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# Bridging Transpersonal Ecosophical Concerns with the Hero's Journey and Superheroes Through Comicbook Lore: Implications for Personal and Cultural Transformation


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# Bridging Transpersonal Ecosophical Concerns with the Hero's Journey and Superheroes Through Comicbook<sup>1</sup> Lore: Implications for Personal and Cultural Transformation

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This paper explores how mythical figures and comicbook superheroes can 1) inspire personal growth, social and planetary change, and 2) explicate aspects of the deep ecology movement and transpersonal ecosophy that invite further academic inquiry while at the same time 3) speak to concerns that ignite the interests of popular culture and personal mythology. Likewise the ecopsychological significance of modern fictional characters in comicbooks, graphic novels, and films will be examined. It is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides a theoretical examination of how definitions of the terms *myth* and *hero* and *hero's journey* are framed, and their implications for understanding personal and transpersonal growth. Part 2 provides portraits of individual characters from comicbook lore, their evaluation, and their significance toward raising collective archetypal awareness of the psyche's relationship with Earth—an ecopsychological framework. In addition the paper offers practical examples of how this understanding of comicbook lore can be used for cultivating a new quality of life on a planetary scale.

**Keywords:** *mythology, ecopsychology, cultural transformation, comicbook lore, transpersonal ecosophy, deep ecology movement*

Jack Kirby<sup>2</sup> believed comicbooks are a contemporary mythology shaping cultural perspective (Kirkman & Karpf, 2017a). This is encouraging because Kirby's view supports one of the primary motivations for writing this paper. Yet this understanding is only the initial act of becoming aware of a deeper insight. Additionally, the varieties of psychological transmutations of the hero's journey in comicbook lore are examined as a means to understand the transpersonal perspective, a means to re-invent humankind, and as a means to address the eco-crisis. This paper's purpose is two-fold. One is an understanding of the social impact of comicbook lore on contemporary culture, which is a natural fit to the widespread meaning associated with the word ritual. Two, this paper seeks a deeper understanding of the psychological transmutations associated with awakening the transpersonal perspective especially as it relates to re-inventing humankind, and as a means toward solving the eco-crisis. Thus while understanding the word ritual as a reference to an intentional practice of prescribed activities associated with religious rites and ceremonial

procedures fits a cultural influence, it does not convey a need to understand the process involved in personal growth and transformation.

This research begins with the affirmation that there is a hero (or heroine)<sup>3</sup> in everyone. Yet, it also begins with a critique of the very concept of the hero.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally the hero is associated with *the quest* (such as Odysseus from Greek mythology), or with *conquest and colonialism* (such as Christopher Columbus), and combinations of these hero archetypes continue to be prevalent in modern literature and films. Indeed, conquest and colonialism heroes represent the worst of human arrogance. Ralph Metzner (1999) referred to this as "the *human (or humanist) superiority complex*" (p. 84). Metzner added that: 1. If this analysis is applied to the collective ideology of humanist arrogance, it would look at unconscious fears and feelings of inadequacy toward the natural world underlying the attitude of conquest and domination; and 2. This speculation comes close to Paul Shepard's ideas on *the loss of paleolithic relatedness and developmental initiation rites* (p. 85, italics added).

Rejecting the human superiority complex includes a critique of “mainstream heroes” or “establishment heroes” and a focus is on what we call the *anti-hero*. In seeking to actualize the anti-hero explored here, the heroic quest becomes the existential confrontation with the ever present moment and the raging shadow within humankind that is threatening to tear each person apart and unleash havoc. It is a difficult balancing act to transform this chaos into a process of self-transformation and self-transcendence, with a need for techniques to ground this awareness. Ecstasy and temperance are the anti-hero’s journey. If the archetypal shadow is not confronted and transformed, then people become all-consuming devouring monsters or become irrelevant contemplative demigods lost in ecstatic reverie. Thus, this paper is about understanding the existential process of awakening transformative awareness through personal mythology, of which the anti-hero archetype belongs, and its intimate relation to *transpersonal ecosophy*, or the wisdom of one’s relationship with a place. This includes anomalous geographic locations capable of evoking alternate states of consciousness, as well as other experientially oriented methods that evoke transpersonal states (Metzner, 2017; Schroll, 2016). Raising the question: does the hero need to be redefined? If so, what then does it mean to be a hero in the 21st century?

Related to this question is the fact that comicbook superheroes portrayed in movies have continued to become increasingly life-like in their cinematic presentation through improved computer generated imagery. Although this new technology is a contributing factor toward making, for example, the *Avengers* (Feige, 2012) film one of the highest grossing films thus far, the stories of these superheroes are still providing the core attraction of its counter-cultural resonance. Why is there such a counter-cultural and cross-cultural fascination with superhero stories? Could it be because hopelessness, angst, and *anomie*<sup>5</sup> are a planet-wide crisis as the 21st century continues to unfold? This is a question that deserves its own in-depth inquiry in future research projects. The current paper has a more preliminary focus into the existential and archetypal significance of comicbook heroes and their demonstrations of transpersonal *ecosophical* themes.

Before delving into this inquiry, it is necessary to briefly define how the authors use the term *transpersonal ecosophy*. At its basic level of meaning, “ecosophy comes from . . . ‘ecos’ meaning place or household, and ‘sophia’

meaning wisdom. . . . hence ecosophy is wisdom of place. Ecosophy as ecological wisdom is manifest in actions which are ecologically harmonious” (Drengson, 1983, p. 2). Home, the spirit of place, and one’s personal relationship to this place, can be a natural location or part of the built environment—thus urban, rural, wilderness, jungle, desert, ocean, and the like, all exist in various ecosophies. Transpersonal ecosophy’s call for a new way of knowing about one’s home/place and way of being embodies what Morris Berman (1981) referred to as reawakening humankind’s *participating consciousness*. Likewise it represents a waking up from *geomantic amnesia* (Devereux, Steel, & Kubrin, 1989), a renewal of humankind’s sense of communion with *our earthbody* (Berry, 1988; Fox, 1993a, 1993b; Spretnak, 1991).<sup>6</sup>

Likewise transpersonal ecosophy includes the practice of *shamanic counseling* (Gray, 1995). It also refers to a more intimate and sensual understanding of one’s relationship to home/place that may serve as one means of *healing humankind’s dissociation from nature* (Metzner, 1999a; see also Schroll & Walker, 2011). Theodore Roszak (1992, 1993, 1994) has suggested that it is a process of *learning how to hear once again the voice of the earth*. Thus the essence of humankind’s “right relationship” with our earthbody is the need to recognize and remember humankind’s co-evolutionary symbiotic orientation with nature. In other words, the transpersonal comes into play because an ecosophical orientation *also* includes a transformative, ecstatic, or transpersonal encounter within people and their relationship and/or co-evolution with planet Earth and all its creatures.<sup>7</sup> This includes, to the extent that it is possible, an awareness of their co-evolution with the universe, spacetime, matter and consciousness.

This *Lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy) has been the ultimate question of existentialists throughout the years: What does it mean to be? What does it mean to maintain a vital symbiosis with existence while upholding a personal meaning or mythos? The concerns discussed so far bring the reader to the specific point of this paper, which has been divided into two parts. Part 1 has five sections that provide a theoretical examination of the following: 1) what is meant by myth, and more precisely, how the concept of myth is used here;<sup>8</sup> How is it really useful to the quality of humankind’s daily lives to examine mythology?; 2) The resurgence of myth in comicbook lore, concerns in archetypal psychology, mainly the hero’s journey, and its specific connection to

Jewish cultural themes within comicbooks; 3) The hero's journey within the framework of Joseph Campbell's and Victor Turner's work, its expression in comicbooks, and its actualization as a form of social critique; 4) What does a hero represent in the 21st century?; and finally 5) The liminal transformation of the hero.

Part 2 has four sections offering examples drawn from comicbook stories as evidence: 1) The hero's character development in literature and comicbooks (including the social-psychological complexities involved in being a hero); 2) The saga of *Swamp Thing* (Wein & Wrightson, 1991) as the hero's journey in light of the dangers of technology, the saving grace of alchemical transformation, and the emergence of transpersonal ecosophy; 3) Parts of the *Swamp Thing* saga are explored within the conceptual orientation of the deep ecology movement and ecofeminism; and finally 4) A hopeful vision of the future in the *new berserker*, and the continuing explorations in transpersonal ecosophical consciousness.

