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MYTHOLOGICAL  
STUDIES JOURNAL



V O L U M E I X

## O N T H E C O V E R

Image: *The Red House* by Jason D. Batt, 2019.

In our modern world, the *genius loci*, the spirit of place, has manifested in the imagery of a haunted house. Potentially no other modern work captures both the recent and the ancient understanding of a *genius loci* as Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. The cover image, done by senior editor Jason D. Batt and inspired by Jackson's work, was originally conceived for a Pacifica course taught by Dr. David Odorisio: *MS 521 Dreams, Visions, Myths*. Exploring both dream space, lived experience, and the modern literature of hauntings, Batt's *The Red House* attempts to capture the dream construction of locations that have their own unique presence—perhaps even a *genius loci*.

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VOLUME IX



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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

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Welcome to the *Mythological Studies Journal*, Volume IX. As with most things during the new Covidpocalypse, the journal underwent change from our initial call for papers. The theme we originally put forth was “*Genius Loci*: Reflections on the Spirit of Place.” The intent was to solicit papers that explored the spirit of location within historical and contemporary mythic, folk, and artistic representations. That call for papers read:

In Roman mythology, a *genius loci* was the protective spirit of a place, and in the ancient world, cultural identity often emerged out of physical location and land. In modern usage, the term primarily reflects a locale’s distinctive atmosphere, although the belief in spirits inhabiting a place is still actively practiced in some cultures, as evidenced by the Chinese folk belief of *Tudigongs*. The spirit of a place is reflected in cultural expressions from stories to art to beliefs, as well as in the actual physical contours of rivers, mountains, pathways, and other topography. Yet, in our modern world, we often consider the concept of culture to be separate from place. And in a moment that presents both forced diaspora and involuntary anchoring—when refugees are fleeing economic, political, and climate crises at the same time a global pandemic limits officially sanctioned migration—what is the role of the *genius loci*?

Mid-year, we reanalyzed the submissions we were receiving and concluded that perhaps the theme was too narrow, and thus re-solicited for this year’s journal without a theme. What you have in your hands (or on your screen) are the submissions that were selected for their unique voice and perspective. The depth of insight in these pages is remarkable. What is surprising is that with the removal of the thematic requirement, that very theme still emerged in the papers submitted. It seems the release of the restriction encouraged a broader and more unique engagement with the topic. There are reflections upon gender roles in cultures

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that transition from one locale to another, the wonder of bubbling waters, the torture of the underworld in film and myth, and more.

Introducing something new to this year's journal, we have chosen a singular work as the "showcase" submission: in "Sacrificial Space: The Tree of Life as the *Genius Loci* for Ritual Sacrifice," contributor James Peters guides us through a mythological meditation upon the primeval forest and the ubiquitous Tree of Life. This paper seemed to capture a reflective moment that emerged during the 2020-2021 Pacifica Mythological Studies Program Celebration Night. In the closing session of last year's program, several of the second-year students gathered under the great tree on the Lambert campus to honor the transition of the third-year students. In that moment of ritual, the tree embodied the very spirit of place that was Pacifica on Lambert—the spirit of location that we had deeply missed in our long time of isolation and separation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much gratitude is owed to our faculty advisor, Dr. Patrick Mahaffey, for his guidance and support. Additionally, we are grateful to our peer reviewers for their time and input in the preliminary review process. We are also indebted to our brilliant crew of editors who spent additional time combing through these words and bringing out the best that each submission promised. This publication would not have been possible without everyone's teamwork, patience, and dedication. We would like to express our thanks to all of the contributing authors for sharing their insights with us.

We hope you enjoy joining us on this moment of reflection on the spirit of place as we stand on the threshold of returning to the physical spaces we've long been restricted from.

Jason D. Batt and Kristinha Maria Reva  
*Co-Senior Editors*

S H O W C A S E S E L E C T I O N

# Sacrificial Space:

## The Tree of Life as the *Genius Loci* for Ritual Sacrifice

James Peters

### KEYWORDS

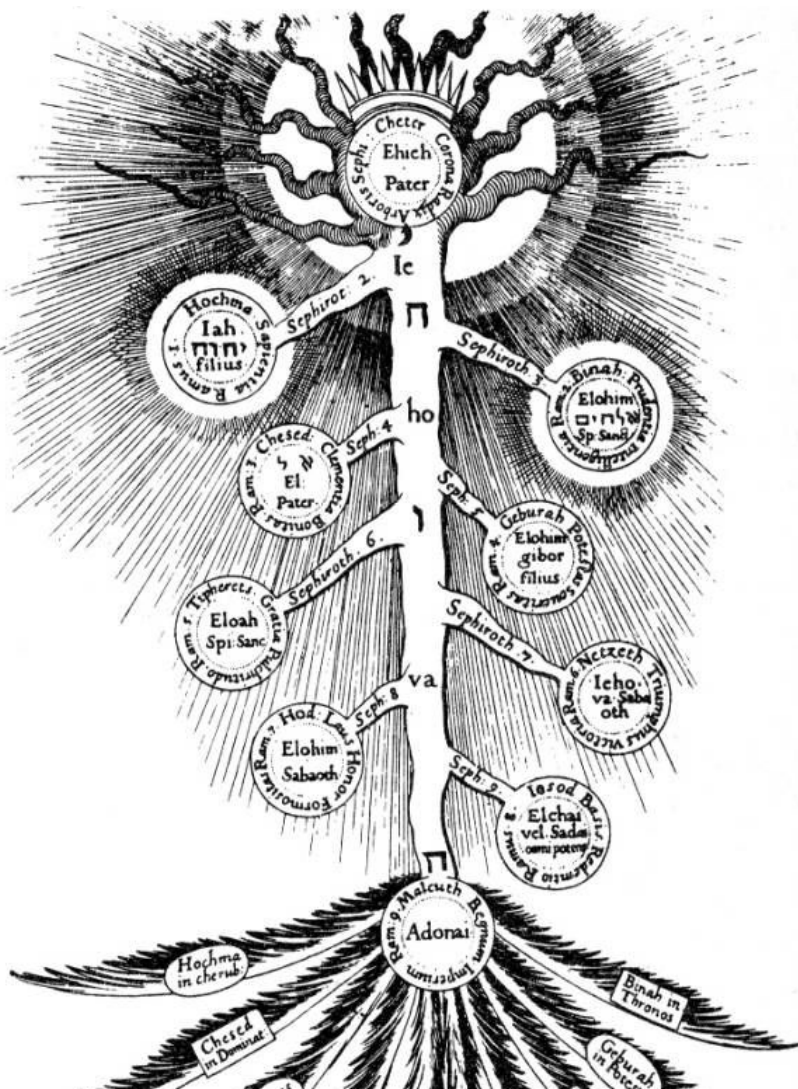
*Tree of Life*  
*Genius Loci*  
*Ritual*

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,” Robert Frost once intoned. As the story goes fastidious editors would later punctuate this line of poetry as follows, “The woods are lovely, dark, and deep” (224) as though the only thing needed to break the forest’s spell was an Oxford comma. The woods ought to be set apart by a pause, lovely precisely because they are dark and deep. I do not know where a magic spell is likely to go better than in a vision of snow faintly falling in a forest on a dark Winter’s night. With a sigh, the flakes touch down and settle into a drift. In the mythological moment, a dark forest becomes a place full of mystery, a living breathing entity, perhaps even the *temenos* of a deity.

