



7-1-2016

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Recommended Citation

Butler, J. (2016). Gnawing at the roots: Toward a transpersonal poetics of guilt and death. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 35 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.51>

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Gnawing at the Roots: Toward a Transpersonal Poetics of Guilt and Death

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As an imaginal approach, archetypal psychology focuses its attention on the diverse and polysemous expressions of imagination as the ground from which all psychological expressions emerge, replacing the dried up concept of a singular ego with the notion that consciousness takes up a multitude of styles concordant with the mercurial flow of images that concentrically influence, grip down, and take over consciousness like a band of pirates commandeering a ship. Archetypal psychology situates itself as a transpersonal psychology by qualifying the image as inextricably archetypal, denoting a valence of meaning that extends beyond the merely personal, beyond the particular cultural-historical situation, pointing toward a pattern that has persisted in the cultural and personal heritage of humanity since time immemorial. After a brief introduction to some of the primary ideas of archetypal psychology, this paper explores the Criminal as an archetypal image, complex, and shadow projection that has been culturally disavowed and expressed through the brutality of systemic racism. The paper concludes with an example of the transformation of this image through the psychological functions of guilt and death.

Keywords: *archetypal psychology, image, Jung, alchemy, war, guilt, death*

*“The image must rise again in the image.”
(Gospel of Phillip)*

Psyche as Image

Archetypal psychology, one of the most influential and far-reaching extensions of Carl Jung’s work, begins with Jung’s (1929/1968) premise “image *is* psyche” (p. 50) His use of the word image here should not be confused with image as picture. Whereas the notion is certainly inclusive of the pictorial images we experience in dreams and reveries, an image is in no way limited to the visual. Sound, taste, touch, smell all arrive with the same kind of metaphoric possibility as a visual image. An image is not designated as such by its mode of sense perception or content; nor is an image limited to internal experience.¹ Rather, an image is contingent on the way in which one approaches the phenomenon; that is a phenomenon is experienced as an image when it is approached through an act of imagining (Casey, 1974; Hillman, 2004). As Patricia Berry (1984) noted:

The image may be a particular entity in a dream or a configuration in the dream, the dream in its entirety, the dream within a situation, symptom, the

course of an illness, etc. The image is simply that upon which the work of crafting focuses as given and nonnegotiable. (p. 156)

The image comes unbidden, given and nonnegotiable, as both the spontaneous fantasy activity of the psyche and “the psyche itself in its imaginative visibility” (Hillman, 2004, p. 18)—the psyche as self-generative, creating itself by producing images. “We live immediately only in a world of images,” Jung (1933/1960) noted (p. 353). The dream, as a gathering of images, shows each night the way in which the image of the “I” lives as one image amongst many in a world of other images. Our basic human ground is psychic reality, or what Hillman (2004) called “the poetic basis of mind” (p. 18). We know experience through our dream of the experience—the nightdream, daydream, feeling, reverie, symptom, slip, gesture, desire, each image like a coiled spring of psychological significance, “a condensed expression of the psychic situation as a whole” (Jung, 1921, p. 442).

A person's psychic images shape the particular kind of world they inhabit, demonstrating the intimate relationship between image and fate. Freud (1914) was able to articulate part of this relationship in his attention to the repetition compulsion—the way people repeatedly and compulsively live the image of their symptom, constricting their world to a small and miserable sliver of reality, a frozen style of interpreting self, other, and world. In his attempt to emphasize the way to extricate oneself from this painfully limited existence, Jung (1951) described “the psychological rule,” noting, “when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate” (p. 71). Unlike Freud, Jung consistently emphasized the symptom as prospective, having a purpose, a teleology aimed at crafting oneself to be more robustly and distinctly oneself. His method for this kind of psychic crafting involved careful attention to his patient's images and to areas of collapsed imagination, opening the image by listening to it differently. In approaching the psyche as image, Jung developed a therapy that centers on relating to images on their native ground: imagination.

