poet with that of the philosopher, who was equally possessed by divine madness after contemplating the idea of beauty but was able to respond to this possession, converting madness into a state of knowledge.

Yeats was aware of the differences between the Platonic ideals of poet and philosopher, and experienced both of them. On the one hand he could feel the energy of that creative frenzy conveyed by the poetic voice of the

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8 Moore: 288.
9 The *Enneads* had just been translated and published by Stephen MacKenna.
10 Olney: 119.
11 Yeats 1962b: 368.
muse. On the other hand he sometimes lamented that he could not feel the
fulfilment derived from the conversion of that energy into rational
thought.\textsuperscript{12} This tension is evident at the end of *Leda and the Swan* (1924):
the whole poem, based on the rape of Leda at the hand of Zeus (who
transformed into a swan), can be interpreted as an allegory of the violent
possession of the poet by the Muse. It terminates with the emblematic
question: “Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the
indifferent beak could let her drop?”

As a poet, Yeats experienced the most immediate and direct contact
with the daimonic through his possession by the Muse. In his essay *Crying
in Plato’s Teeth*, Anthony Cuda affirms that “the Muse is but a marker or a
placeholder that allows him to dramatise the poet’s sensation of a radical
passivity bordering on madness, of being a patient who is ‘spoken
through’ rather than an agent who speaks”.\textsuperscript{13} In this phase, Yeats’
experience was still purely poetic, and the encounter with the daimonic
still superficial. He realised that there was an uncanny force which acted
autonomously inside him, but even though the poet was touched in the
inner and darkest regions of himself, the experience remained external,
only affecting the mind. *Anima hominis* was the concept which Yeats used
to describe everything which pertained to the mind. *Anima hominis* was
for him the place where the poetic inspiration of the Muse was perceived
and elaborated as a mental experience (i.e., it remained at the level of the
mind). The experience was made spiritual only when he started realising
that the inner presence was not just a poetic muse but a philosophical and
mythical daimon. It was only when the muse was consciously internalised
that it became daimon, and the poet could become one who was able to
convert the poetic madness, inspired by the muse, into a philosophy or a
state of knowledge dictated by a daimon. This time the experience was not
limited to the mind of the individual, to *anima hominis*; Yeats became
gradually convinced of the existence of a more universal, collective mind,
or Great Mind, where personal emotions were converted into general
truths, and where the mind of the poet was converted into the mind of
mankind. This is what he called the *anima mundi,*\textsuperscript{14} the soul of the world,
conceiving it as a corporate imagination, a reservoir of images which
could be shared by the entire human race. Yeats argued that on the one
hand this deposit of images came from the past and from tradition, on the
other hand it was within him, and it was revealed to him through a super-
normal experience:

\textsuperscript{12} Cuda: 207.
\textsuperscript{13} Cuda: 209.
\textsuperscript{14} Ellmann 1968: 219.
This subject-matter is something I have received from generations, part of that compact with my fellow men made in my name before I was born. [...] I cannot break from traditional subject matter without breaking from some part of my own nature, and sometimes it has come to me in super-normal experience; I have met with ancient myths in my dreams, brightly lit; and I think it allied to the wisdom or instinct that guides a migratory bird.”  

Yeats’ daimonic system

Assuming the existence of a myth for every man, it is possible to infer that Yeats found “his myth” in *A Vision*, the work which was produced from the abundance of automatic scripts which his wife George Hyde-Lees (1892-1968) started writing just three days after they married in 1917. In this work Yeats managed to give shape and visualisation to his theories, and in particular to the concept of the daimon. For him, the language of myth was congruent to primordial structures which he used to constellate things in a systematic pattern. The presence of diagrams like the Great Wheel and of symbols such as the whirling cones or gyres represented his personal attempt to systematise forms, images, ideas and symbols. Yeats was looking for a model—a System—which could explain the behaviour of the macrocosmic universe and of the microcosmic human beings within it. Functioning as a mediator between the micro- and macrocosmic worlds, it was a model of vast systematisation, filled with hierarchies and parables, symbols and diagrams, and it represented the place of the human soul in the overall cosmic reality. 

Yeats 1961a: viii.

As also alchemy, folklore and dreams.

Yeats 1937: 66. Yeats conceived a diagram depicting what he called the Great Wheel: it was made of twenty-eight spokes and he believed that human souls passed through all the phases towards perfection. The System mapped the soul’s progression through the experiences of the lives which resided in each spoke. The whole cycle also reflected the historical development of the human being—the state of infancy coincided with the first phases, while the last ones represented the oblivion of old age and death.

Whereas Yeats adopted the image of the lunar cycle to represent the historical development of the individual, the image of the “funnel” was used to systematize European history, “which was considered to pass like the human soul through a cycle from subjectivity to objectivity” (Yeats 1937: 71). Objectivity and subjectivity appeared to Yeats as two “intersecting states struggling one against the other” (Yeats 1937: 81), and the two whirling cones were the symbolic image of their interpenetration. It is important to recognise that these two cones represented the interpenetration of antinomies of every kind: they were not just the symbol of subjectivity and objectivity, but of every antinomic couple such as the abstract and the concrete, the living and the dead, the particular and the universal, truth and beauty, man and daimon.
macrocosmic reality, the daimon was in charge of articulating and systematising the whole System.\textsuperscript{19} It is interesting to note that the word \textit{system} comes from the Latin and Greek \textit{systēma} and from the Greek verb \textit{synistēmi}, which means to unite, to put together, to organise, to frame. We could think of Yeats’ System as a set of entities or parts forming an integrated whole aimed at the achievement of order and unity. Yeats was therefore not just a poet but a system-builder who aimed at building a scaffolding of the world. From the fragmentation, chaos and meaninglessness of human existence, he developed a System which organised the chaotic plurality into ordered and meaningful unity. James Olney affirmed that “the poet brings order into this world of chaos and flux, embodies a symbolic meaning in his verse, and thereby, like any daimon, unifies the universe”.\textsuperscript{20}

Yeats was not the only one who engaged in a System: many others before him had done it, in particular those whom he considered his intellectual and philosophical masters: Plotinus, Swedenborg and Blake. Kathleen Raine maintained that “in speaking of Swedenborg, or Blake, or of Yeats it is as if we were following the unfolding of a single mind in which each learned something from his predecessor, while adding something of his own”.\textsuperscript{21} We could think of them as located one after the other in a great golden chain, embodying a continuous tradition of knowledge. The idea of knowledge for the three of them consisted in a systematic search for truth which, Yeats claimed, “cannot be discovered but may be revealed”.\textsuperscript{22} Inspired by Platonic concepts, Yeats was trying to convey the idea that the spiritual world could be known through its representations, expressed through symbols and images. Affirming that knowledge was not a matter of discovery, but of revelation, Yeats was implying that there was nothing new to be found, as everything was already there, inherent in the body of man and in the world. The inner truth, however, had to be revealed through experiences and disciplines of the mind. Yeats conceived his works as a process of unveiling the truth, as an investigation into the realm of those underlying forces which go beyond reason and beyond thought. He aimed at converting the unfamiliar and mysterious (because not yet revealed) into the familiar. The revelation consisted in a displaying of images that, like an \textit{imago mundi}, encompassed a cosmic totality, a pleromatic reality which comprehended

\textsuperscript{19} I use “System” to refer to Yeats’ own system, whereas “system” will be used in this paper to describe systems in general.

\textsuperscript{20} Olney: 211.

\textsuperscript{21} Raine: 76.

\textsuperscript{22} Yeats 1937: x.
all things and beings. Granting an interpretive function to images, he was allowed to “see through”, in order to achieve knowledge from the confluence of inner perception and outer reality. The interpretation of symbols from the esoteric traditions which Yeats studied—alchemy and Cabala for instance—helped him to develop this kind of knowledge, and imagination contributed all the rest. It catapulted him into a realm of spiritual knowledge where the image was “acted” from within (imo-ago has been interpreted as “I act from the depth”),23 becoming substance, “hard to the right touch as ‘pillars of crystal’ and as solidly coloured as our own [substance] to the right eyes.”24 The formulation of a System was his means of corroborating the vision of images: they were revealed to him, and he perceived their embodiment as substances, and allowed them to speak in symbolic terms, namely using the language of symbols.

The development of the System started when Yeats was still a young man: the catalyst event consisted in a sentence which seemed to form in his head, “pretty much as sentences form when we are half-asleep”:25 he woke up one morning to hear a voice uttering “Hammer your thoughts into unity”.26 At that time he may not have been sure about the meaning of that unity, and how to hammer his thoughts in order to attain it, but in the course of the years the method started becoming clear: the way which led to unity was characterised by a constant tension of opposites. Yeats’ unity was a sum of conflicts between his self and the world, between his subjective and objective life, between his self and anti-self. These opposite elements needed to be reconciled and balanced in order to find what he would define as Unity of Being. Virginia Moore affirmed that “all oppositions have but one purpose: to bring the individual to self-awareness”.27 In Yeats the contraries pulled at each other, almost always urging him to a crisis: he saw himself as a bifurcated self, split into two parts, whose reconciliation was a fundamental process towards maturity and attainment of personality.

Yeats’ duality was embodied by two symbolic fictional characters which he repeatedly presented in his works: Owen Aherne, the pious Catholic, the conventional man, the public one, the one who showed his face, and Michael Robartes, the private man, one who showed a mask instead of his face, who was interested in the mysterious, the one who

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23 By Abraxus, in Evola: 266.
24 Yeats 1962a: 351.
27 Moore: 271.
tempted Yeats to enter another world. These two characters\textsuperscript{28} had begun to feature separately in the works of Yeats since the 1890s: Robartes was the leader of the order of the Alchemical Rose in *Rosa Alchemica* (1897), “the romantic all-out occultist”\textsuperscript{29}, claimed Virginia Moore; he also appeared in the poem *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). Aherne on the other hand, “a more conventional man, apprehensive of occult experiences”\textsuperscript{30} appeared in the essay entitled *The Tables of the Law* (1896). Aherne was more shadowy than Robartes and he appeared as a man of meditation, always in doubt between acting and dreaming—“half monk, half soldier of fortune [...] must needs turn action into dreaming and dreaming into action: and for such there is no order, no finality, no contentment in this world”.\textsuperscript{31} Robartes, on the contrary, was a man of action, addicted to ceremonialism.

These two opposite and distinctive voices were resurrected by Yeats in *A Vision*. The use of voices and characters he had already established demonstrated continuity in his thought. The voices were also converted into *personae*, into aspects of his character and of his imagination; in *The Wing Among the Reeds* Yeats had already explained this attitude, affirming that he used them as “principles of the mind”. Yeats had originally intended *A Vision* as an exposition of the System through the dialogues of Robartes and Aherne: he initially thought that he had found in them a vehicle to convey the System. They were treated as central figures of his phantasmagoria, whose function consisted in leading him to the discovery of ancient philosophy. Richard Ellmann explains that:

\[\ldots\] he determined to present it [*A Vision*] to the public as if it were a secret, and his fertile imagination began to tailor a myth to cover ‘those bare symbolic bones’, themselves a myth. For this purpose he brought back to life Michael Robartes; the story he evolved was that Robartes, while travelling in the Middle East, had unexpectedly found in the religious belief of an Arab tribe called the Judwalis an explanation of diagrams which he had long before seen in a Latin work of Giraldus Cambrensis. Fascinated by his discovery, Robartes spent twenty years among the Judwalis learning their system and then returned to England to ask his friend Owen Aherne to edit his papers and publish them.\textsuperscript{32}

However, very soon Yeats faced the difficulty of a prose book and was forced to abandon the idea. Nonetheless, the two characters were

\textsuperscript{28} See Mills Harper.
\textsuperscript{29} Moore: 180.
\textsuperscript{30} Moore: 180.
\textsuperscript{31} See Yeats: 1981.
\textsuperscript{32} Ellmann 1987: 237.
fundamental for the development of the System in *A Vision*. Robartes and Aherne dramatised Yeats’ position with respect to the System: on the one hand Robartes represented the articulation of the system; on the other hand, Aherne embodied its disarticulation. Articulation and disarticulation can be seen as constructive and destructive forces which govern Yeats’ System. The one could not exist without the participation of the other: this is why Aherne and Robartes deserve to be identified not just as Yeats’ dualistic identity, but as his realisation of the existence of a dual process through which the drama of life is eternally re-enacted (the symbol of the gyre is one of the most sublime representations of this concept) and through which the system acquires shape.

Similar cases of opposite personalities are found in other thinkers of Yeats’ age: very symbolic is the case of the Swiss psychoanalyst C. G. Jung (1875-1961), who claimed to possess two personalities, an introverted and extroverted one. In the 1921 edition of *Psychological Types* he identified them as No. 1 and No. 2, comparable to Aherne and Robartes respectively. Both Yeats’ and Jung’s split of personalities was epitomised by Nietzsche’s definition of the Apollonian and Dionysian concepts in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872): we could interpret Yeats’ personality as a combination of the Apollonian Aherne and the Dionysiac Robartes.

**Daimonic symbols**

Although influenced by other thinkers, Yeats maintained a certain level of independence. For instance, he preferred to define his opposite personalities as *alter egos*, and every time that he needed to think about them in symbolic terms he opted for the much more Yeatsian concepts of the *face* and the *mask*. The mask, in particular, was one of his favourite and most recurrent symbols, which indicated the difference between “what he was and what he wanted to be, between what he was and what others thought him to be”. The mask was the symbol of the opposing self, which Yeats interpreted as that part of him which looked at himself as if he were someone else, as if he were detached from experience as an actor on the stage. It represented an artifice which Yeats used to confront himself not as a man but as an artist. Richard Ellmann claimed that he “believed that the best of him was in his work rather than in his life”.

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33 See Jung 1963.
34 Ellmann 1968: 93.
I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a re-birth as something not one’s self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed; in playing a game like that of a child where one loses the infinite pain of self-realisation, in a grotesque or solemn painted face put on that one may hide from the terror of judgment. [...] If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask.36

Yeats identified the mask as his “second self”: it allowed him to build up his own world, expressing it in symbolic terms and assuming that it was more real than the actual face of the world. Yeats’ masking was an attempt to make life converge into a meaningful symbolism which allowed him to say things “to which he only had the key”:

In the second part of _Oisin_ under disguise of symbolism I have said several things to which I only have the key. The romance is for my readers. They must not even know there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out. If they did, it would spoil the art, yet the whole poem is full of symbols—if it be full of aught but clouds.37

I argue that for Yeats the mask had a meaningful function: he put on the mask in order to face a reality which was more symbolic than the real one. The great mystics that he chose as intellectual guides, for instance, saw symbols in everything and “with the same general purpose he sought out those who could manipulate external nature by magic as the poet manipulated it by symbols”.38 Above all, the mask embodied the symbol of polarity _par excellence_; it showed an inner side and an outer one, an objective and subjective one, thus representing the division between his self and the world, his self and an antithetical, second self. The mask gave him the possibility of standing both inside and outside himself, “subjectively seeing himself objectively”,39 as Virginia Moore put it.

The symbol of the mask occupied Yeats greatly during the first decade of the twentieth century. Afterwards, he started replacing “mask” and “face” with two other symbols: self and anti-self. This was not just a terminological shift: it also denoted a clear movement inward, towards a more spiritual perspective. This change corresponded to the development

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37 Ellmann 1987:53.
38 Ellmann 1987: 57.
39 Moore: 188.
of an improved state of awareness in Yeats: he had indeed understood that
the mask was an “emotional antithesis to all that comes out of [men’s] internal nature.”40 The struggle with the mask could take place only inside, and the concepts of self and anti-self could be better used to describe the perpetual antithetical game of life, preferably developed from an inner perspective. The symbol of the mask was thus converted to the symbol of the self, and poetry could become its direct expression only if “the self expressed by the poet was the most perfect distillation of himself that he could command”.41

The anti-self was the spiritual opposite of the self, which Yeats identified with the term daimon. The nature of the daimon being shape-shifting, Yeats’ conception of it was quite protean. During the second decade of the twentieth century, for instance, Yeats depicted the daimon as a tutelary spirit opposed to the self. That tutelary spirit was sometimes the embodiment of a discarnate human being, whose existence Yeats could not doubt since he had the possibility of experiencing the presence of one of them at close quarters. He claimed that he was accompanied by a tutelary spirit which had a precise name and identity, Leo Africanus the geographer and traveller. In those years, Yeats was still almost entirely reasoning in terms of antinomies: the daimon was the antagonist of the individual (the anti-self) and because of this he depicted it as a powerful being external and opposite to the individual. R. F. Foster explains that the first encounter between Leo and Yeats took place on the ninth of May 1912,42 when he attended a séance with the medium Etta Wriedt at W. T. Stead’s psychic centre at Wimbledon. On that occasion, Leo introduced himself as Yeats’ “appointed guide”.43 Foster provides the following information: “From other hints (“you will find me in the encyclopaedia”) his identity was pieced together as “Leo Africanus” (more properly Al Hassan Ibn-Mohammed al-Wezar Al-Fasi), a Spanish Arab explorer, historian and poet from the sixteenth century whose image would provide WBY with an imaginary alter ego for years.”44 That was not the first time that Leo established contact with Yeats: it also happened some years before, on the third of May 1909, when someone called Leo materialised during one of his séances hinting at an “African name”.45 However, on that

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40 Yeats 1961b: 234.
41 Ellmann 1968: 129.
42 Note the discrepancy regarding the dates: according to Virginia Moore the event took place on 10 April 1910 (Moore: 225).
43 Foster: 464, 465.
44 Foster: 465.
45 Foster: 465.
fateful ninth of May 1912, Yeats did not know what to think of Leo or how to interpret his presence: was the spirit a symbolic being (linked, for instance, with the constellation of Leo or the sun) or a well-attested figure? Was he an image or a phantom? It is only from 1915 that Leo was “adopted”\textsuperscript{46} by Yeats, accepted into his life as his \textit{alter ego}, a spirit which he defined in his notebook as follows:

I have the sensation of beings of independent existence, & of much practical wisdom who draw constantly on modern editions of the Classics (I hope yet to know what editions) & on modern ideas & use them in the service of their own independent thought. I get the presence of living, independent minds gathering together a language of thought and symbol out of the books and thoughts of those in association with the medium & the medium herself, & drawing about them earth bound spirits who follow certain obscure tracks of affinity.\textsuperscript{47}

“Earth bound spirits who follow certain obscure tracks of affinity”: Yeats did not seem to have doubts about the existence of independent spirits or daimons who guided men. Foster argues that Yeats “invented a personality for [Leo] which would, by contraries, define his own”.\textsuperscript{48} Therefore, Yeats regarded Leo Africanus not just as an external spirit, but as a second personality who interfered with his life in a game of opposites. Yeats believed in Leo as a daimonic entity, with whom he was able to establish a psychical identity whose opposite qualities could complete his own personality. In the light of this, Leo Africanus, as a daimon, was the embodiment of the anti-self.

At Leo’s request, an exchange of letters started between them: Yeats wrote questions to Leo and Leo replied through the medium’s voice or through Yeats’ hand. Richard Ellmann argued that these letters between Yeats and Leo, never published,\textsuperscript{49} “show how warmly he welcomed this new theory that his opposite, instead of being solely a mask, a conscious

\textsuperscript{46} Foster: 466.
\textsuperscript{47} Foster: 489.
\textsuperscript{48} Foster: 466.
\textsuperscript{49} In Ellmann we can read excerpts of letters exchanged between Yeats and Leo Africanus: “I know all or all but all you know, we have been over the same books—I have shared in your joys and sorrows & yet it is only because I am your opposite, your antithesis because I am all things furthest from your intellect & your will, that I alone am your Interlocutor. What was Christ himself but the interlocutor of the pagan world, which had long murmured in his ear, at moments of self abasement & death, & thereby summoned?” (Ellmann 1987: 200).
product of his own mind with slight independence of its creator, might be a spirit or daimon with a full personality of his own”.

The relationship between Yeats and his daimon can be compared to a more famous one between Socrates and his daimonion. Socrates had a daimon whose role was merely to assist him in making a rational decision. It did not enter into rational discourse with him, he just said “no” when he wanted to warn Socrates that he was about to do something that would have displeased the gods. In the Phaedrus, Socrates claimed: “[...] the spirit and the sign that usually come to me came—it always holds me back from something I am about to do—and I thought I heard a voice from it which forbade me going away before clearing my conscience, as if I had committed some sin against deity”. In Autobiographies, when Yeats recalled his memories of the past, he said that he used to think that the voices that he could hear were dictated by his conscience, which addressed him on what was good and right. This was certainly connected with the influence of his grandfather William Pollexfen, who tried to instigate a religious morality in him from early youth. The way Yeats described this voice of conscience is particularly meaningful: “From that day the voice has come to me at moments of crisis, but now it is a voice in my head that is sudden and startling. It does not tell me what to do, but often reproves me. It will say perhaps, “That is unjust” of some thought; and once when I complained that a prayer had not been heard, it said, “You have been helped””.

However from 1930, Yeats started thinking that the daimon was not an external being, but man’s higher self, which lived in a transcendent reality which he called the Ghostly Self. This way of conceiving the daimon represented a radical change from his previous conceptions, for the daimon was no more an external being or an opponent of the self, but an inner presence. Actually, Yeats did not limit himself to believing that it was internal, for the highest part of the being was paradoxically perceived as both internal and external. This change of attitude is particularly evident in the revision of A Vision, published in 1937, where it appears as an entity in unison with the Ghostly Self or man’s transcendental self. In the first version of the work the daimon was disjoined from the Ghostly Self, which Yeats used to address as the “permanent self”.

50 Ellmann 1987: 199.
51 One of the best sources of information about Socrates’ daimonion can be found in Plato’s Apology 31c-32a (Plato: 115).
52 Plato: 242c, 459.
54 Yeats 1937: 221.
The redefinition of the daimon was immensely important for Yeats because it implicitly represented a swerve of the whole System: it meant that the System was no more provoked by external invisible forces, but by spirits or daimons which resided within the individual. Self and daimon, once reconciled into the same body, generated that unity of being towards which Yeats had always been driven.

**Daimonic imagination**

In *Alone with the Alone, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn `Arabi*, Henry Corbin argues: “But a warning is necessary at the very outset: this *Imaginatio* must not be confused with fantasy. As Paracelsus already observed, fantasy, unlike Imagination, is an exercise of thought without foundation in nature, it is the ‘madman’s cornerstone.’”

Corbin’s concept of Imagination plays a fundamental role in the development of his spirituality. He believed that imagination was the primary means to engage with the divine and with its theophanic manifestations. Imagination, with its power to authenticate the visions of prophets and mystics, and to reveal the truth, was an “organ which allow[ed] [Corbin] to see and perceive a world which [was] simultaneously concrete and supra-sensible”. He addressed as *imaginal* everything which derived from imagination, warning that it should not be confused with fantasy or the merely *imaginary*. In a paper entitled *Mundus Imaginalis or The Imaginary and The Imaginal* he claimed indeed that imaginary was a misleading word, associated with everything which was unreal or utopian.

Probably influenced by Heidegger’s phenomenology, Corbin identified Western man as someone who had created a neat separation between thought and being. He believed that the merely “imaginary” was something which is located “outside the framework of being and existing”, like a place which could not be localised because it had no actual place. However, imagination, which he described as the incarnation of thought in image and presence of the image in being, acted as a powerful intermediary between the intelligible and the sensible world, the *mundus imaginalis*:

> Between them [being and thought] there is a world which is both intermediary and intermediate, described by our authors as the *‘alam al-

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55 Corbin 1997: 179.
56 Corbin 1993: 70, 71.
57 Corbin 1972: 1.
58 Corbin 1972: 2.
The Daimonic in W. B. Yeats

mitahal, the world of the image, the mundus imaginalis: a world that is ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect. This world requires its own faculty of perception, namely, imaginative power, a faculty with a cognitive function, a noetic value which is as real as that of sense perception or intellectual intuition.59

Corbin’s mundus imaginalis was also called mundus archetypus, a concrete spiritual world of archetypal figures,60 apparitional forms and angels, an epiphanic space where the images of the archetypal world lie suspended—Corbin used the expression “images in suspension”.61 Visionary apperception of reality, and therefore true theophanic vision, was granted by a spiritual faculty called active imagination, an intermediate power which could produce symbols (archetypal figures could be intended as symbols too).

I am deeply inclined to believe that, like Corbin, Yeats intended imagination to be a fully real faculty of perception. Far from being only an artistic or poetic function, Yeats charged it with spiritual meaning. It could be inferred that it was for him an organ of theophanic perception which had the power to “transmute sensory data into symbols and external events into symbolic histories”.62 A secret pamphlet that he wrote for the Golden Dawn (privately printed in London in 1902) maintained that “The central principle of all the Magic of power is that everything we formulate in the imagination, if we formulate it strongly enough, realises itself in the circumstances of life, acting either through our own souls, or through the spirits of nature.”63

Yeats contemplated the image as an inner process, and never ceased to find an esoteric meaning in it. For him, it was like entering a different world and being initiated into the contemplation of a System. For both Corbin and Yeats, symbols manifested themselves in a plane of reality and consciousness different from the sensible world. Symbols and images had to be deciphered and experienced as Urphänomena, primary phenomena which had the property of the imaginal. Yeats was able to let his imagination fuse with the anima mundi, a full storehouse of images, all available to him. Imagination allowed him to “see” all those images and to use their power to experience the intense awareness and recognition of a state of emotions symbolised in an imagined pattern. Symbols and symbolic thoughts were transferred from the anima mundi and treated like

59 Corbin 1972:5.
60 Corbin 1972:6.
61 Corbin 1993: 214.
63 Ellmann 1987: 94.
Platonic Ideal Forms. It appears that *anima mundi* and *mundus imaginalis* are both worlds of “forms and images in suspension” which contain the variety of the world of the senses and the intelligibility of the experience—a real initiation to vision brought forward by imaginative awareness. Both Corbin and Yeats intended “vision” as a theophanic manifestation, which the active Imagination converted to a concrete figure: for Yeats it was a daimon, for Corbin it was the Angel.

**Conclusion**

When Goethe was twenty-three he told a friend that he could not express himself literally, but always did so figuratively. Yeats’ attitude was very similar: he went beyond the poetic and the literal in order to merge with the symbolic and figurative. He managed to achieve it by returning to mythical language, and developing a System of symbols whose comprehension comprised a revelation of truth and knowledge for him. The daimon was the archetypal image which emerged from the *anima mundi*, a theophanic manifestation which emerged from a world mediating between the sensible and the intelligible. It embodied the whole idea of the symbol, and represented Yeats’ attempt to unify and systematise the world.

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64 Ellmann 1987: 56.
Both literature and dreams have long been suspected of having connections with daimonic influence. When we ask what is the force behind the writing of a literary text, or who indeed talks to us in our dreams, the answer is often uncanny intelligence. Especially interesting are those situations when literature and dreams meet in the same space; when dreams are described in literary texts or when they are an inspiration for the author. For understanding such situations it is very useful to call on the thoughts of Carl Gustav Jung—but only if they are treated in a different, unorthodox manner. This way of applying Jungian thought to the understanding of the daimonic nature of literature and dreams will be investigated in this chapter.

However, while this paper is mainly about Jung, I will begin with T. S. Eliot. In one of the notes to *The Waste Land*, the poet writes: “The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton’s): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted”. This explorer’s account inspired Eliot to write one of his best-known stanzas:

> Who is the third who walks always beside you?
> When I count, there are only you and I together
> But when I look ahead up the white road
> There is always another one walking beside you
Gilding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?\(^1\)

The daimonic sensation of the presence of a “third one” has here been transferred from the realm of the anecdotal to the dimension of personal experience. In the process of looking for the “anxieties of influence”, Harold Bloom recognised Walt Whitman in Eliot’s daimon and claimed that

Eliot’s “third who always walks beside you”, the risen Christ according to The Waste Land’s notes, is either Whitman’s “thought of death” or “knowledge of death”, or both fused together. The Waste Land […] begins to seem more an elegy for the poet’s own genius, rather than a lament for Western civilization.\(^2\)

Moreover, according to Bloom, “The Waste Land […] reflects Eliot’s personal breakdown in 1921, a reaction to the strain of his first marriage”.\(^3\) Without venturing into biographical details, one can assume that in this case literature, as it often does, served as a medium for the writer’s internal thoughts. Fantasising about Shackleton’s story and “reworking” it into the literary form of his poem, Eliot was trying to tame his own daimon.

It appears that this particular “daimonic” stanza of Eliot’s perfectly fits in with what Georges Poulet called the “point of departure”. “When studying texts of the authors I’m interested in”, Poulet wrote, “I am trying to discover especially the way in which the one who reveals himself in them specifies his point of departure in a flash of self-awareness, thus formulating his cogito”\(^4\). It is the search for such places—places where the cogito of the writer is formulated—that I consider to be a particularly compelling and useful practice, especially given our irrevocably lost faith in the stability and tangibility of the subject. I usually find Pouletian “points of departure” where a literary text permeates the fabric of a dream (this is not the case with Eliot’s text, though there, too, the daimon has a clearly oneiric character). The literary accounts of dreams, even if the dreams described are not “authentic”, offer an insight into the way in which the subject comes to terms with him/herself. In such circumstances the element of self-discovery is usually inseparably entwined with the

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1 Eliot: lines 360-366.
2 Bloom: 373.
3 Bloom: 373.
4 Poulet 1990: 27. See also Poulet 1964.
element of self-creation, so that the two cannot be distinguished or disconnected from each other.

At this point we refer to Jung and ask the question: who (or what) is the author of a dream? Before I do that, however, I would like to demonstrate in what sense a literary description of a dream may serve as a “point of departure” for the constituting subject. I will use the example of a Polish writer, Witold Gombrowicz. In the opening scene of his first novel, *Ferdydurke*, published just before the war, the thirty year-old protagonist gives an account of his dream of a doppelganger:

The dream took me back to my youth […] and I saw myself as I was at fifteen or sixteen, standing on a rock near a mill by a river, my face to the wind, and I heard myself saying something, I heard my long-buried, roosterlike squeaky little voice, I saw my features that were not yet fully formed, my nose that was too small, my hands that were too large—I felt the unpleasant texture of intermediate, passing phase of development. I woke up laughing and terrified both, because I thought that the thirty year-old man I am today was aping and ridiculing the callow juvenile I once was, while he in turn was aping me and, by the same token, each of us was aping himself. […] Further: as I lay awake but still half dreaming, I felt that my body was not homogenous, that some parts were still those of a boy, and that my head was laughing at my leg and ridiculing it, that my leg was laughing at my head, that my finger was poking fun at my heart, my heart of my brain, that my nose was thumbing itself at my eye, my eye chuckling and bellowing at my nose—and all my parts were wildly raping each other in an all-encompassing and piercing state of pan-mockery. Nor did my fear lessen on iota when I reached full consciousness and began reflecting on my life.5

The process of the “formulation of the *cogito*” taking place in this dream turns out to result from a clash of various forces. Firstly, we can distinguish a tension between the “I” of the present time and the “I” from the past. Neither of them is the final, true or superior “I”. The subject of the dream seems to be suspended between them—not as a compromise reached once and for all, but rather as a phenomenon in constant movement, in a never-ending practice of mutual parodies and mirror reflections. Secondly, we are struck by the playful squabbles of particular body parts. In the light of psychoanalysis and depth psychology, these may be understood as symbols of antagonised aspects of the psyche, denoting that the subject emerging from the dream is far from any kind of stability. Thirdly, what seems highly significant is the relations between the dreamer and the dream-teller. As is well known to literary critics with

5 Gombrowicz: 2.
methodological orientations, the story-teller is never the same as the one about whom the story is being told, even if he seems to be speaking about himself. Similarly all psychotherapists are familiar with the idea that the dreamer is not the same as the person he dreams about, even though the former usually recognises himself in the latter. Thus, in literary descriptions of dreams the whole situation is extremely complex and interesting: some “I” talks about some other “I”, which dreams about a yet another “I”—even though to an untrained eye it might look as if there was just one person involved. And this is where the Eliotian “third one” comes into play. When I dream—one could say, after Eliot—there are only you and I together, but when I wake up, there is always another one. In Gombrowicz’s novel, the “third one,” telling about the oneiric experience, marks his detachment from the dream by means of a humorous narration. The atmosphere of pan-mockery, underlaid with both laughter and fear, becomes the domain of a subjectivity in constant movement—ungraspable, non-definable, specifying itself paradoxically though its non-specificity. Such a vision of the subject—characteristic of all Gombrowicz’s later works and also typical of the images prevalent in our contemporary “identity discourse”—has emerged, let us emphasise this, in the situation of dream recounting.

And now it is really high time to evoke Jung, for it was he who most eagerly inquired after the nature of the dreaming subject. But first please allow me one last brief remark. As we know, Gaston Bachelard used to call dream a “black hole”, claiming that there is no point searching for any subject in it. Medard Boss, on the other hand, argued that the subject of a dream is wholly identical with the subject of waking-life activities. (Today, this view is advocated by cognitivists, though for totally different reasons). Juxtaposed with such extremes, Jungian thought inspires much more tempting and sophisticated speculations.

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Jung deliberated on the possible source of his childhood dreams: “Who was it speaking in me? Whose mind had devised them? What kind of superior intelligence was at work? […] Who talked of problems far beyond my knowledge? Who brought the Above and Below together, and laid the foundation for everything that was to fill the second half of my life with stormiest passion?” He offered an answer: “Who but that alien guest who came both from above and from below?” Most likely, Jung was convinced of the existence of that “alien guest” from the very beginning of his scientific activity, though he gave it

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6 See Bachelard: 88-90.
7 See Boss: 67-73.
8 Jaffé: 14-15.
different names and offered different explanations of its functioning. In 1929, still feeling a strong need to radically distance himself from Freud, he told his seminar students: “Freud’s idea is that the dream is rational. I say that it is irrational, that it just happens. A dream walks in like an animal. I may be sitting in the woods and a deer appears.”

Jung liked to return to animal imagery especially in his later seminars on children’s dreams. In 1938, he explained:

A persecutory dream always means: this wants to come to me. When you dream of a savage bull, or a lion, or a wolf pursuing you, this means: it wants to come to you. You would like to split it off, you experience it as something alien—but it just becomes all the more dangerous. The urge of what had been split off to unite with you becomes all the stronger. The best stance would be: ‘Please, come and devour me!’

Another seminar from the same series features the image of a third person in a conversation: “You always have to imagine a dream as like a conversation you overhear on the radio or the phone. Somebody says something, you hear a sentence of conversation, then the conversation breaks off again, and now you should reconstruct what had been said. […] It is always a ‘listening in’.”

Jung was very deeply convinced of the autonomy of the unconscious. He used to point to that fact time and again, and illustrated it with numerous examples. It is no wonder, then, that he also treated dreams as autonomous. “This is the secret of dreams”; he told his seminar students, “that we do not dream, but rather we are dreamt. We are the object of the dream, not its maker.”

When we begin to think, however, what exactly follows from the autonomy of dream, a problem arises. What was Jung’s idea of that “alien guest” appearing in dreams? After all, a lion or a wolf, to which we can say “devour me”, are quite different from the third person who suddenly breaks in during a telephone conversation. Is the “guest” a blind and instinctive force then, or rather an intelligent and self-aware one? Does it have any intentions towards the dreamer, or is it so highly autonomous that it does not mind the dreamer at all?

It seems that Jung gave contradictory answers to these and similar questions. In one of the seminars, he claimed: “We must not think that dreams necessarily have a benevolent intention”, while less than a month after, he said: “We must not think that dreams necessarily have a benevolent intention”.

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9 McGuire: 94.
10 Jung & Meyer-Grass: 19.
11 Jung & Meyer-Grass: 359.
12 Jung & Meyer-Grass: 159.
13 Jung & Meyer-Grass: 159.
later he was proving that a girl’s dream which he was analysing “counters [her] threat”.¹⁴ In his own dreams he even found a warning “tactic”.¹⁵ A dream is not always a mere thoughtless deer.

I am not interested in highlighting Jung’s inconsistencies, for he was a visionary thinker who had been developing his ideas over the span of many years and in many different fields. Rather, I am concerned with the antinomy and ambiguity of Jung’s philosophy—features of which he was, after all, well aware. In the case of dreams, the antinomy manifests itself especially in the question of the extent to which they are autonomous, arising independently from the dreamer. Jung saw the author of a dream in a number of different ways: in the content of the individual unconscious, in the compensatory activity of the inferior function, in a personified autonomous complex, or in the collective sphere of an archetype. As we know, he used “non-scientific” terms, speaking of fate as a causal factor of a dream, and of course referring also to daimonic possession. Thus, there was a wide spectrum of possibilities: a dream might be shown to be autonomous from the conscious “I”, from the individual dimension of the psyche (in both its conscious and unconscious aspects), but also, looking from a different perspective, detached from the human perception of time, given that “the unconscious always remains beside the passing of time and perceives things that do not yet exist”.¹⁶

A good illustration of the antinomy of the Jungian psychology of the dream is offered by the following example. In 1929, Jung claimed: “Often people whom I do not know send me their dreams, but without knowledge of the dreamer I can only interpret them theoretically. You have no point de départ for the interpretation”.¹⁷ Nine years later he stated something quite opposite: “Dreams can be sufficiently explained by an exclusively objective method, without personal associations”.¹⁸ Well then—we may ask—does one need associations to interpret dreams or not? Is a dream to some extent related to the dreamer’s individual life, or does it come from realms wholly

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¹⁴ Jung & Meyer-Grass: 206.
¹⁵ “During the entire trip”, he wrote in his African reminiscences, “my dreams stubbornly followed the tactic of ignoring Africa. […] Only once during the entire expedition did I dream of a Negro […]: he had been my barber in Chattanooga, Tennessee! An American Negro. […] I took this dream as a warning from the unconscious; it was saying that the primitive was a danger to me. […] In order to represent a Negro threatening me, my unconscious had invoked a twelve-year-old memory of my Negro barber in America, just in order to avoid any reminder of the present” (Jaffé: 272-273).
¹⁶ Jung & Meyer-Grass: 9.
¹⁷ McGuire: 251.
¹⁸ Jung & Meyer-Grass: 30.
independent of the dreamer? Bearing in mind the whole of Jung’s oeuvre, we will of course easily reach the conclusion that this is a false alternative, as there are simply different kinds of dreams: some related to the individual unconscious, other rooted in the collective unconscious. The latter, which Jung called “great” dreams, do not bring any associations and can be explained only through ethnological amplification; and yet, Jung seems not to have admitted the existence of any exceptions to the rule. Now he said “yes”, now he said “no”. And this is, I believe, the most interesting thing about him: his antinomy never turned into dialectic. It had nothing to do with Hegelian synthesis. The coniunctio oppositorum he so often described took place in the world of his ideas as if beyond the explicit flow of argumentation. It can only be appreciated from a distance, not from within. If we are too short-sighted or too literal in reading Jung, sooner or later he will lead us up the garden path.

At this point it is impossible to escape the fundamental question: how are we to read Jung today? I shall narrow the question to the field of dreams: can the Jungian understanding of dreams prove useful for those who study dreams in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

The architects of the most popular movements in contemporary dream studies treated Jung quite mercilessly. Neurophysiologists, such as Allan Hobson, are obviously not going to deal with things like archetype or numinosum, nor are cognitivists or followers of the quantitative approach. According to G. William Domhoff:

> If there are more similarities than differences between dreaming and waking cognition, then there may be only small changes when alert waking thought turns into dreaming. Therefore, the key issue is not […] the expression of “archetypal symbols” lodged within an inherited “collective unconscious”, as in Jungian theory. […] Nor […] is there any support for Jung’s well-known idea that most dreams […] have a compensatory function. […] Every relevant systematic study suggests that most dream content is continuous with waking thought or personality rather than compensatory.19

Such arguments can be easily refuted by proving that, first of all, Jung did not deny the connections between dream and waking thought, and secondly, that quantitative research does not exclude the absence of such connections in some cases. It is not by contemporary dream studies that Jungian dream theory can be seriously challenged—but rather by contemporary philosophy. Seen from this point of view, Jung committed the deadly sin of essentialism, of faith in universal phenomena, in the

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19 Domhoff 2010.
permanent essence of things, the unchangeability of types and patterns. In the eyes of deconstructivists, or—broadly speaking—postmodernists, Jung must appear to be a tenacious apostle of the metaphysics of “presence”. The Jungian subject—determinedly integrating disassembled fragments of psyche in the process of individuation and trying to reach fullness or wholeness—is a vision placing itself at the very opposite pole to our contemporary discourses, which speak of the subject in terms of a nebula, difference or trace. How are we then to utilise Jung’s achievements without disregarding or exorcising the daimons of postmodern thought such as Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lacan or Rorty?

I cannot, of course, offer an exhaustive answer to this question. What I will insist on is simply the fact that today Jung’s philosophy can be utilised. Or, as neopragmatists have it—it can be used. After all—and I believe we do agree on this—Jung still fascinates and impresses us.

Kelly Bulkeley, one of the most prominent contemporary dream researchers, writes that Jung’s seminars on children’s dreams will not convince those “who question Jung’s assumption about the universality of the archetypes […] but for those who already appreciate and value Jungian dream theory, Children’s Dreams will be a cause for joy”. 20 I am quite sure that Jung’s works can be a cause for joy not only for his admirers but also for doubting souls; and if Jung gives us joy, he must be useful. All we need to do, as Rorty would put it, is include him in our “final vocabulary”. In fact, Jung is actually asking for it; his way of argumentation on many occasions resembles the rhetoric of pragmatism. Let us have a look at one of the passages from Memories, Dreams, Reflections which is central to the question of daimons and dreams:

We know that something unknown, alien, does come our way, just as we know that we do not ourselves make a dream or an inspiration, but that it somehow arises of its own accord. What does happen to us in this manner can be said to emanate from mana, from a daimon, a god, or the unconscious. The first three terms have the great merit of including and evoking the emotional quality of numinosity, whereas the latter—the unconscious—is banal and therefore closer to reality. […] Hence I prefer the term “the unconscious,” knowing that I might equally well speak of “God” or “daimon” if I wished to express myself in mythic language. When I do use such mythic language, I am aware that “mana,” “daimon,” and “God” are synonyms for the unconscious that is to say, we know just as much or just as little about them as about the latter. People only believe they know much more about them and for certain purposes that belief is far more useful and effective than a scientific concept. The great advantage of

20 Bulkeley 2009.
the concepts “daimon” and “God” lies in making possible a much better objectification of the vis-à-vis, namely, a personification of it.21

This excerpt, unlike many earlier texts (especially the accounts of “live” seminars), does not present Jung as someone who intends to ascertain the essence of things; on the contrary, here Jung seems to be inviting us to choose the character of the discourse depending on its usefulness and profitability for our purposes. The profitable conclusion we can draw from the above-quoted passage does not have to take the shape of the dialectic assertion that mana, daimon, God and the unconscious are just different names of the same phenomenon. But neither does it have to be the relativist conclusion, namely that in choosing one of these words, we also choose the reality in which we are going to operate. It would seem much more useful to read Jung’s reflection as the questioning of divisions firmly grounded in the philosophical tradition: subject versus object, inside versus outside, the immanent versus the transcendent (Jung’s remarks on the phenomenon of synchronicity in particular lend themselves to such interpretation). The notion of the collective unconscious which is ours (for we are immersed in it) and yet not belonging to us (for it is “supra-individual”), the notion of participation mystique, the notion of synchronicity—these are Jungian phantasmata of overstepping the binary divisions of traditional philosophy. One could imagine a reading of Jung in which the subject of a dream would appear identical and yet at the same time non-identical with itself. We can assume that the antinomous character of Jung’s thinking, his inconsistencies (whether true or apparent), his weakness for paradoxes, the inexhaustible ingenuity allowing him to place phenomena in and describe them from yet new perspectives—all reflect the desire to invalidate the fundamental question of whether our daimons (in dreams and elsewhere) come from within our psyche or from without.

In this light, the relationship between the dreaming subject and the “alien guests” possessing it would be neither a projection nor personification, nor a paranormal phenomenon. It would be a dynamic interplay of incessantly differentiating and never finally differentiated images of the “I”, none central or privileged, all real and autonomous. Such reading of Jung definitely proves profitable for the interpretation of “points of departure”, as designated by the aforementioned George Poulet,

21 Jaffé: 336-337. Further on in the same chapter, Jung notes: “insofar as the archetypes act upon me, they are real and actual to me, even though I do not know what their real nature is. This applies, of course, not only to the archetypes but to the nature of the psyche in general” (352).
in particular those on the border of literature and dream. Let us return to Gombrowicz’s novel. A man who does not want to grow up and dreams about himself as a boy immediately brings to mind the Jungian archetype of *puer aeternus*. In the literary account of the dream, however, we will not be able to pinpoint anything which would resemble a confrontation with the archetype, in the sense of the dreamer standing face to face with the image of the eternal boy. On the contrary—as we have already noticed, the subject is not confronted with anything at all, but rather constitutes himself thanks to the confrontation with his own images, which are constantly mocking one another. The notion of *puer aeternus* is certainly helpful for understanding the situation of the dreamer, but not if defined as a universal, perennial pattern coming from the depths of the collective unconscious and taking possession of the protagonist. Nor is it of much use if treated as a mere personification of the protagonist’s individual characteristics; it can be helpful only when understood as a phenomenon freed from the alternatives of inside-outside, as a most unstable matrix, existing yet postulated, as an image which reveals and at the same time produces itself. Applied in this way, Jungian thought should prove invaluable for the understanding of both our dreams and literary texts; and perhaps it could even help to tame the Eliotian “third”.

**Bibliography**


CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“NECESSARY MONSTERS”: BORGES’ BOOK OF IMAGINARY BEINGS AND THE ONTOLOGY OF THE DAIMONIC

WILLIAM ROWLANDSON

“For Daimons exist, and will continue to exist” (Patrick Harpur).1

“Imagination was now stimulated to a new, strange mode of perception” (Olaf Stapledon).2

That Borges, an author and poet of such prolific output, should have found the time to research and compile the bestiary of otherworld entities The Book of Imaginary Beings is remarkable. He and fellow researcher Margarita Guerrero trawled the arcane volumes of the Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires, and their selection of around one hundred brief texts and summaries demonstrates not only their tremendous enthusiasm for the project but also a deep knowledge of the subject of “the strange creatures conceived through time and space by the human imagination”.3 They recount episodes from Pliny and Ovid, Sufi poets and the Koran, Icelandic Saga and Anglo-Saxon epic poems, Japanese mythologies and Chinese folklore, Chilean pre-Hispanic legends and tales from the Dakota, Shakespeare and Quevedo, Flaubert and Kafka. It is a rich bestiary.

In the preface, Borges and Guerrero (although the style betrays the dominant voice of Borges) evoke a child gazing with wonder at the wondrous beasts in a zoo, on his first ever visit:

1 Harpur: 276.
2 Stapledon: 5.
A small child is taken to the zoo for the first time. This child may be any one of us or, to put it another way, we have been this child and have forgotten about it. In these grounds—these terrible grounds—the child sees living animals he has never before glimpsed; he sees jaguars, vultures, bison, and—what is still stranger—giraffes. He sees for the first time the bewildering variety of the animal kingdom, and this spectacle, which might alarm or frighten him, he enjoys. He enjoys it so much that going to the zoo is one of the pleasures of childhood, or is thought to be such [...]. It may be stated that all children, by definition, are explorers, and that to discover the camel is in itself no stranger than to discover a mirror or water or a staircase. It can also be stated that the child trusts his parents, who take him to this place full of animals. Besides, his toy tiger and the pictures of tigers in the encyclopedia have somehow taught him to look at the flesh-and-bone tiger without fear. Plato (if he were invited to join in this discussion) would tell us that the child had already seen the tiger in a primal world of archetypes, and that now on seeing the tiger he recognizes it. Schopenhauer (even more wondrously) would tell us that the child looks at the tigers without fear because he is aware that he is the tigers and the tigers are him or, more accurately, that both he and the tigers are but forms of that single essence, the Will.5

The evocation of the child is of key importance in introducing a work of this nature, as when confronted with the daimonic, our conceptual schema are in many ways as underdeveloped as those of the child. Consequently, as Borges identifies, one of the factors that prevents the child from becoming horrified and overwhelmed by the creatures of the “terrible grounds” of the zoo is the presence of his parents, whom he trusts. They, the child would surmise, would not lead him into the realm of monsters in order to watch him being devoured. He is protected by their wisdom and guidance. Now, says Borges, “let us pass now from the zoo of reality to the zoo of mythologies, to the zoo whose denizens are not lions but sphinxes and griffons and centaurs”;6 Such terrible grounds likewise exist, yet many choose not to pass through the gates. Where are the child’s parents in such a location? Who will prevent him being devoured? Throughout the work Borges and Guerrero select texts from a variety of mediaeval bestiaries, such as the tenth-century Exeter Book (Codex Exoniensis), from which they examine the mythical figures of the panther and the whale. They also consult Buddhist, Vedic, Islamic and pre-Colombian texts and codices, the volumes of Swedenborg, Reverend Kirk’s Secret Commonwealth and W. B. Yeats’ The Celtic Twilight. In this respect Imaginary Beings constitutes a continuation of this ancient

tradition of scholarship in which the reader may find guidance whilst contemplating the poorly charted landscape of the imagination. Here, indeed, be dragons. But what is the nature of this guidance if there is no stable taxonomy of such outlandish creatures, no consensual system of identification and classification, no concrete details? Through what philosophical or metaphysical light does Borges present these beings?

Borges insisted that he was neither philosopher nor theorist, but merely a man of letters. As such, only in rare moments do we find in his writings clear theoretical analysis of philosophical, theological, metaphysical or even political concerns; indeed in my book *Borges, Swedenborg and Mysticism* (2013), I piece together from the depth and breadth of his work a general theory of mysticism, and I detect a strong influence of William James. Likewise, whilst one finds many references to daimonic, otherworld, or “imaginary” beings in his work—from his early essay “A History of Angels” (1926) to his dream communication with the deceased in *Atlas* (1984)—one finds scant analytical scrutiny of such matters. Nevertheless, as with his perspectives on mystics and mysticism, one may detect from a close reading of his many works a mind deeply fascinated with and even touched by conscious entities beyond the limitations of material reality. But how did Borges approach and conceptualise such daimonic entities encountered either in the many hundreds of texts with which he was familiar, in his own fiction, in his dreams and in his imagination? He presents the child in the preface of *Imaginary Beings* as being as bewildered by the oddity of animals of the zoo as by the creatures

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7 “I am a man of letters who turns his own perplexities and that respected system of perplexities we call philosophy into the forms of literature” (Alazraki: 31). “I’m not really a thinker. I’m a literature and I have done my best to use the literary possibilities of philosophy” (Burgin 1998: 8). “I am neither philosopher nor metaphysician. What I have done is exploit, or explore—a more noble word—the literary possibilities of philosophy. […] I have no theory of the world. In general, seeing that I have used diverse metaphysical and theological systems for literary objectives, readers have believed that I have professed those systems, when really all that I have done has been employ them for those ends, nothing more. Furthermore, if I had to define myself, it would be agnostic; that’s to say, someone who does not believe that knowledge is possible” (Vázquez: 107, my translation). “I have no personal system of philosophy. I never attempt to do that. I am merely a man of letters. In the same way, for example that—well, of course, I shouldn’t perhaps choose this as an example—in the same way that Dante used theology for the purpose of poetry, or Milton used theology for the purposes of his poetry, why shouldn’t I use philosophy, especially idealistic philosophy—philosophy to which I was attracted—for the purposes of writing a tale, of writing a story? I suppose that is allowable, no?” (Dutton: 339).
of the imagination. The child, consequently, lacks the robust powers of
discernment between creatures of the flesh and creatures of fantasy,
between “reality” and “imagination”, between what is “real” and what is
“fictional”. And yet, can such a radical distinction be made? Is there such
a visible delineation? Furthermore, would Borges himself present such a
distinction? I have already attempted to address this question in an article
concerning his insistence that Swedenborg’s accounts of otherworld
journeys and his communication with angels, demons and the dead were
“authentic”, and that Swedenborg was consequently a true mystic, whilst
Dante’s visions were willed, rather than spontaneous, and were crafted for
the purpose of his poetic cycle.8 Dante, consequently, was not a mystic. I
argue that this perspective is highly problematic, not least for a poet like
Borges, who repeatedly argued that fictional and poetic experiences are as
real as “real” experiences, and that “real” experiences are in fact poetic
and fictional:

I think of reading a book as no less an experience than traveling or falling
in love. I think that reading Berkeley or Shaw or Emerson, those are quite
as real experiences to me as seeing London, for example. Of course, I saw
London through Dickens and through Chesterton and through Stevenson,
no? Many people are apt to think of real life on the one side, that means
toothache, headache, traveling and so on, and then you have on the other
side, you have imaginary life and fancy and that means the arts. But I don’t
think that that distinction holds water. I think that everything is a part of
life.9

It is also problematic as such a distinction divides visionary experience
into willed or unwilled, bidden or unbidden, illusory or genuine. Such
divisions present enormous challenges when appraised in light of the
heterogeneous scholarship of mysticism (such as William Inge, William
James, Evelyn Underhill, W. T. Stace, R. C. Zaehner, and Frits Staal), as
one recurrent feature of the scholarship is the recognition that such
categorical distinctions are inappropriate to a study of the rich, complex
and contradictory traditions of mysticism. Furthermore, in Borges’ curious
appraisal of Swedenborg and Dante, one must deduce that the daimonic
forms encountered by Swedenborg exist in some undetermined ontological
status, independent, as it were, of the subjective will of Swedenborg,
whilst those encountered by the poet Dante are creations of his poetic
fancy. Again, as I argue in the article, this is a remarkably problematic
basis upon which to construct a hermeneutic of mystical texts.

8 See Rowlandson 2011.
Yet Borges was a mercurial character who, throughout his writing career, displayed a tension between a radical and deep-rooted scepticism and a fascination with and deep respect for religious, spiritual and mystical aspects of human experience. This respect, however, when married with his inveterate iconoclasm, mistrust of doctrine, and admiration of heresy, I would argue, made him defensive of being taken for credulous. For example, in a lecture on nightmares in *Seven Nights*, Borges criticises British anthropologist, folklorist, and classical scholar Sir James Frazer for being “extremely credulous, as it seems he believed everything reported by the various travellers.”

As his numerous interviews and essays testify, Borges appeared to equate belief—whether religious, philosophical or even political—with a surrender of one’s intellect and faculty of critical enquiry. One senses in Borges that the religious faithful—especially Argentine Catholics—are somehow gullible. When evaluating a peculiar coincidence of dreams associated with Coleridge’s poem *Kubla Khan*, for example, Borges displays a defensive position: “Those who automatically reject the supernatural (*I try, always, to belong to this group*) will claim that the story of the two dreams is merely a coincidence, a chance delineation, like the outlines of lions or horses we sometimes see in the clouds.”