### Part 1

#### What Is Meant Here by the Use of the Word Myth

In common use, when someone refers to a concept as a myth, it is considered to be something untrue, a falsehood, an idle tale, a legend, a fable, or an idea that is out of date (Watts, 1973). In its broadest meaning, myth can be understood as a conceptualization of a vision of reality where "primal minds" from antiquity (Tarnas, 2007) provided a culture with the explanatory power to make sense of existential and metaphysical questions (Watts, 1973). This animistic worldview contextualized the spirits and gods that were believed to be in everything with explanatory signs and symbols (Tarnas, 2007). The symbolism helped "human beings code and organize their perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and actions" (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988a, p. 2). Similarly, existential psychologist Rollo May considered the term *myth* as a "nonmaterial way of presenting dramatically a given truth, that then strikes the human being on all levels at once. Unconscious and conscious, group and individual, past and present" (May & Skinner, 1981). Additionally,

Myths are stories reworked over generations to a finely-honed state where they serve as "a powerful language for the communication of traditional wisdom" (Campbell, 1949, p. 43). . . . Myths awaken and maintain in the individual a sense of awe and

gratitude in relation to the spiritual dimension of the universe. They provide a bridge between one's local consciousness and transcendent realms and eternal forms. (Lukoff & Lukoff, 2011, p. 212)

In a world where people are confronted daily with events that make them ask if existence is meaningless, myth provides a vision of a world with meaning and purpose.<sup>9</sup>

From an existential and depth psychological perspective, the process of organization through metaphorical language offers the human species a way to make meaning, which is needed for thriving (e.g., Corbett, 1996; Edinger, 1992; Hillman, 1992; Jung, 1965; May, 1991). This sense of meaning and purpose points to the transpersonal perspective where one lives beyond the usual concerns of the self. Such a perspective can assist someone through the most atrocious events, as Victor Frankl (1946/1959) attested in his account of living in a concentration camp during World War II. May (1991) contended that "as long as our world and society remain . . . empty of myths which express beliefs and moral goals, there will be depression . . . and suicide" (p. 21). Summing up the comprehensive importance of myth in *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) have argued that:

Myths provide ways of comprehending experience; they give order to our lives. Like metaphors, myths are necessary for making sense of what goes on around us. All cultures have myths, and people cannot function without mythology anymore than they can function without metaphor. And just as we often take the metaphors of our own culture as truths, so we often take the myths of our own culture as truths. (pp. 185-186)

Without this guiding vision of myth, humans fail to thrive. Feinstein and Krippner (1988b) agreed: "We believe that a well-articulated, carefully examined personal mythology is one of the most effective devices available for countering the disorienting grip of a world in mythic turmoil" (p. 23).

The metaphoric language of archetypal imagery within the greater cosmos offers a personal logotherapy that assists people in securing their values, higher self, and their *will to power* (Nietzsche, 1968/1901). This will to power is the essential life force within everyone. It helps people maintain their true nature by perpetually improving their relationship with the Earth by living

in accordance with it. In doing so, meaning becomes synonymous with instinctual values. Yet, harking back to the need to avoid the human superiority complex, Metzner reminded his readers that:

“Superiority striving,” a Nietzschean “will to power,” is a central theme in the developmental theory of Freud’s contemporary Alfred Adler. Adler believed that conscious feelings of superiority are always a compensation for an unconscious inferiority complex and that such inferiority feelings tend to arise normally in childhood, as the result of a prolonged dependency and immaturity. Jung and other psychodynamic psychologists accept the notion of conscious attitudes compensating for unconscious ones, even if they do not accept the centrality of the superiority-inferiority complex (Metzner, 1999, p. 85).

According to Frankl (1946/1959), a person’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his or her life and not a:

“secondary rationalization” of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own *will* to meaning. . . . Man . . . is able to live and even die for the sake of his ideals and values! (p. 121)

A personal mythology keeps consciousness “attuned to the unending demands made upon it by a rapidly changing world by the ongoing psychological dilemmas life presents” and is a “venerable source of psychological guidance in the complex choices faced by human beings across cultures and throughout time” (Feinstein & Krippner, 1983, p. 1). Feinstein and Krippner (1983) further contended that the scientific model most appropriate for understanding personal mythology stems from the concept of cognitive–affective structures, or the “‘internalized schemata’ which serve the functions of explaining, sacralizing, and guiding the individual in a similar way that cultural myths serve those functions for a society” (Krippner, 1984).

In spite of this expanded definition of the word myth, modern society continues to live in an age of science and technology, which has its roots in the practical application of knowledge, thereby begging the question: How is it really useful to the quality of humanity’s daily lives to examine mythology? How are myths necessary for making sense of what goes on

around them? This is a similar question to the one that philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1970) explored as the central thesis of his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. However, instead of using the word *myth*, Kuhn referred to humankind’s preoccupation with attempting to understand how the universe works and what a human’s place is in it as a *paradigm*. The word paradigm comes from the Greek *paradigma*, meaning pattern. Kuhn realized that the narrative constructions people use to make sense of what goes on around them forms a pattern of meaning. He defined his concept of paradigm as a “super theory”: a generalized view of reality that encompasses the totality of existing data. Paradigms provide the philosophical shape and form of the scientific model of reality; consequently paradigms serve as the brick and mortar that hold a particular worldview together. A paradigm assists humankind in the creation of their cultural constructs, because it is the guiding light that aids, directs, and interprets the nature of reality for those who adhere to its investigative parameters and its methods of inquiry. According to this view, the present authors argue that the terms paradigm and myth share the same function.

Thus myths and paradigms can be thought of as the lens or perceptual filter through which one sees and interprets the universe. Yet (as those who wear glasses will attest) there are times when the lenses people use to see the world no longer helps them to clearly focus their vision, reminding them that it is time to see the eye doctor and get a new prescription. Similarly, there are times when the perceptual filters humankind uses to create their narrative constructions of reality no longer enable them to resolve the experience of their daily lives into a coherent vision or worldview. The word *weltanschauung* (the root *welt-* meaning “world” and the root *-anschauung* meaning “outlook, perception, conception, intuition, and contemplation”) sums up the idea of a comprehensive conception or image of civilization, the universe, and the relationship to it; a *weltansicht*, where *-welt* means “world” and *-ansicht* means “approval or opinion”, is a particular attitude toward the interpretation of reality or a worldview (Feyerabend, 1980). A *weltanschauung* and *weltansicht* which includes mythology

may lead us to discover more about our spiritual heritage, and perhaps realize some of the defects in the spiritual development of the modern world. The

study of mythology need no longer be looked on as an escape from reality into the fantasies of primitive peoples, but as a search for the deeper understanding of the human mind. (Davidson, 1990, p. 22)

Therefore, the study of mythology is both an existential and transpersonal connective process of orientation with a human's place in the cosmos.

### **Archetypal Psychology and the Hero's Journey**

With the transition from an animistic eco-centric to an industrial androcentric worldview, there has been a slow decline in the connection to the mythopoetic process of meaning-making (Berman, 1981). In fact, in Nietzsche's (1954a/1895) *Antichrist*, he argued that progress was a false idea that did not lead to improvement of society or to the *übermensch* (highest man). Albeit advancements in science and technology improving working and living conditions in some regards, these advancements did not *transcend and include* the animistic explanations with scientific progress in order to fully integrate growth (Wilber, 1996). Borrowing the Wilberian terminology, in a hierarchical or *holarchical* model of growth each stage moves up in rank and includes the other (Wilber, 1996).<sup>10</sup> Additionally, "according to Arthur Koestler, reality is composed of hierarchical and emergent levels. Each level has its own structural uniformities that cannot be reduced to the structures of lower levels" (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 85). Thus, there seems to be a need to move beyond old paradigms while still including them in a recursive fashion. "Advancement" without integration leads to a decline in the archetypal presence of the *Anima Mundi*, the soul of the world, and a disharmony with the Earth (Hillman, 2007).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, technological (or more precisely *technocratic*) advancement seems to contribute to a sickness of the world.

Roszak's (1969) book *The Making of a Counter Culture* resonated with a vibrant youth movement that sought to address anomie and its relationship to technocracy.

*Technocracy* here refers to the systematic application of technology to all levels of human activity, especially government and economic policies that have growth as their central aim. ... A major aim becomes the control of life by means of management techniques to govern the application of the hardware and process integral to technology. Carried to its logical end *it seeks to turn*

*the world into a controlled and manufactured artifact.* Nature is only a resource to be processed (Drengson, 2011, pp. 14-15).

This observation harkens back to Maslow's (1968) diagnosis of psyche and culture that humankind's loss of connection with the transpersonal within the scientific-technocratic age produces a dysfunctional society. In order to shift the paradigm of an ailing world, there is a "cry for myth" (May, 1991)—a need to return to the symbolic language found in the natural world (i.e., metaphors within the Earth's rhythms). This can be done through the creation of archetypal imagery, "root[ed] in metaphors of fantasy" (Hillman, 1976, p. 99) such as comicbook lore.

Interestingly, Jewish artists and authors have been credited as the primary innovators of mythic superheroes (e.g., Superman, Batman, and Captain America; see Gonzalez, 2011; Kaplan, 2008; Weinstein, 2006). Beginning approximately around World War II, these artists seemingly attempted to reintegrate their traumatized psyche with the heroes and anti-heroes who would metaphorically save the *anima mundi* (Hillman, 2007). The transformative figures were personified gods (Hillman, 1975) who could use their powerful yet pathological states to heal chaos within themselves and the world. "Each generation of comic book creators explored the ambiguities of assimilation, the pain of discrimination, and the particularly Jewish theme of the misunderstood outcast, the rootless wanderer" (Weinstein, 2006, p. 18). These wounded healers rejuvenated the collective and individual spirits by offering tools to repair the suffering of humanity. The mythic heroes and heroines bore the pain of humanity and offered hope through the metaphoric stories in which they lived, as the comicbook authors and artists attempted to save their worlds by crossing the liminal space between art and reality.

It is suggested that the artists and storytellers underwent a kind of personal therapy through the creation of healing narratives and images that metaphorically represented their painful experiences and gave them an opportunity to reshape their trials into heroic journeys. Rather than assenting defeat or developing psychopathology, they uplifted themselves and lived through their heroes by choosing to remain engaged with the images of pain in the imaginal world. The arts fortified with storytelling afford humanity

an opportunity to face the images of difficult events, participate in social justice, or simply to experience the events differently in order to heal (Herman, 2005).

The healing propensity of the images of the psyche, the metaphorical language, was first explored by Carl Jung and later expounded on by other theorists including James Hillman. The images "...present themselves each as a guiding spirit (*spiritus rector*) with ethical positions, instinctual reactions, modes of thought and speech, and claims upon feeling" (Hillman, 1975, p. 35). Comicbook superheroes were created in order to provide a moral (or ethical) compass for humanity after all morality seemed to wane.