James Hillman took this strand of Jung's work and articulated a highly differentiated imaginal mode of relating to the psyche. In placing image as primary, Hillman (1979a) approached psychological work with a poetic sensibility, attending to the meaning displayed through the concrete metaphors of the image. He noted, “Careful aesthetic elaboration of a psychic event is its meaning” (p. 135). The image means what it is and is what it means. As such interpretation, in the sense of decoding or uncovering the latent content, is unnecessary. The imaginal approach works in a style mimetic to, rather than interpretive of, the poetic speak of images. Rather than translating psychic experience into metapsychological concepts, abstract theories, or structural typologies, the psyche is addressed in its primary language. Like a poem, a painting, a play, a tree, a cat, the image, he noted, speaks through its presentation, its full gestalt, its “context, mood, and scene” (Hillman, 1977, p. 62).

Hillman (1971) placed primary therapeutic importance on the qualitative differentiation of images, noting “for what else is individuation than a particularization of the soul” (p. 133). He regarded qualitative description, or aesthetic elaboration, as an important move toward understanding the poetic precision of the image, the way an image speaks its

meaning through its presentational display. In taking up an imaginal approach, the language used to describe the image is understood as an expression inherent to the image itself—or as Jung noted “language itself is . . . an image” (Jung, 1939/1959, p. 160). As such, words are allowed to break free from the crust of literalism, allowed all overtones and undertones, all shades of ambiguity and nuance. Hillman (1977) wrote, “We can meet the soul in the image and understand it . . . through word play which is also a way of talking with the image and letting it talk” (p. 81); in granting the image total autonomy, Hillman argued, one gains access to a quality of generativity that he referred to as archetypal.

Archetypal Image

One of Jung's (1934/1954) most celebrated contributions was his expansion of the notion of the unconscious beyond what he called Freud's “personal unconscious” of repressed or forgotten contents (p. 3). Of course, Jung's view of Freud was limited by his own complex relationship with his former mentor; however, this distinction served as a way for Jung to differentiate his psychology from the powerfully persuasive and encompassing psychology of Freud. Jung was adamant about the importance of developing a psychology and psychotherapeutic method that could account for the ways in which psychological experience extends beyond the personal. To this end, he focused his attention on what he called the collective unconscious, a dimension of the psyche that is shared by all of humanity. Jung's notion of the archetypal psyche posited an inborn “psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us” (p. 4). The archetype as such stands outside consciousness, is essentially formless, analogous to Plato's Idea and Kant's *noumenon*. Jung (1938/1954) described the archetype as “a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*” (p. 79). The archetype is “irrepresentable” (Jung, 1921, p. 305)—analogous to the axial system of a crystal, which has no material substance itself but preforms the material of the crystal into definite patterns. In the same way, Jung's notion of the archetype is “empty” (p. 79), only made visible as an image. One never experiences the mother archetype as such, rather one experiences a mother image, a unique and idiosyncratic expression of a universal pattern.

In an adaptation of Jung's work, archetypal psychology pays less attention to the archetype, as noun, and makes more use of the archetypal, as adjective. Descriptors keep one's thinking phenomenological, a preventative against reified thinking, the kind of thinking in which the archetype, a fundamentally *unknowable and irrepresentable* pattern, is reduced to something known and formulated. An archetypal perspective discloses the way an image "resonates with collective, trans-empirical importance" (Hillman, 2004, p. 23). The adjective—archetypal—affords the most significant kind of value to the stream of psychological experience, in that it denotes a valence of meaning that extends beyond the merely personal, beyond the particular cultural-historical situation, the one-sidedness of the *Zeitgeist*, pointing toward a transpersonal, or universal, style of existence.

Jung often wrote of the problems that arise from an unconscious relationship with the psychological expressions of archetypal patterns. "The gods have become diseases" Jung (1929/1968, p. 113) argued, and spent his career attending to the gods vis-à-vis symptoms, dream images, shadow projections, split off parts of personality, pervasive moods, flashes of feeling, and other such expressions of the psyche. He used his method of amplification to contextualize the image, to discover the *psychological* connections between the personal and the transpersonal, using associations to cultural history, mythology, religion, alchemy, the occult, and other features of humanity's symbolic heritage. Amplification gave him an Archimedean point² from which he could lift the heavy psychological conditioning of cultural constructions and developmental trauma.

