

The Otherworld in Myth, Folklore, Cinema, and Brain Science

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By

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Dedicated to the students of Northern Marianas College for their
inspiring stories about Otherworld experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT AND WHERE IS THE OTHERWORLD?

The Otherworld is a living reality that complements waking world reality. It is structured out of eternal ideas about life, time, and space, inhabited by eternal beings, and powered by an eternal, inexhaustible life force. It has its own language based upon metaphors, symbols, and motifs which, like any human language, can have different modes and forms of expression but still convey an underlying universal meaning.

The Otherworld usually manifests itself to individuals during times of extreme emotional states: trauma, panic, and near-death experiences. It can also manifest itself through the use of mind-altering, hallucinogenic drugs or other trance-inducing states of ecstasy. Aspects of the Otherworld most commonly appear in certain types of dreams usually associated with REM (rapid eye movement) sleep and triggered by crucial moments in a person's life filled with anticipation, anxiety, and fear. Because of its relationship with emotionally volatile states of being, the Otherworld is a world of extremes. To remain in the Otherworld indefinitely, one must be dead to the mortal realm.

Religious scholar Mircea Eliade underscored how the Otherworld was once thought of as primarily the land of the dead since those who have suffered a mortal death are thought to inhabit this realm: "...although originally the Other World is the world after death, it finally comes to mean any transcendent state, that is, any mode of being inaccessible to fleshy [i.e. mortal] man and reserved for 'spirits,' or for man as a spiritual entity."¹ Eliade emphasizes the importance of accessing the Otherworld through methods that transcend waking world reality since it is the realm of spirit that lies beyond the mortal realm; by shaking off ego consciousness, one can begin to access this nonrational, unconscious realm.

¹ Eliade (1958) 2005: 65.

The archetypal substratum of the human unconscious—what C.G. Jung called the collective unconscious or impersonal psyche—is a manifestation of the Otherworld, embodying and expressing characteristics of this realm. The characteristics referred to previously about the Otherworld—its eternal dimension, its inhabitants made up of spirit or post-mortal entities, its language made up of metaphors and symbols—all pertain to the archetypal dimension of the unconscious. This means that an aspect of the Otherworld exists within all of us. And yet, one must also understand that archetypal reality has a type of existence somewhere outside of us. Jung considered archetypes living energies with an autonomous relationship with ego consciousness. This seemingly contradictory location of the Otherworld—both an inner and outer reality--relates to Jung's ideas about how the physical and the psychic realms are two aspects of the same reality:

Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another...it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing....[The] nonpsychic [i.e. materialistic representations] can behave like the psychic, and vice versa, without there being any causal connection between them....In archetypal conceptions and instinctual perceptions, spirit and matter confront one another on the psychic plane.²

William G. Roll, professor of psychology and psychical research from the University of West Georgia who also served as president of the Oxford University Society for Psychical Research and project director of the Psychical Research Foundation at Duke University, echoed Jung's ideas about the relationship between psyche and matter, emphasizing the emotional factor: how strong emotions can leave an imprint upon a location. As he explained:

Events that would give us strong memories in our minds—death, accidents, and so forth—are the same kind that are strong outside our bodies. All we need to say is that there is no sharp distinction between mind and matter, and that the processes that go on in the human brain may also go on in the human environment. To me, the main interest of these phenomena is that they suggest body and mind and mind and matter are not as clearly distinguished as we have been led to believe, that mind is enfolded in matter...that the physical environment has mental qualities that come from the people who have lived in that environment.³

² Jung (1946) 1969: 215-216.

³ Adams, ed.: 36.

Roll also mentions that psychological imbalance within an individual or a family can evoke a response from the environment that attempts to illustrate or even fill the void necessary to restore psychic equilibrium: "It's like a dream that has become real, a strong need that has somehow created a situation that satisfies it."⁴

When our reliance upon physical reality for security and permanence is threatened during times of stress and the fear of death, the eternal elements of the Otherworld, linked with the archetypal reality of the human psyche, become more of a living reality. A potent example of how archetypal reality can permeate waking world reality during times when death becomes a real threat, and "a strong need" creates "a situation that satisfies it," is illustrated in the autobiographical narrative, "You Can Count on Miracles." Its young author Aphonetip Vasavong relates how, at the age of eight, he was attempting to flee with his family from their home country of Laos to Thailand in order to escape political persecution. The family left on foot in the middle of the night and struggled through jungle terrain as they made their way to a large river where a boat was waiting to take them to Thailand. Along the way, Vasavong became separated from his family and hopelessly lost. Terrified of being left behind, Vasavong wept to himself as he frantically looked around for any sign that would help him find his family. Suddenly, a glowing object appeared out of the darkness:

I could see that it was a rabbit. It was beautiful and bright like a light. It came back toward me and stood in front of me. I reached out to pet it, but it ran toward the same path that it had come from a moment ago. I decided to follow the rabbit along the path. As I did, I was able to see my way through the woods because the rabbit and the path were bright...I continued to follow the rabbit along the path until it disappeared into the darkness. I looked around for the rabbit, and what I saw instead was my family getting into the canoes. I turned back once more to look for the rabbit, but it was gone.⁵

Vasavong concludes by emphasizing the importance of recognizing "unusual coincidences" fraught with meaning that "could not have happened by chance alone:"

Unusual experiences such as mine occur to people everywhere, but most people do not take the time to think about their meaning. Some critics argue that these occurrences are merely coincidental. My experience leads me to

⁴ Adams, ed.: 36.

⁵ Vasavong: 221-222.

believe otherwise. Being lost in the woods and having a brightly lit rabbit lead me safely to my family cannot be attributed to chance alone.⁶

Vasavong's experience is a classic example of what Jung called synchronicity, unusual but meaningful coincidences that occur during times of great emotional turmoil when archetypal reality becomes more active and can express itself through projection. In this case, it could be said that Vasavong's inherent survival instincts manifested themselves as a glowing rabbit that led him out of a life and death situation to safety. Jung referred to archetypal reality as linked with instinctual patterns of thought and behavior, essentially calling archetypal images pictorial representations of instincts. In Vasavong's narrative, the survival instinct appears as a projected archetypal image: the figure of the helpful animal featured in numerous myths and folk tales from around the world.

Marie-Louise von Franz, a close colleague of Jung's, explained the universal significance of this archetypal image in folklore and its link with human instinctual patterns. After reading countless examples of world folklore, von Franz came to the conclusion that there was only one universal rule inherent in folk and fairy tales:

...one must never hurt the helpful animal in fairy tales.... [You] may temporarily disobey the advice of the helpful fox or wolf or cat. But if basically you go against it, if you do not listen to the helpful animal or bird, or whatever it is, if any animal gives you advice and you don't follow it, then you are finished.... This would mean that obedience to one's most basic inner being, one's instinctual inner being, is the one thing which is more essential than anything else. In all nations and all fairy tale material, I have never found a different statement.⁷

Von Franz underscores how inner, instinctual energies that keep us alert to danger are personified by the figure of the helpful animal in folk tales. Von Franz also explains how experiences such as the one reported by Vasavong are the inspiration for most folk tales:

Personally, I think it likely that the most frequent way in which archetypal stories [i.e. folk tales and myths] originate is through individual experiences of an invasion by some unconscious content, either in a dream or in a waking hallucination...whereby an archetypal content breaks into an individual life....Such invasions of the collective unconscious into the field of

⁶ Vasavong: 222

⁷ Von Franz (1974) 1995: 145-146

experience of a single individual probably, from time to time, create new nuclei of stories and also keep alive the already existing material.⁸

In other words, similar experiences reported by Vasavong are the original source materials for tales featuring helpful animals. Such stories are ignited by an experience perceived as life threatening; in these situations, unconscious energies are activated and sometimes overwhelm ego consciousness, resulting in a type of “waking hallucination” in which the projection of unconscious contents into the physical environment occurs, resulting in a supernatural experience filled with numinous energy. A person who has had such an experience might share it with others; if it’s compelling enough, it could inspire similarly-themed stories.

It is interesting to note that Vasavong never questioned the reality of his vision despite its dreamlike qualities: a friendly rabbit appearing out of nowhere as a glowing object of light encouraging him to follow it, a phenomenon straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*. Vasavong’s youthful age was a major factor. The sudden appearance of a lit-up bunny might have sent someone older with a less open attitude toward the supernatural running in panic deeper into the jungle. As fantastic as the creature might have seemed, he accepted it as real, behaved accordingly, saved his life, and ultimately fashioned a tale presented as autobiographical but could also substitute as a folk tale about encountering a helpful animal.