George Howard asserted that "psychopathology becomes 'stories gone mad' and psychotherapy entails 'exercises in story repair'" (as cited in Sorenson, 2004, p. 51). The dispirited survivors of collective trauma needed to write their own myth in order to overcome their *destructive impulses* (Klein, 1964) to fight their motherland and all inhabitants that seemingly challenged all natural inclinations. They needed to repair their broken relationship within the mythos of their universe and their psyche. In doing so, they returned order to the world.

Yet it can be explained through Joseph Campbell's (1949) *hero's journey*, where someone hears a call to action in order to resolve internal conflicts and old wounds (e.g., getting bullied as kids) or to unconsciously understand one's instinctual nature, values, and/or to find a sense of belonging (e.g., Zionism) through a mythical journey through the heavens and the underworld. Hence, long after battle, they continuously share their wistful stories of combat and brotherhood that sound reminiscent of comicbook superheroes—or anti-heroes.<sup>12</sup>

This is reminiscent of Ralph Metzner's (2008) insight that, "enemies don't actually exist—they are subjectively determined projected images. We label or categorize another being as 'enemy' to serve as a target for our projected hatred and hostility" (p. ii). Metzner elaborated on this insight, suggesting:

If we really are the descendants of genetic hybrid earthlings bred as slaves, and the dichotomies of *master/slave, predator/prey and perpetrator/victim* were built into the human genome as unconscious predispositions, then the evolutionary and spiritual challenge is to free our minds from the thrall

of this religious[, cultural, and/or paradigmatic] conditioning. (p. 59)

In sum, with regard to the majority of heroes of Greek mythology, or even historical ones like Columbus, this kind of hero that hears the call to adventure and follows it are not connected with transpersonal ecosophical consciousness. Nor are most heroes, including those that this paper identifies as anti-heroes. The one primary exception within comicbook lore that fits hearing the call to adventure and following it—connecting back with transpersonal ecosophical consciousness—is the character known as Swamp Thing. Thus as readers will learn in Part 2, Swamp Thing's "hearing the call" was not a conscious decision, but due to an accident and his resulting transformation from human into a human/plant creature. In addition readers will also learn in Part 2 that those comicbook superheroes we have identified as representative of the new berserker embody the perspective of transpersonal ecosophical consciousness

### **The Hero's Journey and Liminal Space**

Arnold van Gennep (1909/1961) pioneered the official study of transformative journeys crossing through liminal boundaries or thresholds of time and space that mark transitions in a participant's life—which have been largely associated with Earth-based cultures. van Gennep subdivided these rites of passages into three categories: 1) "preliminal rites (rites of separation)"; 2) "liminal rites (transition rites)"; and 3) "postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)" (p. 11). His term, *rites of passage*, has been universally adopted as the language to describe these time-marking events that have been practiced by indigenous and modern cultures across planet Earth; according to Charles Whitehead (2011), Gennep "concluded that all rituals are *rites of passage*, because they accompany or accomplish social transitions" (p. 187).

Campbell (1949) expounded upon van Gennep's work as he explored *rites of passage* through the lens of the journeys of spiritual figures, deities, animals, and other supreme beings. Campbell divided his *hero's journey* into three parts, *the call to depart, initiation, and the return*. Campbell's call to depart corresponds to what Schroll here refers to as *rituals to create alternate and transpersonal states* that represent departures from ordinary or consensus consciousness (See Figure 1). These rituals serve as a means of awakening to higher aspects of our self, or "a wide, expansive, or field-like

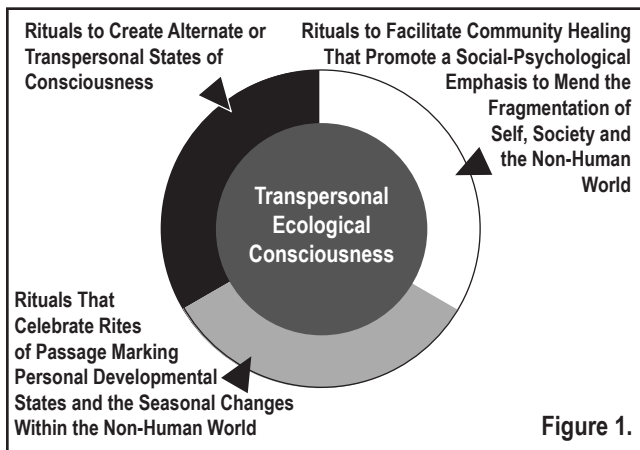


Figure 1.

sense of self” (Fox, 1990, p. 215). It is these rituals that provide humankind with direct access to the source of religion or primordial tradition.<sup>13</sup>

Campbell’s “initiation” involves Schroll’s reference to *rituals to facilitate community healing that promote a social-psychological emphasis to mend the fragmentation of self, society, and the nonhuman world* (see Figure 1). Initiation is an aspect of enculturation that imprints the unconscious infrastructure holding together the views of science and culture. These rituals include what has been referred to as: 1) *the Council of All Beings* (Seed, Macy, Flemming & Naess, 1988); 2) *remembering our animal ancestors* (Metzner & Pinkson, 1994); 3) *self-disclosure* (Jourard, 1971); 4) *the process of dialogue* (Bohm, 1993). This process of mending human fragmentation also includes what is popularly referred to as 5) *a drumming circle*, a place where people use a variety of musical instruments for self-expression. In the Middle Ages drumming was a heretical act as it was believed its practice called up demons;<sup>14</sup> in the beginning years of the 21st century drumming can now be employed and enjoyed safely in a more tolerant era. Activities associated with performing these rituals serve to create a psychological space where people feel safe to be vulnerable; sometimes facilitating a melding experience of consciousness and a sense of collective wholeness. This space also allows people to grieve the loss of natural systems and get in touch with the shadow side of their self. Likewise this space offers a forum for storytelling (that could be developed into theater, dance, and music), thereby serving to keep the cosmic myths alive and grounded within the daily life of the person through dialogue and community development. Storytelling, mythmaking and eventually cosmology are all methods of expressing transpersonal states of consciousness and

represent the fabric that weaves the primordial origins of wisdom traditions together. More research using, for example, Kremer’s (2003) ethnoautobiographical method is needed to establish the effectiveness of these techniques.

Campbell’s “return” is a process that anchors these scientific and cultural presuppositions. It involves what Schroll refers to as *rituals that celebrate rites of passage marking personal developmental stages and the seasonal changes within the nonhuman world* (see Figure 1). “Separation” can also be compared to the onset of a “spiritual emergency” (and can have many characteristics that resemble psychosis), producing a direct encounter with an alternate state of consciousness, peak-experience, or transpersonal experience (“initiation”), followed by “spiritual emergence” (“return”) and/or a plateau-experience (“personal growth”). These personal developmental states and stations can be drawn from a variety of sources and cultures. They include, but are not limited to, Eurocentric research (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Piaget, 1955) and ethnographic research on indigenous tribal customs (e.g., Fields, 1992). Recognizing the seasonal changes of the nonhuman world that require rituals to track and celebrate nature’s organic processes of cyclic change are also needed to be reclaimed. Here again, more research using Kremer’s method of ethnoautobiography and related kinds of research is needed to explore these wisdom traditions.

All three of these aspects of personal growth promote and help to facilitate *transpersonal ecosophical consciousness* (see Figure 1):

[A] context for community alliances [that] facilitates enculturation; and is thereby a key component in both fostering and maintaining transpersonal ecological consciousness [and/or transpersonal ecosophical consciousness]. The theoretical development of [transpersonal ecosophical consciousness] . . . postulates: 1) An increased identification of our personality as fundamentally connected and co-evolving with the living creatures of the earth, the cosmos, and all forms of culture. 2) An increased awareness that our actions or decisions affect [sic, effect] the present and future growth, health, and well-being of all existence. And 3) The consequences of postulates one and two will result in an increase of our actions of environmental and humanistic ethics motivated by our metamotivation or being-needs.



On the other hand, the question that remains to be answered is what kinds of experiences are able to shift our awareness so profoundly? This question refers to the relevance of entheogenic [or alternate states of consciousness] experiences. (Schroll, 2007, p. 56)<sup>15</sup>

This discussion comes full circle back to Campbell's (1949) legendary title *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in which "the hero [as] someone who hears the call to adventure and follows it" (Rebillot, 1989, p. 215)—often with life changing trials and tribulations along the way. To Campbell (1949), this is the choice to challenge or play with the gods and goddesses. Anthropologists continued to adopt the use of liminality in order to describe the phenomenology of these initiatory experiences and life changing moments (Herman, 2005). Victor Turner, for instance, expounded upon van Gennep's work through his description of liminoid spaces or "inner experiences" (Herman, 2005). Turner (1969/2008) explained:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (p. 95).

These symbolic moments of reflection have also been recognized by artists and psychologists (Herman, 2005; Turner, 1969/2008) as they traverse the stage, serve as scribes, or paint the page. The characters within the imagery cross the liminal space between fact and fiction, creator and created.

