EMBRACING THE CRUCIBLE: ALCHEMICAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE HUMANITIES

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DEDICATION

To my family, who laid the groundwork;

To my partner Debbie, who made the journey possible;

And to my cohort, who made it magical.
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INTRODUCTION

I don’t have much knowledge yet in grief
so this massive darkness makes me small.

You be the master: make yourself fierce, break in:
then your great transforming will happen to me,
and my great grief cry will happen to you.

(Rilke, 1981, p. 55)

My journey to Pacifica began in grief. I arrived almost two years after my mother's death, still emotionally shut down and very much adrift in the world, in spite of having a supportive partner and family, enjoyable work, and good friends. I came here searching for meaning and purpose, or at least some hints as to how to look for them, and also in search of fellow travelers who might be on a similar path. It has been my great joy to find all of that and more. In addition to the gifts of knowledge, a chance to challenge myself, and what I hope will be lifelong friendships, the Humanities program has alchemically transformed my grief into an outward orientation and artistic expression, which I hope to demonstrate with the artifacts included here. Alchemy is a process and a metaphor long beloved by both esotericists and depth psychology; it provides a useful pathway for personal growth in its nonlinear series of transformations. Above all, it is practiced in a way that, though there is a goal in mind (the Philosopher’s Stone), the process is equally important. With an abbreviated version of alchemy in mind, then, I will trace my time in Pacifica’s crucible and my own process of refinement.
Prima Materia (Origins)

Grief is rich compost—it is built from death and decay as its foundation, and as such requires acknowledgement of the cycles of life and death that are inherent in the natural world. My mother's death forced me to this knowledge, and it left me raw, with a sense of loss and stagnation as my starting place. I also arrived at Pacifica having recently entered midlife, with its attendant shift of separation of the ego from the collective and toward integration of the unconscious. Finding myself at this crossroads, already broken open, I made a choice to stay as receptive as possible to what was presented, and to push myself where possible toward choices that made me more vulnerable than I might otherwise have been. I wanted to move from grief back into life, and part of that process has been to interact with the elemental powers and be transformed by them.

Calcination (Fire)

Fire is one way to alchemically purify the soul, and it can take many forms. One aspect of this purification in psychological terms is the transition from acting out of ego motives toward acting from the true Self, as demonstrated by equanimity in the face of obstacles. The most formidable obstacle in my Pacifica journey has been self-doubt about perseverance, with all of the attendant habits of procrastination and self-sabotage. The fire that has been transforming those habits is still burning and still has much work to do, but at the end of two years of concentrated work, I am no longer able to tell myself that I always leave important things undone, or that I start them but do not finish. I now have evidence to the contrary, and though I am sure I will have doubts about many things in the future, worries about my ability to read, think, and write deeply now sit in an ash-pile of outgrown fears.
Starting from that point of clarity, I am increasingly able to view the exterior world with all of the psychological tools with which I also examine myself. One of the primary tools with which I have been gifted at Pacifica is the process of active imagination, and by using this practice I was given insights into my grief process and rituals by which to transform it, as well as a relationship with an imaginal guide who I hope will journey with me through the rest of my life. These experiences, which previously seemed closed to me, have re-opened a world of possibility and imagination that I walled off from my conscious life, and represent a bright flame I plan to follow into uncharted territory.

**Solutio (Water)**

*Solutio* can be likened to metaphors both of dismemberment and baptism. It is a process of “cleansing, rejuvenating immersion in an energy and viewpoint transcending the ego, a veritable death and rebirth” (Edinger, 1991, p. 58). In terms of the order of alchemical processes, it is often considered to be the first step, a dissolving of the existing material so that the *prima materia* can be extracted and transformation begin (p. 47). I experienced my mother’s death as this kind of dissolving; we were very close, and once physically separated from her in this new way, I struggled to separate my sense of self from our mutual projections onto each other. I came to Pacifica partly because of a then-unconscious sense that the inner work required would help to complete that process and move me forward.

As particularly represented in Section 1 of this portfolio, I think that instinct was correct; working early in the program with myths about death (and the aftermath of it for the living) dissolved many unhealthy projections of a desire to carry on in my mother’s
place, and left a fresh, open space in which to explore my own reasons for this course of study. Working from the *prima materia* that was left, I have been able since then to open my mind and heart to new concepts such as permaculture that turned the focus of the program outward and toward the future. I still maintain a strong inner focus as well, but the waters of *solutio* brought a balance of inner and outer work to my Pacifica studies that would have been lacking otherwise.

Coagulatio (Earth)

Paradox is at the heart of *coagulatio*. As the phase of alchemy that represents the concretization of matter, it contains both the solidity of that matter and the need to recognize the limits and decay that inevitably come with being part of the material world. It takes dream images, unconscious affect, and other inner elements, and by bringing them to consciousness through desire (the motive of flesh), solidifies them in the conscious realm. *Coagulatio* creates “soulstuff…something visible and tangible [that] we can then relate to…objectively” (Edinger, 1991, p. 100).

In the context of my Pacifica work, this alchemical element has occurred primarily in two intertwined realms: writing and identity. Writing is an act of *coagulatio*; it transforms interior thoughts into an external, tangible product that can be experienced by others, shared, commented upon, mashed up, and so on. It is the primary way in which I have always presented my ideas to the greater world, small though the audience may be, and even personal writing such as journaling has given a solidity to my personal history that it might otherwise lack. Becoming part of a community that not only values this transformation but requires it repeatedly has increased both my skill and passion for writing—a lovely side benefit to actually learning the material. From this increased sense
of skill, and the solidity of two years of good work on which I can reflect, I now have the confidence to truly assume the mantle of “writer” that I was too shy to claim previously. Being able to create cohesive, meaningful work (as contrasted with the fragmented commercial writing I do as my career) has opened my heart and mind to greater aspirations for my words, and increased resolve to continue sharing them thoughtfully with whoever is of a mind to read them.

Sublimatio (Air)

Depth psychology of necessity deals with spirit; the yearning toward the sublime expressed in Rilke’s poem at the beginning of this introduction is a key driver of the individuation process. Alchemically, this is perhaps best expressed in the process of sublimatio, “an ascent that raises us above the confining entanglements of immediate, earthy existence and its concrete, personal particulars” (Edinger, 1991, p. 118). Given the move from the smaller, individual picture toward a wider view of one’s place in the cosmos, this process is particularly suited to the transitions that occur at midlife. I have grappled with my place and my spiritual life for a long time; part of the gift of Pacifica has been to overcome the leftover bits of the fundamentalist experience I describe in Section 2 and fully embrace the eclecticism of the path as it currently appears to me.

As a process related to air and spirit, sublimatio also carries connotations of purification, as concrete forms turn to gas or are turned to dust. Edinger notes that “the symbolism of grinding contains the moral categories of good and bad. Powder made up of small particles is called ‘fine,’ that with large particles is ‘coarse’” (Edinger, 1991, p. 123). This alchemical twist on E.F. Schumacher’s phrase “small is beautiful” illustrates the need to get to the smallest particles of one’s psyche in order to transcend them and
connect to the numinous. It also accurately describes how the process of that connection can feel; it “may have a pulverizing effect” (p. 123). Though I have come through Pacifica greatly strengthened in my relationship to a numinous force (through experiences of imagination and artistic expression), there have been many times when I have felt ground down for the purpose of bringing about some kind of new growth or understanding. Trusting that transformation will be the result and that I can survive the grinding are two treasures I hold close to heart as I move toward my future endeavors in an uncertain world.

Coniunctio (Reunion)

The Philosopher's Stone is a worthy goal, and one that as a result of this program, I feel that I am in the process of creating. I hold this symbol of the union of opposites as a reminder to seek balance, even though teetering on various edges may be required at times. As I enter what I hope will be the second half of my life with a greater sense of belonging to the universe, I am more at home with the polarities and vagaries of life and of my own psyche. Edinger describes the stone as “something like the concrete, practical efficacy of wisdom or consciousness” (Edinger, 1991, p. 216), and it is this combination of applied knowledge and the unconscious poetry of the psyche that inspires me. True coniunctio may be many years off, if it ever comes, but the radiant sense of joining together that this alchemical product represents is something toward which I aspire. Being at Pacifica, in an environment that has fed me so deeply and transformed the grief with which I entered in so many ways, gives me both hope and determination to take what I have learned into the broader sphere. The soul of the world deserves no less.
References


SECTION 1: GRIEF AND GUIDES—AN IMAGINAL JOURNEY

There is no life I know
To compare with pure imagination
Living there, you’ll be free
If you truly want to be

(Bricusse & Newley, 1971)

There is imagination, and then there is imagination. The first, the kind of imagination one might associate with daydreaming and casual artistic creation, is a place in which I have always felt at home. It is the source of the quick quip, the doodle, flights of fancy, and even sometimes more complicated creations such as poetry. I spent much of my childhood there, absorbed in creating pictures to go along with the many books I read, making mashup creations out of the Sunday comics, and playing with my brother in fortresses made of lawn chairs and old sheets. Although its creative capacities came with me into adulthood on some level, I think of this place as populated primarily by my child mind, and visited now mostly in memory.

There is another land of imagination, though, one that could more properly be considered the realm of adults. This is the land of active imagination, as depth psychology defines it—a place in which we can each enact the stages of our hero’s journey as it plays out. Active imagination was a land that I wanted desperately to enter, but I lacked the keys and stood outside the gate, waiting. Pacifica, by taking me deep into myth, gave me the keys I had sought for so long and swung the gates wide open, granting me access to the deep wisdom and creative capacities of my psyche. The classwork did
this, as mentioned in the Introduction, by encouraging me to deeply explore my grief within the context of two of the oldest and greatest myths dealing with death: *Gilgamesh* and *Inanna*. I became part of these stories through a series of exercises, interacting with the characters and the scene, and the process was amazing to me. I had always felt my inability to engage in this type of work as a personal failing, so being able to feel myself in these stories was at first primarily a relief. However, it soon became much more.