The figure of the black dog in certain legends and folk tales, most notably in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, as well as in India, could be variations of the type of experience reported by Vasavong. Although reports of the black dog usually connect the figure to the devil—such as the black dog that appears in Goethe’s *Faust*—other reports of people seeing the black dog have described it as helpful. The majority of the sightings take place on the edge of forests or in deep woods, indicating that the black dog could be a personification of an individual’s dread over being surrounded by the unknown. Two reports, one from Somerset, England, and another from a former resident of Somerset but living in Toronto, Canada, feature the black dog in the role of helpful animal:

“When I was a young girl I was living outside of Toronto in Canada and I had to go to a farm some miles away one evening. There were woods on the way and I was greatly afraid, but a large black dog came with me and saw

⁸ Von Franz (1970)1996: 24.

me safely to the door. When I had to return he again appeared, and walked with me till I was nearly home. Then he vanished.”

[A cottager from Somerset] once had occasion to climb the Quantocks late one winter afternoon. When he had climbed up Weacombe to the top, the sea-mist came down, and he felt he might be frozen to death before he got home. But as he was groping along he suddenly touched shaggy fur and thought that old Shep, his sheep-dog, had come out to look for him....The dog turned and led him right to his cottage door, where he heard his own dog barking inside. He turned to look at the dog who had guided him, which grew gradually larger and then faded away. “It was the Black Dog, God blest it” he would always say.⁹

In these examples, legends of the black dog with which the individuals might have been familiar as residents of Somerset could have inspired their reported encounters with this spectral figure. In each report, the fear factor is significant; the results are nearly identical examples of projection of instinctual energies as reported by Vasavong, with the helpful animal figure materializing and leading each person to safety before vanishing.

A helpful entity that appears out of nowhere in a time of crisis can take other forms, as the following example illustrates, reported by a woman climbing in the Bavarian Alps who had become hopelessly lost:

Having started a little late for the return, with light beginning to fade, I found myself in a really dangerous... [and] hopeless position. All of a sudden, I noticed a sort of a big ball of light, and this condensed to a shape of a tall, rather Chinese-looking gentleman. Extraordinarily, I was not a bit frightened, and not astonished; it all seemed quite natural to me. The gentleman bowed, spoke a few words, led me a small path to the tourists' way, and disappeared as a ball of light.¹⁰

It is interesting that the woman reports having no fear of this “Chinese gentleman” who appears to her first as a ball of light, similar to how the white rabbit appeared to young Vasavong who also demonstrated no fear of his glowing animal specter. Commenting on this report, paranormal investigator Hilary Evans provides an insightful explanation: “Various scenarios suggest themselves, but the simplest one is that her subconscious mind sent out a mayday call, to which the BOL [ball of light]/Chinese gentleman responded.”¹¹ Evans’ explanation complements Willian G.

⁹ Briggs, ed. (1971) 2011: 95

¹⁰ Evans: 86-87.

¹¹ Evans: 87.

Roll's comment about how a strong desire triggers "a situation" that "satisfies" the desire. The woman's survival instincts responded to her life and death situation by manifesting an unconscious, archetypal entity, what Jung would call an animus or male soul guide, also known as a Wise Old Man figure, who could lead her to safety. Unless, of course, Chinese gentlemen disguised as balls of light regularly patrol the Alps to assist those in need. I will explore this projection phenomenon further in Chapter Four when examining the Otherworld/waking world overlap.

Perhaps those most familiar with the Otherworld are shamans, indigenous healers from various traditional cultures whose main task is to journey through ecstatic trance states to the Otherworld as a way to assist a member of the community by gaining knowledge from this realm that can benefit the individual or community as a whole. An example of the long association that shamanism has with the Otherworld can be found in the ancient Lascaux Caves in France. The Lascaux Caves are dominated by paintings, approximately 20,000 years old, depicting huge animals—bison, horses, stags, and bulls--galloping en masse along the walls and ceilings of these caves. One painting, located in the deepest recesses of the caves, depicts a stick-figure human lying naked and sporting an erection; the figure has the head of a bird as he lies with arms extended as if in flight. Near the figure is a staff with a bird emblem perched on top. Looming over the human figure is a giant bison drawn with more significant details in shades of brown, gold, and black. The bison faces the man, its huge body dwarfing him. Although the animal appears alive with piercing eyes and cocked head, the underbelly of the beast is pierced with a lance and the animal's entrails are spilling out (Fig. I-1).¹²