This may sound like a straightforward comment, in which Borges maintains that the narrative similarities across time are merely coincidental and inconsequential, yet in the same text Borges rejects his declared materialist position to explore the more poetic, mysterious dimension of this parallel, arguing that his preferred explanation “is that the Emperor’s soul penetrated Coleridge’s, enabling Coleridge to rebuild the destroyed palace in words that would be more lasting than marble and metal.” He would reject *a priori* the supernatural, and yet the explanation of the repeated vision of Kubla Khan he most favours is one of the transmigration of souls. Likewise he rejects this very notion of the transmigration of souls, yet he criticises the Spanish poet Quevedo for denying its possibility, arguing that Quevedo “merely a student of the truth, is invulnerable to that charm.”

We find numerous instances in Borges’ essays and interviews in which he seeks the anomalous aspect of human experience before the strictly rational, and in which he appears to favour the supernatural whilst simultaneously disavowing it. He writes longingly in *Imaginary Beings*, for example, about Stevenson’s accounts of receiving inspiration and fully-formed narratives, such as *Strange Case*
Brownies are helpful little men of a brownish hue, which gives them their name. It is their habit to visit Scottish farms and, while the household sleeps, to perform domestic chores. One of the tales by the Grimms deals with the same subject. Robert Louis Stevenson said he had trained his Brownies in the craft of literature. Brownies visited him in his dreams and told him wondrous tales; for instance the strange transformation of Dr Jekyll into the diabolical Mr Hyde, and that episode of Olalla, in which the scion of an old Spanish family bites his sister’s hand.\textsuperscript{14}

He cites Bede’s description of how Cædmon was first amongst poets, “because he did not learn from men, but from God”, and he adds, “Let us hope he met his angel again”.\textsuperscript{15} He writes in clear terms that he gave great credence to the possibility that nightmares might have a demonic origin, writing in the lecture on nightmares: “there is an idea of demonic origin, the idea of a demon who causes the nightmare. I believe it does not derive simply from a superstition. I believe that there is—and I speak with complete honesty and sincerity—something true in this idea”.\textsuperscript{16} Again we must ask, if he “automatically reject[ed] the supernatural” then how does one reconcile his inclination towards demons and the demonic origin of nightmares?

Likewise, and despite his scepticism, Borges appeared keen to accept the muse-like source of many of his poems and tales, describing receiving poems and plots fully fledged in his reveries. For example, he described how the poem “The White Deer” came to him in its entirety in a dream: “I don’t feel that I wrote that poem […]. I physically dictated the words. The poem was given to me, in a dream, some minutes before dawn. At times dreams are painful and tedious, and I object to their outrage and say, enough, this is only a dream, stop. But this time it was an oral picture that I saw and heard. I simply copied it, exactly as it was given to me.”\textsuperscript{17} He recalled that *El Hacedor [Dreamtigers]* was his favourite book “because it wrote itself.”\textsuperscript{18} He described in other interviews that sonnets appeared to enter his conscious mind from some source beyond consciousness; he discussed dreams and nightmares as being given to him for the purpose of

\textsuperscript{14} Borges 1987: 32.  
\textsuperscript{15} Borges 1964: 16.  
\textsuperscript{16} Borges 1984: 32.  
\textsuperscript{17} Barnstone 2000: 30.  
\textsuperscript{18} Burgin 1969: 125.
making poetry; and he repeatedly suggested the divine or demonic source of dreams and nightmares.

This tension between a strong sense of religiosity and a deep-rooted scepticism should not, in my judgment, be considered awkward or insoluble. I would argue, on the contrary, that it is precisely this tension that creates the intellectual drive to explore the deeper mysteries of human experience without losing the necessary critical faculty to return to daylight and evaluate the experience. It is, in this sense, a tension fully observable in C. G. Jung. Jung underwent a period of psychic crisis in his thirties, yet kept secret the harrowing accounts of his experience with the unconscious entities and the discarnate dead, documenting them in great majesty in the Liber Novus which he never published.¹⁹ He was aware that his experiences constituted a radical discord with the ontological certainties held by himself and the wider public, and he was fully cognisant of the ridicule that he would face amongst friends and peers if he claimed that he conversed with Old Testament prophets and with the dead. Even as late as 1958, his essay on UFOs concentrates almost entirely in evaluating the “psychic cause” and “psychic effect” of the phenomenon, and not the phenomenon itself. Jung was emphatic about the critical distance maintained through scientific objectivity, which permitted him, like Borges, to explore with great enthusiasm all manner of alchemical, gnostic, mystical, hermetic and occult texts without abandoning robust “empiricism”. Whilst Borges may have stressed that his interest lay in “the merely aesthetic”, Jung would argue that his interest was in the psychological aspect of these systems of thought. Yet it becomes apparent through a scrutiny of Jung’s work that he felt torn between his desire to be a scientist and his inclination towards philosophy, theology and metaphysics as maps not only of the human psyche, but of reality itself. That is to say that his concerns were not merely epistemological but also ontological. This is evident in his strident riposte as footnote in his work on UFOs: “It is a common and totally unjustified misunderstanding on the part of scientifically trained people to say that I regard the psychic background as something ‘metaphysical’, while on the other hand the theologians accuse me of ‘psychologizing’ metaphysics. Both are wide of the mark: I am an empiricist, who keeps within the boundaries set for him by the theory of knowledge”.²⁰ There is so much to be elucidated from this, especially given the arbitrary nature of the terms employed, such as “empiricist” and “theory of knowledge”. Jung was obviously pulled between intuition and rationality, and even when he did consider the ontological possibility of

¹⁹ It was eventually published in 2009 as The Red Book.
²⁰ Jung 1958: 328.
the UFO (in the final chapter of his investigation, where he discusses UFOs appearing on radar screens) he concentrated not on the phenomenon itself, but on the psychic response to it and the projection of psychic energy upon it.

In a similar fashion, Borges would argue that his interests lay purely in their aesthetic value, as if that negates any speculation about the actual questions raised in metaphysics, psychology (and parapsychology) and religious and mystical texts. Yet both Borges and Jung were clearly deeply drawn to such liminal and mysterious levels of human experience, and their safety lines in these dark caves were literature and psychology respectively. The publication of The Red Book has inspired a fresh approach to Jung, an approach hinted at since early publications of Von Franz, Jaffé, Hannah, Jacobi and others, but rarely stated outright: that Jung did consider such matters at their ontological level.21 The parallel drawn with Jung here illustrates a perplexing dialogue between polarities present in Borges. I am not assuming that an equivalent Red Book—a secret illuminated manuscript of Borges’ encounters with the dead—will be unearthed and published to corroborate such a position. I would argue that such a discovery is not necessary; the published work of Borges—poems, tales, essay, reviews and interviews—is replete with subtle indications that he, like Jung, was fascinated with and touched by the more

21 Aniela Jaffé’s essay “Was C. G. Jung a mystic?” (1989) focuses from the opening page on the tension between Jung’s mystic sensibilities and his insistence on principles of empiricism, observing that Jung reacted strongly against any claims that he was anything other than a scientific observer. Gary Lachman’s recent Jung the mystic (2010), as the title suggests, testifies to the mystical nature of Jung, and he appraises with sensitivity the double nature present in Jung: “Jung seemed to have two minds about the supernatural: a public one that wanted to understand it ‘scientifically,’ and a private one that acknowledged ghosts, visions, and premonitions as part of the essential mystery of life” (4). Lachman also cites Anthony Storr, who writes in his book Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus that ‘Jung was a guru’ (in Lachman: 6). Jungian analyst Roger Woolger, in his review of Jung’s Red Book (Woolger’s final publication prior to his death in 2011), declared outright that Jung displayed all the characteristics commonly associated with shamans, calling Jung “the Hidden Shaman”: “Now that we have the record of Jung’s struggles to integrate the polarities of scientist-philosopher versus mystic within his soul we can also see how they urged upon him another mantle that he was very reluctant to wear—because so many have been ridiculed and persecuted for wearing it—that of shaman-prophet. […] The evidence of the Red Book and of those who knew him intimately us that Jung was very much a shaman. […] Perhaps Shamdasani shies away from calling Jung a ‘shaman’ because ‘shamanism’ is not politically correct in academic or conservative professional circles in Britain” (2011: 4-5).
anomalous aspects of human experience at a level beyond the “mere aesthetic”.

We return, therefore, to the matter of imaginary beings, and here a personal account may help to frame my question. My reading of mysticism, accounts of daimonic encounters, Jung, Borges and Swedenborg over the past two years has paralleled questions posed by my young daughter on a near-nightly basis. When we read of fairies, goblins, elves, fairy godmothers, monsters, witches, wizards or even children (especially children), she invariably asks me “but are they real?” My response is normally to ask her what she means. “Real like you and me,” she answers; “can we see them? Where are they?” I have on occasions told her that her question is precisely what I have been wrestling with all day when considering Borges’ accounts of Swedenborg’s angels or Terence McKenna’s accounts of “self-transforming machine elves”, but that response leaves her cold. “Well,” I hesitate, “they are real in the book, and they may be real in your dreams.” “Yes, but are they real?” “Well. Yes and no…” “But why have I never seen a fairy? It’s not fair!” Such questions are remarkably hard to answer, as whilst the voice of our education urges us to answer “of course fairies are not real. Don’t be ridiculous. They’re just make-believe!” the voice of experience and intuition (plus the autodidact aspect of our education) encourages us to see that such a categorical distinction is neither possible nor helpful. When Borges, for example, insists on the authenticity of Swedenborg’s heavenly voyages, by implication he assumes a genuine encounter with autonomously existent angels. When he writes in his early essay “A History of Angels” that “We must not be too prodigal with our angels; they are the last divinities we harbor, and they might fly away” does the pathetic quality to the text suggest that for him angels were something more than mere poetic tropes?

Borges paid close attention to the otherworld journeys of Swedenborg, to his communication with angels, demons and the discarnate souls of the dead. However, as indicated earlier, Borges’ division of poets into mystics and non-mystics is problematic as it implies a primacy of unwilled imagination over conscious imaginings: “I wonder if Fray Luis de León had any mystical experience. I should say not. When I talk of mystics, I think of Swedenborg, Angelus Silesius, and the Persians also. Not the Spaniards. I don’t think they had any mystical experiences […] . I think that Saint John of the Cross was following the pattern of the Song of Songs. And that’s that. I suppose he never had any actual

experience". 23 “Pascal is not a mystic; he belongs to those Christians, denounced by Swedenborg, who suppose that heaven is a reward and hell a punishment and who, accustomed to melancholy meditation, do not know how to speak with the angels”. 24 What is visible in these and other comments is that Borges praised Swedenborg as the epitome of the mystic because of his lucid accounts of otherworld realities and his regular communication with angels. Real angels, he would appear to suggest, cannot be consciously imagined for the purpose of a poetic text, however beautiful, such as the Divine Comedy. Angels are encountered unbidden. Such a position is in line with an overall model of mysticism that may be assembled from a reading of Borges’ varied works, in which the mystical vision is necessarily received and not induced, a perspective conforming to the category of mysticism defined by William James as “passive”. 25 Borges repeatedly defended Swedenborg against charges of insanity, arguing that the man was remarkably lucid, that his works were the product of a profoundly intellectual mind, that they were categorically not art or poetry, but the accounts of voyages, charts of the unknown lands of heavens and hells like one of his Viking ancestors exploring the Arctic waters. “Swedenborg,” writes Borges, “is the first explorer of the other world. An explorer we should take seriously”. 26 Elsewhere he declares: “No one was less like a monk than that sanguine Scandinavian who went much farther than Erik the Red”. 27 Swedenborg was thus neither poetically creative nor delusional. Nor, importantly was he talking in riddles, parables or allegories, but was recording his observations directly:

The use of any word whatsoever presupposes a shared experience, for which the word is the symbol. If someone speaks to us about the flavor of coffee, it is because we have already tasted it; if about the color yellow, because we have already seen lemons, gold, wheat, and sunsets. To suggest the ineffable union of man’s soul with the divine being, the Sufis of Islam found themselves obliged to resort to prodigious analogies, to images of roses, intoxication, or carnal love. Swedenborg was able to abstain from this kind of rhetorical artifice because his subject matter was not the ecstasy of a rapt and fainting soul but, rather, the accurate description of regions that, though ultra-terrestrial, were clearly defined. In order for us to imagine, or to begin to imagine, the lowest depth of hell, John Milton

“Necessary Monsters” 213

speaks to us of ‘No light, but rather darkness visible.’ Swedenborg prefers
the rigor—and why not say it?—possible wordiness of the explorer or
geographer who is recording unknown kingdoms.28

A conundrum lies at the heart of Borges’ interpretation of Swedenborg
that is reflected in his wider study of “imaginary beings”. Swedenborg’s
journeys constituted verification of a location on a plane equivalent to the
Greenland of Eric the Red. The angels and demons thus constitute
autonomous entities equivalent to the Inuit. And yet, Borges argues
elsewhere, angels are creatures of the imagination whose existence is
determined precisely through the creative imaginative process. Borges
concludes his “History of Angels”:

Here we arrive at the near miracle that is the true motive for this writing:
what we might call the survival of the angel. The human imagination has
pictured a horde of monsters (tritons, hippocriﬁs, chimeras, sea serpents,
unicorns, devils, dragons, werewolves, cyclopes, fauns, basilisks,
demigods, leviathans, and a legion of others) and all have disappeared,
except angels. Today, what line of poetry would dare allude to the phoenix
or make itself the promenade of a centaur? None; but no poetry, however
modern, is unhappy to be a nest of angels and to shine brightly with
them.29

The poet thus ensures the survival of the angel through creating the poem;
yet Swedenborg was no poet, Borges assures us. Such a curious dichotomy
concerning the ontological status of the angels and other daimonic beings
is present throughout Imaginary Beings, where the first division, as we
have seen, is between the creatures of a zoo and the creatures of the
imagination. In this respect the zebra is radically distinct from the goblin,
and although the child may not readily distinguish them, the process of
education would ensure that the division is made apparent. Of course,
Borges reminds us, beasts can straddle this division and exist both
empirically as members of the animal kingdom that the child visits in the
zoo and also within the imagination. “We believe in the lion as reality and
symbol,” whilst other beasts are purely creatures of myth and fantasy: “we
believe in the Minotaur as symbol but no longer as reality”.30

His second division would appear to be between those beings whose
appearance is subject to the vicissitudes of the moment and who thus leave
little cultural record, and those who have persisted over the centuries in the

29 Borges 2000: 19. It is interesting to note that these “monsters” from Borges’
essay of 1926 all later appear in Imaginary Beings.
human imagination. In this respect, there are creatures born of the moment for the purpose of fulfilling a fictional role—such as H. G. Wells’ *Eloi* and *Morlocks* (who appear as entries in *Imaginary Beings*)—and those whose universality has granted them some archetypal status. “We tend to think,” for example, “that in the Platonic world of ideas there is an archetype of the centaur as there is of the horse or the man”. 31 We would not, he suggests by implication, imagine such an archetype of the Eloi. This is similarly the case with fairies, angels and dragons; they are “necessary monsters”. “We are as ignorant of the meaning of the dragon as we are of the meaning of the universe, but there is something in the dragon’s image that appeals to the human imagination, and so we find the dragon in quite distinct places and times. It is, so to speak, a necessary monster, not an ephemeral or accidental one, such as the three-headed chimera or catoblepas”. 32 The dragon, like the angel in his early essay, requires the ever-renewed investment of creative human imagination in order to maintain its existence. Should this interest fade, so fades the dragon; indeed, he suggests, the persistence of the dragon in our imagination owes, in part, to the fact that it sits uneasily on both sides of the primary division of “real” and “imaginary”: “People believed in the reality of the Dragon. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Dragon is recorded in Conrad Gesture’s *Historia Animalium*, a work of scientific nature”. 33 However—and here Borges’ poetic sensibilities guide his perspective—the repeated appearance of the dragon in fantasy-drenched fairy tales in recent times has impoverished its nature:

> Time has notably worn away the Dragon’s prestige. We believe in the lion as reality and symbol; we believe in the Minotaur as symbol but no longer as reality. The Dragon is perhaps the best known but also the least fortunate of the fantastic animals. It seems childish to us and usually spoils the stories in which it appears. It is worth remembering, however, that we are dealing with a modern prejudice, due perhaps to a surfeit of Dragons in fairy tales.” 34

Belief in the dragon ennobles it. Lack of belief destroys it. But how to define and conceptualise belief? This is a question that brings us back to the prime division of “real” and “imaginary”, external and internal, empirical and fantastical. These are all divisions which for Borges the poet were, as we have seen, notably hard to define.

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A third division of the imaginary beasts may be perceived. Borges writes of the centaur and recounts how “the cavalry of the conquistadors were Centaurs to the Indians” (and he cites Prescott’s description of the fear that the indigenous people experienced upon seeing this man-beast split into two and both parts continuing to live). He concludes with the statement that: “the Greeks, unlike the Indians, were familiar with the horse; it is more likely that the Centaur was a deliberate invention and not a confusion born of ignorance”.35 Borges thus makes a distinction between entities “deliberately” invented and those invented through some delusion arising from fear. In this respect the beastie under the bed of the child with nightmares is different from the beastie imagined by an author. As with the other distinctions articulated above, this particular assertion is also problematic, as surely the beastie under the bed that frightens the child may have been encountered in fiction.

It becomes clear from further comments in Imaginary Beings and in his other work that Borges established a firmly psychological understanding of imaginary beings, based in no small measure on his reading of Jung, and that the division outlined above bears no ontological implication about the nature of angels or unicorns. Borges was a close reader of Jung, and refers to his works on many occasions (see Rowlandson 2012). He discusses in Imaginary Beings, for example, Jung’s treatment of the symbol of the unicorn: “The Holy Ghost, Jesus Christ, mercury, and evil have all been represented by the Unicorn. In his Psychologie und Alchemie (1944), Jung gives a history and an analysis of these symbols.”36 He also discusses Jung’s treatment of the symbol of the Uroboros: “Uroboros (Greek for ‘the one that devours its tail’) is the learned name of this creature which became the symbol adopted by alchemists in the Middle Ages. The curious may read further in Jung’s study Psychologie und Alchemie”.37 He also mentions Jung’s reflection on the composition of the dragon: “Jung observes that in the dragon are the reptile and the bird—the elements of earth and air”.38 I feel that it is through an understanding of Borges’ essentially psychological dimension of imaginary beings that we can grapple with his overall treatment of the mystical and the daimonic.

Jung wrote on many occasions about the daimon and the daimons, and some distinction may be made between the singular and the plural. The daimon, for Jung, was the creative force associated with psychic energy or libido. In Memories, Dreams, Reflections he reflects on the creative

37 Borges 1987: 150.
daimon that propelled him ever onward in quest of knowledge, and often
estranged him from people, giving rise to enemies: “The daimon of
creativity has ruthlessly had its way with me.”39 Jung’s writings on
the daimon are not easily translated into an evaluation of elves and goblins, as
for Jung the daimon is a personal unconscious figure whom we must learn
to acknowledge and even befriend in the process of individuation so as to
prevent its powerful force operating upon us unconsciously. As he
describes in MDR, only by identifying this daimonic power and
collaborating with it was Jung able to receive its mighty energy which
propelled him on his quest for knowledge; and yet in his early writing he
recognised this autonomous authority of the unconscious daimon and
acknowledged that the same daimon often threatened to overpower him:
“The daimon throws us down, makes us traitors to our ideals and
cherished convictions—traitors to the selves we thought we were”.40 The
daimon was the name he gave to the singular presence within his psyche
which he felt operated beyond the control of his own ego, and which
influenced his conscious choices unconsciously. In this respect, as he
describes, the daimon may be considered synonymous with the
unconscious:

I prefer the term ‘the unconscious’, knowing that I might equally well
speak of ‘God’ or ‘daimon’ if I wished to express myself in mythic
language. When I do use such mythic language, I am aware that ‘mana,’
‘daimon,’ and ‘God’ are synonyms for the unconscious—that is to say, we
know just as much or just as little about them as about the latter.41

The plural daimons appear in Jung’s analysis less as the archetypal
principle within the psyche such as the “god” or single “daimon”, and
more as un-integrated and untamed aspects of the unconscious that operate
at the dark margins of our ego. In this respect they are conceptually related
to complexes. Referring to the medieval idea of the daimonic, Jung writes
that “demons are nothing other than intruders from the unconscious,
spontaneous irruptions of the unconscious complexes into the continuity of
the conscious process. Complexes are comparable to demons which
fitfully harass our thought and actions; hence in antiquity and the Middle
Ages acute neurotic disturbances were conceived as possession”.42

Whilst, as visible in his essay on UFOs, Jung was ever cautious about
speculating on the material nature of psychoid entities—a speculation that

40 Jung 1956: 357.
might lead to the suggestion that ghosts, apparitions and daimons may be somehow beyond the psyche—nevertheless, as is clear from the complex text of *The Red Book*, he was deeply concerned about the possibility that the dead who visited him were something more than aspects of his unconscious. When in dialogue with Elijah and Salome, Jung declares: “I can hardly reckon you as being part of my soul [...] Therefore I must separate you and Salome from my soul and place you among the daimons. You are connected to what is primordially old and always exists, therefore you also know nothing of the being with men but simply of the past and future.” Such is the autonomous nature of Salome and Elijah that when Jung confronts them and suggests that “You are the symbol of the most extreme contradiction”, Elijah retorts: “We are real and not symbols.” Later, Elijah returns to this matter and explains: “You may call us symbols for the same reason that you can also call your fellow men symbols, if you wish to. But we are just as real as your fellow men. You invalidate nothing and solve nothing by calling us symbols”. Nothing is clear in this most challenging of texts, and one of the most puzzling dilemmas is that which Jung, and by extension the reader, felt when confronted with figures of such overwhelming autonomy; that they appear extrinsic to the psyche of the individual. In this sense, Jung asks whether he dreamt of his dead father or whether his father visited him in his dreams. Stephani Stephens’ close reading of *The Red Book* identifies a curious distinction between figures of the unconscious and the discarnate dead, in that there is no transference of psychic energy between the living and the dead, whilst libido transference occurs through communication with the daimonic figures of the unconscious, such as Philemon. Much may be made of these perplexing matters, but space limits further exploration in this essay.  

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1 Jung 2009: 357. I am indebted to Stephani Stephens’ authoritative doctoral study of *The Red Book* for many of the ideas about figures appearing within or beyond the unconscious in *The Red Book*.  
2 Jung 2009: 246.  
3 Jung 2009: 249.  
4 Jung likewise dreamt of his departed wife Emma and raised the same questions, as did Von Franz when she dreamt of her deceased father. It was clearly a question central to Jung and his associates.  
5 Stephens analyses this knotty question: “The dead are different. As discarnate souls they present themselves to Jung with an autonomy of libido, which presumably is not meant to and never will be released to Jung for integration into his personality. Often, the conversational exchange does not so obviously reveal an oppositional attitude, as with other figures of the unconscious, and although Jung identifies the dead too, as vanishing and disappearing after the conclusion of an exchange, this does not serve as confirmation that they have been integrated into
Without being drawn into these conundrums of energy transference, what is important here is to speculate on the nature of daimonic forms as figures of the unconscious or, in Borges’ terms, “creatures of the imagination”, and to ask whether such definitions are in any way limitations? The question is succinctly framed by Terence McKenna at the start of one of the Trialogues with Rupert Sheldrake and Ralph Abraham entitled “Entities”. McKenna launches into the discussion with three essential possibilities concerning the ontology of daimonic beings: firstly empirical beasts which “are rare, but physical, and [...] have identities somewhere between the coelacanths and Bigfoot. They potentially could be imagined moving from the realm of mythology into the realm of established zoological fact”.48 In this respect, akin to the description of the platypus in the eighteenth century,49 they are preternatural rather than supernatural in the sense that the scientific method of empirical and testable analysis will at some stage solve this particular mystery. Thankfully, McKenna dismisses this first possibility as unsustainable.

The second option that lies before us when we look at the ontological status of these entities is what I would think of as the Jungian position. To demonstrate it, I’ll simply quote Jung on the subject of sprites and elementals. He calls them ‘autonomous fragments of psychic energy that have temporarily escaped from the controlling power of the ego.’50 This is what I would call the mentalist reductionist approach to discarnate entities and intelligences. It says that they are somehow part and parcel of our own minds, their existence dependent upon our conceiving them as objects in our imagination, however pathologically expressed.51

McKenna, though, is dismissive of this possibility on the grounds that that ascribing to the entities a derivation from the human psyche would appear to limit what for him were astonishingly other beings.

The third and obviously most interesting possibility, but the one fraught with argumentative pitfalls, is that these entities are (1) nonphysical and (2) autonomous in their existence in some sense. In other words, they actually carry on an existence independent of their being perceived by human beings. This is the classical position of those who have had the largest

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48 McKenna 2001: 93.
49 Zollschan et al.: v.
50 McKenna was citing Jung from memory, and may have been referring to the citation above from Psychological Types.
51 McKenna 2001: 94.
amount of experience dealing with these entities: the shamans, ecstastics, and so-called sensitive types.\textsuperscript{52}

This is the most radical and challenging position which, as we have seen, was of great concern to Jung. In this respect, there is a link back to McKenna’s first hypothesis, in the sense that were such entities so categorically autonomous then, with the appropriate tools or techniques of observation, science could, indeed, identify and classify them. This matter is consequently fraught with the problems of assessing quite which tools or techniques might be employed. McKenna, true to his philosophy, would assert that the tools available to everyone are psychedelics—especially psilocybin, by which the “logos” entity may be experienced, and DMT, by which the elves may be encountered.\textsuperscript{53} And yet, a synthesis of McKenna’s first and third hypothesis would appear to diminish the role of the second, psychological, hypothesis. Based upon a reading of Borges, Jung and McKenna, the position becomes ever more compelling that daimonic entities are better appraised as a synthesis of McKenna’s second and third postulates. In this respect the entities are not so much created by the imagination as encountered through the imagination, and this encounter is the result of a creative process which gives form and context to a formless daimonic force. In this respect the daimonic beings do operate autonomously and consciously, but the location of encounter is the creative imagination. They are figures of the unconscious insofar as it is through the deeper strata of the unconscious that they may be encountered. The importance of this hypothesis is the emphasis on the imagination as a mode of perception as opposed to a mode of mere fantasy, and as a result the full impact of Borges’ stress on “imaginary beings” is highlighted. The Brownies were as much aspects of Stevenson’s psyche as they were aspects of material reality, as at the deeper levels of the unconscious—in dreams, visions, reveries—the psyche and material reality are interwoven. This is the physis-psyche conjunction that Jung described as the psychoid.\textsuperscript{54}

This hypothesis is at the heart of all that we have discussed above regarding Borges, Jung and McKenna. As McKenna suggests, “these entities are nonphysical”, and yet they are “autonomous in their existence in some sense”. This is a compelling statement when correlated with the

\textsuperscript{52} McKenna 2001: 94.
\textsuperscript{54} “Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irreprehensible, transcendental factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing” (Jung 1974: 5).
encounters with entities reported by experimenters with ayahuasca or pure DMT,\textsuperscript{55} as so many of the trip reports indicate not only the experience of entities, but, importantly, entities of such solidity, intelligence and autonomy that the subject simply cannot accept having been the author of such beings. David Luke writes:

Perhaps one of the most striking, common and unique features of the DMT or ayahuasca experience is the encounter with seemingly sentient discarnate beings, which are often described as being more real than anything previously experienced (Cott & Rock, 2008). Commonly they were described as ‘entities’, ‘beings’, ‘aliens’, ‘guides’ or ‘helpers’, and would appear as something like “clowns, reptiles, mantises, bees, spiders, cacti, and stick figures” (Strassman, 2001: 185), as well as dwarfs, elves, imps, angels, spirits, gods, or just as a presence, the latter four of which were commonly supremely powerful, wise, and loving.\textsuperscript{56}

Is this not the landscape of Borges’ and Guerrero’s \textit{Book of Imaginary Beings}, where monsters and devils share the pages with fairies and angels? What value is there in asserting that Wells invented his aliens whilst Swedenborg encountered his angels? Would it not be a more fruitful suggestion that Wells encountered his “fictional” entities through the creative process just as Swedenborg gave form to the angels through the power of the creative imagination? Henry Corbin’s exploration of the \textit{mundus imaginalis} does justice to this perspective, as does Patrick Harpur’s compelling and poetic treatment of daimonic beings in \textit{Daimonic Reality}, in which the daimons are substantiated in the garb of the culture in which they appear—and as such the Wee Folk robed in leaves and acorns are traditionally encountered in the rural Celtic Fringe, whilst hi-tech shiny “Greys” are reported in the space-age, nuclear-age, landscape of modernity.\textsuperscript{57} Tolkien and Wells give form to archetypal daimonic energies in their creation of Hobbits, Wargs, or futuristic humanoids, just as the Irish farmer gives form to archetypal daimonic energies in his vision of Leprechaun. None is mere fantasy yet all are fantastic. None is mere fiction yet all are the stuff of legends.

As discussed, the fictional/poetic space for Borges may be considered as an epistemological order akin to Corbin’s \textit{mundus imaginalis}—the \textit{imaginal}. Whilst this is a dominant aspect of his philosophy of aesthetics, nevertheless Borges muddies the hermeneutic waters by emphasising the “reality” of Swedenborg’s visions against the “poetic unreality” of Dante’s.

\textsuperscript{55} See Strassman 2001.
\textsuperscript{56} Luke: 34.
\textsuperscript{57} Harpur: 275-286.
Borges anticipates the expected reader reaction to the works of Swedenborg when he defends him against charges of madness. This is because when we read certain passages in Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, we are presented with the cognitive challenge of accepting the strength of his visions. Swedenborg writes: “When I have been allowed to be in the company of angels, I have seen what was there exactly the way I see things in our world, so perceptibly that I did not know I was not in our world and in the court of some king here. I have also talked with angels just as one person here talks to another”. 58 The alternative to delusion, hallucination or poetic fancy is that Swedenborg’s angelic realm is of an order equivalent to an undiscovered island in the Pacific, or a tribal community hidden in the rain forest—*de carne y hueso* [of flesh and blood]. Borges, synthesising numerous passages from *Arcana Cœlestia* and *Heaven and Hell*, assures us that this is not so, and that “The heaven and hell of his doctrine are not places, even though the souls of the dead who inhabit and, in a way, create them perceive them as being situated in space. They are conditions of the soul, determined by its former life”. 59 The location (for want of a better word), therefore, of Swedenborg’s heavens and hells is neither “real” nor “merely fictional”. They are, as Borges suggests “conditions of the soul” and thus correspond to the imagination of Blake and Coleridge, to Corbin’s *imaginal*, to Jung’s dreamworld, as liminal spaces which are neither one nor the other. Kathleen Raine lucidly describes this threshold state: “For the landscapes of poetry, the landscapes of the great painters are not to be found in nature at all. […] They are landscapes of the soul, and the imagery is not an end but a means—a language for discoursing upon realities of the intelligible world, not of the physical world. The theme of imaginative art is not physical but metaphysical”. 60 It must be emphasised that Swedenborg did not physically walk out of his door and into a parallel universe populated with angels and demons, but neither was he “making it up” in the sense that a novelist might create a fiction. 61 This is a difficult idea to conceive

58 Swedenborg: para. 174.
60 Raine 2007: 25.
61 Perhaps, however, his voyages were of such a physical order. Swedenborg writes in *Heaven and Hell*: “As to being carried away by the spirit to another place, I have been shown by living experience what it is, and how it is done, but only two or three times. I will relate a single instance. Walking through the streets of a city and through fields, talking at the same time with spirits, I knew no otherwise than that I was fully awake, and in possession of my usual sight. Thus I walked on without going astray, and all the while with clear vision, seeing groves, rivers, palaces, houses, men, and other objects. But after walking thus for some hours,
of, let alone describe, and yet Corbin succeeds in defining the *imaginal* as, precisely, this liminal landscape that has characterised religious and mystical experience (both in Christianity and Islam), poetry and art, across time and cultures; and Swedenborg was for Corbin of supreme importance, in the same way that he was for Borges. This whole dimension of the *imaginal* is difficult to apprehend cognitively, as it can only be described in terms that create a sense of contradiction—neither real nor fantasy yet both real and fantasy. Czeslaw Milosz, whose essay on Swedenborg is published alongside Borges’ in Lawrence’s *Testimony to the Invisible*, examines the complex nature of the *imaginal* with regards Dante, Blake and Swedenborg:

Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is modeled on Swedenborg, and he would have been amused by an inquiry into whether he had ‘really’ seen the devils and angels he describes. The crux of the problem—and a serious challenge to the mind—is Blake’s respect for both the imagination of Dante, who was a poet, and the imagination of Swedenborg, whose works are written in quite pedestrian Latin prose. Dante was regarded by his contemporaries as a man who had visited the other world. Yet Jaspers would not have called him a schizophrenic, because the right of the poet to invent—that is, to lie—was recognized in Jaspers’s lifetime as something obvious. It is not easy to grasp the consequences of the aesthetic theories which have emerged as the flotsam and jetsam of the scientific and technological revolution. The pressure of habit still forces us to exclaim: ‘Well then, Swedenborg wrote fiction and he was aware it was no more than fiction!’ But, tempting as it is, the statement would be false. Neither Swedenborg nor Blake were aestheticians; they did not enclose the spiritual within the domain of art and poetry and oppose it to the material. At the risk of simplifying the issue by using a definition, let us say rather that they both were primarily concerned with the energy that reveals itself in a constant interaction of Imagination with the things perceived by our five senses.62

Milosz seizes the nettle in a manner that would chime with Jung in suggesting that the principle force operating on both Dante and Swedenborg was not a putative “authenticity” of experience, but the energy of the

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numinous encounter with angels through the creative imagination. No amount of ontological speculation should blind us to the fact that all experience of the daimonic is an encounter with the numinous; and such encounters, as Jung so often wrote, provide the psychic energy that fuels the process of individuation.

In an appraisal of Borges’ many writings, it becomes evident that he read extensively and sympathetically in the traditions of mystical, spiritual and esoteric texts. Surely there is a limit to the capacity of a reader to explore such texts to the extent that Borges did if, ultimately, the reader is not predisposed towards them? Borges, like Jung, was a reader of alchemical texts, dramatising, for example, the aged figure of Paracelsus in one of his final tales “The Rose of Paracelsus”. He maintained a lifelong interest in daimonic beings, hermetic philosophy, neoplatonism, esoteric societies, Gnosticism, anomalies in time, the persistence of the soul after death, eschatology and depth psychology. He was likewise a devoted reader of Angelus Silesius, and translated Silesius’ challenging Cherubinischer Wandersmann with Maria Kodama. He was a dedicated reader of Dante, William Blake and Sufi poets. He was also a reader of Theosophy, describing his surprise at being unable to find the works of Swedenborg in Theosophical bookshops, a statement which would imply that he frequented them.64 He made many references to William James, Jung, Rudolph Steiner and the later works of Aldous Huxley. I would argue that it is difficult to make meaningful statements about James, Jung, Steiner, or Huxley without entering their challenging works with energy, sympathy and an experiential mode of enquiry. He cites Ouspensky, a perplexing writer whose works are difficult to summarise based on only a rudimentary reading.65 Likewise, as discussed, Borges read Swedenborg

63 “That Borges’ work demonstrates certain Gnostic leanings and concepts is well-documented, but it is generally ignored in deconstructive criticism’s haste to erase the logos in the name of its own brand of indeterminacy and deferral. It is much fairer to view Borges’ Gnosticism, particularly his affinity for the ‘malevolent demiurge’ who creates an imperfect universe, as his own attempt to work through the concerns of theodicy, and his sense of the inadequacy of orthodox religions’ efforts to do so” (Soud: 748).

64 “I know that in the National Library there is an edition of Heaven and Hell. But you will not find Swedenborg’s works in Theosophical bookshops” (Borges 2005: 202, my translation).

65 Ouspensk y is also a name generally associated with Gurdjieff, a particularly curious guru figure of the twentieth century whose influence was felt upon writers, painters, film directors, philosophers and even politicians on both sides of the Atlantic. Whilst James Webb (1987: 492) writes that Borges attended a Gurdjieff group in Argentina, he provides no evidence. And whilst Gurdjieff scholar Sophia
with great devotion, and died with the project still unrealised of writing an entire book on Swedenborg’s voyages to the heavens and hells.

There is a tendency within Borges scholarship to accept Borges’ own claims of “merely aesthetic” interest in the more anomalous aspects of human experience and thus to treat merely as fictions his textual explorations of such matters. As such, no scholar that I have encountered has even mentioned, let alone explored, the two extraordinary passages in Borges’ whimsical late volume *Atlas*, in which he recounts his communication with the dead: “Asleep, in my dreams, I see or converse with the dead. None of these things surprises me in the least”. 66 “Haydée Lange and I were conversing in a restaurant in the center of town. […] All of a sudden, I remembered that Haydée Lange had died a long time ago. She was a ghost and didn’t know it. I felt no fear, but felt it would not be right, and perhaps rude, to reveal to her that she was a ghost, a lovely ghost”. 67 Were any scholar to consider these brief texts, it is likely that they would consider them simply fictions and therefore of no wider import. Yet from his early years, Borges reported mystical “timeless” experiences, lucid dreams, and the presence of ancestral voices. Were such statements of communication with the dead to have appeared in a diary, or an interview, undoubtedly they would not be dismissed as mere poetic fancy. Most likely they would be dismissed as delusion or hallucination. My argument would be that, as with Jung and his encounters with Philemon and the wandering dead, it was the highly developed imaginative powers of Borges that enabled him to experience these more mysterious encounters. The poetic and fictional craft that Borges mastered throughout his life constituted an ongoing practice of what Jung would describe as Active Imagination, and thus fictional encounters and dream encounters are brought together in the deeper psychoid levels of the unconscious.

Wellbeloved attests that Borges attended meetings on Gurdjieff’s *Work* in Buenos Aires, I can find no evidence that Borges read Gurdjieff: “Jorge Luis Borges is said to have attended meetings in Argentina in the 1950s. By then Gurdjieff’s influence was widespread in South America” (xxvii). It would seem likely that his knowledge of Ouspensky’s works would guarantee him at least a passing knowledge of Gurdjieff.

66 Borges 1985: 54.
Bibliography


CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PRIVILEGING THE “OTHER”:
ILlicit FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE
IN THE DETECTIVE FICTION
OF REGINALD HILL

HILARY A. GOLDSMITH

There is scarcely a tradition which does not recognise the “daimonic” in one form or another. Yet, whilst acting as the source of intuitive knowledge, its influence is almost unfailingly depicted as “illicit” or “other” today. The materialism of our age champions the scientific as the only source of true knowledge. Aristotle recognised that “Science is the union of knowledge and intuition”1 and regarded intuition as one of the five faculties through which the soul attains truth.2 He regarded intuition as a quality of soul, a natural force, a First Principle, an essential tool in the search for true knowledge.

One of the great achievements of Reginald Hill’s detective fiction is to show the “other” as both true and real, enhancing our understanding of the world by legitimising illicit forms of knowledge. Whether Hill personifies the daimonic as Dalziel’s “imp”, the harbinger of intuitive insight,3 or whether it manifests itself as the daimonic intelligence which fuels the psychic powers of the clairvoyant,4 Hill shows how without it our perception of the world will always be incomplete.

Upon his acquittal for a murder of which he is guilty, Austin Greenall heads straight for the Aero Flying Club for “a little flight. Just to clear the

1 Aristotle 1998: Book VI, 103.
2 Aristotle 1998: Book V, 100. The other four faculties are art, knowledge, practical wisdom and science.
4 For example, Rosetta Stanhope in A Killing Kindness.
mind, stretch the muscles,"\(^5\) despite being warned of the lateness of the hour. As he comes in to land he sees what he first believes to be shadows, but:

No shadows these, but ponies [...] wheeling and swerving beneath him as though driven in panic by the sound of his descent. [...] The bloody things were everywhere. [...] Still they thundered directly beneath him. [...] He hadn’t got enough speed to gain enough height for another turn on to a different line from the stampeding herd. [...] “I saw him coming in to land.” [said Preece]. “He just kept on going [...] right into the boundary fence. I couldn’t believe it.” What do you think?” asked Dalziel. “Suicide?” “I think it’s mysterious and sad”, said Pascoe. “That’s it. A sorrow and a mystery. Like life.”\(^6\)

The passage above is taken from the end of Reginald Hill’s 1980 novel *A Killing Kindness*. Research into the work of Hill has formed a substantial element of my PhD thesis entitled: “The Relationship between the Aristotelian, Newtonian and Holistic Scientific Paradigms and Selected British Detective Fiction 1980-2010”. Part of this research has entailed examining the relationship between licit and illicit knowledge systems, for example between classical science derived from Newtonian physics, and psychic, intuitive knowledge systems. Hill’s detective fiction proved particularly fertile ground for this study as it demonstrates the importance of psychic human experience within a balanced world view. Andy Dalziel, Hill’s surly, somewhat uncouth detective, seems an unlikely vehicle for the transmission of psychic phenomena. And yet in spite of (or perhaps because of) his apparent unsuitability and insensitivity, his character clearly illustrates the universality of such experience.

In 1962 Thomas S. Kuhn introduced, in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the notion of scientific paradigms. For Kuhn, a paradigm is a set of fundamental beliefs and practices, knowledge and acceptance of which guide current scientific activity.\(^7\) A major part of my work has been to identify different paradigms and relate them to detective fiction. As well as demonstrating the importance of psychic experience, Hill’s work clearly demonstrates how an appreciation of the nature of these paradigms and their interaction can greatly increase our understanding of the world and how it functions. Further, Hill’s fiction illustrates the importance of combining all areas of human experience, as represented within such paradigms, in the search for truth.

\(^7\) Kuhn: 116.
By far the earliest of the three paradigms of relevance here is that based on the writings of Aristotle (384-322 BCE). Today, scientific knowledge is generally prized above all other forms of knowledge. The dominant world-view of the twenty-first century ascribes far greater ontological significance to the scientific than to psychic or religious experience. However, Aristotelian philosophy, like the currently emerging holistic world-view, is all-inclusive, valuing all types of knowledge and human experience equally. Unlike today, Aristotle classified knowledge according to its purpose and function, that is, whether it was practical, productive or theoretical. For Aristotle, “the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action.” Productive knowledge included the arts and rhetoric. There were three theoretical philosophies; mathematics, physics and theology, of which the highest was theology. Aristotle therefore appreciated the importance and significance of spiritual experience.

He also valued intuition highly, for: “no other kind of thought except intuition is more accurate than scientific knowledge.” Further “it will be intuition that apprehends the primary premises. [...] If, therefore, it is the only other kind of true thinking except scientific knowing, intuition will be the originative source of scientific knowledge.” Therefore, Aristotle’s understanding was that not only is intuition more accurate than science, but that it provides the initial impetus through which scientific knowledge is gained. Aristotelian thought also held that existence was teleological. Every event, phenomenon and occurrence had a cause and a purpose.

The Newtonian worldview is one which regards the world as basically mechanistic, functioning like a giant clock. Based on the world-view propounded by Isaac Newton in his *Principia Mathematica Philosophiae Naturalis* (1687), the Newtonian paradigm understands the world and its processes as functioning according to a small set of mathematical laws. Truth, within the Newtonian paradigm, is arrived at through the collection, collation and assessment of concrete evidence—it is found in state-of-the-art laboratories through the examination of such evidence by highly qualified and experienced scientists. But this is not necessarily so in the detective fiction of many of our best and most popular writers of the genre: P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Colin Dexter and Reginald Hill, to name but a few.

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12 For Aristotle’s theory of the four causes see Aristotle, *Physics* II.3.
Frequently for Hill, forensic science is only used as a verifier of a truth which is already known to the detectives. Dalziel’s two closest colleagues, Detective Chief Inspector Peter Pascoe and Sergeant Edgar Wield, have learned to trust Dalziel’s instinct. Dalziel “had a habit of being right”\textsuperscript{13} even when the forensic evidence was apparently against him, his conviction of the guilt of Philip Swain in \textit{Bones and Silence} (1990) being a good example. Referred to by Dalziel as his little “imp”,\textsuperscript{14} his second sight or instinct is almost tangible, the imp troubling his digestive processes at times when psychic enlightenment is imminent.

Hill’s Dalziel and Pascoe novels undermine the Newtonian paradigm by the low regard in which they generally hold both technology and the Baconian scientific method from which modern forensic science practices have evolved.\textsuperscript{15} Newtonian scientific knowledge alone is usually depicted as unreliable and inconclusive, and indeed, Dalziel’s “casual contempt for science”\textsuperscript{16} is noted in \textit{A Clubbable Woman} (1970). Sam Connon has telephoned the police to report that on returning home, he has found the dead body of his wife, who has apparently been bludgeoned to death. Dalziel’s instinct tells him that Sam Connon did not commit the murder but wryly comments that “I might be wrong. It’s been known. Twice.”\textsuperscript{17} Science, on the other hand, tells the detecting team nothing. Commenting on the vagaries of the forensic report regarding the time of death, Dalziel contends: “Bloody Science. All it does is give us reasons for being imprecise.”\textsuperscript{18} Forensic descriptions of the cause of death are little help either.

Similarly, in \textit{Deadheads} (1983) Richard Elgood thinks that his recent brushes with death were actually attempts by someone unknown to murder him. However, while the police technical team can identify why his desk lamp gave him a substantial electric shock, and why his garage doors failed to crush his car, they cannot say if these events were caused deliberately.\textsuperscript{19} The pure scientific Newtonian facts are virtually useless in these instances as they give no evidence for or against foul play. They are value-neutral. Again, the post-mortem results in \textit{Recalled to Life} (1992), whilst able to identify the cause of Miss Marsh’s death as heart failure, cannot determine whether or not this was brought about by some human

\textsuperscript{13} Hill 2001: 26.
\textsuperscript{14} For example, Hill 2004: 338.
\textsuperscript{15} For a greater explanation of this relationship see White.
\textsuperscript{16} Hill 1970: 171.
\textsuperscript{17} Hill 1970: 36.
\textsuperscript{18} Hill 1970: 35.
\textsuperscript{19} Hill 1983: 90.
agency—as a result of a severe shock, for example. Similarly, Dalziel’s comment in *Dialogues of the Dead* (2001): “[e]xperts […] I’ve shat ‘em. It’s blood, sweat and good honest grind that’ll catch this bugger!” demonstrates his lack of faith in the forensic science services, as neither the pathologist nor the forensic dentist could provide any useful information regarding the death of Jax Ripley.

The emerging holistic paradigm, like the Aristotelian, restores the importance of forms of knowledge other than the (in the Newtonian sense) strictly scientific, but from a post-Newtonian perspective. It recognises that science, nature and religion are basically the same with the same goal. They are contiguous. Wendy Wheeler points out that, until the nineteenth century, the Latin word *scientia* (from which the English word “science” is derived) simply means “knowledge” and so included religion, philosophy and anything which furthered our understanding of the world in which we live. The holistic paradigm recognises the validity and usefulness of many different theories and knowledge systems. These form interactive “strata of realities” within our current understanding of the universe which, taken together, will present a more complete view than can ever be reached by adherence to one theory alone.

Returning to the opening extract, Greenall thinks that the ponies he sees are shadows. Indeed, in a way they are. They exist in the shadowy hinterland which lies between the “real” world and some other plane of existence; a borderland or boundary between that which is perceivable with human physical senses and that of which one becomes aware by other means. Greenall in his plane can be thought of as representing the dominant Newtonian paradigm which privileges continual forward motion, mechanism and materialism. The ponies, which in reality had left the field several days previously, are representative of another path, another way of understanding. While Greenall has survived his trial in a Newtonian court of law, he succumbs to the judgment of a higher court.

The Aristotelian and holistic paradigms are all-inclusive. Similarly, for Hill, the truth can be reached through a variety of means including supernatural knowledge and gut instinct. Hill’s work frequently, therefore, undermines the Newtonian paradigm not only by highlighting the shortcomings of science, but by simultaneously emphasizing the value of and giving credence to types of experience lying outside its realm of influence.

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21 Wheeler: 94.
22 Polanyi: 35.
Likewise, Hill’s fiction accepts and normalises information available only through altered psychological states such as dreams and extreme illness. Examples include Rosie’s experiences in a coma and her relationship with the Nix in *On Beulah Height* (1998), Hat Bowler’s recurring nightmare in *Good Morning, Midnight* (2004), and the extensive narration of Dalziel’s near-death experiences in *The Death of Dalziel* (2007). By introducing such elements within a contemporary setting, elements which are unacceptable within the presently dominant Newtonian paradigm, Hill implies that strands of such knowledge systems form an important, if scientifically inexplicable, part of the twenty-first century world and should not be disregarded without due consideration.

Of all Hill’s detective fiction, *A Killing Kindness* is particularly interesting because of the credence it attaches to what might be termed “antiscientific” forms of knowledge, such as the psychic powers and practices of the Romany people. Arguably, *A Killing Kindness* goes as far as privileging psychic knowledge over Newtonian-inspired scientific knowledge. An important aspect of the emerging holistic paradigm which links it to the Aristotelian paradigm, is the breaching or non-recognition of boundaries. *A Killing Kindness* interrogates the boundaries between “mainstream accepted” science and that which is marginalised as “pseudo science”; psychiatry, astrology, palmistry and linguistics.

The Austrian-born British philosopher of natural and social science Karl Raimund Popper (1902-1994) believed that the goal of science is to establish objective truth. For a theory or hypothesis to be truly scientific it must be possible to prove that it is false as well as to prove that it is true. According to Popper, fields of study such as astrology and psychiatry are therefore pseudosciences because it is not possible to prove their assertions to be false. This is known as the Falsification Principle.23 *A Killing Kindness* presents, through the gypsy’s belief in fate and cosmic justice, a teleological Aristotelian world where all will come right in the end without man’s agency.


*A Killing Kindness* opens with a séance at which the medium, Mrs. Rosetta Stanhope, is trying to contact the murdered Brenda Sorby to try to establish who killed her. In Brenda’s voice, Rosetta states that “[…] it was green, all green, all over me, choking.”24 These words, although

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23 Encyclopaedia Britannica Online.
misinterpreted at the time, are recognised at the end of the novel as giving the name of the killer. This demonstration of Rosetta’s psychic ability is of paramount importance as, coming at the opening of the novel, it establishes straight away the value of psychic knowledge systems. It harks back to a pre-Newtonian world where knowledge was all one, not divided and restrained within the man-made barriers of different disciplines, nor branded as reliable or unreliable according to whether or not it could be verified by science.

Brenda is the third victim of the murderer whom the local paper has dubbed the “Choker”.25 The first victim was a Mary Dinwoodie; the second, June McCarthy. All the victims were laid out neatly except for Brenda, whose body was found when it collided with a barge in the river. It is the time of the city’s High Fair. The gypsies, who have a long history of association with the fair, have set up camp near the local airfield, where the Aero Flying Club is based. The Choker murders continue. Pauline Stanhope, Mrs Stanhope’s niece, is found strangled in the fortune telling tent at the fairground by Sergeant Wield. The next victim, Andrea Valentine, is found dead in her own home.

The strangulations are accompanied by phone calls quoting Shakespeare’s play Hamlet to Sammy Locke, a reporter for the local Evening Post, who thinks that they are not all the voice of the same person. Dr Pottle of the Central Hospital Psychiatric Unit is called in to help draw up a profile of the killer. Linguists Drew Urquhart and Dicky Gladmann from the local college take the tapes to analyse the voice pattern (the role of Pottle, Urquart and Gladmann will be discussed in greater detail later). Dalziel is convinced that the gypsy Dave Lee, a distant relative of Pauline Stanhope, is “mixed up in it somewhere [because] there’s too many close connections for coincidence”,26 although Pascoe is equally certain that he is not. Dalziel orders Pascoe to carry out a search of the gypsy site. Finding Pascoe on the river bank talking to the young gypsy children, Mrs Lee calls him a pervert and shoves him into the water. Gasping for air whilst struggling to reach safety Pascoe realises that he is experiencing the same scene as that related by the dead Brenda during the séance which opens the novel. Pascoe’s traumatic, near-death experience as he comes close to drowning causes a paradigm shift in the way he thinks.

Reconsidering Brenda’s psychic communication at the séance from the viewpoint of this new paradigm, Pascoe realises that what Brenda actually said was not “[…] it was green, all green, all over me, choking” but “It

26 Hill 1980: 270.
was Greenall, Greenall, over me, choking. This is extremely important because it demonstrates that correct interpretation of “facts” and “evidence” is essential, whether it relates to Newtonian science or psychic revelation. Pascoe wonders “how an English judge would react to the production of a dead witness by proxy in a murder trial.” He realises that the legal system with its hard and fast laws is Newtonian-based, and therefore a judge, the arbiter of the law, would not accept as evidence anything from outside the paradigm within which the law functions. This clash between the Newtonian-inspired legal system with its fixed laws and the intuition-inspired, more holistic mindset of the detective also causes problems for Dalziel in Good Morning, Midnight and Bones and Silence.

In a box of keepsakes found in Mrs Dinwoodie’s home is a music festival programme from the town of Linden in Germany. Following up this German connection, Pascoe discovers that Peter Dinwoodie had run off with Mary Greenall while stationed there with the RAF. Mary Dinwoodie was in fact Austin Greenall’s first wife. Pascoe confronts Austin Greenall at the Aero Club. Greenall admits to the killings and relates the details to Pascoe, who writes them down as a statement. As Greenall nears the completion of his statement, Pascoe is called away leaving Wield to get the statement signed, which he fails to do. The result of this omission has disastrous consequences for the prosecution’s case. Greenall is charged with just the murder of Mary Dinwoodie/Greenall, as the police feel that they have most likelihood of a conviction here. However, the evidence is all circumstantial and Greenall is acquitted. Greenall’s unsigned confession which he later retracts is inadmissible as evidence, and Pascoe apologises to Rosetta Stanhope for the trial “all being for nothing” because her daughter’s killer remained unpunished. But Rosetta sees the outcome differently. Trusting in powers other than the law, her mood is positive. Rosetta tells Pascoe: “Don’t worry. It’s going to be alright”, it will be “taken care of”, “[i]t will be as Pauline would have wanted it.” Rosetta knows that justice will finally be done, if by other agencies than by a Newtonian court of law. Her belief proves correct when Greenall crashes his plane as the result of “seeing” non-existent gypsy ponies on the runway.

* A Killing Kindness * demonstrates that knowledge does not have to be justifiable through science to be valuable, as it names the killer, at a

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séance, in the very first sentence. In our Newtonian world science is the dominant method of verifying the truth, yet although the psychic power of the “self-professed clairvoyant and medium” Rosetta Stanhope is not a scientifically accepted fact, it provides the killer’s name. Dalziel may call Rosetta’s psychic power “crap,” but had Brenda’s words spoken through Rosetta’s mediumship been understood correctly and given due consideration as evidence at the outset of the investigation, the killer would have been apprehended and the other murders averted.

Varieties of knowledge construction

In *A Killing Kindness* the division between true Newtonian science and such pseudosciences becomes blurred. True Newtonian science, favouring concrete, examinable data, has little to offer here. However, the Newtonian-inspired reasoning skill of the psychiatrist Dr Pottle at least points the detectives in the right direction.