The stories began to work me, allowing me to argue with Gilgamesh as a part of myself who had not finished grieving, and be booted out of Inanna’s resurrection scene because I had not participated in the death first. Most surprising was the continued engagement of a hooded figure that was my guide in the Inanna myth; she not only interacted with me during the original assignment, but told me to return twice and gave me instructions for a ritual. This entire sequence, from my first experience with active imagination and the Gilgamesh myth to the performing of the ritual I was given, is related in the first two papers of this section, “Don’t Fear the Reaper: *Gilgamesh* and the Search for Immortality,” and “Walking Alongside Inanna: Resurrection, Active Imagination, and Healing,” both from the *Myth as Guide in Psychological Development* class. I have written a new section to the second paper, “The Aftermath,” to finish telling this story, because performing the ritual was deeply healing to me in the grief process, and was given to me by a part of myself I was unaware existed until I learned the active imagination techniques.

The story does not end there, however; it merely begins. As an assignment in the *Cultivating Inner Awareness* class, in this final quarter of coursework, I once again entered the land of active imagination, this time in search of a new guide who was to
represent my wisest self. Because of the sense of closure I was given around my previous experiences, I expected to meet a new figure, and I did. He was not at all what I expected otherwise (beginning with his gender), but he made it clear in our initial meeting that the relationship was intended to be a long one; I was there just as much for his needs as mine. The final paper in this section, “Meeting Jake,” is the story of that first encounter, and I look forward to having many more; he is a warm, loving presence, but a demanding one as well, and I think the tension of that will serve me well as I make the transition out of this academic world into what comes next. I feel blessed by this process to have been given such a guide and friend.
References

Artificial 1 – Don’t Fear the Reaper: Gilgamesh and the Search for Immortality

*Gilgamesh*, as the oldest surviving written story in human history, has much to teach us about the awakening of the human race. Part heroic epic, part cautionary tale, and part meditation on the relationship between humans and the gods, it functions as “a record of what first occurred to human beings as they recognized this remarkable gift—consciousness” (Jarman, 2005, p. 329). Given the harsh conditions of physical and political life in the third millennium BCE, it is unsurprising that one of the first expressions of this gift was a rumination on death, friendship, and the rightful use of power. In working personally with this myth, I have chosen to address Gilgamesh’s search for immortality, a journey born of deep grief over the death of his friend Enkidu.

Enkidu’s death, itself a result of misused power, is one of several scenes that are told three times in the story, once as part of the main narrative and twice as Gilgamesh explains his quest to those he meets along the way. This repetition emphasizes one of the main themes of the myth: the human struggle to understand death and the afterlife. In his wanderings in the wilderness, Gilgamesh begins to make the transition from an arrogant ruler, to “a child at the threshold of adult awareness who for the first time is faced with the concept of dying” (S. Mitchell, 2004, p. 47), to the humbled king who returns to Uruk with the gift of hard-won wisdom.

The scene of mourning that begins his journey is told after the fact, as a way of explaining his haggard appearance to Shiduri and Utnapishtim, two of the gatekeepers he meets along the way. He tells them both that “for six days I would not let him be buried,
Don’t fear the reaper

thinking, ‘If my grief is violent enough, perhaps he will come back to life again.’” (S. Mitchell, 2004, p. 175). This great warrior, a massive man, is brought to a state of childlike helplessness in the face of death, and like a child, hopes against hope that this expression of grief will be enough to reverse his tragedy. When he finally accepts that Enkidu is dead and acknowledges that he is “frightened…terrified by death” (S. Mitchell, 2004, p. 175), he begins to wander in the wilderness, pondering his own future demise.

Gilgamesh at this stage of the story is a man who feels with the heart of a boy, roaming aimlessly in the countryside “with matted hair, in a lion skin” (S. Mitchell, 2004, p. 158) as he wrestles with what is perhaps the ultimate human question: “What will happen to me when I die?”. He rails against Enkidu’s death, laments “the sorrow that gnaws at [his] belly, this fear of death that drives [him] onward” (S. Mitchell, 2004, p. 159) and does not fully come to terms with the fact of his own death until he has journeyed far and exhausted all opportunities at immortality. Each attempt brings him back mentally to that place of solitary mourning by the side of his friend’s body, until finally there is nowhere else to go and he re-enters the city of Uruk. The words that end the poem match those at the beginning, but their tone, in the face of Gilgamesh’s reluctant acceptance, is completely different; triumph over the glory of Uruk and its king turns to a sardonic recitation of power and works that no longer holds meaning. He is no longer the mighty warrior, for “in realizing death Gilgamesh becomes human. His two-thirds divine substance have reached the human in him” (Kluger, 1991, p. 160).

In working with this aspect of the myth in active imagination, I first pictured the initial mourning scene. I saw Gilgamesh in a room of his palace, one with a large door to the inside and an open patio to the outside; everything around was brown and dry, and the
temperature was very hot. Enkidu’s body was laid out on a low bier in this spartan room, honorably but simply arranged in clean clothes. The body, though well dressed, was starting to smell from the heat and flies were buzzing around; Gilgamesh was violently swatting them away from his beloved friend.

His mourning moved in waves, from violent, physical outbursts (the room contained several pieces of broken furniture) to numb stillness, but always with tears. He sobbed quietly, moaned gutturally like a wounded animal, then begged Enkidu to return or the gods to bring him back. Finally, a maggot crawled out of Enkidu’s nose, and Gilgamesh, claustrophobic suddenly from the realization that his friend was truly gone, buried him and fled the palace in search of eternal life.

This scene, though it is quite extreme, resonated very much with my life. Two years ago, I was in Washington helping my mother die at home from leukemia. I stayed with my parents for six weeks, finally returning home two days before she died. Though I was perhaps spared that final act of seeing her pass, I have been Gilgamesh, as he presented himself in this scene, many times. Raging behind the steering wheel with tears so hard I had to pull over, deep wells of sadness, weird denial of her death, mental journeys where I tried to figure out the meaning of life, or my life without her: these were all new emotional vocabulary to learn, and as I re-read that part of the story, I wanted to pull Gilgamesh close and call him brother. I have discovered, as these scenes begin to be repeated with my friends and their parents and siblings, that there is a familial relationship that can be found among people who are living through grief. Of all of my friends, the only one I turned to (aside from my partner) when my mother was dying was a good friend who had lost both of her parents—I needed someone who knew exactly
how it felt without me having to verbalize it. As I approach the second anniversary of my mother’s passing, I still find that need present; like Gilgamesh, I am searching for people who truly understand the lived experience of death.

As I went more deeply into the story, putting myself into the scene through active imagination, this experience of kinship with Gilgamesh took a more directly personal turn. Looking at the dialogue that resulted, I think that part of the reason it took the direction it did was because I went in with some intent—I tried to empty myself of that, but from the beginning I felt drawn to try to help Gilgamesh with his grief instead of just being present. My attempts to steer the conversation led to a mutual expression of anger, and though we came back to a place of understanding, I was eventually asked to leave.

I began by imagining the palace as before, and then through a light induction of walking down a spiral staircase, I entered the scene through the large door. Standing there silently, I waited for Gilgamesh to speak first. He was coming to the end of a crying bout, and looking up, he challenged my presence, asking angrily why I was there. I replied that I wanted to help with his grieving, and though he saw no point in discussing the matter, he allowed me to continue the conversation.

I talked for a bit about feeling grief as a physical pressure, as something closing in that I wanted to run away from, and he strongly agreed, adding that for him it was something that came from inside, and so he could not run. I mentioned in this part of the conversation that my mother had died, and after giving him some more information about the specifics, he said a heartfelt, “I’m sorry.” I responded in kind about Enkidu, and it appeared at that moment that we had reached the state of understanding I had imagined earlier. Though I did not go so far as to approach him, there was a feeling of kinship that
felt warm and comforting. I rested in this feeling for a moment or two before continuing, but the conversation quickly turned to conflict. While discussing my need to purposefully vent my grief through watching sad movies, Gilgamesh became visibly agitated and angry at the thought of re-creating his current emotional state on purpose. In trying to explain myself, I told him that the feelings do come back occasionally, even though time passes and they are not constant, and that this was one way I had found to work with them when they appeared. He began to yell “No!” at me repeatedly, and feeling attacked, I lashed out at him:

Yes. And it has its own schedule. It will not run by yours, it doesn’t care that you are the king; that wasn’t enough to save your friend and it won’t save you. But this isn’t fair, I already know you’re going to bury him and then run away. You’ll meet wiser people than me later. I should go before I discourage you any more.

At this point, unsurprisingly, he told me to leave and the scene disappeared. This sudden influx of anger at the end was very surprising. I remember feeling so irritated at Gilgamesh for not wanting to engage with the grief, but in reflecting on our exchange, I am struck by the childlike nature of his response, and my reaction feels overly critical and somewhat cruel, even though I did back off a bit at the very end. I experienced the entire dialogue as a conversation between two parts of myself: one who has worked through many aspects of grief and has an intellectual understanding of the process, and another who is still very much in that searing moment of fresh grief, bewildered at the loss like a child and feeling cut adrift. The night after this active imagination session, feeling the physical manifestation of grief in my back, I sat down with a DVD of Rent and my mother’s prayer shawl for a good cry. Still feeling that childlike presence, I tapped into a deeper well of grief than I have felt in a long time, and though that session of grieving left me exhausted, it ended with the same peaceful feeling that I had felt in first
imagining Gilgamesh. An undefined presence, which I choose to associate with my mother, comforted me in those moments and brought me back from the sobbing to deep cleansing breaths. This entire experience was a visceral reminder of not only the mind-body connection, but also of my own tendency to intellectualize my feelings and shunt them aside. The grieving child who appeared does not care about stages of acceptance, whether my mother is in a better place now, or how long it has been. All she knows is that she wants her mommy back. It is ironic but amusing to me that if “every human archetypal experience gets its full weight only when it meets in us the maturity to receive and to understand it” (Kluger, 1991, p. 159), one of my experiences of that maturity has come through engaging this childlike response, but that is itself a valuable lesson. Consciousness and insight do not always come in stereotypically wise packaging, and I will be looking for that young girl again to see what else she might have to say.
References


My active imagination experience with Inanna was a very different experience from the one with Gilgamesh. It was a more difficult story for me to enter, and my interaction was more limited, although this may have had to do with my willingness to sit back instead of lecturing. Based on the scene that resonated the most, I decided to enter the story just as the kurgarra and galatur have been given Inanna’s corpse.

