

The body as a symbol for psychic change

Suffering and transformation

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“ARCHETYPES BEING SO POTENT CAN ONLY BE APPROACHED AND MADE SENSE OF INDIRECTLY THROUGH SYMBOLS”

We are all ready to win, projecting villains and obstacles onto the situations and people who appear to be in our way, but as always, the enemy is within.

Our bodies suffer in space and time: we share this with other people. Our bodily pain has a direct equivalence in our minds; mental suffering has physical manifestations; physical suffering alters and affects our minds. But if we externalise our struggle we can never be responsible for our actions, own our bodies or change our minds.

Physical and mental suffering: mutilation, searing pain and trauma can be given context and even made to work for our best interests; we have a long history of bloody myths and fairy tales and a modern history of updating these in the premier medium of time, film. No matter how great the external impact on the body, so long as we survive it's the mind that suffers and the mind that remains malleable to change and redemption, if we can face the true obstacles those we give force to with our own mental activity.

Jung and the Key to Self-Knowledge

Using Jungian concepts, it is possible to discern how the myths and fairy tales of a culture have developed to mediate powerful emotions, drives and primordial images erupting from individuals. Jung names the psychic forces which are responsible for this 'Archetypes':

Archetypes are typical forms of apprehension, indeed wherever we meet with uniformity and regular recurring ways of apprehension, they are referable as archetypes. (Jung, 1969)

The Archetypes for Jung are present in the 'collective unconscious' defining that space, which is like the psychic equivalent of DNA. Present in the collective unconscious are the ancient hopes, aspirations, fears, desires, drives and notions of the sublime which come to define a culture/epoch through their repeated insistence via individual's psychic workings. In their essentialised form, the Archetypes being so potent can only be approached and made sense of indirectly through symbols, through a translation into meaning via creation myths, stories, art and so on and being the source of psychic energy, they are inexhaustible.

Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language. (Indeed language itself is only an image.) The most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress. And whatever explanation or interpretation does to it, we do to our own souls as well

*with corresponding results for our own well being.
The Archetype - let us never forget this - is a psychic
organ present in us all. (Jung, 1969)*

Dr Jolande Jacobi gives the following explanation of this in her book *The Psychology of CG Jung* (1942) using the example of an 'axial system'. Jacobi explains:

Thus, the archetype as a potential 'axial system' (the archetype per se) is pre-existent and immanent in the psyche. The 'mother liquid' - the experience of humanity - in which the precipitate must form represents the images which crystallise around the axial system and which take on increasing sharpness and richness of content in the womb of the unconscious. (Jolande, 1942)

In this way we might understand Jung's account of Archetype as a kind of river bed carved in the land: "An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries digging a deep channel for itself. (Jung, 1969)

And man, as Heraclitus said, is a river.

We might understand the notion of Archetype further by giving it the status of an axiom in Jungian theory or a kind of absolute truth of the psyche: in this way we

“THEY CYNICALLY MOCKED THE PAINTING WITH A SPOOF OF ITS TITLE”

Bert Gilbert,
*Wrestling with my Inner
Demons V*, 2016

can see how the artists of the romantic and symbolist movement have an affinity with Jung since their work was an attempt to approach such notions, emphasising feelings such as awe and horror, Turner's *Slave ship* (1840) is surely his attempt to approach horror, his original title *Slavers throwing overboard the dead and dying - typhoon coming on* pointing directly to the terrible event in which a number of slaves were cast overboard so their owners could claim the insurance. Turner gives the event a biblical overtone, the raging sea full of piteous hands and the storm threatening to obliterate the whole desperate scene.

The ship was The Zong and the event was known as the 'Zong massacre' which took place on 29 November 1781. The law at the time stood as follows:

The insurer takes upon him the risk of the loss, capture, and death of slaves, or any other unavoidable accident to them: but natural death is always understood to be excepted: by natural death is meant, not only when it happens by disease or sickness, but also when the captive destroys himself through despair, which often happens: but when slaves are killed, or thrown into the sea in order to quell an insurrection on their part, then the insurers must answer. (www.umich.edu, 2015)

None of those responsible for throwing over slaves to claim insurance were charged with murder.

Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer above the sea of fog* (1818) is also a clear example of this affinity, the lone figure set against the epic landscape immediately draws a distinction between the power and wonder of nature compared to the fragility of a human individual, and yet the young man seems to be risen up on his rocky perch, poised to adventure into whatever lies below the mist, an image of the courageous human in a moment of profound apprehension of the sublime.

The romantic and symbolist artists gave primacy to intuition and feeling over what for them had become a too rigid rationalism during the enlightenment. Turner had evoked the wrath of the popular opinion-makers *Punch* magazine, who satirised his title for its dramatic emphasis. They cynically mocked the painting with a spoof of its title,

The humorous magazine Punch, invented a catalogue entry which included 'A Typhoon bursting in a simoon over the Whirlpool of Maelstrom, Norway, with a Ship on fire, an Eclipse, and the Effect of a Lunar Rainbow' In a London pantomime of 1841 there was a scene in which a boy with a





tray of jam tarts falls through a window in which a Turner painting is being displayed; the shop owner dusts down the broken tarts, puts a frame around them, and sells them for a thousand pounds. (Ackroyd, 2006)

This contributed to the painting's ill-reception and was a sign of Turner's falling out of favour.

Jung also encourages scorn for his use of a more (although not entirely) poetic language in his writing. Commenting in The Guardian in 2004, Adam Philips rebukes Jung for "characteristically high flying and far flung titles". He goes on to say that Jung has an "ominous uniqueness", finally stating: "The question we are likely to ask Jung is, why is he so interested in himself? (Philips, 2004)

Philips, like *Punch* before him, cast himself in the 'no nonsense' role. For Jung he conjures the image of self-satisfied eccentric, a self-appointed genius in love with their own pronouncements. But to say that Philips is divisive seems obvious as Jung can answer Philips' glib question himself:

Imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw these projections all and sundry, you get an individual conscious of a pretty thick shadow. Such a man has saddled himself with new problems and conflicts. He has become a serious problem to himself for he is now unable to say that, they do this or that, that they must be fought against. He lives in the 'house of self collection.' Such a man knows that what is wrong in the world is in himself, and if he only learns to deal with his own shadow, then he has done something real for the world. He has succeeded in removing an infinitesimal part at least of the unsolved gigantic problems of our day. (Jung 1970)

Here Jung makes clear the necessity for a working through of one's own problems, this would be a uncompromising understanding of self, requiring a great deal of introspection. We might ask Philips, 'how can a person put their house in order without taking an interest, and eventually responsibility for their own psychic workings?' perhaps such a pronouncement is beyond Philips' no-nonsense approach?

**"TO REACH AS BROAD AN AUDIENCE AS POSSIBLE
BY TAKING RELIGIOUS, MYTHIC OR FOLKLORIC
NOTIONS, INTUITIVELY GRASPED BY PEOPLES"**

Michael Eden,
Linchpin, 2017



**“IT IS A MOMENT OF DEATH AND REBIRTH WHICH
BEGINS THE PROCESS OF INDIVIDUATION”**

Art
Jungian transformation

Philips is not however Jung's most heavyweight critic: the sober rationalist AC Grayling has a similar problem with Jung, although for the most part his emphasis is at least on Jung's interests and style rather than the man himself:

Jung's work, which on a blunt view is vitiated by its eclectic baggage of mysticism, superficial anthropology, credulity and superstition. Freud was at least an empiricist and rationalist... even if he is (scientifically speaking) off with the fairies. (Grayling, 2004)

It's difficult to know since Grayling gives no specific examples of what he is referring to by 'baggage': he simply lists the subjects via which Jung tried to help both himself and those interested in his theory come to a greater understanding of analytical psychology, to reach as broad an audience as possible by taking religious, mythic or folkloric notions, intuitively grasped by peoples, to illuminate difficult concepts otherwise reserved for the elite few, and for Jung, to demonstrate the connection between individuals by showing how these themes found a voice over and over again across the world.

With regard to 'credulity' we might remind Grayling of his own misstep over his exclusive and very expensive University for the Humanities. Speaking after falling out of favour with leftist students, he writes: "My whole record, everything I have written, is turned its head. Now I am a bastard capitalist. It is really upsetting. (Carthy, 2011)

It's difficult to accept that Grayling would not have predicted the anger this move would inspire, after all a little Holmesian deduction can't be beyond his rational mind? Grayling may benefit from giving some attention to his shadow, or at least looking at ways to bring his teaching to a wider audience.