If the hero intends to embark on a quest, then he or she should begin by plunging headlong into the dark forest mystery. Whether traveling over vast distances of time and place, or delving deep within the psyche, Nature is the proper setting for enlightenment, the *genius loci*. Inspired by the Arthurian tradition, Joseph Campbell writes, “For there is, in fact, in quiet places, a great deal of deep spiritual quest and finding now in progress in this world, outside the sanctified social centers, beyond their purview and control” (Flight 186). When he speaks of the forest spirit, he seems to shift from the example of the Knights of the Round Table to thoughts of his own students and their life quests: “there entering the forest at those points which they themselves have chosen, where they see it to be most dark, and there is no beaten way or path” (186). When people are alone in nature, the forest speaks most clearly, and the spirit of the place infuses them with intimations of the numinous. Like a solitary crusader, we revel in the loneliness as the forest whispers sublime insights – if only we had a mind to listen.

The most ancient extant journey to a sacred grove is in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, where the hero ventures to a cedar forest to steal whatever he can lay hands on before the gods become aware and intervene. Cuneiform chiseled into a rock slab records for posterity these mythological exploits. The poet says of Gilgamesh, “... he went trampling through the Forest of Cedar, / he discovered the secret abode of the gods” (17-18). In the story, the trees are guarded by the monster Humbaba. Together Gilgamesh and Enki defeat the guardian, and, claiming the forest as

Illustration: Original Image from the Deutsche Fotothek, 1621, by Robert Fludd.



their own, they chop down the rich storehouse of timber. Enki warns against losing the forest's magic if they do not act quickly when he admonishes Gilgamesh, "The auras slip away in the thicket / the auras slip away, their radiance grows dim" (10). The spirit of the place, infused with the energy of the gods, is theirs for the plundering, but the power is diminishing as they tarry over their theft. In the heart of the forest, Gilgamesh searches for one tree special from the rest. He commands Enki:

Seek out for me a lofty cedar, / whose crown is high  
as the heavens!

.....  
I will make a door of a reed-length's breadth...  
let no stranger draw near it, let a god have love for  
[it.]

.....  
Let the god Enlil delight in it. (47-48)

Gilgamesh takes the cedar wood from the sacred grove and uses it to fashion a door for a temple venerating the god Enlil. In his study *Daemon in the Wood*, David Bynum explains the desired transmission of power: "wood that is hewn and fashioned to human purposes in these tales . . . brings with it into the service of men those same virtues which it possesses inaccessibly to men while it remains in a natural or wild, unhewn state" (95). The spirit that once empowered the living forest will now be transferred as Gilgamesh and Enki consecrate a locale as holy and enchanted as the god's secret grove once was, the architecture infused with the god's secret power. The metamorphosis thus completed relocates the power of the genius loci from the sacred grove to the environs of the city temple.

At the beginning of another Sumerian myth titled *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*, a chaotic storm rages, and sapling consequently uprooted is borne upon the life-giving waters of the Euphrates. Inanna, a woman who walks with respect for the gods An and Enlil, happens along and rescues the halub-tree, taking it with her to the genius loci, the garden known as Unug associated with the goddess Inanna. Betty De Shong Meador writes, "We can think of Inanna, with her complex mix of characteristics, as an attempt to bring together the seemingly chaotic forces of the universe into one unifying, and therefore orienting, personification" (16). Inanna replants the tree, tamping the ground around it with her feet, and she wonders how long it will take for the tree to mature and provide her with a chair (possibly a throne) and a bed on which to recline. In the ensuing ten-year wait, malevolent creatures come to inhabit the World Tree. Around its base curls a snake immune to the incantations of any priest. At the tree's crown, the Anzu-bird builds a nest and hatches her young. Most remarkably, a phantom maid makes her home in the tree and henceforth will not vacate the premises. To rid the tree

of its unwanted guests, Inanna first seeks the aid of her brother, the Sun-god Utu, who nevertheless refuses her, so she turns to Gilgamesh, who dons his heavy armor and taking his battle axe in hand kills the serpent. In alarm, the phantom maid flees the tree, and the Anzu-bird takes flight for the hills. In the end, Gilgamesh chops down the tree and shares the timber with Inanna. As Diane Wolkstein writes, "Inanna, provided with a shining bed, awaits her consort; and prepared with a throne, she is ready to act on her own" (144). After ten long years, the Tree of Life has come to fruition, allowing Inanna herself to mature within a sacred space invested with both regal power and the promise of fecundity. The Tree of Life planted in her garden creates the focal point around which to found an empire, both earthly and celestial.

Similar to the story of Inanna, a Tree of Life also stands at the center of the cosmos in Norse Mythology. Referred to sometimes as the World Ash, its name is Yggdrasill. The tree is the source of various life-giving waters, its branches reach up into the heavens, and the roots sink down deep into the underworld. Stories about the sacred tree are told in *The Poetic Edda*, forming part of a prophecy:

An ash I know that stands, Yggdrasill it's called,  
a tall tree, drenched with shining loam;  
from there come the dews which fall in the valley,  
green, it stands always over Urd's well. (1.19)

According to the myth, Urd's well is the fount of wisdom, and among the sacred sites and vast forests of the North, "Yggdrasill's ash is the most pre-eminent of trees" (4.44). Around this tree, and near the sacred water source, the gods gather for their councils. Thor wades through turbid rivers to inhabit the temenos where he and the other Norse Gods will decide the fate of humanity:

Kornt and Ormt and the two Kerlaugar,  
these Thor must wade  
every day, when he goes to give judgements  
at Yggdrasill's ash. (4.29)

Like the Tree of Life situated in Inanna's garden, Yggdrasill also suffers depredations from a host of malicious beasts. A dragon curls around its base sucking the vitality from it, a stag nibbles at its leaves, an imposing eagle perches on its crown, and a rumor-mongering squirrel traverses its entire length:

Yggdrasill's ash suffers agony  
more than men know;  
a stag nibbles it above, but at its side it's decaying,  
and Nidhogg rends it beneath (4.35)

In writing about sacred trees, Carl Jung posits the psychological implications of their symbolism: "Just as the myths

tell us that human beings were descended from trees, so there were burial customs in which people were buried in hollow tree-trunks, whence the German *Totenbaum*, 'tree of death', for coffin, which is still in use today. If we remember that the tree is predominantly a mother symbol, then the meaning of this mode of burial becomes clear. *The dead are delivered back to the mother for rebirth*" (Jung's emphasis, *Symbols* 233). This motif of the Tree of Life as a mother-symbol involving death and rebirth is apparent in the prophecy of *Ragnarök*, the story detailing the end of this mythic age and the birth of a new one. The seer foretells the end of the world in an apocalyptic vision:

There she saw wading in turbid streams  
false-oath swearers and murderers,  
and the seducer of another man's close confidante;  
there Nidhogg sucks the corpses of the dead –  
a wolf tears the men (1.37)

The worst offenders are subjected to horrendous punishments for transgressions considered most abhorrent to the Norse, but crucially, two human beings will be spared:

Lif and Leifthrasir  
will hide themselves  
in Hoddmimir's Holt.  
The morning dew  
they have for food,  
from them springs mankind  
(qtd. in Sturluson 78)

In his *Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson relates how, during the end times, these two humans will hide themselves inside the trunk of Yggdrasil against the destructive fire in the Holt (forest) of Hoddmimir; when the cataclysm is over, they will be reborn from the Tree of Life and commence repopulating the Earth (77). In this way, The Tree of Life becomes a mother figure, not only as she welcomes home two of her children and provides them with protective covering, but also as she then provides a rebirth, the chance to start a new cycle of life. According to Jung, "In the wood of the world-ash Yggdrasill a human pair hide themselves at the end of the world, and from them will spring a new race of men. At the moment of universal destruction, the world-ash becomes the guardian mother, the tree pregnant with death and life" (Symbol 246). The spirit is the numinous energy running through the cosmos, emanating from the Tree of Life. The tree is symbolic of the mother figure, in this instance figuring as both the womb and the tomb of humanity.