### **Who Is a Hero?**

In retrospect of Craig Chalquist's (2015) article, *Why I Seldom Teach the Hero's Journey Anymore—and What I Teach Instead*, it is important to clarify what *hero* and the *hero's journey* means here.<sup>16</sup> While Chalquist's argument that the hero is often a male character full of flaws and complexes is valid, the use of the word hero in this paper is a gender neutral term that does not simply imply *man* similar to the contemporary gender neutral use of the word *actor*. The importance of gender-balance and the feminist movement has highly influenced the authors. In fact, Schroll's first encounter with feminism was in 1965 at the height of the reformation of pivotal

civil rights movements in the United States (Schroll, 2012a, see also Batten & Schroll, 2012). Years later, a series of papers by Jürgen Kremer throughout the 1990s influenced the course description of a class Schroll taught at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (1998-2000) titled, "Ecopsychology and Indigenous Science." Revising and reprinting this course description, Schroll and Schwartz (2005) stated:

Ecopsychology and Indigenous Science can be understood as an emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century psychological awareness, and growing cultural response, to the "mark and wound" of Euro-American science's "imperialistic grasp for the control of a reality experienced as" an external other comprised of isolated parts (Kremer, 1997, p. 47). Other is the splitting from our indigenous origins that continues to be colonized and manipulated in a rationalistic dissociated worldview (Kremer, 1994, 1996). A worldview dominated by masculine heroes whose quest for knowledge has excluded heroines from this quest, thereby eliminating feminine capacities for knowing (Kremer, 1992a). (p. 18)

Driving this message home, Kremer (1992b) deepened this inquiry by asking:

how can we learn to think and be in the world that breaches this dissociation—without abandoning the achievements of 'scientific thinking'? . . . How can we determine what is real and true in our world without subscribing to a rationalistic imperialism? . . . What is the direction in which the masculinized hero needs to go in order to integrate the feminine, the wild, and the awareness of participation in world creation? (p. 4).

In clarifying the meaning by the "hero's journey," the orientation of this paper is influenced by Campbell's work, and the significance of tragic or establishment male heroes will be discussed further. Furthermore, the orientation of this research is also shaped by Turner's work on "liminality," and also to some extent by alchemy. The question, "What does it mean to be a hero in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?" brings this inquiry closer to an examination of *picaresque* or anti-heroes, some of who are not even human.

### **The Liminality of Superheroes**

The superheroes enter the liminal space in order to undergo "rites of passage," both collectively and individually, as they seek to conquer their dualist

relationship with the deities of the cosmos and within themselves—thereby serving as imaginal representatives of humanity’s greater struggles through the allegories of resistance, surrender, defeat, and triumph. For instance, the *Avengers* (Feige, 2012) traveled from their homes and other remote locations, some reluctantly, in order to save the planet from the super-villainous god Loki. Eventually, the *Avengers* teamed-up with the god Thor (Loki’s brother through adoption) in order to challenge Loki. As the Superheroes overcame their personal weaknesses such as inflated egos and anger, they unified their psyches with one another for a higher purpose. They needed to save their world by returning the powerful *Tesseract cube* into the rightful hands of Odin/Woton (leader of Assgard), a god “known as the truth-seeking wanderer, the vision-quester or questioner, who wandered through many worlds seeking knowledge and wisdom” (Metzner, 1994, p. 9; see also Schroll, 2017a). The cube had the potential to benefit or destroy the universe depending on who used its power, much as with scientific progress. It could solve their energy crisis or be used to create weapons. Eventually through their combined efforts to retrieve the *Tesseract*, the superheroes were able to close a hole in the sky (an inter-dimensional portal) in order to prohibit alien opponents from entering Earth and destroying humankind. Incidentally, this hole (or inter-dimensional portal) seemed like a mythological representation of the hole in the Earth’s ozone. Thus, one could argue that the aliens were mere archetypal representatives of the human-caused destruction of Earth.

As the *Avengers* sought to save planet Earth, they strengthened their relationships with one another and learned to overcome their psychopathology—or at least learned to channel their weaknesses into strengths. They essentially descended into their personal underworlds and emerged through chaos and destruction more content and confident. In other words, they “reap[ed] the fruit of death, ... reenter[ed] the womb of things, the matrix of unknowing, and to [sic; were] born anew, severed from old distinctions and limitations, [and] induce[d], by sheer force of will, [into undergoing] self-transformation” (Foster & Little, 1992, p. 4). Thus, through their sacred journey to save the world, they integrated the conflicting parts of their psyche and became whole. Much like the men that *Zarathustra* met in the forest in Nietzsche’s (1954b/1883) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it was clearly understood that higher man and perhaps the ultimate

*superman* (übermensch) were not one individual—but a collective awareness of the cosmos and consciousness, or what is now referred to as “transpersonal” (Maslow, 1968). Conversely then, the higher man, the self-actualized and self-transcendent person (Maslow, 1968) belongs to the collective and must be integrated in order to reach the highest potential. In this way, the *Avengers* were able to unify in order to rescue the planet by superseding their individual egos and working together.

It is not that “the underworld journey ... promise[s] you a rose garden” nor does it “fix what was wrong with the life you had been living” (Plotkin, 2003, p. 330) but it does show a new way of living, what depth psychologist Bill Plotkin (2003) referred to as the “soul path.” Through the adventures of the archetypes of success and failure, the superheroes demonstrated how humankind can prevail and overcome adversity. In the words of Campbell (1949), the *Avengers* “won the blessing of the goddess or the god and [were] explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society” (p. 197) and the Earth.

Likewise there is a very practical application of this perspective offered here that relates to the cinematic example of the *Tesseract* device in the *Avengers* film. In his reflections on why it is important to be careful in choosing the kinds of new technologies humans develop, Everett Mendelson (1994), asserted:

The technology itself will tend to have a momentum. [By this I mean that the general orientation of the technologist] is to go ahead and develop it and worry about the consequences of its development after we have it. This [kind of orientation is] probably a mistake. Why? Because human societies are often selfish; human societies often avoid the projection and the consequences of what they do; so they live from day-to-day; [totally immersed without reflection in] their existential situation: with technology that’s lousy. Because [it’s a practice] that can get you into terrible troubles. [For example, there is] the marvelous image that Tom Lehrer gave us of the technologist. Remember [the song] “Werner von Braun”: once the rockets go up I don’t care where they come down, that’s not my department said Werner von Braun in that famous song. Well to some extent this has been the record of the technologist, the engineer, and then the society comes running along afterwards figuring out how to pick up the pieces.

The need to develop a greater sense of ethical responsibility in the application of scientific discoveries reflects the widespread absence of a connectedness within both individuals and every culture influenced by modernity to a life-affirming sense of the transpersonal; the (*übermensch*) or superman within everyone.

Another example of the need for a transformation of consciousness as an antidote to the technocratic paradigm and the importance of awakening transpersonal ecosophy (and/or the planetary person ecosophies) was first published in the Marvel comicbook *Fantastic Four* #48–50 (Lee & Kirby, 1966), and retold in the film *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (Arad, Eichinger, Winter, & Story, 2007). This story provides a personified example of Roszak's (1969) discussion of technocracy as an "accelerating industrialism" (p. 19), that is neither left or right, conservative or liberal, but an all-consuming "grand cultural imperative which is beyond question, beyond discussion" (p. 9). The Marvel Comics character, Galactus, personifies technocracy as the consumer of worlds:

To survive, Galactus spends all of his time consuming the life-energies of planets throughout the universe without any thought of the consequences to whatever planet he is feeding on. Galactus's herald, the Silver Surfer, in a moment of self-transcending transpersonal awareness, realizes that the Earth and its creatures have intrinsic value and says "no" to the authority of Galactus, opposing the consumption of these life energies. This is also an example of myths providing a new worldview toward a transpersonal/ecological perspective. Meanwhile, applying this analogy to humankind's current eco-crisis, the future of planet Earth and all its creatures hang in the balance between hope and extinction, praying that the miracle of a transformation of consciousness comes in time to save us from total destruction. (Schroll, 2011a, p. 55)

### Conclusion to Part I

*Myths operate like paradigms.* This is explored in Part 1, contrary to the assumption that myths represent flights of imagination from real world problems. This view of myths assists the objective and subjective ways of knowing, and the ability to shape social, psychological, and cosmological ways of being. Nevertheless, as important as this is, the solution to the planet-wide social and eco-crises could very well depend on humankind's ability to birth a new myth or person/planetary

paradigm. Birthing and envisioning this new myth will require a planet-wide hero's journey, which is why the cross-cultural fascination with superhero films is so important to humankind's future. Yet, the consequences of modern society's actions cannot be known with certainty because the future has yet to arrive. A decision must then be faced: Do people continue to believe in their current Technocratic Paradigm to solve the social and eco-crises? Or should they try something different, which is the proposal put forth in this paper.

If humankind chooses to try something different, then assisting their ability to envision this person/planetary paradigm (perhaps calling it *transpersonal ecosophical consciousness*) are a variety of methods, techniques, rituals and ceremonies that was explored in Part 1. With this knowledge, in Part 2 the clinical and practical importance of the hero's journey will be considered, aided by a deeper inquiry into the hero's character development in literature and comicbooks (including reflections on the social-psychological complexities involved in being a hero), and a discussion of some specific examples.

## Part 2

### Sketches of the Hero's Character Development in Literature and Comicbooks

Applying this view of mythology as a means of assessing the hero's character development in Western literature, one of the protagonist's predominant roles has been the tragic hero, represented by such figures as "Achilles, Oedipus, Antigone, Hamlet, [and/or] King Lear" (Meeker, 1997, p. 29). A very general depiction of the personality orientation of the tragic hero is conceived by witnessing these actions via cinema, dramatic plays, or through the literary representation of the good soldier who follows orders—and marches to the beat of technology's drum. The character orientation of the tragic hero tends to serve as the dominant culture's symbol of order, authority, and social coherence, whose heroic deeds represent a method of imposing this order onto the lives of ordinary citizens from the top down. Twentieth-century pop-culture and Hollywood have created their share of tragic heroes (or a more accurate description seems to be *establishment heroes*), such as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Captain America; these heroes are billionaires (like Batman) or a princess (like Wonder Woman) or symbols of nationalistic loyalty (like Superman and Captain America). In every case, they are

(in their original characterizations) symbols of nearly intangible goals (great wealth, high social status, and/or always representing the dominant status quo moral code without question). Nevertheless, it should be noted that since the initial origins of these hero archetypes, their continued character development has evolved through the liminal process of the hero's journey (brought to our awareness through the insights of new writers), and have incorporated aspects of *the rebel*.