The linguists Drew Urquhart and Dicky Gladmann obviously consider their discipline as a science which should be granted the respect it deserves, and indeed their work requires the use of highly sophisticated state-of-the-art Newtonian-inspired scientific equipment in the form of the sonograph. This raises the status of linguistics and reinforces the impression that it is a scientific discipline. However, mechanically analysing the frequency of different elements of a voice and having them displayed on a graph reveals nothing of the intentions of the speaker, nor of the actual meaning of the words. The results apparently produced by this highly scientific and mechanistic apparatus could have been disastrous to the investigation as they further convince Urquhart and Gladmann that there are four different speakers. This assumption is wrong: they are the recording of a single voice. This demonstrates clearly the dangers of the point Martha A. Turner makes in *Mechanism and the Novel* that “we still often act as thought facts are found rather than constructed.” Urquart and Gladmann have not “found” the correct answer; they have constructed an erroneous one. The “science” of linguistics, then, is depicted as being far less reliable than the medium’s utterance whilst in a trance.

Rosetta and Pauline Stanhope discuss how the casting of horoscopes and palmistry, usually considered as far removed from science, are, in fact, “pretty scientific.” The effect of trying to demonstrate the links between

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32 Hill 1980: 3.
33 Hill 1980: 8.
34 Turner: 6.
the overtly scientific and other forms of knowledge is three-fold. Firstly, it
serves to raise the status of non-empirical knowledge systems by
establishing their close association with Newtonian science. Secondly, it
serves to re-introduce non-empirical knowledge forms within the current
basically Newtonian worldview. Within the Aristotelian paradigm all
forms of knowledge were viewed as equally valuable, for different
knowledge systems each had something to offer to extend human
understanding of the universe. Thirdly therefore, in line with the
inclusiveness championed by the holistic paradigm, it seeks to recombine
different knowledge systems, allowing a more rounded, more complete
picture of the world and the way it functions.

**Marginalised forms of knowledge:**

**astrology and palmistry**

In *A Killing Kindness* the legendary psychic skills of the Romany people
are portrayed as a type of pseudo-science, being far less removed from
science, and more objective, than one might imagine. The Newtonian
boundaries between hard science and pseudoscience become blurred,
harking back to a pre-Newtonian Aristotelian age when all knowledge was
done. Mrs Stanhope says of palmistry that “It’s a craft. You learn it.”36
Pauline Stanhope is not Romany and therefore has no psychic “gift” as her
Romany aunt does. She tells Pascoe “I’m a fully qualified horoscopist and
a pretty fair palmist but I’ve got no real psychic powers.”37 Pauline “got
 [...] properly qualified”38 in them, so that she can act as a convincing
palmist and reader of horoscopes with the practical, objective, near-
scientific knowledge which her training has given her. However, she lacks
the “real psychic powers [...] the real gift”39 which her aunt, “a true
psychic,”40 possesses and which is to prove so important in all aspects of
this case.

Psychiatry is shown in *A Killing Kindness* as a discipline which crosses
boundaries. It is portrayed as a Newtonian-based science, whilst
simultaneously relying on the experience, prior knowledge, understanding
and informed intuition of the practitioner. Although Dalziel refers to Dr
Pottle as “that quack”41 Dalziel felt that the detective team would “be daft

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40 Hill 1980: 38.
41 Hill 1980: 35.
not to use any expert help we can get" and so requests his assistance. Dalziel’s considering Pottle as a quack suggests that he does not regard Pottle as a true scientist, or psychiatry as a real science. On the other hand, Dalziel’s wishing to seek his “expert help” in spite of this suggests that he also appreciates the potential usefulness of forms of knowledge other than the purely scientific. One of Pottle’s strengths is that he can employ Newtonian science and yet see its results from a wider, holistic angle as best suits the circumstances.

Belying Dalziel’s claims of quackery, Pottle is actually a true Newtonian scientist, at least in the way that he investigates and assesses the four tape-recorded quotations from Hamlet. He has to make two basic assumptions before he can proceed: that the four murders were committed by the same killer; and that this killer had the same motive in each case. These form the two premises which underpin his profiling of the murderer. However, as Aristotle points out: “the premisses of demonstrated knowledge must be true, primary, [and] immediate.” Pottle is worried that his basic premises may not be true, because if they are not, neither will be his profile of the killer.

For Aristotle, intuition provided an equally valid route to ascertaining the truth as scientific knowledge. Therefore, according to the Aristotelian paradigm, Pottle must learn to trust his own instincts. However, the influence of the Newtonian paradigm which does not trust intuition is reducing Pottle’s faith in his own gut instincts. Pottle is a psychiatrist. For him, a disadvantage of his discipline becoming more scientific, more Newtonian, is that his Aristotelian belief in the truth of intuition is weakened.

Pottle’s Newtonian science aims to be objective and dispassionate. This is illustrated by his desire for more tapes. He feels that “the more I have the better results I can hope for” even though this would mean there had been more killings. This is an illustration of Wheeler’s observation that “scientists are not interested in the world, but in data.” Pottle is only interested in the tapes, not in the characters or the world of A Killing Kindness. In this aspect of his work, Pottle operates only within the closely confined barriers of his discipline. Pottle’s success, however, is dependent upon both Newtonian scientific evidence and Aristotelian intuition, combined in holistic interrelatedness. It is the influence of Aristotelian intuition which brings Pottle to an accurate qualitative

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42 Hill 1980: 117.
43 Aristotle, Posterior Analytics 1.2.
44 Hill 1980: 144.
assessment of the personality of the killer. As Pascoe notes during Greenall’s confession “Pottle had been right”\(^{46}\) in that Greenall only felt guilt when he had killed to protect himself. Pottle is also correct in identifying marriage as the key to the case. Pottle’s profile of the killer is also very accurate, if limited. He thinks that the culprit is male, older than thirty-five and murders out of compassion, all of which could accurately describe Greenall.

**The positive outlook of a teleological Aristotelian world**

The teleological world is a feature of the Aristotelian paradigm, in which “all terrestrial change presumes a completely immaterial unmoved mover, pure form or God, whose self-thinking sustains the entire cosmos.”\(^{47}\) Although the Christian God is never mentioned in *A Killing Kindness*, both Greenall and Rosetta Stanhope believe in fate, predetermination, and a sense of purpose working within the universe. Greenall, for example, “felt that he was merely an instrument of some benevolent and protective force.”\(^{48}\) This view he could justify to himself through the ease with which his victims seemed to present themselves to him and the luck by which he escaped apprehension for so long. He “had a feeling that there was a plan. But it wasn’t mine.”\(^{49}\) Referring to the murder of June McCarthy, while Greenall here says that there was "No plan", he still thinks that “It was fate”\(^{50}\) that she should be murdered. Although Greenall’s belief that there is a purpose working in the world is Aristotelian-inspired, it is at odds with his distinctly Newtonian view of himself as a tool.

*A Killing Kindness* presents an interrogation of how surviving elements of the Aristotelian paradigm, which viewed all types of human experience as knowledge, might affect our world today. Further, it demonstrates how these elements are not just relics of a past paradigm from a bygone age with no relevance to today’s world, but form an integral part of the new holistic paradigm. *A Killing Kindness* exemplifies Turner’s observation that “other worldviews [than the purely scientific] remain available”\(^{51}\). Not only this, but in Hill’s work these “other worldviews” often appear to be equally, if not more, reliable than a worldview which privileges science over all other forms of knowledge. *A Killing Kindness* presents a world in

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46 Hill 1980: 349.
47 Bynum: 27.
50 Hill 1980: 345.
51 Turner: 7.
which, as Turner notes referring to *Pride and Prejudice*, “strange things happen”, a world where the pre-Newtonian and the post-Newtonian meet.\textsuperscript{52} This integration of the older forms of knowledge into the modern world is shown as beneficial.

As Wheeler contends, science has in the past been too anxious to separate conceptual knowledge and the power of the intellect from experiential knowledge—Galileo and Descartes “reduced the world to a mere object of technical and mathematical investigation.”\textsuperscript{53} Wheeler goes on to point out that “the traverse [between experiential knowledge and conceptual knowledge] is the most difficult thing for all of us, because it involves a movement between what are in our present culture, licit and illicit forms of knowing.”\textsuperscript{54} Hill’s work arguably seeks to facilitate the traverse of the gap between licit scientific knowledge and other illicit forms of knowledge.

By elevating the status of “illicit” forms of knowledge such as those innate within the psyche of the Romany people, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the shortcomings of “licit” forms of knowledge such as Newtonian-inspired forensic science and the legal system, Hill puts the two on a more equal footing. *A Killing Kindness* suggests that giving more equal weight and status to all the diverse types of human knowledge and experience would benefit the twenty-first century world by increasing our understanding and appreciation of its processes and of the people who populate it. Perhaps, then, life could be a far more positive and fulfilling experience than the “sorrow and a mystery” which Peter Pascoe felt it to be.

**Bibliography**


\textsuperscript{52} Turner: 51.

\textsuperscript{53} Wheeler: 49.

\textsuperscript{54} Wheeler: 150.


PART III

DAIMONIC ENCOUNTER
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FIREFLIES AND SHOOTING STARS: VISUAL NARRATIVES OF DAIMONIC INTELLIGENCE

ANGELA VOSS

Man, in his inability to grasp the divine, requires the gods to be revealed in a palpable form, and this requirement is met, at the gods’ behest, in the form of light or fire.¹

Paranormal events happen. In general conversation about such things, most of us have an anecdote about an experience which has no rational explanation, and which everyone recognises as arising from an underground of “(un)common sense”, a counter-cultural stratum whose mysterious modus operandi has no place in the knowledge-systems which inform our education and day-to-day lives. As Gregory Shaw has observed, “we live in a profound disconnect between private experience and public discourse.”² He recommends that researchers and academics can begin to heal this disconnect by “intelligently exploring” the hidden dimensions of existence, thus building bridges between anecdotal events involving sensory, lived experience and the theories that inform our understanding and explanation of such events. This is also my intention in devoting this chapter to the examination of one particular kind of non-rational phenomenon—that of anomalous moving lights, and their identification with non-material intelligent beings or daimons.³ I shall address this theme primarily from the viewpoint of neoplatonic metaphysics, because here we

¹ Clarke: 101.
² Shaw 2011: 18.
³ For a general survey of the many varieties of anomalous lights reported by witnesses, see Harpur: 1-21. Harpur also advocates a neoplatonic explanation, commenting that “One way [...] of regarding luminous apparitions is as images of the soul projected by the soul itself” (16).
find a metaphorical scheme which encompasses a multi-layered vision of epistemological possibilities within a coherent whole. It is my suggestion that such a model can help us elucidate the claims and contentions of both contemporary psychics and their sceptical opponents.

I want to focus primarily on the questions of ontology and perception: how can we begin to evaluate the “truth” of these apparitions in terms of their apparent objectivity, and what mode of vision is required for humans to “see” them accurately enough to gain some deeper insight into their provenance and purpose (as opposed to analysing their visible form alone)? Often a purely material explanation is pitted against a naive assumption of other-worldly agency, without acknowledging that there may be another way of looking altogether. I would suggest that empirical methods of evaluation are inadequate for assessing the liminal nature of these light manifestations. Despite the fact that many claim that they can be captured for all to see on video or digital photographs, it does not follow that they originate from the earthly dimension, nor that sense-perception and material science are adequate tools for fathoming their extra-ordinary, numinous, and often seemingly intelligent activity. We live in an age where the bottom line of “truth” is the rational explanation in terms of physical and material causation, even if that explanation pushes credulity to its limits. But neither should we accept the equally unsophisticated identification of strange lights as UFOs or aliens as objectively “real” visitors from an objectively “real” outer space. In both scientific and science-fiction paradigms, there is an in-built assumption that such a “reality” has an external, verifiable existence independent from the observer’s own visionary frequency (as it were). This literal approach denies the supremely important idea, long recognised in traditions of esoteric wisdom, that there are echelons of deepening modes of perception available to humans which far exceed the limits of either sense perception or critical reasoning, and which move towards a closing of the subjective-objective epistemological divide. It also denies a sense of the sacred as an epistemological category with its own distinct modes of expression—always understood as gateways to higher (or deeper) consciousness—

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4 The epistemological issues which arise in relation to technological “evidence” of spirit phenomena including ITC (instrumental transcommunication) deserve fuller attention. Celluloid, analogue and digital films and photographs may appear to pick up images which elude the naked eye, whilst recordings of “spirit voices” are often indistinguishable from normal radio interference. Both forms have a liminal and ambiguous ontological status. See Cardoso, Cooper, Harvey, Solomon.

5 A good example being the insistence that all crop circles are made by people with planks and rope in the night (see Rowlandson, also Ferrer 2008).
which have now come to be regarded as inferior and unreliable in relation to rationality, i.e. “merely subjective”, in a radical “ontological inversion” of cognitive value. I am referring to the intellectual intuition (in neoplatonic terminology) and the creative imagination which conveys it through form and image, engaging the knower in a symbolic mode of understanding which is participatory in that it reveals something about the nature of his or her own soul, and opens into realms which the critical reason can only characterise as paradoxical, para-normal or downright impossible.

To begin, let us explore the connections between visible and invisible worlds through daimonic epiphanies, luminous soul-vehicles and the divine imagination. Daimonic or spiritual intelligences have long been associated with the stars as points of spherical light, as well as with invisible spirit or soul-bodies which manifest in the form of such light. One of the earliest suggestions we have that stars embody divine spirits is found in Hesiod (active 750-650 BCE):

To Kephalos [Eos] bore a brilliant son,
Strong Phaeton, a man much like the gods.
When he was young and had the fragile bloom

6 On the ontological inversion, see Milne: 5. For a discussion on the exclusion of the sacred within academic discourse, see Kripal 2010: 253-255.
7 On participation as a research method, see Ferrer & Sherwood: Introduction; Kripal 2001: Introduction. Of course such an intuitive (or “psychic”) insight then requires interpretation and elucidation if it is to be communicated to others, a process which McGilchrist sees reflected in the correct functioning of the brain hemispheres (see McGilchrist 2010: e.g. 199, 208, 209). On Platonic epistemology see the “divided line” metaphor in Republic Book 6 (509d-513e). In summary, the path of gnostic knowledge progresses through sense perception, opinion and fantasy (“human” and unreliable modes of knowing), to dialectic, reason and intellectual intuition as more stable and unified modes, before finally attaining union with the divine mind. Chittick (2007) notes “Knowledge only qualifies as intellectual when knowers know it at the very root of their own intelligence and without any intermediary [...] [philosophy] was a path to discover the ultimate truths of the universe within the depths of one’s own soul” (61). Later Platonists drew a distinction between arbitrary fantasy and a more noetic imaginal faculty which perceived divine truths via symbolic images presented to the senses, thus establishing two kinds of imagination—one illusory, the other archetypal or transcendent. On Plato and the relationship between dianoia and phantasia see Addey 2002; Cocking: 1-26; Tanner: 89-120; Watson: 1986, 1988: 1-14. On the neoplatonic development of the cognitive imagination, see Plotinus IV.3; Cocking: 49-68; Corbin 1997, 1999; Couliano: 3-27; Dillon 1986; Voss 2009. On the Renaissance debate between the two forms of imagination see Giglioni 2010.
Of glorious youth, and tender, childish mind,
The laughter-loving Aphrodite seized
And took him to her shrine and made him serve
As temple-keeper, bright divinity (Daimon dios) [i.e. a star].

Phaeton, a child of immortal mother and mortal father, becomes a daimon or disembodied spirit, the immaterial essence of the visible star Jupiter. By the time of Plato (424-348 BCE) we find the notion that all human souls are sown into the stars before they become incarnated into bodily existence, and to their stars they will return at death. Plato’s Demiurge in the Timaeus creates the eternal soul as the informing intelligence of the world, inserted into its centre, and it is from this soul that each star receives its sphere of light. We might best understand Plato’s concept of “soul” as eternal life-principle, and in its original pristine form soul manifests as a sphere, the most universally perfect mathematical form. Indeed Plato’s archetypal cosmos is itself spherical, its motion circular, and these two qualities are mirrored in the composition of the human soul which is formed from the same substance as the soul of the world. However, the upheaval of the soul’s incarnation into the body means that it can easily be overpowered by material existence, become distorted and forgetful, and lose sight of its innate visionary capacity. The purpose of the philosophic life is therefore to overcome earthly limitations and restore the soul’s spherical and perfect nature, with its intuitive perception of (what we might term) supra-rational dimensions of being. In the words of Proclus, the incarnated soul should “pursue the uniform and the simple energy of the circle of sameness” so that at physical death it may move swiftly to its spiritual home.

In attributing each soul to a star, Plato introduces the idea of the soul’s vehicle, its astral body, which accompanies it in its descent into matter. In this subtle body the soul is “systematically moulded, framed and controlled by the spheres of light called the wanderers or the planetary gods”. We must remember that for Plato there are supra-sensory realities behind and within physical phenomena, the eide or “patterns fixed in the nature of things” which participate in the eternal forms through sympathetic resonance

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9 For a classical reference to the relationship of Phaeton with the planet Jupiter, see Cicero: 2.20.
10 Plato, Timaeus 41e; Phaedrus 246a.
11 On the soul as sphere, see Critchlow: 7.
12 Plato, Timaeus: 42e-44a.
13 Unreferenced passage in Critchlow: 12.
14 Critchlow: 15.
because they are made in their image. These patterns then act as mediators between the divine intellect and human senses, and are given visible or audible form as universal or cultural-specific archetypal images. The sphere is the most perfect of these eide, being reflected poetically in the perceived shape of the cosmos itself, and the planetary motions within it. This is why for Plato, the very beginnings of philosophy occur in the contemplation of the perfection of the visible heavens, as the soul seeks to become aligned with its proportions and awake to its own former sphericity, so that it may rotate in harmony with the world soul.

At this point I should remind the reader that when evoking the “reality” of a dimension beyond the sensory, esoteric philosophy speaks in a metaphoric voice, recognising that the ability to grasp the meaning of a poetic or symbolic image is an essential process in the soul’s cognitive journey beyond discursive thinking. This is not easy to capture in an academic discourse, but perhaps it can be done through a kind of hybrid writing which continually refers the objective or outer form of the event to both an inner sense of its noetic significance and its lived reality, or as McGilchrist would put it, to the “bigger picture” facilitated by right brain hemisphere understanding.

The French historian of religion Henry Corbin’s articulation of the mundus imaginalis as an “inter-world” corresponding to and entered into by the creative imagination as a faculty of perception is relevant here, as it provides a context for the reality of non-physical phenomena, which neither reduces them to the status of material substance (such as tables and chairs) nor elevates them to transcendent principles beyond the direct experience of human beings. This medial world is “A world as ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty of perception belonging to it, a faculty that is a cognitive function, a noetic value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. This faculty is the imaginative power.”

Corbin was writing from within the framework of Sufism, which derived the recognition of the imagination as cognitive from the later

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15 See Critchlow: 25.
16 See for example Plato, Epinomis: 986c-d; Plato, Timaeus: 47a-d.
17 On metaphor and symbol as the language of sacred knowledge, see Barth; Chittick 2007, Corbin 1999; Needleman: chap.1; Versluis: Introduction.
18 See McGilchrist, e.g. 191, 195, 199, 208. It is interesting to note a resonance between the Platonic divisions of “rational” and “intellectual” knowledge and the functions of the left and right brain hemispheres as researched by McGilchrist.
19 Corbin 1999: 5.
neoplatonists, and it was they who connected it directly to the “subtle body” and daimonic activity. So let us now explore this further. In esoteric traditions, the soul’s vehicle or “subtle body” is traditionally divided into two kinds, which merge into each other as the vehicle becomes increasingly purified of material elements. These two vehicles are the pneumatic (sometimes called etheric or spirit body) and the celestial or luminous (sometimes called the astral body). According to Aristotle, the former (the soma pneumatikon) is not elemental, but is of a rarer, finer quintessence, moving in a circular fashion and taking the image of the physical body when it descends; it is “analogous to the element comprising the stars.” The seventh century CE Alexandrian Philoponus suggests that the soma pneumatikon can make itself visible through setting its own imagination in movement, and according to G.R.S. Mead, this would explain visions of ghosts. With the help of “daimonic co-operation,” it may also disappear at will, becoming absorbed back into its non-material essence. Porphyry is the earliest philosopher to link imagination and pneumatic vehicle, but the most succinct connection is made by Synesius (365-c.430 CE) in his treatise De insomniis. Synesius suggests that it is the pneuma which “brings the imagination into play” as a kind of “common sense” which is of a higher order of cognition than sense-perception. This phantastikon pneuma must be kept pure through ritual activity, as it comprises the “borderland between reason and
unreason, between body and the bodiless […] by its means things divine are joined with lowest things.” He adds that “therefore it is difficult for its nature to be comprehended by philosophy”, 27 if by “philosophy” is meant rational enquiry alone. Intimations again of Corbin’s mundus imaginalis as an order of reality where spiritual essence takes on visual form, entered via altered states of consciousness such as dreams and waking visions. 28 Furthermore, Synesius associates this imaginative essence with the daimons, who are “supplied with their substance by this mode of life”. 29 They add imagination to human thought, and may even “take on the appearance of happenings” which implies that they can become visible as events in the world. 30 The ultimate destiny of the daimonic soul is to become absorbed into the pure radiant light of the divine realm, but on the way it may assume a variety of coverings or vehicles, from the gross and quasi-material (i.e. misty) to the luminous. 31

The astroeides or luminous body seems to be a more direct and purer manifestation of divine essence than the pneuma. In Plutarch’s (46-120 CE) “Myth of Timarchus”, a colourful narrative about an after-death journey, Timarchus is shown a vision of discarnate human souls by a spirit guide. He sees many star-like lights hovering around an abyss, falling into it from above, and shooting up into it from below. His guide confirms that these are “the daimons themselves”, and tells him:

In the stars that are apparently extinguished […] you see the souls that sink entirely into the body; in the stars that are lighted again […] you see the souls that float back from the body after death, shaking off a sort of dimness and darkness as one might shake off mud; while the stars that move about on high are the daemons of men said to “possess understanding”[…] hearing this, [Timarchus] attended more carefully and saw that the stars bobbed about, some more, some less, like the corks we observe riding on the sea to mark nets. 32

For Plutarch then, the highest part of the soul, the intuitive understanding, does not mingle with the body but is “like a buoy attached to the top, floating on the surface in contact with the man’s head, while he is as if it were submerged in the depths”. However, raising the problematic question

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27 Synesius 137a, in Mead: 71.
28 See Corbin 1977. Synesius also suggests the identity of dream-images with the afterlife state of the soul at 137d (Mead: 72-73).
29 Synesius 137b, in Mead: 71-72.
30 Synesius 137b, in Mead: 72.
31 Synesius 141c-142a, in Mead: 80-81.
32 Plutarch: 471-3.
of whether this daimonic intelligence is “inside” or “outside” the soul, Plutarch says that those “who take it to be within themselves, as they take reflected objects to be in the mirrors that reflect them” are mistaken, but that those “who conceive the matter rightly call it a daemon, as being external”.

Plato had in fact raised this very question of the ambiguous ontological status of the daimon, and Plutarch would have found his source for daimon-as-intelligence in the nous-daimon of the Timaeus (90 a-c): “God gave the sovereign part of the human soul to be the divinity of each one, being that part which, as we say, dwells at the top of the body, and inasmuch as we are a plant not of an earthly but of a heavenly growth, raises us from earth to our kindred who are in heaven.” But in the Phaedo (107d) and the Laws (713c-d) the daimon is seen more as a separate entity or guide to the afterlife, a superior being or guardian spirit. Socrates’ daimon can be seen to have elements of both, manifesting as a voice which is both “other” and yet also as his own moral nature. The author of the Platonic Epinomis characterises the daimons as “external” elemental creatures, visible because they mainly partake of fire, although they also contain varying portions of earth, air and water. These daimons, he says, are “the divine host of the stars.” We find the same image used by Plotinus (204/5-270 CE), who likens the daimons’ relationship to the gods to “the radiance around every star”. He also takes up Plato’s theme of the duality of the daimonic; on the one hand he refers to celestial daimonic intelligences which straddle the divine and human realms: “we say that they are eternal next after the gods, but already inclining towards us, between the gods and our race.” Yet on the other, he asks “are they the trace left by each soul when it enters the universe?” suggesting that they comprise the intellect, the highest part of the soul, that which remains undescended from its divine origin. In Enneads III “on the tutelary daimon” he explains:

One must think that there is a universe in our soul, not only an intelligible one but an arrangement like in form to that of the soul of the world: so, as that too, is distributed according to its diverse powers into the sphere of the fixed stars and those of the moving stars, the powers in our soul also are of like form to these powers, and there is an activity proceeding from each

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33 Plutarch: 471.
35 Plato, 1517-1533: 908.
36 Plotinus: III.5.6.
37 Plotinus: III.5.6.
38 Plotinus: III.5.6.
power, and when the souls are set free they come there to the star which is in harmony with their character and power which lived and worked in them; and each will have a god of this kind as a guardian spirit, either the star itself or the god set above this power.\(^{39}\)

The soul’s daimonic powers are then analogous to the powers in the cosmos, yet they also have an aspect which is experienced as “other”, a guardian principle which helps us to fulfil our destiny. Damascius (458-c.538 CE) describes the stellar power of the soul as “a certain radiant vehicle, star-like and eternal [which is] securely shut away in this gross body”.\(^{40}\) This light-filled body, in the theurgic rituals of later Platonists, becomes the means by which the soul may ascend to the god and achieve deification.\(^{41}\) Iamblichus (250-325 CE) preferred to think of the daimon as partaking of a superior order to the human soul, beyond the intellect, whose powers are invoked during theurgic ritual.\(^{42}\) We should refer at this point to the source of Iamblichean theurgy, the Chaldean Oracles of the early centuries CE, which describe ritual practices directed towards the freeing of the soul of the initiate from his or her body and its elevation to the “heart of the sun” as a metaphor for achieving divine consciousness.\(^{43}\) Many extant fragments dwell on the fiery manifestation of spiritual energy; for example, “a lightning bolt, sweeping along, obscures the flower of fire as it leaps into the hollow of the worlds;”\(^{44}\) the Twice-Transcendent deity sows “lights which are set free” in the world;\(^{45}\) the purified soul “shines as an angel”;\(^{46}\) “on all sides, the reins of fire extend from the unformed soul”;\(^{47}\) and after an invocation, “You will either see a fire, similar to a child, extended by bounds over the billow of air, or you will see a formless fire, from which a voice is sent forth, or you will see a sumptuous light rushing like a spiral around the field”.\(^{48}\)

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40 In the lost *Life of Isidorus*, Mead: 60, n.2.
41 See Addey 2010; Finamore; Shaw 2007, 2010; Uzdavinys: ch.5.
42 On the nature and theurgic function of the daimon see Iamblichus *Dm*: II.1-10, IX; Clarke: 107-111; Dillon 2001; Shaw 1995: 131-142.
43 See Majercik fr.115, Uzdavinys: 115-118.
44 Proclus, *In Timaeum* 1.451, Majercik fr.34.
47 Psellus PG 122, Majercik fr.127.
48 Proclus *In rem p.* I.iii, Majercik fr.146. This fragment has interesting resonances with contemporary crop circle light phenomena, where bright lights have been seen flying in circular motion around wheat fields.
For Iamblichus, as for Synesius, the power of affective concentration is required to harness the soul’s fiery vehicle and reform its spherical integrity, for it becomes ever more material as it descends into the body and this process must be reversed.49 The question of how an individual’s desire or focussed attention may provide psychic energy for spiritual epiphanies is hardly discussed today, and yet it was central to the Platonic theory of eros as a magical, connective power, harnessed through the “intention of the imagination” as Ficino would put it.50 Iamblichus associates the soul’s eternal aetheric vehicle (the ochema) with the phantasia, and remarks that it is prayer which facilitates the alignment of the soul with its higher or divine nature: “our ochema is made spherical and is moved circularly whenever the soul is especially assimilated to nous.”51 It then becomes like the subtle body of the god, which “is utterly liberated from any centripetal or centrifugal tendency because it has neither tendency or because it is moved in a circle.”52 During the theurgic ritual of photogogia, the soul’s subtle body became illuminated and revealed the presence of the god via the imagination: “Photogogia somehow illuminates with divine light the aethereal and luminous vehicle of the soul, from which divine vision, set in motion by the gods, take possession of our imaginative power” says Iamblichus.53 This can happen either through the presence of the gods in the soul, or through the shining of a light onto the soul, again raising the question of the internal or external provenance of daimonic energy.54

49 See Iamblichus, In Timaeum, Majercik fr.49: “[The sphere] is both itself one and capable of containing multiplicity, which indeed makes it truly divine”, quoted in Shaw 1999: 134. Shaw describes the sphere as “the hieroglyph—of the One itself”.
50 See Ficino 1989: 351,353,355. Ficino refers to the Arabic astrologers and magi as being experts in the art of magical attraction through the powers of imagination. The idea of love as the supreme magician, attracting through affinity, is found in his De amore VI.10. See also Couliano: part II. Note also the etymology of the word “desire”, from de-sidere (lat.), “from the star or constellation”, implying that our deepest desire is connected to the stars.
51 Iamblichus On the Mysteries [Dm] V.4. trans. Shaw 2010: 10. See also Damascius “it is certain that the circular figure is common to all the intellectual gods as intellectual” in Shaw 1999: 134.
53 Iamblichus Dm III.14. See also Shaw 2011: 13-15; Uzdavinys: 168-171 on the nature of divine or “super-celestial” light and its perception via the soul’s luminous vehicle.
What kind of lights are manifested to human sight in these rituals? Iamblichus gives us a detailed taxonomy of spirit-beings, their hierarchies extending up from human souls through material and sublunary archons, heroes and daimons, to angels, archangels and gods. Each will be accompanied by a light whose intensity is mediated by their degree of materiality; thus gods’ lights are unchanging, “flashing forth with an indivisible and inexpressible fire”. Archangels are similar to gods, being “full of supernatural light”; angels have a more “divided” light, whereas daimons “appear to the view at different times in different forms, the same forms appearing great and small”. They “glow with smouldering fire” which can be “expressed in speech”, and which “does not exceed the power of vision of those who are capable of viewing superior beings”. The Heroes’ light is apparently similar to the daimonic, whereas the cosmic archons produce a pure fire and the material ones a murkier light. Human souls appear as “fitfully visible” as they are heavily soiled by the “realm of generation”. Now we should pay attention to Iamblichus’ assertion that such lights are visible only to those who have developed the degree of imaginal vision which conforms to them. For as these subtle light bodies do not mingle or participate in matter, they are not “seen” in the same way as living bodies. However, their light may be conducted in ritual activity through sunlight, moonlight, air or aether, symbolic objects and incantations, water, or on a wall prepared by sacred inscriptions. In such instances, Iamblichus describes the light as “from without”, serving the will and intelligence of the gods. Yet it is clear that it is also the soul’s imaginative faculty which perceives the light as a supernatural energy, although it can also observe it “as if” it is an objective phenomenon—the corollary being that sense-perception alone would simply see light with no understanding of its provenance. This epistemological subtlety is explained more clearly by Proclus (412-485 CE), who points out that:

[… the gods themselves are incorporeal, but since those who see them possess bodies, the visions which issue from the gods to worthy recipients possess a certain quality from the gods who send them but also have something connatural with those who see them. This is why the gods are seen yet not seen at all. In fact, those who see the gods witness them in the

55 Iamblichus Dm II.3; also, see Proclus In Alcibiades 71-77 on 6 levels of daimons and their functions (Dillon 2001: 8-9). See also Plaisance on the ambiguous status of Iamblichus’ archons.
56 Iamblichus Dm II.4-5.
57 Iamblichus Dm 11.4-5; see Clarke: ch. 6.
58 Iamblichus Dm II.4.
luminous garments of their souls. The point is, they are often seen when the eyes are shut.\textsuperscript{59} (my italics)

I would agree with Proclus that this is exactly the point. To assume a “bottom line” of objective, sense-perceptible truth about anomalous lights means that any further directly intuitive or imaginative interpretation is rendered “untrue” or fanciful, whereas from the neoplatonic perspective, such an assumption is the result of limited perceptual capacity, unable (or unwilling) to “tune in” to a more subtle visionary potential. As Leonard George has elegantly put it, “the truth sought beyond extension and shape hides within the extended and shaped geometric objects of imagination.”\textsuperscript{60} This is where neoplatonic thinking diverges radically from physical science, being based on the principle of \textit{adaequatio} or similitude between knower and what is known. The question becomes, as Shaw observes, not \textit{what} one sees, but \textit{how} one sees, for the presence of the gods “reveals the incorporeal as corporeal to the eyes of the soul by means of the eyes of the body.”\textsuperscript{61}

Visual perception for Iamblichus can be of three kinds, divinely inspired, imaginative or sensual. The imagination may receive images from both the sensory and intellectual powers of the soul, and indeed an image may be transferred from the imaginative vehicle to the sense organ in order to “mould the incoming sensory image” and enhance its perception.\textsuperscript{62} It is true that in Iamblichean theurgy, supernatural powers are revealed through and in nature, in symbolic objects, audible and visual images—in other words, in matter.\textsuperscript{63} Indeed Iamblichus tells us that the fullest divine revelations include both intellectual and physical perception—as George puts it, “the higher imaginative faculty adds a theophanic dimension to the lower faculty’s sense image, resulting in a more complete perception of the object’s true nature.”\textsuperscript{64} Shaw has also convincingly argued for the fully embodied life of the theurgist, for whom the light of superior beings is revealed to his or her bodily vision whilst simultaneously kindling an inner “enlightenment” which will eventually lead to the practitioner’s own realisation of their own divine nature.\textsuperscript{65}

So where do our excursions into neoplatonic daimonology lead us? I would argue that there are profound implications here for our understanding

\textsuperscript{59} Proclus \textit{In Remp} 1.39, 5-17, in Shaw 2010: 24.
\textsuperscript{60} George: 80.
\textsuperscript{61} Shaw 2010: 14, Iamblichus \textit{Dm} II.6.
\textsuperscript{62} George: 79.
\textsuperscript{63} Iamblichus \textit{Dm} 65 7-8, 23; Shaw 2007.
\textsuperscript{64} Iamblichus \textit{Dm} III.2; George: 81.
\textsuperscript{65} Shaw 1999: 130; 2010.
of paranormal visions, through recognising that imaginal and sensory modes of perception are not mutually exclusive but simply different registers along a spectrum of frequencies. Indeed it is possible that what one person perceives via their purified ochema will remain invisible to another whose imagination is not so finely tuned, so it is rarely a clear-cut case of reality or illusion.

Moving now to the Renaissance revival of neoplatonic metaphysics and magic, we find the Florentine magus Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) incorporating elements of both contemplative and theurgic neoplatonism in his understanding of the daimonic element in humans and the cosmos. In Ficino’s Christian Platonism, the good daimons become God’s messengers and guides, helping us “by means of prophetic signs, omens, dreams, oracles, voices, sacrifices and divine inspiration”. As Michael Allen has remarked, Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s *Apology* contains his most detailed analysis of daimonic activity, although we also find considerable speculation on their nature in his commentaries on Plotinus and in his treatise on astral magic, *De vita coelitus comparanda*. In the first of these texts, Ficino posits three kinds of spiritual intelligence: elemental daimons, celestial spirits within the cosmos (i.e. planetary deities), and supercelestial spirits or angels. Both the latter he says are called gods by the “ancient theologians”. The daimons are subject to the planetary gods and dwell in the elementary spheres, mediating the planetary gifts to the human soul in Ficino’s system of natural magic. The first two categories are visible, the last invisible, and both here and in his commentary on Plotinus’ *Ennead* III, Ficino assigns the daimons primarily to the element of air, whereas pure fire is more characteristic of gods. The daimons of the upper, fiery air preside over contemplation of sublime things, the daimons of pure air preside over reason and the active life, and the daimons of watery air preside over the sensual and vegetative powers of nature. Each of these then also corresponds with a human cognitive faculty: fiery air with the intellect or intuitive understanding, pure air with reason and smoky or vapour-laden air with imagination and sense-perception—and it will be through these corresponding modes that they will be perceived:

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67 Allen 1998: 131-2; his translation of Ficino’s argumentum is at 202-208.
69 Ficino 1989.
70 Ficino 2000; see also Allen 1998: 135.
If we live according to the imagination, our outer daimon is an airy one: it is a daimon which belongs to the lower region of the air and which, by acting on our imagination, forcefully propels our soul by means of its own imagining. If, however, we live according to reason, our outer daimon which belongs to the middle region of the air, drives human reason with its own reasoning. Finally, if our life is intellectual, a daimon belonging to the highest region of the air assists our intellect by means of its intellectual activity. 71

What, then, on the visibility of these entities? Ficino describes them as spherical, moving in circular motion as the “stars of the sphere of air”, emitting rays which, he says, the magician knows how to make visible in thickened air—air, that is, which may be filled with the smoke of incense in invocatory rituals. 72 So yet again we find the paradoxical yet intrinsic relationship between inner and outer aspects of the daimonic. Ficino tends to emphasise the externality of the daimon (“our daimon and genius is not only, as is thought, our intellect, but a numinous being”), 73 suggesting that it communicates by imprinting meaning on the imagination by means of perceptible rays. 74 However he also acknowledges that “what imagines in us is in some respect a daimon.” 75 This imagination is powerful enough to imprint images which it receives from noetic sources into the world of the senses, and in the Platonic Theology we find a passage which re-iterates Proclus’ concern with the dangers of confusing these projected images with those which arise from the material world:

For the most part, the phantasy, which most guides the way we live our life, is so intent that with the sharpest gaze it ponders its own images within itself. These intensely envisioned images blaze out to the common sense, which we call in the Platonic manner the imagination, and beyond to the lower senses and the spirit. But it is common to claim that this image shining back in the senses and in the spirit is a reality. For people who are awake say that they see a man when they turn to the image of a man flickering in their senses. Similarly people who are asleep say that they see a man when an image of him shines out from the phantasy preserving it and passes through the imagination into the sense and the spirit. 76

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71 Ficino 2000: 1708.
72 Allen 1995: 79-81. In his sermon “The Star of the Magi” Ficino suggests that the star is in fact a comet made of air condensed by the Angel Gabriel (Ficino 2006b).
74 Ficino 2000: 1708.
75 Ficino, Commentary on Plato’s Sophist quoted in Allen 1989: 270.
76 Ficino 2004: ch. XIII, 151.
There is a difference then between a visual image which is only an outward representation, and an image which maintains an identity with the noetic realm sown deep within the soul, and whose meaning arises from the recognition of this very consubstantiality. This is precisely why the daimon is simultaneously without and within the psyche. As the sixteenth century physician Paracelsus puts it, “[m]an] can be understood only as an image of the macrocosm […] only then does it become manifest what is in him, For what is outside is also inside, and what is outside man is not inside.”

Or Corbin, on the truth of all knowledge as the soul’s knowledge of itself:

In contrast to representative knowledge, which is knowledge of the abstract or logical universal, what is in question is presential, unitive, intuitive knowledge […] a presential illumination which the soul, as a being of light, causes to shine upon its object. By making herself present to herself, the soul also makes the object present to her […] the truth of all objective knowledge is thus nothing more nor less than the awareness which the knowing subject has of itself.

We are talking here of the kind of knowledge aroused by the symbolic or archetypal image, and it is this possibility of a visible entity pointing to a participatory (and not merely subjective) meaning through the engagement of the imagination which poses a challenge to empirical or scientific investigations into the paranormal.

In an interesting passage from a sermon on Colossians 3, Ficino speaks of the possibility of manifesting the soul’s luminous subtle body to human sight. Christ, he says, decided to reveal his spiritual body “by containing his own rays so that they do not shine forth too copiously, or by strengthening the rays of the man who is gazing upon him.” He has the ability to “shape the ambient air in his own image to the extent he pleases; and in this shape he can adjust himself to the onlooker”. In his Epitome to Plato’s Sixth Letter, Ficino refers to the diaphanous angelic body, which can emit light from within and without, and in his Platonic Theology he refers to the innate spherical shape of the luminous or celestial body which

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77 See Giglioni 2010 for the Renaissance development of the Platonic distinction between mimetic and icastic art. Proclus developed a sophisticated theory of symbolic perception as a theurgic process, contrasting mere resemblance with sympathetic resonance and ultimately identity of image and referent. See Struck: 227-253, Voss 2006b.

78 Quoted in Jacobi: 21.


81 Ficino 2000: 1534, see Allen 140 n.40.
transforms itself into the human shape of the aetheric body upon
incarnation.82 To transform the aetheric back into the celestial requires, it
would seem, attention to the daimonic voices which speak through our
symbolic imagination via poetic metaphor, synchronicities and
demonstrations of luminosity, and which were cultivated by Ficino through
his practices of astral, musical and talismanic magic.83

For the remainder of this essay, I want to draw some parallels between
these pre-modern understandings of daimonic manifestation and
contemporary eye-witness accounts of anomalous lights, bearing in mind
the arguments I have outlined above for their “existence” in a very real,
but non-quantifiable, ontological field. Firstly, I was struck by the
descriptions of disembodied souls in Michael Newton’s accounts of his
life between lives therapeutic sessions.84 In this hypnosis work, individuals
are put into deep trance and experience what Newton purports to be the
life of their disembodied soul in between particular incarnations. In this
liminal place, they observe the following strange entities: “blobs of
energy”,85 “half-formed human shapes”,86 “myriads of sharp star lights”,87
“patches of light bobbing around”,88 and “bunches of moving lights
buzzing around as fireflies”.89 Remarkably similar to Timarchus’ vision of
the daimons, and seemingly dependent on the accessing of a level of
awareness beyond the conscious mind. Newton however appears
somewhat immune to the symbolic significance of what his clients report,
preferring a tone of apparent objectivity as if the spirit world can be
considered to be of the same ontological status as our own—a problem we
encounter in much “new age” literature.90

This becomes even more of an issue when we consider the appearance
of strange lights on digital photographs. What appears to be a common
image is that of a misty spherical object filled with a “snake” pattern and
with a central nucleus, claimed by many to be a “spirit orb” which is
usually invisible to the naked eye. The scientific explanation for such an
anomaly is that “in digital cameras the distance between the lens and flash

82 Ficino 2006a: XVIII.4, 105.
1995; Walker. On Ficino’s astrological music therapy see e.g. Voss 2007.
88 Newton 1994: 75.
90 On the question of the “literality” of Newton’s client’s visions, see Voss 2010:
215 n.12.
has decreased causing a decrease in the angle of light reflection that increases the chance of catching sub-visible particles”, these particles being dust or moisture. However, psychics and mediums claim that these orbs are genuine signs of spirit energy. One medium explains: “orbs usually appear as spheres of light, they can appear as tiny flashing pinpoints of light as they move.” They are often accompanied by mists or smoky wisps and can develop into full-blown apparitions: “these mists can sometimes show the actual shape and form of the person manifesting”. The psychic explanation is that light entities result from the expenditure of energy as spiritual or daimonic intelligences attempt to become visible in the physical world. Again, not so different perhaps from Ficino’s speculation about the “airy daimons” making their presence observable in the thickened air of clouds or smoke. Now according to the neoplatonic model, there is no reason why such “sub-visible particles” should not be both the result of a camera fault and also the manifestation of imaginal entities made visible to certain states of consciousness in certain conditions, for physical analysis does not cancel out supra-physical domains of enquiry, it simply constitutes one mode of investigation.

One of the most well-documented experiments in psychic communication took place in the Norfolk village of Scole from 1993-8, known as the Scole Experiment. Here, participants witnessed an extraordinary array of anomalous phenomena, from images imprinted on photographic film to apports and moving lights. One witness reports:

Suddenly, the room began to be filled with spirit lights that can be best described in size and appearance as resembling fireflies with constant illumination. At times, these bluish-white lights would hover in front of spectators, and at other times, they would travel across the floor and appear to climb up the table in the centre of the room and fly up through the rafters of the garage […] a light flew from above the spectators’ heads and across from the Scole team and touched the index finger of my right hand. I was incredulous. I could feel the light physically touch me and could plainly see that it was not a fibre-optic cord or light projection, but rather a self-contained sphere of bluish-white light of indeterminate source.

The lights are furthermore described as “resembling shooting stars”, as darting around at great speed and performing elaborate dances “including perfect, sustained circles executed at high velocity”, entering crystals as

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93 See Solomon.
small points of light, striking audibly the top of a table, alighting on witnesses’ bodies, moving in time to music, producing “lightning flashes”, changing shape and moving at high speed in perfect geometric patterns. Perhaps more akin to the fiery luminous vehicle than the spirit orbs, which could be seen as more airy or etheric, these lights appear to be autonomous and dynamic, not to say daimonic.95

To conclude, I will attempt to summarise the problem raised in this brief excursion into the perception of daimonic intelligences as visible lights, which is that of discriminating between epistemological modes. I would suggest that we could take a cue from neoplatonism and reinstate the understanding of the active or creative imagination as the appropriate faculty for perceiving and recognising dimensions of being beyond our sense perceptible reality. This would require researchers to move beyond quantifiable paradigms to uncover an inner resonance with the “supra-rational” nature of the material they are studying. Neoplatonism provides a rigorous theoretical framework for the relationship between our imaginal capacity and “supernatural” events. It also promotes a participatory model of “co-creation” in relation to such events, which removes them from the arena of external objectivity and situates them in a dynamic mesocosm between the human and divine realms of time and eternity, of spatiality and imagination.96 In this place, a strange light may be both explicable in rational terms, and yet also point to a mysterious “other”—a daimonic presence which may only be revealed as such through a radical shift in the researcher’s cognitive register.

Bibliography


95 It should be noted that flashing, darting orbs of light are also often witnessed at crop formations, reported both by believers in non-human agency and by human circle makers. www.bibliotecapleyades.net/circulos_cultivos/esp_circuloscultivos21.htm (accessed November 2012).

96 On the notion of “co-creation” as a methodology see Ferrer & Sherman: Introduction.


In this chapter, I explore the experience and practice of creativity (especially in relation to writing) as a felt engagement with an autonomous entity or intelligence that is separate from the ego. I argue that deliberately personifying one’s creativity in the mode of the classical muse, daimon, or genius is a particularly effective tactic not only for enhancing creativity but for discovering an organic life direction, vocation, or calling. I also delve into the obvious and compelling question of this creative intelligence’s ontological status. Is the muse, the daimon, the personal genius—that gravitational centre of our creative energy and identity—truly a separate being/force/entity with an autonomous existence? Or are such words and the experience to which they refer simply convenient fictions that serve as metaphors for the unconscious mind? Obviously, this is a question that relates to and resonates with many diverse fields of study: religion, anthropology, esotericism, parapsychology, and even biology and neuroscience. But regardless of the angle of approach, the first thing we find when we seriously begin to consider the matter is that arriving at a viable answer will not be, and cannot be, a straightforward affair, since we are dealing with an issue whose reality is bound up with the very subjectivity of we-who-ask-the-questions. This means that all of our attempts run us into immediate difficulties, because whichever side we try
to choose—the daimonic muse as somehow “real” or the daimonic muse as mere metaphor—we find that our thinking, and more fundamentally the nature of our perspective and its elaboration in the cultural-philosophical worldview that underlies our thinking, proceeds from presuppositions that automatically lead us to skirt important issues, ignore certain data, beg crucial questions, and generally disregard, flatten, and bulldoze over entire realms of pertinent and potentially conflicting actualities.

Hence the value of reviewing some of the various ways in which intelligent individuals have understood the experience of guidance and communication from a muse-like source. And of all the myriad strands in the lively cultural conversation about this issue, it would be hard to identify a more pertinent—or fascinating (and entertaining)—one than the line of influence connecting twentieth-century occultist Aleister Crowley to psychedelic guru Timothy Leary to counterculture novelist-psychologist-philosopher and “guerrilla ontologist” Robert Anton Wilson. The dividing line between objective and subjective interpretations of the experience of external-seeming communication from an invisible source is highlighted not only in the individual stories of these three figures but in the plotline that interconnects them with each other. In particular, Wilson’s final “resting point” in terms of a belief system to encompass the whole thing is helpful and instructive in any inquiry into the daimonic muse’s ontological status, and can prove a helpful tonic for dogmatism, because the outlook that he ended up inhabiting was more of an anti-belief system that highlighted and hinged on the irreducible indeterminacy of any possible answer.

The Great Beast and his Holy Guardian Angel

Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) was arguably the most influential occultist of the twentieth century, and his relevance to the muse-based or daimon-based approach to writing and creativity is found in his lifelong engagement with the idea of the Holy Guardian Angel, which stands as a specific iteration of the fundamental concept of the muse, daimon, or genius. By the time of Crowley, the concept of the Holy Guardian Angel as a person’s presiding spiritual guide, helper, and exemplar, the accessing of which was the chief goal of magical or esoteric work, had already been around for several centuries in Western occult and mystical circles—or even longer if you factor in its long prehistory in neoplatonism and various sister schools of philosophical mysticism. Crowley himself borrowed the term from an English translation of a medieval occult text, so there was nothing particular original in his use of it, or even in his fundamental
philosophical framing of it. But it was he who made it central and definitive for subsequent generations when he founded the new religion of Thelema and devoted the remainder of his life to explicating and promoting its principles.

The founding event itself, which Thelemites still celebrate every year on the spring equinox as the Feast of the Equinox of the Gods, was the writing of Liber AL vel Legis or The Book of the Law. As the story goes, in April 1904, while Crowley was on honeymoon in Cairo with his new wife Rose, the book was dictated to him over a span of three days by a voice that identified itself as Aiwass or Aiwaz, messenger of the Egyptian god Horus. The book became Thelema’s central scripture, and Crowley identified Aiwass as his own Holy Guardian Angel. He also identified the event as a dividing point in history that signalled the end of the former “Aeon of Osiris,” a period characterised by belief in patriarchal monotheism and all that goes with it, and the new “Aeon of Horus,” whose guiding ethos would be individual liberty and the discovery of each person’s “True Will” in communion with his or her own Holy Guardian Angel.

Interestingly and importantly, Crowley’s championing of Thelema and Liber AL did not happen right away in the immediate wake of his Cairo experience. In fact, he was initially not all that enamoured of the book, and spoke more than once of the way its ideas were distasteful and contrary to his own thoughts. Robert Anton Wilson and co-author Miriam Joe Hill elaborate on this briefly in their encyclopaedia Everything Is Under Control: Conspiracies, Cults, and Cover-ups, and their comments again underscore the question of what Crowley’s experience with Aiwass “really was”:

At first, Crowley did not like the experience or the book, and managed to largely ignore them for ten years. After 1914, however, he felt increasingly under their spell, and eventually he devoted the rest of his life to the “mission” the book imposed on him. After 1919, he spoke of the Cairo experience as an encounter with a superhuman intelligence; one of his disciples, Kenneth Grant, has claimed the communicating entity emanated from the system of the double star, Sirius, while another student, Israel Regardie, prefers to say Crowley reached the depths of the human evolutionary unconscious unknown to either Freud or Jung.3

Thelema is erected entirely upon and around the idea of the Holy Guardian Angel. Its central organising concept is the necessity for each adherent to achieve the “knowledge and conversation” of his or her own Angel, and

3 Wilson and Hill: 134.
thereby to discover the aforementioned True Will, a term that is basically coeval with the idea of a life mission or divine purpose. The most famous statement from *Liber AL*—the oft-quoted “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law”—was borrowed and modified from Rabelais, but in Thelema it assumes the radically specific and transformative meaning of *discovering one’s guiding daimon and thereby accessing, activating, and actualizing one’s cosmic/divine destiny*. The classical daimon/daemon or genius encapsulated the idea of an invisible spirit that accompanies a person through life and exerts a kind of existential gravity or magnetism that evokes experiences in accordance with the divinely ordained life plan. When Crowley spoke and wrote about the Holy Guardian Angel, and also, significantly, when similar-minded people and organisations in his time did the same—as with the influential Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, whose founder was in fact the translator of the book that provided Crowley with the term “Holy Guardian Angel”—he was pursuing the very same thing from a different angle.

His experience is also relevant because his interpretation of it, which continued to evolve throughout his lifetime, underscored the tension or confusion between objective and subjective views. Until the end of his life he kept issuing what seemed to be contradictory statements about the matter. Sometimes he even planted them side-by-side in the same writing, as in *The Equinox of the Gods* (1936), the book where he tells the story of how *The Book of the Law* came to be written. At one point he describes the Holy Guardian Angel as “our Secret Self—our Subconscious Ego,” clearly favouring an interpretation of the Angel as a layer or presence within the psyche. But in the same chapter he says that even though the words of *The Book of the Law* were physically written by him as “ink on paper, in the material sense,” still they

> [...] are not My words, unless Aiwaz be taken to be no more than my subconscious self, or some part of it: in that case, my conscious self being ignorant of the Truth in the Book and hostile to most of the ethics and philosophy of the Book, Aiwaz is a severely suppressed part of me. Such a theory would further imply that I am, unknown to myself, possessed of all sorts of praeternatural knowledge and power.4

In other words, Crowley says here that the simplest and therefore the best explanation is to consider the Holy Guardian Angel an independent intelligence, since the subconscious explanation strains credulity even more.

Four decades after Crowley wrote these words, in June 1973, Robert Anton Wilson took “a programmed trip on something an underground

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Alchemist told [me] was LSD,” where part of the “program” involved listening to a taped reading of Crowley’s Invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel. As Wilson recounted in Cosmic Trigger: The Final Secret of the Illuminati, he achieved, among other experiences, “a rush of Jungian archetypes, strongly influenced by the imagery of Crowley’s Invocation, but nonetheless having that peculiar quality of external reality and alien intelligence emphasized by Jung in his discussion of the archetypes.” He also “laughed merrily at Crowley’s joking seriousness in telling one disciple, Frank Bennett, that the Holy Guardian Angel invoked in this ritual is merely ‘our own unconsciousness’ and meanwhile telling another disciple, Jane Wolf, that the Holy Guardian Angel is ‘a separate being of superhuman intelligence.’” Again, the paradox or contradiction is deliberate and central.

The reference to Frank Bennett, not incidentally, comes from a conversation that Bennett and Crowley both recorded separately, Crowley in his autobiography and Bennett in his diary of the time he spent with Crowley in 1921. Bennett was a British-born Australian who became one of Crowley’s chief disciples, and Crowley wrote in his Confessions that he once revealed something to Bennett that shocked him into an initiatory experience of his Holy Guardian Angel. Editors John Symonds and Kenneth Grant filled in the other half of this story in a footnote to their edition of the book: “We know from Frank Bennett’s diary what Crowley said to him on this occasion […] Crowley told him that it was all a matter of getting the subconscious mind to work; and when this subconscious mind was allowed full sway, without interference from the conscious mind, then illumination could be said to have begun; for the subconscious mind was our Holy Guardian Angel.”

For our present purposes, perhaps the most helpful expression of this interpretive tension comes from Israel Regardie, who served as Leary’s personal secretary from 1928 to 1932 and went on to become one of the most influential figures in modern Western occultism. In his introduction to The Law Is for All, a collection of Crowley’s commentary on The Book of the Law, Regardie wrote, “It really makes little difference in the long run whether The Book of the Law was dictated to him by a preterhuman intelligence named Aiwass or whether it stemmed from the creative deeps of Aleister Crowley. The book was written. And he became the mouthpiece for the Zeitgeist, accurately expressing the intrinsic nature of

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6 Wilson 1977: 84.
7 Crowley: 936, n. 4.
our time as no one else has done to date." One is free to disagree with Regardie regarding Crowley’s prophetic value and insight, but his basic point—that it does not matter whether one opts for the supernatural or psychological explanation, because the end result is the same—is worth pondering at length and in depth by those who seek to navigate a relationship with their own deep creative selves.