I enter the cave of the underworld. The two small beings are lifting the corpse off of the meat hook and they set it down on the ground. Each little fly takes its gift, food or water, and puts a drop in her mouth. With a gasp, she reawakens and sits up. She is still slightly rotten, but not as much as when she was on the hook. She dusts herself off and begins to climb a set of stone stairs upward.

I follow her up the stairs and it gradually becomes brighter, until finally we reach the surface of the earth. As soon as she walks out, a hooded figure with a scepter in a hooded robe stops her. I am still in the mouth of the cave, in shadow. The demons, a dozen or so, jump down off the top of the cave onto her, and the hooded figure says we can go no further, that she must find a substitute. The demons start to push her forward, and I follow, a little afraid that I will be picked to be the substitute, but no one seems to notice I am in the scene.

We arrive at the first potential candidate, Inanna says no, and I hang back a little as we move on to the next one. We are trudging through some kind of scrub forest; it is sandy but not too hot, with small trees around. We get to the next person and the same
thing happens; she says no, but I am still not noticed. I decide to move up a little closer as we head to the third person, until I am standing right alongside. I am still hoping to not to be picked, but am a little annoyed to be completely ignored. As I am thinking this, a female voice says, “This is not your story. Don’t worry about being part of it.”

I watch Inanna say no to the third person (who I mistakenly think is Ninshubur), and then we head off, with her and all the demons and the hooded figure, until we get to Dumuzi. I see him up high in purple robes, seated on what looks like a giant mushroom, a bit like the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland*. There is a crowd far away, and he is smiling and waving at them in royal fashion with his back to us. I hear a loud crack and he turns around smiling, but as soon as he sees Inanna his face goes ashen, as if he has been caught doing something naughty. Before he can even get a word out, she fixes him with the eye of death and the demons rush him and drag him off. His robe falls off and she puts it on, and climbs up the mushroom to regain her throne. Ninshubur and I just stand there, and then this dialogue begins between me and the voice:

— I’m frustrated. I wanted this to be more involved.

— This isn’t the time; you can’t force it. Maybe you should have picked a different scene. What are you running from?

— I don’t know. I didn’t think I was running from anything in this story, but maybe there is something.

— You should think about that. I have to go now but you can come back later if you want.

Up to this point, the voice has not seemed to come from anywhere, but in this last statement it comes from the hooded figure, though I cannot see her face. After saying
this, she walks away and though I can still see the scene as it was, I appear to have popped out, so that I now see it like a picture behind glass.

The Aftermath—One Year Later

After writing the paper above, I meditated on this active imagination exercise and came to the conclusion that I was fleeing the first part of the myth, where Inanna descends to the underworld, is stripped of all her queenly attributes, and is put to death by her sister Ereshkigal. In starting the exercise with Inanna’s resurrection (even though that was the resonant scene as required by the assignment), I was missing her descent and death, which are crucial to give the resurrection meaning.

In order to truly enter this scene, I needed to start at the beginning of the story, and in order to descend with Inanna, I had to prepare in the same way she did, by gathering the seven me. As the final project for the Myth as Guide to Psychological Development class (for which the original paper was written), I was to create a ritual based on the Inanna myth. I decided to create a way to return to this scene and enact the first part of the myth. I created a wooden token for each me, with a drawing on the front and its name and order in Inanna’s dressing ritual on the back, and then returned in active imagination to meet the figure and find out if my plan was acceptable.

I entered a forest in my imagination, nearby the exit to the underworld, and waited by a small pool of water for a while. The hooded figure returned; we discussed our previous conversation and I was told that my plan to return with the me was a good one. I told her that I understood that to ascend I would have to be ready for some part of myself to die—that just as Inanna surrendered her body, I would have to give up something. The figure agreed and said I would know when it was time, and that she would meet me again
there when I was ready. I decided that as part of the ritual, I would burn the me to symbolize the end of that cycle of descent and ascent.

Almost a year after this original paper was written, in the *Jung and the Humanities* class, we worked again with active imagination and dream material. I had not yet returned as promised, and so for that assignment I went back to the forest to meet the hooded figure and receive further instructions about the ritual I was to perform. Beyond the forest was a large pile of sand, with doors at both ends—it was here that Inanna had entered and exited in my previous session. I waited at the pond and had a drink, and eventually my dream figure emerged, hooded in a dark robe as before. She chastised me gently for not coming back sooner, and said I was now ready to undertake the ritual of descent.

I asked what the ritual was to be, and she said that I was to return soon in imagination with the me, and do a ritual with the following steps:

1. Invoke the cardinal directions and their associated elements, as in Wiccan tradition (she hinted I might need to study up on this), and also invite the ancestors to join me.

2. Enter the underworld with the me and duplicate Inanna's journey. At each of the seven gates I was to stop, sacrifice the appropriate item (and any symbolism it had for me that I wished to be rid of) by burning it in a fire.

3. Allow myself to be killed by Ereshkigal, and try to internalize this as an ego death and then emptiness while on the hook.

4. Wait for some sign or feeling that the kurgarra and galatur had arrived to resurrect me.
5. Imagine the resurrection, my reborn self, and exit the underworld.

6. Reverse the calling of the ancestors and directions and close the ritual.

7. Take the ashes from the me, and the small vial I still had of my mother's ashes, and scatter them at sea.

I had intended to do this ritual soon after the imagination session, but events synchronistically intruded and I ended up performing it on the third anniversary of my mother’s death. I would not say that I feel complete in my grieving process, and I may never feel that, but as I watched the ashes ebb and flow on their way out to sea, I felt a sense of completeness and peace that up until that point had eluded me. The grief I felt during the year before this ritual was particularly intense, especially in the period leading up to the anniversary. I was beginning to despair of ever coming to grips with this loss, but by acting out the myth of death and resurrection symbolically, I found a way to let my mother go more completely. Active imagination gave me back what counseling, journaling, and crying could not—a story with an ending toward which I could work—and through that process I finally reached some sense of closure around my grief. Of all of the practices I have learned at Pacifica, it has been the most helpful and rewarding.
Artifact 3 – Meeting Jake

Jake was a revelation. I have done active imagination with a guide before as part of assignments at Pacifica, and developed a relationship of sorts with that presence, but she came out of working with the Inanna myth and both the guide and setting always felt tied to that myth, which made entering it from the current day (and my current state) difficult. When starting this guided meditation, I decided to put myself in a natural setting I love (a meadow in Bolinas that has personal meaning and overlooks the ocean) and go from there. Where I ended up was equally meaningful and a lovely surprise to me.

I walked from the meadow into a eucalyptus forest, in damp fog; following the instructions, I ended up in a cave on one edge of the wood. It was rather large, but I could only see a few feet in. At the entrance, on the left side, was a small wooden table and chair; on the right was a fire circle with a cast iron Dutch oven in the middle—the cave was clearly a home for someone. I walked in and looked around, waiting for an animal to appear as indicated, and finally a pigeon walked toward me out of the darkness. I offered it some bread from my pocket to get it to come closer, and this was a revelation for me. I was unsure of what to do at first, but realized suddenly that it was my imagination, and so whatever I needed could be at hand; I needed bread and then it was there in my pocket to be offered. This was my first experience, in a way, with lucid dreaming and the ability to change an imaginative narrative in progress, and was very exciting.

The pigeon took me deeper into the cave—it began glowing green to lead the way—and I entered an area that looked like a library: many wooden shelves full of
books, and two large high-back leather chairs with lamps and tables beside them. An old man approached as I walked toward the chairs; he was dressed like my father, in a flannel shirt, jeans, and hiking boots, but I responded to him emotionally more as a grandfather. He was thin, and looked like Don Quixote mixed with Robert Altman. I asked if he was my guide and he replied, “It would seem so,” and smiled. Then I asked his name. He looked at me and said, “I can see that you think it’s Philemon, because I look like that guy from the Red Book, but my name is Jake.” He smiled again, and I caught a twinkle in his eye.

I began to ask him the questions outlined in the meditation, pausing the recording as needed to leave time for a full answer. What amazed me most about this process was how real the relationship felt; it had no sense of being imaginary, even though I was aware of sitting at my desk at home, and Jake’s responses were full and very human. He was clearly wiser than I, but very warm and not at all distant, and in fact, told me (when asked why he came to me at this time), that he knew a lot and had read a lot, but was lonely and wanted to share it with someone. He was adamant that this knowledge not die with him (or me either, as he later charged me to share it as well through my writing). It had never occurred to me that a guide would have autonomous needs; I seemed to have shown up in his world for just as much reason as he showed up in mine.

We continued through the questions, pausing for a drink of lemonade at one point, and after finishing our conversation I stood up and offered him a gift—a flattened penny from Frontier Village, a local Western-themed amusement park from my childhood. Jake was delighted, and walked over to a lit display case of similar pennies, where there was one open spot in the center; he opened the case and completed his collection with mine.
This was almost too much for me; I felt very emotional at this point, thinking that I was possibly one (and the final) in a long line of people for whom he had been a guide, or at the very least that my penny being the last one had some significance for us both. In turn, he took off a leather corded necklace from his neck and handed it to me; it had a large metal charm in the shape of a log on it, and he told me that when I wanted to come back I just needed to put it on, and it would bring me back to him. We walked out of the cave arm-in-arm, pigeon on my shoulder, and I left him to walk back through the meadow.

I am still processing this experience, rolling it over in my mind; it was so much more than I expected it to be, and it was clear from Jake that he had a lot to teach and that he had certain expectations for our future meetings, which I found a bit intimidating. However, if he is a representation of my wisest self, that makes sense; I am in a position now where there are some old self-inflicted boundaries that need to be broken through, and though that is scary, it is comforting to know that I will have some help.
I think the world exacts a terrible toll on those of us who live in it. We lose our loved ones and witness a lot of destruction and damage. It’s a hard place to live, but it also offers us all the opportunities we’re going to get in this life.

(Berry, 2007, p. 166)

Pacifica’s motto means “for the sake of tending the soul of the world,” and as Pacifica is a community of scholars and practitioners focused primarily on the psyche, its emphasis on soul is understandable. However, the world also has a body that requires tending, and I have been pleased in my Pacifica work to find that the soul/body split so prevalent in Western culture has been well deconstructed in the coursework. That is my feeling from my current vantage point, of course; when I entered Pacifica, this was not a deep concern of mine. As with so many other things in my studies here, Pacifica has brought to consciousness feelings and intuitions I have long had about the environmental crisis, politics, and art, and given me a new framework in which to examine them more deeply.