The second predominant character or protagonist is the rebel, the politically conscious social deviant, whose actions represent a rejection of the dominant culture's symbols of social conformity. The act of rebellion, of standing up and saying "no" to a command or established cultural norm, requires in its action a transpersonal state of awareness (humankind's connectedness and birthright to something greater than themselves with which they belong). Simultaneously saying "no" is an act of liberation, and it is in this moment of freedom from oppression that fully embodies transpersonality. Albert Camus (1951/1971) agreed, asserting: "The rebel limits himself as a matter of principle, to refusing to be humiliated without asking that others should be" (p. 5). Furthermore this protagonist emerges from the ranks of ordinary citizens. Meeker (1997) associated this protagonist with *the comic hero*, which should not be confused and/or conflated with comicbook heroes. By *comic hero* Meeker was referring to the *anti-hero*, or more precisely the *picaro* or *picaresque hero*. Meeker explained the picaro has no classical literary pedigree, instead:

Scholars differ over its literary origins, its definition, and the kind of evidence that might be needed to interpret it. There is general agreement that the term derives from the Spanish *picaro*, "rogue," and that this genre comprises tales about socially deprived people. The first clear example of the form is the anonymous little book *Lazarillo de Tormes*, which appeared in Spain in 1554. *Lazarillo* is the story of a young man's adventures as he struggles to survive in a hostile world that seems bent upon destroying him. To endure, he must adapt himself somehow to the given conditions of his environment, however many rules of decorum and ethics must be ignored in the process. The picaresque, at its origins, is a mode of survival against odds in a world that is hostile or indifferent. (p. 51)

The picaresque or anti-hero often find themselves standing up for the abolition of rigid social structures,

and whose actions are intrinsically motivated to actualize a way of being that represents a transpersonal orientation of the self. Comic/anti-heroes become leaders not because they are seeking to perform heroic acts, but because they get caught up in situations that are beyond their control. In order to survive these situations, anti-heroes (in the process) end up serving as a means of liberation for themselves, as well as others caught up in the same situation. This anti-hero appears in the clinical setting as well, especially in sandtray therapy and within artistic expression. A client of Polansky's, for instance, identified with the rebel archetype who creates order out of chaos on principle (e.g., the magician, the court jester, and the supervillainous Joker from DC Comics' *Batman*) and teaches by fool and folly while denying his hero impulse (i.e., the unconscious desire to save the world in a post-apocalyptic era). However as Polansky (2017) noted, the two faces of the anti-hero converge as the self-destructive client deconstructs his or her internal and external world and returns from the unconscious underworld renewed as a hero with the potential to repair the world and experience love. Within Western literature, Meeker (1997) associated the anti-hero with *Lysistrata*, "first performed in Athens in the year 411 BC[E]" (Aristophanes, 1964). The anti-hero can also be found within comicbook heroes such as Spider-Man, the Incredible Hulk, Thor, Wolverine, Rogue, Swamp Thing, Dr. Strange, and Captain America. To offer one specific example out of all these, Captain America rejects the attribute of the good soldier who always follows orders (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Feigen & Russo, 2014; *Captain America: Civil War*, Feige, Russo, & Russo, 2016) as he questions the hero registration act, and in the act of saying "no" becomes a rebel.

Likewise this continual metamorphosis of establishment heroes into picaresque or anti-heroes is demonstrated by Wonder Woman's rebellion against her uniform in issue #179 of *Wonder Woman* (O'Neil, 1968) as she wore street clothes until issue #203, which was the Women's Liberation issue (Delany, 1972). This all took place during the rise of feminism in the late 1960s, and it was during this time that Wonder Woman explored different costumes until in issue #204 (Kanigher, 1973) when she returned to the original costume. More recently historians have pointed out that Wonder Woman's so-called rebellion against her uniform in issues #179-#203 was an attempt by new male writers to diminish her power; she reclaimed her powers and her original costume

in #204 as part of her feminist awakening (Kirkman, & Karpf, 2017b). Wonder Woman's feminist awakening was a positive influence. She was a DC comicbook hero, and most DC comicbook heroes at this time tended to be establishment role models (i.e., Superman and Batman). This however is also changing. In *The Dark Knight* (Thomas, Roven, & Nolan, 2008), inspired by Frank Miller's 1986 revisioned story of Batman DC Comics series, it is the film's conclusion that transforms the story. Batman takes the blame for crimes he did not commit, choosing to be viewed as the villain as a means of preserving the greater good. To some extent this does transition Batman into an anti-hero, but is more accurately representative of the fallen hero and thus a variation on the idea of the tragic hero. In *The Dark Knight Rises* (Thomas, Roven, & Nolan, 2012), Batman's fortune is taken from him, which further humanizes him as representing an ordinary member of society; nevertheless upon defeating the villain and saving his city, he fakes his death at the end of the film which allows him to retire his Batman persona. Moreover, the film concludes by reinstating Batman as an establishment hero with a memorialized statue. Still there is a deeper message expressed twice in this film, that "Batman" represents a unifying symbol of the hero inside all of us, and thereby reflects a transpersonal orientation. Then again, one of Polansky's clients attests that the Joker's primary modus operandi is to help Batman recognize his fallible nature—perhaps implying that there is a criminal in everyone (or as Jung suggested, everyone has a shadow-side to their personality).

The latest cinematic incarnation of Superman in the film *Man of Steel* (Roven, Nolan, Thomas, Snyder, & Snyder, 2013) offered the most realistic (least cartoonish) movie version of this story. In deference to the 70 plus years of pop cultural awareness of Superman, this film summarized his extra-terrestrial origin, and his adopted human-parents concern to keep his identity secret because of humankind's tendency to fear the unknown; a tendency confirmed when the knowledge of Superman's existence is learned, and he is first distrusted as an alien like the other Kryptonians who are intent on terraforming (and thereby destroying as we know it) planet Earth. Ultimately people come to view Superman as a hero, yet in saving Earth he is also responsible for various aspects of widespread destruction. Despite this the U.S. military (and government) more or less decides to accept him as an ally, and thus his character continues to be representative of the establishment hero.

The film *Batman Vs Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Roven, Snyder, & Snyder, 2016, which includes Wonder Woman), clarifies the previously stated views of these heroes. Superman reestablishes his role as an establishment hero, giving his life to save the Earth from an otherworldly threat created in part by Lex Luthor. Batman initially represents the hero turned villain or fallen hero by his own shadow, yet in the end resumes the role of establishment hero by deciding to create *the Justice League*. Wonder Woman too initially represents an anti-hero archetype, yet by the end of the film joins Batman in his efforts to find other metahumans to create the Justice League.

On the other hand, Marvel comicbook heroes (such as those first created by Stan Lee and many others with whom he collaborated) gave insights into the existential angst and personality flaws of ordinary people, portraying their lives as superheroes through circumstances beyond their control where they were called to be heroic. Here, Schroll offers the hypothesis that it was the influence of Stan Lee's Marvel comicbook characters, combined with the 1960s counter-cultural revolution, which spilled over into the DC comicbook universe. Subsequently DC heroes began to exhibit more human flaws.<sup>17</sup> One specific example of DC heroes undergoing self-examination based on the previous discussion is Wonder Woman's rebellion against her costume. Wonder Woman also rebelled against the need to have a "man" telling her what to do—exit her boyfriend Steve Trevor—and enter an old Chinese martial arts guru as her sidekick, whose name was "I-Ching." *I-Ching* (as many know) refers to the Chinese *Book of Changes* and, hence, this introduced a distinct Eastern psychological influence into Wonder Woman's world in November 1968, issue #179, which predated the first issue of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in 1969. Some aspects of this character orientation of Wonder Woman continue to be represented in *Batman Vs Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Roven et al., 2016).