Often, myths the genius loci encompassing a sacred tree take on a metaphysical dynamism when life itself is sacrificed for the sake of new knowledge. This is not a Faustian bargain, but a ritual to suffer death and be reborn with

powers even greater than before. The Norse god Odin, for example, hangs himself from Yggdrasil, essentially sacrificing himself to himself for the sake of gaining an understanding of runes. About this ritual, Gwyn Jones supplies some historical context: "[Odin] was a god of the gallows and those who died on it, god of war and those who perished by it, god of occult knowledge and master of the dead from whom this must be won. He was no Christ who hung on the tree for others. He sought his own gain – dominion and knowledge – and his suffering has more in common with shamanism than with Christianity" (320). Similarly, in the *Elder Edda*, Odin tells his tale:

I know that I hung on a windswept tree  
nine long nights,  
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,  
myself to myself,  
on that tree which no man knows  
from where its roots run (2.138)

One possible explanation for Odin's sacrifice posits he is attempting to gain new knowledge by subjecting himself to an initiation ritual. Not that he is hanging by the neck from the tree, but that he is dangling upside down as the figure of the hanging man in a tarot deck. In that ritual pose, he reaches down and plucks the runes granting wisdom (Fleck 122). The historical record also supplies certain details about the ritual human sacrifice marauding Viking invaders performed for Odin. In the context of Norse culture, the "Scandinavian god Odin had human victims regularly offered to him, and these were put to death by being hung on a tree and stabbed with a spear" (Porteous 153). The Tree of Life creates a central focal point in the ritual landscape of the sacred forest, in that Odin sacrifices himself on the tree for the sake of gaining wisdom. He thus suffers death and rebirth, not as Christ does for the sake of redemption, but for new knowledge.

A remarkably similar transference occurs in the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*. The narrator of this poem is a tree cut down for the purpose of being fashioned into the cross upon which Christ was crucified. In Medieval iconography, the cross was often depicted as a living tree. For example, Christ was sometimes pictured hanging from a tree in full bloom. A fascinating aspect of this poem is the metaphorical conflation of cross and tree, as though they are one and the same:

|                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| A wondrous Tree            | Me-seemed I saw       |
| Most shining of crosses    | towering in air,      |
| Brightly that beacon       | compassed with light, |
| Jewels adorned it          | was gilded with gold; |
| Five on the shoulder-beam, | fair at the foot,     |
| ( <i>Early</i> 93)         | blazing in splendor.  |

As Michael Swanton writes:

The particular function of the cross in the act of Redemption is explained in terms of its own natural history. Beginning with the forest tree not only draws naturally on contemporary representations in which the cross is seen as the burgeoning stem of the Tree of Life, putting forth leaves, fragrant with flowers, but derives thematic significance from its apparent simplicity. There is no confusion as to the different types of wood of which the cross could have been composed; neither is there any unnecessary reference to the tree's Old Testament antecedents, both of which so engaged contemporary exegetes. The use of the simple, natural tree, while concealing within its metaphor this body of traditional theology, remains a convenient and convincing symbol of the beauty in creation perverted by the evil in men for their ends. (*Dream* 69)

At the center of the ritual landscape, a god hangs from a tree to undergo the transformation that must occur for the hero to become invested with the magic power of new knowledge and redemption. After this initiation, the hero will then journey to the underworld.

*The Dream of the Rood* also contains a medieval conceit introduced in a description of Jesus' descent into Hades, also referred to as the harrowing. In this tradition, Jesus bodily descends into the underworld to do battle with the forces of evil and rescue the poor souls who had gone there prior to the promise of redemption:

There He freed from bondage    abundant spoil,  
A countless folk    from the City of fiends,  
This very host    which you here behold!  
.....  
   leading this folk  
That by His triumph    He took from the fiends.  
(*Early* 100)

In this apocryphal episode, after Christ is crucified, he journeys to the underworld, and breaks through the doors of Hell before engaging two demons in immortal combat. Once he is victorious in subduing the demons, he leads Adam and other saints to freedom. In the Apocryphal *Gospel of Bartholomew* it reads, "For when I vanished away from the cross, then went I down into Hades that I might bring up Adam and all them that were with him" (*Apocryphal* 167), and in another description, Christ engages in actual combat with the forces of evil: "Then Jesus rose and mounted into the chariot of the Cherubim. He wrought havoc in Hell, breaking the doors, binding the demons Beliar and Melkir and delivered Adam and the holy souls" (183). In this way, the Tree of Life and the Underworld

both represent a Genius Loci for self-sacrifice leading to enlightenment.

As we have seen with The Tree of Live in Gilgamesh, gaining access to sacred precincts requires the cunning and strength of a hero, for the entrance will be jealously guarded. In Chretien de Troyes's *The Knight with the Lion*, the guardian is a hideous beast: "this gigantic shapeshifter and guide of souls encountered on the threshold of the mysteries of the forest directs Calogrenant (and then Yvain) to the tree and fountain, where begin the marvels of the terrors of the initiation" (Campbell, *Romance* 110). The ingress is blocked by a storm god who must be summoned in a ritual rain ceremony. Campbell references Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* for insight about sympathetic magic: as Frazer writes, "If they wish to make it rain they simulate it by sprinkling water" (74). After entering the forest, Yvain is told to go to the tree in the valley, take the ladle, fill it with water, and sprinkle the water on the emerald stone. This instance of sympathetic magic does the trick: "The knight comes with a roaring, preceded by a fearful storm. He is black as a storm cloud, swift and inescapable as the lightning" (Campbell, *Romance* 196). Once the storm god has been summoned, a battle ensues, and Yvain is the victor. Evans Lansing Smith further elucidates the imagery: "All of the elements of this description are archetypal — tree, spring, golden cup, gemstone, and thunderbolt — and together yield one of the great moments in the Arthurian tradition" (*Hero* 110). Smith also notes the tree is the liminal point between two worlds, and thus, by defeating the storm god, Yvain has completed the rite of passage preparing him to descend into the underworld — another location with a spirit all its own. In reference to modernist conceptions of the journey to the underworld, Smith writes, "the underworld is more than a crypt, an inferno, or a temenos—it is, perhaps most significantly, a cornucopia, or granary, where the seed forms of the archetypal imagination are stored" (*Descent* 11). Like Odysseus' descent into the underworld, students sometimes plunge into the shadows to gain insights. To commune with the spirits of the past is to discover the best that has ever been thought or written. In this way, one might imagine the underworld as akin to a university library stocked to the rafters with dusty, venerable old tomes. By journeying deep into the shadows, wandering among the labyrinthine stacks, the reader searches for the wisdom of our ancestors who drift like nightshades in those sullen environs, not just a warehouse for dead souls but a storehouse of ancient wisdom, a cornucopia of knowledge.