Looking at these areas of human expression through a depth psychological lens has had the paradoxical effect of increasing my agitation about the various crises, while at the same time increasing compassion for my fellow human beings, who after all are trying to figure all of this out just as I am. Understanding particularly how easy it is for us to be overcome by various archetypes such as the shadow (and how our culture sets us up to be overtaken) means that if I am to engage others, I need to practice this sense of
compassion actively and recognize that we all act to some degree in response to unconscious impulses.

The papers in this section address these issues from several perspectives. The first two both stem from studies related to the ecological crisis and examine it from different angles. Because water is almost universally a symbol of the unconscious, “How the West Was Won: Water and the American Eden” views the relationship of the American West to water through a depth psychological lens. The result is an unknotted tangle of religion, beliefs about property, morality, and just plain greed that has led to misguided policy and deep environmental strain within that large ecosystem. I attempt to explain not only the chain of beliefs that has brought the region to this point, but also the unseen psychological costs of damming up our souls the same way we do the rivers, and how they are mirrors of each other to our great detriment.

Looking at ecology from the opposite perspective, “Permaculture and the Ecology of the Psyche” starts from a design method used in the material world and theorizes how its principles could be adapted to inner work. During the middle of my time at Pacifica, I completed a one-year permaculture design certification course, and because it (like depth psychology) is a way of looking at the world in an integrated fashion, it has deeply influenced my work. This was particularly true in the Models for Depth Ecology and Sustainability and Models of National Transformation classes, which dealt directly with environmental issues, but it is indicative of how far permaculture can go in engagement with psychology that this paper was written for the Jung and the Humanities class. Exploring the connections between soul and earth, especially within the context of Jung’s
work, was inspiring to me both in thought and in the desire for action; to paraphrase futurist Stewart Brand, we are nature and might as well get good at it (Brand, 1968, p. 3).

Moving outward from the specifics of ecology to the wider political and religious realms, the final three papers in this section examine how those realms can be experienced through archetypal interactions, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. As many do who study psychology, I wrestled with the human capacity for evil, and searched within my studies for an explanation for both the monstrous and the everyday ways in which we diminish and destroy each other and ourselves. “Only The Shadow Knows: Image and Integration” tackles this head-on, examining the cost of unacknowledged shadow impulses in the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison. It also explores how they can be reintegrated through art, by holding up a mirror to the shadow until we see our own reflections.

As my understanding of archetypes increased over the course of my studies, I felt drawn to examine one in particular with which I had a life-changing interaction. In “It’s the End of the World As We Know It, and I Feel Fine: The Psychology of Apocalypse,” I explore the archetype of apocalypse and its ability to overwhelm the human psyche so completely that the basic survival instinct can be overcome. Though my own relationship with the archetype was not as drastic, the paper also delves into the submerged aspects of my own psyche that enabled it to get a foothold and reroute the course of my life for several years. I was fortunately able to retain some sense of balance during that period rather than being sucked under the waves, as many others are when they are confronted with such powerful unconscious forces.
Balance is also the theme of the final paper in this section, “Hey Nonny Nonny: Holding the Tension Between Fool and King.” Written as part of the *Transformational Polarities in Myth* class, and originally developed as a module of the class that I was allowed to lead, it views politics in a slightly different way than the others presented here. The king and fool, though they are often seen as being in opposition, actually represent different views of reality that need to be reconciled in order for the polity to function well, much like the conscious and unconscious of an individual. As with the individual, the question to be answered is whether the king will allow the hidden intrigues of the court to come to light through their designated path. As with all of the papers in this section, this final entry tries to find pathways of metaphor between the inner stirrings of the psyche and the outer stirrings of policy, politics, and public life.
References


Artifact 4 – How the West Was Won: Water and the American Eden

When Pan is dead, then nature can be controlled by the will of the new God, man…creating from it and polluting in it without a troubled conscience.

(Hillman, 1989, p. 97)

You have any idea what this land would be worth with a steady water supply?
About 30 million more than they paid for it.

(Towne, 1974)

The history of humankind is, on one level, a history of interaction with the landscape. Even in the earliest days of human civilization, before agriculture and permanent settlement, people carved out their existence from the multitude of gifts the earth had to offer; plants, animals, rocks, fire, and water provided the means for them to feed, clothe, and protect themselves against the elements. As long as *homo habilis* has roamed the Earth, transformation of the environment has been the result—we are a tool-building, innovative species. However, in our modern world where over 6 billion people are trying to attend to their physical needs in an often highly degraded landscape, it could be argued that our innovations have gotten the better of us. There are many lenses through which to view the environmental destruction that has accompanied human expansion throughout the planet; this paper will examine it through the prisms of the belief in America as a limitless resource and the use of water in the American West.

Although this examination will be focused on the United States, it is important to note that the attitude toward the natural world that American culture has inherited has a large debt to Western culture in general, going back to the Neolithic era. Interpretations
of historical data vary, but regardless of the cause, a shift seems to have occurred between 4300 BCE and 2800 BCE from relatively small-scale, egalitarian human societies to larger-scale domination-based societies (Korten, 2006, p. 100). Economist David Korten marks this period as the beginning of Empire, “a social pathology some five thousand years in the making” (p. 108), and though the destructive powers and tendencies of Empire have been much magnified over time, their beginnings go back almost as far as human history and are rooted in the growth of human societies and the need to maintain some semblance of order as those societies continued to grow.

Moving forward through the ancient kingdoms of the Middle East and the plutocracies of the Greeks and Romans, we see not only an increasing codification of systems of power and resource distribution (both begin to concentrate in upper echelons), but also changes in fundamental philosophy with regard to the natural world. What has resulted after several millennia of Empire’s expansion is

> a tradition [that sees] humans as the only species of moral significance on the earth and thereby sanction[s] the uninhibited use, the misuse, even the wholesale extermination of the rest of the living world for the sake of satisfying human needs. (Worster, 1993, p. 207)

This is the philosophical framework within which the United States was initially founded. In addition, political and religious frameworks of the 17th through 19th centuries accelerated the process of environmental destruction of the “new” world.

The peculiarly American conception of nature, which persists to this day and which we have exported to much of the rest of the world, rests on a worldview deeply informed by deism. Early Americans saw the abundant landscape of their new home as proof of the permanence of nature, as created by a God who set natural laws and processes in motion and then left them to do their work. The early settlers and
expansionists of the new continent saw it as a new Eden, “the planet’s last, best place…kept sequestered for us” (Worster, 1993, p. 10), and in the face of the fecundity that greeted them, assumed that nature’s gifts were unending, leading to an attitude of wastefulness masquerading as gratitude. We show respect for the earth, in that way of thinking, by “the intensity of our enjoyment, the size of our appetite….Nature will take care of itself” (p. 11). Added onto this destructive love is the concept of dominion over nature as expressed in Genesis, which to the mostly Protestant settlers was tied into their own self-image as workers and servants of God; the theological outlines of Empire, already tied to hierarchal structures, transferred easily to a new and fertile landscape, especially in contrast to the pollution and classism that the settlers left behind in industrial Europe. The colonies were, in the words of one settler, “a faire virgin longing to be sped and meete her lover in a Nuptiall bed. Her fruitfull wombe not being enjoyed is like a glorious tombe” (Merchant, 2003, p. 123). Engendering nature as female, a practice which by then already had a long history in Western culture, was thus brought to one logical conclusion; in order for her fertility to be meaningful, it must be brought to life through symbolic marriage to the men who will transform mere fertility into actual life, in the form of products for human use.

Another strand of thought that led into what became the myth of the American West was the emphasis, born of the desire to escape the centralized authority of Europe’s kings, on owning land. This was particularly true for those of the lower classes who came to the colonies—and later the United States—whose chance at upward mobility (assuming they were white and male) was tied primarily to that ownership. Linking true participation in the new country to privatization of land created two distinct and
contradictory attitudes toward the land, summarized by environmental historian Donald Worster:

First, to keep America a decent, virtuous nation the land ought to be owned by as many individuals as possible. Second, to make the nation grow in richness and power the land and its products should be treated as commodities, put up for sale to the highest bidder in the marketplace. (Worster, 1993, p. 99)

The tension between these two beliefs was not resolved in the American soul, and as a result, the desire for land ownership led to rapid westward expansion from the lush forests of the Eastern seaboard, through the plains, and eventually into the comparatively dry areas west and south of the Rocky Mountains. Faced with a less hospitable landscape than they were accustomed to, and fueled by the belief that their labor could and should turn these desert lands into an oasis, the western settlers dug in and set to work remaking the land to serve their needs. The West was a dry landscape to be transformed into an extension of the eastern Eden (which itself was already becoming more urban); cultivation of apparently “barren desert [would] convert the West into a fruitful garden, in defiance of conventional meteorological understanding” (L. C. Mitchell, 2003).

An interesting paradox about Western land development is that in this area where the individual is exalted even more than in the American myth in general, the remaking of the landscape, though begun by pioneers in small groups, was almost entirely accomplished by the state (Worster, 1985, p. 131). A long-term drought in the 1890s, which to people in intimate relationship to nature might have signaled the need for conservation or travel, instead triggered in the recent arrivals an increased desire for irrigation. Working under the assumption (already delineated previously) that nature would continue to provide for human needs, the technocrats of the era envisioned
a technological civilization…bent on the complete domination of nature….The Colorado was wasting its energy by cutting canyons through sandstone and shale…it would be put to better work generating electricity for a brave new world. (p. 134)

This vision has led, in the last 150 years, to the damming of the American West, which in its physical terms has been damaging enough. What has been less examined is the effect of damming and domination on the American psyche. In pure political terms, this approach has taken an area of the United States whose reigning mythos is unfettered independence and turned it into a ward of the federal and state governments with regard to water rights, creating an emotional dissonance in its citizens that results in erratic public policy generally and particularly where natural resources are concerned. In addition, it has exacerbated the already strong American tendency to see nature as only a collection of resources to be extracted, a pool of substances and products wholly separate from, and subservient to, the needs of the humans who extract them from their places. Water, which carries so many historically mythic and spiritual meanings, is in this system reduced to merely a means to an end; it is allowed to flow where we need it to flow for agriculture, mining, or other industrial operations, rather than along its own natural paths.