### **The Saga of Swamp Thing**

Roger Woolger (1986) reminded his readers that Jung viewed the hero as a means of representing ego consciousness; speaking metaphorically, the hero archetype functions as a lens to view ego consciousness. Equally insightful was Jung's understanding of the hero's journey of self-actualization as a metaphorical representation of personality development and the ego's striving to "be in control of everything" (p. 3). This

striving for control and self-awareness is a necessary aspect of personality development from childhood to becoming an adult, and yet in achieving this, the person experiences alienation from the source of our life-giving origins. “This alienation or separation from the [E]arth, particularly from the feminine, sets up a tension that can only be overcome by a return, a decline, and ultimately a death” (p. 3). This understanding of the hero’s journey as one of both ascent and decline will be subsequently applied to the reflections on the saga of Swamp Thing—whose literary reality and mental landscape can be entered with this introduction:

The darkness cries—a long mournful wail that writhes through the snarled cypress branches like a breath of Hades’ wind, skipping over the placid surface of the stagnant mire below. This is Bayou country: A swampy, desolate marshland forsaken by civilized man—and now inhabited by far less demanding creatures. Screaming herons stretch their sleek wings toward the angry heavens. Mottled bullfrogs ring their croaking night-song in eager anticipation. Great reptiles loll unceasingly beneath the cloud-cloaked moon. And this night, this rainy wind-swept night, impatient humanity intrudes itself into the primitive region once more. (Wein & Wrightson, 1972, p. 1)

Swamp Thing was a protagonist in DC Comics created by writer Len Wein and artist Berri Wrightson. Swamp Thing first appeared in the horror comicbook *House of Secrets* #92 in July 1971, and with the success of this short story it was revised and transformed into its own series in October–November, 1972. The story begins by introducing us to Dr. Alex Holland, a happily married man, deeply in love with his brilliant partner and fellow scientist, Dr. Linda Holland. They were working on a bio-restorative formula in a top-secret government laboratory deep in the Louisiana swamp that would be able to both rapidly and miraculously regenerate cell structure.<sup>18</sup> This background information becomes complete with the additional plot twist that someone attempts to steal this formula and this conflict results in an explosion. Linda Holland escapes the blast, but her husband Alex suffers the following ordeal:

Imagine pain—so intense it defies description—as countless unclassified chemicals seep deep into throbbing, flame enveloped flesh. Imagine what such terrible suffering can do to the fragile mind . . . as it

drives the stricken body forward clawing desperately at the cool night air in hopes of some small comfort. . . . Imagine relief as the smoldering man-shape reaches the soothing waters of the ever-present bog . . . then disappears soundlessly beneath its bubbling surface (p. 13). . . . A muck encrusted shambling mockery of life. . . . A twisted caricature of humanity that can only be called swamp thing. (Wein & Wrightson, 1972, p. 15)

Reflecting on the saga of Swamp Thing, the first half of the hero’s journey can be observed prior to the explosion—an increasing ascent to self-actualization and ultimately control in the form of a bio-restorative formula. The explosion represents the decline and death of the ego, whereas the miraculous transformation into the Swamp Thing is a very literal alchemical transmutation of elements and a metaphor of the liminal state of transpersonal metamorphosis and return. In brief, Swamp Thing’s superpower is to become one with Gaia, possessing the regenerative power of plants—a 20<sup>th</sup> century merging of science and nature that produces a rebirth of the Green Man of Pagan lore. This concept will be explored in more depth as a means of inquiring further into the philosophical orientation represented by the transpersonal ecosophical vision. Moreover this is both the heroic and positive vision of the future that humankind so desperately needs as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds, which DC Comics could remake into a successful film franchise.

### **The Deep Ecology Movement and Ecofeminism**

The arts . . . have the ability to evoke and express the ‘ecological imagination, to lead us experientially into a wider horizon of the human-earth praxis of perception and artistic empathetic expression. (Reinders, 2008, p. 10)

*Swamp Thing* does essentially this as it facilitates an understanding of the intrinsic relationship that humans maintain with the living environment, anthropomorphized through art. As Dr. Alex Holland transmogrifies from an ordinary man into an avatar-like creature, he unifies with Gaia and embodies the deep ecology movement concept of interdependence with the Earth. He is an immortal man with the Achilles heel of sensitivity to environmental pollutants. Meanwhile, his wife, Dr. Linda Holland, represents the ecofeminist notion of living with the Earth as a separate, but caring being. Although she loves Dr. Holland, she can only

love him from afar and cannot physically enter or be the swamp. However, this does not diminish her ability to have compassion for *Swamp Thing*.

The deep ecology movement emphasizes an intrinsically linked relationship to the natural world as it challenges the concept of the dualistic ontology of the environment and humanity. However, ecofeminists refute the deep ecology movement's over-identification with the Earth, believing that the Earth must be nurtured instead (Langer, 2003). However, "Brian Swimme asserted 'If you do not experience the universe directly, it doesn't matter at all what you believe about it'" (Reinders, 2008, pp. 10-11). *Swamp Thing* shows that ecofeminism and the deep ecology movement have the capacity to work together in order to nurture the environment by focusing on personal choices, remembering that each individual choice impacts the greater whole. Moreover, as Freya Matthews pointed out, there is a "dark side" to nature where "decay, death, and destruction are aspects of Nature's 'earthiness' that have been repressed in the traditional dualistic ontology favoring light, reason, and culture" (as cited in Langer, 2003, p. 105). In doing so, one can love the Earth as oneself and as someone separate that must be cared for.

### **The New Berserker:**

#### **Explorations in Transpersonal Ecosophical Consciousness**

So far, various aspects of mythology and the hero's journey have been explored throughout this paper that offer a greater understanding of their transpersonal insights and ecosophical wisdom for personal growth. The question that remains to be explored is how these insights can be embodied as a personal mythology and applied in daily lives within modern culture. The initial clue to answering this question emerged in Metzner's (1994) book *The Well of Remembrance: Rediscovering the Earth Wisdom Myths of Northern Europe*, in which he illuminated the relationship between Norse mythology and the present eco-crises with his chapter "Wodan's Warriors and the Heroic Mystique" (pp. 73-84). Metzner drew a connection between the *berserker* (Wodan's warriors), who "wore bear-pelts [and sometimes wolf-pelts] in order to acquire the animal's power and ferocity" (p. 75), with what he, Marie Louise von-Franz (1985), and Norbert Mayer (1994a, 1994b) have suggested represent their transformed contemporary counterparts as "the new berserker."<sup>19</sup> "These new berserkers are shaman-warriors, divinely inspired by their love of nature to combat the greed-motivated exploiters, polluters, and

destroyers of ecosystems" (Metzner, 1994, pp. 82-83). It is this perspective that Metzner saw embodied in the "eco-warrior" mentality prevalent in the members of such groups as Greenpeace and Earth First! There is considerable merit in this point of view that these transformed berserkers represent guardians of the Earth, as Mayer suggested.

The following criticism should be raised, or more precisely an observation offered to clarify a particular point regarding how difficult it is to channel berserker power in a positive way. In Metzner's (1994) discussion of the original berserkers, he pointed out that:

One of the problems associated with the battle fury of berserkers . . . was that it was sometimes difficult to direct the warrior's attack toward only the desired target. There are reports of berserkers killing everyone in sight, friend or foe. (pp. 81-82)

It was in thinking about the potential danger of the wonderfully inspired vision of eco-warriors or Earth guardians that reminded Schroll of an incident he observed at *Common Ground*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC) conference on October 3-5, 1991, at the University of Colorado in Boulder. This incident took place during an open microphone session, where the nearly 2,500 participants had gathered to share their stories about the various aspects of environmental devastation that had touched their lives. Prior to the beginning of this session, during the gathering of this huge crowd, there was a group of about 40 people (several wearing t-shirts bearing the name Earth First!) dancing around and chanting to the beat of several drums. There they are, the eco-warriors getting ready to do battle, Schroll thought to himself.

Not long thereafter, the conference organizers appeared on stage welcoming everyone to this session. Following their opening remarks, the crowd received instructions that they would have five minutes per person to express their views, thereby allowing as many people as possible to participate. With these simple rules of common courtesy established, people were invited to approach the stage. This opportunity for self-expression proceeded smoothly until a woman (who had been dancing to the beating drums, accompanied by a male companion) stepped up to the microphone. Her voice trembled with emotion as she spoke about the midnight raids and eco-sabotage she had been involved in against loggers in Oregon, encouraging the people in the

audience to join her and other eco-warriors in the fight to save old growth forests. This enthusiasm (bordering on the maniacal) was still building momentum as her five minutes of speaking time expired. Continuing to rave on, she was eventually asked politely to yield the microphone to the next person waiting to speak. Yet she refused, exclaiming that she still had important things to talk about. Finally two large males serving as security personnel appeared on either side of her and her silent male companion. Realizing that they had come to remove her from the microphone, this woman began exclaiming: "You see the people running this conference aren't our friends, they're the enemy; they're fascists trying to suppress the truth." This outburst left the security personnel with little choice; they moved in and physically escorted her (accompanied without resistance by her silent friend) from the stage. As they led her away you could hear her shouting: "No compromise in the defense of Mother Earth!"<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile Schroll too was waiting in line to speak, allowing him to witness one of the women whom had helped to organize the conference standing backstage alone crying. Having been introduced to her the day before, Schroll went to her. Through a steady stream of tears she expressed how much this incident with the angry woman had upset her. This incident helped to inspire Schroll's own open microphone comments about how our private ideological struggles (the deep ecology movement vs. social ecology vs. ecofeminism, etc.) often become larger issues than efforts toward trying to solve the bigger picture of the eco-crisis (Drengson, Devall, & Schroll, 2011; Fox, 1989; Kheel, 2008; Schroll & Wright, 2011; Batten & Schroll, 2012; Schroll, 2012a; Walker, 2012).

Mayer (1994b) raised an interesting and related point about the way one might come to think about *the new berserkers* as eco-warriors. Mayer wrote that in March 1989 he participated in a past-life regression, which provided the following insight:

I am sitting at a thing [or tribal council] among a circle of twelve people. . . . A statue is on a pedestal to my right. To my surprise, it is a statue of Freya, the goddess of Earth, love, and beauty and the wife of Odin. I am surprised, for up till now, Wotan has been the protector of the berserkers. (p. 142)

The meaning of his vision suggested that "because men have played a major role in the ecological destruction

of the Earth, to invoke its healing we must turn to the wisdom of the goddess Freya" (Mayer, 1994a, n.p.; cf. Mayer, 1994b).<sup>21</sup> Mayer's additional point should be included (if Mayer ever considers revising his chapter), because it helps to clarify the shift in attitudes (paradigm shift or transformation of consciousness) that the vision of the new berserker is seeking to represent. The new berserker is not someone who charges headlong into battle killing friend or foe (like the logos-oriented male dominated tragic heroes of Greek antiquity) that were re-introduced into the way of thinking in the comicbook heroes in the USA during the 1940s and early 1950s. The new berserker instead represents the conscious awakening of the anti-hero that came to life most vividly in the 1960s in such comicbook heroes as the Incredible Hulk and Spider-Man, whose powers were the result of their exposure to nuclear radiation. (In the recent film adaptations of Hulk and Spider-Man their powers are the result of genetic manipulation). Both the Hulk and Spider-Man began their lives as scientists with egos striving for self-actualization, whereas their accidental transformations (i.e., liminal experience, ego death, and return) awakened these heroes to the shadow side of technology, and to the social responsibility (and subsequent social ridicule) that comes with having abilities beyond those of ordinary citizens.