Whether Jung's theory is 'vitiating' by baggage must surely be a matter for individuals to judge. For my part, Jung's insistence on those themes which AC Grayling lists so disparagingly in his article are simply helpful in making his points clear; we can agree or disagree with Jung as suits us. It is also clear that there are motifs which occur so frequently in our myths, fairy tales, literature and cinema

that a coherent theory such as Jung's can help us to give them closer study, bringing greater understanding of their relevance and implications for individuals and societies.

Archetypes were, and still are, living psychic forces that demand to be taken seriously, and they have a strange way of making sure of their effect. Always they were the bringers of protection and salvation, and their violation has as its consequences the 'perils of the soul' known to us from the psychology of primitives. Moreover, they are the infallible causes of the neurotic and even psychotic disorders, behaving exactly like neglected organs or organic functional systems. (Jung, 1969)

One must be clear to understand the distinction between 'personal' and collective unconscious the following quote from Dr Jacobi is useful:

In contrast to the personal unconscious, which is an accumulation of contents that have been repressed during the life of the individual and is continually being refilled with new materials, the collective unconscious consists entirely of elements characteristic of the human species. (Jacobi, 1942)

This makes clear Jung's concept that we, the human species, share a fundamental base in the archetypes.

The challenge of the individual, then, is to confront both these archetypal forces which emanate from the collective unconscious as well as what is present as repressed in the personal unconscious. This process is difficult: its beginning initiates the journey of the individual subject towards a greater knowledge of themselves; we might understand this by employing the ancient Greek aphorism, 'know thyself' so often associated with Plato and Socrates. For Jungians 'know thyself' is expanded into the process of individuation where by the subject begins the painful task of coming to terms with their shortcomings, their repressed material, forbidden desires and so on, taking responsibility for these things to form a more whole, true self, a man or woman in the round, so to speak.

Every advance in culture is, psychologically, an extension of consciousness, a coming to consciousness that can

take place only through discrimination. Therefore an advance always begins with individuation, that is to say with the individual, conscious of his isolation, cutting a new path through hitherto untrodden territory. To do this he must first return to the fundamental facts of his own being, irrespective of all authority and tradition, and allow himself to become conscious of his distinctiveness. If he succeeds in giving collective validity to his widened consciousness, he creates a tension of opposites that provides the stimulation which culture needs for its further progress. (Jung, 1969)

Naturally this is a painful, difficult process, one which stretches the limits of the individual's will and necessarily threatens to shatter previous formations of self. It is therefore paradoxically a process which would be impossible to begin without pre-existing areas of reflection, kept open by the radical implications of fairy tales for example, or if one prefers in art or philosophy and so on, while simultaneously being the process in individuals from which such creativity originates. The odd moebius nature of this concept brings to mind Douglas Hofstadter's notion of a strange loop:

Despite one's sense of departing ever further from one's origin, one winds up, to one's shock, exactly where one had started out. In short, a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop. (Hofstadter, 2007)

Hofstadter's visual example of this is MC Escher's Drawing hands. The 'self-creating' motif of this image is central to the notion of a 'strange loop'; it is meant to help us understand Hofstadter's idea of subjectivity:

In the end, we are self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages that are little miracles of self-reference. (Hofstadter, 2007)

This modal seems to complement Jung's idea of the psyche as a self-regulating adaptive system, although for Jung the Ouroboros would surely serve as a better example of the paradox, not least since the image can be traced back into antiquity its variations occurring in many different societies:

The dragon is probably the oldest pictorial symbol in alchemy of which we have documentary evidence. It appears as the Ouroboros, the tail-eater, in the Codex Marcianus, which dates from the tenth or eleventh century,

together with the legend 'the One, the All'. Time and again the alchemists reiterate that the opus proceeds from the one and leads back to the one, that it is a sort of circle like a dragon biting its own tail. (Jung, 1968)