The Criminal

Take the following example: A young man enters therapy and begins to give voice to his psychological experience. He recounts memories, shares his fantasies and dreams, his sighs, gestures, verbal intonations, silences. He yells, cries, breaths, thinks, avoids, shuts down, takes risks, and learns. In short he discloses his psychological world. In the mind of both therapist and client, patterns begin to cluster together. As he repeats and repeats, patterns become more differentiated—his basic wounds begin to show their true shape. He sees the ways he lives his life as if he were a criminal.

The criminal arrives in a complete constellation of accompanying images—Law, Prosecutor, Defense, Judge, Jury, Police, Accomplices, Victims. Cruelty and

punishment are expected and even inadvertently sought after. Defenses are made, and often. Everything is at stake, and the true crime is unknown. Guilt pervades as the dominant mood. Guilt colors his world, fertilizes his fantasies, each of which relentlessly reproduce scene after scene of crime, arrest, trial, prosecution, defense, judgment, and cruel punishment. Guilt blinds him to himself, blinds his imagination to imagining the way in which he is gripped by the criminal image.

Like any image, his criminality is relational. He attributes his guilt to his failure at being the person people want him to be. Tragically, he breaks himself to live up to their expectations, but will always fail because he is attempting to conform to an enigmatic and protean Law that lives outside him. His repeated failures stoke a rage that lives inside his stomach, a fiery ulcer marking in flesh the point where trauma has eaten away his protective lining. The wound reminds him of his eternal punishment; pulses of hydrochloric acid vent up his esophagus, burning his chest, constricting his heart. Like the acid reflux, his anger boils to the surface, defending the innocence he knows is a lie. He is, as Rilke (1905/1996) noted, "a house gutted by fire" (p. 137).

Amplifying the Image

Kafka's (1925/1998) novel *The Trial* begins with, "Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested" (p. 3). K. is in bed when the guards arrive, confine him to his room, and make his private world a spectacle. Utterly exposed under the watchful gaze of his landlord, his neighbors, and his co-workers who were, for no obvious reason brought in by the guards, K. sees himself through their eyes, finds himself thrown into a world of Guilt and Innocence; Defense and Prosecution. It matters little that he has done nothing wrong; his world has been arrested, ceased by the mood of guilt that has been projected into him. K. is in an inextricable bind because, as the guard noted, the Law does not seek out guilt but is "attracted by guilt" (Kafka, 1925/1998, p. 9). Therefore since he feels guilty, in this absurd and twisted logic, his arrest is perfectly reasonable.

Later that evening, K. anxiously waits late into the night for his neighbor Fräulein Bürstner. When she returns to the boarding house he thoughtlessly ambushes her with a wild recounting of his arrest. K. acts with utter disregard for his neighbor, justifying

his harassment for the sake of demonstrating the tale of his suffering under the punishing Law. It is as if he is saying “You have no idea of the suffering I endure. If only you understood how much suffering I am in, you would understand why I am acting this way. You would throw your arms around me and love me back into a good place.”

He frightens her with his disruptive account, and when he sees the fear written on her face, he takes her by the wrist and says “You’re not mad at me, are you?” Removing his hand, she replied, “No, no, I never get angry at anyone” (Kafka, 1925/1998, p. 33). The Criminal, one might imagine, requires this kind of vindication; someone to give him solace. Just as Fräulein Bürstner, late at night, let K. into her room, allowing his needs to disrupt her world, reassuring his anxiety, the Criminal demands the sympathetic ear, requires the one person that will remind him of his innocence, his goodness, and his power.

K. is not only blind to the way he is perpetuating the same kind of disturbance he endured in others, he also makes himself painfully ignorant to the implications of his own situation. Blinded by his rationalizations, he uses reasonable interpretations to keep himself calm when he is standing on the edge of an abyss.

K. makes several comments about how little he cares about the trial and the possibility of a pending conviction. He comports himself like a petulant boy who has endured too many of his mother’s angry punishments. The boy, powerless and enraged, forces himself to take control of his facial muscles, ensuring his mother can see no sign of emotion. He hides away his hurt, knowing that if she knew she could hurt him, she knew she had power over him, a power she would use to force him to behave the way she wanted. The boy is punished, and no attempt is made to understand why he is behaving as he is. Without the mother’s understanding, the boy cannot understand himself. Punishments alone create very little opportunity to learn from experience.