From Medieval forests to the forest primeval, in North America, the hero on his journey again gains impetus and strength from his sojourn communing with Nature. During the heyday of the Transcendental movement, in his novel *The Deerslayer*, James Fenimore Cooper config-

ures the numinous as expressed in the sublime perfection of the pristine forests of upstate New York circa 1745. The hero's name now is Nathaniel Bumpo; his friends call him Natty, and his sidekick is Chingachgook. His special weapon is the long rifle, also known as Deerslayer. Sometimes Natty himself is called Deerslayer, but he is best known by the epithet his Native American brethren bestow on him: Hawkeye. As a hunter in the woods who spends weeks and months treading his own solitary path, to keep his sanity, he must revel in the loneliness, the dark forest the one true companion of his heart. As Cooper writes, "And so we are back at the idea of vegetation becoming a hierophany – that is, embodying and displaying the sacred – in so far as it signifies something other than itself. No tree or plant is ever sacred simply as a tree or plant; they become so because they share in a transcendent reality, they become so because they signify that transcendent reality" (Eliade 324). While in the aforementioned case of Gilgamesh, the harvesting of the sacred trees was an attempt to bring the spirit of the forest into the city structure; Cooper, on the other hand, is evincing a Romantic movement in the opposite direction, escaping the church confines and heading back to the source of the numinous, Nature herself. In his novel *The Pathfinder*, Cooper has Natty Bumpo say:

I have ende'vered to worship garrison-fashion, but never could raise within me the solemn feelings and true affection that I feel when alone with God in the forest. There I seem to stand face to face with my Master; all around me is fresh and beautiful, as it came from his hand, and there is no nicety of doctrine to chill the feelin's. No, no; the woods are the true temple, a'ter all, for there the thoughts are free to mount higher than even the clouds. (92-93)

In Romantic terms, Nature is God-revealing: the mountains, rivers, flora, and fauna exist as direct evidence of God's creation, but only when still in its pristine state. Once humankind gets their hands on the timber and appropriates it to whatever their desired and petty ends, then the magic has been wrung from it and forever lost.

Very much like the example from Chretien de Troyes, however, the genius loci of the forest encompasses a battle on the way to the underworld. In the spirit of Christ's apocryphal harrowing, Uncas, another of Natty Bumpo's compatriots, penetrates the underworld and brings back one of the kidnapped sisters, Cora, whereas the other sister, Alice, must stay behind. In the Common Era, the underworld offers the promise of spiritual redemption: Cooper's imagery in this regard is unmistakable when he describes the forest in *Last of the Mohicans*, he writes, "The place, seen by its dim and uncertain light, appeared like the shades of the infernal region, across which unhappy ghosts and savage demons were flitting in multitudes" (qtd. in Peck 128).

As Daniel Peck explains, "In his quest toward the mythic center, Uncas must pass through the "underworld," symbolized by the Huron village." The hero is Uncas, the symbolic demon he is pursuing is Magua, to free the goddess character Cora who has been kidnapped. Uncas's bravery in passing this right of passage proves him worthy (128-129). Cooper is partaking of the Christian tradition positing the rescuing angel versus an evil demon. In this way, the spiritus loci of the forest becomes the battleground in a mythological struggle between good and evil. Cooper's awareness of the numinous in Nature is expressed in archetypes of both the Tree of Life and the Underworld.

In keeping with the spirit of modernism, which saw the world degraded and deteriorating in the dreary light of World War I, the Tree of Life at the entrance to T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* stands rooted but dead. Whereas in earlier literature a wasteland referred to a wild and inhospitable forest, Eliot's description is more reminiscent of a dry and arid country where no vegetation can find purchase in the rocky soil:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no  
relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. (I.19-24)

Just as the Tree of Life appears repeatedly in world mythology, so too the dead tree has a place in the collective imagery symbolizing the human condition. Like many of the examples discussed previously, however, the dead tree stands at the entrance to the underworld so that the mythological tree is joined to the modern urban landscape fulfilling Eliot's vision of the underworld. Smith writes, "The descent precipitates the revelation of the archetypes which structure the poem, so that in addition to the infernal aspects of the underworld, a sense of its power as the repository of the many mythic allusions in the poem (underworld as granary) must be added. As with other major Modernist works, therefore, the personal nekyia is associated with poesis" (*Descent* 119-120). The mythic imagery of the dead tree illustrates Eliot's personal experiences, which become amplified into a statement about the world culture of the Modernist period. Does the spirit of a location always have to be positive? The testimony of art in the case of Eliot would seem to suggest otherwise. In the postlapsarian world the dead tree here stands as a symbol of the ills infecting a sick and ailing modern culture.

The forest as genius loci surrounding the Tree of Life illustrates how the archetype informing these various manifestations reveals the ancient wisdom in our subconscious. The psyche understands human life on this planet depends

on our symbiosis with these verdant purifiers of the very air we breathe. Human lives have always been entwined with these venerable giants, so much so Jung chooses the tree as his alchemical symbol for human growth, otherwise known as the individuation process: "If a mandala may be described as a symbol of the self seen in cross-section, then the tree would represent a profile view of it: the self depicted as a process of growth" (253). Inanna, Gilgamesh, Yggdrasil, the Rood, and Hawkeye all summon forth the archetype. I can remember as a child wandering through a grove of Redwoods in Northern California among trees growing there for a thousand years, in some cases even longer. As a breeze swept through the treetops high above and those lofty spires waved and swayed while the roots remained anchored and the trunks immovable the trees creaked and groaned to each other and to me in a way bespeaking their age and cryptic wisdom. In the light of this memory, the words of Robert Frost again give pause. The woods are lovely.

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# Bubbling Waters: Finding Ourselves in Nature

John & Caroline Schairer

## KEYWORDS

*genius loci*  
*City Planning*  
*Archetypal Psychology*

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*Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality.*

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—D.H. Lawrence

Carl Jung in his autobiography describes a dream in which he finds himself in the upper story of a two-story house. It is elegantly furnished with elaborately ornamented furniture, precious old paintings, and pastel colors. He eventually decides to explore more of the house. He descends the stairs into the first floor where everything seems much older, probably from the fifteenth or sixteenth century. He finds a doorway that descends to the cellar. The cellar is constructed in such a way as to suggest Roman influence. He finds an opening in the floor that leads to a stairway to an even deeper room; a cave cut into the rock. In the cave he discovers scattered bones and broken pottery from a primitive culture (Jung 182-183).

Jung's interpretation of the dream was that the house represented his psyche. The upper floors represent his consciousness and the lower levels represent his unconscious. In the cave he found the remains of a primitive man within (Jung 184). Home is where we find shelter, family, our roots, security and love. It is a symbol of who we are, it represents our Self. It is the point of reference from which we view the world. Home is our *genius loci*. Everyone wants to go home, both physically and metaphorically, but have houses been our only home? We shall discuss nature as our possible archaic home.

## OUR TWO-MILLION- YEAR-OLD-SELF

"Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," a phrase coined by Ernst Haeckel, which means that in the embryologic development of an organism (ontogeny), we can observe the evolutionary history and all the intermediate forms of its ancestors (phylogeny) (Gould 208). Recapitulation means the de-

velopment of an embryo follows the evolutionary history of the organism. In short, we can find in modern humans, forms of our ancestors. An example is our DNA which contains remnants of Neanderthal DNA and Denisova DNA as well as that of other archaic hominins. Another example would be the human brain with archaic structures such as the brainstem<sup>1</sup>, which can also be found in life forms as primitive as reptiles. Following this line of thinking, it is Jung's opinion that the human psyche contains archaic structures such as the collective unconscious and archetypes that are found in all humans, both past and present.