The Incredible Hulk is truly indicative of the battle fury of the berserker as it is rage that triggers his transformation from Bruce Banner to the rampaging and often destructive Hulk; it is in this heightened berserker state of awareness where he gains his strength. The Hulk is also one of the first Avengers (accurately depicted in the May 4, 2012 film; Feige, 2012), and he later becomes part of another group *The Defenders* (of the Earth), led by Dr. Strange. Frequently in his comicbook series the Hulk is shown in nature scenes, and it is in the tranquility of nature where he returns to his human self. It is also shown in *The Incredible Hulk* #140 (written by science fiction author Harlan Ellison, 1971) when the Hulk is shrunken to a sub-atomic world—where he is both the Hulk and has the rational mind of Bruce Banner—that he is less powerful.

Even more representative of the new berserker as an Earth guardian is the comicbook hero Swamp Thing, whose powers resulted from experiments with a bio-restorative formula, plus the co-mingling with the swamp waters and vegetation of the Louisiana Bayou. Swamp Thing's character re-embodies humanity's



identification with nature symbolized by the pagan image of the Green Man or Leafy Man, whose image “is found tucked away secretly in corners, under lintels and pedestals” of Gothic churches throughout Europe (Metzner, 1999, p. 138). Metzner did not think the analogy of including Swamp Thing as a new berserker was accurate, saying that “Berserker’s wore bear and wolf pelts, where Swamp Thing was this slimy creature” (personal communication, April 18, 2013). However, the analogy made here is that Swamp Thing represents an Earth guardian who is the total embodiment of what Dave Foreman (1990; founder of Earth-First!) argued is needed: “we need people who . . . are willing to take things into their own hands and essentially *become the forest in defense of itself*” (p. 60, italics added). Moreover, von Franz (1985) added this point of clarification:

For the old Germans to wear a bearskin means to be a berserker—a berserk. . . . To go berserk was also called “hamfong,” which means changing one’s skin or shape and also shadow or ally (Schutzgeist). . . . [and,] as a bear whose pelt contains the golden lustre [which]. . . alludes to the “new sun” in alchemy, a new illumination. (p. 19)

Thus, it is because of Swamp Thing’s shape shifting alchemical transformation, and bio-restorative alliance with nature, that this superhero is considered to be representative of the new berserker.

Also representative of the new berserker is Dr. Strange (Schroll, 2017b), who in his early career became a highly skilled neurosurgeon whose rapid success led him to become arrogant, callous, and materialistic, interested only in charging high fees and obtaining more wealth. In this brief summary one sees all the essential elements of the hero’s self-actualizing journey. Then Dr. Strange is involved in a car accident, damaging the nerves in his hands and abruptly ending his medical career—the consequences of which are representative of liminal experience and ego death. Eventually Dr. Strange goes to Asia in search of a cure and a series of events unfold that are representative of self-transcendence and transpersonal awakening, resulting in his becoming a practitioner of all things mystical and magical. He returns to the USA, moving to New York’s Greenwich Village, and begins a life as a mystical consultant—representative of his return and re-birth. Further extraordinary circumstances lead Dr. Strange to becoming the leader of a group called *The Defenders*, who are guardians of both humankind and the Earth.

Along similar lines of berserker alchemical transformation, illumination, or *hamfong* (changing our shape), is a quote by Michael Grossinger that has really stuck with us:

Gradually, over the aeons, lead turns to copper, copper to iron, iron to tin, tin to mercury, mercury to silver, and finally silver to gold. The Earth is a loom in which the planets weave their vibrations. The vibrations may be thought of as musical notes that become concretized in the loom; transmutation is thus a changing of the planetary note. (as cited in Devereux, Steel, & Kubrin, 1989, p. 24)

Fascinating and so in touch with the vision of transpersonal ecosophy, and in keeping with the discussion of comicbook lore, Grossinger’s message was known in the 1960s in the stories of alchemical transformation called *Metal Men*, whose fictional creator was Doc Magnus (think Doc Magma, or the molten rock, crystals, and gases deep within the Earth). The “Metal Men” were always most powerful when they combined themselves. Plus there was this added twist: Tina, who was made of platinum, was in love with Doc Magnus—such wondrous metaphors in these stories.

In sum, these examples given by Mayer, the hero’s journey described in the characters of the Incredible Hulk, Swamp Thing, Dr. Strange and to a lesser extent Spider-Man and Metal Men have provided a way of understanding how these insights can be embodied within a personal mythology. Yet the question remains as to how this archetypal orientation of the new berserker can be directly applied to humankind’s daily lives. One suggested practical application would be the development of a “conservation corps” as an alternative to military combat service.<sup>22</sup> This conservation corps could be employed to clear out dead trees and brush to help prevent the annual forest fires in various parts of the USA, assist in re-planting marshlands that act as a natural barrier to hurricanes, and assist in the prevention of soil erosion, thereby helping to prevent mudslides. Further examples could also be envisioned and modeled on the exemplary life of John Muir, including exposing this corps to the specific wilderness experiences that transformed Muir’s worldview as a training technique to prepare such a corps for service (Fox, 1981; Turner, 1985).

### **Conclusion to Part 2**

In Part 1, the assertion that *myths operate like paradigms* was revisited; and yet their entertainment value

is not devalued. It is because these stories of the hero's journey resonate so deeply with the authors that their archetypal significance is influential to a way of being: comicbook lore represents a contemporary example of this archetypal significance.

Part 2 offered several examples of how comicbook lore provides humankind with lessons carrying transpersonal and ecosophical implications: embodying shared visions and principles from the deep ecology movement (wherein all are interconnected) to lessons on how to work together in order to care for planet Earth. Of course it remains to be demonstrated whether ecopsychology is morphing (or needs to morph) into transpersonal ecosophy. Thus, in sum, ecological concerns, social change, feminist orientations, transpersonal visions, and concerns about the dark-side of technology can all be found within the characterization of superheroes, and is understood by the collective cross-cultural audience who has little or no exposure to academic ecopsychology discussions. These contemporary anti-heroes, termed the new berserkers, are exemplars of transpersonal ecosophy.

This paper presents many ideas for future research. For example, it would be interesting to consider transpersonal ecosophy through 1) humankind's interest in developing technology which will allow humans to leave the planet, rather than developing technology to restore the planet's sustainable ecosystems; and 2) recent developments in the transhumanist movement, both of which intersect with the science fiction storylines and characterizations of superheroes in past, present, and future comicbooks (Crouch, personal communication, December 9, 2017). It is hoped that further research on the facets of transpersonal ecosophical awareness will encourage the awakening of such consciousness on a planetary scale.

### Notes

1. Stan Lee (who created many of the Marvel superheroes) told AMC's *Comic Book Men* blog on May 3, 2014, "the accepted spelling of *comic book* as two words is wrong. People always write it as if it's two separate words. But to me, if it's two separate words, then it means a funny book — a comic book. If you write it as one word, which is the way I do it, then it's a generic term meaning a *comicbook!*" (Lee, 2014, italics added).
2. The late Jack Kirby was an artist and creator of several DC Comics superheroes and co-creator with Stan

Lee of several Marvel Comics superheroes.

3. Hero is used here as a gender-neutral term, which will be explained further in the paper.
4. Thank you to Melanie Andrei who pointed out this critique.
5. The Urban Dictionary defines angst as "a transcendent emotion in that it combines the unbearable anguish of life with the hopes of overcoming this seemingly impossible situation. Without the important element of hope, then the emotion is anxiety, not angst. Angst denotes the constant struggle one has with the burdens of life that weighs on the dispossessed and not knowing when the salvation will appear" (accessed September 18, 2012). "Anomie represents a breakdown of the social structure, [characterized by a state of normlessness] and the consequences for the individual are often referred to as anomia, anomy or alienation. . . . A situation of anomie takes place when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural goals and the legitimate means available to achieve them" (Clinard & Meier, 1979: p. 67).
6. This reference to *our earthbody* comes from Charlene Spretnak's book *States of Grace* (1991). From a grammatical and stylistic perspective: "the" is more correct than "our." In other words, saying "the earthbody" represents the mind/body problem's influence on language and humankind's dissociation from nature. It linguistically reduces nature to an object, which conceptually reflects the resulting consequences of dissociation. Whereas saying "our earthbody" linguistically makes earthbody a subject—which seems absurd to consider nature as a subject. This is the point Spretnak is making: humankind has co-evolved with nature and thus it is "our earthbody." This is one of the clearest examples of how grammar/language influences humankind's paradigmatic separation from nature.
7. Schroll 2013b pointed out that:  
My knowledge and understanding of transpersonal ecosophy emerged from a symposium [Schroll] organized on "The History and Future of Ecopsychology" for the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness conference on "Bridging Nature and Human Nature". It was during this symposium Drengron pointed out, in response to Warwick Fox's *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (1990), that Arne Naess said a better title would have been "Toward a

Transpersonal Ecosophy” (Schroll, 2011b:4). Shortly after this conference Drengron sent me a copy of his book *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess* (2008), edited with Bill Devall, which reiterated this point: “Warwick Fox suggests that those, including Naess, whose ultimate premises call for an extended sense of identification with an ecological self be called transpersonal ecologies, but Naess would say that they have transpersonal ecosophies (p. 37). Ecosophies are not platforms for a political movement or policies [Drengron and Devall explain,] but are personal philosophies of life in a worldview (p. 33)”. Ecosophies therefore serve the same function as personal myths or our personal mythology, defined as “more than just intellectual constructs; they are ingrained models of reality that determine how you see your world and understand your place within it” (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988[a]: 2). Moreover the term transpersonal ecosophy fosters an interdisciplinary perspective to a greater extent than the term ecopsychology” (p. 118-119).