This intriguing image has been studied by experts in art, anthropology, and archeology and earned numerous interpretations. One of the most often-repeated interpretations is that the image depicts a shaman dressed as a bird as he flies in ecstatic trance—indicated by his erect penis—to commune with a bison spirit in the land of the dead. Numerous other images associated with shamanism feature the shaman depicted with bird-like attributes or riding upon the back of a long-necked water bird. As Joseph Campbell explained:

I have tried to suggest...the rich context of associations linking the figure of the bird to the spiritual flight of the shaman... [and] to the Paleolithic context of shamanism. Let me now add that the Hindu master yogis, who in

¹² Creative Commons

their trance states go beyond all the pales of thought, are known as...”wild ganders,” and “supreme wild ganders.” In the imagery of traditional Hinduism, the wild gander is symbolic of the *braham-atman*, the ultimate transcendent yet immanent ground of all being, with which the yogi succeeds in identifying his consciousness, thus passing from the sphere of waking consciousness...passing even beyond dream, where all things shine of their own light, to the nonconditioned, nondual state “between two thoughts,” where subject-object polarity is completely transcended and the distinction between life and death dissolved.¹³



Figure I-1: Lascaux cave painting, circa 20,000 B.C. (Creative Commons)

Campbell’s description of the visionary trance-flight of the shaman and its relationship with the flight of the Hindu yogi emphasizes the symbolism of the bird as not only illustrating the trance state but also the Otherworld itself as a “nondual state” where “the distinction between life and death” has dissolved. Campbell also hints in his comments that the Otherworld is the true reality, the origin of both the material and the spirit realm, “the ultimate transcendent yet immanent ground of all being.” Campbell’s comments relate to the Aboriginal Australian concept of dreamtime—explored in more detail in Chapter Six--and Jung’s ideas about the dual nature of the psyche

¹³ Campbell: 134-135.

with ego consciousness having its origins in the archetypal reality of the unconscious.

Joan Halifax echoes Campbell's association with shamanism and bird symbolism with the Otherworld in her description of the Lascaux image, stating that the shaman featured in the painting has journeyed to this life-in-death realm to commune with his deity—the fatally wounded bison who appears alive in this realm. As Halifax states: “The spirit of the shaman and the bison are both liberated—one through death, the other through trance. Thus communication is established....The spirit of the shaman is self-fertilized in the experience of ecstasy.”¹⁴

Because shamans are known to be experts at effecting and immersing themselves in otherworldly visionary experiences, shamanic descriptions of their journeys to the Otherworld have had a major impact on the content of folklore and myth. As it will become apparent in subsequent chapters, many common motifs found in folklore and myth, such as the motif of the journey to the underworld—one of the most universal of all mythic themes—are based upon shamanic visionary experiences. Other shamanic elements such as experiencing flight, encountering spirits of the dead and other fabulous creatures, and being subjected to torturous extremes including death and dismemberment followed by resurrection, show up frequently in folklore and myth.

Two nineteenth century tales from the Grimm brothers, for example, have obvious shamanic elements, both featuring fabulous bird-like creatures. The first tale, “The Fitcher’s Bird,” is a unique variation of the famous “Bluebeard” folk tale in which a mysterious aristocrat marries, kills, and dismembers a succession of wives and keeps their bodies stored in a bloody chamber. In the Grimm’s version, the aristocrat is a magician or wizard who kidnaps girls and takes them to his mansion in a deep forest. Each potential bride is given the keys to all the rooms of his palace and has the run of the castle except for one room that remains off limits. When the magician leaves the palace to take care of business, he tests the loyalty of each bride by giving her an egg to protect from harm. After he leaves, each bride gives into temptation and unlocks the forbidden room which contains the dismembered corpses of the magician’s previous brides. Each bride is so shocked by the sight of the bloody corpses that she drops her egg which then becomes permanently stained with blood. After the magician returns

¹⁴ Halifax: 11.

from his business trip and inspects the egg, he notices the bloodstains and ends up killing and dismembering his latest bride.