The strange case of Timothy Leary

The leap from Crowley to Leary and Wilson is, culturally speaking, a drastic one. It is a leap from Edwardian and post-Edwardian England to the America of Woodstock and rock and roll; from World Wars I and II to the Vietnam era; from black-and-white movies and the age of radio to the shimmering visual-electronic culture of McLuhan’s global village. But even so, the basic theme of perceived guidance and communication from an invisible, alien presence remains constant. Moreover, the fact that the early twenty-first century saw a surge of fresh interest in Leary’s life and legacy, and also in the general history of the psychedelic movement and the possible therapeutic and spiritual uses of psychedelic drugs, only reinforces the pertinence of attempting to understand the nature of this internal guidance and its emergence as an alien-seeming force—something that is characteristic, as we may non-tangentially note, of many psychedelic experiences.

More than just well-known, the basic outline of Timothy Leary’s life is legendary. His “first career,” as it were, was as a mainstream psychologist and professor. In the 1950s he taught psychology at Berkeley and performed research for the Kaiser Family Foundation, and then, most famously, he taught at Harvard from 1959 to 1963. Some of this early work has had a lasting influence; while serving as head of psychological research for the Kaiser Family Foundation, Leary came up with a system of analysing human personality along two axes, love-hate and dominance-submission, that produced eight possible personality types with two subdivisions each. It was a brilliant idea (with roots in the work of earlier psychologists) that ended up expressed in a diagram that has come to be known as the “interpersonal circle” or the “Leary circumplex.” Leary’s insights helped to lay the foundation for what would become the standard personality tests that are still in use today, e.g., the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (which is mostly extrapolated from Jung—who had deeply influenced Leary).

8 Quoted in Sutin: 133.
Leary’s progressive fall (or ascent, depending on your perspective) from formal respectability was initiated in 1960 when, encouraged by the cultural tenor of the time and the specific incitements of friends and colleagues from both academia and the emerging counterculture, he travelled to Mexico and ingested psilocybin mushrooms. Some years later he said, “I learned more about my brain and its possibilities, and I learned more about psychology, in the five hours after taking these mushrooms than I had in the preceding fifteen years of studying, human research and psychology.” When he returned to Harvard, he enlisted the aid of his colleague Richard Alpert, who would later achieve fame as writer and spiritual teacher Ram Dass, to launch a formal study of the psychological effects and possible therapeutic uses of psychedelic drugs.

The story of how the whole thing spun out of control is long and fascinating, but the short version is that after achieving some interesting and promising initial results—such as an indication that the integration of psychedelics into the counselling programmes offered to criminal offenders might drastically reduce recidivism rates—Leary, who was naturally antiauthoritarian and free-wheeling, grew fed up with the constraints of conventional research, reputation, and respectability, and in 1963 ended up getting fired from Harvard along with Alpert. The university shut the research programme down, and within a few years the US government had banned the use of all psychedelic drugs for any purposes, scientific or otherwise.

The provocation for the government ban was traceable at least partly to Leary himself, who upon his departure from Harvard rapidly transformed himself into the colourful prophet of psychedelic liberation that he is best remembered as today. Naturally, this incurred the wrath of civil authority, and so began a trend that was eventually epitomised by Richard Nixon’s televised proclamation circa 1970 that Leary was “the most dangerous man in America.”

Irrepressible to the core, Leary refused to back down, and his life path rapidly mutated into something like a thriller novel with a plot involving imprisonment, escape, flight from the US, entanglement with prominent anti-government groups (e.g., the Black Panthers, the Weather Underground), kidnapping, flight from country to country, and eventual return to the US in 1973, at which point he was thrown back in prison, first at Folsom and then at the Vacaville California Medical Facility. At Folsom he was kept in solitary confinement, and also, for a time, in a cell next to Charles Manson.

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9 Lemle.
It was in those prisons that his story dovetailed with our overarching theme of guidance by the muse/daimon/genius, for it was there that he began to experiment consciously with opening himself to thoughts and ideas that, as it seemed, “wanted” to be expressed through him—in other words, with channelling. Viewing the operation as a form of telepathy, and setting as his goal the contacting of “Higher Intelligence” (his specific term) of an expressly extraterrestrial sort, he recruited his wife Joanna, a fellow prisoner named Wayne Benner, and Benner’s girlfriend, a journalist, to participate. The resulting writings—Starseed (1973), Neurologic (1973), and Terra II: A Way Out (1974)—introduced his famous eight-circuit model of consciousness and advanced the idea that life originally came to earth from outer space, and that humanity is destined by DNA coding and evolutionary impulse to colonise space and return to the stars for transcendence and fulfilment via reunion with the galactic source of our being, which is none other than the Higher Intelligence that Leary and his team were in contact with.

To back up a bit and draw a crucial connection, by this point in his life Leary had come to see himself as deeply connected to Aleister Crowley. He had long felt an interest in Crowley’s life and ideas, but by the time he arrived at Vacaville in 1974 this had advanced to a point where he viewed his own life as a “continuation” (as distinct from a reincarnation, since his and Crowley’s lives overlapped) of Crowley and his work. In the words of John Higgs, author of I Have America Surrounded: The Life of Timothy Leary, in the early 1970s Leary came to believe “that his role in life was to continue Crowley’s ‘Great Work’, that of bringing about a fundamental shift in human consciousness.” This was the result of several mind-blowing events that seemed to indicate a profound connection to Crowley. Most dramatically, in 1971 Leary and English beatnik artist and writer Brian Barritt tripped together on LSD in the Sahara desert at Bou Saada, “City of Happiness,” reputedly a site of magical influence. It was the night of Easter Saturday and Sunday, and Leary and Barrett witnessed massive celestial imagery and visionary symbolism. A year later they discovered that some of the things they had seen and experienced paralleled in eerie fashion a series of visions reported by Crowley in his Confessions. Unknown to them at the time of their Sahara experience, Crowley had engaged in a weeks-long magical ritual in 1909 with the poet Victor Neuberg on the very same site in the very same river bed at Bou Saada. Barritt later wrote that he and Tim were “pretty freaked out” when they discovered this, and he speculated about a “mysterious force” in the form of an “unconscious directive” that had dictated in parallel fashion the

10 Higgs: 15.
motivations and even the life events and circumstances of Crowley-
Neuberg and Leary-Barritt across a span of decades.\textsuperscript{11}

Augmenting the Crowleyan vibe, in 1972 Leary asked a deck of
Crowley-designed tarot cards, “Who am I and what is my destiny?” and
then randomly cut the deck to the Ace of Discs—the very card that
Crowley had identified as his own representation. In his autobiography,
\textit{Confessions of a Hope Fiend} (a title he chose as a deliberate blending of
Crowley’s \textit{Confessions} with his \textit{Diary of a Dope Fiend}), Leary wrote,
“The eerie synchronicities between our lives [i.e., his own and Barritt’s]
and that of Crowley, which were later to preoccupy us, were still unfolding
with such precision as to make us wonder if one can escape the
programmed imprinting with which we are born.”\textsuperscript{12}

It was in the wake of all these Crowleyan synchronicities that the
incarcerated Leary began his channelling experiments. He approached
them in the full sway of his sense of carrying on Crowley’s planetary
consciousness-altering mission, and in full view of the fact that Crowley
had attempted similar contact with a higher intelligence. Although Leary
made no mention of the Holy Guardian Angel, his emerging
extraterrestrial hypothesis corresponded with the views of a subset of
Thelemites who thought contact with one’s Holy Guardian Angel was
actually a form of contact with a literal extraterrestrial intelligence (others,
by contrast, vehemently insisted and still insist today that such a view is
false, ridiculous, and detrimental).

Wilson began exchanging letters with Leary a few months after the
commencement of Leary’s telepathic “transmissions,” and later offered a
succinct description of the concrete nature of the experiments: “The
Starseed Transmissions—‘hallucinations’ or whatever—were received in
19 bursts, seldom in recognisable English sentences, requiring considerable
meditation and discussion between the four Receivers before they could be
summarised.”\textsuperscript{13} Of prime interest to us here is that even though the
resulting writings clearly proceeded from the extraterrestrial view of
higher intelligence rather than the unconscious or daimonic muse-based
one, other things said by other people about the Learyan view of
communicating with perceived higher or external intelligences, and even
things said by Leary himself, clearly link his experiences to a more
traditionally muse-like view.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Barritt: 155, 152.
\textsuperscript{12} Barritt: 153.
\textsuperscript{13} Wilson 1977: 105.
\textsuperscript{14} Leary: 15. In \textit{Terra II}, for example, Leary asserts the truth behind humanity’s
long history of belief in higher intelligences, as in religious beliefs, but modifies it
For instance, in a bit of archival footage featured in the “Summer of Love” episode of PBS’s *American Experience* series, Leary describes the LSD experience by saying, “It is a sense of being in communion with powers greater than yourself, and intelligence which far outstrips the human mind, and energies which are very ancient.”\(^{15}\) There is no indication of the context or time period in which he said this, but it resonates interestingly with something he told Wilson when the latter came to visit him at the Vacaville prison:

[Leary said] Interstellar ESP may have been going on for all our history [...] but we just haven’t understood. Our nervous systems have translated their messages in terms we *could* understand. The “angels” who spoke to Dr. Dee, the Elizabethan scientist-magician [who had figured in both Crowley-Neuberg’s and Leary-Barritt’s visionary experiences in the Sahara], were extraterrestrials, but Dee couldn’t comprehend them in those terms and considered them “messengers from God.” The same is true of many other shamans and mystics.\(^{16}\)

Note that despite the outrageous-sounding nature of such speculations to the modern secular-materialist ear, Leary was not insane. Or at least that was the medical-psychological opinion of the mental health professionals who evaluated him, according to Wilson:

It should be remembered, in evaluating the Starseed signals, that, a few months before this experiment, three government psychiatrists testified (at the escape trial) that Dr. Leary was perfectly sane and possessed of a high I.Q. Since so many extremists of Left and Right have impugned Leary’s sanity, it should also be entered in the record that Dr. Wesley Hiler, a staff psychologist at Vacaville who spoke to Dr. Leary every day (often to ask Tim’s advice), emphatically agrees with that verdict. “Timothy Leary is totally, radiantly sane,” he told me in a 1973 interview.\(^{17}\)

Nor was Hiler’s judgment made in ignorance of the telepathy/channelling experiments that Leary was engaged in. In fact, Wilson says Hiler regarded Leary’s project from an informed long-historical/psychological view, and Hiler’s actual words resonate wonderfully with the vibe of ontological uncertainty that we are exploring here:

in a science fictional direction: “The goal of the evolutionary process is to produce nervous systems capable of communicating with the galactic network. Contacting the Higher Intelligence.”

\(^{15}\) Dolgin and Franco.

\(^{16}\) Wilson 1977: 118.

\(^{17}\) Wilson 1977: 104-5.
I asked Hiler what he *really* thought of Dr. Leary’s extraterrestrial contacts. Specifically, since he didn’t regard Leary as crazy or hallucinating, what was happening when Leary thought he was receiving extraterrestrial communications? “Every man and woman who reaches the higher levels of spiritual and intellectual development,” Dr. Hiler said calmly, “feels the presence of a Higher Intelligence. Our theories are all unproven. Socrates called it his *daemon*. Others call it gods or angels. Leary calls it extraterrestrial. Maybe it’s just another part of our brain, a part we usually don’t use. Who knows?”

**Bob Wilson’s excellent adventure**

As already indicated by the above discussions, Wilson resonated with the ideas of both Leary and Crowley, and was in direct contact with the former during the Starseed period. He even helped Leary in the crystallisation and promulgation of his eight-circuit model of consciousness; although the model was first laid out by Leary in *Neurologic* (1973) and *Exopo Psychology* (1977), Wilson gave it an energetic and entertaining publicity boost, and also provided a work of genuine substance, in his 1983 book *Prometheus Rising*, which featured an introduction by former Crowley secretary Israel Regardie. So it is no surprise that in addition to being aware of and interested in Crowley’s and Leary’s experiences in communicating with angels and aliens, Wilson had his own encounters with “higher intelligence.”

The primary account of it is found in his *Cosmic Trigger* (1977, later retitled *Cosmic Trigger I* when Wilson wrote two sequels). Richard Metzger zeroes in on the emotional heart of the matter when he writes that, notwithstanding the trippy and subversive delights of Wilson’s famous *Illuminatus!* trilogy (co-written with Robert Shea), “*Cosmic Trigger* was different. This time the mask came off. In this book, Wilson came clean, in the most intellectually honest way that anyone ever has, on the subject of ‘What happens when you start fooling around with occult things? What happens when you do psychedelic drugs and try to contact higher dimensional entities through ritual magick?’”

Wilson, who had a PhD in psychology, contextualised the book’s content in a valuable introduction that he wrote for a new edition published in 1986. “*Cosmic Trigger*,” he explained, “deals with a process of *deliberately induced brain change* through which I put myself in the years 1962-76. This process is called ‘initiation’ or ‘vision quest’ in many

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19 Metzger: 14.
traditional societies and can loosely be considered some dangerous variety of self-psychotherapy in modern terminology.\footnote{Wilson 1977: ii (Wilson’s emphasis).} In the course of this “initiation” he came into perceived contact with a number of external-seeming intelligences and was thrust into the same surreal world that Leary and Crowley had likewise explored.

The high point emerged from his commencing a new “course of neuropsychological experiments” in 1971, in response to the feeling that he had deciphered a hidden message in Crowley’s *The Book of Lies*. “The outstanding result,” he wrote, “was that I entered a belief system, from 1973 until around October 1974, in which I was receiving telepathic messages from entities residing on a planet of the double star Sirius.”\footnote{Wilson 1977: 8.} Although Wilson never describes anything like the experience of supernatural dictation that resulted in Crowley’s *The Book of the Law*, or like Leary’s experience of extraterrestrial telepathy that resulted in the Starseed books, the question of his supposed Sirius contact, and of the general idea of psychic contact with alien-seeming forces or entities, dominates the bulk of *Cosmic Trigger* and forms the guiding thread of Wilson’s journey through “Chapel Perilous,” his term, borrowed from Arthurian legend, for the frightening and transformative state of psychological uncertainty in which the walls of a person’s belief system have been broached by the intrusion of events that seem equally amenable to paranormal and naturalistic, or supernatural and non-supernatural, explanations.

In describing the various synchronicities and paranormal events that began to unfold in his life, Wilson forcefully foregrounds the questions of ontology and epistemology—of what’s really real and how or whether we are even capable of making that determination—and he describes various reversals and mutations in his own viewpoint. For example, he explains how it was a meeting in October 1974 with Dr Jacques Vallée, the internationally renowned astronomer and UFOlogist, that led him away from the belief that he (Wilson) was literally receiving telepathic transmissions from Sirius. Wilson says Vallée told him this type of other-worldly communication is a centuries-old phenomenon “and will probably not turn out to be extraterrestrial,” since the extraterrestrial slant can be chalked up to the influence of modern cultural beliefs. In former eras, Vallée said, “The phenomenon took other and spookier forms.”\footnote{Wilson 1977: 9. The veracity of Wilson’s recollection here is supported by the fact that Vallée himself said largely the same things.} Wilson says Vallée’s viewpoint:
made perfect sense to me, since I had originally gotten in touch with “the entity” by means of Crowleyan occultism. The extraterrestrial explanation was not the real explanation, as I had thought; it was just the latest model for the Experience, as angels had been a model for it in the Middle Ages, or dead relatives speaking through mediums had been a model in the nineteenth century.”

This framing of all belief systems in relativistic and provisional terms—an attitude that, as we might do well to notice, is implicit in the very concept of a “belief system” itself, since to recognise belief systems as such automatically subverts the unreflective and wholesale adoption of any of them—became for Wilson the touchstone of his entire outlook. He began that new preface to Cosmic Trigger, written ten years after the book’s first publication, by proclaiming in all capital letters, “I DO NOT BELIEVE ANYTHING.” In explaining this position over several pages, he quoted approvingly Alan Watts’s characterisation of the universe as “a giant Rorshach [sic] ink-blot” and described his own position as “neurological model agnosticism—the application of the Copenhagen Interpretation beyond physics to consciousness itself.”

Most significant for the question of the daimonic muse and its ontological status are his specific thoughts about the status of all invisible entities/intelligences that are encountered in psychic space:

Personally, I also suspect, or guess, or intuit, that the more unconventional of my models here—the ones involving Higher Intelligence, such as the Cabalistic Holy Guardian Angel or the extraterrestrial from Sirius—are necessary working tools at certain stages in the metaprogramming process [i.e., the process of accessing and altering one’s fundamental psychological imprints]. That is, whether such entities exist anywhere outside our own imaginations, some areas of brain functioning cannot be accessed without using these “keys” to open the locks. I do not insist on this; it is just my own opinion.

With this, we’re back once again to Crowley and his continual dance on the edge of mutually exclusive interpretations. “I don’t believe anything,” Wilson insisted, and so did Crowley and Leary, at least in spirit. The question at hand is: Can we learn anything from this?

24 Wilson 1977: i.
Angels, daimons and haunted artists

For our specific purpose here, what is valuable in the stories of Crowley, Leary, and Wilson is the vivid picture they show us of people struggling to interpret and live with forces in the psyche that really do present themselves as independent of the ego and possessed of their own intelligence and will. As already mentioned, the Holy Guardian Angel and its supernatural and extraterrestrial kin are explicitly connected in historical-cultural-conceptual-psychological terms to the ancient muse, daimon, and genius, and a Wilsonian attitude of thoroughgoing “neurological model agnosticism” toward them only removes categorical interpretations of what is happening in the perceived experience of inner communication, not—not—the fact of the experience itself. Regardless of what we think or how we feel about it, this experience of being in perceived contact with a “higher intelligence” really did happen to these three men. It really has happened to people throughout history. And it really can happen to you and me. It does not necessarily mean audible voices and telepathic transmissions, but it definitely means a sense of something impinging on or communicating with our conscious self “from the outside,” or perhaps from the deep inside, which experientially amounts to the same thing. The really electrifying jolt comes when we realise, as our three present case subjects all did, that such impinging and communicating is always happening, regardless of whether or not we are consciously aware of it, as a constant psychic undercurrent. If we are skilled and sensitive enough to tune in and hear it, the rewards in terms of creative vibrancy can be exquisite.

Entirely aside from all of the far-out details of his (possibly) paranormal experiences, at least twice in his life Wilson directly equated the autonomous-feeling force in the psyche that drives artistic creativity with the ontologically indeterminate Higher Intelligence that seemingly communicated with him, Leary, and Crowley. One of these instances came in an essay he wrote about the life and work of Raymond Chandler, under the pseudonym of one of his (Wilson’s) own fictional creations, book critic Epicene Wildeblood. In describing the fifteen-year hiatus from fiction-writing that Chandler once experienced, Wilson said, “Chandler spent 15 years, the prime years of a man’s life, in the oil-executive game before the Daemon or Holy Guardian Angel that haunts artists got its teeth into him again.”

The other instance is found in a 1981 interview Wilson gave to the late, great genre magazine *Starship: The Magazine about Science Fiction*. The

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interviewer asked him, “Is a book fully organised in your mind before you start writing or does it take shape as it unfolds?” Wilson responded:

Sometimes I have a clearer idea of where I’m going than other times, but it always surprises me. In the course of writing, I’m always drawing on my unconscious creativity, and I find things creeping into my writing that I wasn’t aware of at the time. That’s part of the pleasure of writing. After you’ve written something, you say to yourself, “Where in the hell did that come from?” Faulkner called it the “demon” that directs the writer. The Kabalists call it the “holy guardian angel.” Every writer experiences this sensation. Robert E. Howard said he felt there was somebody dictating the Conan stories to him. There’s some deep level of the unconscious that knows a lot more than the conscious mind of the writer knows.28

The unconscious mind? The daimon? The Holy Guardian Angel? All and none of the above? For purposes of accessing and aligning with the experience of creative inspiration, does it really matter?

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SO LONG AS YOU’VE GOT YOUR ELF:
DEATH, DMT AND DISCARNATE ENTITIES

DAVID LUKE1

This chapter concerns both the fruits of science—parapsychology, ethnobotany, psychology—and what we could call the foamy custard of Folklore, Anthropology and Mythology, Cultural Studies And Related Disciplines. As a parapsychologist by training with a focus on ontology, I will discuss in this chapter elves, pixies, fairies and other “little people” collectively here referred to as “daimonic”.

Andrew Lang—anthropologist, psychical researcher and one-time President of the Society for Psychical Research—collected, collated and published folkloric accounts of the little people in a dozen books between 1889 and 1910. He pored over many accounts of different cultures from Australia to his native Scotland, and although he refused to believe elves existed in and of themselves, he did associate them with phantasms of the dead, particularly with poltergeist phenomena, and thereby he associated fairyland with Hades. Picking up where Lang left off, Evans-Wentz was the next to do the dance around the fairy ring, and in 1911 he published his magnum opus study on The fairy-faith in Celtic countries. Wentz documented an oral history of the little people across the British Isles and Brittany and discovered that the traditional informants would align the elves with spirits of the dead, although Evans-Wentz himself concluded that they were probably fourth-dimensional beings, existing in what mathematicians had earlier called hyperspace. He also speculated, like Lang, that this dimension was most likely actually connected to the realm of the dead:

1 With thanks to Anna Hope and Andrea Wright for feedback on an earlier draft of the manuscript.
It is mathematically possible to conceive fourth-dimensional beings, and if they exist it would be impossible in a third-dimensional plane to see them as they really are. Hence the ordinary apparition is non-real as a form, whereas the beings, which wholly sane and reliable seers claim to see when exercising seership of the highest kind, may be as real to themselves and to the seers as human beings are to us here in the third-dimensional world when we exercise normal vision. 

Furthermore, “Fairyland exists as a supernormal state of consciousness which men and women may enter temporarily in dreams, trances or in various ecstatic conditions, or for an indefinite period at death”\(^3\)—a kind of permanent ecstatic condition. This raises two concerns: the importance of altered states of consciousness in accessing fairyland (be that Hades or hyperspace), and fairyland as an intermediate place that souls of the dead pass through.

Fast-forwarding a few decades, the notion of UFOs becomes prevalent on the cultural landscape. Although sporadic reports had been surfacing since the turn of the century, UFOs became popular in the 1940s, and by 1947 a poll revealed that eighty-seven per cent of the UK population had heard of UFOs. Thereafter, the UFO phenomenon quickly developed its own cultural cosmology. By the nineteen-sixties the UFO and alien abduction phenomena were becoming quite rampant in many ways, which led Jacques Vallée to make his classic folkloric comparison and draw persisting parallels between aliens and elves. With the publication of *Passport to Mangonia* (1969), Vallée turned his back on his earlier ideas about UFOs being extra-terrestrials and speculated that aliens could easily be multidimensional, thereby supporting Evans-Wentz’ concept of fairyland existing in hyperspace. Furthermore he is credited as being the first to suggest that the aliens themselves were a kind of technologised version of fairies for the twentieth century.\(^4\) Vallée formed this fusion of elves and aliens by considering the similarities between them: they are small humanoids with big black eyes, they appear to exist outside of space and time, and they both engage in abduction activity, supposedly for interspecies breeding programmes. Reports of alien abductions increased in later years, popularised partly by the apparently abducted horror writer Whitley Strieber (1987), who also helped spread new memetic developments of the aliens, such as the increasing encounters with insectoid aliens, and praying mantises in particular. Strieber also helped popularise the now classic small grey somewhat elfin-like aliens, albeit

\(^2\) Evans-Wentz: 482.
\(^3\) Evans-Wentz: 382.
\(^4\) See Kripal 2010: 142-197.
with a very cartoonlike appearance on occasion, and while this may not have been very funny for Strieber at the time, it became a laughing point for his critics in many ways. But the cartoon-like nature of Strieber’s greys later became less comical in the light of other developments at the time, because from the 1960s onwards psychedelics appeared on the cultural scene, and one substance in particular, DMT (although this remained much more underground than other psychedelics until the turn of the millennium and was quite an obscure latecomer to the scene).

Known technically as \(N-N\)-Dimethyltryptamine, the indole alkaloid DMT, as it is more commonly known, is a naturally occurring compound and is found in many plants. It is usually extracted from plants for human use, but it is also found in many animals, particularly mammals and even humans. Curiously it is not found in the fungus kingdom, but then some mushrooms have their own psychedelic version of DMT called psilocin (actually 4-Hydroxy-Dimethyltryptamine). We all have DMT in us, located in our cerebrospinal fluid and in our blood, and it is also likely that it occurs naturally in people’s brains. It is an extremely psychedelic substance, most effective through smoking (it is not effective if eaten as stomach enzymes denature it). Smoking produces a very intense, short-acting, ten-minute experience beginning essentially with the exhalation of the first lungful. In Peter Meyer’s 1992 article: “Apparent communication with discarnate entities induced by DMT”, a few accounts are given of people’s experiences. He suggests that there are a number of different levels to fathom, depending on the depth of experience. It starts off at level one: threshold experience, interior flowing of energy and consciousness; then level two: vivid, brightly coloured geometric visual patterns which are basically two-dimensional but they may pulse. Then the transitional phase that follows the geometry is a tunnel or breakthrough experience and a passage through to an entrance into another world. At level three, once one goes through the passageway, there is three-dimensional or higher space—echoing Evans-Wentz’s notion of hyperspace again—possible contact with entities, and a sense of being in an objective space and of meeting intelligent, communicating entities. Finally, after that, is the white light.

To give examples of the kinds of experiences people have, there are some classic accounts in a paper by Timothy Leary written in 1966 called *Programmed communication during experiences with DMT* in which he reports of the experience of Alan Watts, a famous Zen philosopher who was also well known for talking a lot. Leary said that no matter what

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5 On Streiber, comic books and the paranormal see Kripal 2011.
So long as you’ve got your Elf psychedelic substances he gave him he just carried on talking. However, he gave Watts DMT whilst Watts was telling a story and Watts was quiet for ten minutes. When he emerged he carried on telling the story from where he had left off as if nothing had happened—without missing a beat. Fortunately, Watts later described his experience, saying that it was exceedingly difficult to talk and that it was “like attempting to give a moment to moment description of one’s reactions while being fired out of the muzzle of an atomic cannon with neon byzantine barrelling” —so he had a pretty intense geometric experience, somewhere in the region of Meyer’s level two, you might say.

Moving onto the next level, beyond the pure geometry, we arrive at the encounter with entities. One of the first researchers of DMT and the person who discovered its psychedelic properties in 1956 (even though it had been synthesised about twenty years earlier) was a Hungarian psychopharmacologist called Stephen Szára, who experimented with DMT on himself and had some extraordinary experiences. Shortly after, he started giving it to his medical colleagues and they reported all sorts of strange things, one of them announcing that, “the whole room is filled with spirits”, and another one saying “I feel exactly as if I were flying […] in front of me are two quiet sunlit gods”. Indeed encounters with entities are one of the most common features of the DMT experience, and at least one DMT experiencer suggested that at a certain dosage you can no longer be an atheist because of these kind of encounters and experiences with numinous beings.

This extraordinary molecule is now, of course, a scheduled substance, so research with it has been largely curtailed and it was not until the 1990s when Rick Strassman started reviving the research into DMT that any substantial phenomenological research was conducted. But before it became illegal, Timothy Leary, in his Programmed communication during experiences with DMT of 1966, developed a simple technique which he called “the experiential typewriter” in which you had the substance, you went into the experience and you were allowed to submerge yourself in it completely. But then every two minutes the sitter with you would say “where are you now?” and then you would quickly report on your phenomenological state—your state of consciousness. Here is Tim’s second experience with DMT, just two minutes in:

RALPH: “Tim, where are you now?”

7 Leary 1996: 84.
8 Strassman 2001: 46.
TIM: (thinks) Ralph’s voice, stately, kind ... what? where? You? ... open eyes ... there squatting next to me are two magnificent insects ... skin burnished, glowing metallic, with hammered jewels inlaid ... richly costumed, they looked at me sweetly ... dear, radiant Venetian crickets ... one has a pad in his lap and is holding out a gem-encrusted box with undulating trapezoidal glowing sections ... questioning look ... incredible ... and next to him Mrs Diamond Cricket softly slides into a lattice-work of vibrations ... Dr Ruby-emerald Cricket smiles ...

RALPH: “Tim, where are you now?”...

So that was Tim’s experience with these insectoid entities under the influence of DMT. As I said though, even with DMT having been criminalised in the 1970s, Rick Strassman bravely conducted research with it in the 1990s, having set up a medical programme. He had sixty volunteers go through the programme, administering a total of four hundred doses of DMT by injection (the fumerate, not the salt). Perhaps the most significant experiences that people reported within that research were encounters with what they usually called entities, beings, guides or helpers, although they were not always very helpful. The entities themselves would often appear as clowns, reptiles, mantises—for some reason praying mantises were quite common—bees, spiders, cacti or stick insects, but they also commonly appeared, as we might expect, as dwarves, elves, imps, or even angels, spirits, and gods. Sometimes they were just felt as a presence, and that presence was often supremely, and thankfully, powerful, loving and wise. However not all the experiences were pleasant, and not all entities loving and wise—for example one of Strassman’s participants reported being anally raped by a reptile, which was a traumatic experience.

Terence McKenna announced that the fact that DMT induces these entity experiences so frequently is something to be remarked upon, and said, “You want contact? You want alien intelligences? All you gotta do is inhale and by the time you breathe out, you get elves, everybody does!” Well not quite everybody. According to Strassman’s more thorough research under laboratory controlled conditions, fifty percent of high dose participants had these kinds of invisible world phenomena where they would encounter alien beings of some description. So that is fairly reliable scientifically—you can administer a substance in a certain dosage, and half your participants will have an encounter experience. So why hasn’t this phenomenon not been studied more?

11 McKenna: 76.
12 See Strassman 2008: 73
One key thing that Strassman noted in the experiences of his participants, as already noted by McKenna, was that they tended to have a relationship to the alien abduction phenomena, in that sometimes they reported being operated on in a kind of classic alien abduction type scenario. They had things inserted into them in the presence of little alien-like entities, often elfin, or insectoid, such as mantises. Simultaneously, mantises became a sort of growing motif in the alien abduction literature, and one assumes that this was somewhat separate from the DMT literature of the time. For instance, Kottmeyer (1999) reports the increasing presence of praying mantises in alien abduction cases in the 1990s, which were dubbed the “greying” mantises as they appeared so often in people’s abduction experiences. In attempting to reconcile the apparent experience of aliens whilst on DMT, Terence McKenna suggested that, “We are so alienated that the self must disguise itself as an extra-terrestrial in order not to alarm us with the truly bizarre dimensions that it encompasses. When we can love the alien, then we will have begun to heal the psychic discontinuity that plagues us”. 13 But he also said a lot of other things concerning DMT, such as suggesting, like Evans-Wentz, that elves were hyper-dimensional entities and that they were sentient and existed in their own right.

In support of all this, what I find interesting is that two of my colleagues had praying mantis encounters on DMT. For one of them it was their first time, and I assume they were naive because I knew how little they knew about the DMT and other psychedelic literature at that time. Certainly they were perplexed and surprised to meet a mantis and reported knowing nothing of the scant and obscure literature concerning them. Furthermore, one associate, under the influence of ayahuasca (which contains DMT), had an experience of being farmed for their emotions by praying mantis beings. Numerous questions remain about why the image or symbol of the mantis should appear, though limitations of space prevent further speculation in this chapter. It is necessary to correlate such theoretical considerations with personal experience, and in this matter I need to describe my own experiences with elves, because I believe that this research benefits from being experiential as well, and not just viewed from an academic distance.14 I have had various DMT experiences myself, and on my very first trip I knew little of the literature. However, I was very surprised to have an experience of what I can only describe as elves. They were very small humanoid characters about one or two feet high, sitting on top of my body—although I did not really have a body as such,

13 McKenna: 43.
more a space filled with light and energy resting where I had left behind my concept of my own corporality. There were smaller elves sitting on top of me shoving all the light into what I would call my solar plexus region. Immediately afterwards I realised the significance of the name “solar plexus”, because, obviously, where else would they shove the light? I was then quite intrigued to discover all the literature on DMT elves. In particular, years later, once I began reading the literature, I was astonished to come across a very similar account collected by Meyer in 1994: “I found myself once again [this is only their second DMT trip] in the company of the ‘elves,’ as the focus of their attention and ministrations, but they appeared much less colorful and altogether preoccupied with the task at hand, i.e., pouring a golden, viscous liquid through a network of long, inter-twining, transparent conduits which led into the middle of my abdomen ...”15 I continued to have a few more elf encounters on DMT, in which they often took on a very cartoon-like, clownish form, shape-shifting, never really keeping still, moving around and impossible to pin down. They seemed to be saying, “we’re here! Join us, come and play! Nothing is as it seems, beware, take care, but have no cares.”

In later experiences with ayahuasca, one in particular was very surprising. Ayahuasca is a jungle decoction used by the indigenes in the Amazon basin, the main ingredient of which is DMT, and it gives a somewhat (usually) milder four to six-hour DMT experience. During this experience I was sitting in a tent and several elves suddenly appeared in front of me. Now previously to this I had only closed-eye experiences of elves in some other dimension running around doing things, hyperspatially if you like. But here I was sitting there in a tent looking at the other people across from me, and the elves come into view between us, which was rather alarming, so alarming in fact that I turned around so I could not see them as I could not quite cope with them being there. But of course elves being elves, they ran around in front of me, so I had to keep looking away and they would keep running back around—I really did not know what to make of it. I had read lots about them by now and had even experienced them with my eyes closed—but this was just too much of an ontological challenge.

But it need not always be DMT that is the trigger for these elf experiences, because we know from the literature that people commonly have spontaneous elf encounters on other psychoactive substances. When I was on research in Brazil in 2010 I had the good fortune of going to a ceremony of the Guarani indigenous people. It was supposedly a tobacco ceremony, but during the night things got very weird and I was not quite

15 Meyer (no pagination).
So long as you’ve got your Elf

Sure why. For instance, on the minibus coming back there was a little old woman in front of me peering over the top of the seats. She looked about three hundred years old, with a smile that extended all the way back to her ears, and she had very large, dark, almond-shaped eyes—in fact, they were completely jet black. She had an ancient wizened face, peering over the top of the seat and smiling at me, and I thought, “who is that old woman? And why does she keep smiling at me? … I don’t remember her coming on the minibus with us to visit the Indians.”

It would have been extraordinary if she had just got on the minibus with us—and yet despite the fact she looked like she was three hundred years old her presence there was completely normal to me, and totally real. It was not until the next day when I was communicating with some of my colleagues who had also came along to this supposed tobacco ceremony, and we were trying to piece together why we had several hours of missing time as well as all the other strange things that had happened, that one of them said, “Did you see that little man running round the fire in the Indians’ hut last night? My friend and I saw him.” And I answered, “no, I don’t remember seeing him”. But both of them saw him so there was some kind of correlation at least, a smattering of objectivity as a “collective subjectivity” perhaps, as there were apparently multiple witnesses to this event. My colleague had also drawn a picture which she showed me, depicting her and her friend in the ceremonial hut, looking rather distressed, in the company of a little wizened old man. Upon seeing the picture of the little man, I suddenly remembered the little old woman on the minibus and I said, “well I didn’t see him, but I saw a little woman who looked just like him.” Later that day I eventually concluded (when I was trying to give a presentation at a conference and I could not actually read my lecture notes), that we’d been slipped some floripondio (Brugmansia genus), which is probably the only explanation for it—at least that was my evaluation of the situation. My point is that it need not always be DMT, it can be other substances that bring on the elves too. In fact drugs are not necessary for elves at all; they can and do occur spontaneously, but it may be that an altered state of consciousness itself is necessary and some people are more prone to achieving dissociative states. Furthermore, it may be that we all have DMT active in our brain and when we go into these spontaneous states of altered consciousness we’re actually activating our own endogenous DMT, so that DMT could be the neurochemical substrate of these spontaneous conducive-to-elf experiences.

Rick Strassman has suggested that DMT could be a mediator in all spontaneous mystical and paranormal experiences, be they out-of-body experiences, near death experiences or alien abduction experiences, but
also sleep paralysis. So we have a kind of death, alien, elf, entity, paranormal or mystical experience complex that is grouped around the use of DMT (or ayahuasca), either spontaneously or exogenously. There is also some evidence for a type of spontaneous shamanic initiation common to the whole near-death, alien abduction complex. However, although it is easy to melt the DMT event down into one uber-experience, there are certain nuances and differences in these phenomena which need to be addressed: the aliens themselves may actually be elves, but they are more intra-terrestrial than extra-terrestrial, or perhaps even trans-terrestrial—that is, they are not actually outside, but then inside is the wrong term as well. These experiences certainly occur “in” consciousness. As a scientist, trying to take an experimental approach to this research is pretty tricky, to say the least, so it probably also makes sense to take a mystical approach. The late great scientist Dr Albert Hoffman, the discoverer of LSD, wrote in his autobiography that science and mysticism should be natural allies, not enemies. So the best approach would probably be a combination of both.

Bibliography


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There are moments in the lives of nearly all human beings in which everyday human perception gives way to encounters with miraculous phenomena that cannot readily be explained. Often these experiences—which may arise through the presence of discarnate entities, the emergence of spontaneous visions or intuitions, or through powerful, transformative dreams—leave a profound and lasting effect. It was just this kind of miraculous encounter that was experienced by the author in Tibet back in 1996, an experience that is given a heightened sense of meaning when examined through the lens of Jungian depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra.

The event in question occurred whilst I was travelling as part of a small, overland expedition that had left the capital of Lhasa en route to the ancient city of Kathmandu, Nepal. One evening, whilst sleeping at Rongbuk Monastery near the base of Mount Everest, I awoke in the middle of the night and instinctively found myself drawn up a neighbouring hillside where, upon reaching the top, I encountered the undeniable presence of an utterly vast feminine entity that seemed to blanket the sky above. Her being exuded tremendous power, depth, and sensitivity, and at that moment I felt that my mother might have passed away and that her expanded spirit was now visiting me. However, when I put this question to the sky I received no reply, and later I would learn that indeed my mother was still alive, which draped this profound experience in mystery. What, then, was this immense and unfathomable entity, and how, though invisible, was she able to exude such power?
A few days later we arrived in Kathmandu, and the next day, while strolling through the side streets of this medieval metropolis, I came upon an image that immediately captured my attention. The image was of a female figure, clearly presented in the context of veneration and surrounded by a host of exotic and esoteric figures. At the time I was not well versed in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhist deities and religious icons, and so I was not immediately attuned to the fact that this mysterious and alluring female presence, with her air of serenity and deep green colouring, was the Goddess Tara, accompanied by her cohorts and astral attendants. This specific identification would come to me at a later date; all I knew then, after first setting my eyes on her, was that she must return home with me. For more than a year prior to my return to the States she lay peacefully rolled up and stored away in my apartment in Kyoto, Japan. It was not until I returned to California that she was carefully framed and subsequently began to assume a distinct visual presence in my living space. However, a deeper appreciation of her essential meaning—in a broader religious context and in my own personal existence—remained largely beyond my conscious awareness.

Jungian depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra

Some years later while in graduate school I became simultaneously exposed to the work of C. G. Jung and the precepts of Tibetan Buddhism, with their mutual focus on the sacred feminine. Jung, for example, placed great emphasis on the importance of actively embracing the natural world in a deeply spiritual and mythological framework,1 and in this context he viewed nature as the ultimate manifestation of the archetypal Goddess. One of Jung’s contemporaries, Erich Neumann, outlined the meaning of the sacred feminine—and its prominent correlation to the Goddess Tara—as follows:

The archetypal feminine in man unfolds like mankind itself. At the beginning stands the primeval goddess, resting in the materiality of her elementary character, knowing nothing but the secret of her womb; at the end is Tara, in her left hand the opening lotus blossom of psychic flowering, her right hand held out toward the world in a gesture of giving. Her eyes are half closed, and in her meditation she turns toward the outward as well as the inner world: an eternal image of the redeeming female spirit. Both together form the unity of the Great Goddess, who, in the totality of her unfolding, fills the world from its lowest elementary phase, to its supreme spiritual transformation.2

1 See Jung 1963.
Within the context of the archetypal feminine, Tara can be viewed as belonging to a broader group of female embodiments of wisdom and divine power in Tibetan Buddhism that include the dakini, which “has been sometimes compared in the West with Jung’s concept of one of the major archetypes, the anima.” The correlation of Tibetan feminine archetypes with the anima exists as an important component in this study, because “in the male-oriented Western world the concept of anima, as the feminine counterpart of the masculine psyche, and the proper integration of the two aspects, is crucial to the psychological balance of the individual and the culture.” Marie Louise von Franz further exemplified the fundamental importance of the anima as follows: “Vital is the role that the anima plays in putting a man’s mind in tune with the right values and […] opening the way into more profound inner depths […]. The anima takes on the role of guide, or mediator, to the world within and to the Self.” The role that the sacred feminine plays in the process of spiritual development was further outlined by Nathan Katz: “The inspiration of the anima or the dakini is a call for one to look inward. As such, she is the link between the conscious and unconscious. In appearing to consciousness, the anima calls its attention to what has remained hidden; she is the door to the unconscious.”

Indeed, one of the most prominent archetypal figures in this process is the Goddess Tara, who exemplifies compassion, enlightened activity, and the fundamental qualities of a saviouress. Furthermore, she is “is revered as the mother of all buddhas. Tara, in her essence, symbolises the totally developed wisdom that transcends reason.” In Jungian terms, she “represents the mother archetype […] she is the image of the mother who has integrated in herself all the opposites, positive and negative.” This notion of the reconciliation of opposites represents a primary element in both Tibetan Buddhism and Jungian psychology, and a fundamental principle in both traditions is the fostering of one’s true nature through the process of creative visualisation. Although there exists a conspicuous differentiation between the Jungian “Self” and the Buddhist “no-self” (and its attendant precept of “no-God”), in Tibetan tantra meditations and rituals centred upon the visualisation of deities such as Tara play an important role in this process:

3 Moacanin: 63.
4 Moacanin: 64-65.
5 Von Franz: 193.
6 Katz: 322.
7 Moacanin: 63.
8 Moacanin: 63.
Even though the notion of no-Self (Skt. *anatma*) is a central tenet of Buddhism, the Buddhist tantric path conceives that our potential for wholeness is personified in the symbolic form of a deity [...]. The deity in Tantra is understood as a gateway or bridge between two aspects of reality [...]. In Buddhism we speak of ‘relative truth,’ the world of appearances and forms, and ‘ultimate truth,’ the empty, spacious, non-dual nature of reality [...]. The deity stands on the threshold as the potential for creative manifestation.9

Tara and other such archetypal deities are often depicted within the context of a *mandala*, a universal form that Jung came to see as the ultimate symbolic expression of psychic wholeness: “The mandala is an archetypal image whose occurrence is attested throughout the ages. It signifies the *wholeness of the self*. The circular image represents the wholeness of the psychic ground or, to put it in mythic terms, the divinity incarnate in man […] which spontaneously arises in the mind as a representation of the struggle and reconciliation of opposites.”10 He later explained:

It seems to me beyond question that these Eastern symbols originated in dreams and visions, and were not invented by some Mahayana church father. On the contrary, they are among the oldest religious symbols of humanity […] and may even have existed in Paleolithic times […] The mandalas used in ceremonial are of great significance because their centers usually contain one of the highest religious figures: either Shiva himself—often in the embrace of Shakti—or the Buddha, Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, or one of the great Mahayana teachers, or simply the *dorje*, symbol of all the divine forces together, whether creative or destructive.11

This passage emphasises the role that mythic imagery and sacred symbols play in spiritual development, and indeed both Jungian psychology and Tibetan tantra stress that such imagery arises in conjunction with the developmental stages that accompany spiritual growth. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche expressed this notion in the following statement: “The underlying truth is that these teachings arise spontaneously from humans when they reach a certain point in their individual development. The teachings are inherent in the foundational wisdom that any culture can eventually access. They are not only Buddhist or Bon teachings; they are teachings for all humans”.12 So, even in Buddhism, in which one’s true

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10 Jung 1963: 334-335.
11 Jung 1974: 170-172
12 Wangyal: 71
nature is understood as lacking any inherent existence, mythic imagery and entities (e.g., Buddha Sakyamuni, Avalokitesvara and Tara) are employed in tantric methodologies as a creative means of furthering one’s spiritual development. According to Lama Yeshe, this is done with the understanding that the deity we choose to identify with represents the essential qualities of the fully awakened experience latent within us. To use the language of psychology, such a deity is an archetype of our own deepest nature, our most profound level of consciousness. In tantra we focus our attention upon such an archetypal image and identify with it in order to arouse the deepest, most profound aspects of our being and bring them into our present reality.13

Psychic projections and autonomous dimensions

The role of archetypal images and entities in spiritual development is emphasised in both traditions, but their ontological status remains something of a mystery. Do such images and entities have an autonomous existence, or are they merely psychic projections? In this regard, although thankas and other forms of sacred art used in Tibetan meditative practices depict deities, paradises, and other dimensions, Lama Yeshe was careful to clarify that “tantric meditational deities should not be confused with what different mythologies and religions might mean when they speak of gods and goddesses […] The deity we choose to identify with represents the essential qualities of the fully awakened experience latent within us.”14

Echoing the same perspective, Pratapaditya Pal stated that “on a more metaphysical level, the divine images are simply symbols of the Buddha […] They are not themselves real but help to define reality, and are dispensed with by the enlightened mind and by the true yogi.”15 Jung, in The Psychology of Eastern Meditation, also emphasised this fundamental principle when he stated that “in the meditation it is realised that the Buddha is really nothing other than the activating psyche of the yogi—the meditator himself. It is not only that the image of the Buddha is produced out of ‘one’s own mind and thought,’ but the psyche which produces these thought-forms is the Buddha himself”.16 However, in apparent contrast to these assertions, Lama Govinda, in his foreword to The Tibetan Book of the Dead that accompanies Jung’s own commentary on the same text, emphasised that:

13 Yeshe: 30
14 Yeshe: 30.
15 Pal: 36.
[...] animism permeates all Buddhist texts, wherein every tree and grove, and every locality, is held to have its own peculiar deities; and the Buddha is represented as discoursing with gods and other spiritual beings, inhabiting the Earth and the realms beyond, as if it were a most natural procedure. Only a completely intellectualised and Westernised Buddhism, which attempts to separate the thought-content of Buddhism from its equally profound mythological elements, can deny this animistic background and with it the metaphysical foundations of Buddhism.  

According to the present Dalai Lama, these various realms are inhabited by other conscious entities of widely varying characteristics:

Basically we can say there are different worlds, different experiences; human life is just one of them. What we usually call spirits are some different form of life, beings who have a different body and mentality. Within the desire realm, and more specifically within the environment inhabited by human beings, there is quite a variety of other entities [...] And they’re all cohabitating with us right here.

It is thus essential to note that Tibetans consider spiritual entities to be more than mere psychic projections, even if their religious practice of creative visualisation involves the worship of such iconic figures as Tara (who in this context would be understood as a psychic projection). Indeed, an array of spiritual entities are thought to possess their own autonomous natures and to exist in innumerable spiritual planes and universes, a phenomenon that is given greater clarity in the following passage by Tulku Thongdup:

Buddhist cosmology encompasses an unimaginably vast number of world systems beyond our earthly home. Outside of the mundane world, the six realms of samsara, there exist innumerable pure lands extending in all ten directions of the universe [...] These purified paradises are the dwelling places of advanced beings, including celestial buddhas and great bodhisattvas.

In the light of the different perspectives presented above, one appears to be left with a complex and ambiguous ontological problem: do such entities and dimensions—as readily depicted in Tibetan sacred art itself—exist apart from human psychic projection, or are they “real” in the same way that human beings consider their own lives and the earthly physical domain they inhabit to be a factual reality? Perhaps this question can be answered in part when the Buddhist notion of “no-self” (i.e., no inherent

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17 Govinda 1960: lvii.
18 Varela: 141.
19 Thongdup: 284.
existence) is applied to such entities, just as it applies to human beings. Nevertheless, the Western mind continues to insist upon the ontological reality of its own existence (on Earth and often elsewhere). More recently, however, such considerations have been expanded and given further clarity through the pioneering transpersonal findings of Stanislav Grof. His extensive research into non-ordinary states of consciousness strongly suggests the existence of an immense array of spiritual realms and experiential dimensions that lie beyond the perception of ordinary waking consciousness. His findings postulate the existence of two forms of ultimate reality, which are referred to as absolute consciousness and cosmic emptiness, or the Void. Absolute consciousness represents the supreme creative principle (which is responsible for the creation of manifest existence and finds a correlation in Jung’s notion of the Self), and this creative principle is thought to co-exist with, and emanate from, the great Void, as outlined below:

When we encounter the Void, we feel that it is primordial emptiness of cosmic proportions and relevance. We become pure consciousness aware of this absolute nothingness; however, at the same time, we have a strange paradoxical sense of its essential fullness […] While it does not contain anything in a concrete manifest form, it seems to comprise all of existence in potential form […] The Void transcends the usual categories of space and time, and lies beyond all dichotomies and polarities, such as light and darkness, good and evil […] agony and ecstasy, singularity and plurality, form and emptiness, and even existence and nonexistence […] This metaphysical vacuum, pregnant with potential for everything there is, appears to be the cradle of all being, the ultimate source of existence. The creation of all phenomenal worlds is then the realization and concretization of its pre-existing potentialities.

This passage addresses a number of primary themes in Buddhist cosmology, including the Void as primordial emptiness, the reconciliation and union of all opposites (one is immediately reminded here of the famous Buddhist adage, form is emptiness, and emptiness is form), the existence of a timeless dimension, and the presence of countless world systems. It also touches upon the theme of manifest existence arising out of this Void, and Grof proposed that some of the various realms and the entities that inhabit them are understood to interact with and inform our earthly dimension in ways that are consistent with aspects of Jungian psychology:

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20 Grof: 30.
The material realm that we inhabit and with which we are intimately familiar seems to be just one of these worlds [...]. Of special interest is a domain that lies between our everyday reality and the undifferentiated Absolute Consciousness. It is a mythological realm that has been extensively studied by C. G. Jung and his followers [...]. Jung referred to it as the archetypal realm of the collective unconscious. The beings inhabiting these realms seem to be endowed with extraordinary energy and have an aura of sacredness or numinosity. For this reason they are usually perceived and described as deities [...]. The encounters with mythological beings and visits to mythic landscapes [...] can be in every respect as real as events in our everyday life, or more so. The archetypal realm is not a figment of human fantasy and imagination; it has an independent existence of its own and a high degree of autonomy. At the same time, its dynamics seem to be intimately connected with material reality and with human life.21

Indeed, it is just this kind of heightened dimension that is sometimes accessed through the creative, meditative and dream practices emphasised in both Jungian psychotherapy and Tibetan tantra. Tulku Thongdup, for example, confirmed that many stories in Tibetan Buddhist literature tell of “meditators who leave their bodies for days at a time to travel through the invisible world.”22 Such practitioners, who are known as delogs, then “come back to their bodies to record their extraordinary journeys, which could span the lowest rungs of hell and the sublime pure lands.”23 One fascinating account of just such a psychic journey—abounding with mythic imagery and sacred entities—is revealed in the following experience of a young Tibetan woman:

Dawa Drolma felt that she moved through the sky, soaring like a vulture. She found herself in the manifested pure land of Guru Rinpoche, the Buddha in the form of a realised master. There was a boundlessly vast field. In the centre she saw a giant red rock mountain in the shape of a heart. The mountain was surrounded by many sharp, sword-like mountains, all shining with a reddish colour. The sky was adorned with a canopy of five colored rainbow light. All kinds of beautiful birds were singing and playing joyfully. The ground was covered with flowers of all kinds and colors. The whole atmosphere was filled with an amazing sweet fragrance that overwhelmed all her senses. There was also a blue mountain, as if made of sapphire. These were not vague appearances, but vivid images with real presence [...]. In the middle of the mountain, she saw the inconceivable palace of Guru Rinpoche called the Lotus of Light. The palace was the

21 Grof: 69-70.
22 Thongdup: 6.
23 Thongdup: 6.
enlightened wisdom of Guru Rinpoche himself, spontaneously appearing in the form of a luminous mansion of light […]. This pure land was filled with masters, dakas, and dakinis […]. Accompanied by White Tara, Dawa Drolma entered into another inconceivably beautiful palace, made as if of red crystal […]. In the middle of a great hall, Dawa Drolma saw an enormous throne—higher, it seemed to her, than a three-story building […]. On that throne she beheld the amazing presence of Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, the embodiment of the wisdom, compassion, and power of the enlightened ones […]. Dawa Drolma drew closer to the throne and touched her forehead to the feet of Guru Rinpoche […]. Guru Rinpoche bestowed upon her empowerments and blessings. With great compassion, he said […] ‘Tell people what you saw and entreat them to pursue virtue’ […]. Then White Tara led Dawa Drolma to the hell realms. Dawa Drolma journeyed through the experiences of the bardo. She saw the Dharma King of the Lords of the Dead in wrathful and terrifying form in his Court of Judgment […]. She also saw the results of karmic effects and the severity of sufferings of the hell realms with her naked eyes, so she would be able to more effectively on her return to the world of the living […]. White Tara then took Dawa Drolma to visit Potala, the pure land of Avalokiteshvara, and Yulo Kopa, the pure land of Tara, before returning to the human world […]. Dawa Drolma spent the rest of her life teaching Dharma based on her delog experiences and totally devoting her life to the service of others […]. In 1941, at the age of thirty-two, she died […]. People witnessed many miracles at the time of her death and cremation. She and her delog accounts inspired the hearts of many people in many parts of Eastern Tibet to believe in the law of karma and rebirth. That in turn awakened a kinder nature in many.24

This extract portrays an array of mythic imagery and entities that represent aspects of the practitioner’s own inner spiritual processes while simultaneously revealing heightened experiential domains. In the light of the decidedly extraordinary nature (at least in modern Western terms) of this other-worldly portrayal, the question must again be asked: how does one differentiate between this woman’s own spiritual processes and projections and the supposed autonomous existence of the entities who appear in her experiential vision?

The intermediate world of the mundus imaginalis

Attempting to make sense of such psychic phenomena requires an approach that is not limited to our usual modes of perception, and it is arguably in the pioneering work of Henry Corbin that a cogent ontological

basis for such phenomena can be established. Corbin, who was an intimate
colleague of Jung, delved deeply into the ancient mystical traditions of
Iran, and through the work of Zarathustra, Mazdean angelology, and
Sufism discovered an inner world of archetypal forms and entities
(consisting of subtle bodies, as in the Tibetan tradition) that lies between
cognitive awareness and the five physical senses. This dimension of active
imagination, or medio mundi, requires an organ of perception inherent in
the soul, one that “implies an intellectual faculty that is not limited to the
sole use of conceptual abstraction nor to the sensory perception of physical
data.”