The psychological result of this damming up and rerouting seems clear in the American psyche. If we hold to the sense of water as an emblem of the unconscious, then what we have done is to shut off the unconscious from its own innate, archetypal expression and instead tried to turn it toward our own ends. This has met with some success, at least on the surface; the American West is highly productive in economic terms, both from its land and its people, and personal energies have been redirected toward highly entrepreneurial enterprises that have created wealth and arguably brought much good to the world. However, it would be disingenuous to say that these innovations
and wealth have not come at a cost; they have, and it is one we are only now beginning to
calculate in the wake of environmental disaster and increased personal pressures.

We live in communities that are not sized to human scale or related in any
meaningful way to the natural landmarks that circumscribe them. Political boundaries are
arbitrary, based on centuries-old patterns of conquest, corrupt land dealings, and current
legislative gerrymandering rather than on watersheds, mountains, and other traditional
ways of defining areas of human habitation. Our unwillingness to see these natural
expressions of the Earth’s own growth and limits has led us to settle in places where our
numbers are greater than the land can support, and that is nowhere clearer in the United
States than in the West, with its perennial water and resource battles. Similarly, our own
latent desires for community, conservation, and care of the land are waved away as
impractical considerations, given the amount of perceived need for natural resources.

The resources themselves, though—that is, the water, soil, plants, rocks, and air—
would likely tell us something different. The need we have is real, but its size is largely a
reflection of appetite and the resistance to telling it “no.” Conservation efforts have been
highly sporadic over American history, and highly reactive to specific external events
such as the OPEC embargo or extended droughts or flooding. Taking these resources
seriously, even if we continue to view them as only that, requires at the very least a
commitment to living within our means. If we are willing to go a few steps farther and
reinvest them not only with economic potential but with the spiritual and psychological
meanings they used to have, the economic strategies of Empire would be turned on their
heads. Damming up entire watersheds would be seen as theft from those downstream,
just as damming up one’s emotions similarly cuts a person off from communal life. Rain
would once again be a gift, something to be treasured and measured out carefully within a fair distribution for all the needs present in a watershed, not just those of humans. The watershed itself would be honored in its complete diversity and abundance, from the snowpack in the mountains to the marshes where rivers meet sea. We could then drink deeply, knowing that we are not only made of water, but sustained by it and respectful of its own journey through our landscapes.
References


Oh, the farmer and the analyst should be friends,
Oh, the farmer and the analyst should be friends.
One man fills your salad bowl,
The other looks deep in your soul,
But that's no reason why they can't be friends.

With apologies to Rodgers and Hart, whether the farmer and the analyst can be friends seems a worthwhile question in a time when both matter and soul make claims on our attention. Permaculture is one way of looking at the intersection between people and the land that sustains them. It tends to the ecologies of land and human culture; itself a contraction of “permanent culture” or “permanent agriculture” (depending on which source is consulted), it is a discipline that appears at first glance to be devoted primarily to dealing with matter. Psychology, by contrast, deals mostly in phantoms—realities not seen by the eye (except in affect) but nonetheless real and highly active in human affairs—and the core of human existence commonly called soul. However, these two disparate ways of looking at the universe can meet on common ground with a bit of a stretch, because neither is as wedded to its relationship to its subject as it might seem. The place where they meet is what I am choosing to call the “ecology of the psyche,” and the psyche’s ecosystem needs at least as much tending as any watershed—perhaps more.

Permaculture, though it is described as a design science, has interrelationship as a major theme. At its core are three simple ethical guidelines that circumscribe its activities: care for earth, care for people, and setting limits on consumption with
redistribution of surplus (Holmgren, 2002, p. 1), which are sometimes summed up in the catchphrase “earth care, people care, fair share.” An ecological system requires dedicated attention to flourish in a way that serves both its own innate needs and those of the beings who tend it, lest the system fall out of balance. I believe this is true of the soul no less than a farm or homestead, and that permaculture is a useful way to look at human individuation within the broader context of the natural world (of which we are a part) and its processes.

When looking at a landscape, whether exterior or interior, observation of what actually exists there is a crucial first step. It is easy to be distracted by one’s own desires toward a piece of land, but “the landscape is the textbook” (Holmgren, 2002, p. 15) and will point toward what is appropriate for development, based on available water, contour of terrain, and many other factors. Likewise, examination of the inner landscape, given its hidden nature, requires some time and patience before adding an interpretation; either for oneself or as an analyst working with another’s psychic material, “you can read all about psychology but then you just have to look at what is there” (von Franz, 1999, p. 13). Interpretation and action should wait until the lay of the land has been established.

Another key permaculture principle, as formulated by Holmgren (2002), is to “use edges and value the marginal” (p. 223). In design practice, this may take the form of rippling the edges of a pond (instead of making it perfectly round) or other means to increase places of ecosystem interaction. Edges are where growth and transformation necessary to the whole system occur, such as water filtration, nutrient transfer, and species interaction. In the psyche, these edges primarily take the form of the unconscious material, both individual and collective, that rests in dreams, intuitions, and other murmurings of the
soul that prod us toward their integration. As Jung (1953/1966) described the process with regard to repressed thoughts,

   It is often very interesting to watch how the dreams fetch up the essential points, bit by bit and with the nicest choice. The total material that is added to consciousness causes a considerable widening of the horizon, a deepened self-knowledge... (p. 137)

At the edge of conscious and unconscious, then, is where the archetypes make their presence known and where repressed ideas find a place to bubble up and force themselves upon the ego. The margins are the places where messy or wasted areas can be rejuvenated; having a healthy ecology of the soul means considering “the abandoned fields, hidden with scars under the bushes…we will have to think competently and kindly of lands of all sorts, even the apparently useless” (Berry, 1977/1986, p. 185). The unconscious may seem fallow, but it teems with possibility when looked at more closely.

Another key permaculture concept is that the problem is the solution. This principle is often invoked in reference to “waste” materials left over from working the land, such as straw after grain has been separated from the rest of the plant. One way of looking at the straw is to see it as waste that needs to be disposed of, but from another view, it is the solution to another problem: the high cost of building materials. Worked with appropriately, the straw can be used to build houses or other buildings that would otherwise require timber. Similarly, neurosis or complexes could be seen as a waste product (or worse) of a person’s individuation process—some leftover bit that needs to be disposed of or eliminated. This may even be true in fact, if the complex is debilitating in some way. However, it is also often the case that complexes, if one is willing to see them for what they are, can be worked with to bring about a deeper integration of the soul, and that the energy which they generate can help to drive that process. Analyst Edward
Edinger put it beautifully, speaking of the power of darkness in concert with light: “every increase in consciousness (light) derives from a creative encounter with darkness…but the law of opposites is then activated and the compensating wind of the spirit rushes in. This spirit fertilizes the darkness and new light is born” (Edinger, 1986, p. 19).

Permaculture and depth psychology have many other connected principles, due to their shared integral ways of looking at the systems they describe (the natural landscape and the human psyche). Looking at one method through the eyes of the other emphasizes that as humans, we are not separate from the natural world and in fact, can view even our most interior landscapes as part of a larger whole represented by the tangible, material world. We can even choose to follow or adapt processes described for working with that world. So far, that has largely led down a path of alienation from self and nature as represented by industrial culture, but as we regain access to knowledge of other ways of seeing the outer world, the possibilities for the inner world expand as well and can bring us back into harmony with the creation of which we are a part. “Earth care, people care, fair share” then becomes just three different ways of saying the same thing; when we can see ourselves as fully part of earth and it as fully descriptive of us, our individuation and that of the planet and culture are visibly intertwined and can proceed hand-in-hand.
References


It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

(Williams, 2001, p. 318)

What does it mean to live in a world without image and symbol? It is hard to imagine. Even in a world as wedded to the rational as ours, room is left for these expressions of our shared archetypal heritage. Perhaps a better question is why, given an innate capacity to engage with these expressions of the collective unconscious, so many “die miserably” (Williams, 2001, p. 318) for the lack of them, at least on a conscious level. Why do people turn away or remain unaware of such a deep vein of understanding? There are advantages to mining the unconscious and going underground is sometimes necessary to move human culture forward. Those advantages and some of the reasons why many stay up top, away from the caves of image, are explored here.

If “mutual communication and social organization would be impossible without the existence of images and concepts shared by all” (Whitmont, 1991, p. 104), then we humans are dependent on images to create culture with each other, and limiting our gaze to the visible and factual leaves behind the deeper unconscious connections we share, to our detriment. This often takes the form of not acknowledging the shadow side of the Self or the culture, and then projecting the unwanted aspects it represents onto a person or
group defined as “Other.” This distancing from and lack of empathy for the Other is at the root of most human conflict, and imagination and effort are required to overcome resistance to the malign or inferior aspects of ourselves that the Other represents:

The engagement of the other, which is...the source of fear, bigotry, and most violence, is the ultimate moral challenge. The work of integrating, of dialoguing with, of respecting the energetic powers of the Other, is an enduring task for each civilization and for each individual. (Hollis, 2004, p. 34)

One way to begin this dialogue is through art. Because art deals in image and symbol, it provides an avenue by which these seemingly lost connections, actually present in the collective unconscious, can be brought to the surface. The sense of loss itself may even be the impetus for the journey, a “yearning to re-find something we believed we once possessed” (Leader, 2002, p. 75). Whether the loss is felt consciously does not matter—the urging of the collective unconscious is unavoidable and symbolic function “continues to operate, whether consciously or unconsciously; and like every function, it may, when so repressed, give rise to difficulties and pathological expressions” (Whitmont, 1991, p. 23). How aware each of us is of searching for connection, and the choice to listen to that voice’s urging or not, determines the effect of art on restoring the balance of dialogue between the Self and the collective.