The national recidivism rate of 77% in the United States provides a nauseating piece of evidence for this argument. One might imagine that punishment evokes the criminal just as the criminal evokes the punishment. Possession by this archetypal constellation is passed down from parent to child vis-à-vis the emotional ambiance of the child’s home and

from systems to particular cultural groups vis-à-vis the culturally constructed designations of privilege and prejudice. The Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that in the United States a metropolitan police officer is “28 times more likely to use stop-and-search powers against Black people than White people” (Dodd, 2012). The U.S. Department of Justice reported that the number of Black men in prison or jail is *five times* higher than the number of White non-Hispanic men (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2007).

This judicial discrepancy is a symptom of a cultural-wide projection of the Criminal as a shadow image, qualities that are rejected within oneself and relentlessly attributed to and evoked in the other. Jung (1938/1969) noted the heavy cost of this violent disavowal, arguing “the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is” (p. 76). The astounding number of police officers who have shot unarmed Black men, along with the myriad examples of systemic and explicit racism in the United States, demonstrates the double meaning of Jung’s statement: the “blacker” one is, the more one is forced to embody the shadow.

The Alchemical Black

The use of the English term ‘white’ as an ethnic category and identity, first noted in the sixteenth century, arose out of racist presuppositions, allowing the privileged groups distance from the derogatory category of ‘black,’ the color attributed to Africans, a color the Christian world had long associated with evil (Hillman, 2004); other meanings of black going back to the fifteenth century have included “deeply stained with dirt; soiled; foul; malignant, atrocious, horrible, wicked; disastrous, baneful, sinister” (p. 84). These associations all cluster together as shadow qualities—“the thing a person has no wish to be” (Jung, 1946/1966, p. 262). Wish as one may, the qualities do not disappear, nor can one rid oneself of the shadow by projecting it into a marginalized group. The disavowed shadow tears through one’s most congenial self-presentation, disrupting asymmetrical fantasies, ethical values, and best intentions.

The work of analysis involves a committed confrontation with the shadow. The psychic energy that leaks out through projection is contained in the alchemical vas of analysis, allowing an exploration of

all the different shades of the psyche. From black to blue, to white, to red, the alchemical texts, so important to Jung's depth psychology, described psychological transformation through a spectrum of different colors. The initial confrontation with the shadow was imagined as the stage of *nigredo*, or blackness, which involved taking the work through a series of dark and painful operations: *mortificatio*, *putrefactio*, *calcinatio*, and *iteratio*—death, decay, desiccation, and ceaseless repetition.

A Dream

I was walking through wild land with Elana. We stopped near a bush, standing side by side. There was a dead squirrel on the ground surrounded by a horde of flies. I was repulsed and didn't want to look. The flies were thick in the air. I saw one fly land and find its way to the decaying body through the pile of flies. I really didn't want to look. Elana picked up a short stick and began moving part of the squirrel's body saying she wanted it to decompose faster. I thought she shouldn't do that, or at least get a longer stick.

A Synchronicity

The next day as the dreamer walked out of his studio, he glanced over at the claw foot tub sitting outside his house. Noticing something unusual, he stopped and walked over, finding in the empty tub a squirrel, dead and rigid with rigor mortis. Pain gripped his heart as he carefully removed the squirrel from the bathtub and placed it amongst the trees surrounding his house, knowing that the resident animals would take the body and put it to use.

The dream, dreamt by the same young man described above, offers several images, each displaying a different relationship to death. The dream ego is clearly repulsed by the scene; he wants to keep distance and not look; he finds himself sickened. Elana, unfazed, casually joins the flies, assisting the decomposition by fearlessly prodding the morass of decay. The fly wants nothing more than to find its next meal in the rotting flesh, no stick needed. The fly fights to be near the decaying body, the object of its desire. Like flies in waking life, one might imagine this fly as driven to lay its larvae on the body of the dead squirrel—death, for the fly, is an essential gateway to life.