Jung contends that the two-million-year-old archaic man's Self has survived and is buried deep in the substratum of the unconscious of the contemporary human brain. Just as the brainstem is phylogenetically old-

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<sup>1</sup> Central trunk of the mammalian brain consisting of the medulla oblongata, pons, and midbrain, extending down to form the spinal cord

er than other areas of the modern human brain and reflects our reptilian, mammalian, and hominin ancestors, so too can we find psychological structures that are phylogenetically older than our modern psyches.

We can interpret this observation to mean that each of us does not construct our psyche *de novo* or will it into being; rather it exists *a priori*, as a product of nature or of evolution. The psychic structure of the human brain is made up

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*Two million years ago, our ancestors with brain sizes ranging from 435cc to 680cc—only a little bigger than the gorilla—were doing human things, cultural things . . . They were hunting, building shelters, making tools, curing skins, living in base camps, and possibly doing many other things . . .*

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— Robin Fox, *The Search for Society*

of conscious and unconscious intelligence. The unconscious intelligence can be further divided into collective and personal unconscious intelligence.

The collective unconscious is common in all humans from the time our species separated itself from other hominids, and the personal unconscious intelligence contains the memories and experiences from our formative years.

Within the collective unconscious there are nodes of psychic energy that have been present since hominids separated as a species and are passed from one generation to the next. They are universal across cultures and time. Jung called these patterns 'archetypes' from 'arche' meaning primordial, and 'typos' meaning typical. Archetypes cannot be visualized. Archetypes are patterns of behavior, and packets of energy stored in the collective unconscious of humans and embody essential elements of the human experience and drama (Stevens 9, 15). Archetypes are the basic functional unit of the collective unconscious (10). Archetypes are a potential or a possibility of a pattern in the conscious mind, that as soon as we encounter it, the archetype is clothed in images of the conscious world. Symbols are the medium by which archetypes can be visualized in the time and space of this world (Cooper 130-131). The archetypal manifestations that are most interesting to psychologists and mythologists are the "Parallel thoughts, images, mythologems, feelings and patterns of behavior that are found in all cultures around the world, throughout time and irrespective of social class" (Stevens 14). For Stevens, "Whenever a phenomenon is found to be characteristic of all human communities, then it is an expression of an archetype of the collective unconscious" (15).

Archetypes have special meaning, and when we see or experience one, we say it resonates with us, some examples are "The wise old man, mother and child and home." The concept of archetype is counter to the "tabula rasa" concept

that our minds are a blank slate at birth to be written upon with our life experiences. Archetypes make up "The archaic heritage of humanity" (Stevens 11). Some investigators have even postulated that archetypes preceded the origin of the cosmos, much like some investigators postulate Plato's ideal forms were present before the creation of the cosmos.

While life seems to be infinitely variable, our responses are guided by the archetypes that have evolved over the two million years of evolution of the hominin species. When an event resonates with an archetype, where the conscious and the unconscious come together, we may have a numinous experience. we feel a connectedness and harmony with the event. A numinous experience possesses specific energy that brings the event to conscious reality, and we experience it emotionally.<sup>2</sup> Typical would be the emotional and intellectual response we might have while listening to a particular piece of music that we find beautiful and that "speaks to us (Stevens 14). One such archetype is the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place.<sup>3</sup> On Detroit's waterfront is a statue of the Spirit of Detroit. However, for me, the *genius loci* is not in the city but in Kensington Metro Park, located 35 miles from downtown Detroit.

## THE HISTORY AND THE PROBLEM

In the late 1930s, Detroit was the hub for technological advancements due to the auto industry. These were soon translated into

advancements in the quality of life in Detroit and across the United States. There was one problem,

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*Nature Can Live Without Man, But Man Cannot Live Without Nature.*

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— Prentice Bloedel

however, namely the lack of public parks and the resultant lack of experience of nature, the primeval ground of our being. Humans have evolved alongside nature since the beginning of time; losing touch with nature, we lose touch with ourselves. There were three million residents in the Detroit metro area and 6000 total acres of parkland or 500 people per acre of parkland. The National Park Service standard was 100 people per acre of parkland. Of 600 lakes, only 14 had public beaches, while the remainder were private lakes with no access for the public. Weekends saw long lines of cars trying to access the parks, and picnickers waited hours in line to eat a picnic lunch. Detroit was the

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2 For Jung, the concept of the archetype extended beyond psychology into the organic and inorganic makeup of the universe. It was this idea that was the common ground between Jung and Wolfgang Pauli.

3 *Genius loci* originally grew out of the Roman concept of the spirit of place. It results from the belief that places are occupied by gods or spirits that need to be honored and respected. Spirit of place is defined as the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place. The spirit of the place can be thought of as an artistic muse in residence" (Quebec 2008 Declaration).

center for technological advancement and entertainment but was severely lacking in parkland.

Dr. Henry S. Curtis and Professor Harlow O. Whittemore proposed a public park system, as both were recognized as experts in parks and recreation. After studying the problem, they created a plan to develop a park system along the Clinton and Huron Rivers that formed a 120-mile horseshoe around the Detroit area. From downtown Detroit to the horseshoe was a radius of 25 to 60 miles. It was a distance easily accessible in an afternoon by automobile. Between 1937 and 1939, the idea gained support, committees were formed, and a regional park system known as the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority was formed. One of the two original sites to be developed was the Kensington Metropark, located 35 miles from downtown Detroit.

Kensington Metropark required a dam to be constructed to convert a 70-acre lake into a 1200-acre lake. There are many outdoor activities and opportunities to experience nature at Kensington Metropark for the citizens of urban Detroit. Today, the park has two public beaches with a water park, a golf course, a disc golf course, an eight-mile biking and hiking trail around the lake that hooks into other hiking and biking trails in the area, trails for horseback riding, a nature center with trails and a farm with a petting zoo. In the winter, the park has cross-country-ski trails and sledding and tobogganing hills. Every season brings new experiences and opportunities for the public to experience and be in the healing power of nature. By the second summer of operation, a sunny weekend could bring 50,000 visitors to the park. By the mid-50s, more than one million people used the park annually. Today the park is 4,357 acres and hosts 2.6 million visitors annually.

## HOME IN NATURE

Jung looked back into our human history to the time of the hunter-gatherers and even before. He recognized in his patients that the psyche contains archaic elements from our ancient ancestors, and they still played a role in the minds of his patients both in health and disease. He called this the natural mind and labeled the phylogenetically (biologically evolved) intelligence, the two-million-year-old Self. It was not until about 11,000 years ago that humans began to live in villages and cities. Before that, home for our two-million-year-old Self was in nature. Our genius locus is in nature. Nature is our home. We all want to go home, home resonates with us, and calls to us. We say it holds a special place in our hearts but we really mean in our collective unconscious.