How that voice speaks to us is mysterious, but not entirely unknown. Life is awash in images and symbols: those given by the greater culture, those that are specifically ours based on experience, and those from the collective unconscious, which are often hidden but speak to us in art and dreams. “Images are the soul’s immune system and transit system” (Barry, 2008, p. 44); they bring what is otherwise unconscious to the surface, in images that can be plumbed by the conscious mind for meanings and then acted upon. The images that arise during the creative process or when viewing art are
keys to the unconscious, both personal and collective, and offer avenues of exploration into one’s own history and unfolding Self. Working through image, we allow ourselves (if diligent and willing) to see facets of the Self that previously may have been hidden, even facets of which we may not wish to be aware:

There is no mirror I know that can show me all of these singularities, unless it is the strange distorting looking-glass of art where I will not find my reflection nor my representation but a nearer truth than I prefer. (Winterson, 1995, p. 150)

Art can therefore bring a greater sense of integration to the Self; it creates a path of redemption by which cast off or ignored aspects can return and become part of the whole again. Image is key to this redemption because it slips around the defenses already put in place by the rational mind, and because it connects the individual’s meaning to that of the greater unconscious, affecting the Self on both levels simultaneously. Art “points to something beyond itself” (Leader, 2002, p. 75), a level of meaning or experience beyond the object, just as archetype appears in dreams: as a way to express “a part of the personality which has not yet come into existence but is still in the process of becoming” (Jung, 1974, p. 79). By engaging actively with the images that present themselves in art and dreams, especially those of which one has been unaware or to which one has been resistant, one becomes attentive to the voice of the unconscious and is able to converse with the greater realm of the collective unconscious.

Images can broaden the range of understood experience, as in the case of Frida Kahlo, whose vibrant use of color and symbol reflected the joy, passion, heartache, and physical pain of her life. Her paintings show the full range of feeling in a human life, with all of its messiness and beauty, and while the images are in some ways particular to her experience, such as the back brace in The Broken Column (Taymor, 2002, p. 145),
they also symbolize more generalized feelings that can be shared by others, such as brokenness and a need for support. For any person who sees that image and then resonates with that emotion, the connection is made: her brokenness is theirs and that of the whole human family, and the need for support symbolized by the metal brace can be extrapolated to other types of support, such as community, financial assistance, or shared belief. One may speak of feeling “moved” in moments like these, and they do nudge the soul a bit farther along its path toward wholeness.

On a cultural level, images can bring a similar sort of redemption to a society by making it aware of ideas or groups of people made outcast by that society. The images in the 1960s of African-Americans being attacked by police, dogs, and fire hoses, for example, arguably had more effect on the general population’s view of civil rights than the preceding three decades of legislative effort, although both were ultimately crucial to achieving the goals of that movement. The visceral and violent nature of those images helped sidestep for many the rational mind’s and the greater culture’s assurance that the status quo was acceptable. Seeing direct violence against other human bodies (in whose place the viewers could see themselves) forced an admission that the existing order was not actually natural, but maintained by force. Identification and empathy with those who were attacked was therefore created by bringing these images to the attention of the conscious mind (even though this occurred not through art but through news reporting), and forced the U.S. on some level to confront its shadow around issues of race.

Bringing the political and social realm into the discussion, however, makes apparent one aspect of image and the unconscious that is not as readily seen, perhaps, in the individual case. Because images have the power to move people so deeply by
engaging common archetypes, they have the power to influence and amplify negative behavior as much as positive. It is possible, in the course of bringing shadow elements to consciousness, to also increase their pull rather than reintegrating them into the whole. In its attractiveness, shadow can become paradoxically more hidden than ever, if those who are interacting with the image and the archetypes it represents either do not recognize it as shadow or choose not to integrate it. The immune system that image can be is sometimes compromised and unable to heal the rift between shadow and the conscious mind when the psychic cost of acknowledging the shadow seems too high.

As a nation, for example, the United States was shown an aspect of its shadow when photos of U.S. soldiers torturing prisoners in Abu Ghraib were released to the public. These pictures, taken in the middle of a war that could itself be seen as the result of a shadow projection, held the nation’s image of itself to scrutiny and found it lacking; photos of our soldiers torturing prisoners do not show the moral high road on which we like to picture ourselves. Aside from the imprisonment of a few soldiers (who have borne the burden of what we did not want to see) the larger issue of whether the behavior shown is consistent with our national sense of self appears to have been left unresolved. One result, as often occurs in the repression of shadow elements, is that the unresolved question keeps being brought to our attention. In the case of Abu Ghraib, that has happened in one instance through art, in the movie Standard Operating Procedure (Morris, 2008).

In this film, many of the soldiers involved in the incidents at Abu Ghraib were interviewed about their experiences, and they reported on a personal level much of the same journey the United States has taken on a cultural level. They learned by example to
see the prisoners as less than human, and as representatives of an enemy that for them personally was all too real. Interrogation techniques used by various agencies led to an environment where anything short of killing the prisoners was deemed acceptable in light of the war; as one soldier put it, “there’s only so much you can feel” (Morris, 2008). All of this is brought back in a more intense form in film than in the printed pictures. In the film, we see the photos again, but instead of being flat prints, parts are re-enacted and video shot by the soldiers during some of the more demeaning incidents is also shown. However, the true reckoning of shadow comes as we are literally forced to face some of the people who performed these acts. We are shown the photos of what they did, hear them describe it and the context in which it occurred, and then we see them, facing the camera and looking and sounding remarkably like us. There is very little room in which to make them the Other, and so we are left to ponder whether our own behavior would have been any different under the same circumstances.

This painful reckoning is the great task of self-actualization: learning how to acknowledge and integrate the shadow. It is also one of the most difficult. If the shadow is “that which we have measured and found wanting” (Whitmont, 1991, p. 163), then our resistance is understandable: “It takes nerve not to flinch from or be crushed by the sight of one’s own shadow, and it takes courage to accept responsibility for one’s inferior self” (p. 163). As a nation, with regard to the war in Iraq, we are still struggling with shadows and our own sense of responsibility in the same way the soldiers from Abu Ghraib are struggling with theirs. Art that continues to raise these questions will hopefully force us as a nation to acknowledge this shadow side. On both a national and personal level, this requires the willingness and ability to listen to the voice of the collective unconscious as
it comes through these symbols of soldiers who stand in for the rest of us. What we feel when we see the flag or our faces in the mirror should reflect the knowledge that we are capable of both extraordinary feats and common cruelty, and everything in between. To acknowledge this would be to see “ourselves as we really are, and take the first step toward…reality” (Whitmont, 1991, p. 165). Art, then, is one vehicle for coming to this understanding—it is a mirror into which we can look to get a new picture of the Self.
References


As the world moves fully into the twenty-first century, there is alongside modern culture what at first glance seems to be a retrograde impulse: the belief in an end time as defined in the writing of a first-century prophet. John’s fever dream, as laid out in the Bible’s Book of Revelations, sits in stark contrast to both the practiced nonchalance of popular culture and the relatively slow decline of environmental degradation. It does not find itself completely without an anchor in our world, though; humans have lived for the last 60 years or more with the knowledge that the complete destruction prophesied in that dream is within the scope of human action.

It should be no surprise that under such circumstances, apocalyptic thinking would abound, and in fact it does—a 2002 Time/CNN poll indicated that 59% of Americans believe that the events John outlined will come to pass (Gibbs, 2002). Such beliefs, however, long predate nuclear weapons, and in the Christian tradition can be traced at least back to him, if not all the way to the Old Testament prophets. One might ask what in Western culture encourages such beliefs, and what their consequences are for both the individual and the culture at large. Through an analysis of the apocalyptic mindset and a related personal history, this paper will explore that question.

Apocalyptic thinking does not arise in a vacuum; it is the result of factors in both the culture at large and the individual. In cultural terms, the “radical dislocations of our times, and the attendant breakdown of symbol systems of authority, education, religion and family life, which provided clear guidance to individuals,…no longer [exist]”
(Lifton, 1997). Without that guidance or some other structure to sustain the individual’s sense of self, the chaos of the outer world can become mirrored in a person’s inner world, so that it is felt as an expression of one’s own inner state. One then can either open to the feeling, or close down and try to repress it. In the second case, the refusal (whether conscious or unconscious) to engage with these feelings leaves the individual open to possession by the archetype of Apocalypse, due to the sense of meaning, structure and stability that it provides in the face of a world that appears to be falling apart.

In such times, people are more likely to look for both an explanation for these events and for some relief from their own disquiet. Belief in apocalypse fulfills both needs, “because it is magical in nature and magic promises certain control of events to those who practice it. Magic rituals, magic formulae, magic words provide a supposedly automatic result, if one faithfully adheres to them” (Sickinger, 2001, p. 188). These techniques are not usually thought of as “magic” by those who believe in them, but are instead couched in terms of doctrine, obedient faith, and special knowledge. Literalism with regard to one’s chosen doctrinal documents is one of the outgrowths of this combination of repression and magical thinking; it removes the possibility of “interpretation and its inevitable result, the conflict of interpretations” (Davis, 2006, p. 270) and offers instead “great protection against a world teeming with complexities” (p. 270). To maintain this feeling of protection, one must put this literal faith above the stirrings of one’s own heart, which are subject to doubt and therefore suspect—“certitude that in its simplicity puts an end to all doubt, even to the possibility of doubt” (p. 273) is the desired result.
If this form of magical thinking is the beginning of the apocalyptic mindset, what then is the path that leads to full possession by the Apocalypse archetype? There is a clear correlation between the breaking down of the outer world’s form and its rebirth into a godly paradise, and the breaking down of the ego and its rebirth into a fully individuated Self. As Edward Edinger (1999) described it, the arrival of Self that individuation necessarily brings the “opposites,” since they are its essential content…Once this essential content touches the area of consciousness, the opposites split apart: and the individual ego is confronted with “conflict.”…What usually happens is that the individual is not able to contain this “warring” within oneself, and the conflict of opposites spills out into the outer world by way of projection. (pp. 174–175)

Thus we have the next step toward possession, which is the insistence on not only personal certitude, but also a removal from the outside world of factors that might threaten it. Some apocalyptically minded people react to this necessity by turning inward, engaging with the world only to the extent necessary for survival but otherwise self-isolating for what they perceive to be their own protection. More commonly, however, the impulse to remove temptations toward doubt takes the form of the external projection that Edinger described, and has political and social consequences in the culture at large.