One could assume that the dream ego holds a style of response that is analogous to the waking ego's dominant attitude: death and decay evoke repulsion

and should only be touched with a long stick, that is from a distance. From his perspective, the short stick used by Elana brings her too close to the rotting corpse, too close to something that feels emotionally fraught and repulsive. Her short stick evokes fear. He would like her to back off or drop the matter all together. Look away, he repeats to himself. The dream image as a whole, however, opens possibilities of a more direct engagement with death, relativizes the ego's one-sidedness, his repulsion, looking away, and distancing,

Patricia Berry (1982) wrote of "Layard's Rule," which she articulated as "*Nothing in the dream is wrong, except perhaps the dream ego*" (p. 83). This simple move quickly flips the dream, distances those imagining the dream from a limited identification with the attitude of the dream ego. The "perhaps" opens imagination to the possibility that the dream ego has a limited view, that the images he finds himself in relation to in the dream are not wrong; they belong to the "full democracy of the image" (Berry, 1982, p. 60), are produced, in precision, out of necessity. The single fly *must* land and visibly make its way through the mass of flies toward the rotting flesh. Its hunger for death, its thirst for rot, disturbing as they may be to the dream ego, is right: life feeds on death; death breeds life. In addition, Elana's short stick approach complements the dream ego's aversion. While he looks away, she moves closer to the death and decay that lies between them, the death that comes with closeness, with "standing side by side." She illuminates the way close engagement involves taking apart the dead pieces, supporting the necessary transformation of death into life, something akin to the work of mourning in analysis.³

As noted above, medieval alchemists were well acquainted with the notion that the work of transformation requires an intimate relationship with death and rotting. Throughout the primary alchemical texts one finds frequent reference to *nigredo* as the first accomplishment in the work, a transformation of the *prima materia*, the basic material of psychological work, the symptoms, opaque fantasies, blind literalisms, and inchoate feelings—virginal and unworked. The *nigredo* blackens virginal consciousness through deep immersion in one's psychological situation, a descent into psychic reality—lights out and you're inside, nothing to say, name, or categorize, no foresight, no insight, no hindsight, nothing but "the madness of space" (Stevens, 1977, p. 115); all is obscured, and

any hope would be “hope for the wrong thing” (Eliot, 1943, p. 28).

Alchemy, like any transpersonal modality, unabashedly dissolves the split between subject and object, work and worker, writer and writing, both poles coalescing into what one might call “the *Opus*.” As the nigredo unfolds, the work is infused with images of death, any notion of objective distance ends, and the worker is pulled into a confrontation with the dark side of the psyche. Like the flies in the dream, the psyche requires death. As such, psychological alchemy begins with an ending; death is the door. The death, rotting, putrefaction, and fermentation of the nigredo are essential operations in transmuting one’s narrow and literalized perspectives into psychological experience, imbued with a polyphony of metaphorical significance.

Death and Guilt

The dreamer has, to use a gross understatement, struggled with death. At age 15, his father, dead from a liver rotted out by alcohol, was nothing more to him than a terrorizing presence he was glad to be rid of. He hated his father and saw that his father hated himself. After his father’s death the hatred was turned into his own form of self-hatred and guilt, punishing himself frequently with thoughts that cut like razors.

The dreamer’s therapy ushered him into imagining the ways his guilt points to his transgressions, the way he tormented his mother with his acting out, his substance abuse, his disregard for the emotional strain he unwittingly placed on those close to him. The meaning he discovered in his guilt, however, extended beyond his need for accountability and reparation. His guilt became an affective link between himself and his father, allowing him to imagine what his father felt returning back from the deplorable violence of the Vietnam war; what he felt walking his vodka-soaked body through the door to his home and minutes later watching his wife hustle his two children into the car, leaving him quarantined; what he felt living in his car, jobless, broke, and alone; what he felt when he was told by his family that he had to go live near his sister, back to his hometown in a state far away; what he felt as his body began to swell with water, as his liver was slowly eaten by cirrhosis; what he felt in his dying moment when he undoubtedly thought of the family, the two children he would never see again.