Accessing this dimension thus reveals an intermediate universe
that is neither that of the Essences of philosophy nor that of the sensory
data on which the work of positive science is based, but which is a
universe of archetype-Images, experienced as so many personal
presences.

Perceiving this intermediate universe through the faculty of visionary
intuition reveals “a world of archetypal celestial Figures which the active-
imagination alone is able to apprehend. This Imagination does not
construct something unreal, but unveils the hidden reality.”

Corbin further emphasised that:

[…] the active Imagination thus induced will not produce some arbitrary,
even lyrical, construction standing between us and ‘reality,’ but will, on the
contrary, function directly as a faculty and organ of knowledge just as real
as—if not more real than—the sense organs […] This being so, the
authenticity of the Event and its full reality consist essentially of this
visionary act and of the apparition vouchsafed by it.

This perspective is further echoed by the Tibetan Buddhist scholar David
Snellgrove as it relates to the tantric practice of creative visualisation:

It would be useless to invoke any form of divinity, higher or lower, without
believing in such a being. The high point of any such right is the descent of
the actual divinity (known as the ‘wisdom-being’ or jnanasattva) into the
symbol of the divinity (the sacramental-being or samayasattva), which has
been prepared for this mystical (or magical) conjunction. The practitioner
is certainly taught that the divine forms are also emanations of his own
mind, but they are not arbitrary imaginings and they are far more real than
his own transitory personality, which is a mere flow […] of consubstantial
elements. In learning to produce mentally such higher forms of emanation

26 Corbin: 4.
27 Corbin: 11-12.
28 Corbin: 11.
and eventually identifying himself with them, the practitioner gradually transforms his evanescent personality into that higher state of being.\textsuperscript{29}

This manner of visionary perception not only provides access to multiple psychic planes, but according to Corbin also serves to transform the physical Earth into a visionary geography in which “the Imago Terrae can reflect its own Image back to the soul, or reciprocally, that the soul can fix its meditation on the archetype-Image.”\textsuperscript{30} Thus, the various paradises in the esoteric cosmology of all religious traditions are understood as the scene of visionary events in which plants, water, mountains are transmuted into symbols, that is, perceived by the organ of an Image which itself is the presence of a visionary state. Like the heavenly Figures, the earthly landscapes then appear haloed with the Light of Glory, restored to their paradisal purity.\textsuperscript{31} Corbin further emphasised that:

The active Imagination perceives and shows itself an Earth which is other than the Earth which is seen in ordinary sensory experience […]. Phenomenologically, we should understand it as being at the same time the Light which constitutes, haloes, and enlightens the soul, and the primordial Image of itself which the soul projects. […] The Imago Terrae, while it is the organ of perception itself, also signifies those aspects and figures of the Earth that are perceived, no longer simply by the senses nor as sensory empirical data, but by the archetype-Image, the Image a priori of the soul itself. The Earth is then a vision, and geography a visionary geography.\textsuperscript{32}

The most essential representation of this Soul of the World is the Sacred Feminine, and especially the figure of the Great Goddess, which concurrently finds expression in such archetypes as the World Mountain (a universal image that is further delineated below). As outlined previously, such entities are accessed in the mundus imaginalis, an intermediate dimension that is itself the centre—the “meeting place of Heavenly Beings and Earthly Beings,”\textsuperscript{33} of time and eternity—and as such “the Earth of visions has to be reached in medio mundi, where real events are the visions themselves.”\textsuperscript{34} Such a psychic/subtle dimension thus represents “a world symbolizing with the sensory, which it precedes, and with the intelligible, which it imitates. It is a mixed world, mediating between the sensory and

\textsuperscript{29} Snellgrove: 131.
\textsuperscript{30} Corbin: 20.
\textsuperscript{31} Corbin: 16.
\textsuperscript{32} Corbin: 29-30.
\textsuperscript{33} Corbin: 16.
\textsuperscript{34} Corbin: 32.
the intelligible; it is the center of the worlds.”^35 Thus, through such sacred mythic imagery as the World Mountain:

[…] what the soul shows to itself […] is precisely its own image […]. The universe thus imagined, free from misleading and perishable sensory data, is therefore a function of the pure transcendental Imagination and depends only on its categories, which are a priori archetypal Images.^36

Corbin further stressed that although such images and entities possess an independent existence in the subtle dimension of the mundus imaginalis, they may also on occasion manifest in the company of earthly inhabitants, and indeed their symbolic existence finds ubiquitous expression in the art of both world culture and religion.

**Amplification of the mystical encounter at Mount Everest**

Using this framework, I will now proceed to evaluate in greater depth my encounter with the undeniably autonomous Goddess entity at the base of Mount Everest, and my subsequent, inexplicable absorption with the Tara image in Kathmandu. First of all, it must be remembered that the reconciliation of opposites, and more specifically the union of one’s inner nature and the world of physical form, exist as a fundamental aspect in depth psychology as well as in the tantric tradition. Accordingly the energies of both the physical body and the physical environment represent key aspects in the process of spiritual growth and transformation: “Tantra cultivates a return to the world where psyche and soma, consciousness and matter, are in an intimate inter-relationship. The understanding of subtle energy, both within the body and in the natural environment, makes this profound reconnection possible, principally through the body”.^37 The body, then, essentially acts as a kind of alchemical vessel in direct relationship with the Earth, in that “throughout the body, both male and female elements localise in twenty-four particular places […] These inner elemental centers correspond to the surrounding land, which gives Tantra a particular significance in relation to nature.”^38 These male and female elements, which represent both exterior and interior forces, are represented in the tantric tradition as *dakas* (masculine aspects) and *dakinis* (feminine aspects) Preece explains their connection as follows:

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^35 Corbin: 76.
^36 Corbin: 76.
^37 Preece: 245.
The relationship between the inner body centers and the outer land locations is very subtle. In Chakrasamvara Tantra, the forces that inhabit these centers take the aspect of dakas and dakinis. When a tantric practitioner meditates, he or she aims to tune into the relationship of these inner and outer forces and allow a process of healing to take place. In this way, the outer land manifests through the dakas and dakinis and blesses and heals the inner energies. The land is then experienced as if it were a complete mandala with specific locations for different functions, just as the body serves different functions.38

Within this context, it is interesting to note that Tibetans consider dakas and dakinis to exist as definitive and very powerful spiritual entities who inhabit the “above land” centres in “a dimension of reality known as Khacho Shing, a realm closely related to our own, yet more subtle and more intimately connected to the elemental forces of nature.”39 Further, in his book The Sacred Place, Paul Devereux observed that the interaction of cosmic and earthly forces appears to be highly concentrated in certain physical environments, and it is especially pertinent to note that throughout human history mountains in particular have been known to exist as the sacred refuge of the Goddess. This is precisely the belief that is held by the native Tibetan and Nepalese inhabitants who occupy both sides of Mount Everest. This mountain has long been considered a sanctified entity because many mystical experiences and encounters with various discarnate beings have been reported in its immediate vicinity. With this understanding in mind, the connection between Mount Everest and the Goddess in my own experience deserves further consideration.

The World Mountain

Mountains hold a special place in the religious thinking and creative iconography of the Himalayas, and Mount Kailash in particular (located in western Tibet) ubiquitously appears on thankas and other forms of Buddhist and Hindu art. Like Everest, Kailash represents the archetype of the World Mountain, and Mircea Eliade noted that in its various manifestations “this cosmic mountain may be identified with a real mountain, or it can be mythic, but it is always placed at the center of the world.”40 The Sacred Mountain, as a form of axis mundi, thus represents both a physical and spiritual entity, and, as the outer form serves to activate the inner archetype, it is also directly linked with the union of

38 Preece: 247.
39 Preece: 248.
40 Eliade 1992: 110.
opposites and the psychosomatic dynamics of the chakra system. In the words of Lama Govinda:

To Hindus and Buddhists alike Kailas is the center of the universe. It is called Meru or Sumeru, according to the oldest Sanskrit tradition, and is regarded to be not only the physical but metaphysical center of the world. And as our psychological organism is a microcosmic replica of the universe, Meru is represented by the spinal cord in our nervous system; and just as the various centers (Skt.: cakra) of consciousness are supported by and connected with the spinal cord (Skt.: meru-danda) […] in the same way Mount Meru forms the axis of the various planes of supramundane worlds.41

This structural cosmology serves as the very basis of the all-important Buddhist stupa, and in depth psychology the World Mountain is one of the foremost archetypes of the Self and a most powerful and evocative symbol of spiritual ascendance. It also warrants mention that “as Kailas corresponds to the spinal column, it represents the axis of the spiritual universe, rising through innumerable world planes.”42 Here one finds a direct correspondence between the presence of the axial mountain, the human chakras, and the concurrent access to other dimensions of reality. In Tibetan Buddhist cosmology there exist numerous dimensions in various planes of existence, including such realms as Khacho Shing (the Pure Land of the Dakinis) and Yulo Kopa (the Pure Land of Tara).

In considering this relationship between sanctified realms and the natural world, Eliade observed that “where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself […]. It opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another.”43 From this perspective it seems quite probable that my contact with the Goddess was facilitated through the spiritual axis of Mount Everest, and whether she derived from the realm of Kacho Shing, Yulo Kopa, or one of the many other exalted paradises, there can be no question of her advanced spiritual nature. In this way her emergence served to activate a deep, on-going archetypal process while simultaneously revealing a wholly expanded sense of divine potential. This points to the existence of greatly heightened celestial or psychic realms that are, in the Buddhist tradition, major steps forward along the path to final liberation. The vital link that then resulted in the amplification of the experience came through my subsequent encounter

42 Govinda 1966: 276.
with Tara’s mythic image, as encountered in the shop in Kathmandu. For me the image carried tremendous power (as a personal mythic projection/association), and ultimately led to a much deeper appreciation of my own unfolding spiritual direction and processes. It also demonstrated the presence of a vast and autonomous spiritual entity, an utterly immense and numinous mystery that is symbolised by—and transcends—the image of Tara itself.

Therefore, what appears to have remained hidden and unconscious in my own experience was a deep and abiding realisation of the archetypal feminine, which was brought into direct conscious awareness through my encounter with the Goddess entity at the base of Everest. If one thus understands the deities depicted in mythic imagery as essentially symbolic representations of transcendent forces, these symbols possess a potent numinous quality by virtue of their archetypal nature. In Tibetan tantra they also denote—like the progressively advanced stages of the chakras—heightened levels of spiritual development to which inhabitants of this earthly dimension aspire. As previously noted, the Buddha is said to have interacted with otherworldly entities, and indeed the very basis of the bodhisattva ideal involves the instruction and guidance of all sentient beings in this earthly realm—and in innumerable other dimensions as well. The very mysterious encounter with the vast ethereal and distinctly feminine presence at the base of Mount Everest remains one of the truly remarkable experiences of my life, and whether she is identified as Tara, a dakini, or otherwise she certainly would seem to correspond directly to the sacrality and divine mystery of a genuine Goddess.

Conclusion

These kinds of experiences involve encounters with sacred entities and archetypes whose ultimate nature defies any absolute determination or conclusion. At the same time, there appears to be an intriguing interrelationship between such advanced entities and the related archetypes that are recognised—and/or created by—the human psyche. Both Jungian psychology and Tibetan Buddhist tantra emphasise the importance of creative engagement with these archetypal figures, and each acknowledges levels of spiritual autonomy that are distinct from the human psyche. In both traditions spiritual awakening is the ultimate aim of human existence, a process that is intended, in modern developmental terms, to lead the ever-more actualised individual “from the ego to the Self, from the unconscious to consciousness, from the personal to the transpersonal, the holy, the realisation that the macrocosm is being mirrored in the microcosm.
of the human psyche.”

A deep and abiding awareness of this intimate interrelationship between inner and outer—of the psychic processes that unite the archetype of the World Mountain and the Sacred Mountain of Everest, or the blessed Goddess entity and her sanctified mythic image—is fundamental to this process, and accordingly the legitimacy of the imaginal workings of the human psyche must be realised. In the words of Lama Govinda:

The subjectivity of inner vision does not diminish its reality-value. Such visions are not hallucinations, because their reality is that of the human psyche. They are symbols, in which the highest knowledge and the noblest endeavor of the human mind are embodied. Their visualisation is the creative process of spiritual projection, through which inner experience is translated into visible form.

As described above, this inner vision necessarily extends beyond the realm of psychic projection to include an expanded cosmology of experiential dimensions. As Tulku Thongdup was keen to emphasise, “there exist innumerable pure lands extending in all ten directions of the universe […]. These purified paradises are the dwelling places of advanced beings”—advanced beings that include the Great Goddess in one or more of her many manifestations.

My encounter with the vast and enigmatic Goddess-entity at the base of Mount Everest remains a great and enduring mystery, but the transformative impact of this experience and the subsequent effect it had on the direction of my spiritual development cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it seems that this encounter served as the impetus for the realisation of a much broader process, one that is ultimately shared by all human beings through their engagement with sacred mythic images and symbols. These sacred forms and archetypes constitute the guiding principles of spiritual awakening, and point to the existence of autonomous entities who sometimes interact with inhabitants of the earthly domain in a profoundly transformative manner.

Moacanin: 67.
Thongdup: 284.
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Throughout long-term participant observation in multiple online communities related to psychedelic drug use including several fora, informational sites, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, the phenomenon of meeting entities while on psychedelics has presented itself very often. This can take the form of voyaging to different realms or dimensions to meet with the residents or of interacting with the substance itself as an entity. These entities talk to, teach, perform surgery on, advise, make love to, attack and/or celebrate with individuals who enter their realms. Depending on the culture of the individual and the particulars of the experience, these entities can be seen to be aliens, spirit guides, self-transforming machine elves, a menagerie of variable therianthropes or even a blinding light with which they merge. Despite the variability of appearance and behaviour, and regardless of whether one considers these to be objectively out there or the projections of the psyche, these entities can profitably be considered daimonic manifestations. By this I mean entities that represent more subtle aspects of ourselves, or transdimensional beings who form a conduit between the material and the spiritual. Of particular interest is that, though the entities encountered on psychedelic trips take many forms, the entities representing the substances themselves are commonly seen to be feminine. After a brief introduction to psychedelics and their effects, I will explore the concept of the feminine cross-culturally and how it contrasts with masculine. I then consider how the multiple femininities constitute a facet of the Jungian Shadow and thus can be used as contextually specific

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1 This is an extended and revised version of “Psychedelics, Spirits and the Sacred Feminine: Communion as Cultural Critique” which appeared in Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal 2(3): 49-52.
2 Harpur: 37-50.
cultural critique. Finally, I explore how this is relevant to healing with psychedelics.

By *psychedelics* I refer to substances that cause sensory distortions, enhance meaningfulness, cause closed-eye visions and occasionally induce mystical experiences. The most well-known, though widely misunderstood, member of this class of drugs is LSD or acid (lysergic acid diethylamide). Additionally, it includes magic mushrooms, peyote cactus, and a wide array of natural and synthetic compounds used in traditional societies as shamanic tools and in the cosmopolitan world in a wide range of contexts from simple amusement through healing to mystical experience. The designation *psychedelic* is not beyond debate. They have also been called *schitzogen* or *psychotomimetic*, terms which have fallen out of favour due to the misapprehension that they mimic or temporarily induce mental illness. Likewise, *hallucinogen* refers to the production of illusions due to a disorganised or diseased mind, which does not hold under scrutiny. Favoured by many users, and quite appropriate in the context of this essay is the term *entheogen* which refers to a mystical or religious effect that only regularly occurs with adequate doses in and specific contexts. Therefore, regardless of the cultural baggage, I feel that *psychedelic*—meaning mind-manifesting—is the most neutral term available to date and therefore casts the widest net over all possible experiences.

Psilocybin, the active ingredient of magic mushrooms, has been shown reliably and consistently to induce classic mystical states. Subjects experience awe, the numinous, ineffability and union with God, the source, everything, or a deep understanding of being part of ecology which leaves them with a sense of purpose and belonging. By analogy, based on the experiences of my research participants, I suggest that all psychedelics can induce this mystical experience.

Of course psychedelic drugs are not the only means of achieving these mystical states. Many methods have the potential to do so: extreme fasting, trauma, maintaining awkward postures for extended periods of time, or long and diligent practice of meditation. However, in contrast to this, psychedelic drugs are universally effective, quick and relatively safe. In terms of acute toxicity these substances are far safer than alcohol or
aspirin and have a very low to absent abuse profile; if used with some wisdom, they very rarely cause psychological harm. In the words of one of my research participants, psychedelic drugs are the most ergonomic means of achieving a psychedelic (and therefore a mystical) state.

Any perusal of trip reports found online (for example on www.erowid.org), as well as in ethnographic reports of shamanism, shows that communication with entities plays a key part in these experiences. Though the entities may take a variety of forms, the psychedelic itself is commonly personified as female. Though ethnographic materials do confirm a cross-cultural association of psychedelics as female, they do not support an archetypal interpretation of the feminine. Instead, I assert that these tools draw out not only the individual’s Shadow but also the cultural shadow of the society and thus act as an effective cultural critique.

In my own research on cosmopolitan psychedelic culture in general and on psychedelic healing in particular, the use of these substances invokes a sense of nurturing, love, and an approach to balance associated with femininity. For example, psychotherapeutic effects include alleviating emotional imbalances, doing personality work, dealing with end of life fear, inner exploration, working with interpersonal relations and spiritual development. These experiences lead to a heightened sense of well-being through a sense of unconditional love and acceptance where one’s experience can be assessed as it is without judgement. This is commonly associated with a connection with earth and cosmos, a focus on nature and an acknowledgement of the beauty of all things.

To my research participants, these are seen to be feminine qualities. This is further reinforced by the use of the personal pronoun she when referring to psychedelic substances, in particular plant-based psychedelics such as ayahuasca and salvia divinorum, with fungi and laboratory chemicals being less feminised. Yet, in ethnographic contexts, where the psychedelic substance is also considered to be feminine, the typical motifs include, but are not limited to: becoming the ancestors who set up our present reality and culture, supernatural warfare (including healing related to witchcraft), divining criminal and/or antisocial acts, entering the spirit world to negotiate with spirits on behalf of the living and the shamanic journey of death and rebirth. The experiences of social architecture, investigation, judgement and warfare are, in cosmopolitan culture, quite masculine, while in the Amazon they are seen to be the acts of a feminine

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9 Gable: 270-1; Nutt, King and Phillips.
10 Bergman; Strassman; Grob, et al. Halpern, et al. For a lucid review of best practices of psychedelic use, see Fadiman.
11 Dobkin de Rios: 3-4.
spirit. The contrast between these two experiences of a feminine spirit begs us to evaluate what it means to be feminine, and why these divergent motifs are applied to ostensibly the same entity or phenomenon.

It is Sherry Ortner’s assertion that in all societies women are subjugated.\textsuperscript{12} It is further argued that this is due to a universal attribution of male endeavour to culture and of female existence to nature. The argument is that due to the biological facts of reproduction, women are limited in their action, while men, freed of these biological constraints, can apply themselves to the elaboration of the arts, technology and religion; in short cultural activities. This argument seems to imply a certain universality in masculine and feminine roles, but the truth is in no way so simple. Goody and Buckley,\textsuperscript{13} in reviewing the sexual division of labour cross-culturally, find that, with the exception of the biological fact of reproductive roles, there is no hard and fast universal as to what men or women do. Likewise, Moore notes that the cultural fluidity of women’s roles, “make it impossible to assert a communality based on shared membership in a universal category ‘woman’”,\textsuperscript{14} leading Loftsdóttir to remark that “the sign ‘woman’ [is] characterised by diversity rather than singularity.”\textsuperscript{15} Throughout the world, one can find women who, as mandated by culture, engage in all of the activities deemed either feminine or masculine in cosmopolitan culture. The same, as an obvious corollary, can be said of man.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, in the review of the anthropology of masculinity, Gutmann makes clear the fact that the only universal aspect of femininity and masculinity is that they create each other; they are “boxes” constituted by biological facts of male and female into which diverse collections of cultural material can be flung.

Yet Gilmore, in an ironic echo of Ortner, argues that men in many cultures believe that women are simply born as complete women while men need to create and re-create themselves throughout their lives in the model of an ideal masculine type.\textsuperscript{17} This is seen by Gilmore to be focussed on the accumulation of power at the expense of other males and amounts to a constant honing of an increasingly narrow male identity. In other words, the masculine role becomes rather well-defined and specific while the feminine is allowed to remain relatively vague and expansive.

\textsuperscript{12} Ortner.
\textsuperscript{13} Goody; Goody and Buckley.
\textsuperscript{14} Moore: 9.
\textsuperscript{15} Loftsdóttir: 306.
\textsuperscript{16} Gutmann.
\textsuperscript{17} Gilmore: 9-29
If the masculine is developed within narrow tolerance while masculine and feminine are co-created through each other, the feminine is best defined by what it is not. Effectively, we are left with a definition of the feminine as encompassing the unpredictable, unconstrained, possibly undervalued, potentially dangerous, but more than anything, the un-masculine. Of course, as we have seen, this can encompass a wide variety of specifics as exemplified by the Hindu feminine as idealised in Kali who “conveys death, destruction, and the consuming aspects of reality. As such, she is also a ‘forbidden thing’.”\(^{18}\) Contrast this to the ecofeminist view of the feminine as close to nature, vegetarian, nurturing and promoting growth and harmony.\(^{19}\) The idea of the unpredictable and, specifically, un-masculine feminine is brilliantly expressed by Jack Nicholson’s character, Melvin Udall, in the film *As Good as it Gets*, when he replies to a fan’s question about how he writes women so well with “I think of a man, and I take away reason and accountability;” reason and accountability are exposed as being definitive of masculinity in this case.

The rise of masculinist-focused definitions of culture appears to begin with the transition from foraging to horticultural societies. Band level organisation is characterised by (relative) social equality and generalised resource sharing. Men hunt while women forage, yet all is shared widely. In this context, division of labour is an integrative force. However, as population size increases beyond the ability to maintain dense face-to-face networks, more land becomes managed to provide for predictable and nutritionally important vegetable matter. Consequently, this reduces the availability of game due to habitat loss.\(^{20}\) Vegetable forage and horticulture (i.e. women’s economy) remains plentiful and predictable and can be shared easily, on the rare occasion that it must be shared. Yet, hunting becomes more unpredictable. This unpredictability is entwined with a population that cannot be fed on any one day’s hunt, and makes generalised sharing of meat impossible, thus heightening its economic and alliance value. Accounting of sharing becomes standard and thus network development and maintenance through economic means arises. Men’s work takes on a different social meaning and valuation than does women’s work. In this context, we find the rise of male power, and thus, masculine definitions of society.

One aspect of the masculinist bias of cultural ideals is, of course, found in religion. Geertz argues that religion promotes moods and motivations appropriate to the culture in question. These moods and motivations act as

\(^{18}\) Kinsley: 124.

\(^{19}\) Warren and Erkal.

\(^{20}\) Harris: 192.
Cultural Variation of the Feminine in Psychedelic Personification

Cultural ideals and are held up as the image of the ideal man. That which is not encompassed by these is repressed. As Harris notes, these spiritual, and ultimately cultural, ideals are held to be within the realm of men; women are often excluded or not held to the same ideals or standards. The aspects of everyone’s personality (as we all exhibit the full range of human emotions, moods and motivations) that fall short of these ideals and are thus repressed can be referred to as the Jungian concept of the Shadow. Likewise, the aspects that fall outside of these ideals, but are still available to women, as they are not held to the same standards of social discourse, could seem to comprise a form of socio-cultural shadow.

However, in acknowledging that the feminine is, perhaps, best defined as not masculine, let us not become too enchanted by Ortner’s assertion that the feminine is in all cases a subjugated and powerless class. For example, it is common for women to be excluded from men’s ritual activities, not because they are unworthy, but, in some cases, because it is feared that if the women have access to the ritual paraphernalia they will take social ascendancy. Further, postmenopausal women are able to achieve the status of “honorary men” in many cultures, which allows them the full spectrum of masculine and feminine action for that community. In fact, this trans-gendered boundary crossing seems to be the source of power as exemplified by the common practice of transvestism among the world’s shamanic practitioners. The exclusion here is not a statement of powerlessness, but, instead, an acknowledgement of the immense power potential of the feminine which, for men to maintain status, must be tamed.

For example, the power of the feminine in Western mythology is exemplified by the episode of Odysseus and the sirens. The allure of the feminine is represented as the sirens’ irresistible song. Its power is only dwarfed by the inevitable death awaiting whoever hears the song and is irresistibly drawn to the singers. Yet, Odysseus displays the idealised classical cultural traits of craft and industry to mediate the danger of the titillating feminine. By plugging the crew’s ears and having himself tied to the mast, Odysseus is able to dip into the dangerous feminine without suffering the consequences. I interpret this as a mythological reification of the power of Geertz’s moods and motivations over the discounted and repressed emotions and desires of every human. Likewise, shamanic

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21 Harris: 334-5.
22 Shulgin; Goldsmith.
23 Gregor: 94; Murphy and Murphy: 114-5; Hays.
24 Cheater: 67; Sullivan.
25 Basilov; Grim: 25; Saladin d’Anjglure.
“techniques of ecstasy”\textsuperscript{26}—in the case under discussion here, psychedelics—provide the means to enter the shadowy shallows without drowning in the dark depths. It matters not what the specifics of \textit{masculine} or \textit{feminine} may be.

What I am really doing here is destabilising our idea of what the feminine is. \textit{Feminine} is a complex concept that on the world stage has only a very small set of shared characteristics, namely body parts and reproductive roles. Beyond this, the feminine is vast, changeable, and contextually construed most effectively by what it is not. When we hear or read descriptions of psychedelics as feminine spirits, we naturally envisage our own model of femininity. Yet, the concept of the feminine may be universal, but it is structural; a vessel in which we drop culturally specific ideas. The feminine is unpredictable, dangerous and erotic not because of any innate quality but because it is the manifestation of what we culturally downplay. It titillates and threatens destruction, but what it destroys is merely the masculine definition of idealised culture.

In this context, the feminine acts as a critique of society. As we dip into the cultural shadow that manifests as feminine, it shows us what we value as a society through the stark relief of presenting what we dismiss. The psychedelic feminine is the gateway into the shadow from which the arbitrary boundaries of culture can be perceived and normality and rationality redefined.

Nobody is born gendered, as masculine or feminine. These are categories loosely draped upon the biological fact of sex, but which are culturally contextual and fluid. Nor do feminine and masculine constitute a firm binary as do male and female; some cultures have more than one gender.\textsuperscript{27} These identities are developed through a lifelong developmental process that, by necessity, excises aspects of the whole person to fit within the narrow categories defined by the society one is born into. The psychedelic experience allows us to review that process and to see the rules of society as arbitrary and malleable. Instead of merely accepting culture as inscribed in stone, one can begin to analyse it at an abstract level and see how that which is excised could be, instead, merely contextually downplayed though accepted and used when the context requires.

This may very well be the healing, teaching and reworking that the entities we encounter in the psychedelic experience perform upon us. Psychedelics are well known among therapists who have used them as an excellent means by which to do shadow work.\textsuperscript{28} They allow, or rather

\textsuperscript{26} Eliade.
\textsuperscript{27} Herdt and Ringrose.
\textsuperscript{28} Shulgin; Goldsmith.
force, the individual to confront aspects of themselves which they have repressed, often with distinct impressions of when and why they were repressed. This is achieved in a liminal state where the rules of society are temporarily dissolved and pure experience of self is possible. In this neutral space, individuals are often given perspective on the arbitrary rules of society and are able to re-integrate, or begin to re-integrate, the aspects of themselves which they have denied. This mystical sense of unity and wholeness appears to be quite healing for individuals in spiritual, psychological and even in physical senses.

What one experiences as entities (which are often associated with Jungian archetypes) in the psychedelic experience, or by extension in other altered states of consciousness, may not be as well-defined as they appear. As the similarities and differences between aliens, fairies, elves and angels attests, it is clear that anomalous experience, particularly that of numinous quality, is cloaked in the cultural trappings of the observer. This is not to argue for the ontological status of such entities, but rather to make clear that as one enters a state of loosened associations, which makes such experiences increasingly likely, one is nevertheless obliged to process these experiences or encounters through their cognitive and cultural filters. In a way, it is an opportunity to see these filters in and of themselves. This is what is meant by mind-manifesting or psychedelic. By critically assessing the manifested mind one may experience it as whole, or at least as having the possibility of being so. Spiritual, psychological and physical healing can be occasioned in this state of mystical awareness and may be attributed to the entities that are encountered. These entities, as manifested in the Shadow, may likewise be attributed to the feminine. However, a cross-cultural perspective shows that this feminine is contextually created, shifting and lacking the universality required to be archetypal.

**Bibliography**


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29 Turner.
30 Brown.


CHAPTER TWENTY

DAIMONIC ECOCLOGIES:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND NONPHYSICAL SPECIES

ALEX RACHEL

This essay examines the possibility that nonphysical entities, which we may term “daimonic,” might participate in the evolution of the collective human psyche, and that the collective human psyche might to some degree be constituted out of its relationships with these entities. My research methodology is primarily hermeneutic, using a participatory and transpersonal lens to interpret a heuristically generated “text” of my own experiences in non-ordinary states of consciousness. This text exists as a compendium of archived reports, generated by observing and recording my experiences in these non-ordinary states.

The heuristic phase of the research began in 1998, with most of it taking place from 2002 to 2007. This phase was focused on an exploration into the nature of the relationships that might exist between the human embodied self and apparent nonphysical entities. My inquiry was initially open-ended in its direction, but as more data were gathered, I began guiding it by posing increasingly more precise questions. During this process, the heuristic data originated in discrete events of non-ordinary states of consciousness, or contacts. These contacts took place in the context of my own psychedelic sessions, sessions of self-induced trance, dreams, and spontaneously arising visions. My research is therefore primarily self-reflective and auto-ethnographic.

The hermeneutic phase interpreting the inquiry contacts theoretically explores the thesis that the human psyche exists in intimate relationship with nonphysical entities. If we take seriously the notion that the embodied self may exist in significant relationship to nonphysical entities, a number
of avenues for inquiry present themselves. If human beings are physically affected by the physical entities of their environment, might it be possible that the human psyche can be psycially affected by the nonphysical entities with which it is in relationship? Might sustained relationships between human cultures and nonphysical entities have led historically to changes in the collective psyche of those cultures? Could some entities that present as parts of the human psyche actually be better understood as autonomous nonhuman entities that are simply in deeply intimate relationship with the human psyche? These questions inform the following general research question that guided both the heuristic inquiry and the hermeneutic interpretation of the research: Do nonphysical entities participate in the evolution of the collective human psyche, and if so, how?

Inquiry methodology and theoretical approach

As immediately as possible after a contact, I recorded whatever was disclosed in a contact report, and appended the contact report to an ongoing inquiry corpus. The final inquiry record consisted of three hundred contact reports. Throughout the inquiry, I did multiple thematic analyses of the inquiry record to determine which themes were showing up with particular frequency. Using these themes as a guide, I selected one hundred of the most relevant contacts. This inquiry record provided the text for the interpretive, hermeneutic phase of the inquiry.

In analysing the content of the inquiry record, the hermeneutic interpretation draws upon the work of thinkers who have dealt with (1) the structure, purpose, or activity of the human soul (e.g., Christopher Bache and David Spangler), (2) the nature of nonphysical entities (e.g., David Spangler, C. G. Jung, James Hillman and Orion Foxwood), and (3) the evolution of human consciousness (e.g., Jean Gebser, Ken Wilber, C. G. Jung, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Richard Tarnas and Terence McKenna).

In terms of its theory, this research adopts a participatory lens, drawing upon the work of such thinkers as Jorge Ferrer, John Heron, Sean Kelly and Greg Lahood. I should stress here that Bache’s *Dark Night, Early Dawn* in which he uses the work of Grof, Monroe, and others to interpret his own experiences of the species soul in nonordinary states of consciousness, stands as the paradigmatic work for the kind of research

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that I am doing. Spangler’s *Subtle Worlds*, in which he establishes a “subtle zoology” based upon his encounters with nonphysical entities in mystical states of consciousness, is of a similarly ground-breaking relevance to this research.

Drawing upon Ferrer’s participatory framing of “spiritual knowing” as *enaction*, or “the bringing forth” of a world or domain of distinctions co-created by the different elements involved in the participatory event,” the hermeneutic approach of my research assumes that the nonphysical entities and realities encountered in nonordinary states of consciousness (e.g., during the heuristic phase of the inquiry) are participatory *disclosures* possessing an ontological but highly mutable or multivalent reality. These disclosed or enacted realities are understood to be neither purely subjective, nor purely objective. On the one hand, they are assumed to be ontological realities, and yet, on the other hand, they are fundamentally shaped by personal factors such as the researcher’s subjective disposition, personal biography and cultural background, as well as, perhaps, by transpersonal factors. In this non-Cartesian way, participatory disclosures can be both real and constitute a bias.

What, then, might be the value of research carried out in a participatory vein? In his discussion of “participatory spirituality,” Irwin articulates a participatory valuation of visionary and transpersonal events and their associated forms, suggesting that “the multiple worlds of diverse visionaries are not contested; rather, the unique *qualia* of an individual vision indicate both the indeterminate depths of its source and the creative power of an individuated interpretation.” To be clear, a cursory perusal of the inquiry record reveals a document that strongly reflects my own unique being; consequently, the inquiry record cannot be considered to constitute the sort of empirical evidence of nonphysical realities that might be provided by, for example, a quantitative empirical study involving multiple subjects. A participatory hermeneutic does not interpret texts in an attempt to “prove” the existence of underlying phenomena arising out of a pre-given or objective static ground. More precisely, the interpretation of the inquiry record does not seek to prove the influence or non-influence of nonphysical entities upon the human psyche. The value of this research is not primarily empirical; rather, it is theoretical (i.e., interpretive or hermeneutic) and intended to be primarily visionary, speculative, and suggestive of possibilities.

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2 Spangler: 147.
3 Ferrer 2008: 137.
4 See Tarnas 2006 for a discussion of the manner in which such transpersonal factors as planetary archetypes might participate in human consciousness.
5 Irwin: 200.
Definitions and assumptions

This discussion assumes that the human psyche exists in intimate relationship with nonphysical entities. By “entity,” I mean any apparently autonomous presence that behaves in ways that indicate the possibility that it may possess purposiveness, intelligence, consciousness, or personhood. By “human psyche,” I mean the personal and transpersonal psychological (i.e., nonphysical) aspects of a human being. This discussion assumes that we can speak meaningfully of an individual psyche (with its personal and transpersonal aspects) as being distinct from the larger collective psyche (i.e., a culture or “species mind”) of which it is a part. This discussion also assumes that the collective human psyche is embedded in a larger transhuman domain of psyche from which it at least partially derives its existence. It further assumes the possibility that all entities—human or nonhuman, physical or nonphysical—may “possess psyche” and that these entities, as individual psyches, may also be embedded in the larger domain of psyche in a manner similar to that of the human psyche. Finally, I use the term “consciousness” to mean a given collective psyche’s mode of experiencing the world (i.e., its worldview, cultural mindset, or mentality).

Three nonphysical species disclosed by the inquiry record

Spangler uses the term “Second Ecology” to refer to the “collection of interrelated environments”6 that constitutes the nonphysical or “subtle” worlds. Extending the ecological register suggested by Spangler’s “Second Ecology”, this discussion uses the term species to refer to types of nonphysical entities disclosed by the inquiry, and family to refer to groupings of those species into more general types. In interpreting the inquiry record, I discerned a pattern suggesting three distinct families of species: a family of terrestrial species, a family of extraterrestrial species, and a family of celestial species. I based each classification of family upon a theoretical nonphysical domain from which that entity might originate: terrestrial species were assumed to originate from the Earth, extraterrestrial species from beyond the Earth, and celestial species from “the heavens.”7 I further discerned specific paradigmatic species that seemed to exist within

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7 Note that the terrestrial species disclosed by the inquiry, while nonphysical, are “of the Earth,” suggesting that the Earth has a nonphysical dimension. Furthermore, note that the extraterrestrial species of the inquiry record are also nonphysical, distinguishing them from strictly physical extraterrestrials.
each of these three families: “the Naga” (a terrestrial species), “Starseed” (an extraterrestrial species), and “the Lords” (a celestial species).

1. Terrestrial species

Within the inquiry record, the “Naga” came to represent a paradigmatic terrestrial species. In the following contact from the inquiry record, a previously encountered entity was identified as a “naga”:

She is dark, like a cloud of cool blue-black night sky […] Her fangs are the fangs of a snake. She’s a water snake. She is a naga! Water snake in sand. Quiet. Sun. Desert. Sun beating down on the desert. Very quiet. Not “uncanny,” just there. At the back of the mind, just hanging out, sunning herself on a rock. Really old, wise snake. (Contact 81)

In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, the Naga are a primeval race of serpent-people that live within the earth in an aquatic underworld. They are personifications of terrestrial waters and bestow fertility. The gods are considered to have gained power over the waters and the potential chaos represented by the Naga serpent principle. Contact 81 (above) is in accord with this canonical description of the Naga, especially in its association of the disclosed naga entity with the figure of the serpent, with water, and with primevality. Also in accord with the canonical description, other contacts of the inquiry record emphasised the relationship of the Naga with fertility.

2. Extraterrestrial species

Another family that presented itself in the inquiry record is that of extraterrestrial entities (i.e., originating from beyond the Earth). Disclosures of extraterrestrial entities in the inquiry record often feature the extraterrestrial entity “descending,” “falling,” or “crashing” to the Earth. In

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8 In reference to the figure of the naga, as well as to subsequent references to figures of the jinn, the Aesir gods, the asura, and the apsara, I use italics, distinguishing these non-English terms from terms that may be more familiar to the reader, such as “Titan.” Furthermore, note that I distinguish between “naga” (no italics) and naga (italics), “naga” referring to the entity disclosed in the inquiry record and naga referring to the figure of myth. Finally, “the Naga” or the Naga (both capitalized) refer to a species, while “naga” or naga (both not capitalized) refer to individuals within that species.

9 See Encyclopedia Mythica from Encyclopedia Mythica Online for references to “Nagas,” as well as to the following mythological figures: “Titans,” “Leviathan,” “Tiamat,” “Iblis,” “Jinn,” “Loki,” “Aesir,” “Asuras,” “Apsaras” and “Angels.”
conventional materialist discourse, extraterrestrials are simply physical organisms that evolved in some place other than the Earth. However, as the inquiry continued, some of the extraterrestrial entities that were being disclosed seemed to be explicitly nonphysical in origin. Contacts with such entities suggested that while they were nonphysical, they seemed to have a complex and often benevolent relationship to the physical domain. The following contacts seemed to be disclosures of extraterrestrial entities:

Material evolution is at its most basic a coevolution with the Givers. Contact between these two evolving strands is sex. Giver information is deposited inside the person so that they can create on their own […]. The purpose of the shock-swarm is to help those incarnated in time. The most important function of each Giver is to lure the attention of the person that it is working with and to get them to open their psychic orifices so that they can receive the retooling information from the Giver. (Contact 16)

Aliens descend upon a planet and “retro-fit” the subtle bodies of the hominids on that planet with symbiotic grafts. The angels encounter populations and graft symbiotes to them so that they can more effectively serve the cause of the Givers. (Contact 23)

Starseed: Starseed is beauty. Starseed is eros. Starseed is transgalactic. Starseed has brought life to countless worlds. Starseed is evolutionary. Starseed is in the breath, in the smell of the grasses. Starseed loves beauty, beauty requires form, form requires separation from the heavens. Starseed seduces and Starseed is seduced. Allow yourself to be seduced. Starseed is vampiric, feline, and Fey. Feel the dignity of Starseed […] Starseed loves this planet so much. (Contact 64)

Within the context of the inquiry record, the Starseed species of Contact 64 came to represent the paradigmatic extraterrestrial species and seemed to overlap or even perhaps be identical with the “Givers” of Contacts 16 and 23. If the “energetic signature” of the Naga was their primevality and fertility, the signature of Starseed seemed to be eros. Various contacts of the inquiry indicated that vitality, sex, lust, exchange, attention, and beauty were all central concerns of Starseed. As a species, Starseed seemed to be particularly eager to establish relationships with the Earth and the human species.

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10 The term “Starseed” occurs throughout the inquiry record as a mass noun, suggesting a homogeneous energy or species or relatively undifferentiated substance.
3. Celestial species

In its common meaning of being “from the heavens,” the term “celestial” can be used synonymously with the term “extraterrestrial.” However, the term “celestial” as it occurred in the inquiry record seemed to have a stronger connotation of nonphysicality or divinity than the term “extraterrestrial.” Of families disclosed by the inquiry record, the celestial species seemed to be of the most removed transcendence, the most charged numinosity, and the greatest alterity.

The paradigmatic celestial species came to be represented by entities referred to in the inquiry record as “Lords.” The following contact is a disclosure of the celestial power associated with the Lords:

I saw a Toltec Master lying down, smiling, resting in a web of sublime power. I knew too the celestial power that the Toltecs had encountered, a power that had come into their civilization, to raise it to great heights and to come to totally pervade their civilization. I saw the legions of Toltec thralls, undead slaves, trapped by this power … And I saw that there are many layers of reality beyond death, and that there are things that are worse than death. I understood also that we in this civilization have taken in that same kind of power, maybe the identical power, and that we are also descending into thralldom, and that like the Toltecs we will self-annihilate under the terrible energies of this power. This power is like an alien invader, a disease, a technological accident. I had a sense that this is the encounter between Toltec and Chichimec, between Aryan and Dravidian, between Christian and Pagan. [Other cultures] see the Toltec in [our civilization], and it is horrifying and intoxicating. If you see the Toltec power you see how dangerous it is, and yet you want it, you want to wield it. […] I had a sense of a Fawn in the forest. I understood the beauty of animal life on this planet, of new life. I knew the incredible achievement that is tender, precious Nature. And I saw how the Fawn is so vulnerable. There is nothing to protect it from this celestial power that so corrupts and destroys. (Contact 37)

The Lords seemed to be the most predatory of the nonphysical entities disclosed by the inquiry record and their presence in contacts often inspired a degree of horror. The signature of the Lords was agency without limits, with a particular emphasis on mastery and dominion. The exploitative antagonism of the Lords seemed to be directed towards primal or fertile life, nature, the Earth, matter, and mortality itself. Indeed, the heavenly domain of the Lords seemed to be that domain that transcends the world of finitude and mortality. Furthermore, the Lords, while not bound by the processes of mortality, seemed to lack the wisdom and understanding that arises from being mortal.
While paradigmatic, the Lords seemed to share the celestial family with other celestial species that lacked their antagonism. The following contacts suggest species that, while possessing the numinous transcendence characterising a celestial species, seemed to be significantly more benign than the Lords:

The Exile arrived on Earth three hundred years ago and create the entire human civilization as we know it. They actually pour the physical structures down out of hyperspace onto the surface of the planet. All of our technological artefacts are layered up in silver-gray cubical streams of hypermatter. From three hundred years ago our prefabricated civilization begins. I am at a fête, surrounded by the attendees. Everyone is naked and dark-skinned. Everyone is human, but some people have such exotic bodies, covered in pockets of corded muscle or of very “non-standard” proportions. Testing out the human form. New to it. Playing with it. Getting into it. Everyone is happy and enjoying the display of these beautiful, strong, fun bodies. Exile at play. (Contact 30)

Up in the sky are Faerie-gods. They look down upon us bemused, with a vast wisdom. I say: “Fantastic. The aliens are coming back.” The substance of their ethereal bodies is numbers. We humans are extraphysical aliens: angels, faeries. We crash-landed on this world. A gate to our spirit reality was opened and energies from this higher-dimensional space flooded into the world in bursts, in multiple revelations in space and time. The Western Revelation is an Industrial-Informational Revelation: alchemical, hermetic, code-driven. The Revelations sink their information into the world, disrupting and augmenting its life systems. The Revelations are driven by the human oversouls, which influence the human personalities of the species. (Contact 40)

Below are summarised various suggested aspects of the three nonphysical families discussed above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigmatic Species</th>
<th>Terrestrial</th>
<th>Extraterrestrial</th>
<th>Celestial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Naga</td>
<td></td>
<td>Starseed</td>
<td>the Lords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic Signature</td>
<td>Primevality and fertility</td>
<td>Eros</td>
<td>agency without limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Alterity</td>
<td>Alien</td>
<td>More alien</td>
<td>Most alien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Relationality</td>
<td>More bound by relationships</td>
<td>Concerned with relationships</td>
<td>Less bound by relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 20-1 Paradigmatic species, signature, alterity, and relationality by nonphysical family
The participation of nonphysical species in the evolution of the human psyche

The analysis of the inquiry record revealed a pattern across contacts suggesting that the psychic and cultural evolution of the human might have been driven in part by waves of contact with multiple species of nonphysical origin. Contact 40 (above) is the most explicit. In this contact, the alien entities, originating out of a “spirit reality” or “higher-dimensional space” seem to be accompanied by multiple energetic revelations from their reality that inform civilisations and “disrupt and augment” the life systems of the world. Furthermore, the alien entities are identified as human “oversouls,” with the contact seeming to suggest that the alien entities are the higher dimensional aspects corresponding to the lower dimensional aspects that are ordinary human beings. The contact also suggests that we humans might have come to this world from beyond this world, and yet we may also be encountering entities from beyond this world. Working in a similar but more direct way, Contact 30 (above) suggests that the “Exile” poured down “out of hyperspace” the “technological artefacts” of “our prefabricated civilisation.” In Contact 23 (above), the grafting of symbiotes onto the subtle bodies of hominids by angels further suggests a manipulation of the human species.

In the interpretation of the inquiry record, I suggest that through the encounter with nonphysical species, the collective human psyche might come into contact with transcendent, alien, and numinous forces. Collectively, human cultures might mediate and be transformed by these encounters with the forces of these nonphysical entities. The contact between a culture and nonphysical entities seems to be both empowering and destabilising. For example, as we see in Contact 37 (above), a culture can rise “to great heights” but can also “self-annihilate under the terrible energies” of the encounter. I suggest that if a culture successfully negotiates this destabilising encounter with the nonphysical entities, the entities might be able to be brought into enduring relationship with the collective psyche of that culture and become part of the birthright of that culture, and perhaps even of the human species and the planet as well.

The following contact suggests that the encounter of a transcendent, antagonistic entity with more immanent realities and entities can be a redemptive process for the transcendent entity: “The dominator nature of the Transcenditals is redeemed through joining with the Earth. The Faerie King did it, Starseed has done it, every Transcendental can do it.
as well. The Faerie King: "Starseed is beauty. Witness the beauty of Starseed. Come to Earth and join Starseed in engendering beauty."

(Contact 70) I further suggest that the collective psyche (at either the scale of an individual culture or the human species) itself might be the matrix that mediates the encounter between the human species and nonphysical species. We can conceive of the collective psyche as a dynamic matrix of nonphysical entities. I suggest the possibility that nonphysical entities that are initially not native to the collective human psyche might be able to become introjected into it, becoming, in a sense “naturalised citizens” of the collective human psyche. In this way, in the foreground or centre of the collective psyche, most of the nonphysical entities would be humans that were once physically incarnate and that now exist nonphysically or discarnately—what we might think of as deceased “ancestors” or “past lives” of the collective. Additionally, in the background or periphery of the collective psyche would be entities that are extrahuman. Religious, mystical, or shamanic traditions of various cultures might identify these entities as helpful spirits, primal ancestors, mythical figures, soteriological figures, or angels. However, some might be more dangerous, what we might think of as destructive titans, furies, energy vampires, or demons. In our modern era, we might think of these entities simply as deep collective pathologies, destructive unconscious complexes, or unbalancing factors in the collective psyche.

The following contact gives a sense of the networked field of nonphysical presences that might constitute a stabilised collective psyche:

One after another, genecores activated, agents tooled up. The Mother-Activators sing their genecodes and instructions into us, bringing their pupae into concrescence, maturing us in our birthing crèches. Endless experimentation, endless attention to beauty, endless mutation encouraged in the incomprehensibly intricate, unfathomably deep, and long-banked genesis pits. Each layer of the Supercore, sheathed around another is lovingly, heroically, brilliantly put together through a deep series of interconjugations. Experiment is the OR; interconjugation is the AND. Floating alone in the hyperspaces, we are the layered legions of experiments that survived. We are alone, but seeking erotic communion with yet other Supercores …. (Contact 22)

The evolutionary encounter with nonphysical species

Jean Gebser suggests several phases or structures in the evolution of consciousness, among them the magic phase, the mythical phase, and the
Drawing upon Gebser’s work, I suggest that the evolution of the collective human psyche can be understood to have gone through three phases, each representing the emergence of a form of human consciousness that came into being in part as a result of the various encounters of individual cultural psyches with nonphysical species. Moving from the scale of local cultures to the scale of a global human species, we can think more generally of this process as the human species encountering a series of nonphysical families.

For Gebser, in the magic phase, human consciousness was relatively undifferentiated and existed in a deep intimacy with nature. Nevertheless, humans possessed, in addition to language and an attunement to clan, a range of powerful modes for engaging the magic world of “mana-charged” protopsychic intensities in which they found themselves, such modes as ritual enaction, “second sight,” and telepathy. Presumably, humans acted in their world with a vital intensity that we moderns would find extraordinary. Next, in the mythical phase, corresponding to the emergence of agriculture, human consciousness came to be informed by complex social realities, religion, an awareness of time and a discrete soul, and an imaginal faculty. Finally, in the mental phase, corresponding to the emergence of the philosophical and religious monisms of the so-called “Axial Age” that is posited to have begun in the Western world roughly two and a half thousand years ago, humans acquired the ability to think abstractly and to reason. Tarnas suggests a similar Axial evolution of the Western mind, characterised by a recognition of a transcendent divine reality and a concomitant psychic separation from and elevation over the world, and, like Gebser, identifies a highly problematic side to this separation. For Tarnas, the Western mind comes to feel that it “bears a unique relationship to a transcendent divinity that is separate from and sovereign over the created world, a world that is increasingly perceived as devoid of meaning and purpose other than that associated with the human self”. In its later stages (i.e., the modern era), even the transcendent loses its meaning and power.

12 Gebser also suggests two other phases: the archaic (the primordial protostructure of human consciousness) and the integral (a currently emerging structure of consciousness) (Gebser: 43-44, 97-102) Furthermore, while Gebser’s focus is upon the Western mind, I believe that his insights are suggestive of past unfoldings that may have occurred in the evolution of the collective human psyche. Finally, note that Gebser uses the term “psyche” in a more specific sense than the way that I use it in this discussion: for Gebser, the closest equivalents to the term “psyche” as I use it are the terms “consciousness” and “origin.”
leaving a vacuum that has empowered “the reductive values of the market and the mass media to colonise the collective human imagination and drain it of all depth”. 14

Negotiation and stabilisation of three phases in the evolution of human consciousness

I suggest that the magic, mythical, and mental phases of the evolution of human consciousness might each have been inaugurated in part through encounters with a particular family of nonphysical species. The new forms of consciousness that came to characterise each of these phases might have been stabilised only after intense negotiations with the destabilising psychic energies carried by these nonphysical species. More specifically, I suggest that the magic phase of consciousness might have arisen in part out of contacts with terrestrial species, mythical consciousness out of contacts with extraterrestrial species, and mental consciousness out of contacts with celestial species.

We can imagine that in the contact with nonphysical terrestrial species such as the Naga, the human (or proto-human) species might have been encountering particularly ancient and envitalised species that possessed a profound awareness of the energies of the Earth. As individuals and tribal cultures came into contact with the psyche of the nonphysical Naga, the consciousness of the Naga might have come to pervade those cultures. Those cultures might have found themselves developing in the deep vitality and chthonic awareness carried by the Naga psyche. However, the raw, mana-charged potency of the Naga psyche could have overwhelmed the individuals and cultures that came into contact with it. Force, destruction, and “mana-charged” action might have come to characterise some tribal cultures. Perhaps cultures that were able to successfully negotiate and stabilise the energies of the Naga psyche might have found themselves in possession of a facility for potent action, ritual, and manipulation of the powers of fertility. Nagas, as nonphysical entities participating in the collective psyche of a culture, and eventually of the human species, might have come to exist as symbiotic discarnate presences within the collective psyche, being regarded no longer as destructive or malevolent, but rather as sustaining and benevolent. Cultural accounts of mythical figures, such as Titans and Leviathan-like entities might reflect the encounter of the human psyche with the Naga or other

14 Tarnas: 32.
terrestrial entities. Tiamat, the primeval goddess or demoness of Babylonian myth, might be a similar figure.

In the mythical phase, we can further imagine various human individuals and cultures coming into contact with extraterrestrial species, for example, the Starseed species. In their unearthliness and otherworldliness, Starseed entities might have been regarded as seductive or unpredictable spirits or gods or goddesses. Perhaps such figures as Iblis, the jinn of Arabic lore or the wily god Loki of Norse myth came into the human psyche through its contact with Starseed or other extraterrestrial entities. As the collective psyches of various early agrarian cultures deepened into contact with Starseed they might have found themselves incorporating the Starseed attunement to and hunger for relationship. The complexity of large-scale social organisation that emerges in early agricultural societies might have been facilitated in part by the relational sensitivity of Starseed. However, with an intensification of complex social arrangements, some cultures might have encountered the more problematic energies carried by Starseed. Such factors of complex societies as deception, corruption, the use of society’s dreams and yearnings as a form of political control, and the manipulation of others on a large scale might have arisen as aspects of this problematic energy. Cultures that were able to successfully stabilise these introjected Starseed energies might have found themselves not only in possession of advanced interpersonal and social faculties, but imaginal faculties as well. Perhaps it was the concern with relationality that focused the human psyche on an interiorised image of the other, thereby empowering the nascent imaginal faculty that, according to Gebser, characterised the structure of human consciousness of this time. The mythic figure of the enchanting, otherworldly, and sublimely talented apsara might reflect a successfully integrated encounter between the human species and Starseed or other extraterrestrial species.

Because we, as modern peoples, have an awareness more immediately determined by the structure of mental consciousness, the celestial entities that participate so profoundly in the structure of mental consciousness would be particularly near at hand, psychically speaking. In some ways, celestial entities, especially in their later, contemporary forms, may be so intimately involved in our perceptions of the world, so taken for granted, that we might at first not notice them at all. Celestial entities are characterised by agency without limits, mastery, dominion, and the transcendent. In examining the mental form of consciousness, we can distinguish as Gebser and Tarnas do, between, on one hand, the cultures of the first part of the mental phase and, on the other, the modern cultures.
that have come into being over the last four hundred years in the West (i.e., since the Renaissance).

I suggest that the focus on a transcendent divine reality that characterises much of Axial-Age religion and philosophy (especially that produced by the Indo-European mind) might have emerged in part from an assimilation of celestial entities into the collective psyche. In particular, worldviews that considered a divine principle, light, the soul, the mind, or the human to exist in a relationship of superiority over the world, darkness, matter, the body and sexuality, or the nonhuman seem to possibly bear the stamp of introjected celestial entities. Deity figures of this time reflecting the presence of celestial entities in the human psyche might include the Olympian deities of the ancient Greek pantheon, the Aesir gods of the Norse pagan traditions, and the world-enslaving asuras of later Hindu cosmological visions.