The internal opposites, because they are not being consciously dealt with, emerge in the individual’s view as an externalized other that must be overcome to maintain one’s own sense of surety and equilibrium. This role is often filled by socially outcast groups such as racial or religious minorities, but can just as easily land on political opponents, other countries, anyone outside a small group of true believers, or in the most extreme and paranoid case, anyone other than the individual in question. The conversion process that leads to the creation of such a true believer (whether or not it takes the form of a
religious conversion) is at its core a negation of the Self and the individuation process. Instead of struggling with one’s own internal workings toward an integrated whole, the apocalyptic believer chooses a split in one’s own life and the dissolution of the old self in favor of a reborn self, dedicated to the chosen higher truth or power and redeemed by that power rather than by its own action. In this case, rather than transforming the self, apocalyptic conversion “annihilates it. That is, in fact, its function” (Davis, 2006, p. 277).

It is, at its core, the ego saying “no” to life and all of its complexities in favor of a simple set of rules to follow. This annihilation of the self to erase doubt, when combined with the projection onto groups of “outsiders” that they are the cause of that doubt and therefore a threat to personal stability, leads to a hyperbolic feeling of threat.

One result of this type of projection has been the motif of ritualized violence among various religious cults. As with the individual example, the violence can turn inward as self-isolation of the group from the outside world (sometimes ending in mass suicide), or outward, as murder. The dynamics of apocalyptic cults that lead to violence are usually reinforced by a combination of three factors in addition to self-isolation: strong charismatic leadership, the belief that oneself is always just short of realizing spiritual perfection, and belief that questioning received doctrine reveals a self-deficiency rather than a doctrinal error (Lifton, 2001). These factors keep the individual members in a perpetual state of self-doubt, for which further solidifying their commitment to the group is offered as a remedy. Along with the real needs for structure and ritual that such groups also provide, this collection of behaviors creates a feedback loop which greatly increases the possibility of group members being willing to die or kill for their beliefs; their need for the removal of self-doubt in the face of perceived chaos is so strong that it
can overcome even the instinct for self-preservation. The physical body, in this case, can even be seen as a final obstacle to ascension to a better world; in the case of the mass suicide of the Heaven’s Gate cult, for example, “earthly bodies were held to be temporary vessels for ‘creator spirits’ which were soon to be discarded…suicide provided the opportunity to ascend to a higher realm of existence” (Dein & Littlewood, 2000, p. 112).

As a final illustration of how apocalyptic thinking can collide with already-existing individual complexes and transform individual behavior, I offer the story of my own brief involvement with an apocalyptic Christian cult. When I was in my early twenties, having recently come out as a lesbian and moved in with my first girlfriend, I came across literature published by the Worldwide Church of God. I had been fairly non-religious in my life up to that point, and was also a lesbian, which other pamphlets from the same church made clear was unacceptable to their conception of God. In spite of these circumstances, however, something about the booklets continued to draw me in, and as I read more of them, I began to feel concerned about the state of my soul and whether I would be “right” with God when the end times came (I was fairly well convinced after several months of reading that they would come). The booklets presented several common beliefs about the Apocalypse, all of which were explained in great detail and keyed to many scriptural quotes.

The results of this self-inflicted onslaught were significant. I began to keep a Saturday Sabbath, observe Jewish holidays, and engaged in weekly Bible study. Most importantly, I decided I needed to be celibate, given that my orientation was toward women. The church seemed to indicate that orientation was inborn, but if it was not heterosexual, should not be acted upon. I lived like this for three years, until I gradually
reawakened to myself and began to question what I had been reading; I moved quickly from that to re-establishing a more secular lifestyle, and have followed a fairly eclectic spiritual path since.

What is it about these teachings that could make them so compelling so one who would seem to be the antithesis of what they represent? I believe that my “conversion” (which though drastic was always partial) followed many of the same patterns I have described earlier in this paper. At the time (1988), I was in a place of great transition: my own sense of self had been drastically altered by coming out, I was living away from my family for the first time, and was coming to consciousness in a world still gripped by fears of nuclear war and AIDS. The signs of the end times, as they were laid out in the literature, seemed to match up very well with what was in my daily newspaper. In addition, within this already emotionally gripping context, the lure of having special knowledge of these events was strong; the booklets were full of flattery toward the reader for having the faith and discernment necessary to be interested.

Fear about the direction the world was heading made the transition to specific action dictated by the church quite natural. I wanted a more certain life, one with stronger parameters than I could hold by myself, and the church offered that to me free of charge if I was willing to bend myself to its conception of holiness. In retrospect, my acceptance of it seems very reasonable given the circumstances. What I find more surprising now is that I did not become fully submerged, given that it is so often what happens. Throughout the entire three years, I kept at least a toe in the greater world, and unlike many who fall under Apocalypse’s spell, I felt the insights I had been given needed to be acted on in my own life, but not necessarily anyone else’s. I do not attribute this to any inherent virtue on
my part, but reflecting on it opened up the key difference between my experience and that of many who have followed similar paths. My sense of dislocation was acute, but it came from the generalized struggle of adolescence moving into adulthood—in other words, a temporary part of the self-individuation process and not the result of trauma or other external factors. I was also isolated in my worship; the church had no public place where I could have attended without granting an interview I was reluctant to undergo. For those whose sense of a world out of control is stronger due to traumatic factors or powerful shadow aspects which have yet to be integrated, or who have a more totalistic group-based experience than mine, it seems much more difficult to escape the orbit of beliefs that promise so much comfort. The self-reinforcing spiral drags them in until they have been “‘consumed’ or ‘devoured’ by the process which then deprives them of their personal lives. Archetypal factors make them mere ‘actors’ in the archetypal drama” (Edinger, 1999, p. 169).
References


Reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it.

(Wagner, 1986, p. 18)

The King and the Fool seem to be a pair made in heaven for our time. On the one hand stands the “active, masculine principle come to bring order” (Nichols, 1980, p. 103), and on the other hand a jester, able “to travel at will, often upsetting the established order with his pranks” (p. 23). Sitting in the modern world poised between chaos and authoritarianism, we have much to learn from the mutually beneficial relationship of these two archetypal figures. The polarity they represent is not one of unresolvable conflict, but rather one of the union of opposites. Each serves a valuable function for the other, and absent either, the kingdom never runs quite right.

The traditional relationship between the king and fool is a basic trade. The king offers fools employment, the meeting of basic needs, and free speech. The fool offers kings entertainment, a portal into castle intrigues, truth-telling, and verbal cover for errors in the king’s speech. The fool is often seen as an antihero, “the antithesis of decorum, beauty, grace, intelligence, strength, and other virtues embodied in heroes” (Klapp, 1949, September, p. 157), but this greatly underestimates both the fool’s capacities and his value to the king. In a political world where absolute monarchy was the general rule, the only balance to power was provided by the fool’s antics; only he could openly mock the king. This required deep understanding of the politics of the court, knowledge of human nature, and attention to the goings-on of the realm. One aspect of this is the fool’s ability
“to roam around freely; he [has] access to the king and to the kitchen” (Orsy, 1970, p. 276); and therefore brings to the king’s ear perspectives he is not likely to hear otherwise, whether that be a scullery maid with an eye for danger or the queen seething in her bedchamber. The fool serves one other key function in the workings of government, which is to cover for the king in case of a gaffe:

whenever the king said something that was unmistakably stupid the Court Jester would paraphrase…what the King had said so that it appeared to be obviously foolish…as though the King had only said it originally just to get a laugh. (Hawk, 1987, p. 116)

Given the current state of governmental discourse worldwide, the need for such a function, and for fools in places of power generally, seems clear. The specific dynamic by which the fool and the king share power, however, is worth exploring in more depth.

What is the fool actually doing in the court? More specifically, what polarity are the king and the fool both playing with that makes the game work? The polarity in this case seems to be one based on power. In the general society (at least, in a historical monarchy), the king is the most powerful individual in the land—his word is law. The fool is seen outwardly as perhaps a simpleton, a naïve lackey of the court. Fools of the type kept by kings, however, are tricksters by nature, and turn power relationships upside-down as necessary, reminding the king that “the urge to anarchy exists in human nature and must be taken into account” (Nichols, 1980, p. 30). Kings, likewise, are not always as powerful as they may seem; aside from speaking truth to power with regard to the king’s pronouncements, the fool also does this for the pronouncements and advice of other members of the court. The king and fool are in effect enacting a kind of ritual theater around power with the rest of the court and kingdom as the audience.
In the United States today, we are over two hundred years removed from a monarchy of the type this polarity describes; politically we work within at least a nominally representative government and there is no royal court. The fool might ask, “Are you sure?” and we would do well to listen to him, for though the court and the royalty are more diffuse and there is no single figure of power to be king, there are still many people who could benefit from the services of a good fool. It could be argued that given our multiplicity of ruling personages, we need fools now more than ever. American political culture, regardless of party, clearly suffers from the disease of taking itself both too seriously and not seriously enough. We have made our kings into jesters and our jesters into kings, and the balance of power in the public mind suffers because neither can play their appointed role properly. The fools we do have, such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, have influence in popular culture but not as much in the corridors of power as the fools of old; they play to the kingdom at least as much as the court.

The lack of proper foolishness is by no means limited to elite circles, however; as a culture we have in many ways lost an admirable foolish streak that has always run through Western culture but became highly visible after World War II. Beginning with the Beats, through the Merry Pranksters, hippies, Yippies, and so on, much of the last half-century was an extended experiment in semi-organized foolishness, calibrated for a mass media age. This experiment, rather than being recognized by the kings of the land as valuable feedback toward a shared culture, was subjected to violent repression. As fools tend to be symbolically, the experiment was one of the young, and they paid for their hubris as part of their own transformation into the Hero-Saviors they may have wanted to become (Nichols, 1980, p. 32).
What of the king in all this? He is not merely a foil for the fool, but a strong figure in his own right. The natural human impulse toward anarchy may make his stance in the world seem less desirable, but without the structure of the kingdom, the desire for foolishness on the part of the populace rapidly vanishes. Even the fool, in all of his mockery, does his job precisely because it is necessary for the kingdom to function properly; he is a check on the power of the king so that ill judgment does not ruin the kingdom. The king, if he is to get the full value form his fool, must also be comfortable enough in his own power to withstand the mocking that is provided. This suggests power held lightly; the Emperor card of the Tarot deck pictures a ruler sitting “jaunty and relaxed, legs akimbo, fearlessly offering us a profile view of his left, or unconscious side…this ruler wears no armor and carries no sword” (Nichols, 1980, pp. 103–104). Such a leader personifies the order, reason, and practicality that lead to a peaceful kingdom. In the Tarot, the Emperor is also numbered four, a classical symbol of completeness. This would seem to indicate that the true leader considers the anarchic impulse and truth-telling of the fool to be part of a complete kingdom.