“Guilt,” Jung (1945) noted, “spreads itself over the whole neighborhood. A house, a family, even a village where a murder has been committed feels the psychological guilt and is made to feel it by the outside world” (p. 195). The veterans returning home from Vietnam are a primary example of just such a response. Guilt hit them from all sides; guilt for the violence they personally inflicted; guilt for surviving when many of their closest companions were killed; guilt in response to the antipathy of the anti-war activists and the neglect born out of a culture that had dissociated from the atrocities happening overseas. A multitude of biographies speak to the way in which upon returning home, the Vietnam vets became isolated in a claustrum of post-traumatic stress, left to quietly endure the psychological ramifications of a profoundly violent war. One Marine Corps vet recounted the following anecdote:

This one kid ran out toward the helicopter in the 1st Platoon, which was about five ahead of us, tossed a grenade and ran. As it exploded, a gunner in another ship shot the kid. The grenade killed the crew chief and gunner, and wounded both pilots. After you see that, what do you say? (Dean, 2010)

The culture-wide response to this question: “Say nothing.”

The guilt that accompanied the war trauma was devastating. But to whom does the guilt belong? The veteran? Surely he was complicit, but social traumas such as these are far too great for any one person. The lion’s share of guilt over Vietnam belongs to the culture as a whole; however, few cultural groups make space for the weight of war. The emotional burden is left on the shoulders of the soldiers and their families. War trauma spreads like a contagious disease.

In his essay *A Psychological View of Conscience*, Jung (1958) made the following observation:

The psychoid archetype has a tendency to behave as though it were not localized in one person but were active in the whole environment. The fact or situation is transmitted in most cases though a subliminal perception of the affect it produces. (p. 452)

Jung was able to set aside the Cartesian presuppositions that stand in the way of imagining the porous nature of the psyche and the confluence

between the intersubjective and archetypal fields. In the example given, the guilt transmitted from the patient's father unwittingly initiated him into his archetypal lineage, first connecting him to fantasies of his deceased father's emotional experience, filling in the gapping lacuna left by his premature death. Second, it directed him to the archetypal core of the complex shared by father and son. Through the deeply personal experience of guilt, the patient gained access to a central thread of his transpersonal heritage, the weave of which wove together the disparate pieces of his traumatized psyche.

One thread leads to a life lived as the criminal, averting his eyes from the decay of his values, avoiding the inextricable fact that he is what he is, choosing instead "every kind of self-deception if only he can escape the sight of himself" (Jung, 1945, p. 203). Jumping over his own shadow, denying his own inferiority, he will undoubtedly spend his life indicting the world, "looking for every-thing dark, inferior, and culpable *in others*" (p. 203).

His heritage of guilt also opens a second possibility, an opportunity to confront the ways in which he, like all people, has failed, is failing, and will fail to live up to his own psychological values. Jung (1945) celebrated this function of guilt, noting, "If only people could realize what an enrichment it is to find one's own guilt, what a sense of honour and spiritual dignity!" (p. 202). He added, "Without guilt, unfortunately, there can be no psychic maturation and no widening of the spiritual horizon" (p. 216). However, for guilt to widen one's spiritual horizon, one has to widen the way the emotion is imagined, deepening into the personal implications to access the transpersonal meaning, the archetypal root of the emotional experience. Hillman (1979b) referred to this psychological move as *epistrophe*, or reversion—connecting a personal experience or personality attribute back to its root metaphor in the archetype.

Kafka's *Trial* demonstrates the absurd cruelty of a culture that has lost the transpersonal aim for the emotional experience of guilt. Guilt becomes a mechanism for blind adaptation to oppressive cultural mores rather than the opposite, an awakening to what each individual values most. To understand the full significance of the emotion, guilt requires transpersonal amplification. The psyche, because it is archetypally constituted, needs mythology to fully know itself.

A Transpersonal Poetics of Guilt and Death

Myth is a mirror for the soul, reflecting the ways in which the most deeply personal experiences are at once transpersonal, reflecting both the soul of the individual and the soul of the collective, as well as the paradoxical sameness and difference between the two.