8. An expanded discussion on myth is provided because the immediate response most people have to this topic is that it is irrelevant toward advancing significant scientific understanding.
9. To be clear, we are here speaking of the need for purpose and meaning within human culture and are not projecting this claim onto the physical universe; the discussion of ultimate reality is a complex topic and has been taken up elsewhere (e.g., Schroll, 2012b, 2012c, 2013a, 2016; Webb, 2012, 2012/2016).
10. That being said, Wilber’s holarchical model is in need of further revision, as Sean M. Kelly (1996) has argued: “This critique of Wilber’s holarchical paradigm does not, as Wilber aptly phrases it, demand ‘getting rid of holarchy per se, but [of] arresting (and integrating) arrogant holons’ ([Wilber,] 1993, 217)—or would-be holons in this case. . . . An essential task for transpersonal theory will be to set Wilber’s paradigm in dialogue with those of Grof (1985) and Washburn (1988)” (p. 23). A more complete discussion of holons and Wilber’s model is in Esbjorn-Hargens and Zimmerman (2009, pp. 83-117).
11. Roszak (1992) has discussed both the historical roots of the anima mundi, its periodic resurgence, and

contemporary significance in *The Voice of the Earth* (pp. 136-159), and in Roszak (1994).

12. Polansky also noted that not everyone in Israel chooses compulsory service by joining the army. Conscientious objectors, those with health issues, and the Ultra-Orthodox instead volunteer their service in organic community gardens, social service, animal rescue projects, and various other cross-cultural peace activist organizations.
13. The need for a more precise definition of ritual arose during a meeting between Krippner and Schroll on December 12, 2015, in Oakland, California. Krippner voiced his support that Schroll’s model (see Figure 1) provided a valuable summary of previous work on which to extend this discussion of ritual especially as it relates to its updated focus and application to understand transpersonal ecosophical consciousness. Schroll’s model also reminded Krippner of his discussion of ritual and ceremony in his (and Sidian Morning Star Jones’) book *The Voice of Rolling Thunder* (2012): “Rolling Thunder believed that ritual was important in that the ritual itself was an important element in building community” (p. 9). “Ritual reinforces the biological need for human communication that evolved to provide attachment bonds between infants and those who nurture and protect them. Humanity’s evolutionary ancestry produced a neuro-psychology for a social world, a need for a shared emotional life that is wired into the human nervous system” (p. 12-13). “[Whereas a] ceremony is what chaos theorists would liken to a ‘strange attractor,’ an influence that the rest of the system weaves and dances around, never escaping from its influence. Therefore, the system itself generates its own complicated behavior. When the ceremony begins, time is created for the ceremony. From that moment on, time is sent backward into the past and forward into the future. The strange attractor of time can be generated out of the rhythms and relationships within the world of Nature and Spirit” (p. 9). This discussion is a first step toward differentiating the cultural importance of ritual with the influence on personal transformation that take place utilizing various methods and techniques which are capable of consciousness transformation during a ceremony.
14. One of the most accurate sources of how entheogenic substances have been used (specifically with regard

to witchcraft) is discussed in Michael Harner's (1973) chapter on "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft." Harner (2005) later suggested:

This is why I think they [i.e., witches] distinguish the sabbat from the esbat, as I indicated in my book, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*. The sabbat was probably the journey where all the nonordinary things happened to the 'witches' in an altered state potentially produced by these plants with the spirits, and the esbat the formal meeting of these shamans together in ordinary reality. It's just a theory, but it would explain why there is this peculiar dichotomy in European witchcraft, which was really a form of shamanism. This dichotomy wasn't there among the Sami in northern Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century, because they were still using the drum.... I think what happened is that they [i.e., witches] couldn't use drums if they wanted to avoid being discovered by the Inquisition, they had to have a silent way. The plant ointments were quiet and less discoverable. I've found the same thing in Inuit villages. They're not about to do shamanic drumming within hearing of other people, because they'll be singled out and reported to the Christian authorities. So the drum is really a liability in a situation of persecution" (pp. 166-167).

In addition it is important to briefly mention the value of ingesting traditional ethnopharmacological substances to achieve consciousness transformation. This discussion sparks its own controversy; if alarm bells go off when contemplating these substances, self-reflection may focus on whether or not this feeling of resistance comes from the same paradigmatic prejudice that opposes paranthropological ways of knowing? Asking this question invites further inquiry. Margot Adler (1986) briefly touched on this point (pp. 450-453), discussing both the pros and cons. She pointed out, "even the most ardent advocates of psychedelics urged extreme caution" (p. 452), and that "despite whatever value these substances may have, many Pagans emphasized the legal problems connected with them" (p. 453).

15. Transpersonal states can be induced through a variety of methods within a ritual context, including: 1) pilgrimages to sacred places in nature

(i.e., Stonehenge, Big Horn Medicine Wheel, etc.; see Devereux, Krippner, Tartz, & Fish, 2006, 2007/2016; Hagens, 2011/2016; Hoffman, 2011/2016a, 2011/2016b; Hurd, 2011/2016; Schroll, 2011b, 2016; Krippner & Schroll, 2011/2016; Viggiano, 2011/2016); 2) various forms of meditation (Tart, 2000), shamanic journeying (Harner, 1980, 2005; Grof, 1988), somatic religious experiences that produce metanoia (Tedlock, 2006), and ingesting sacred plants, such as the traditional ethnopharmacological substance ayahuasca (Metzner, 1999b; Beyer, 2009), peyote (McKenna, 1992), psilocybin (Metzner, 2005), balché (Metzner, 1999a; Ratsch, 1992, 1994) and San Pedro cactus (Davis, 1999; Webb, 2012, 2012/2016).

16. Clarifying what we mean by "hero," and "the hero's journey" is our response to Chalquist's (2015) focus on male tragic and/or establishment heroes.
17. This is an observation worthy of further research. In a conversation with Scott Stewart (comicbook historian and research librarian at Lincoln City Libraries; personal communication, April 15, 2013), he said Marvel's hip realism attracted a wide audience, including university students. DC Comics observed this and responded to the increased market share and financial gain that making its heroes more like Stan Lee's would produce, which is why character changes were made in its heroes' personas.
18. Schroll reminisces that he was deeply influenced during his adolescent development with this character image of a female partner who could share his scholarly interests, and be his intellectual equal.
19. Our use of the term berserker is a positive one, similar to an alchemical transformation of consciousness and positive transpersonal growth. Thus our discussion of berserkers should not be confused with the way that Wade (2016) investigates the dark magic and frenzied rage associated with berserkers.
20. In response to a previous draft of this paper, Metzner commented that: "A warrior who is 'out of control' with anger has lost it, and has broken the code of the warrior. This woman's behavior is, therefore, a good example of non-constructive anger" (personal communication, July 9, 1996). Schroll is thankful to Metzner for reminding him that he makes this distinction. Metzner (1994) has noted that the interested reader can find a more extensive exploration of this point:

The basic pattern of the Indo-European migrations is that of horse-mounted warrior bands raiding and plundering their way through history. They idealized their warrior-heroes and the force of their weapons, and they sung heroic tales of divinely justified warfare, from the *Mahabharata* to the *Iliad*. Of course, intertribal warfare and the existence of dedicated warrior cults is not limited to the Indo-Europeans. In a fascinating study, *The Code of the Warrior*, Rick Fields [(1991)] compares the underlying similarities in cultic warrior traditions the world over, from the samurai of Japan to the Plains Indians of North America to the knights of medieval Europe.” (p. 74)

21. Katie Batten (MacDowell) has questioned Freya’s overall wisdom considering her obsession with obtaining the Brisignamen (personal communication, May 18, 2009), that according to H. R. Ellis Davidson (1990) was most likely a piece of amber made into a necklace—this necklace may have represented fertility, and/or could also have been a family heirloom (p. 116). It is therefore not clear if the desire to obtain the Brisignamen originated from vanity or represented a more profound significance. Batten also raised the concern that Freya’s predisposition for battle was equal to or exceeded Odin/Wotan’s (personal communication May 18, 2009). Similar to Batten’s concern about Freya is Metzner’s disinterest in Odin/Wotan’s warrior orientation in favor of his attraction to “Odin as the truth-seeking shaman poet-seer” (Metzner, 1994, p. 73). Whereas in support of Mayer’s intended perspective, it is the wisdom of Freya’s orientation as seidr or seer that interests us. For a more complete discussion of Freya’s abilities as seidr or seer, see Davidson (1990); Kremer (1994); and Metzner (1994).
22. In Israel, Polansky participated in a community garden project spearheaded by a conscientious objector who completed a few years of volunteer service and created organic community gardens rather than entering the military.

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### ***About the Journal***

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