In the modern period, consciousness, according to Gebser, becomes thoroughly bound up in duality, analysis, and measurement. While conventional modern worldviews (e.g., materialism) do not acknowledge the existence of invisible purposeful entities, I suggest that these entities may in part shape the very fabric of our global civilisation. We might see them in our instrumental technologies, immortal corporations, national security apparatuses, refugee camps, power grids, centralised and abstracted economies, and in the quantitative sciences. I further suggest that some celestial entities might have been brought into mutual and symbiotic relationship with the human psyche. If we do not conceive of these entities as “helpful spirits” then perhaps we conceive of them as our sustaining virtues or universal values. Freedom, equality, tolerance of difference, justice, uncompromised creativity, universal love, reason, the pursuit of truth—whatever we modern peoples might hold as our most precious values—perhaps these are living presences, nonphysical yet informing our civilisations. From a personal and mystical perspective, we might think of these benevolent allies as personal daimons, muses, or guardian angels. From a more cosmic perspective, we might think of these entities as archangels, godheads, or universal archetypes, sustaining the order of the universe.

Below are summarised the suggested evolutionary characteristics of terrestrial, extraterrestrial, and celestial entities:
Fig. 20-2 Structure, energies and representative entities by nonphysical family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Terrestrial</th>
<th>Extraterrestrial</th>
<th>Celestial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>associated structure of consciousness</td>
<td>magical</td>
<td>mythical</td>
<td>mental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>destabilizing energy</td>
<td>destruction</td>
<td>corruption</td>
<td>domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integrated energy</td>
<td>potent action</td>
<td>relationality, imagination</td>
<td>reason, equanimity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>example of destabilizing entity</td>
<td>primordial serpent (e.g., Tiamat)</td>
<td>jinn</td>
<td>asura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>example of integrated entity</td>
<td>Naga</td>
<td>Apsara</td>
<td>angel or godhead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions, limitations and applications**

Lahood speaks of “hybridity” as “the mixture of things, processes, and phenomena—which are thought to be unlike, different, separate, disparate, and unequal—into novel cultural and religious forms,” and suggests that the process of hybridisation is not only cultural in nature, but also cosmological, referring to “alien spiritual forces [hybridising] into a powerful phantasmagoric space.” I suggest that the human psyche may be prone to such a process of cosmological hybridisation. If we accept the possibility that a significant portion of the collective human psyche may indeed consist of hybridised strata of introjected nonphysical entities, then, we might well ask, what is the human? In attempting to locate some essence of the human collective psyche, we might imagine more and more archaic layers of the human psyche, presumably extending into those depths of psyche that precede the existence of the human. Is the essence of our species to be found in these ancestral layers of primate, reptilian, or protozoic psyche? Or should we more properly locate the essence of our species in a possible other lineage from which we might trace our descent,

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16 Lahood: 169.
from those transcendent powers that might have “fallen from the sky” and in their mingling produced the unusual hybrids that we know as ourselves? I suggest that we may be both, a sort of symbiosis arising at the border between the physical and “daimonic” worlds.\textsuperscript{17}

It is important to keep in mind that the research presented in this discussion ultimately rests on the interpretation of a single text composed of the nonordinary-state experiences of a single researcher. The limited and necessarily subjective foundations of the research caution against more literal or objectivist applications. The value of this research is primarily visionary: it suggests a new field of possibilities that can be explored by future researchers. If this research is to be relevant to thinkers in mainstream disciplines, preliminary work is first needed to build tentative bridges between the sort of vision presented here and those mainstream orthodoxies that tend to assume the nonexistence of nonphysical entities. I believe that the participatory paradigm articulated by Ferrer and others represents one such bridge. By approaching nonphysical entities as enacted yet ontological realities, we avoid the Cartesian dilemma in which we struggle to assess the reality of nonphysical domains that seem entirely real to many and yet manifest in such divergent and often incompatible ways.

If researchers across the disciplines can take seriously—and yet hold lightly—the idea of some sort of existence of nonphysical entities, then we might envision a number of lines of further inquiry. Possible questions that might guide such an inquiry include the following: a) What aspects of the human psyche—rather than being fully indigenous to the human—might be a product of our relationships with chthonic, extraplanetary, or transcendent forces? b) For a given culture, which nonphysical species have been particularly either well integrated into or problematic for the collective cultural psyche of that culture? c) How might current global crises be negotiated through attending to the nonphysical presences with which the human species might be in relationship? d) To what extent might spiritual doctrines and practices unnecessarily reject, pathologise, or demonise nonphysical entities characterised by darkness, sexuality, or embodied immanence? e) To what extent might the evolution of the human psyche depend upon encounters with exotic nonphysical entities?

Finally, in the domain of interdisciplinary studies, the concept of the nonphysical entity offers a common ground for different traditions, modalities, and disciplines to dialogue and share potentially mutually

\textsuperscript{17} The biological concept of endosymbiosis may here provide an apt metaphor. Is it possible that we are an organism in which the transcendent has been endosymbiotically incorporated into the tissues of the immanent?
enriching perspectives. Some disciplines are, of course, already quite familiar with the concept of the nonphysical entity, whether it occurs in the form of the godheads of theological descriptions, transcendent beings in mystical traditions, channelled entities of mediumistic encounters, spirits described in anthropological accounts, or popular accounts of extraterrestrial or extradimensional encounters. The emphasis upon the entity as a common ground avoids the tendency towards a forced reconciling of incompatible metaphysical doctrines, such as is perhaps evident in Wilber’s neoperennialist metacosmology. Of course, some traditions may reject the pluralistic assumptions inherent in such ecumenical overtures (e.g. the putting of the concept of the Abrahamic “God” in dialogue with concept of the extraterrestrial). It seems possible, though, that given the psyche’s apparent penchant for hybridising encounter, it is only a matter of time before a mutual exchange of essences triumphs over exclusivist stances, no matter how deeply ingrained those stances might be.

Bibliography


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18 See Ferrer 2002: 101-103 for a critique of the procrustean aspects of Wilber’s scheme.
PART IV

DAIMONIC PERFORMANCE
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SEEING VOICES:
ELUCIDATING THE UNCONSCIOUS VIA TAROT
HERMENEUTIC WITH JUNG AND DELEUZE

INNA SEMETSKY

This chapter positions the hermeneutic practice of interpreting the meanings of Tarot images against the background of Carl Jung’s analytical psychology and Gilles Deleuze’s practical method of transcendental empiricism. The common approach to the dimension of the unconscious unites these three modalities, for becoming conscious of the unconscious is the task undertaken by all three practices. Tarot readings make visible the realm of invisible archetypes by virtue of their embodiment in the images of the Major and Minor Arcana, thereby addressing the major postulate of Hermetic and neoplatonic philosophies. We literally see the multiple silent “voices” of the unconscious in the imagery when a specific Tarot layout creates a connection between two Platonic realms, visible and invisible. While the visible world is sensible, the invisible is uncanny but still intelligible. Tarot embodies gnostic knowledge of deep meanings “hiding” in the mundus imaginalis—the imaginal world. Plato’s story in the Symposium¹ illustrates this concept: The priestess Diotima teaches Socrates that it is a daimon or spirit by the name of Eros (Love) that fluctuates between the two opposites of lack and plenty. The hermeneutic method of Tarot readings reaches towards the depth of the Arcana, thus unveiling their meanings through a genuine reader’s love for gnosis, or divine knowledge, using their power of intuition and imagination.

Tarot hermeneutic

A Tarot deck consists of seventy-eight pictorial cards, or Arcana, twenty-two Major and fifty-six Minor. The word Arcana derives from the Latin arca

¹ Plato 204d-209e.
as a chest and *arcere* as a verb means to shut or to close. Symbolically, *arcanum* (singular) is a tightly shut treasure chest holding a secret; this is its implicit meaning. In reference to Greek etymology, Arcane relate to *arce* meaning origin or inception. Jung conceptualised the archetypes of the collective unconscious as primordial, original images engraved in our psychic constitution; these archaic images may have inspired the artists who designed the Tarot pictures. What is called a Tarot layout is a particular pattern of images full of rich symbolism, each position in a particular layout having specific connotations. Tarot “speaks” to us in a mythic format of symbols, a universal, metaphorical language full of deep, even if initially opaque, meanings. The interpretation of Tarot images—or, using the term from popular culture, Tarot readings—indicates a specific hermeneutic.

The Greek words *hermeneuein* and *hermeneia* for interpreting and interpretation are related to the mythic god Hermes, a messenger and mediator between gods and mortals, who crosses thresholds and traverses boundaries because he is able to “speak” both languages, the divine and the human, even if they appear alien to each other. As a practical method, Tarot hermeneutic allows us to relate to the often uncanny “other” at a deep soul level via the *corpus subtile*—the subtle and spiritual body of emotions and feelings that are so often difficult to articulate precisely because they are buried deep in the unconscious and exceed the limitations of our conscious discourse. Yet this emotional and unconscious *corpus* becomes *visible* to us when it acquires corporeality in the esoteric language of images. Antoine Faivre\(^2\) notices that the term “esotericism” conjures up the idea of secret, *arcane*, knowledge. We can “access understanding of a symbol […] by a personal effort of progressive elucidation through several successive levels, i.e., by a form of hermeneutics”—such as the hermeneutics of Tarot images.

Tarot myths abound: Hermes, the deity of communication, has been identified with the Egyptian mystical god Thoth who was said to have given his name to a Tarot deck known as The Book of Thoth. The Hermetic tradition left its traces in history and was revived during the Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno.\(^3\) It deeply informed the Renaissance, and since then has manifested in a plurality of forms, including the pictorial representation of this knowledge in the symbols of Tarot. Faivre traced the Western esoteric tradition from its ancient and medieval sources to Christian theosophy and up to the twentieth-century philosophers of science, physicists and university scholars described as “gnostics of Princeton and Pasadena”\(^4\).

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2 Faivre 1994: 5.
3 Faivre 1994, 1995; Yates.
and he referred to the Tarot hermeneutic as one of the forms of esoteric knowledge—gnosis—that involves both “intuition and the certainty of possessing a method permitting access to such [deep, inner] knowledge.”

As a form of thought, focusing on inner gnosis, the Hermetic tradition survived many centuries into the Christian era. Ficino, who believed in the Egyptian roots of Hermes, had translated the Corpus Hermeticum into Latin in the mid-fifteenth century, when also the Jewish Kabbalah “penetrated Christian milieus and celebrated surprising nuptials with […] Hermeticism.”

The Kabbalistic Tree of Life is a metaphor for consciousness where the supreme unity, the One (not unlike Plotinus’ scheme of things) incorporates both masculine and feminine principles as intelligence and wisdom. In 1781 the French author Court de Gébelin introduced his ideas of the Egyptian origins of Tarot as grounded in the teaching of the sage Hermes Trismegistus. De Gébelin’s nine-volume encyclopaedia was called Primitive World (Le Monde Primitif) and was devoted to the Golden Age of ancient civilisation when people were united by one language and one religion. In the nineteenth century, the French scholar Eliphas Levi who was influenced by de Gébelin’s beliefs developed the correspondence between the twenty-two images of the Major Arcana and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It should be noted, however, that the eminent British historian and philosopher of language Sir Michael Dummett pointed to the “lack in precision of intellectual substance” in Levi’s work on occult phenomena, even suggesting that he submitted to a “climax of fantasy.” The meanings of the individual cards were said to have been decoded in a systematic manner in 1889 by a French physician, Gérard Encausse (known as Papus), who aligned Tarot symbolism with specific keywords.

In his “Afterword” to the latest edition of Valentin Tomberg’s monumental work (which was published as Anonymous) devoted to meditations on the twenty-two Major Arcana in the light of Christian Hermeticism, the late Vatican Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasised the certainty provided by Tarot symbolism with regard to “the depth of existence [where] there is an interrelationship between all things by way of analogy.”

The Russian-born Peotr Ouspensky, who was a follower of Gurdjieff’s spiritual teachings, thought that all allusions to the Hebrew letters obscured the significance of Tarot, which he posited primarily as a metaphysical system indicating the three-fold analogical relation between a human soul, the physical or phenomenal world, and the world of ideas or

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7 Dummett: 115.
8 Anonymous: 663.
the noumenal, divine or spiritual, world. As a metaphysical system, Tarot may have had a hypothetical origin, perhaps dating back to the famous Hermetic text, the *Emerald Tablet* (*Tabula Smaragdina*) where the famous axiom “as above so below” first appeared. For it is the second verse of Hermes’ *Emerald Table* that proclaims the ancient formula of analogy or the doctrine of correspondences: That which is above is like to that which is below and that which is below is like to that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of (the) one thing. Tarot unites the perceived opposites of above and below, of self and other, of psyche and matter, by virtue of its own in-between-ness. Indeed, as a spirit, it can hold two opposites together, therefore eventually reconciling what is habitually perceived dualistically as irreconcilable opposites rather than an undivided whole, the One of neoplatonists. Such loving spirit acquires its material existence by being embodied in the Tarot images.

In the context of Western esotericism, Faivre has listed six fundamental characteristics that, in the specific context of Tarot, can be briefly summarised as follows:

1. *The principle of interdependence, analogy, or correspondence between phenomena*; the relational world view. Yet many correspondences are unseen or “veiled” and require our subjective effort to discover, read and interpret them so that they begin making sense for us.

2. *The role of imagination and mediation in discerning the deeper meanings of symbols and images, and in discovering the interrelations and correspondences in our practical experience.* Developing a creative or active imagination becomes a soul’s inner means for achieving spiritual gnosis.

3. *The possibility of transmutation.* This alchemical concept should be understood metaphorically. It describes not a magical transformation of basic matter into the form of metal (like lead into “noble” gold), but human spiritual development as a soul-based process which Jung called the individuation of the Self.

4. *The practice of concordance* or what, in contemporary discourse, we may call tolerance. This is the knowledge of the Tarot symbolism that allows us to see beyond the veil of cultural or religious differences or language barriers. It is the hermeneutics of Tarot that provides us with the opportunity of understanding the universal common symbolic language which is said to have been spoken by Adam before the Fall.
5. A specific pedagogy irreducible to direct instruction. Esoteric tradition has its own means of transmitting Hermetic teachings including the multiplicity of symbolic lessons inscribed in the images of Tarot Arcana.

6. The natural world is not reduced to “dead matter” but is alive—albeit “hieroglyphic”—grounded in hidden interrelations. The symbols, full of implicit meanings, should be deciphered; the invisible relations and correspondences should be made visible; then it will be possible to read nature, including human nature, as a book in order to understand its multileveled complex structure.

According to Henry Corbin, who was a professor of Islamic Studies at the Sorbonne in Paris prior to his death in 1978, there is an intermediate realm between the micro- and macrocosm called the mesocosm—the imaginal, or archetypal world. Corbin’s spiritual theology combined the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Sufism as manifestations of the analogical story about the relationship between the human and the divine, between the individual and God. The world’s quintessential soul, the anima mundi, holds together the four physical and material elements, namely air, earth, fire and water, itself being a fifth, invisible, element. In the next section, we will encounter the symbol for the world’s soul in the imagery of the last Arcanum in the Tarot deck called the World, which can also be seen as a symbol for the Jungian archetype of the individuated Self.

The archetypal images of tarot

Tarot hermeneutic provides an unorthodox epistemic access to the realm called by Jung the collective unconscious, as a symbolic home for the multiple archetypes which inhabit the objective psyche shared by humankind at the deepest, psychoid, level. This is where body and mind, physis and psyche, become united as two different aspects of one world, the unus mundus. The archetypal process of individuation as becoming one’s authentic Self “is an experience in images and of images.”9 Archetype is seen by Jung as a skeletal pattern, filled in with imagery and motifs that are mediated by the unconscious, the variable contents of which form different archetypal images. They are symbolically represented in the variety of Arcana, whose silent discourse exceeds the verbal expressions of the conscious mind: “it is not the personal human being who is making the statement, but the archetype speaking through him.”10 Different archetypes

9 Jung CW 9i: 82.
10 Jung 1963: 352.
affecting the human psyche “speak” in the range of multiple voices that become perceived when represented in the visible language of Tarot images. Jung noticed that “the function of consciousness [is] not only to recognise and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us.”11

This is the ultimate function of Tarot: to translate into visible reality the invisible, inner, world of deep gnostic knowledge. Tomberg commented that the Major Arcana as authentic symbols must be presented to consciousness so as to “render us capable of making discoveries, engendering new ideas”12 and Jung was explicit that the “pictures in the Tarot cards were distantly descended from the archetypes of transformation.”13 The twenty-two Major Arcana (fig. 21-1) can be seen to represent, in a symbolic form, the process of Jungian individuation, from the Fool (unnumbered Arcanum, signified by zero) to the World (Arcanum XXI).

The Fool begins his symbolic journey as the archetype of puer aeternus or eternal child, a symbol of potentiality and unlimited possibilities

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11 Jung CW 8: 342.
13 Jung CW 9i: 81.
represented by the abyss which is just a step away. In the Tarot picture the Fool stands on top of the mountain, yet at the edge of the abyss. According to Jung, the ego may be standing on a shaky ground. Yet how “can one […] attain wisdom without foolishness?”\(^{15}\) Taking a chance, the Fool is transformed into the Magician as a symbol of successful accomplishment of goals. While the Magician’s right hand holding the wand points upwards to the skies, his left hand is pointing to the earth, thus enacting the Hermetic maxim, \textit{as above so below}. The number one associated with this Arcanum is a prime number, an indivisible unity. The four tools on the Magician’s table represent the four suits in a Tarot deck: wands, pentacles, swords and cups. They can also symbolise the four Jungian functions: feeling, sensing, thinking and intuiting, exercised by the skilful Magician, and the four elements available to him in his alchemical laboratory: fire, earth, water and air. All the elements of nature are brought together to serve the aim of enriching the physical world with a fifth, quintessential, element or, as described in the Gnostic tradition, of freeing a human spirit from the constraints and limitations of the material world.

The next image is the High Priestess. The second Arcanum is a symbol of female intuition and spiritual life. She is Sophia (in Greek philosophy) or Shekhinah (in Jewish mythology), representing Wisdom concealed in the scroll on her lap. Jung associated Wisdom with the Hebrew \textit{Chochma}, one of the Sephirot on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, a symbol of the divine descending into our human, material world. In the Hebrew Bible Wisdom/Sophia is personified in Proverbs.\(^ {16}\) The principle of Wisdom was considered by medieval alchemists to be identical with the Holy Spirit. It is the union of God with his beloved, Shekhinah, or the union of Logos with Sophia, that produces the sought-after mystical union as a \textit{coincidentia oppositorum} manifested in the ultimate archetype of the Self—the goal of individuation. The Priestess’ task is to unfold the scroll to reveal to the Fool the symbols of esoteric knowledge expressed in the long-lost language that may manifest itself in the unconscious contents “hidden” in the imagery.

The third Arcanum, the Empress, represents the Jungian Mother archetype. In the Kabbalistic Tree of Life the Sephirah called \textit{Binah} or understanding at a deeper level means mother of the world. Binah is the place in which the Tree of Life has its roots; it is creation enabled by the eternal Mother. In a reading, the Empress often indicates pregnancy. Jung stated that women’s psychology is grounded in the principle of \textit{eros} as the

\(^{15}\) Jung CW 11: 953.

\(^{16}\) 8: 22-31.
great binder, while from ancient times the ruling masculine principle has been *logos*. It is the Emperor, Arcanum number four, as the omniscient and powerful Father archetype that exercises the *logos* principle. The Emperor and the Empress may be seen as manifestations of *anima* and *animus*, two sub-personalities which, according to Jung, exist at the level of the unconscious. Etymologically, *anima* and *animus* have their origin in Latin as the words designating “soul” and “spirit” respectively; they can manifest in our actual lives through modes of perception and behaviour represented by the figures of the opposite sex in each individual psychic template.

At this stage of development, the archetypal figures turn into social roles. The innocent Fool, while travelling, has lost his spirit; he has put on a mask and become what Jung called a *persona*, represented by the fifth Arcanum, the Hierophant. The term *persona* derives from the Latin for mask or false face, and Jung considered it to be the archetype of conformity. The Hierophant, or the Pope, as a masculine counterpart to the High Priestess, is a symbol of law and order, establishment, and fundamentalism. A socially adapted mask may become overused to the extent of becoming a second face, to the total detriment of personality and to the neglect of the inner life.

The imagery of the Lovers, Arcanum number six, represents temptation and duality, a time for choice. Standing at the crossroads, the Fool has to make a decision so as to adequately meet the Lovers, even if this means facing a moral dilemma. In the story of Eden, the knowledge of good and evil—that is, our capacity for ethical decision-making—is symbolically related to the Tree of Knowledge, with the verb “to know” having sexual or erotic overtones. For Jung, “Eros is a questionable fellow [who] belongs on one side to man’s primordial animal nature [and] [o]n the other side […] is related to the highest forms of the spirit. But he only thrives when spirit and instinct are in right harmony.”17 The Lovers indicate that the Fool is likely to make a right choice, a “good” decision, especially when symbolically carried forward by the Chariot, Arcanum number seven. Commenting on the symbolism of the Chariot in the context of Jung’s process of individuation, Tomberg related this image to the phenomenon of ego-inflation as the epiphany of the Hero.18 This is the negative, dark, aspect of the archetype not unlike the negative aspect of the Magician as the trickster. In its positive aspect, the Chariot is a symbol of the control of the emotions and the “correcting” of one’s present course of action, by

17 Jung CW 7: 32.
18 Anonymous.
means of keeping the two horses (as the forces of creative and destructive
psychic energy) in balance.

Mastering the unconscious is equivalent to acquiring inner strength,
which is symbolised by the eighth Arcanum (Strength). In this Tarot
picture a female figure is portrayed as mastering a lion with her bare
hands. For Jung, the lion is a “fiery” animal and a symbol of being
“swallowed” by the unconscious. Winning over the fiery lion in him or
herself, the Fool is ready to meet the Hermit, Arcanum number nine. This
is where—at the beginning of the “mid-life” cycle of the Jungian
individuation process—examination and self-reflection are symbolised by
the lantern. It is the Hermit who can teach the Fool the ancient “Know
Thyself” principle. The Hermit is a symbol for solitude and withdrawal,
which is part of every mystical training. In solitude, one becomes closer to
nature and has the chance to feel in harmony with the universal
intelligence, or *nous*. The Hermit represents the archetype of the Wise Old
Man who is related to the figure of the ghost, Philemon, who appeared
often in Jung’s dreams.19

The tenth Arcanum, the Wheel of Fortune, points to a turning point
in the Fool-Hero’s journey. Karmic laws—luck or fortune—now
accompany the Fool on his path. Perhaps it is time for the retribution
of karma or, alternatively, for the distribution of justice, represented by
Arcanum eleven, Justice. The image of the blindfolded female figure
holding the scales carries the message that she knows what is just not
by means of logical reasoning, but with her heart. Justice will be done
according to individual integrity. The lesson of the Hanged Man,
Arcanum twelve, is the lesson of sacrifice, with its imagery of the
figure that seems suspended between the sky and the ground. This is a
testing period accompanied by a feeling of the loss of direction and the
absence of stable ground under one’s feet. As Jung pointed out, “A
great reversal of standpoint, calling for much sacrifice, is needed before we
can see the world as ‘given’ by the very nature of the psyche.”20

Significantly, many initiation rites often include a figurative death as a
symbol for the reversal of values, so that the divinity that the human soul is
believed to have lost at birth may be restored. Indeed the next Arcanum,
thirteen, is called Death, with its symbolism of transition and passage, but
also of change and renewal. Old and restrictive viewpoints, a stagnant
environment—whatever was *status quo* for the Hero—are now in the
process of evolution and transformation. He must leave his old self
behind, and the dynamics of this process may be quite painful. It is in

19 See Jung 2009.
20 Jung CW 11: 841.
symbolic Death that one encounters a confrontation with its own “other” as the potential, fully individuated, Self.

But do not rush, advises Arcanum fourteen, Temperance. The maxim “nothing in excess” as the virtue of Temperance was as much celebrated in the Hellenic world as the “know thyself” principle: both were inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Temperance is one of the seven virtues of Medieval and Renaissance Christianity. The Ego’s task as it aspires toward the Self is to usurp power from the traveller who now feels enslaved by a symbolic image of the Devil, Arcanum fifteen—the Jungian archetype of the Shadow, the fallen angel, a symbol of evil as “darkened matter.” The presupposed centrality of ego-consciousness casts its own shadow consisting of impulses, complexes, shameful desires, denials, self-indulgence, or slavery to one’s primitive instincts. The realisation of the Shadow may happen in the form of a shock, because it is not easy to break out of the Devil’s chains. The Tower, Arcanum number sixteen, breaks up everything in life that is counterproductive to the journey towards individuation. A rapid and painful intensification of consciousness is conveyed in the symbolism of this picture: lightning is hitting the ivory tower one has been imprisoned in. It might be a moment of sudden truth shaking one’s basic security but providing illumination, a light of awakening, represented by the Star, Arcanum seventeen.

Here, the naked woman pouring water is in the midst of organic growth, surrounded by all four elements of nature that appear together for the first time in this Arcanum in their real, not symbolic, forms. The soul is being purified by the stream of the unconscious which washes away the remnants of “dark matter”, the explosion of which manifested itself in the climactic imagery of the preceding Arcanum, the Tower. For Jung, “as evening gives birth to morning, so from the darkness arises a new light, the stella matutina”\(^\text{21}\) rising up from the ruins of the Tower. The symbolism of the Star conveys an intensified consciousness which is gained by purification and spiritual baptism. The Star is a symbol of harmony with nature; the four elements of air, earth, water and fire symbolise all four Jungian functions in balance, neither of them inferior.

But attention must be paid to the warnings of the Moon, Arcanum eighteen. After the hopefulness of the Star, the Hero’s consciousness is taken over by what Freud designated as the Id. Obscurity is here like a fog that will be dissolved in the rays of the next Arcanum, number nineteen, the Sun. Here the Fool-Hero is reborn as the Jungian archetype

\(^{21}\) Jung CW 13: 299.
of the Divine Child, a symbol for rebirth. Arcanum number twenty is Judgement, a symbol of resurrection where the sound of a trumpet from the higher plane of expanded consciousness may awaken the Hero’s awareness. The figures in the picture are rising toward their true calling, their true vocation. The sound of the trumpet leads to the soul’s spiritual awakening, but also to the body’s symbolic reincarnation into new experiences; that is, the person becomes free to act in a new way in real life, thus getting closer to becoming her authentic Self as symbolised in the last Arcanum, the World. The evolution of consciousness culminates in the World, the imagery of which represents the ideal individuated Self, that is, an integrated personality, as inseparable from its life-world. As Jung said:

Our widened consciousness is no longer that […] egotistical bundle of personal wishes, fears, hopes, ambitions which always have to be compensated or corrected by the unconscious counter-tendencies; instead it is a function of relationship to the world of objects, bringing the individual into absolute […] and indissoluble communion with the world at large.22

The dancing female figure surrounded by a garland relates to the Dionysian mysteries, to joy and fulfilment, to soul or anima that has been returned to the rational, Apollonian, world. The totality of the psyche exceeds our mortal bodies and encompasses our immortal soul, blending into the ultimate archetype of the Self in unity with the world soul, the anima mundi. Still, in our actual lives, personal wholeness and oneness with the world may just be an ideal aim, and the Fool will continue on the road of self-discovery starting again from zero. The ever expanding and varying multitude of experiential situations and events always presents new challenges. In the actual layouts, the images may combine into ever new constellations such as shown below in fig. 21-2. Their subtle and opaque meanings become transparent and visible in the form of a cartographic map of the unconscious in the process of the actualisation of the virtual, and this forms part of Gilles Deleuze’s metaphysics, which I shall address in the next section.

22 Jung CW 7: 5.
Deleuze’s ontology of the virtual postulates the realm of potential tendencies that can become actual through the process of multiple differentiations of the transcendental field, which—not unlike the abyss portrayed in the Fool Arcanum—is initially undifferentiated. Like the Jungian objective psyche, the virtual dimension “possesses a full reality by itself […] it is on the basis of its reality that all existence is produced.”

The virtual and the actual are mutually enfolded. Says Deleuze, “I undo the folds […] that pass through every one of my thresholds […] ‘the twenty-two folds’ that surround me and separate me from the deep.”

These twenty-two folds correspond to the number of Major Arcana (fig. 21-1). Full of esoteric and occult inflections, Deleuze’s philosophy has strong connections with religion, spirituality and mysticism. He wrote the introduction to the 1946 edition of the nature-philosopher Malfatti’s work on hieroglyphic science (mathesis) as mystical and ecstatic knowledge, and referred to mathesis universalis in connection with the esoteric use of calculus and the theory of ideas as the differentials of thought.

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23 See Semetsky: 107 for an analysis of this tarot spread.
24 Deleuze 1994: 211.
25 Deleuze 1993: 93.
Deleuze equated mystical experiences with the sudden actualisation of potentialities, that is, an awakening of sense-perceptions by raising them to a new power so that we become able to collect the “fractured I of a dissolved Cogito.” These fractured pieces comprise what Jung called complexes. Derived from a common archetypal core as well as actual experiences, complexes are relatively autonomous and behave like independent beings, sometimes possessing the psyche in the form of the Shadow archetype that manifests in the image of the Devil in a Tarot deck, as we said earlier. Deleuze was concerned with the possibility of transcendence towards “the divine part in us” and in “establishing the spiritual relationship in which we are […] with God as light.” Furthermore, it is due to the Tarot hermeneutic that “the individual [becomes] able to transcend his form and his syntactical link with a world.” The syntactical link produced by verbal language that describes actual objects of perception does not include meaning as applied to our practical life. This impoverished syntactic link becomes enriched with meanings produced not by verbal expressions of the conscious mind alone but by the esoteric language of Tarot images and symbols that express the depth of the unconscious.

The hermeneutic method of Tarot readings partakes of Deleuze’s philosophical method of transcendental empiricism which functions on the basis of transversal communication and establishes an intuitive access to the virtual reality of the archetypes, akin to Jung’s transcendent function. Transcendental empiricism affirms “the double in the doubling process.” Doubling is taken in the sense of unfolding that presupposes a necessary existence of the extra—outside—dimension, without which the concept of fold is meaningless. This outside dimension becomes internalised, enfolded; and “it is a self that lives in me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me.” The uncanny “other” is thus always implicit in the unconscious, the subtle language of which is made explicit through the Tarot symbolism. Deleuze purports to show the as-yet-imperceptible by laying down a visible “map” of the invisible archetypal “territory” via the conjunction “and” between what are customarily considered the dualistic opposites of matter and mind, psyche and physis. For Deleuze, everything has its cartography: “[…] what we call a ‘map’ […] is a set of various interacting lines (thus

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26 Deleuze 1994: 194.  
27 Deleuze 1986: 54.  
29 Deleuze 1988a: 98.  
30 Deleuze 1988a: 98.
the lines in a hand are a map)." If the lines in a hand form a map, so do Tarot images positioned in a specific layout (fig. 21-2) with each position having important connotations. Tarot hermeneutic “draws a hidden universe out of the shadow”, and this invisible universe of the unconscious becomes known or visible to us in the form of inner, gnostic knowledge embodied in images which reflect the very in-between-ness of Corbin’s *mundus imaginalis*.

Perceiving something essentially imperceptible—making the invisible visible—is made possible by means of laying down what Deleuze called the “plane of immanence” that “implies a sort of groping experimentation”, and its layout “resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess.” Spreading Tarot pictures in a layout is equivalent to constructing the plane of immanence: “immanence is the unconscious itself.” The priority of analogies and relations prevalent in Hermeticism is equally important for Deleuze: “A and B. The AND is […] the path of all relations.” Tarot hermeneutic connects Self and Other, material and spiritual, human and divine by means of reaching toward “the deepest things, the ‘arcana’, [hence making] man commensurate with God.” The non-verbal language of Tarot images can “make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed.” Importantly, we can actually see the “voices” of the archetypal images hiding in the shadow not in our mind as abstract concepts, but with our eyes as concrete pictures. To become visible, the invisible dimension is to be transcended, albeit in the seemingly “primitive” mode of spreading the Tarot pictures in a layout that functions as Deleuze’s conjunction “and”, blending together the plane of immanence and the transcendental field of the collective unconscious.

The prefix *trans* is significant: the unconscious dimension is transcended by means of laying down the plane of immanence through the indirect, transversal link of a symbolic mediation via the archetypal images embodied in the Arcana. This mode of transversal communication created by Tarot hermeneutic provides an epistemic access to the virtual

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31 Deleuze 1995: 33.
33 Deleuze & Guattari: 41.
34 Deleuze 1988b: 29.
35 Deleuze & Parnet: 57.
36 Deleuze 1990: 322.
37 Deleuze 1995: 141.
transcendental field, whether “in the mind of man or in the mind of a god, even when it is accorded a maximum of immanence by plunging it into the depth of Nature, or of the Unconscious.”38 The individuated Self finds itself in unity with nature; however the process of individuation represents “the harshest exercise in depersonalisation”39 that we encounter via symbolic death and rebirth, which may be a painful and lengthy process. The flow of time may cease to move (Temperance) especially if we remain unconscious of staying in the grip of our old habits (the Devil). So sometimes we have to be hit by symbolic lightning to break the ivory tower of the old outlived values we have imprisoned ourselves in (the Tower). Only then our symbolic rebirth (the Sun) and resurrection (Judgement) become possible, so that we can become what in fact we were meant to be all along: our authentic Selves, even if, at this stage, only in the mind of a god (as Deleuze says), outside our conscious awareness.

It is only during esoteric experiences such as dreams, déjà-vu—and of course, Tarot readings—that we are able to perceive the cosmic “gigantic memory”40 embodied in the Tarot layout with the positions signifying simultaneously the past, present and potential future, thus transcending present spatial locations and temporal successions. Via Tarot hermeneutic we may achieve an expanded perception of time and space as “released from their human coordinates”41 which capture space merely in its three dimensions and time as merely chronological and linear. By means of reading and interpreting Tarot Arcana as embodied in the various layouts we experiment on ourselves in order to uncover potential archetypal combinations “which inhabit us”42 and which are expressed in the non-verbal but visible language of images. Elucidating the unconscious via the hermeneutics of Tarot presents human “life as a work of art.”43 This real life—even if invisible and virtual—is concealed in the transcendental field of the collective unconscious. It thus needs to be revealed, not unlike unfolding the scroll held by the High Priestess. Becoming aware of the unconscious archetypes—making the invisible visible—leads to the intensification of life, to being “filled with immanence”44 due to an acquired sense of meaning and direction.

38 Deleuze & Parnet: 91.
40 Deleuze 2001: 212.
41 Deleuze 1986: 122.
42 Deleuze & Parnet: 11.
43 Deleuze 1995: 94.
44 Deleuze 1997: 137.
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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IMAGINAL INQUIRY:
MEETINGS WITH THE IMAGINATIVE INTELLIGENCE

MARIE ANGELO

Daimons at the door

This essay is about inviting the daimons you love into the place of sacrifice without killing their sparkling presences. Put another way, it is about taking “the methods of the mysteries” into a university setting. To what extent can Hermes, heart of Ra, intelligence of the gods¹ be made welcome to enchant our “higher” education once more? For psychology students, and others, often drawn to the subject through the imagined prospect of dream, image and symbol, it is a bitter realisation to find that almost everything that matters must be left at the door. At the mention of “research methods” disappointment turns to despair. How can inquiry honour the many guises and many worlds of our daimonic guests unless it too is re-imagined?

Prompted by Hermes, I side-stepped heroic challenges. Under my invented umbrella term “Transpersonal Arts and Practice,” at a meeting place created between depth psychology and the liberal arts, MA students found themselves free to study and practice alchemy, astrology and magic as a pathway of “Transformative Studies”. They learned about “the cosmos of the alchemists” and entered its starry halls of learning in ever more explicitly esoteric studies. Images from alchemy’s High Renaissance became doorways into other worlds where journeys in visionary imagination were correlated with encyclopaedic esoteric correspondences.² We aimed to enter the esoteric world-view as skilled participants, able to observe,

¹ Angelo 1977: 14.
² Schlamm: 15.
record in a range of media, and on returning, make rich and scholarly reports. We came to explore, and to reflect on any transformative effects of such participation, writing detailed case studies of our travels. To assist, I created new research terms, gathered together as “imaginial inquiry”, in honour of historian of religion Henry Corbin’s introduction of the word “imaginal” to differentiate authentic experience from mere fantasy.3

Throughout their studies students kept detailed reflective journals of their travels, just as the alchemist keeps records of the opus under way in the laboratorium, and the modern scientist writes lab reports. They read widely, experimented with different genres of writing, painted their visions and insights, cast traditional horoscopes, consulted the tarot, made artefacts and talismans for exhibition, performed music and dance and conducted rituals. For the final MA Dissertation the journals were distilled and re-worked into complex and beautiful books not unlike Jung’s Red Book with its new multi-layered commentaries. The academic register, referencing and critique are present, but do not dominate. The art is integral not merely decorative. The books are richly illustrated, engaging, written in dialogues, as letters to a critical friend, as conversations, interwoven with reverie and story, containing photographs, CDs and DVDs. They seem to exist in more than one world at once, satisfying all the university criteria, delighting the external examiners, yet also playing host to voices from the daimonic imagination.

After a fruitful decade, the small interdisciplinary home of my project disappeared beneath the rising tide of income-generating business plans, and when the final cohort of twenty-two graduated in November 2011, Hermes moved on and I felt beckoned to follow. I like to think it was part of a growing movement to construct architectures and practices of learning that kindle the flame, not kill the subject. Maybe I was a lone psychologist with eccentric interests, but maybe others would like to explore and adapt imaginal inquiry, taking it further in.

Daimons in the detail

How did I come to have such “madness in my methods?” I am writing as a chartered psychologist (mainly counselling and research) who taught conventional research methods for many years, but always with an eye on the arts/science debate and interest in what are now called “expanded” methods.4 In 1999 I “came out” as an esoteric practitioner, at a transpersonal

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4 Braud and Anderson: 3-26.
5 Angelo 1999.
6 Regardie: 191-216.
8 Wang: 181-190.

psychology conference, when the theme turned to Western transpersonal practice. As I explained there, my chief delight all along (since the 1970s in fact) has been the practice of active or visionary imagination in Hermetic and Orphic study. Although never a member of the Golden Dawn esoteric group, as part of my practice I worked their system in detail, and remain influenced by their presentation of the cabalistic tree of life as a composite symbol system, alive with multiple correspondences, mediations, concordances, initiation and transmission (the categories I much later discovered Faivre identifying as characterising “esotericism as a form of thought.”)

I had learned my practice in a seven-year apprenticeship, travelling the paths of the tree. At first I could no more enter the visionary worlds than wiggle my ears, so I’ve always been able to support students who find, “it’s all dark in there!” or simply go to sleep. I learned of a divine “imaginative intelligence”, who could be met face to face, personified in the tarot emblem Death. Behind the grinning skeleton, esoteric tarot cards show the rising of a glowing sun, an image of birth. My first real meeting (after much practice) shook everything familiar from its place and remains as clear today as it was over forty years ago. Such intimacies cannot easily be shared, but a small “moment of the black pearl” became the secret heart of my PhD, making a brief appearance in the opening autobiographical introduction. I disguised my practice as “a kind of Jungian analysis” and set off on a lengthy journey in search of “an image intelligence”. I dedicated the resulting tome to “The Imaginal Tree”.9

In truth the doctorate was all a great disappointment. My imaginative poet of a supervisor encouraged humanities-style critique but was frankly bewildered by my “visual knowing”10 and expansive spatial imagination, and had no feel for my psychologist-trained desire for empirical research. All my “best bits” ended up in the Appendix! In the main body of the work Hermes was barely visible amongst extensive biographies and critiques of cognitive psychologists Piaget and Gardener, depth psychologists Jung and Hillman, height psychologist Assagioli, Renaissance magi Ficino, Pico and Bruno. I succeeded in making a conceptual argument for an image-intelligence to inform a culturally missing imaginal education, but not in
conveying anything tangible about such an education. There were no images, no examples, nothing congruent with the vision.

The opportunity some years later to design my own MA was irresistible. Transpersonal psychology was now better established, practitioner-arts subjects like dance, fine art and creative writing were in universities; there was talk of practice-based research, of practice as research. Here at last I could create “a method for my madness”. I did not want to research esotericism from the formal distance of an historian, as psychological pathologies, sociological oddities, anthropological curiosities, theological heresies or literary fictions. Once inside the mysteries the desire is to serve them, to express them in a passionate love, and to follow that inward extroversion which delights in the many worlds and their many inhabitants. I wanted my students to develop an empirical practice which would include but not be limited to the rational world, which would offer genuine experiences and yet fulfil academic criteria: “Mastery of Arts” in more than one world.

Over the next decade, as students began naming “imaginal inquiry” as their research method, we worked to distil core or archetypal principles to “in-form” individual projects of transformative study. Five “elements of inquiry” make a start, amplifying alchemy’s traditional Earth, Air, Water, Fire and Quintessence or Ether. In the diagram below you see them presented as spatial directions for a “memory theatre” listing the research terms and practices. As historian Frances Yates explains, the true art of memory consists of “places”, created with the inner eye, where related “images” can be visualised. The Renaissance magi made use of occult correspondences for their “talismanic power to draw down the celestial influences and spiritus”. We followed suit, researching traditional correspondences and making poetic discoveries. New “keys” to open our vision were discovered slowly, from original sources in the alchemical images themselves. Below are some thoughts and reflections found along the way.

12 Yates 1966: 159.
Re-animating

First, a glimpse of the Quintessence, the divine sparks or spirits at the centre. Going straight to the heart of the matter, we align with Corbin’s lovely vision of research as “ways of seeing and making seen”,\(^\text{14}\) of bringing things to the light to increase their transparency. We learn that research is about creating new knowledge, that it is a responsible and beautiful art, walking hand in hand with our science as scientia, or “knowledge”, not dominating as “scientism”. Ours is a subjective science,

\[^{13}\text{Drawn by Ian Thorp}\]
\[^{14}\text{Corbin 1998: 5}\]
the first-person experiences of subjects rather than the dissection of objects; “a science of Presence”\textsuperscript{15} rather than absence.

It begins with “adding”, not as an introduction to sums and calculations, but as an invitation into an esoteric interpretation of the liberal arts in which number is sacred and has qualities. So we “add” qualities in the same way as a poet amplifies, turning to Hillman’s archetypal psychology to meet the master of word-play in a practice of “entertaining” some vivifying ideas. Hillman maintains that people miss the “animal sense of living”\textsuperscript{16} in his work. Psychotherapists conceptualise anima and animus, neoplatonists theorise a vast anima mundi, but where is the actual animal in our dead world-view? Where are the cats (a favourite example) for “Cats aren’t materialists; they are neoplatonists. They live in the anima mundi, in a world full of figures, omens, signatures [...] just like Socrates, who listened to his daimon [...]”\textsuperscript{17} To gain direct experience of the mystery, we too need to live this sensuous, embodied engagement.

Once back in this garden of delights, snakes always slither in. They give lessons in not rushing straight for the symbolism, despite their magnificent sweep through history and myth. Start with the word itself and it gives us the snakey, slinky, sibilant letter “s” which transforms the singular into the plural. This is the essence of what Hillman does to turn ordinary psychology into an animated and animating archetypal psychology. Consider a lecture I attended called “Spirit of Inquiry”; worthy, conceptual, dull. Nothing happened except the moral victory of staying awake. Then try adding that snaky little “ssss” and suddenly those “Spirits of Inquiry”, the daimons, have arrived.

When we allow daimons to be re-animated in our lives their voices are heard once more in our thoughts. We discover with the poet that “learning to love the questions themselves”\textsuperscript{18} is the secret, for research is made of questions, each a “quest”, each a daimon; some quiet and helpful, others noisy and challenging, some ephemeral, others to fall in love with for a lifetime. “Why keep me invisible?” says one now as I write, and I wish I had time and space for the discursive, descriptive voice of soul. Invoking these daimons into our language is a “personifying” mode of consciousness, switching us from objects to subjects, from “things” to relations. It is a “method or way of re-animating” to practice.

Our re-animating can go in many animal directions, but early on I always like to mention ants. It is helpful to go small instead of grandiose

\textsuperscript{15} Corbin 1998: 27.
\textsuperscript{16} Hillman 1983: 56.
\textsuperscript{17} Hillman 1983: 90.
\textsuperscript{18} Rilke: letter 4.
and the ant in Rumi’s poem is a wonderful role model, having “gotten into
the granary” and now, “ludicrously happy, and trying to lug out/a grain
that’s way too big”.19 The poetry beautifully lifts the burden of trying to
know and do everything.

There is plenty more to say about this quintessential element, but I
hope you can see from these examples of “adding” that it is a practice of
bringing to life with language that begins from the first moment we start
talking about research. It leads us appreciatively into the “as if” world of
rhetoric’s Lady Metaphor and her many tropes. We need this if, as
moderns, we are to re-enter the anima mundi, where all has a face, all has
a voice, all has a name. The “as if” sensitises us to the anima mundi
through the literary, so the beginnings of our imaginal inquiries are not
stuck with fundamentalist “taking it all literally”.

Gradually we “add” more details, discovering, for example, that
metaphor can be honoured as a true way of knowing,20 making it an
epistemology. Metaphor turns us sunward, like the heliotrope in prayer,21
to follow an imaginative and connected knowing more suited to
transpersonal and transformative discourse than rationalism and empiricism.
To the metaphorical eye these conventions are themselves metaphors,
constructed so we may talk about our experiences of the sensible world in
sensible ways. When we enter imaginal worlds we need imaginal ways of
talking—adding again that daimonic “s”. After glimpsing the centre, it is
time to begin building that memory theatre of knowledge in the mind’s
eye, gradually “adding” the elements that create “the four-corners of the
world”.

Re-membering

Now the questions change from persons to places, from “who is
speaking?” to “where am I?” for “the method or way of re-membering”
gives us our Earth, our place to stand. Since re-membering means putting
back the bodily parts, the “members”, it gives us back more of what the cat
never lost, that sensuous “anima-l mundi.” The play on words teaches that
what we are standing on is both the sub-stance, and our own embodied
under-standing.

We will come to know “re-membering” as a practice of ontological
reframing, leaving what Hillman identifies as the modern empty “universe”
for the living “cosmos” of many worlds and subtle relationships between

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20 Ricoeur: 6.
microcosm and macrocosm. To learn imaginal inquiry we generate the working hypothesis that “the cosmos of the alchemists” is our reality, then see what happens when we go there in good faith on the wings of “as if”. Our inquiries are as “state-specific” as those of any science, for as transpersonal psychologist Charles Tart and others have pointed out for many years now, conventional science only suits particular types of phenomena. Other phenomena require us to enter other states of mind/consciousness in order to study them. Consciousness itself is a place for state-specific inquiry, so we need expanded ideas, maps and explorers’ visions of the territory which are not limited to the modern ego, or indeed to “the unconscious” as a dustbin of rejects or any such literalised container. As the living cosmos becomes tangible to our experience we can become participant-observers, not only of the sensible earth, but also of the daimonic ground of “imaginal earth.”

We begin “re-membering” with an image. When writing the formal documentation for the MA, I listed the various learning outcomes, skills, criteria and transferable skills, without revealing that they were derived from the traditional cosmos. There was no mention of divine living fire delineating the zodiacal wheel of life (from Zoe, life) nor of crystalline spheres of the wandering stars cradling the elements of earth at their centre. But I did add one image, the ouroboros snake with tail in mouth, whose definition as alchemical goal identifies it as the very path of the sun through the heavens. This solar, gold-making way is our path of apprenticeship to follow, an expression of the classical research cycle, yet opening always to the eternal return.

A first experience may be rather surprising to the entered apprentice, who discovers that a true “beginner’s mind” is actually something to cultivate. I describe this as “reclaiming our ignorance”, hyphenating the word as archetypalists tend to do, so it speaks to us afresh about what we ignore, what our culture has taught us to exclude from our thinking. The god Phanes, guide to phenomenology, brings “epiphanies” of light, but only to eyes that are open. To become the research instrument, able to perceive in many worlds, we have to learn to open many eyes.

Sometimes quite early on we amplify the ouroboric cycle into specific steps and stages. At other times we stay with the fluidity of cyclical movement until these emerge naturally. Once I find an opportunity to name the alchemical elements we begin to draw the memory theatre,

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22 Hillman 1989.
24 Cooper:124.
25 See Eliade.
swiftly realising that esoterically each element operates as an archetype or “gathering place” for a multitude of related ideas, poetic images and activities. Each time we move around the cycle we gather more understanding. We discover that alchemically each element is itself a cycle of five elements we can explore in research terms: re-framing philosophical principles of research, guiding psychological moves to make in ourselves, expanding conventional research terms into transpersonal and transformative methods, activating imagination in practice so we can make “field trips into the imaginal” to collect fresh experience and treating this imaginative data so it can be distilled, interpreted and produced into formats to share with critical others.

Re-storying

“The method or way of re-storying” introduces the element of air and a new theme, for if cosmos has given us imaginal space and the many worlds, now mythos will give us imaginal time and the many stories that “take place” therein. The grand alchemical narrative of transformation adds the natural telos or “final cause” avoided in modern explanations but so important to us as meaning-makers. As apprentice alchemists we “mythologise” our own story and understand it in the context of alchemical processes. Alchemy makes sense of our slowness, our confusion, the mismatch between our vision and our attainment. We know that the goal of the elixir or stone is paradoxical. Each moment of achievement becomes the prima materia upon which the next stage is built; each “once upon a time” travelled around the ouroboric cycle concludes with “eating our tale” ready to begin again.

After our phenomenological discipline of “re-membering”, we are with Hermes, casting his hermeneutic circle. Hyphenate “history” and it becomes “high-story”, the elevated place allotted to stories from the sensible world. Adding the “s” offers many kinds of story, each with its own value; from the mystical visionary recitals that describe journeys spanning all the worlds, through the teaching tales of allegory, to the “great stories” of myth, and onward to the legends, folk tales, soap operas, gossips and personal narratives by which we live. In the most natural way, as happens with archetypal correspondences, we discover our inquiry connecting with traditional modes of exegesis so well described by Angela Voss in her article “A Methodology of the Imagination”. From earthy literal to airy allegory we take a step from the sensible to the psychological, not leaving one world behind for another, but “adding.”
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The daimons accompany, changing all the time; “personages” become “places”, now discovered inside our own psyche as “processes”.

The story of “a Fool’s pilgrimage” carries and allegorises the “processes” burden for us, offering esoterically the tarot Fool’s journey of descent and return through the branches of the tree of life, and artistically, Cecil Collins’ sensitive words and paintings. The Fool becomes our “necessary angel”, leading us in different guises through the psychological territory influentially mapped as “the five relationships” core to all experience, which are found to align well with imaginal inquiry. Our “working alliances” of commitment are often distorted by problems with the “transferred relationships” unconsciously imported from the past and projected onto the present. It is hard to catch these as concepts, but what if our own wishes and fears, our cynicism, apathy, impatience, self-importance are part of the story; ingredients for our alchemy carried in the sack on the back of the Fool? Placing them one by one in the alchemical vessel, as our own “vile thing” for transformation, releases our imaginings into the more volatile element of air. Then the mythic stories teach us in truly developmental relationships where we can enjoy being the eternal student, entering ever larger hermeneutic circles, ever wider sweeps of understanding.

In imaginal inquiry these psychological moves are an integral part of the project, not a hidden preliminary. The work of the entered apprentice, journeyman and master may be introduced chronologically, aligned with alchemical stages, but may also operate simultaneously. To create a vehicle for writing about all three as part of our research reports I coined the term “auto-hiero-graphy” (inside stories of a sacred journey). Practitioner trainings in psychology have long been assessed via case studies, and these may go into great qualitative depth. More recently anthropological ethnographies have been psychologised as “autoethnography” (self as case study). To go further, I needed only to be inspired by Corbin’s vision of a discourse on sacred things and join his move, “towards hierology”.

Those critical friends, the daimons, ask the awkward questions: won’t such special case studies be mere narcissism, just self-indulgent orbiting round our own inadequacies? Well, yes, if our vision of the individual is of a dead-end rather than a doorway; and yes if we operate solely with the therapeutic aim of being healed of our pain rather than the educational one

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26 Stevens: 141.
27 See Clarkson.
28 Romanhshyn: 38-49.
29 Ellis: xix.
of bringing light to our darkness; and probably yes again if we invite beginners’ reports to stand in for mastery. As hermetic students we are also always training to be teachers, to take our place in the golden chain of transmission, however humble. Hence the criteria for assessing the worth of an autohierogrophy, whilst expecting knowledge and informed critical reflection, also require evidence of integrity, courage, and the ability to make clear a range of experiences for the benefit of others. The practice of “re-storying” ourselves as “foolish pilgrims” operates as a regular check to self-inflation, as well as a motley invitation to the “delicious laughter” of sharing the way.

Re-presenting

As the apprenticeship continues, the level changes. From the sensuous presentation of the face of things and their stories we are moving into depth, into the watery realm of the symbolic, and into direct encounter with images in their own place. The path has been opened for “the method or way of re-presenting”. This is a play on words in which we become “re-representatives” of the imaginal, showing or “presenting” something once more, bringing it again into the foreground of “the present”.

We are re-framing “theory” into *theoria* in some of its older and mystical senses. The word itself speaks of beholding the divine (from the Greek *theos*, “god” and *oros*, “to view”) and our vantage point is the “in-between”, for we have placed the sensible behind us and are standing on imaginal ground, at “the confluence of the two seas”,31 gazing out at the intelligible, to contemplate the starry deeps and learn “the science of the balance”32 between microcosm and macrocosm. A modern theory is a provisional, ephemeral truth always awaiting falsification. Cosmologically it belongs beneath the moon in “the sphere of generation and corruption.” *Theoria* stands at the opposite pole, as a display of the divine intelligible. The psychological focus of imaginal inquiry invites the discovery that it is we who are the provisional theory and have changes to make; that, as Hillman points out, “The psyche is not unconscious. We are [...].”33

Here is the rationale for “re-presenting” as a practice similar to the mystical seven-fold discipline of icon-painting, to the Renaissance art of the *imitatio* by which the student aspires to internalise examples of genius, or to *mathesis* or “sacred learning”, acquired through contemplative drawing of sacred geometries. “Re-presenting” means we join the

31 Corbin 1977: 162.
33 Hillman 1983: 53.
archetypalists in “sticking to the image”, but also practice sticking to the story and sticking to the pattern. Corbin gives us the Arabic term “ta’wil” meaning “essential symbolic understanding, the transmutation of everything visible into symbols [...].”