Home is an archetype and being home can lead to a numinous experience. *Wilderness* is defined as nature in its original condition, undisturbed, unadulterated by man (Meier 1). We are drawn to natural places because they help us to remember. We see the world as it was immedi-

ately after creation before humans intervened "To make it better." Truth, wisdom, and our archaic selves can be found in the wilderness. Wilderness is also the other, it is the place of the

un-known, the un-planned, the un-expected, the un-familiar which can best teach us. In the tiny prefix "un," which so often spells trouble, lies the potential for change, for the new, for hitherto un-considered, un-imagined, unrealized. Our relationships, ideas, attitudes – everything in our little world moves into a new, an "un" perspective: the old is turned on its head. (Hinshaw xii)

There are two wildernesses to be identified, however. There are the wildernesses of distant primeval forests, mountain ranges, and perhaps even the sea. Just as important is the wilderness within each of us. Excessive interference with the outer wilderness creates, out of necessity, disharmony with the inner wilderness, and vice versa, for the two are intimately connected. Our disregard for nature and wilderness has led to today's psychological plague, i.e., neurosis. We are a microcosm of the macrocosm. In nature, we learn that the same laws of physics that govern the stars govern our being. Sitting quietly on a bench in the woods we realize we are all participants in a great cosmic dance. We understand the oneness of the universe and everything that is in it. The interrelatedness of the components of the universe is a concept dating back to the writings of the pre-Socratics, Heraclitus, and Parmenides.

## MYTHOLOGICAL JOURNEY TO KENSINGTON

It's the weekend after a hard week in the classroom, the office, or mind-numbing time spent in traffic. We look forward to being outside in nature. For us, living in the Detroit metropolitan area, one place to experience nature and wilderness is Kensington Metro

Park. While a metro park may not immediately conjure up nature, wilderness, or a *genius loci*,

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*Wilderness—to go into wilderness is to face the shadow of wild nature at its source. When we identify with our wilderness shadow, consume it, and assimilate it, we thereby re-own this vital and powerful energy.*

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— Roszak, 194

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please allow me to set the stage. Going to Kensington Metro Park we begin the journey by taking a road out of town. We leave behind the ordinary world, the known world, and cross the threshold to the world of the unknown; nature. As I approach Kensington, I pass the toll booth where the guard for the park (guardian of the threshold) resides, and

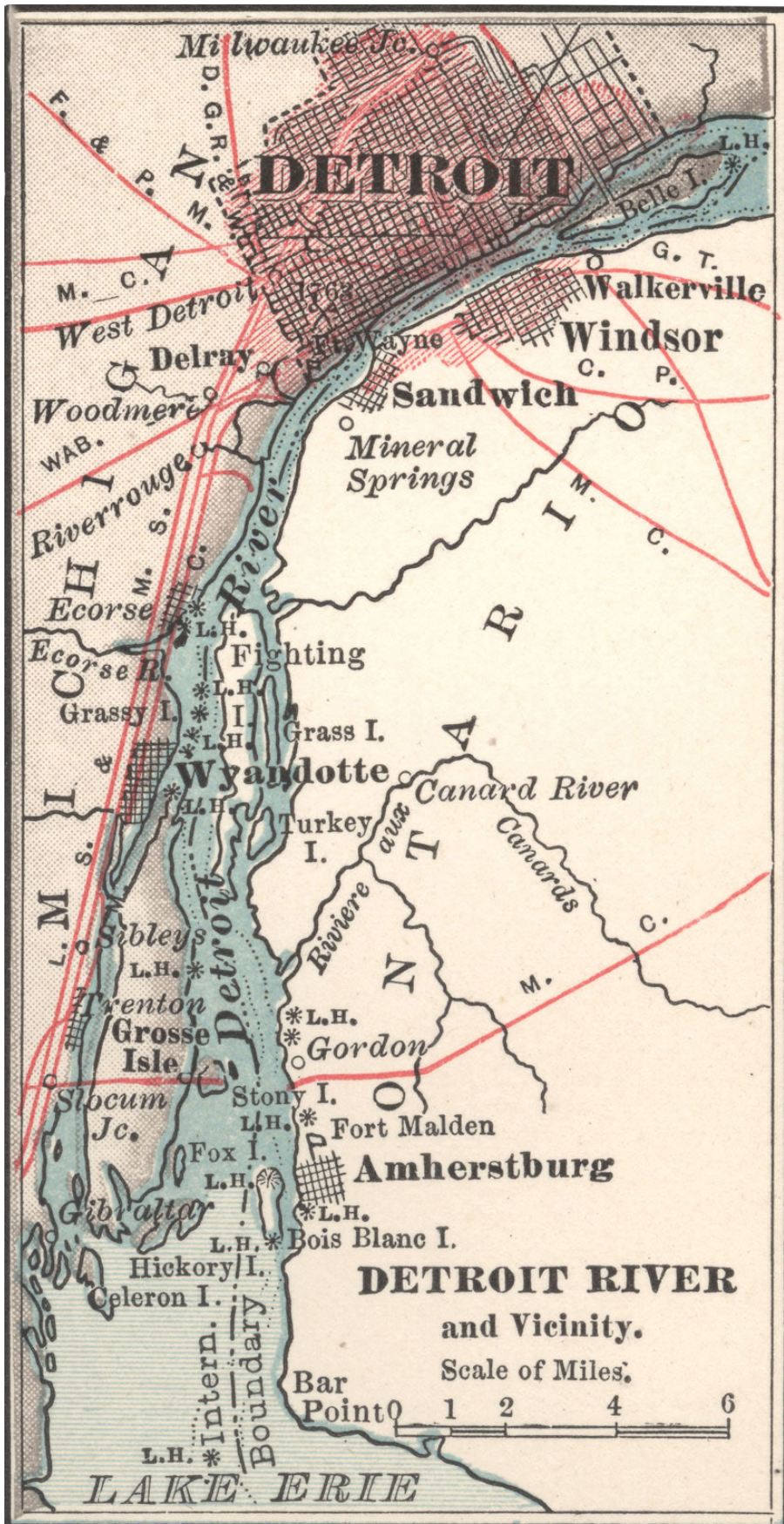


Illustration: Detroit River, Encyclopedia Britannica

I have my park sticker scanned. I must pass the test (entry fee and valid park sticker) so that I am worthy to undergo this adventure. Once entering the park I go to the nature center where a kind lady, the wise woman of the nature center, explains the trail system, its markers, and points of interest. She also cautions me about the dangers of poison ivy, requests that we not feed the animals, and cautions us about getting too close to the animals. *They are wild, don't you know, and touching them could elicit a harmful response.*

Hiking on the Aspen trail just outside the nature center, one can travel back in time to 1912 or maybe even find Jung's two-million-year-old Self. The trail will bring you to remnants of an old deteriorating foundation. On closer inspection it is the crumbling stone fireplace, the hearth, of the home of Joseph Labadie, a famous Detroit labor leader, and his wife, Sophie. Sophie planted the patch of Lily-of-the-Valley in front of the house over one hundred years ago. The crumbling stone fireplace reminds us of the warmth, friendship, and freedom that once resided here: the spirit of the place, the maternal hearth. Envisioned as a recreational retreat from the concrete city life, Jo and Sophie built a cabin, a barn, henhouse, and den, complete with a printing press. Joseph Labadie, a printer by trade, believed individuals had a right to speak, write, and publish their opinions (Fitzpatrick 1). Friends and family were invited to use the property free of charge so long as they took care of and tended its needs. There was a natural spring close by and they named their property "Bubbling Waters."