Because of this inextricable paradox, amplification is fraught with opportunities for misdirection and mistimed moves, the too familiar defenses of spiritual bypass (Welwood, 2000), intellectualization, inflation, and reductionist interpretations. Moreover, amplification from a dream image to a symbol is often accompanied with an abstraction away from the emotional fervor and fecundity of the concrete image—the sharp edges,⁴ the astounding complexity, and always-unique weave of the dream context.⁵

Mythic figures are different from symbols in that they are never separate from their stories, the imaginal context that bespeaks who they are, where they are, and the company they keep. Symbols generalize an image to demonstrate collectivity and numinosity. Myths differentiate the gods and the relationships between gods and mortals, mirroring the complex differentiation of the psyche and the relationship between psyche and spirit. The particularities of the enigmatic images in myth evoke imagination, keeping one dreaming about their existence and the way of things in the world.

Mythic images and dream images feed each other in a dialectic of image-making. The dual weave of myth patterns the dream image, broadens its context so it swells with mythic reference. In the dream cited above, for example, one might imagine the twice-repeated image of squirrel through the Norse mythology of *Ratatoskr*, the drill-tooth, a creature of communication who runs up and down *Yggdrasil*, the world tree, passing messages between the Eagle perched on top and *Níðhöggr* Wurm, the dragon who lives at the bottom of the world tree incessantly gnawing at its roots and eating the bodies of men. Much could be said about Squirrel as medium between above and below, between air and earth, soaring and crawling, spirit and body, archetype and instinct. I will limit my associations, however, to the way in which the myth mirrors a particular piece of the dreamer's psychological life.

One morning before his therapy appointment, the dreamer opened his desk drawer, removed a ring, and placed it on his finger. The gold platted ring held a

red ruby at its center and was embossed with the words UNITED STATES MARINES. Atop the ruby is the Marine Corps insignia—the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. The ring, which he had up to this point never worn, was inherited from his father, who wore it proudly throughout his life. Prior to that, the ring belonged to his mother’s uncle who fought and died in Iwo Jima.

The ring materialized a transformation of the invisible into the visible—his relationship to his father held in an image that he wore on his ring finger—a material correlate of a psychological accomplishment; the red ruby like the *rubedo* of the alchemist who has brought his work through the many stages of transubstantiation, reddened it into life, the eagle like the soaring spirit of transcendence, and the anchor like the stabilizing force of facticity; and like the squirrel that moves from ground to sky, from gnawing dragon to soaring eagle, the ring connects the dreamer to his own capacity to move between the two poles—the ceaseless gnawing of the guilty mind, chewing at the past and future, metabolizing events into experience, and the eagle-eye vision of spirit, eyes moving from ground to horizon, watching closely for what he values most.

Notes

1. The categories of internal and external, although used here, are clearly inadequate when discussing psychological experience, which unabashedly undercuts the distinction between internal/external, subject/object. As J. H. van den Berg (1972) noted, “Never do we see objects without anything else. We see things within their context and in connection with ourselves: A unity which can be broken only to the detriment of the parts” (p. 37).
2. An Archimedean point is a theoretical vantage point from which one can observe the subject in its entirety—an objective perspective. Whereas pure objectivity, devoid of subjective presuppositions, is clearly a fallacious fantasy, a recalcitrant remnant of enlightenment era thinking, Jung’s amplification expands the limits of subjectivity, broadening imagination beyond the limits of the contemporary cultural and personal presuppositions.
3. Analysis is derived from “*ana*: ‘up, throughout’ + *lysis* ‘a loosening,’ from *lyein* ‘to unfasten’” (Harper, 2017a, n.p.). With this etymology in mind, one might imagine analysis as a loosening,

unfastening the pieces of psychological experience to assist transformation.

4. Seeing through to the basic expression of the psyche, one experiences the way the details of an image disclose an account of the psychological situation with scalpel-like precision. The image cuts through the ignorance of single-minded perspectives.
5. The etymological root of the word *context* is “*contexere* from *com-* ‘together’ + *texere* ‘to weave, to make’” (Harper, 2017b, n.p.), suggesting that context weaves the image together—disclosing a constellation of patterns and relationships.

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About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floragades Foundation, and serves as the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 59

official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).