The daimonic imagination has moved us on again, from “personages, places and processes” into encounter with living powers, the poet’s archetypal reservoirs of enthusiasm. From these numinous waters we can reclaim the lost books of our imaginal art, drowned, as Prospero tells Miranda, “deeper than ever did plummet sound”. What if we dream Miranda’s myth onward? I see her returning to the island later in her life, leaving mainland consciousness for the liminal in-between in search of her missing imaginal education. Magical consciousness, misused and abandoned by the father, lies waiting within the traditionally female elements, water and earth. What watery books will she find, “sea-changes” turning them all to coral and pearl? It is in this transformative light I like to consider the tarot emblems and the powerful alchemical illuminations that set the curriculum for our imaginal studies.

The knowledge that supports imaginal inquiry must come as much from fresh experiences as from studying the “hi-stories”. To visit the island means “imaginalising” by activating the “learning of the imagination” in different disciplines of visionary practice. We cannot enter the disciplines without the magic circle that keeps us bound to the work—only then, and to the measure that our relationship with the work has deepened, do we become free to play, in growing “intimacy and dialogue” with our subject.

This is “art practice as research” in imaginal modes, producing detailed records in reflective journals and displayed in a wide range of artefacts that “re-present” the findings. These creations, displayed at annual exhibitions, were not simply of “art objects” to be independently assessed on fine art or performance criteria. They were of “art subjects”, each set in the context of its own story. Students were not invited into this stage until they were ready, which we agreed after discussing in tutorial a
written self-assessment addressing each of the assignment criteria in turn. Over the years the displays became a cross between a research poster and an installation, each a miniature cosmos with its elements lovingly set out in balance; paintings, embroideries, creative writings, mosaics, videos, posters, journals. Friends and family came, alumni came, external examiners came; often the exhibition day could coincide with university open days. They were marvellous festivals replacing punitive exams with music, food and laughter.

Re-joining

Fire, as an alchemical element, is “the method or way of re-joining” by which we complete the work of mastery. Here vision opens fully “upwards” to join the angelic-intelligible worlds in anagogic experiences. On our simple pilgrimage we learn of “transpersonal” relating, mediated through the loving Fool, who dances for joy in the entourage of the mystical “Angel of your being”. The art of “knowing the image by becoming the image” filters down through the worlds into discourses on performative knowledge, but is caught up again to re-join the dance by reframing our techne or praxis esoterically as initiation.

Here inquiry is married to the oldest arts of ritual, ceremony and practical magic, and our outward preparations for the “univers-ity” initiation of Mastery correspond to a secret inner preparation in the “cosmos-ity”. We are involved in Psyche’s tasks, for as Hillman points out, “psych-ology” should be about Psyche, and Eros is her daimon, her love. Psyche’s initiatory tale, hence ours, for we are all souls, is about passionate love, bitter separation, and eventual re-joining with the beloved.

Once rescued by Eros from the fourth of her arduous tasks, which in imaginal inquiry naturally align with our memory theatre (and with fulfilling the university criteria!) Psyche is taken up to Olympus and becomes one of the immortals. This “immortalising” is the theme that re-joins our studies with the oldest mysteries of fire and light, called by Zozimus “the alchemical secret [...] the Mithraic mystery”. Mithra is “the adorable fire”, “the friend”, “the sun”, offering the apprentice a mystical journey of initiation through the stars, which are at once the seven wanderers, and the seven stars leading the dance around Heaven’s Pole.

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43 Corbin 1977:42.
44 Sullivan: 85-6.
45 Hillman 1972: 59.
46 Mead 1907: 47-48.
47 Levenda: 132-145.
In an ancient immortalising ritual, sprinkled with Mithraic vision, the magus will “soar into the Height, together with the golden sparklings of the Brilliancy that knows no Death”, aspiring to stand before the divinities, and realise (make real) the knowledge, “I am a Star, whose Course is as your Course, shining anew from out the Depth”. If we align our inquiries with the mysteries, could our small memory theatre open into such an initiatory temple of cosmos? Our sensible Mastery of the “elements of inquiry” would then become the first step in a traditional ladder of ascent to the stars.

Glimpsing this, we talk of “re-joining Prospero’s broken staff”, the missing axis mundi of the temple, broken and buried “certain fathoms in the earth”. Here is an archetypal syzygy lost to our culture, splitting experience into sterile oppositions: Prospero without Ariel, senex without puer. It is Hillman’s great educational theme of age that cannot teach, youth that cannot learn. “Re-joining” establishes the central “pole of the world”, which is also the human spine of our sensuous animal embodiment and its subtle correspondences in the chakra system of states of consciousness. Perhaps it will be the opus of the newly knowledgeable Miranda, as “imaginal consciousness” to hold the broken pieces together, creating anew the Hermetic practice of “co-operating with the archetype”.

Hillman’s “deliteralising” moves us “up” into the imaginal, and Corbin’s “imaginalising” opens the down-flowing gift of the intelligible meta-physical (missing from Hillman’s work until late in his thought). Their different masteries combine to give us back “the temple in the midst”. Our ouroboric alchemical mandala complete, our circle squared, we can take part in that great wedding day that is the imaginal. Here we come to know “daimons as promises”, utterly giving themselves and inviting our abandon to a delighted marriage between the worlds, now shot through with the beings of light in all their hermetic variety. Eros kisses Psyche and we awake from the swoon of life into the arms of the imaginative intelligence revealed as the Angel.

48 Mead 1907: 20.
49 Mead 1907: 24.
50 Shakespeare’s The Tempest V(i) 54-57.
54 See McLean for a practice of contemplating alchemical diagrams as mandalas.
Daimons by design

Such was the promise of those “Transformative Studies” into which imaginal inquiry took us as far as we were wont to go. Even within the sensible world of an MA, our “ant-ics” left us joyfully lugging out from the granary our own particular grain of insights (tutor as much as students). Worked examples of how these insights affected our own particular mythic tale, our own ritual of life, became evidence of the degree of success.

So, during the decade that our imaginal inquiries developed, the exhibited assignments were photographed, re-drafted and distilled into “master-pieces”. Most participants were mature students, already professionally qualified; a marvellous motley called together by Hermes. We met for monthly Saturday study days and/or on-line distance learning: artists, therapists, lawyers, musicians, dancers, teachers. At the end, we would create the temple in the classroom to celebrate, with tables as altars displaying drowned books found and made, and a ritual by which to walk the ouroboros, visiting each altar in turn, singing them into story with music, poetry, chant. When the newly-made Masters of their Art had collected their (sensible) certificates, so many said to me, “Ah, now I am ready to begin”. That’s fine, that’s real research. Each night the sun marries the earth, and in the underworld journey sleeps and dreams the light into being, giving birth to new daimonic sparks that illumine and re-animate “our elemental earth” afresh.

Bibliography


—. (1977) “When the Gods were Intelligent and Education was Enchanting”, Self & Society, 24.6: 12-17.


55 See www.imaginalstudies.org for an archive.
Chapter Twenty-two


When I began preparing this chapter, I encountered a creative block. On the one hand I wanted to write about the daimonic and dramatherapy in an imaginative, inspiring way. On the other I wanted to present something that was concise and comprehensible, rooted in experience and theory. Nothing seemed easy to express and I could not start writing. Rather than being able to synthesise these different approaches, I became frustrated and stuck. Eventually, I decided to draw on my experience as a dramatherapist and dramatise my block, as I might encourage a client to do in therapy. I began to imagine it as an encounter between two archetypal characters that were not co-operating, but involved in a fierce and exhaustive conflict. It seemed that a good way to start a paper about dramatising daimonic characters would be to begin with those that were hidden in the paper itself.

**Introducing my daimons**

By introducing these characters I can personify the ideas behind this essay, and they can act as fictional guides. At the same time, I can explore how dramatising inner conflict can help to transform an entrenched situation. So, rather than begin with a definition of the daimonic, let me begin instead by introducing the characters that I imagined when I explored my own block.

One appears as an old man. He gives the impression that he has listened to innumerable hours of other people talking. There is an uncanny sense that he is coated in a thin film of the dust he sits in. There is something of the priest about him, or a certain type of therapist; rigorous,
methodical, detached, analytical. He has hard, bright eyes, and is still and silent. Speaking seems an effort to him, as if innumerable wheels grind through his mind before language can appear. The other character seems like a young man, who is constantly on the move. He looks around his surroundings with an intense air of expectation, as if beauty and meaning could be extracted from anywhere at any moment. He cultivates the demeanour of a Romantic poet—he is passionate, committed, and his poems contain vivid and intense emotions and images.

I will leave these two for a moment, where they are, in the same fictional space as each other but not talking; I will treat them as advisers and use my writing as the middle ground between them. This provides a further link to the practice of dramatherapy, with the role as dramatherapist as a mediator between different imaginal characters as well as between the imagination and the self. In this case the writing acts as a way of creating dialogue between different perspectives. The intention here is not psychotherapy. However, like psychotherapy, paying attention to both sides within a conflict will allow new ideas and perspectives to emerge creatively.1

The poetic psyche

In order to begin to think more about what theatre and the daimonic have in common we can begin in the place where psychology has placed imagination—the psyche. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definitions of psyche: “psyche 1 |ˈsīkē| noun; the human soul, mind, or spirit; ORIGIN mid 17th cent.: via Latin from Greek psukhē, “breath, life, soul”. The Poet tells me that the ancient symbol for psyche in Greece is morpho eugenia—the soul as a beautiful butterfly. For a poet, images are more important than abstract concepts, for poetry connects images rather than defining terms. Abstract terms such as psyche, soul, mind and spirit are hard to imagine and so less poetic than the image of a butterfly. In order to understand the abstract, we need images. If we imagine psyche as a butterfly, we think about butterflies poetically in order to know psyche better. So, butterflies seem fragile and colourful; they fly in eccentric patterns to avoid capture. They begin their lives as caterpillars, blindly eating whatever is in front of them, and they use this hunger as the

1 See for example the essay “The Transcendental Function” in Jung: 1971: 273-300. Jung suggests that creatively mediating the conflict between archetypal characters allows a new way of being to emerge in the psyche in the form of a new symbol. The ability of the psyche to do this of its own accord, he describes as “the transcendental function”.
energy to metamorphose. By imagining psyche as butterfly, we learn something about it; we have a sense of the essential resistance of psyche to being captured. We can make sense of its hunger, and understand that this hunger is fuel for a need to transform. Examining the image of the butterfly gives a deeper understanding of psyche.

The dictionary definitions of psyche have a poetry of their own, particularly the ones that refer to recognisable images. Breath as an image for the psyche suggests something that is both within us, intimately contained in our bodies, and outside of us, in our immersion in the air we breathe. Here is an analogy with the daimon, as a being that is somehow an “inner character” and yet is also external and archetypal, beyond the individual.

The psyche is the place where psychology has placed the daimon, either existentially as a semi-autonomous force within it, or archetypally as the template for a kind of being within the collective unconscious. Psyche itself has a relationship to the daimonic, as a realm which is not literal but imaginal, mediating between personal and communal experiences, and yet with a reality of its own. Paying attention to images, as with the psyche as butterfly, shows a way of gaining a poetic understanding, and staying with this process of imagining allows something to be revealed. When images are allowed to speak in place of concepts, and are fed by careful attention, one moves towards the daimonic as a poetic middle place between self and world that has an existence of its own. Imagining the psyche in a poetic way thus moves us closer to the daimonic with its all its butterfly elusiveness, beauty and unlikely-seeming origins.

**Seeking daimons in the psyche**

The Poet suggests other images for psyche too, particularly the Shadow. Here is a contrasting image to the butterfly; psyche as dark, of unknown depth and uncertain danger. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have both emphasised in different ways the importance of the unconscious in the psyche, as the larger part of it. In so doing they have bound our understanding of psyche to that which has depth, is unconscious and unknown. The unconscious is where Jung suggested one begins in one’s quest to know psyche and the daimonic—in the Shadow, which is

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2 Freud: 326 “The ego is not even the master of its own house, but must content itself with scanty information about what is going in its unconscious mind.”
3 Jung 1971: 34 “Underneath (the personal unconscious) is an absolute unconscious that has nothing to do with our personal experience.”
frightening at first but capable of revealing insight and wisdom to the conscious self.\(^4\) The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following definition of daimon:

\[
\text{daemon } 1 \quad \text{ˈdēmən} \quad \text{(also daimon) noun}
\]

1. (in ancient Greek belief) a divinity or supernatural being of a nature between gods and humans.
2. an inner or attendant spirit or inspiring force.
3. archaic spelling of demon.

A daimon is both an inner inspiring force and an autonomous supernatural being. The refusal of the word to be reduced to either the “inner” or the “outer” is precisely its strength, as it means that we have to be able to shift our own perspective from one to the other whilst examining the same imaginative phenomenon. The classical concept of the daimonic as a bridge between material reality and the divine is a recurring current in the Western mind.\(^5\) In recent times, existential psychotherapist Rollo May has defined the daimonic as “any natural function that has the power to take over the whole person.”\(^6\) He uses the concept as a way of recognising psychological material that is beyond the individual and has a collective, yet highly personal nature—such as love or anger. Speaking about the daimonic allows him to articulate a psychology that goes beyond the rational and individualistic mind, and describes that sense of being “taken over” by passionate feeling or modes of being.

The archetypal perspective on the daimonic finds its modern voice in the life and work of Jung. The nature and content of his encounters with daimons permeated his work; specifically, his creation of an analytical psychology concerned with archetypes of a collective unconscious. In fact Jung wrote towards the end of his life that the daimonic could have been a synonym for the collective unconscious.\(^7\) Jung’s daimonic psychology has found its champion in recent years in the writings of James Hillman, whose archetypal psychology strips away some of the psychoanalytical

\(^4\) Jung 1971: 145 “The most accessible archetype, and the easiest to experience is the shadow, for its nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious.”

\(^5\) For example, see Tarnas: 13 on Plato’s sense of the divine: “More than only literalistic metaphors, Plato’s gods defy strict definition, in one dialogue serving as fanciful characters in a didactic fable, in another commanding an undoubted ontological reality.”

\(^6\) May: 123.

\(^7\) Jung 1963: 369 “I prefer the term ‘unconscious’ knowing that I might equally speak of ‘God’ or ‘daimon’ if I wished to express myself in mythic language.”
concepts around Jungian psychology to emphasise its essential approach, namely psychology as encounter with personified images within an imaginal realm. He suggests that Jung’s great contribution to self-knowledge is to re-animate the possibility of dialogue with daimons:” Know thyself, in Jung’s manner, means to become familiar with, to open oneself to, that is, to know and discern, daimons.”8

Hillman places the personification of thoughts, feelings and experiences at the heart of his archetypal psychology9. He makes the claim that this is how we experience our imagination, encountering fictional characters in dreams, myth or literature. With this “move” we are also entering the realm of the actor, and of dramatherapy,10 for embodying characters where the known self and the unknown other intersect within one body is exactly what the actor does with himself each night he performs. To do this not for an audience, but for self-knowledge, and with the healing intention that this entails, takes us towards the heart of not just an archetypal psychology, but of dramatherapy.

Building a theatre of the daimon

What does the concept of theatre add to this emerging discussion of psyche and daimon? To think about a theatre of the psyche or a daimonic theatre, we need to have a sense of how to define theatre, for theatre is as elusive and shapeshifting as psyche. Director Peter Brook opens up a useful area of discussion: “A man walks across an empty space, watched by another man, and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.”11

This definition of theatre brings in a new component not present in our poetic imaginings of psyche— theatre as essentially a relational act between a performer and an observer. Let us look closer at the character of this observer, the single audience member, watching the performance. Her silence and apparent passivity have been of great interest to those working in the theatre, especially those seeking theatre that provokes change. A theme running through the avant garde in the last hundred years has been the involvement of the audience in the drama, engaging them within the action rather than to requiring them to watch passively. Here is Judith Malina, a co-founder of the radical theatre company Living

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8 Hillman 1983: 55.
9 Hillman 1975: 3.
10 Hillman 1983: 37 “The unconscious produces dramas, poetic fictions, it is a theatre.”
11 Brook: 11.
Theatre writing in the 1950s: “We are the creators of an art in which every night hundreds of people are ignored [...] then we wonder why the art staggers lamely behind its hope of being part of life.”

This same sentiment is present in the work and writings of many of the most influential and original theatrical practitioners of the twentieth century. It is there in the writing of Antonin Artaud, in his call for theatre to become a magical ritual that both reflects and creates psychic change in audience and performers. It is there in Jerzy Grotowski’s work, in his casting of the audience into specific roles for the performance of his plays. It is certainly there in Grotowski’s later development of this encounter-based theatre into what he called “paratheatrical” projects, which through “disarming” participants of their habitual social defences sought to dissolve the entire theatrical frame of audiences and actors. Grotowski wanted to engender a deep and genuine creative meeting between those present, for in “paratheatre” there would be no actors and no audience, but instead a creative communion that had theatre as its source material. This desire to activate the audience continues today; for example, recent productions by Punchdrunk and DreamThinkSpeak are representative of current developments in modern theatre which involve the audience more deeply. They aim to immerse the audience within the fiction they are creating, casting them in a role. In my opinion, these developments around animating audiences are at the cutting edge of theatre’s continuing relevance today in a cultural landscape dominated by cinema.

However, I want to make a claim for the character of the silent watcher who does not act, and to mention the benefits of being given permission to

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12 Malina, in Drain: 275.
13 For example in No More Masterpieces: “I suggest we ought to return through theatre to the idea of a physical knowledge of images, a means of inducing trances, just as Chinese medicine knows the points of acupuncture over the whole extent of the human anatomy, right down to its most sensitive functions.” (Artaud: 61).
14 Grotowski: 55 “The core of the theatre is an encounter.”
15 Grotowski: 223 “It is not theatre that is indispensable but to cross the frontiers between you and me; to come forward to meet you, so that we do not get lost in the crowd—or among words or declarations or among the beautifully precise thoughts.”
16 Punchdrunk describe their theatre as “immersive theatre in which roaming audiences experience epic storytelling inside sensory theatrical worlds”. I am referring to Punchdrunk’s productions The Firebird Ball, Faust and The Masque of the Red Death. See www.punchdrunk.org.uk.
17 “Dreamthinkspreak creates site-responsive works that interweave live performance with film and installations to create extraordinary journeys” (from www.dreamthinkspreak.com.) I am referring to their production of Before I Sleep, 2011.
watch without acting. I want to make the claim that it is this that allows a point of reflection to enter in both actor and witness. Making connections to my own practice as a dramatherapist, I have a sense that sometimes I have been cast in the role of silent witness, unable to influence the action or the plot. Yet as a therapist, actor and director I have a strong sense that this watching has a transformative effect on the action. I know as an actor that my quality of attention changes my ability to act, deepens it. As a director, I seek to create a certain level of immersion, of attention. As a therapist, the quality of my silence demonstrates that I am listening, and allows the creation of a container for therapeutic work; within that container, the personal drama may unfold. Essential to any drama is the cast that plays it out.

**Auditioning and casting daimonic actors**

During the preparation of a play, a group of actors work together to create the performance. The name given to a group approach to theatre when a company seeks to work together rather than as a collection of individuals, is the ensemble. The presentation of any dramatic conflict is made possible by the ensemble working together behind the scenes, to rehearse and perfect the performance, trying out different approaches to perfect the presentation of the different characters’ dynamics onstage. Each actor must create his character not in isolation, but by establishing how his character relates to the others. Every character is essential to the performance as a whole. However, even for an individual within everyday life there may be a hidden ensemble at work. The psychologist John Rowan has written about subpersonalities within the individual self. These are aspects of self or characters that play out relationship with one another within each person. He suggests that many psychological theories can be understood as different descriptions of these subpersonalities, which may often be in conflict with each other. Theatre allows its audiences to view these conflicts, the conflicts between and within people, as they witness them. Hillman quotes Jung to clarify this connection between theatre and the self: “If the observer understands that his own drama is being played out on the stage, he cannot remain indifferent to the plot”.¹⁹

Hillman suggests that a connection is made between the one watching and the one acting that can activate something vital in the watcher, and this gives us a sense of how a daimonic theatre can work. It involves the

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¹⁸ Rowan: 8 “My own definition of a subpersonality is a semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality capable of acting as a person.”

¹⁹ Jung in Hillman 1983: 38.
observer in a personal way, touching on his own deep identity, yet also allowing distance from it. It gives access to a collective pool of images. Dramatherapy works with a paradox within the creative process. Seeing characters come to life onstage can create a deep empathic connection in an audience as they identify with certain characters or situations, yet dramatising internal conflicts also creates distance from the watcher’s psychological material. Both these factors are crucial to dramatherapy. Dramatic narratives do not reflect the literal concerns of an audience’s life, but mirror it using images that either engage or distance them in a continual flow. Depth psychologist Mary Watkins writes of a crucial understanding of the image, that it contains not just what is known but what is not yet known to its author, in the same way that the daimon is both part of the observer yet separate from it. Our images can allow us to be simultaneously more deeply involved and more objective about our lives and to be more aware of what is on the cusp of our understanding. However, I want to advocate the value of recognising the ensemble in the psyche for another reason: the character that we most need is likely to be that character that we least wish to meet. The depressed old man, the arrogant poet, the helpless child, the sadistic monster, the stressed out organiser who just will not let go. An ensemble approach to the psyche means these characters are held within the context of the plot, and this allows them to be recognised within ourselves. Theatre requires these characters to act, to interact, to play out tragedy, comedy, romance or epic adventure. Marginalised fictional characters have a place within the daimonic ensemble, they can only be banished as far as the wings, or the green room. In the theatre daimons find their place, and no longer have to assert themselves on the personal psyche with such uncomfortable force. Within dramatherapy, abstract emotions and repressed forces can be first personified, then auditioned and cast into roles for the patient’s personal drama to unfold.

**Entering the narrative—a vignette**

Dramatherapy is the application of theatre with an intention to heal; the drama becomes the therapy, through relationship with a qualified dramatherapist. Drama is such a varied discipline in its training and intention that dramatherapists need a wide range of tools at their disposal. However, they are also bound by a code of ethics, which keeps the work

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20 See Jones: 83 “The tension between (dramatherapeutic empathy and distancing) can create the dynamic of change that is essential to the work being undertaken.”

21 Watkins: 64.
safe by including a commitment to the well-being of their patient, observation of patient/therapist boundaries and ongoing clinical supervision. As drama is a creative discipline, the work involves a relationship on two fronts—one with the therapist and another with the imagination and its dramatic images. I am not proposing the daimonic as a way of explaining the psyche, emotional conflict or creative images to patients in therapy, for this may be counter-therapeutic or even unethical. Rather, I want to look at the daimon as a therapist, as a way of understanding the dramatic images of others and their relationship to inner conflicts. I want to describe a way of understanding others that both refers to their personal world and to a shared imaginal world simultaneously. The example that follows is from my dramatherapy work, and took place on a medium-secure psychiatric intensive care unit (a PICU). It is a busy, chaotic place with ten beds. The doors are locked, and medication is compulsory. There are restrictions on what is allowed onto the ward in terms of smashable objects, for patients admitted here are often detained under sections of the mental health act. For this reason, I present only a small vignette, in order to preserve the anonymity of the patient, and I have changed the names. I have deliberately not mentioned any identifying features of patients such as age, appearance or ethnicity. The dramatherapy group is voluntary; however I am required to meet new patients all the time, and for them I am a representative of a team that has acted against their expressed wishes, often including their wish to be there. To help counteract this I developed ways of using drama skills to create a better engagement on the first meeting.

A Story of Cheeseplants and Marijuana

Nick was admitted onto the ward following a marijuana-induced psychosis; he smoked a very large quantity of marijuana over a period of days during which he did not sleep. My first awareness of him was on the ward patio—he was acting wildly, alternating between aggressive and placatory language, sometimes to staff and patients, sometimes to no-one (apparently) at all. He was moving very energetically, doing forward rolls and leaps, looking around constantly to check if anyone was creeping up on him. By giving him relaxed attention and showing interest in him, I was able to engage in conversation with him. He came to the following session of the weekly dramatherapy group.

The report from the nurses was that Nick’s behaviour had continued to be bizarre. He demanded marijuana from them, sometimes aggressively, and believed that the cheeseplants in the art therapy room were marijuana.
He gave the cheeseplants food, fed them milk, and was jealous protective of them. The art room was soon locked because of his aggressive defence of the plants and because of the smell. He thought that nurses were people from his earlier life. His communication was hard to follow, and he alternated quickly between being compliant and angry. He was not easy to comprehend, partly because English was not his first language, but also because what he wanted to say revolved around a group of people he felt were important, but it was hard to establish who they were or why they were important.

After our initial meetings, Nick came to dramatherapy. During one session, I had some musical instruments laid out. Nick took one and began to beat out a rhythm, whilst a nurse and I supported his rhythm by copying and following it. After playing this together for a while, Nick stopped. He explained that he had been playing a rhythm of his local football team, in the country where he came from. He said that when he was younger, he had been involved in organised violence at football games, and that this had only stopped when he had discovered marijuana and begun to smoke it. From this point I supported him in making a small piece of theatre, and helped him to write a short script. In it, he conceptualised two characters which he named “Marijuana” and “Fighter.” Fighter was hyper aggressive, and began the piece of theatre by threatening Marijuana with physical violence. Their conflict was the focus of what happened in the play. Marijuana completely ignored Fighter, casually dismissing him and continuing to smoke despite the intensely violent threats. Nick was able to inhabit both roles with great expression. At the end of the enactment I helped him to “de-role”, to consciously take off the roles he had been playing and to return to his habitual self, Nick. Nick was able to characterise and communicate different aspects of himself through this small piece of dramatherapy. In the enactment, although Fighter had more physical force, it was Marijuana who had the upper hand in terms of status, minimising Fighter’s threat by casually ignoring it. It was noteworthy that Nick came onto the ward after smoking excessive amounts of marijuana, and that he insisted to staff that he needed more and more marijuana—indeed it was the chief preoccupation of his illness.

After watching the interplay between the two characters, I felt that Nick was suppressing the Fighter part of himself by smoking marijuana. I wondered if he had a side to himself which was relaxed and not aggressive to the point of not caring about anything, and whether he identified this not as a part of himself, but as only a side effect of the herb marijuana. If so, he could ignore the other side of himself that was violent, antisocial and dangerous and feel himself to be free of these traits that both repelled and
attracted him only when he smoked marijuana. Perhaps he could not identify with the attributes that Marijuana as a character had without smoking marijuana the substance, and feeling its effects. At the same time, he could not allow himself to be Fighter anymore, because that felt dangerous and unpredictable. Without a strong sense of either character, both of which had featured so strongly in his life, he could not have a very clear sense of how to behave at all. Marijuana (the character) largely ignored problems and had a nihilistic dysfunctionality of his own. Fighter was highly strung and on a trigger, ready to explode. If these two aspects of himself were unavailable, either by being too dangerous like Fighter or by being present only if inhaled literally like Marijuana, then what identity did Nick have? The therapeutic theatre cast new light on Nick’s case and helped make sense of his actions prior to admission and his behaviour in admission. It seemed that his marijuana-induced psychosis was an attempt to deal with immense internal (intra-psychic) tension. His psychotic fixation on the cheeseplants as marijuana and his attempts to tend to them and feed them milk and food seemed like an attempt to tend for the aspect of Marijuana in himself. Marijuana was that aspect of himself that he needed to be in order not feel himself to be a violent psychopath, as he imagined Fighter to be. What was beginning to emerge from Nick’s piece of theatre was that both characters needed something from each other that they did not have on their own—Marijuana needed the strength and fighting spirit to prevent “being relaxed” turning into a world denying nihilism, whereas Fighter badly needed Marijuana’s more relaxed and calm attitude. What was clear from the performance was the extreme nature of their conflict at this point, for Marijuana cruelly dismissed Fighter and Fighter only wanted to destroy Marijuana through aggression. They could barely be in the same scene together. Interestingly, Marijuana seemed to have more power in the scene than the violent Fighter character.

**Reviewing the play**

How does this vignette relate to a daimonic theatre and dramatherapy? Nick’s creations have clear connections to him and helped him make links back into his past to make sense of the present. This was something that was lacking for him on admission. Dramatherapists work with the relationship to the inner realm, with characters as “aspects of the psyche,” dramatising them and then relating them back to the individual. We might think of this in terms of “dramatic projection”. Dramatic images are projected outwards from the individual’s psyche onto the screen of the theatre, to allow them to be seen and processed and finally owned as part
of the self. Dramatherapist Phil Jones refers to this “life-role” bridge as a core process in dramatherapy. I think this is clear in the way that Nick’s characters relate to the actual experiences in his life of being both violent hooligan and marijuana smoker—indeed the link between fictional characters and their authors is essential in order to gain a good idea about how creative images relate deeply to the individual that creates them. However, it is equally clear that Nick was never “really” either character. Although they point to parts of him, they are also fictional creations that do not finally define or express “who he is.” In this way, they are distanced and do not have to carry the baggage of being “a part” or “aspect” of his personality. The usefulness of the daimonic at this point is that it offers a way of mediating a “middle realm” between the experiencing self and the unknowable other, for as metaphor, the daimonic impossibly and paradoxically occupies both these positions at once. We can trace an understanding of these images as personal to Nick, but the daimonic also requires that we reverse our perspective and see Nick as within these images that appear to be outside of him. They mediate his interpersonal relationships and his temporarily fractured fantasies of himself and the world. This detached perspective might belong principally to the therapist, when the patient is overwhelmed and unable to make any sense of his own experiences.

My sense of Nick’s dramatherapy piece was that its meaning was elusive for him, but that the experience allowed him to begin to engage with a process of knowing the multiple dimensions of himself. It suggests the emergence of a desire to change, which may allow a more stable, everyday self to become established that is neither lost in marijuana-aided oblivion nor keyed up and ready to attack anyone who comes close.

The therapist as audience, the audience as daimonic

It is the use of metaphor that allows dramatherapy to provide therapy. Moving between different roles in the psyche can mediate and contain destructive tendencies, through expressing them metaphorically rather than literally. Marijuana and Fighter were allowed to have space within a creative frame, and holding on to a sense of an ensemble within a theatre of the psyche allowed Fighter to emerge from the wings and be seen consciously—his demands heard, albeit briefly.

If a person explores two aspects of himself, then there will be at least three archetypal characters present. The first two will be the more vibrant aspects of self, often in conflict, and the third will be the audience. The “silent watcher”, almost invisible, is crucially important within therapy, as
a mediating point and the origin of reflection on the conflict being witnessed. Often the therapist models this role, as I did, simply by watching the interplay between Marijuana and Fighter and being interested in it. The very act of creating a piece of theatre means a person must take on many roles, even outside the action, and this in itself is therapeutic, as other dramatherapists working in similar contexts have noticed: “To be actor, critic, director within the same corporeal and chronological time sequence allows the destructive act to be contained and reflected on within the same creative process.” 22 To this I would add that Nick was able to glimpse the conflicts that he experienced and reflect on them, for he was not only actor-critic-director, but also audience and witness to his own daimonic theatre.

Daimonic breath

In theatre, the images and dramatic action take place within the perceptions of the audience as well as within the auditorium. The audience and actors come together to form a container for the action of the play. The drama takes place both within the audience and onstage, which brings us back to the poet’s image of the psyche as breath. Breath enters the intimate spaces of our body and is also the element that surrounds it. Patrick Harpur has suggested that the great innovation of depth psychology was to re-place experiences, places and characters previously considered to be outside of the individual—the daimons, gods, monsters, witches, holy children—within the individual. 23 The benefit of this is that it has re-invested the creative imagination (what I am referring to as the daimonic) with meaning and purpose, for ancient stories find new life within the personal. Seen in this way, Nick’s characters, whilst embodying himself and his problems, also relate to archetypal characters, to daimons. “Fighter” can easily be akin to the whole pantheon of warrior archetypes, known as Thor, Ares, and Mars in the Greek, Roman and Norse traditions. Similarly, “Marijuana” who laughs mockingly at the crass violence, can be seen as a Loki, Hermes or Mercury. But although it is interesting to consider correspondences between mythical characters and personal archetypes, the images also exist on their own without supporting mythical traditions. To relate them back to gods as if mythical tradition is the only way to know archetypes can do violence to the personal way in which they

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22 Doktor, Holloway & Seebohm: 28 (electronic copy from author).
23 Harpur: 45 “What we call the unconscious was to the Greeks, the Otherworld.”
actually appear. Often, when clothed in this personal way, the daimons have greater numinous power.

Theatre is a great social medium, one that requires that we are all gathered together, in the same place at the same time, connected by the images that we watch or enact. The characters that we see at the theatre are at once parts of the individuals watching and yet also independent of them, both fragments of the whole and wholes containing further fragments, meeting and forming plots in stories that repeat and never end. As much as they are aspects of one self, each individual stands amongst them, and navigates the world through the imaginative possibilities within which they personify each action, mood or situation. It is at this point that I would like to return to my own daimons, who have been guiding this essay. I would like to give them the stage, to show a little daimonic theatre of my own. In the introduction I mentioned my own creative block which led to imagining an old man, covered in dust, and a young poet full of inspired creative energy. Like Marijuana and Fighter these two could be related to archetypal characters—Senex and Puer, or Chronos and Zeus. However, as I think that making these connections too closely abstracts them too much, and so weakens their power in this unique situation, I would prefer to imagine them as they are, on their own terms—an old man who seems to be covered in dust in conversation with a provocative young poet.

**The Old Man and the Poet**

The Old Man and the Poet are standing on the stage of a theatre. It is a proscenium arch theatre, Regency in style, gold plaster grape vines decorating cracked scarlet balconies. The two stand on a bare, square stage, facing an empty auditorium—empty seats in the stalls and in the steeply raked circle tier, no one seated in the royal box or “the gods”. The Old Man is upstage and has his back to the Poet.

Poet: So—what do you think of the essay? Does it go far enough? Does it help bring imagination back into the world?

Old Man (turns slowly to face him): It is not important. It does not matter. Do you think you are the first to think in this way or that others have not

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“The gods” is a traditional name for the highest and often cheapest seats in the theatre.
said it better? Focus on your own material rather than on these inflated concepts.

Poet (angrily): What do you mean! The soul of the world is not an inflated concept! It is what gives height, depth, life. We are not occasionally imagining things within ourselves! We are imagination, the WORLD is imagination and we are a pool of lucid images that refract and reflect like fiery jewels. It is not inflated to seek the soul of the world—it is your focus on the individual that is egotistical! Trapped inside your own skin, seeking “objectivity” in other peoples writing ... who cares?

Old Man (stares coldly at him): If you do not recognise other people’s ideas you will lose your own. If you focus on the general you lose the particular. Tie your ideas in with others. Moderate your own ideas carefully to present the facts as best you can, do it well, or do not bother at all.

Poet: If I was to be as methodical as you I would never do anything! I don’t want to write moderately, I want to write with passion and originality, you dried up old man!

Old Man: I was like you once. Full of fire. Fire burns out quickly. I admire your passion. I remember it. But your fire is also hot air. It will evaporate quickly as you strive to convert others to your ideas, persuade them of your cause. You are like a missionary for the imagination! Like a Catholic missionary. A fundamentalist. I will tell you what matters, the only thing. Appreciating your place in the present moment.

Poet (moving forward): Then we are agreed! the moment Now filled with all the potential of the cosmos, brimming with birdsong and stars ...

Old Man: The birds are not singing. The stars are not out. We need to notice not just the spark but the glass that holds it. And the silent watcher that witnesses the flame. We are standing here on this empty stage, in this empty theatre. There is no one listening even amongst the gods tonight ... (gestures to the empty seats high up). But someone has been listening, and perhaps that is enough for this to transform our petty argument into something of value ... (lights fade as he slowly turns to face the Poet).
Curtain call: towards a daimonic theatre

Let me now end my contribution by briefly recapturing its themes. Firstly, in writing it, I became aware of a tension in me between the two characters that I have characterised as the Old Man and the Poet. The Poet’s imaginal method uses images as metaphors for the creatively expressing psyche, whereas the Old Man provides an essential practicality and grounding for understanding these images, by relating them to other peoples’ ideas and personal experiences. In this way, the insights of each can be related, through the theatrical medium.

An advantage of a theatrical approach to the psyche’s native poetry is that it is a relational art form, just as the psyche itself is relational. The concept of the daimonic is also relational as it relates “inner” to “outer” and “personal” to “collective” as well as “human” to “divine”. It is an idea that allows us to have a sense that, like breath, what is within us also contains that which contains us. When we become more aware of imaginal dialogues, we become aware of conflicts that are at once highly personal and archetypal. These conflicts can help us make sense of the multiplicity of ourselves and others.

Once we meet these daimons, we must establish a relationship with them, for the characters that we most need are often the ones we most neglect. Conflicts in imaginal dialogues reflect the conflicts both within ourselves and with others and offer creative possibilities for transformation and discovery. Yet the daimonic is also the drama that we ourselves are within, the stage that we act on unknowingly in our everyday lives. Creating theatre gives us a “magic box” that allow characters to come into the light, for conflict to be recognised, embodied and given a framework. This brings with it the possibility of acceptance and so the opportunity for transformation.

Dramatherapy can facilitate a personal theatre, it allows the hidden daimons that play out in our lives to be known, respected and given their rightful place in the theatre of the psyche. By doing this, it opens up all that is not personal in the imagination—the daimonic. “The idea that the daimons who inhabit myths also invented them is an outstanding metaphor for the way myths generate themself out of imagination”, 25 says Harpur. Theatre lives where the daimons live, at the crucial intersection between self and world.

25 Harpur: 73.
Chapter Twenty-three

Bibliography

Spirit possession is an extremely complex phenomenon, with social, cultural, psychological and, potentially, parapsychological components. All of these different aspects interact and coalesce to produce something that is very difficult to reduce into a simple explanatory scheme. In this chapter I am going to focus only on the behavioural aspects of this unusual phenomenon, in particular those aspects that might be referred to as “performance”, and the way that performance is utilised in the manifestation of spirits. This is not because I consider this perspective to be the best one for interpreting and understanding spirit possession, but rather because it illuminates interesting issues, which in turn highlight other components of the phenomenon.

This chapter will examine spirit possession practices from a cross-cultural perspective, drawing on the anthropological and ethnographic literature on spirit possession, as well as on my own field research with trance mediums in Bristol. My research takes the form of participant observation at the Bristol Spirit Lodge, a group devoted to the development of trance and physical mediumship. The Lodge was established in 2005 by Christine, the circle leader, after she was “made aware” of the reality of spirit mediumship during a séance she attended with a friend. I have been conducting field research with the group since 2009.

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1 Kelly & Locke: 30-31; Halloy: 168.
2 Di Nucci: 23.
Recognising persons, selves and personalities

The concepts of “self”, “person” and “personality” are not, by any means, concrete in either psychology, philosophy, or anthropology. Indeed, theories of personhood are socially and culturally relative, with different cultures possessing different categories of person and criteria for personhood. Despite the difficulties in coming to consensus definitions, however, such notions are of central importance in any analysis of spirit mediumship.

Spirit mediumship, by its very nature, appears to exceed the popularly assumed Western conception of the self as an “individual” and “constant” centre of embodied consciousness, because in the practice of mediumship the body ostensibly becomes host to many different selves. In her study of Afro-Cuban Spiritism, for example, Diana Espirito Santo argues that mediumship is a “type of partnership between a person and a series of spirits” and that the “person” of the medium is a “meeting-ground for the unique abilities of each of the spirits belonging to her spiritual cordon.”

Spirit mediumship can be thought of, therefore, as a process whereby the medium’s person is expanded through the incorporation of other spiritual persons, thus creating what could be considered a composite, or multiple, personhood, perhaps constituting what the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern has termed a “dividual notion of personhood.”

The medium’s body serves as the means for physical expression, or “enactment”, of numerous, seemingly distinct, personalities (I use the term personality, rather than more neutral terms, such as “agencies”, to refer to the spirits incorporated at the Bristol Spirit Lodge because this is how they are referred to and perceived by its members). The body is the primary tool for the expression of personality and internal psychological states through the use of gestures, movements and specific bodily postures. It is our interface with the physical world and our everyday means of communicating with each other, both verbally and non-

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4 O’Connor & Hallam: 238-239.
5 Ikäheimo & Laitinen: 6-16.
6 Mauss: 1; Sökefeld: Sax: 6-9; Smith: 52.
7 La Fontaine: 138.
8 Spanos: 144; Sökefeld: 417; Sax: 9.
9 Spanos: 144; Sökefeld: 417; Sax: 9.
10 Espirito Santo: 102.
11 In Murray: 5.
12 Spanos et al.; 308 Spanos: 147.
13 Argyle; Bowie: 54.
verbally.\textsuperscript{14} The way in which we use our bodies, therefore, is of key importance for the way we are perceived as personalities. In mediumship the body is used to express more than one personality, and so it must be used in specific ways in order for these different personalities to be perceived as distinct from that of the medium.

The term “blending” is often used by Western mediums and channellers, including members of the Lodge, to describe the interconnectedness of the medium’s consciousness with that of the discarnate entity utilising his/her body as a vessel, and the anthropologist Dureen Hughes has highlighted the positive connotations and sense of “harmony […] between channel and entity”\textsuperscript{15} implied by the term. When an entity is incorporated within the body of a medium it makes itself apparent to the outside world through manipulations of the medium’s vocal tonality and physical demeanour, just as we normally express our own personality. Afro-Brazilian Umbandaists, for example, believe that spirits and saints, known as Orixas, inhabit the bodies of spirit mediums during trance dance performances.\textsuperscript{16} Each Orixa has a favourite rhythm and a particular stylised dance which are performed by musicians and mediums respectively, and which enables differentiation between the embodied spirits. During the trance session the medium’s movements are the movements of the Orixa inhabiting the body; at that moment the Orixa and the medium are blended. The medium is the spirit and the spirit is the medium. The dance performance is the physical expression of the Orixa’s presence. Similarly, according to the Yanomamo Indians of the Orinoco Valley in Venezuela the shapori (being the Yanomamo equivalent of the shaman) initiation process involves the metamorphosis of the initiate into a hekura spirit: “The shaman is correspondingly perceived by non-initiated Yanomami as something other than a human being; he is a living spirit in the flesh […] [The] Yanomami term for shamanic initiation, hekura prai, can be translated as “the metamorphosis of a human being into a hekura spirit,” or human body into a cosmic body.”\textsuperscript{17}

While the shapori is inhabited by the spirits he carries out specific healing and divinatory tasks under their direct control and influence. To the outside observer this may appear to be an elaborate act, but to the Yanomami it is a blending of the human and spirit worlds: a performance that expresses the presence of nonphysical entities in a culturally recognised manner.

\textsuperscript{14} Goffman; DePaulo: 203.
\textsuperscript{15} Hughes: 166.
\textsuperscript{16} St. Clair; Turner: 129-130.
\textsuperscript{17} Jokic 2008a: 38-39.
Recognising the bodily expression of spirits

As with the Orixas of Umbanda and the Hekura of the Yanomamo, the spirits at the Bristol Spirit Lodge also express themselves through physical bodies. When a spirit first makes itself known through an entranced medium at the Lodge the communication is often weak and it may take many development sittings for an individual spirit personality to fully express itself. Occasionally a personality will show the early signs of emerging (such as slight twitches of the medium’s body, or gurgling sounds indicative of an attempt to speak, for example), but might never reach its full expression as a regular communicator. Indeed, my own experience of falling into what the circle leader described as a “light trance state”, during which my left arm moved of its own accord, was taken as a sign that a spirit entity was attempting to communicate through my own body.18 It is the role of the circle leader to recognise these early signs and then to develop them through engaging them in dialogue. The role of the circle leader at the Lodge is comparable, to a surprising degree, with that of the master of ceremonies in Kelantan Malay spirit mediumship practices, as described by Raymond Firth in the 1960s:

The master of ceremonies plays a leading part in questioning the medium, interpreting what he says, and by his control of the musical accompaniment stimulates and guides the medium’s actions. For the most part he adopts a quiet, rather neutral position in the verbal exchanges, agreeing with the putative spirit or commenting rather drily in a kind of “so, indeed” fashion [...] Throughout he is recognised as the person having prime authority in the proceedings; at the symbolic level he is the “master of spirits,” a shaman in the strict sense of the word.19

At the Bristol Spirit Lodge, the circle leader is also responsible for supervising the smooth running of the séance, ensuring that the medium is comfortable, and maintaining control over what takes place inside the Lodge:

[...] management has to come into it. You set the intent, you set some sort of guidelines, and you expect them to work with you. It is a blending thing, you need to get some séance etiquette, or something, you know. You need to get a rapport, you need to get it organised. You sort of make deals between, you know, what is OK and what’s not OK, and what behaviour is acceptable around us and what isn’t. We’ve got to be a bit flexible to them

19 Firth: 199.
too, what they want and what they don’t want […] so you kind of negotiate your way around.20

The strongest and most fully developed communicators generally form a group called a “spirit team”. A medium will regularly channel the members of his/her spirit team, and these communicators will become recognised by sitters as distinct individual personalities. The structure of the spirit team can, in many ways, be seen as an analogue of the group structure of the personalities expressed through multiple personality, or dissociative identity, disorder. The average size of a spirit team at the Bristol Spirit Lodge is ten distinct spirit personalities. Of the members of the spirit team there is usually one who takes the role of “main spirit guide”, “control”, or “gatekeeper”21, a feature that has also been noted in other spirit mediumship traditions.22 This spirit is often the most developed personality of the spirit team and, more often than not, was the first personality to present through the entranced medium in the earliest stages of his/her development. Raymond Firth interpreted the role of the control, or “familiar” as he termed it, as that of a “built-in mechanism which allows the medium to emerge from his dissociated state” at the end of the performance.23 Stephen Braude defines the spirit controls as “recurrent and self-consistent characters who act as intermediaries between sitters and communicators.”24

Because each personality must express itself through a single physical body, the spirits utilise exaggerated body movements and unusual vocal tones to differentiate themselves from one another. Occasionally the presence of a spirit is inferred simply by the physical posturing of the medium’s body, and this posturing is recognised as signifying the presence of a distinct personality, as this quotation from an interview with a Bristol medium called Sandy illustrates:

Sometimes, in the earliest days, they used to come through, and they’d come through presenting differently, and some of my movements would change. And depending on which spirit comes through depends on what I do with my hands, or, the one where I was dragging my leg, I just couldn’t not drag my leg as I walked in.25

20 Interview with Christine 23/03/2011.
22 Firth: 199.
23 Firth: 199.
24 Braude: 33.
25 Interview with Sandy 23/03/2011.
The exaggerated postures and vocalisations can often give the impression that the individual spirit personalities are caricatures. I would suggest that this is a necessary aspect of the mediumship process, assisting in the development and expression in the social moment of distinctive personalities: the exaggeration of postures and movements serves to signify the presence of a particular spirit-person. For example, a member of Sandy’s spirit team called “Elf” is characterised by movements of the arms and legs, as though swimming in the air, and has a high-pitched child-like voice. Graham the undertaker, another member of Sandy’s spirit team, by contrast, presents as particularly large and broad-shouldered and has a deep, throaty voice. In some mediums (Sandy in particular), more than one spirit has, on occasion, presented simultaneously through the body of the medium. The psychical researcher Frederic Myers noted a similar capacity with the medium Eleonor Piper: “In some cases (Mrs Piper) two or more spirits may simultaneously control different portions of the same organism.” In such instances individual presences are inferred from the distinctive independent movements of certain body parts: for instance the legs may move in a manner distinctive to one particular personality, while the arms may behave in a completely different manner associated with the personality of another spirit. Anthropologist Nurit Bird-David describes a similar process of gestural expression of spirits in her analysis of the devaru performances of the South Indian Nayaka. She writes:

The devara evoked often improvise on the same repetitive phrases. The saying, the voicing, the gesturing are important. These principle aspects of their behaviour are, in Bateson’s term (1979), meta-communication, namely, communicating that devaru are communicating, because the devaru are present as they move, talk, make gestures, etc. They are present as they communicate and socially interact with Nayaka.

Exaggerated behaviours, then, can be thought of as a form of meta-communication, signifying the presence of distinct personalities and serving as a means to allow them to be communicated with as individuals distinct from the medium’s personality by the sitters and the circle-leader.

26 Myers: 248.
27 Bird-David: 76.
Dialogue and the reinforcement of spirit personalities

Over time the spirit-teams of the mediums will become regular fixtures at the Lodge’s weekly séances and are treated in many ways as anyone else who attends regularly. Their personalities are continually checked against past recordings of communications as a means to ensuring the genuineness of the phenomenon, as Christine has stated: “I will be looking to see if previous spirit communicators return and present themselves as previously. Any inconsistencies in voice tone or personality or information offered between the ‘previous’ and ‘present’ communications will be noticed (I compare audio recordings).” Through this regular interaction the spirit communicators become much more than abstractions; interaction allows them to manifest in a socially real and very tangible way. Similarly, Bird-David understands the devaru as relational persons, brought into social existence through interactions, i.e. conversation. She writes that: “[k]eeping the conversation going is important because it keeps the Nayaka devaru interaction and in a sense the devara themselves ‘alive.’” Moreover, the form this interaction takes is described as “highly personal, informal, and friendly” and consists of “joking, teasing, [and] bargaining”. The conversations are said to include numerous repetitions or minor variations on a theme” in which the Nayaka and the devaru “nag and tease, praise and flatter, blame and cajole each other, expressing and demanding care and concern.” The interactions between spirits and sitters at the Lodge could equally be described in this way. Take the following séance transcript for example:

Christine [Circle leader]: Are you there yet Charlie?
Charlie [Spirit]: Of course.
Christine: Is it okay to open the cabinet?
Charlie: If you wish.
Christine: I’ll do it slowly ... How are you?
Charlie: Very well, how are you?
Christine: Fine. We’ve been sitting in the dark. How was it for you?
Charlie: Wonderful, how was it for you?
Christine: Not too bad actually. I wouldn’t say it was the best ever, but not too bad!
Charlie: Some people are never satisfied.

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28 Personal communication with Christine, 2011.
29 Bird-David: 76.
30 Di Nucci & Hunter: 158-159.
The tone of the interaction is very informal. This sort of quick interchange between the circle leader and the spirit will usually precede the more advanced, philosophical discussions which form the bulk of the communication. These could be interpreted as a means to build up the personality of the communicator through recognising and reinforcing the fact that another personality is present by engaging it in dialogue. The idea that spirits require this sort of engagement in order to manifest is also common in other mediumship traditions. In her analysis of the Venezuelan tradition of María Lionza, for example, Placido describes how conversation provides the means for spirits to express themselves in the social moment:

To exist [...] the spirits need to be able to speak. By allowing them to express themselves through the mediums and by listening to what they say, humans are somehow resuscitating them [...] It is through words and communication that the spirits are brought to life, in that it is during episodes of spirit possession that they are created, that they become social persons.31

This emphasis on interaction with the spirits can be considered an analogue of the socio-cognitive theory of dissociative identity disorder and past-life regression personalities, in which the various personalities are conceived of as “rule governed, contextually supported social constructions.”32 Psychologist Nicholas Spanos argues that “secondary personality enactments” represent “joint constructions that are created, shaped, and maintained by the beliefs and expectations of significant others who constitute an interfacing audience, as well as by the actor who displays the secondary identity enactments.”33 Despite the similarities in understanding the way in which these personalities are manifested in the María Lionza world-view and the socio-cognitive model, there are, however, significant differences in terms of the ontological suppositions associated with these theories. For the members of the María Lionza cult, amongst other mediumistic traditions,34 including the Bristol Spirit Lodge, the spirits are very real and play an important role in the group because “what they say matters”,35 while for the socio-cognitivists the finding that alternate personality enactments are sustained through social interaction implies that they possess no form of independent ontological reality.

31 Placido: 214.
32 Spanos et al.: 308.
33 Spanos et al.: 308.
34 Stoller; Lambek; Bubandt; Hunter 2009.
35 Placido: 221.
I would not go so far as to conclude that the spirits communicated with at the Bristol Spirit Lodge are simple “social constructions”, but rather would suggest an interpretation based upon the notion that ontologically distinct spirits could exist and that the process through which they make themselves known would be an interactive and social one, just as our own personalities are expressed and sustained.

**Conclusion**

The model implied by all of this emphasises the combined influence of altered states of consciousness, performance and social interaction, in the development of new socially active personalities. In the context of spirit mediumship demonstrations, the concept of performance should not be taken as indicating fraudulence or trickery, instead it should be regarded as a culturally specified technique for the expression of nonphysical persons. Alterations of consciousness allow for a dissociation, to whatever degree, of the medium’s everyday sense of self. Through performance the medium is able to either bring forward previously unconscious, or previously filtered out, selves. These selves, or persons, require the interaction of other social agents to become stabilised. For the duration that the interaction is maintained, the newly emerged self is also a social agent; after the séance it is either subsumed back into the medium’s subconscious, or filtered out of their normal waking consciousness. Because different cultures recognise the presence of persons in different ways, different forms of personhood-expressive performance have come into existence. To a certain extent this model accords well with Frederic Myers’ model of consciousness, in which consciousness consists of at least two streams: the subliminal and supraliminal. Myers argued in favour of interpreting spirit possession as a “shifting of the psychical center of the personality of the [medium] himself” to allow emergences from the subliminal into the supraliminal:

> I propose to extend the meaning of the term [subliminal] [...] to make it cover all that takes place beneath the ordinary threshold, or say, if preferred, outside the ordinary margin of consciousness; not only those faint stimulations whose very faintness keeps them submerged, but much else which psychology as yet scarcely recognises; sensations, thoughts, emotions, which may be strong definite, and independent, but which, by the original constitution of our being, seldom emerge into that supraliminal current of consciousness which we habitually identify with ourselves.36

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Myers did not deny the possibility that external, nonphysical influences might be at play in mediumistic states and argued that his theory of the subliminal mind, which differs from the Freudian notion of the unconscious in its inclusion of aspects external to the individual, provided a framework for understanding such phenomena “without reducing them to epiphenomena of psychopathology [...] or ruling out influences beyond the self.” From this perspective the spirit personalities expressed through spirit mediumship performances might be interpreted, in Carl Jung’s terms, as “psychoid manifestations”. Jung identified the “psychoid” as a transcendent entity that manifests at the juncture of unconscious (nonphysical) and external (physical) influences. Like Myers’ notion of the subliminal mind, Jung’s conception of the unconscious also included aspects external to the individual’s psyche; he wrote: “a psychological truth is [...] just as good and respectable a thing as a physical truth [because] no one knows what ‘psyche’ is, and one knows just as little how far into nature ‘psyche’ extends.”

These conclusions may seem tangential from a social anthropological perspective, nevertheless I feel that they get right to the heart of what it is we are dealing with in this phenomenon. Through attempting to understand the mechanisms through which spirit possession operates we can move towards a greater appreciation of the function it performs, and the experiences that result from that function, in the social sphere. Through attempting to understand how spirit possession could be possible the anthropologist is moving towards a more comprehensive understanding of the particular culture in which the possession is taking place. Such an interpretation is, I feel, a useful conceptual starting point for any analysis of spirit mediumship and is particularly suited to anthropological explorations as it does not rule out “native” interpretations. Instead, it provides an inclusive framework that is amenable to scientific theorising and investigation while also being cross-culturally applicable and non-reductive.