It is this perplexing notion of the emergence of consciousness and the creativity which ensues from greater levels of self-knowledge that Jung hopes to illuminate by referencing the Ouroboros, the;

...dragon that devours, fertilises, begets, slays, and brings itself to life again. Being hermaphroditic, it is compounded of opposites and is at the same time their uniting symbol. (Jung, 1968)

It is a moment of death and rebirth which begins the process of individuation. This is evoked beautifully throughout the variations of the Cinderella stories, where the despised feminine figure must endure until she can be reborn and take her rightful place in the social order. Cinderella herself was forced to sleep in the hearth

“KEPT OPEN BY THE RADICAL IMPLICATIONS OF FAIRY TALES”

surrounded by smouldering embers, what better place for a phoenix to emerge?

One such story, a German fairy tale *Allerleirauh* (many kinds of fur) has a princess resolve to run away to avoid the incestuous advances of her grief-stricken father.

She put on her mantle of all kinds of fur, and blackened her face and hands with soot. Then she commended herself to God, and went away, and walked the whole night until she reached a great forest. And as she was tired she got into a hollow tree, and fell asleep. (Jones, 2012)

For the early peoples of northern Europe, the forest was a place of the unknown, of the ‘other’, and going into it represents that ‘going down’ which Nietzsche speaks of where people were encouraged to explore the dark recesses of their inner world and return to a shared reality, changed and stronger. The princess must become aware of the ‘other’ in herself in order to survive. The creature she becomes is not simply a mask, a surface disguise; rather it is her innermost self personified, a monster, resourceful and capable of enduring all the dirty work. Jung writes:

A person who by reason of special capacities is entitled to individuate must accept the contempt of society until such a time as he has accomplished his equivalent. (Jung, 1969)

The princess possesses potential, the symbols of her creativity and individuality shut up in a nutshell: a golden ring, a golden spinning wheel, a golden reel, and three dresses of the sun, the moon and stars. The impossibility of these objects being compacted into such a small space gives emphasis to the bursting forth of the individuated self, when the princess shakes of her furs, wipes her face clean and wears the dresses which catch the attention of her suitor. Of course, the image which is brought to mind when the princess becomes her ‘true self’ is a glorious one, but for my part it is *Allerleirauh*, a dark thing, a stain almost, with the voice of a woman, and a single perfect finger which resonates in my mind’s eye.

It is after all *Allerleirauh* who represents transformation itself, suffering and struggle, these themes which seem to evoke the most vivid images in the imagination. Many young women stand for this struggle in fairy tales; who can fail to be moved by the painful mutilation of the miller’s daughter from *The Handless Maiden* as she is continually pushed, tempted to act, first the selfish actions of her father, whose narcissism is such that he sees only one course of action: “Help me in my affliction and forgive the injury I am going to do to you.” (Jones, 2012)

A corrupt authority in the extreme who chops off his daughter’s hands to save his soul while simultaneously looking to be pitied, not even in her mind is she free to resent her father such is suffocating nature of his power over her: “Do what you will with me. I am your child.”

The girl’s stumps seem to actualise her acute passivity and the brutal narcissistic wound at play in the background due to her father, being too much to bare she leaves him, with all his treasures.

Upon meeting and marrying a king she is adorned befitting royalty and yet still she seems frozen, the silver hands he gives her to wear, ‘which could not sow or weave’, a mere decoration, a symbol perhaps of her new status, bringing her up to standard in a palace of beautiful things. There is a pivotal moment in the story which begins her journey to a greater balance of opposites, a feature of individuation. It is the passive feminine which has to die before she can individuate, and in proper dreamlike fashion with the character of a non-sequitur, the old queen slays a doe deer in place of her unfortunate daughter in law and keeps its tongue instead of hers as requested, to show as evidence of the terrible execution.

With the doe’s death a new story begins, and like *Allerleirauh* the miller’s daughter finds herself in the forest struggling to survive. In the Russian variation of the story she finds autonomy in the woods; after the silver hands have fallen away she plunges her stumps into a river to save her baby boy who has fallen in, amongst the mud

“HIS OVERLY PROUD FATHER WHO WANTS A CHILD TO STIFLE THE GOSSIPS AND IS GRANTED A GROVEL HOG INSTEAD”

and water her hands reappear, the baby rescued. The little boy surely a composite of burgeoning masculine qualities like the ones his mother gains and so badly needed to balance her character.