While springs are essential for providing the water necessary for life, a spring is also the source of many mythological images and stories. The spirit world or underworld can be entered through a hole in a tree, a hole in the ground, a pond, or a spring. Shamans would enter the spirit world through one of these openings to find answers to questions and cure disease. The spirit world is the residence of gods, goddesses, the dead, fairies, and sprites. It represents going from the known to the unknown, from the womb's darkness to the world's light, i.e., the unknown. The ego and the unconscious become comfortable with each other (von Franz 89-90). Psychologically, the wilderness and the underworld are metaphors for the unconscious, the storage bin for archetypes, the shadow, ancient wisdom, monsters, and demons. Crossing the

threshold is growth. It also heals the split between psyche, nature and spirit.

There is a bench near the crumbling stone fireplace where one can sit, still the mind, and soon images and ideas come bubbling up from the unconscious like the waters of the nearby spring. It is a place where one can be in touch with their two-million-year-old Self and the archetypes of the collective unconscious. It is the Labadie home, and it is our archaic home. Sitting on the bench, we can begin to experience the natural world surrounding us and the natural world within. Some primary cultures use vision quests, rituals, and rites of passage to experience the wisdom of the Other: the animals, the plants, and the rocks. To step outside our known Self and world, to become these wild and natural things, is to give life not only to them but to those archaic parts of ourselves. In the wilderness, we can grasp the magnitude of the cosmos, witness the intrinsic order, and understand what a small part we play individually. We begin to understand our oneness with the cosmos. Our egocentricity begins to erode (Harper 194). John Muir recovering from an eye injury, "Vowed to spend the rest of his days studying God's unwritten Bible, nature, which he called the University of the Wilderness" (Fleck x).

As did Emerson and Thoreau, Muir believed that nature communicated with us through metaphor and nature's hieroglyphic language (Fleck xii). For him, the mountains were the key to discovering the geography of a wilderness and one's inner psyche, one's inner wilderness. The journey into the mountains is a journey into our psyches. Like the hero's journey, it is both an inward and external journey. It combines the physical with the symbolic or spiritual aspects of discovery. From the mountain top we are above the chaos and see ourselves and the world clearer, we gain perspective. We visualize the human spirit and experience higher levels of consciousness. With the descent, we return to the world with our new insights—human spirit and primal nature fused: man, nature, and God (Fleck viii). You blend with nature and become part and parcel with nature (Fleck xi). A genius locus is a place of holiness, where one might hope to see God, the landscape of religiosity, the *locus Dei*.

Steven Harper tells us wilderness and nature are our culture's shadows. For the individual to go into the wilderness is to face the culture's shadow at its source. By identifying with our wilderness shadow, we "Re-own this vital and powerful energy" (Harper 194). We can become whole. The instinctual Self was left behind as we have evolved over the past two million years. He recommends we reclaim our wildness, our instinctual Self because this is where vitality lives.

The person who suppresses the animal side of his nature may become civilized, but he does so at the

expense of decreasing motive power for spontaneity, creativity, strong emotions, and deep insights. He cuts himself off from the wisdom of instinctual nature, a wisdom that may be more profound than any learning or culture can provide. (qtd. from Hall and Nordby, *Primer of Jungian Psychology*).

Sitting on the bench, we focus your consciousness on the nature around you. Rays of sunlight penetrate the forest canopy. We hear the rustle of the leaves on the ground as the squirrels and chipmunks search for food, or maybe they are playing tag. We become aware of the songbirds rejoicing on the sunny warm day. Is that a cardinal, a hawk, a tufted titmouse, or maybe a wren? How many birdsongs can one identify? We begin to notice the wildflowers around you and, on closer observation, see the bees moving from flower to flower, gathering honey. As we sit on the bench, ideas and thoughts begin to bubble up from one's unconscious into consciousness. One begins to notice the exquisite balance in nature: the sun, the rain, the plants, the insects, the animals. We are witnessing creation as it appeared the first day. We are witnessing the order that provides reassurance that everything is OK and is going to be OK. I am home. Nature is a source of discovery and truth. In our reverie we realize we are one with nature and nature is one with us. Our soul begins to heal.

The sun sinks lower in the sky and it is time to head home. We do not want to end this peaceful meditation. The first impulse is to "Refuse to return," but it is getting late, and there are so many stories to tell our family. We want to tell of the peace and tranquility we experienced sitting on the park bench as thoughts bubbled up from our unconscious into our awareness. The harmony and balance we witness in nature reassure us that everything is not only OK but the way it should be.

## CONCLUSION

We evolved from nature and in the beginning we lived in nature. Nature was one of our homes. In nature we find beauty, meaning, order, and peacefulness. Everyone wants to go home.

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# Osun Still Whispers: The Embodiment of Gender Roles in Post-Diaspora Yoruban Cultures

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## KEYWORDS

*Yoruban Culture*  
*Osun*  
*Cuba*

This world could not, and would not, exist without women. It is through the bodies of women that the cycle of life and death continues to spin; it is through women that the sacred hope of humanity is tended, stoked, and fostered. This is true of all women in all places: however, this paper focuses on women's roles in the Yoruba religion, which originates from what is present-day Southwestern Nigeria (also known as Yorubaland) and involves a system of divination called Ifá. This essay examines women's positions in Yoruba mythology and precolonial Yoruba religion, as well as the influence of Christianity on Yoruba gender beliefs, culminating in an exploration of the Cuban Yoruba diaspora tradition Lucumí as an embodiment of women's creative resilience over time and space. In no way is this article meant to be a conclusive

or definitive statement; it is not meant to be read as an all-encompassing narrative of Yoruba women's experiences and thus another colonial endeavor meant to categorize the lives of women of color. Rather, this exploration is a short assertion of the effects of colonization on women and a glimpse into the power of Yoruba women's resilience.

The embodiment of gender roles in precolonial Yoruba society stems from the Ifá divination corpus' *Odu Ose tura*. In a myth from this *odu*, the Supreme Being Olodumare sends out the seventeen Irunmole divinities, known as "orisas," to occupy the earth, of which only one is female: Osun. While the Irunmole are on earth, the sixteen male orisas neglect and exclude Osun from all their endeavors, knowledge, and decision-making, positing that she is only a female. This angers Osun, and when she can stand it no longer, the goddess gathers all the women of earth. With their powerful congregation of *asé* (life-force), the women interfere with the workings of the male

orisas: this sends the world spinning into chaos, and famine, plagues, pestilence, and lawlessness beleaguer humans. The sixteen male orisas rush to Olodumare for a solution, explaining what has happened. Olodumare's response to them is not a solution, but rather an inquiry about Osun's whereabouts and why she is not present. The male deities report that, as Osun is only female, they have excluded her. Instead of fixing the chaos, Olodumare orders the male deities to make peace with Osun and her powerful women; only then will stability and normalcy return. When the sixteen male orisas plead with Osun, she asserts they will only gain her forgiveness if they promise to no longer exclude her from any proceedings on earth. When they promise this, Osun forgives them, and peace returns once more (Olajubu, "Seeing" 50).

In this narrative, Olodumare, the Supreme Being, endorses the complementary roles of male and female. By asserting that it was Osun and her powerful women who could bring the

world back into balance, and that the male orisas needed to reconcile with her (Olajubu, "Seeing" 50), the Supreme Being reveals the intention for balance and cooperation between the male orisas and Osun. Olodumare could have intervened and restored peace to earth without any reference to Osun or her powerful women: that Olodumare references the female orisa implies a divine expectation for collaboration between male and female and the suggestion that one gender cannot exist or reach potential without the other (Olajubu, "Socio-Cultural" 317). Indeed, Oyeronke Olajubu asserts that the Yoruba myths and oral narratives, which "serve as the people's storehouse of philosophy," reveal "gender interdependency as opposed to the oppression of women by men" ("Socio-Cultural" 316).