The cycle of destruction is disrupted when the magician captures three sisters in succession, two of whom end up dismembered. The third sister, however, protects her egg from harm before opening the bloody chamber. When she sees the dismembered bodies of her two sisters among the other corpses, her reaction is not fright and panic but pity. She ends up arranging the body parts in their correct positions, and in doing so brings her sisters back to life. When the magician returns from his business venture and inspects the girl's egg, finding it unblemished, he bows down before her and proclaims her his superior in magic. He tells her they will be wedded in a spectacular wedding ceremony. While he prepares for the ceremony, the girl has her sisters secretly return home and warn family and friends of the evil wizard. She then strips down and covers her body in honey, then rips open some pillows and lets their feathery contents stick to her body until she is completely covered in bird feathers. The girl then places the skeletal remains of one of the wizard's previous victims in the upper window of the mansion and begins to walk through the countryside. Whenever she comes across someone, she squawks like a bird and invites the person to the wedding (Fig. I-2).¹⁵ After the wizard returns and spies the skeletal corpse in the window, he runs to his so-called bride. The girl's family and friends then show up and set the mansion on fire, killing the wizard and his wedding guests.¹⁶

One of the key motifs that mark the tale's influence by shamanic practices is the theme of initiation which includes ritual dismemberment. When a young shaman hopeful is being tested for his or her potential status as a community healer, the candidate is put through rituals that simulate dismemberment by ancestor spirits. Dismemberment can also occur in a potential shaman's dreams; if such a dream occurs, the individual is considered a superior candidate since it's believed that the spirits themselves have visited the individual and conducted the initiation in the dreaming state--the realm of the Otherworld.

¹⁵ Creative Commons.

¹⁶ Tatar, ed.: 148-151.



Figure I-2: Dressed as a fabulous bird, the young girl/shaman wanders through the countryside inviting friends of the evil wizard to a fateful wedding. Illustration for “The Fitcher’s Bird,” by Maurice Sendak. (Creative Commons)

Bird symbolism is predominant in the tale as it is in numerous shamanic traditions. Certain traditional shamanic belief systems speak of potential shamans born in the cosmic tree of life, hatched out of eggs laid by a great mother bird. After the shaman candidates are born, the great mother bird nurses them before turning them over to demons who dismember them, after which the mother bird reassembles the body parts and brings them back to life with new attributes beneficial to their new shamanic profession.¹⁷ This tradition featuring the great mother bird appears in the tale, with the girl taking on the role of the mother bird who has the power to resurrect dismembered individuals and restore them to life. The girl ultimately dresses as a mother bird figure as she wanders through the countryside inviting people to her wedding. Ultimately, the tale as a whole illustrates the

¹⁷ Eliade (1951) 2004: 36-37.

making of a shaman through the performance of certain rituals that test the candidate's expertise. The rites involve simulated death, dismemberment, and resurrection. Note that death in this tale, as it is in shamanic initiation rites, is followed by resurrection or transformation of some sort. Death is never a finality in the Otherworld.

The other Grimm's tale with strong shamanic themes is "The Juniper Tree." The tale begins with a woman giving birth to a boy, then dying soon afterwards and being buried next to a juniper tree. Several years after the mother's death, the father remarries. His new wife has a young daughter, Marlene, who befriends the boy, causing the wife to become jealous of the boy's favorable status with his new sister and with his father. She plots to kill the boy, and ultimately succeeds, after which she chops up his body and makes a stew out of his body parts which she later feeds to his father. Her own daughter Marlene is horrified by her mother's actions and ends up burying the boy's bones underneath the juniper tree. Not long afterwards, the tree splits apart and in a blast of lightning, a fabulous bird appears out of the trees' trunk (Fig I-3).¹⁸

The bird begins flying through the village singing this song:

My mother, she slew me
My father, he ate me
My sister, little Marlene,
Gathered up my bones,
Tied them up in silk,
And put them under the juniper tree.
Tweet, tweet, what a fine bird I am!¹⁹

Those in the village who hear the bird's song are enchanted by it. Some throw up gifts to the bird: a golden chain, a pair of new shoes, and a miller's stone. The bird flies back with its presents to the boy's home and throws down the golden chain to the father, the new shoes to little Marlene, and then drops the miller's stone on the stepmother's head who is crushed by the weight and dies in an explosion of lightning and thunder. After the smoke clears, the bird is nowhere to be found. Instead, the boy emerges in its place from the rubble. He takes the hand of his father and sister, and they walk back inside the cottage to finish their supper.²⁰

¹⁸ Creative Commons.

¹⁹ Tatar, ed.: 193.

²⁰ Tatar, ed.: 190-197.