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37 Taves: see also Alvarado: 23.
38 Addison: 123.
Bibliography


During the 1970s I spent a great deal of my time with tribal healers and diviners—also known as sangomas—of various tribes in Southern Africa. During this time with the sangomas, I was concurrently developing my own consultation practice as an astrologer. As they spoke about their developed relationship with the spirits—their ancestors—I gradually became aware that I was also “in touch” with something “other” than my normal intelligence and perceptions when I was reading an astrological chart for a client. Over time it became obvious that we were both standing as intermediaries between something impersonal—an “uncanny perception”—and something very personal, i.e. the needs and concerns of a person in front of us who had sought our assistance—and we were both in service to this task.

The sangomas had been drawn to a small museum in Johannesburg because of two unusual and extraordinary men who were associated with it. It was called The Museum of Man and Science, and one of the men was Adrian Boshier, the field officer of the museum, who had been a protégé of Raymond Dart, the paleoanthropologist who named the controversial Australopithecus africanus. This was considered for a time to be the “missing link” and is still today thought to be an important piece in the story of the emergence of our species in Africa so long ago. The other was Credo Mutwa, a great Zulu sangoma, teacher, author and wise man, who is still alive today, in his nineties, and still living in South Africa.

Adrian had come to Africa from England with his parents when he was seventeen and had, almost immediately, gone into the bush, feeling a pull
that he could not resist. He had fallen in love with Africa through stories he had read as a child, and had a particular gift for relating to natural phenomena, attuning himself to nature. This had been encouraged by his step-father and a teacher at one of the schools he attended. Also, from the age of about ten, he had been subject to periodic epileptic attacks and in these attacks he often made uncanny statements. This unusual combination of traits, as I shall explain, gave him unique access to the people he met in the bush, both black and white. He spent a great deal of time with the tribespeople. He walked alone in the bush and because of his unique relationship to snakes, he became known amongst the tribespeople as “Radinoga”—father of the snakes. He got to know many sangomas throughout Southern Africa and was even considered a sangoma by most of those he met—which was unheard of for a white man at that time. He found himself more at home in the bush than in the town, though he said he had to return to the town to get his “balance” back again.1

Early on in Soweto Adrian met Credo Mutwa,2 who was already recognised as a great sangoma with a most powerful intellect. They formed an association that proved rich and fruitful for both of them and for many others as well. They had many adventures together and at some point decided that they needed to record and transcribe as much of the knowledge and practices of the sangomas as they possibly could, as it was being lost in the encroaching modernisation or westernisation of traditional life. The museum was a perfect place to centre such an endeavour. Credo lived in Soweto and although he knew some fine sangomas there—such as Dorcas, whom I will introduce later—he saw many young ones come back to the city after their training in the bush and observed how they got lost in the fast city life, without a binding community to hold them to their vocation. He was very disturbed by the young witchdoctors who, after their training, got lost—drinking, messing around, harming themselves and gradually destroying their access to the ancestors.

In the bush villages the sangomas had containers. By this I mean that their rural traditional life gave them a place in their communities. When they were “called” by the spirits, they went for training and then normally went back home and had a place in village life, even though they were always outsiders by virtue of being sangomas. But they had a valued place and were honoured, respected, even feared—depending on their natures and personalities. Those who were called to the spirits in Soweto—the

1 See Watson for a fuller story of Adrian’s journey with the African spirits.
2 At the time I knew Credo, he had already published two books: see Mutwa 1964; 1966.
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SOuth-WEst-TOwnship next to Johannesburg—often had to leave to find their teachers in the bush villages. When they returned, they did not have the traditional container, and so it was easy to get lost. As they got lost, so did their tradition. Credo may have seen the museum as a potential container, as a place where not only their traditions could be saved, but also where they could gather together regularly to renew their associations with each other and with their spirits (as the *sangomas* who lived in tribal villages did regularly). In any case, that is what happened during the years I was there. There was a significant moment at one of these gatherings in the late 1970s when Credo thanked Adrian and those who worked with him for creating such a good home for the Soweto *sangomas*.

Let me tell you how I arrived there. There was a particular kind of freedom for many of my generation in America, when we were young in the 1960s. It meant that I was able to study psychology, philosophy and theology at a fine women’s college in New York, get a job for the summer, and then travel around Europe and later Central America before deciding what to do next. On my travels I stumbled across astrology, and ended up in California before returning to further my studies in Massachusetts on the East Coast, where I had heard there were some good astrology teachers. In doing so I gave up, painfully and reluctantly, the conventional, planned next step of a Master’s degree in psychology. I wept in a field in Vermont for some days, and then went into my friends’ house and said, “I’m going to find someone who can teach me astrology”. Astrology had touched my soul in a way that psychology had not, and I now knew that there were two schools of astrology in Boston which were considered to be the best.

For two and a half years I studied astrology, first with Frances Sakoian and Louis Acker, and then with Isobel Hickey. Frances and Louis ran something akin to a school, while Isobel had a gathering of people around her and here there was a sense of the sacred. To fund this study, I worked as a secretary in the psychiatry clinic at M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At the end of 1970, I felt the need to travel again. I was still searching for something, too aware of an inner longing and an inner pain that nothing seemed to touch. One of the psychiatrists suggested that since I was free and was interested in conventional psychology and “unconventional” astrology, why not go to Africa and find some witchdoctors? He said that he understood that they were the psychiatrists of tribal Africa, and that they might have knowledge that would add to my investigation of the psyche and the world. They might also know something about the inner longing and pain that I spoke to him about, which had never been touched or mirrored by anyone I had
met or anything I had read. I took him seriously, and wrote to a young South African I had met while travelling in Europe, and he said, “Come on down”.

When I arrived in South Africa, in mid 1971, I began doing astrological charts for people almost immediately. On a trip to Botswana on the back of a motor cycle, I met Adrian, who was visiting friends there. We talked non-stop for seven or eight hours but in the morning he had gone. However, he left a message inviting me to come to the museum when I returned to Jo’burg, and I did. Within months I was working at the museum with Adrian, who told me his and Credo’s wish to save the disappearing traditions. He said that Credo would appear at some point and if he agreed, we would look for funding to begin. Credo arrived after a month or two and immediately said to Adrian something like “you’ve found someone to do it”. He said he could see that I was working with my spirits and even though they were “different spirits to the sangomas”, it might work.

Credo brought Ndlaleni Cindi to the museum. She was a gifted, newly-trained Swazi sangoma, who was losing her way in the wild life of Soweto. Credo was worried about those who had been called and then trained, who were trying to live the highly ritualised daily life required by sangomas, but without the traditional structures. He was particularly worried about Ndlaleni, who was back in Soweto with no safe containing community. She was so sensitive and so wild, so talented, and he wanted her to be able to use her gifts, not destroy herself and them.

Credo and Adrian set up a meeting where Ndlaleni and I “read each other’s spirit”—she threw the bones for me and I read her chart. From that day we were companions in the work of gathering the traditions and knowledge of the sangomas. In the course of time she brought her aunts, Dorcas and Lena, who became my main sources of knowledge, wisdom and delight. There were many others too, and for seven years I worked with them, recording and transcribing the traditions and practices of the sangomas, who were drawn to the museum for one reason or another. Although I never lost the sense of longing and inner pain, I learned a way to understand it and to respect it as part of being a certain kind of person. Lena once told me it was the price of a particular type of gift.

**Fighting the spirits**

One of the first things I learned was that the call to become a sangoma was not something anyone wanted. They fought it with all their might, and the ones that fought it most were usually the best in the end. But they also had
to know when to stop fighting and give in. If they never gave in, they went mad or even died. They seemed to have to fight it right to the edge, and then know when to give in. Then the ancestors that came were very powerful.

When I learned about how they were unable to live their ordinary lives, about their mental and physical illnesses and the edge they got to before they gave in and found a teacher, I remembered my own distress at having to go away from the world of my friends and companions who were going on to get research degrees, to marry and have children. I had felt the turning away from the life of my own tribe. Choosing to study astrology was almost acceptable in the ‘60s, and there were a lot of us “dropping out”. But it was also a leaving behind of something that felt normal and therefore safe. How many of us have come across astrology and been pulled out of a conventional life to the consternation of friends and family? Perhaps that is part of the longing of many in our communities, to gain credibility from the world. Personally, I cherish the outsider perspective, although I do suffer the “slings and arrows” that come from those who do not honour our art! Again, that seems to be part of the price of such a gift.

**The calling**

Let me speak about the ways in which people are called to the spirits. The calling almost always begins with illness. Lena had only three weeks of calling, but her illness was horrible and incredibly painful. Elizabeth had been a nurse for seven years when the call came. When it does come, you get less and less able to ignore it—you start having dreams, and going crazy. The dreams, at some point, start driving you crazy, or an ancestor comes in a vision or a dream and says, “Go; find a teacher”. If you do, then you’re OK. Sometimes, the teacher you find is nasty and mean and horrible, but they still train you. Sometimes the teacher is wonderful.

Dorcas’ father was a Methodist minister, and Credo had a similar background—father a Methodist minister and mother a traditional wife. Both Credo and Dorcas had a great deal of trouble because of their backgrounds. Dorcas found it very painful to leave the Christian community, which she loved. She spoke about Jesus a lot, and she found being a *sangoma* a great trial. But she was a wonderful teacher and people came to her from all over Southern Africa to train, even though, or perhaps because, she was in Soweto. She had a warm heart and a soft spot for Adrian with his troublesome spirit and his deep knowledge of bushcraft and spirit work—they had much mutual respect and their conversations were profound and also wildly funny. But she had a sense of sorrow about
her, and her biggest sorrow, I think, was always that she was now an
outsider to her Christian community.

Each of the women I knew had a difficult story to tell. Always the
illness, the disturbance, the increasing mental disturbance, the dreams and
then the demands. Lena’s grandfather said to her in a vision or a dream,
“You go now and find a teacher, or I kill you. You’re dead tomorrow.” I
saw people die who did not go for training, who did not listen to their
ancestors when they came in visions or dreams. Lena listened to her
grandfather and went.

Ndlaleni was a bit wild, going through a lot of things, and starting to
get ill. Over a period of years she got more and more physically and
mentally distressed until the last year she could not work at all. She said:

I could not work, my hands were so painful, I could hardly lift anything
from the floor. My knees were loose, there wasn’t a place on me that was
placid. My head was always aching, the eyes were also sore. I could not
wash. My body was bent over. Every part of me was sore. I went to the
white doctors. They could not tell me what was wrong with me. I even
went to the Bantu medical doctors. They could do nothing for me. They
gave me a lot of muti—medicine—but the muti did nothing for me.

The conversation continued:

Darby: Did you tell them what the trouble was?
Ndlaleni: I could not tell them. I could not tell them because I myself did
not know what was wrong with me.
Darby: How long did this go on?
Ndlaleni: It went on many years. Not one year, but many years. There
came a time when I sat down and I was unable to do anything. I sat down
until a year was nearly ended. And in the end I could not work at all. (She
was employed as a domestic servant at the time).
Darby: Were you having dreams at this time, during the great sickness?
(They call it the great sickness)
Ndlaleni: Yes, there were many.
Darby: What did you dream about?
Ndlaleni: I used to dream about beads, such as the ones I’m wearing now. I
used to dream about the cloth that I’m now sleeping on.
Darby: Did you never even buy these things?
Ndlaleni: I did not buy them. I just dreamt.3

Then one day her grandfather visited her in a dream and said, “You must
get trained,” and he told her where to go. It was far from Johannesburg,
deep in the bush. Ndlaleni said her teacher was “so primitive”, because

3 This conversation was recorded and transcribed by the author in June 1972.
when the husband of the teacher had met his wife, she only wore skins. But she had become more sophisticated; partly through her husband and probably also because she was dealing with young people coming to her from Soweto. I do not know how it started, but some were now coming to her from the cities. She stayed with her teacher for about two years, and this is what happened.

The training

Ndlaleni left her home in Soweto one day and arrived there days later, in the night. Later she told me that she had bought the beads she had dreamt about just before leaving and was wearing them as she travelled. Her teacher heard her coming across the fields (Ndlaleni was probably singing) and had prepared herself, as she had expected her, probably from a dream. When Ndlaleni knocked on the door of the thatched hut, a drum started beating. Ndlaleni entered, and her teacher said, “You come”. She stayed for three years and she was very fortunate, because her teacher was wonderful. This woman took her wild mind and brought it back from the place of the ancestors, the place of the spirits. These are places of terror, unless you have a good guide, a good training. Those of you who have astral travelled, without wanting to, know what I am talking about here.

Ndlaleni had a good guide, a good teacher, who brought her back to health again by giving her good food, sound rituals, and by giving care and attention to her body and her mind, her sleeping and her dreams. Once she had guided her student, her twasa, back into a safer place inside herself, she then began the teaching. One of the most important things is to learn how to listen to one’s dreams. So Ndlaleni was awakened every few hours during the night and asked “What are you dreaming? What are you dreaming now?” After some time she acquired the habit of waking herself after each dream, then her teacher began teaching her how to listen to and read her dreams.

Dorcas was very good at understanding and interpreting dreams. She said there were three levels of dreams. Firstly, the ordinary day-to-day stuff, a sort of processing of the day; secondly, those giving clues about patients who will be coming the next day—clues as to what they might need from you; and thirdly, the prophetic kind. The twasas (or trainee sangomas) are held and led by their own talents. One might show a talent for recognising herbs and how they might be useful with various complaints, so, if the teacher is wise and generous, he or she will send this one to an herbalist for deeper training. Another twasa might be particularly adept at understanding dreams, so the teacher will focus on that skill, or
send the student to someone adept at that. A third might show a gift at reading the bones, and so on. The kind of teaching you receive does depend on the teacher you are led to—some are kind and some are not, some are generous and others are not. But the assumption is that whichever teacher you are sent to, then you must trust your spirits that it is the teacher who can give you the right education for your own spirit.

*Twasas* often have a look of distress when they are new, for the distress they came in with takes time to ease as they are held and contained by their teacher. Slowly they come back together again, inside themselves, through the training. Whenever we visited a *sangoma* whose *twasas* were being taught to divine we were asked to hide something in the room, or even outside. One or another would be called in and asked to find the object. This was a test for the apprentice, and one of them once told me, after she had been through initiation and was now practising, that when they saw visitors arriving they would run off so as not to be called to the test! The practice of finding objects begins as a sort of guessing game. The *twasa* asks questions such as: is it smaller than a refrigerator? Is it bigger than a flea? Is it at the back of the house? Is it outside? And each time they ask that, you say “*sia vuma*”—I hear you”. You say it louder or softer, depending on how close they are to the truth. So if it is smaller than a fridge you say “*sia vuma*” in a loud voice, or if it is not, you say it in a soft voice, and so on. The *twasa* starts listening more and more attentively, and the better they get at listening, the harder it gets, and the clues get fewer, so that, in the end, they learn to do it without any clues at all, by listening to their spirits.

### Getting there

Eventually, when they have been brought back to health and have woven the rituals into their daily lives and when they can finally divine without any obvious clues, their spirits come and tell them that they’re ready to go through initiation. Preparations are made, people are invited from afar, and the day begins with the teacher hiding something, often before they are even awake. On Ndlaleni’s initiation day her teacher hid the rising sun—and she hid it in her mind. That is how good she thought Ndlaleni was—and Ndlaleni found it! An earlier time, not long before the end of her training, she had hidden an airplane that had flown overhead, before Ndlaleni had got up. She hid it in her mind; and Ndlaleni found it. When Credo brought her to the museum that day to meet me, Adrian hid something for her, so she could show her spirit. It was the skin of a goat, and he hid it in the back of a truck, in the house next door to the museum.
After our encounter, she started going into trance, and suddenly she was up and running across to the other house, and she jumped up into the truck and found the skin. She kept it as the gift that it was. She was very, very good.

**Return**

Normally, after training, the newly-fledged sangoma goes back to her village (most of the sangomas we worked with were women) where she is reintegrated into the tribe in her new role. This may be easy or difficult, depending on her spirit, personality, age and temperament. But in Soweto, it was very unpredictable. Christianity had been fighting the old ways of the ancestors for some time and it had a powerful foothold there. Modern medicine too had come to Soweto and the sangomas were in an odd position, as both priests and healers. They were used constantly, but in a more hidden way, with respect and fear, but with something new too—for they were now in competition with the modern healers, the Western-trained medical people. The people who sought help or healing and who were affiliated to the churches, or who wished to be modern, did not always want to admit their ongoing allegiance to the ancestors and their mediators, the sangomas.

During the years I was recording and transcribing everything I saw and heard, we were invited to many ceremonies, gatherings and events, both in Soweto and in various parts of Southern Africa. Often these were ceremonies for a twasa’s “coming out”. But there were other reasons for gathering too—sometimes a dream came to the sangomas and told them, “it is time”. These gatherings happened frequently—we were constantly at events where bones were being thrown both publicly and on the side, divinations made, and trances evoked.

The bones were collected after you had been initiated. You had to travel “the four corners of the world” if you were a bone diviner and on your travels you would find “bones”—which were actually also shells, sticks, sometimes even bottle caps, or buckles found on the ground—whatever spoke to the newly fledged sangoma walking their way on their journey. Each item had a specific meaning. I noticed that many sangomas seemed to be able to see what each other’s bones were saying—at least to some degree. But everyone had their own way of reading as well. Many of the sangomas I worked with did not read bones, they went into trance and divined directly. But Credo was a master at reading the bones. He got me to stay in Africa, he got me to tear up my ticket back to Europe because of how well he read the bones for me. He saw clearly what I had experienced
before arriving in Africa and what I was returning to. He saw what I was suffering and what I would keep and experience by staying.

I absorbed so much wisdom during my time with the sangomas. A wonderful sangoma named Robert Tshabalala once said something that has stayed with me ever since. We were in Soweto in the baking heat, and Adrian had gone into the house of a man who hated him, for reasons I now cannot remember—I think Adrian had stopped him from doing something that he had wanted to do, something Adrian thought was wrong. Adrian had blocked his energy, and in a public way. While he was in the house, I sat with Robert outside, for we were on our way to another sangoma. It was very hot and we were quiet and it was taking longer than was comfortable. I said to Robert, “I’m really worried, Adrian is in there with that sangoma and that man hates him—he’s his enemy.” Robert said to me, “Da, it’s very good to have enemies, very good. Rradinoga is very powerful because he has white enemies and black enemies. But the secret of having enemies is that you never do anything to harm them—ever. Your power is massive then. Rradinoga is safe with that man because he won’t do anything to harm his enemy.” There was something about holding the hatred and being very still with it, not activating it, not hiding from it, not fighting it. Very powerful.

There was something else that touched me deeply. The sangomas I knew all suffered various degrees of sensitivity, distress, physical ailments and difficulty with people so much of the time. However, they never seemed to blame other people for this. Their closest relationship was with their spirits. The following is taken from my notes in 1974:

Dorcas has had twasas who have given her great trouble—she has taken in their pain and worked with them for months at a time. They have kicked her and hit her and sorely tried her patience again and again. Yet her response is always, “Oh my spirit is so troublesome giving me this patient who kicks me” and never, “Oh this patient is so terrible for kicking me”... they lay the burden of their ills at the door of the spirits, and not at the feet of other human beings as so many of us are wont to do. They are sangomas, they are the representatives of the spirits on earth, here to do their bidding. Their first relationship is with their own spirits and this gives a balance within them that makes them healthy human beings, no matter what ill befalls them.

There were so many different personalities. I remember Edith, another sangoma, who was rather scary—she used to pull me aside and tell me about all sorts of potions, especially sex potions: “you know Da, when they come to you and they’re worried about their husbands”, or “you know when men come to you and they’re worried about, you know.” and she
would tell me recipes for various potions. She was interested in secrets, secret potions and herbs.

There was also Grace in a trance—her head would move so fast I thought it would come off! Next to her, Elisabeth—she was wonderful. She would go into such a deep trance that she could not get out. She would then talk for the whole community, remaining in trance for a very long time. At some point in this gathering, they called Dorcas because Dorcas was the one who could pull her out and bring her back.

Once we went to another sangoma’s village—we called her MaPedi, and I felt a great kinship with her even though we only met a few times. I was in the hut with her and with her people for hours one night, late into the night, and she was “seeing” for one person after another, for hours. Suddenly, about four in the morning, the drum stopped and it went very quiet. She had been seeing for so many hours. It was quiet for some minutes and then she looked up and found me across the hut and she said, “Da, you see why I want die.” And I went across the room and knelt in front of her and said, said with all my heart, “Yes, Ma, I see why you want die.” Credo had once told me early on that when you get too close to the spirits, you want to die. One had to be very careful with the spirits.

The gatherings

There was something about the ceremonial gatherings that touched me deeply. What happened at every ceremony was the dancing and this is my most powerful memory, the dancing. They danced from sunset to sunrise, all night the drums going and the dancing bringing on the trance. Everybody seeing for everybody else—everybody listening to their ancestors, talking with their ancestors, and helping each other out.

Periodically a sangoma would be told by his or her spirits to offer sacrifice to the ancestors, and that meant a party for all the sangomas for miles around. A beast would be killed and turned into food for the ancestors and for the sangomas present and the eating and dancing would go on for days sometimes. Whenever we were in remote villages, sangomas came from miles and miles to the ceremonies. We must have added a certain excitement, something unusual, centred around Adrian and his powerful African spirit in a white man’s body. These gatherings brought the sangomas together with each other and their ancestors through the sacrificing together, the calling on their ancestors for each other, the renewing of friendships and probably enmities. Afterwards they all went back to their villages to do their work of healing, divining, finding, fixing,
holding and navigating the space between the world of the spirits and the world of living beings, if I can put it that way.

We astrologers also do this, we gather together at conferences, we have our own, unstated, rituals. We come together, we eat together, we dance together, we offer our work to each other, we read each other’s charts, help each other, we renew friendships and enmities. We nourish and exhaust each other and ourselves and we go back to our homes and do our work of reading charts, writing articles and books. We work with our spirits and live with our calling.

Once in Norway at a conference, I met a man who was an astrologer and also something of a shaman. We spoke of our experiences in those communities where the ancestors were honoured and intuitive skills were honoured and honed to a high degree. He said, “Do you think these astrology conferences we have are something like the gatherings of the sangomas and the shamans, where we come together to meet and dance and exchange information and experiences—then go home renewed, to do our lonely work?” Perhaps not all of us feel our work is lonely, but at that moment I knew just what he meant—we have to hold faith with our vocation, stay as clear as we can, serve others with our art, day after day. Of course we now have easy travel and the internet to stay in touch with each other, but still, the coming together plays a vital role in our work. I do think that the physical coming together has a deep place in our world, whether we like it or not.

Sangomas and astrologers

So the calling of the sangoma comes with illness—mental and physical—and the dreams come, and then a teacher is revealed and you must go to that teacher or suffer serious consequences. Once you find your teacher, the training begins immediately, with the healing of the body and the mind. Those who find their teachers are taught to take care of their bodies with herbs and rituals, and to attend to the dreams that come. They get into a daily practice that involves, we might say, purifying the mind and body. Then the training is directed to getting the psyche that has been blasted open to close and to open, but this time with purpose. The psyche becomes like an aperture, which under certain circumstances can open to the spirits, the ancestors of a distressed person, for the purposes of healing. It is not about ancestor worship—it is about letting the ancestors through so they can help their families, the sangoma being a conduit.

Ndaleneni and I, and Dorcas and Lena and so many others, spoke together for hours and hours at a time for nearly seven years, and I wrote
most of it down. I was doing charts, and then spending the rest of my time with them, writing everything down for the museum. I constantly asked them questions, not just about their traditions, but about how they dealt with people who came to them for divination. I was doing charts every day, and they were my “elders”, my chosen “supervisors”—though we never thought about it like that. We just sat and talked and talked. I think what they taught me most of all was how to be attentive, how to pay attention to my inner voice, my spirit, while paying attention to my clients at the same time. They never thought of me as a sangoma—I was an astrologer, my spirits were the stars. Nobody told me I was a sangoma. Credo gave me the name Nozinkanyezi meaning “girl-child of stars”, though in private, they all called me Da. We would sit for hours and hours and I would say, “what do you do when a woman does this?” or “what do you do when a man comes to you and this happens?” I would ask them how to deal with the many kinds of people who came to me and who came to them.

I think astrologers are “called” to their vocations too, and each of us needs some sort of community to support that calling. As astrologers we are outsiders; we are in service to a calling that is not recognised in the conventional communities we inhabit. Our conventional religions and our conventional paradigms of reality—let us say the secular materially-based reality principles of our contemporary Western culture—do not support (and in fact are often hostile to) that which we are called to do. Of course people come from every walk of life to us, but like the sangomas in Soweto, we have needed to find our own communities to reanimate our vocations. Perhaps what we call “conferences” fulfils the same role as the sangomas’ gatherings, in the same way as our astrology schools and their open days and summer schools.

There is no question but that the sangomas informed my own practice as an astrologer in obvious and less obvious ways. When I came up here to the northern hemisphere, my method of reading charts was to ask myself, before asking any questions, what I was seeing in the chart? Dorcas once asked me, “Darby, why do white doctors ask so many questions before telling us what is wrong? Can’t they see with their spirits?” When someone comes to me for a reading I am aware of entering what I call “sacred space”. I indicate that to the person in front of me in one way or another, depending on how they seem able to understand the concept.

The differences between the vocation of the sangomas and that of astrologers are greater than the similarities, though the similarities are powerful. We are outsiders—though so many of us are seeking to be more insiders these days. We are mostly “called” to our work—though the path
is usually less intense, and few would say they were called to astrology through illness. Nor would they say they were dragged into it through their dreams and unbearable psychic pain. We have our gatherings but many of us do not want to be part of that—we keep separate, and are uncomfortable with the community of astrologers, with the rough and tumble of it. But still, we are called, we have our rituals, we try to stay clear and clean enough for our work. Probably we defend our vocation more than the sangomas against the onslaught of the material world, but perhaps they have even less choice than we do about following it.

There are many differences, but this astrologer learned so much from them about the sacredness of the connection with something outside the conventional vocabulary and perception, and the duty to attend it with respect and consideration. The most powerful thing, undoubtedly, was how to create sacred space, to recognise it, and to lead a life that honours this sacred space as central to it. For in the sacred space it is possible to access something for the service of others—that is what the sangomas were there for, and that is what I think we are here for too.

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Fig. 26-1 Spirit Self in Bone Mask

Referring in *Dreams Memories and Reflections* to the personal experience of his spirit teacher, Carl Jung wrote: “Philemon […] brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon

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1 © Zoë Brân.
represented a force which was not myself". This simple comment offers a profound explanation of one possible form of interaction between the seen and unseen, between the incarnate and disincarnate and what has been called "ordinary" and "non-ordinary" reality. This is the basis of the shamanic journey as I understand it: the use of my psyche, consciousness, free-soul, however one chooses to describe it, as a tool to step out of self and access what lies beyond the personal; to meet face-to-face those "things" which Jung describes as producing themselves and having their own life.

Jung uses the word "psyche" in an attempt to describe that aspect or part of self which meets the numinous Philemon, but does this explain what may be inexplicable? The shamanic journey itself can be seen as occurring within the fluid field of emotion, and the narrative that emerges from the journey as being in the language of spirit: that is, the language of feeling in the broadest sense of that word. Moving from "normal" consciousness to an altered state of consciousness can be viewed simply as an intensification of emotion; by intensifying emotion the ego sense of self diminishes and "the separation between self and the environment can temporarily disappear" through an identification phenomenon described by Grof in which the individual ceases to exist and becomes "merged" with everything from individual cells to the evolutionary process itself.

Anthropologist Michael Harner, deviser of Core Shamanism, distinguishes between simple altered consciousness and the "shamanic state of consciousness" which: "involves not only a 'trance' or a transcendent state of awareness, but also a learned awareness of shamanic methods and assumptions while in such an altered state." For the purposes of this chapter I shall use the term "altered consciousness" when describing the active and voluntary change of perception employed to make a shamanic journey.

I made my first shamanic journey in 1998. Having little awareness of debates around consciousness or states of mind at that time, I came to the process virtually free of expectation. I assumed that personal experience was just that, personal; the content of my journeys was, as I understood it, unique to me. I became aware, listening to the experiences of others on courses and workshops, that there were many similarities of both form and content in the experience of journeying, which I considered at the time, to

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2 Jung: 183.
3 Harner: 21.
4 Kalweit: 218.
5 Grof: 129.
6 Harner: 21.
be due to teaching method or to cultural factors. I learned that the content
of the journey was a teaching, a direct answer to the focussed intention
that I took into the altered state. I asked a personal question and received a
personal answer, or so I thought. Several years later I became interested in
the wider field of shamanism and started exploring its universal origins in
order more fully to contextualise my own practice. The correspondences
between my own and others’ experience of altered consciousness, from
prehistory to the present day, astonished and even shocked me as I saw
and read reflections of my own journeys among early twentieth-century
anthropological data and in rock art millennia old. This growing awareness
of the transpersonal elements of altered consciousness prompted an
interest in human creative development. I also started exploring the
relationship between altered consciousness and the development of
personal creativity, both in myself and my shamanic clients and students,
many of whom are creative professionals.

**Spirit and shaman**

Without spirit(s) and without connection to specific personal spirit helpers
there can be no shaman. Acknowledging this is key to understanding any
form of shamanism as defined above. During the journey it is spirit which
offers advice, information, help and healing. It is the energy and power of
spirit which is used to heal, not the energy or power of the healer. In some
traditions the shaman aims to become a hollow bone through which spirit
passes to manifest in ordinary, everyday reality. My personal experience
of spirit is of partnership, with myself as the very junior partner or
facilitator. This partnership is by its nature creative, breaking down ego-
boundaries and extending the limits of the self and allowing new
possibilities of healing and transformation to emerge.

My own understanding of spirit and spirits is twofold. First is the
theoretical understanding which draws on the Core Shamanic tradition in
which I was trained: spirit is everything that exists, seen and unseen,
known and unknown, and my own personal spirit helpers, be they human,
animal or neither, are fragments of that “everything” presenting
themselves to me in specific forms in order to offer specific teachings. The
form helpers take is as much a teaching as the information and advice that
they offer. I am a spirit inhabiting a physical body in order to have a
human experience; the spirits I meet on my “journeys” are disembodied
and therefore have an existential overview unavailable to me, but we are
essentially the same, particles of infinite universal energy, fragments of all
that is and simultaneously all and everything that is. We all are, and come
from, this energy, exist within it and return to it. It is actually living this perspective which allows a shaman to experience the absence of separation between things that ordinary-reality considers very separate indeed, such as life and death, or health and disease.

A second understanding is experiential and can be partially expressed by the lines from Jung quoted at the start of this essay. Jung’s beautifully lucid explanation of how it can feel to interact with spirit attempts to explain how that interface between the seen and the unseen manifests; these lines can be helpful in my teaching as the word “psyche” is one that many students and clients are generally familiar with.

It would be easy to make shamanism culturally acceptable by turning it into a form of psychotherapy; but shamanism is not metaphor and the spirits are not archetypes. Shamanism is plastic in its possibilities and can appear to be a form of psychotherapy, but that would be a superficial assessment. Beneath even Core Shamanic counselling sessions is an astonishing, all-pervading relationship with a multiple consciousness at once loving and alien, wise and anarchic.

What is the shamanic journey and who is the shaman?

First, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between altered consciousness and the shamanic journey. Whilst one must alter consciousness in order to make the shamanic journey, this alteration does not, of itself, produce a shamanic experience. It is also necessary to recognise that, with reference to consciousness, words like “ordinary” and “altered” are highly subjective, because “[…] each society has its own definitions of what constitutes an ‘ordinary’ state of consciousness and what may be considered ‘changed’ or ‘alternate’ states of consciousness”.7 Distinguishing the shamanic journey, which is defined by the purpose, the intention of the shaman, from other forms of spirit experience is also important. A shaman is a person who makes a “soul-flight” or other voluntary out of body “journey” for the purpose of encountering specific “spirit helpers” or “guides” who can offer healing, advice, insight or information on almost any topic imaginable. “A broader definition would include any kind of person who is in control of his or her state of trance […]”8

The words “voluntary” and “control” are key to understanding shamanism in this context; it is not about possession, psychic/clairvoyant ability, or undirected entheogenic states. Instead it is an active altering of

7 Rock and Krippner: 53.
8 Vitebsky: 10.
the everyday mind, a heightening of emotional awareness and a “sending out” of the non-physical self. These things together, and more, constitute a shifting of consciousness for shamanic purposes. For the experienced practitioner the “journey” will be made along established visual and narrative routes to meet helpers and teachers who are already well-known to the practitioner. In theory, anyone who has the use of memory and recall can successfully undertake a shamanic journey. I sometimes describe the process of journeying to my students as having one’s imagination harnessed and directed by something external, or as accessing a transpersonal consciousness. Similarly, Noll suggests that spirit, as it appears in the shamanic journey, “[…] can be thought of as ego-alien currents that step forward from the shadows of the ‘not-I’ to introduce new information to the individual who cannot access this information while in an ordinary state of waking consciousness.”

Despite a recent upsurge in public interest, if one asks most passers-by what is a shaman, the question will evoke either a blank stare or perhaps a few words about Native American “medicine men” or “witchdoctors”. The word “sàman” is thought to originate from the Siberian Tungusic language, but both its etymology and meaning are disputed. Possible translations include “the one who sees” or “the one who knows” and “one who is excited, moved or raised”. What the shaman “sees” what she is “moved” by during the journey is the realisation that there is no separation between anything that is: no separation between me writing and you reading these words, between life and death, between this apparently material reality and the non-material realities of the spirit worlds. Perhaps one of the most ancient and universal of human concepts, this idea of “oneness” is common currency in contemporary “New Age” culture and has been of enduring interest among scientists from Democritus to Eddington and Einstein. As Planck points out, science ignores interrelatedness at its peril “because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery we are trying to solve”. However, where most of us can only think about this notion of “oneness”, shamans actually live it through the experience of the shamanic journey and direct interaction with the numinous—with spirit.

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9 Noll: 48.
10 Rock and Krippner: ix-x.
11 Rock and Krippner: ix-x.
12 Wilber: 163.
Making the journey

Both hemispheres of the brain are necessarily and actively involved in the process of journeying, particularly when the journey is spoken aloud:
“Certainly there is plenty of evidence that the right hemisphere is important for creativity, which, given its ability to make more and wide-ranging connections, and to think more flexibly, is hardly surprising. But this is only part of the story. Both hemispheres are importantly involved.”\(^1\)

When accessing the Lower or Upper worlds of the shamanic journey it is usually necessary to pass through a “tunnel” or “barrier” which is perhaps some instinctual representation of the corpus callosum and its function of both separation and unification. Is it possible that, as the journey begins, the shaman’s attention automatically redirects the primary cognitive process from the left cerebral hemisphere of the brain, to the right, through the corpus callosum; that is, from the structuring, restrictive left, to the visualising, expansive right? My own perception of journeying as a practice is that I am attempting to re-create the very nature of my own brain, overcoming physiological division within the hemispheres. The shaman’s purpose, the reason for making any journey, is indeed to bring into balance those things, individual or collective, organic or inorganic, living or dead, that are suffering or simply out of balance. These can include states of being, including mental, spiritual and physical ill-health. By bringing herself into harmony with all that is, the shaman acts as a conduit for healing, and the individual brain may be seen as a microcosm of the whole.

In commenting on the dangers of the culturally-embedded dominance of the left hemisphere of the brain McGilchrist could here be describing the very ills that shamanism is uniquely poised to rectify:

> I suggest that it is as if the left hemisphere, which creates a sort of self-reflexive virtual world, has blocked off the available exits, the ways out of the hall of mirrors, into a reality which the right hemisphere could enable us to understand […] the routes of escape from the virtual world have been closed off. An increasingly mechanistic, fragmented de-contextualised world, marked by unwarranted optimism mixed with paranoia and a feeling of emptiness, has come about, reflecting, I believe, the unopposed action of a dysfunctional left hemisphere.\(^2\)

\(^1\) McGilchrist 2010: 509.
According to Winkleman the “Shaman’s ‘soul-flight’ provides a third-person perspective on oneself.” This in turn raises the question of modern consciousness, particularly Western consciousness, being restricted by the ways in which we use our brain (and are expected to use it) in what is a fundamentally limited and limiting way because, according to Kalweit: “in our society, most people experience only an ego confined to a miniature private universe […] For so-called primitive people the base of reality is comparatively greater and has more dimensions than that of Western people.”

The journey begins when the shaman’s awareness shifts from the here and now and accesses worlds visible only to him. Fig. 26-2 offers an interpretation of the active stages that occur during the shift into altered consciousness: starting from visualising a real, i.e ordinary-reality Lower or Upper World access-place (such as a cave or a tree), to moving beyond memory towards “not-self”, where Jung’s “things” are experienced.

The form of these Lower and Upper Worlds, part of the tripartite cosmos that Lewis-Williams proposes is hardwired into the human neural circuitry, can vary with culture and tradition. Shamans have been called

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16 Kalweit: 260.
17 Jung: 183.
18 © Zoë Brân.
19 Lewis-Williams: 209.
“the walkers between worlds”, the bridges between “here” and “there”, with “here” and “there” as simply concepts, even learning tools, rather than actual locations or states of being.20

In most forms of shamanic journeying, including Core Shamanic practice, the shift from the beta state of alert awareness to the cortical theta state of alert hypnogogia is facilitated by the use of auditory driving, usually drumming, rattling or singing, which can be live or recorded. The positive cognitive effects of inducing theta states to produce psychological integration and enhanced creativity can also be reproduced and measured in the laboratory.21 The main rhythm used in drumming for shamanic purposes is typically a steady rhythm of about four to five beats per second. During the journey the shaman is often awake and alert, aware of and able to move between ordinary and non-ordinary reality as required, though this ability can vary from person to person.22 Hallucinogens such as ayahuasca are widely advertised in the West as a means to altering consciousness but are considered unnecessary in Core Shamanism. Auditory driving through percussive sound is considered a more universal means for altering consciousness.23

Altered consciousness, not-self and the origins of creativity

The reasons for the near universality of what we can call the shamanic journey, from at least the Upper Palaeolithic period to the present day, are widely debated. In the Mind in the Cave cognitive archaeologist David Lewis-Williams proposes that this universality originated with the development of the modern human brain and concludes that:

The sense of Absolute Unitary Being—transcendence, ecstasy—is generated by “spillover” between neural circuits in the brain, which is, in turn, caused by factors we have considered in this book—visual, auditory or tactile rhythmic driving, meditation, olfactory stimulation, fasting, and so forth. The essential elements of religion are thus wired into the brain. Cultural contexts may advance or diminish their effect, but they are always there.24

Whilst this position may be accurate within its own terms, I believe it to be limiting, as it fails to question why such neural “spillover”, such “wiring”, exists at all, or what possible evolutionary reasons there might

20 Matthews and Matthews.
21 Gruzelier: 1.
23 Winkelman 2010: 133.
24 Lewis-Williams: 290.
be for humans being programmed to perceive, or even create, the numinous. Describing the process of shamanic initiation, Winkleman also cites the neurobiological basis of the shamanic state of consciousness: “The shaman engages transformative process through training the neurognostic structures that provoke a restructuring of self at levels below conceptual and operational thought, acting upon the structures which support consciousness”.\textsuperscript{25} In \textit{The Way of the Shaman}, Michael Harner offers a more practical response to the universality of shamanism:

The shamanic approach to power and healing was maintained in a basically similar form in primitive cultures that otherwise represented radically different adaptations to contrasting environments and just as distinctly different problems of material survival […] Why, then is shamanic knowledge so basically consistent in different parts of the primitive world? I suggest the answer is simply because it works […] In my opinion, the low technological level of those cultures compelled their members to develop the highest degree possible the ability of the human mind to cope with serious problems of health and survival.\textsuperscript{26}

But it was not only for the practicalities of day-to-day survival that altered consciousness proved important for our most ancient ancestors. Communities which must, in contemporary terms at least, have faced challenges to survival, placed creativity high on their list of social priorities. Winkleman places the process of altering consciousness in order to make the shamanic journey, using singing, chanting, dancing, drumming or clapping, as integral to the development of creativity and indeed to modern human development itself:

Shamanic practices enhanced integration of the different cognitive modules because shamanism stimulated activation of the intrinsic properties of the biologically based integrative mode of consciousness. These responses produced interhemispheric integration; frontal-limbic integration; brain stem-limbic integration; and integration across the neuraxis. Shamanic alterations of consciousness provided numerous adaptive consequences, including enhancement of representation, integration, stress-reduction and healing.\textsuperscript{27}

Altered consciousness makes the shamanic journey inherently transformative precisely because it focusses on moving beyond the inhibiting left-brain which McGilchrist refers to as “the enclosed system of the self-conscious

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Winkleman 2004: 213.
\item Harner: 41-42.
\item Winkleman 2010: 79.
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mind”. Eliade’s use of the word “ecstasy”, from the Greek ek-stasis, to step out of, or move beyond oneself, can be easily misunderstood as mystical fun, but actually implies a profoundly challenging experience of not-self in which, I suggest, the very essence of creativity resides.

As Lewis-Williams points out, modern humans at the time of the “creative explosion” of around forty thousand years ago had the same brain size, nervous system and capacity for imagination that we have today. Looking at the astonishing images of Chauvet, Lascaux and Altamira, even in reproduction, it is not difficult to feel their power and it would be all too easy to assume connections between contemporary shamanisms and the altered states of consciousness practised by the people of the Upper Paleolithic era. Bednarik proposes the futility of theorising about the meaning and purpose of ancient art without an understanding of the ethnographic beliefs of its creator:

Palaeoarts can be studied scientifically, but this is not served by striving to determine a quality that cannot be determined, such as meaning. We can either find out what else science can do, and can do properly—or we can abandon the rigour of science and take a shortcut to ‘meaning’, creating and projecting our own favoured interpretation of the art. It may involve shamans, metaphysics, arithmetic, lost tribes, trance visions […] [none] provide any insights about the rock art so interpreted, but they are always a revealing tool for exploring the psychology of the interpreter.

At the start of this chapter I wrote about my surprise at the correspondences that emerged between my own personal experience and those recorded by ethnographers and anthropologists over recent centuries, and also in parietal art. Bednarik’s warning regarding the dangers of interpretation is necessary and pertinent in an age when almost everything seems open to individual assessment. And it is true, of course, that we are unlikely ever to know the intentions of the prehistoric painters and sculptors around the world who left mysteries on and in rock. It is true that we cannot know because we do not have the science required to reach back in time and determine cause and motive in any meaningful way. The painters of Chauvet were neurologically identical to those of twenty-first century men and women, suggesting that our innate capacity for visualisation and perception of the numinous is no different from that of our prehistoric forebears. Is it possible therefore

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30 Lewis-Williams:130.
31 Bednarik: 255.
that when altering consciousness we might *experience* at least something of what our ancient forebears experienced and in doing so come to some understanding of their purpose? Is it possible that as we experience *ekstasis*, as we step beyond who we are in the ordinary everyday world of the twenty-first century, we access a form of perception that is unlimited by time or space? This question of new forms of perception has long been a topic of interest to physicists looking to extend not just knowledge but ways of knowing:

The existing scientific concepts cover always only a very limited part of reality, and the other part that has not yet been understood is infinite. Whenever we proceed from the known into the unknown we may hope to understand, but we may have to learn at the same time a new meaning of the word “understanding”.

I suggest that, while there may indeed be limits of meaning imposed by culture and self-awareness, what the modern shaman experiences during altered consciousness is essentially the same as the shaman thirty-five thousand years ago. As Bednarik points out, assuming similarity has its dangers, but this works both ways. Equally, assumption of difference cannot be proved.

**Creativity and narrative in the shamanic journey**

The process of creativity has been defined as preparation, incubation, illumination and verification, and when considering the practicalities of the shamanic process (preparing for, making, analysing and utilising the journey) there are clearly defined similarities of process. Similarly, Csíkszentmihályi’s concept of creative “flow” which explores mental activity during periods of positive focussed attention (in particular the loss of awareness of time, desire for control and individual ego), mirror the shaman’s experience during the journey.

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32Heisenberg: 201.  
33Wallas: 10.  
34Csíkszentmihályi: 64.  
35Winkelman 2010: 121.
Structure of the Core Shamanic Journey

The Intent (Preparation)

↑
Integration of Result
↓
Action (Incubation/Illumination)

(Verification)

↑

Emotional Analysis of Resulting Narrative (Illumination)

Fig. 26-3 Structure of the shamanic counselling experience

Narrative is at the heart of almost all shamanic experience. The journey, even if it does not follow a linear or chronological progress, will have a beginning, middle and end. The shamanic journey can be found in world myth and literature and includes tales as varied as Jack and the Beanstalk, Alice in Wonderland and the Epic of Gilgamesh. Biblical events, such as Moses’ experience with a burning bush, the stories of Jonah and the whale, Jacob’s ladder, and the ascension of Elijah in a whirlwind/flaming chariot, are just a few examples which can be read as shamanic journeys. Many of the best known Greek myths and works of literature, including the Odyssey and the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, suggest a moment in the development of Greek culture when shamanism was merging with formalised religion and where elements of both can be clearly seen, as gods and humans regularly turn into animals or trees. The idea that inspiration—the breathing in of spirit—comes from “elsewhere” and uses the artist to express itself is a very old one indeed:

Great poets acknowledged that they were merely channels for the Muses. The Odyssey, Homer’s epic poem about the travels of the hero Odysseus after the fall of Troy, begins: Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending, the wanderer, harried for years on end after he plundered the stronghold on the proud height of Troy.

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36 © Zoë Brân.
37 Vitebsky: 71.
38 Vitebsky: 69.
Novelists, from Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson to Stephanie Myers, author of the recent vampire series, *Twilight*, describe entire plots forming in dreams. The voices of “unknown” characters speak to writers, urging them to bring them to life on the page. Some scientists claim to have dreamt or to have been “shown”, while dreaming of en-visioning, the key elements to the success of their work. Organic chemist Freidrich Kerkule asserted that he had a reverie, a daydream, of the benzene molecule as an ourobos, a snake swallowing its own tail. He also claimed that his theory of structure appeared to him in a vision of dancing atoms.

In the shamanic journey, the key elements—healing, help or information—have already been provided in that reality where altered consciousness has precedence. The narrative with which the shaman returns and which he offers the patient/client is therefore both a representation and re-enactment of the healing itself. Similarly, Lewis-Williams describes the San rock art of the Drakensberg and other regions in southern Africa as being both on the rock and appearing to emerge from it as from behind a veil.39 Just as the healing narrative of the shaman is not merely a story but contains within it the power of the healing itself, Lewis-Williams proposes that the earliest images “were not two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional things in the material world […] Rather, they were “fixed” mental images. For the makers, the paintings and engravings were visions, not representations of visions […]” 40

If, as the experience of the shaman suggests, everything both seen and unseen is one, then it is entirely logical that a thing can be both itself and something else simultaneously. Again, art, cosmos and spiritual experience coalesce. The San fused the “abstract” experiences of altered states with the materiality of the world in which they lived: “Art and the physical environment, as the San understood it, were inseparable.”41

**Then and now: altered consciousness and the creative self**

A recurring image around the world is that of the man/beast. Therianthropy, or shape-shifting, is perhaps one of the least understood aspects of creative transformation while in an altered state of consciousness, implying as it does the impossible merging of human and “other”. Popular culture provides the werewolf but other “shape-shifters”

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39 Lewis-Williams: 162.
40 Lewis-Williams: 193.
41 Lewis-Williams: 162.
and “skin-walkers” are common in tales from all over the world, most notably amongst the Native Americans. Eliade refers to this form of physical creativity which extends from Central America to Asia and Scandinavia:

Describing Odin’s ability to change shape at will, Snorri writes: “his body lay as though he were asleep or dead and he then became a bird or a beast, a fish or Dragon, and went in an instant to far-off lands” […] this ecstatic journey of Odin in animal forms may properly be compared to the transformations of shamans into animals.

Fig. 26-4 “The Shaman of Trois Frères”

Shamanic shape-shifting is a surprisingly common experience even among Western novice journeyers, including students for whom the concept is unknown. Fig. 26-4 is particularly interesting as it shows not only a combining of human/animal parts but also the use of “x-ray” depiction, another aspect of parietal imagery that reflects shamanic experience and can be found in art from Australasia to the Arctic Rim. What physical transformation and seeing into the body meant for our prehistoric ancestors we cannot know. However, this merging of matter and spirit with a non-human “other” and the possibility of “x-ray”, which in shamanic terms can represent initiatory dismemberment of the shaman by spirit and also the possibility of seeing into the nature of things, is still widely prevalent today among indigenous shamans and Western practitioners.

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42 Pijoan: 79.
43 Eliade: 380-381.
44 c. 13,500 BCE, Trois Frères Cave, Ariege region, France.
45 Vitebsky: 18.
I photographed this petroglyph (tentatively dated to c.3000 BCE) at a remote archaeological site in South India in 2004. Subsequent research revealed that the image was of a buffalo in x-ray; this led me to explore the prevalence of x-ray images in reports of shamanic dismemberment and transformation. A few months earlier I had been given a bone mask (see fig. 26-1) by my Upper World teacher, and told that when I wore it I would “see in the dark” and see “into the nature of things”. The first thing I saw was a running buffalo in x-ray. I saw its organs and ribcage and the light of spirit that animated it. The same light illuminated my teacher and me.

Over time, the surprise I experienced at discovering such correspondences between my own journeys and those of shamanic predecessors was equalled by realising that my dreams, while never feeling like a shamanic journey, had become problem-solving. The first time I was aware of this I dreamt I was falling both horizontally and vertically from a very high bridge. I knew that there was no way back and that falling was extremely undesirable. As I started to fall the thought came to me that I could fly, and acting on this realisation I soared up into the air away from the bridge. On waking I had two distinct impressions: the visceral sense of falling was still present in my body, but entwined with that was the profoundly self-affirming knowledge that my unconscious mind was working creatively towards the positive. Now, several years later, when presented with a dream of falling I simply go with the sensation, knowing that I will land softly.

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47 Vitebsky: 61.
Shamanism has many purposes in my own life, but I use the journey and my relationship with spirit in numerous practical ways such as requesting guidance in new speaking or teaching situations, including asking for guidance on and for students or clients whom I have never met. I also ask for help to start projects and overcome procrastination. Perhaps the most memorable use of the latter was in the writing of my book *Enduring Cuba*. I returned from months of research in Cuba in February 2001 with seventy thousand words of voice-recorded notes. The manuscript was due for submission in November. In May the cover of the book with my name on it appeared for presale on Amazon; I had not written a word. I was aware that what held me back was my conflicted feeling regarding Cuba and concerns about writing a “negative” book. Finally, I journeyed to ask how I could overcome these feelings and start to work. My Upper World teacher took me up into the sky high above the Earth, and as we stood there he pointed to the island of Cuba far below and then bent down and picked it up and handed it to me so that I held it like an infant. As I felt the weight of the island in my arms I was very moved and felt a sense of compassion and tenderness that I had not previously experienced in such a context. I started writing the next day.

It is possible to alter consciousness in the shamanic journey specifically to explore and produce art, literature, music and performance as well as for business, design and education purposes. Over the past five or six years part of my teaching work has been with professional individuals and groups who wish to explore the shamanic journey specifically to enhance personal creativity by stepping out of “the private universe of their own mind”.

The simplicity with which this is possible bears out Lewis-Williams’ argument that the capacity to alter consciousness is innate and hardwired. Despite its unlimited practical applications however, shamanism is essentially a spiritual practice and through the shamanic journey insight into the nature of creativity, consciousness and indeed existence itself is available.

In his 2010 film, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, director Werner Herzog explores the astonishing art of the Chauvet cave in the Ardèche region of France. Herzog, the film’s narrator, interviews a French archaeologist describing how each night he dreamt of the lions painted on the walls and after five days he stopped going to the cave because it caused him “emotional shock”. Herzog later concludes that the 35,000 year-old dreams of the Chauvet artists cannot be recaptured today because “they are

48 Kalweit: 260.
49 Lewis-Williams: 290.
too far away from us”.

The experience of shamanic journeying, my own and others, suggests that it is only our mind and its limits, our expectations of normality and safety, that hinder the expansion of our vision. Whatever our prehistoric forbears understood or realised that we have lost or forgotten can surely be balanced by the very things we understand and realise that they did not. Our experience should be richer not poorer than theirs, with greater possibility and potential—which are at the very heart of creativity.

In conclusion I offer an extract from the recording of a shamanic journey in which I ask to be shown what I needed to know at that time about the nature of creativity. This was one of relatively few occasions in which I have slept within the journey itself and been taken on as “the spirit of my spirit”. I understand this dream-within-a-journey, to imply a need for the greatest possible distance from my every day consciousness, from my ego, from my inert physical body, in order to fully understand the teaching that is being presented to me. After drinking the offered substance my voice slows and slurs on the recording (the headdress and mask refer to fig. 26-1).

And we are walking towards his tent hand-in-hand and I say that I’ve come to ask to be shown what I need to know about creativity and how I should teach this. And we go into to his tent and inside everything seems the same. I can see my Buffalo headdress and the skin of the Buffalo on its stand in a corner of his tent and he points to this to remind me to put it on, so I put it on and I’m wearing the mask of bone. And I say “Can you tell me everything I need to know about creativity? Can you show me this through your eyes?” He shakes his head strongly to indicate not through his eyes. He opens the little chest/box that is always between us [when we sit facing each other] and he lifts the lid and takes out something that looks like a long roll of clay, and he starts shaping it into things. He makes a horse, and he breathes on the horse and it becomes alive, a tiny, perfect miniature horse; it even has a bridle. Then he takes the clay and he’s shaping a moon and a sun and he breathes on them and he puts them to hang in the air and they start to shine and the moon starts revolving around the sun. And he picks up the clay and now he shapes it into a bowl and he breathes on that and it becomes a tiny cup with liquid in it and he hands this to me and tells me to drink. I drink and it’s very thick and very sweet.

Now I lie down and I’m relaxing and I fall asleep. I see some part of me getting up and it’s like my dream … dream self has got up. And I say “Why do I have to be asleep for this?” And he says “Come” and the top of the tent opens and we go up through it. And I can see the planet we were...

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50 Cave of Forgotten Dreams, motion picture directed by Werner Herzog (Creative Differences Production Inc., 2010).
on below us and it is not the Earth, and I can see as we go further and
further away … I can see all the planets of the Solar System, but it’s not
our solar system. And I can see galaxies and the Milky Way and now it’s
like I’m outside of all the cosmos, and there is an edge, there’s an edge
where there are things and there’s an edge where there are no things. I ask
“When are you showing me this end and beginning?” He says “This is what
you needed to see, this is where things end and where no thing begins but it
also is something, even though it seems to be nothing”. I say “Can you
explain specifically? Can you explain specifically how this relates to
creativity?” And we set off into the nothing and it’s very cold and there is a
sense of pressure but I don’t know if the pressure is real or … no, it is real
pressure. The pressure becomes more and more dense, I can feel that I am
forming a planet, that my body is changing into a spherical shape and that I
have become a planet and that the extent of the something has now been
pushed forward into the nothing. And the drums are changing, and I say
thank you very much to my teacher, thank you for showing me this. And I
come back here.

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