Given the state of the various societies of the world, whether monarchies or not, there appears to be an imbalance in this regard. Those who hold the reins of power, in contrast to the Emperor of the Tarot, hold them tightly and with hidden faces (and presumably much armor as well). They carry swords designed to cut foolishness off at the ankles. How then do we find a way to continue holding the necessary tension between these two polarities when the scales are already so far out of balance? Part of the answer lies in valuing the fools we do have; Stewart, Colbert, and many others have devoted audiences for a reason, and though they are often labeled as favoring one political side
over the other, have shown themselves willing to mock pomposity and stupidity in all its flavors. Because the nature of power is more widely distributed, foolishness needs to follow suit, and so one way to bring the scales back into balance may well be for each of us to embrace our inner fool. Cultural developments of the last few decades in many countries, ranging from punk rock to zines to elaborate art puppets at global protests, indicate a hunger to participate in a conversation with power through other mechanisms than the existing political process. The question now is whether the king is willing to listen and embrace what the fool has to say.
References


Section 3: Crown of Creation

This final section is in many ways the one that pleases me most, primarily due to its very existence. Throughout my adult life, I have attempted in many ways to engage my creative faculties; in addition to writing, there have been music lessons, drawing classes, tinkering with electronics, and so on. In spite of these activities, however, I have (except for a few brief periods) often felt creatively stymied. Inspiration felt limited to personal crisis; good intentions and practice fell victim to fears of inadequacy and lack of practice. It has therefore been a great joy to have the inspiration and opportunity to create as part of this program, and the results of that potent combination are offered here.

One of the most inspiring elements of that process has been the myths themselves. As the artifacts in Section 1 illustrated, working deeply with myths can have life-changing effects on one’s soul and spiritual work. This is also true of art, and the artifacts included here all come from this type of engagement with the psychological truths and archetypes that myths offer us. They also represent my growing relationship with a felt sense of the numinous, which has been an elusive part of my life in the wake of my fundamentalist experiment. Much like my encounter with Jake, these new feelings are full of possibility and potential for future explorations.

The first two poems in this section, “Maidens and Mothers: A Myth Retold” and “Psyche’s Dagger,” were the result of exploring the stories of Demeter/Persephone and Eros/Psyche in the Mythodrama class. Given the choice to write either an academic paper or engage in an artistic exploration of some kind, I eagerly chose the latter. “Maidens and Mothers: A Myth Retold,” though it tells the story of Demeter and Persephone, is
primarily focused on the psychological meaning of the myth, as expressed through the mother and daughter relationship. I tried to imagine each woman’s perception of the events and how they might differ, guided by a feminist interpretation of the story written by Charlene Spretnak, in which Persephone was not kidnapped but went willingly to the underworld. This heightened the gap in their points of view and enabled me to create a narrative of their separation and reunion that had the relationship at the center rather than the long chain of external events that comprises the story.

“Psyche’s Dagger” was developed in a similar way, trying to find an oblique angle on the story to move it from just plot into something more meaningful. Eros and Psyche was a more difficult story with which to work; the relationship was not as emotionally accessible to me and I had grown a bit weary of the story itself, because we had also worked with it extensively the previous quarter. However, I received a gift in the course of my research in the form of an article written by Elizabeth Nelson, which delved deeply into the key point of action in the narrative: the moment when Psyche decides to view her mysterious lover by lamplight. Nelson examined the meaning and agency represented by the long knife Psyche carries in this moment, and this was a revelation to me; I took the opportunity and put myself into the scene, imagining this young woman, lamp and dagger in hand, making the first real choice of her life.

“To the Unknown Power” is a more personal poem, a prayer of gratitude to those flashes of numinous presence that have come my way in the last few years. I tried to capture the feeling of being temporarily brand new that such experiences sometimes provide, and also the seeming randomness of their occurrence.
Finally, “Numinous Journey” is an entirely new kind of artistic endeavor for me. My initial intention was to create a piece of music, because though it has not been a part of our curriculum, music and dance have been a crucial part of my Pacifica experience. They have been one of the backbones of my cohort’s experienced sense of community (and I hope the others as well), which we built intensely in the brief times we were physically together through drumming, dance, yoga, laughter, talk, and healing work. As I began to put the piece together, however, two things became clear: my musical skills were not up to the task, and a story was starting to take shape in the sounds I had put together. I decided to follow this direction, and the result was a story in sound, built piece by piece from drumming and sound effects. It is the story of another person’s encounter with the numinous; a text narrative is provided here as a guide for the audio recording. This sound/written narrative form suggests many possibilities to explore in the future, as do all of the artifacts in this collection, and I am grateful for the program’s embrace of artistic activities as a complement to academic work. I hope to continue in both arenas as I look to the time after graduation, and take myth into ever-widening circles.
I. Persephone

They called her grief extravagant; it may be so. I will point out that I was “kidnapped” from above, not her. She does not know the truth: I left willingly. I have work here tending the souls of the dead.

I doubt she believes it; she may rest in knowing where I am, but a mother’s pride runs deeper than her love sometimes. I remember the day of escape: Narcissus blooming large just for me, cracked earth, my love’s large hands, the chariot.

He needed a queen, the souls’ guide, someone to ease the shock of death and renew them in their waning. He asked, and wanting purpose, I agreed and descended. She mourns but will not understand my ways until spring, when renewal is the way of the earth. Then red, the pomegranate’s juice, will turn green and explode from earth with life. Then, we will reunite, embrace, and celebrate the bright season.
II. Demeter

You, child of my body, daughter of my deepest self, disappeared—swallowed by the earth that I tend. How can I accept this? No tears are enough to comfort me now. My heart has no balm—it lies bare, open wide as the riven soil that stole you, my mourning endless.

Taking refuge with the mortals, I offer immortality, to give Demophoon his godhood, but even this is foiled. Mothers protect their children; the infant was saved from fire though I could not save you. Failing this gift, retreat seems the only option; darkness overcomes and envelops me. I will not tend earth until it returns my own fruit to me, whole.

The gods worry, of course; worship feeds them like my grain feeds mortals. They urge acceptance. You married within the family—Zeus’ brother, I should be happy. I am deaf to their concerns. I will not yield.

But wait—you return! Grief pierces even Zeus and you walk above once more. Different now, regal, you are no longer my little girl but Queen; your red-stained lips tell me your story in embrace; the dark around my heart recedes, and I bless your work even though my heart will mark your absences. Where glad tears fall, grass now grows.
They rarely mention the knife, 
rarely mention in the midst 
of appreciating Eros' beauty 
the long blade, sharp, 
held at bay but ready 
to slay the feared beast 
your sisters conjured.

You approach your broad-backed lover, 
gently tiptoeing; he snores 
secure in secret godhood, 
yet you seem to hold only the lamp. 
They rarely mention 
cold metal gleaming in oily light, 
one wick flickering 
tongues whispering "be sure."

His mystery holds you both 
prisoner, love limited by Apollo's arc, 
only shared in darkness. 
He loves half a woman, you half a god, 
this secret circumscribing 
all your lack of knowing. 
What other path but light can there be? 
All must be sorted out; Aphrodite will have 
her tasks for you, but the first is yours, 
and though they worry and love and envy, 
this light is your sisters' discernment 
made manifest. Their fear becomes yours 
until you face him, lamp and dagger in hand, 
and beholding beauty, prick yourself 
into true love lost.
Artifact 11 – To the Unknown Power

Peek at me with your many faces
I sense you just beyond
my vision,
cloud and light
a flickering dance
for my attention.

Or perhaps it is mere fortune
I see you—
our paths crossing through
chance, not intention
toward me at all, a happy accident
that we meet.

But what a meeting!
I stand enveloped in this haze
unsure of direction.
You are pure movement;
I cannot catch my breath
but take in smoke and water
until I am a new creature—
she who responded from my mirror
this morning is gone.

So perhaps this is no accident
after all
how else would you come
at just the right time,
burning and dissolving
the molecules of this soul
to some new end—
it could have been a big mess
but instead
my new reflection shines
a diamond
in the silver mirror.
Close your eyes and imagine a barren land, from the vantage point of a mile above the Earth. Come closer...fall slowly from your airplane height. Notice that as you near the ground, what seemed barren now shows some life. Scrub brush is plentiful, and off in one direction are some low hills and a small forest. All around you, as you touch dirt, is a village of small houses, fires, and people; they are in the midst of gathering. It is night. A large bonfire burns a few hundred feet from the edge of the village, competing with slight winds and crickets for your attention.

It becomes clear, as you watch the adults in the village gather around the fire, that tonight’s gathering is not an everyday occurrence—a ritual is about to begin. Drums call the circle to attention, and summon the spirit power of the wind. A man steps into the circle, next to the fire. He is dressed differently from the others, as if for travel but also with ceremonial garb, and he carries a small pack on his back. He is prepared for his journey, a trek to a cave in the forest where he is to be a sacrifice to the gods. He was, until this night, the leader of this village, but his time has come. To ensure the future good fortune of his people, he makes himself an offering—the new king, his son, now sits uneasily nearby on what was once his throne.

He kneels, and the other men begin to sing, a hypnotic hum that echoes out over the flatlands. The traveler stands and answers them, singing a farewell to his people as he prepares to leave. After he finishes, there is a moment of silence, and then the young king
holds up a feather, touches it to his father’s forehead, and blows it into the fire, a symbol of this transition.

The traveler begins his journey. Traveling on foot, he walks toward the forest, where he knows he will find the cave of the gods. The warmth of the fire recedes as he walks by moonlight. After some time, he reaches a stream that leads him deep into the cave, and finally to the altar his people set up so long ago. Catching his breath, he sits, closes his eyes, and begins to hum. The vibrations stir deep in his chest moving outward toward the walls of the cave. He can feel the gods coming…the vibrations inside and outside his body increase…a raven, their messenger, flies past and he knows the time is nearly here. A windstorm follows the raven, swirling around him, lifting him off the ground…they are here, now, and he is their perfect offering.

And then, in a flash of light, he is consumed. The gods are pleased, and the water that now drips inside the cave will soon drip on the village, bringing life to the seeds waiting underground.