If ever there was a creature who “must accept the contempt of society until... he has accomplished his equivalent”, as Jung says, it is the grovel hog from *Hans My Hedgehog*. Hans is the result of a cavalier wish on the part of his overly proud father who wants a child to stifle the gossips and is granted a grovel hog instead.

His wife had a son, who was part hedgehog, the upper half hedgehog, the lower half human. She was aghast when she saw him, and said, ‘Look what you’ve done with your wishing.’ (Jones, 2012)

We might see Hans as a personification of the couple’s unconscious and neglected problems represented by their childless marriage. The neglected son is left behind the stove, as if to be put to the back of one’s mind, while his parents fantasise how much easier it would be if he were dead. His form awkward and horrifying with sharp quills, a symbol of a curt and hardened character which has helped him survive his melancholy childhood.

The bagpipes his father give him allow Hans to channel his suffering when he goes into the forest: there his time is fruitful, his herd grows and he helps two wayward kings find their way home. Much like *The Handless Maide*, the turning point of the story is announced by a slaughter, in this instance of Hans’s pigs - all he has left materially from his parents. In a gesture of paying back he takes them to his father then leaves to claim what he is owed from his royal acquaintances.

He is rejected many times by the agents of society, his parents, the false princess who is made bloody by his quills and her father who sends his soldiers to attack him, his eventual ‘becoming’ is no less painful his true princess and their union, which surely represents the

incorporation of the feminine, has to burn his hedgehog skin and leave him charred and black. This transformation from grovel hog to man is both violent and painful we are left with Hans in a bed, ‘human from top to toe’. Now ready for healing, he is rubbed with balms and ointments and married again to his true princess. As Dr Jacobi says:

The complementary or compensatory relation between opposite functions is a structural law of the psyche.” (Jacobi, 1942)

If autonomy is a whole robust self, and these are the goals of the painful transformations which occur in individuation, why must this entail so much pain? He continues

The first stage leads to the experience of the shadow, symbolising our ‘other side’, our ‘dark brother’ who is an invisible but inseparable part of our psychic totality. For the living form needs deep shadow if it is to appear plastic. Without shadow it remains a two-dimensional phantom. (Jacobi, 1942)

The personal shadow represents all our repressed material, our forbidden desires and difficult truths embodied in a figure the same sex as ourselves; it comes into our dreams to haunt us and gives body to our prejudices when we project onto others. Its assimilation is painful as it requires us to abandon delusional self-perspective and act responsibly; we can in this mode no longer escape into victimhood, although the reward is a more creative, whole self.

The archetypal shadow is much more ominous, it is untameable, akin to a kind of ‘death drive’ with the character of Thanatos it can only be coped with, so to speak, since it is that which primordial man has feared and ever will it is the other as a changeable god, for Nietzsche, the void which looks back at us.

Mutilation and the failure to act

Bert Gilbert,
*Shadow of My Former
Self*, 2016



The failure to incorporate the shadow is a failing that prevents any further development, and so a most brutal physical act is the marker which comes to symbolise this shortcoming; the horror is a prompt. Our eyes and hands are powerful tools and are symbolic of our ability to be active in the world; they are connected to sexuality, independence and creativity.

Touch, intimacy, survival, skill, giving and receiving comfort, eroticism and violence.

We have seen how the idea of mutilation in myth and folklore is linked to a feeling of being stifled, trapped and frozen in an unhappy state, for example with the handless maiden her bloodied stumps suggest her mental pain, her inability to escape her selfish overpowering father. He treats her as a possession and the injury is present in her mind before it's made real with the cutting off of her actual hands.

In the ancient world too, self-mutilation had powerful cathartic qualities relating to self-knowledge perhaps most famously with Oedipus, as the blind seer tells him in *Oedipus Rex*: "So, you mock my blindness? Let me tell you this. You [Oedipus] with your precious eyes, you're blind to the corruption of your life."