Figure I-3: Little Marlene lays the bones of her dismembered brother under the juniper tree, resulting in an amazing transformation of the boy's spirit into a fabulous bird. Illustration from "The Juniper Tree," by Louis Rhead, 1917. (Creative Commons)

Like "The Fitcher's Bird," "The Juniper Tree" has initiatory themes of dismemberment, transformation, and resurrection. There is also the appearance of another fabulous bird, this one born out of the juniper tree, a type of cosmic tree of life. The bird flies through the village and restores harmony and joy with its appearance and with the song it sings. The bird is the boy in spirit form, experiencing an initiatory flight. His initiation is conducted by an ancestor spirit—his stepmother. He passes her brutal tests and emerges resurrected from the dead. Once again, the idea that death is not the end of life becomes a major motif, one of the distinguishing aspects of the Otherworld.

Most traditional initiation rites, whether they are puberty rites, shamanic preparatory rites, or hero-in-training rites, involve a simulated death followed by resurrection. This indicates that, like folklore and myth, certain ceremonial rites were influenced by shamanic visionary experiences in which the Otherworld is evoked to help keep a community and its members healthy and in harmony with the spirit realm, the source of all life. This harmonious balance between the spirit realm and the material realm mirrors the balance between ego consciousness and the unconscious. Outer and inner harmony must be maintained; otherwise, the spirit realm will become more active, as it attempts to reestablish a healing balance between the two realms.

The following chapters explore the Otherworld while also exploring the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, noting how the characteristics of the human psyche and the Otherworld relate to one another and reflect their interrelationship. Each chapter emphasizes an aspect of the Otherworld, how this reality is linked with the inner reality of the human psyche, and how this link has been expressed in folklore, myth, shamanistic practices, traditional rites, and contemporary examples found in cinema as well as in contemporary experiences of individuals reporting various types of supernatural encounters.

Since aspects of the Otherworld live inside of us, we all seem to know of its existence on an instinctual level, yet we let our big, rational-thinking brains convince us of something different. According to the brain's reasoning center--the cerebral cortex--the Otherworld is like Santa Claus. After children reach a certain age, they are informed by big-brain adult caregivers that Santa doesn't exist, that he is just a fantasy, a symbol of the spirit of Christmas, so they should stop believing in him. Up until that point, most children probably had little problem believing in such a fantastic figure. But now, continuing to do so would mark them as childish: capable of believing in the wildest fantasies.

Ironically, some scholars believe that the original Santa Claus was based upon shamanic practices. Note that Santa flies throughout the world on his annual wintertime journey, helped by his spirit animals, in this case reindeer rather than birds, since the influential shamanic elements associated with Santa Claus are thought to have originated by the indigenous peoples of Lapland--located not all that far from the North Pole--where reindeer play an important role in their culture. Like the boy in "The Juniper Tree," Santa distributes gifts to both the good and the bad. Also, Santa is somehow able

to perform his journey by flying over the entire world in one night, another attribute of the Otherworld where time doesn't follow the usual 24-hour cycle but can be extended indefinitely. And Santa's mission is the same as the shaman: to create harmony among his community, in this case, the people of the material world.²¹

Although the reasoning centers of the brain insist that the Otherworld doesn't exist, other parts of the brain actually encourage us to believe in this reality, just as many of us believed at one time in such otherworldly spirits as Santa Claus. Every night, certain parts of the brain remind us: the Otherworld is real.

²¹ Dalton: n.p.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE OTHERWORLD

In 1912, C.G. Jung published the first book-length presentation of his psychological views: *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, also known as *Psychology of the Unconscious*. The book's first section was devoted to Jung's exploration of what he called two kinds of thinking: directed thinking and fantasy thinking. Directed thinking, also known as logical or reality thinking, deals with solving problems affecting the person at any given moment: it is "a thinking that adjusts itself to actual conditions, where we...imitate the succession of objectively real things, so that the images in our mind follow after each other in the same strictly causal succession as the historical events outside of our mind."¹ The highest form of directed thinking is scientific thinking. Jung, therefore, considered directed thinking an evolutionarily advanced mode of cognitive functioning superior to fantasy thinking: "...the directed thinking of our time is a more or less modern acquisition, which was lacking in earlier times."² Fantasy thinking "...leads us away from reality into phantasies of the past and future. Here, thinking in the form of speech ceases, image crowds upon image, feeling upon feeling; more and more clearly one sees a tendency which creates and makes believe, not truly as it is but as one indeed might wish it to be....The customary speech calls this kind of thinking 'dreaming.'"³

Further defining the differences between these two modes of thinking, Jung stated that:

Thus, we have two forms of thinking—directed thinking and dream or phantasy thinking. The first, working for communication with speech elements, is troublesome and exhausting; the latter, on the contrary, goes on

¹ Jung (1912) 2001: 13.

² Jung (1912) 2001: 18.

³ Jung (1912) 2001: 19-20.

without trouble, working spontaneously, so to speak, with reminiscences. The first creates innovations, adaptations, imitates reality and seeks to act upon it. The latter, on the contrary, turns away from reality, sets free subjective wishes, and is, in regard to adaptation, wholly unproductive.⁴

It would appear from these comments that Jung had a prejudicial attitude toward these two kinds of thinking, with fantasy thinking considered an inferior and more primitive form of thinking than the more logical and productive directed thinking. However, what Jung was attempting to do in his first major work was to distinguish his psychological views from Sigmund Freud's and noting how all thinking is fueled by libido or psychic energy. According to Freud's dogmatic attitude, libido is driven primarily by sex and aggressive tendencies, while Jung considered libido to be a much more creatively expressive drive within the psyche. Although Jung referred to fantasy thinking as infantile and primitive, he also called it the source of the mythopoetic or myth-making source of the psyche; since certain mythic themes and motifs can be found universally in the cultures of the world from various points in historical time, Jung insisted that the fantasy mode of thinking responsible for the creation of myths must have an objective or impersonal dimension:

...the products arising from the unconscious are related to the mythical. From all these signs it may be concluded that the soul possesses in some degree historical strata, the oldest stratum of which would correspond to the unconscious....[There] come to light pronounced traits of an archaic mental kind which under certain circumstances, might go as far as the re-echo of a once manifest, archaic mental product.⁵

The "archaic mental product" of the unconscious expresses itself most often with symbolic images and motifs appearing in dreams. In many cases, dream symbolism does not appear to have relevance to waking world concerns; it appears to be irrelevant, nonsensical, and "wholly unproductive." Yet, as Jung goes on to investigate in great detail, these strange, seemingly irrelevant images and motifs, are made up of a type of archaic language expressing concerns and concepts universal to humanity.

Jung rightly raises the question: what is the source of this symbolic language? "How are phantasies created?"⁶ Because of the tremendous influence that Freud still had upon Jung's psychological views at this stage

⁴ Jung (1912) 2001: 20.

⁵ Jung (1912) 2001: 32-33.

⁶ Jung (1912) 2001: 28.

of his professional career, Jung concluded that repression of id-driven wish fulfillment urges was the source of dream fantasies which consisted of unfulfilled desires: “We imagine that which we lack.”⁷ In other words, the source of dreams is the conscious human imagination desiring taboo wishes and dreaming up scenarios of fulfillment. This early view of the source of dream content reflects the more commonly accepted view of dreams which emphasizes how dreams reflect waking concerns and are made up of symbolic content reflective of the dreamer’s personality and daily subjective experiences; also, according to this view, imagery and scenes that appear to have nothing to do with the person’s waking life concerns are considered meaningless, random spurts of neural activity.

Jung also originally considered the concept of God based upon the Freudian view of God deriving from parental figures who appear omnipotent and all-powerful to a child. Classical scholar Jane Harrison eloquently expressed the Freudian concept of God in her examination of Greek religion. Although a superb interpreter of Greek art depicting references to religious and mythological scenarios, Harrison herself was an atheist and considered Greek religion based upon barbarous, “wholly unproductive” rituals derived from delusions and fantasy thinking with the primary intent of encouraging fertility and procreation. Writing in the early twentieth century, Harrison was influenced by both Freud and Jung and quoted extensively from their works—the former primarily from *Totem and Taboo*, the latter from *Psychology of the Unconscious*—as she explained the human origin of the God concept derived from fantasy thinking:

Finding himself helpless in the face of natural powers, man tries to pull the strings of higher powers and so obtain control. He imagines gods and tries to influence them by prayer and sacrifice....Man utterly forgets that his gods are man-begotten....Man hungers to be one again with the [fantasy] image he has himself made....[Phantasy] thinking...is typified by the mental operation of children and savages and by those adults in their dreams, reveries, and mental disorders. It is from this early infantile type of dream or phantasy thinking engendered by the fertility rite that primitive theology and mythology spring....The older mind, still buried in all of us, is and always has been, incessantly weaving dream-images of imaginary wish fulfillment.⁸

⁷ Jung (1912) 2001: 28.