Oedipus's mutilation is self-inflicted: he gouges out his own eyes because he failed to have insight into his destiny, and his eyeless face stands for his new informed perspective. The contemporary artist Bert Gilbert explores personal transformation in her evocative shadow images (*Shadows of my former self* and *Wrestling with my inner demons*). Many of her works utilise her own body in performances which see her donning her creations or struggling with them. Gilbert's titles are suggestive but do betray an interest in Jung (the shadow images and *Animus* most directly). While mutilation literally transforms an individual, it stands for the negative manifestation of the failure to act which creative reflection counters. As her website states:

Gilbert's ritualised and obsessive methods are in turn energetic and meditative. What they make signifies a rite of passage, from one state to another, operating as alchemical relics of this transformation, in all their material sensuality. (artist statement, 2018)

Exploring the 'dark feminine' ambiguous images such as *Furka*, which manage to conflate religious, Jungian and

folkloric references in Gilbert's practice, directly recall the struggle with the personal shadow, the artistic process of creative risk, reflection and action is surely an excellent alternative to living out hubris or self-mutilation and takes the cathartic release of watching tragedy further in the active mode of art making.

Shadow in Film

A surprisingly poetic representation of shadow can be found in *The Hitcher* (1986) the debut film of director Mark Harmon, previously a landscape photographer. His long picturesque shots of the epic western landscape create that eerie land of the unconscious which in fairy tales is the forest.

The story follows Jim Halsey, a young man who picks up a hitcher on a road journey through the mid-west to help him stay awake. The distinction between them is clear: Halsey is young, naïve, full of clichéd pleasantries; an awkward youth on a journey to California, the land of his childhood dreams. John Ryder by comparison is an older man, rough and jaded, the choice of the European Rutger Hauer to play Ryder adding to his mythical alien persona in the cowboys and sheriffs landscape.

Immediately we are thrust into their struggle, as after an uncomfortable exchange Ryder torments the boy holding a knife on him. He asks Halsey to repeat: "I want to die." Halsey is tentative, Ryder acts; this is the theme of their ongoing encounters. All the time Halsey appeals for help; from his brother over the phone, from the paternalistic sheriffs who follow the trail of destruction and from Nash, a young woman who does lend him her strength. All the time Ryder prompts Halsey to act, electing never to hurt him despite many opportunities, he repeats,

“THE PATERNALISTIC SHERIFFS WHO FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION”

“You work it out... I want you stop me.” Ryder even gives Halsey weapons to help him survive the clumsy police who are hunting him wrongly, and comes to his aid when it looks like he will be killed by law enforcers.

Ryder is a horrifying yet oddly compelling figure he is archetypal, primal. Like Loki of Norse myth he is mischievous; he mocks the boy and the police for having a domestic, weak morality, he pushes a coin into Halsey’s mouth and closes his eyes: “You are damned,” he seems to say. Give that to Charon. He leaves the boy to ponder the meaning of the gesture.

Sadly, Halsey grasps this too late and in the most controversial moment of the film he fails to act, and Nash, who is tethered between two lorries, is ripped apart before the impotent police and traumatised Halsey. Ryder is disappointed in Halsey, hanging his head while pushing down the accelerator.

For those of us who are willing to think symbolically, however, Nash’s death is not gratuitous: it serves to announce the turning point in Halsey’s individuation where the inferior function is incorporated, for Halsey, like the handless maiden, it is active masculine qualities which are needed to bring balance to the psyche. Nash is like the doe deer, her death is the beginning of Halsey’s self-reliance, his taking up of the shadow’s challenge. “I want you to stop me,” and that he does; he ignores the police and their appeals to ‘polis’, he seeks out Ryder in search of something more eternal, more primal, and in a suitably arduous struggle Halsey kills Ryder, then looks on him sympathetically as the camera pulls away.

The end of the beginning of individuation is the point at which one incorporates/acknowledges the shadow components of the personal unconscious. Individuals capable of this have prepared the ground for their life’s work, just as ‘self-knowledge’ is a readily understood idea, while its fulfilment is an especial feat of will. The struggle to break up the false self and come to terms with our ‘dark brother’ represents a process which is ongoing, and it’s this reason why figures such as Allerleirauh, the handless maiden, Hans and Halsey appeal to me in their absolute extremity. When they are monstrous, mutilated and desperate they seem to be more human.

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