⁸ Harrison (1921) 2001: 34-36.

Harrison emphasizes the human-begotten idea of God, one embraced by Freud and other atheists. According to this view, every human civilization has invented the concept of God and then somehow repressed the creation of this supremely sophisticated manifestation of the human imagination; then, due to some type of mass amnesia, all human civilizations have forgotten that God is an invention of humanity, envisioned as the ultimate parent figure rather than the revelation and experience of an otherworldly, supernatural power.

As previously mentioned, Jung also seemed to accept this man-begotten view of God based upon the Freudian view. However, in *Symbols of Transformation*, the revised version of *Psychology of the Unconscious* written decades later after he had more firmly established his distinctive psychological philosophy, Jung makes his view of the concept of God much clearer. He also retracts the unsympathetic statements he made about fantasy thinking as a less evolutionarily developed stratum of the psyche:

...one must certainly put a large question-mark after the assertion that myths spring from an “infantile” psychic life of the race. They are on the contrary the most mature product of that young humanity....[Myth-making] and myth-inhabiting man was a grown reality and not a four year-old child....In reality, we are concerned with primitive, archaic thought-forms, based on instinct, which naturally emerge more clearly in childhood than they do later. But, they are not in themselves infantile, much less pathological.... The instinctive, archaic basis of the mind is a matter of plain objective fact and is not more dependent upon the individual experience or personal choice than is the inherited structure and functioning of the brain or any other organ. Just as the body has its evolutionary history and shows clear traces of the various evolutionary stages, so too does the psyche.⁹

After struggling in his first major published work to distinguish his psychological views from Freud, Jung eventually emphasized how, within every human being, there is an “instinctive, archaic basis of the mind.” It is this archaic substratum that produces fantasies with universal tendencies and forms. One of these tendencies is the concept of God. As Jung later stated, God and other supernatural beings of omnipotent power are pre-existing psychic energy patterns filled with tremendous numinous power. Man, therefore, does not invent God but projects this internal concept on to figures that reflect and embody this power, the way a child, for example, projects the God image upon parental figures. As Jung explained:

⁹ Jung (1952) 1967: 24-25.

...archetypes...are found in every individual, and their effect is always the strongest...where consciousness is weakest and most restricted, and where fantasy can overrun the facts of the outer world. This condition is undoubtedly present in the child during the first years of its life. It therefore seems to me more probable that the archetypal form of the divine [parental couple] first covers up and assimilates, the image of the real parents until, with increasing consciousness, the real figures of the parents are perceived.¹⁰

As Jung states, the effects of archetypes are strongest when “consciousness is weakest and most restricted,” which is not only in the early stages of development but during other occasions when one’s directed thinking is less of a factor, such as it is when one is daydreaming. For the longest time, daydreaming has been considered idle and “wholly unproductive” thinking. However, now it is considered the brain’s default mode network (DMN), necessary for consolidating memories and for creative imaginings that benefit self-concept and conscious awareness. The brain is actually more active during daydreaming than it is with directed thinking.¹¹ Fantasy thinking, therefore, is hardly evolutionarily inferior to directed thinking; it complements and influences such thinking, having a similar relationship that consciousness has with the unconscious. It is because consciousness is more aligned with waking reality, where logic and rational methods of problem solving are valued, that fantasy, daydreaming, and other unconscious processes are deemed less important by the developing ego.

Jung raises the question of the origins of the archetypal dimension of the psyche, ultimately stating that its origins are unknown. Why the archetypal substratum expresses itself in symbols is also a mystery. These unfathomable dimensions of archetypal reality could relate to Jung’s ideas about the compensatory function of the psyche, that the unconscious compensates for what consciousness lacks in order to maintain a homeostatic balance between these two dimensions of the human psyche. For example, when our lives are threatened, the psyche reacts with images and motifs symbolizing life enduring mortal death. And yet, where did the concept of immortality originate? Is it a wish fulfillment fantasy, something we all crave due to the survival instinct and the fear of death? Or, is immortality a concept inborn within us because it exists in an Otherworld reality?

¹⁰ Jung (1936) 1980: 67.

¹¹ Davanger: n.p.