This mythologically prescribed and exemplified balance of genders translates into the way women existed in precolonial Yorubaland. The connotations of roles and behaviors ascribed to male and female were not fixed, confining a person to one position or the other, as these roles and behaviors were flexibly informed by Yoruba culture, myths, and life-experience (Razak 129-30). For example, Osun's counterpart, the goddess of wealth and fertility, Ajé, who invented trade, commerce, money, and banking, led to a social sphere where women dominated the Yoruba market economy in both public and private (Olajubu, "Seeing" 46). According to LaRay Denzer, "[women] occupied a pivotal place in the local and state economy—organizing household industries, operating the local market system, and establishing long distance trade networks" (3, 5). Likewise:

In the political arena, traditions recall that women founded kingdoms and communities, occasionally wielded political authority as rulers, acted as regents, sat on the king's councils, held political offices, intrigued in palace politics, helped to make and unmake kings, served as go-betweens in diplomatic relations, and safeguarded their towns when their menfolk waged war elsewhere. They conducted key rituals to maintain the spiritual well-being of kings and kingdoms as well as of their own families and communities. (3)

Illustrating this last point, women played prominent and essential roles in Yoruba religion, just as Osun does in the myth. Women not only comprised Yoruba religion's sustaining force and majority membership, but also held influential roles in ritual and religious leadership (Olajubu, "Socio-Cultural" 312). Women were initiated into sacred knowledge (alongside men) and became diviners called *Iyanifá*, the highest level of priesthood in Ifá (Ifadamilo-la 1). Women and their bodies were glorified as bearing the potent and spiritual creative forces of fertility, healing, and sexuality, as women had the power either to ensure the continuity of the tribe—or send the world spinning into

chaos (Razak 129-30).

Prior to seeing how these precolonial gender performances have been both changed and honored in modern Cuban Lucumí, it is imperative to note how it is that Cuban Lucumí came to be. Through the advent of colonialism and the subsequent Transatlantic Slave Trade, which forcibly settled many of these aforementioned Yoruba people in the Caribbean, Ifá was carried by the Yoruba people from Africa towards the Americas. Preceding this relocation, invading colonial powers barreled into Africa, abusing the people and carving up the land while introducing an unbreachable set of oppressive ascriptions into the Yoruba worldview. Through its Aristotelian and Enlightenment-inspired nature, colonialism objectified and categorized everything. Thus, colonizers demanded the split of the Yoruba tribes into individuals; the division between the tribes and nature; and a rejection of a multidimensional worldview that saw the divine, nature, and humanity as inseparably intertwined (Hinga 179). Colonial oppressors, in enacting the rape of colonialism, not only brutalized the Yoruba people, but also inserted their underlying Cartesian worldviews, the gender binaries of Christianity, and their inherent racism into their violent reworking of the Yoruba societal and religious structure (Holdstock 12-13). The colonizers instituted Western education, which favored men, and Western civilization, which not only exploited the land and people, it also monetized labor, separated the corporeal and spiritual, and demarcated the public and private sectors of life (Olajubu, "Socio-Cultural" 318). The colonizing powers embedded themselves as the highest power and the benchmark for supremacy in Africa and Yorubaland, and ensured the Yoruba cultural narrative would be continued on men's lips through English (Ogunbado 53; Holdstock 22, 26). Thus, the colonizers began planting the seeds of a patriarchal disequilibrium whilst wedging a knife into the Yoruba worldview and religious construction.

The aforementioned is imperative to note and see as relevant because hand in hand with the imposition of colonial powers' worldview came the imposition of their religion (Holdstock 12-13). Christianity here was used as a tool of domination; in converting the Africans away from their traditional religion and into a European one, colonizers further disrupted Yoruba gender roles (Hinga 172-3). As they perceived the indigenous Yoruba people to be heathenistic, spiritually and societally, and consequently in need of their religion of the "one true God" (Holdstock 22), the colonizing powers further imposed their worldview, with its rigid gender roles, onto the Yoruba people via Christianity. According to Holdstock, "African beliefs in the divinity were denigrated as superstition, whereas Christian beliefs were regarded as scientific" (22). Therefore, the rigid gender roles and structures, the view of women as subservient, and the deified view of men's superiority (Olajubu,

"Socio-Cultural" 314, 318) were purported to be scientific and thus inherently correct. This ideology and praxis starkly opposed the native paradigm of interdependency between the divine and human, nature and the tribe, and men and women:

It is important to note that the colonial ideology of domination that led to the extreme abuse of the African environment also led to the gross abuse and exploitation of women, since colonial ideology and praxis were also very sexist. The colonial presence and ideology in Africa led to the radical patriarchization of African societies, with the consequent disempowerment of women in all spheres of life. (Hinga 179)

The era of colonialism, which brought with it the interpretation of women's subservience as theologically and scientifically prescribed, had irreparable effects on the Yoruba people. In turn, this influenced Yoruba religion and culture. However, it is also important to note that, as Wade W. Nobles writes, the Yoruba peoples' "... ancestral rights and spiritual connections were not destroyed or severed by colonialism" (325), though colonialism did lead to women's restrictions in religion and society.

Western colonialism, rooted in systemic beliefs that the African peoples' humanity was lesser based on the marker of skin color, led to the grotesque, inexcusable genocide of the Atlantic slave trade. Yoruba religious practitioners, despite being squelched by European Christianity and education and enslaved by European colonizers, still brought their tradition and religion to the Caribbean and the Americas. Nonetheless, many colonizers and slave-masters demanded that the Yoruba religious practitioners adopt Christianity under the threat of death. In order to adapt to the "dislocating and oppressive circumstances of the modern world-system" (Udo 34) and maintain their autonomy and spirituality, the (particularly Caribbean) Yoruba religious practitioners syncretized Yoruba religion with Roman Catholic beliefs. Subsequently, their pantheon of orisas lived on through the guise of the Catholic saints.

However, although women can and do actively participate in the Roman Catholic church, only men can be ordained as priests; as aforementioned, Christianity has rigid and inflexible gender roles that were imposed onto the enslaved and relocated Yoruba people. Contributing to the

disempowerment and restrictions of the Yoruba women in the religious sphere, the construct of race intersected with that of gender. In short: women were doubly precluded from spiritual leadership positions in Roman Catholicism, for not only were they seen as lesser and subservient in sex, they were also seen as lesser in race. Black was metaphorically declared as the opposition to that which is "pure" and "white," and so was associated with Satan (Holdstock 22). Thus, Yoruba women found themselves unable to become priestesses in Roman Catholicism and in some syncretized diasporic traditions because of their gender and skin color, a stark contrast to the precolonial interdependent Yoruba society in which women could historically hold any level of leadership.

All of the aforementioned mythology and historical ref-



Illustration: Map of Cuba by Cornelius van Wytfliet in 1597. Photo by Cornelius van Wytfliet

ences to colonialism and slavery lead to the practice of Yoruba religion in Cuba, where many Yoruba practitioners were forced to live. Cuba is a place in the Americas where aspects of precolonial Yoruba religion live on, having been kept alive in the caring hands of Yoruba women: Ifá has influenced Afro-Latinx culture for hundreds of years (Udo 34). Despite the heteropatriarchal ideologies held within the Cuban government and other Cuban religious tradi-

tions, some assert that “Santería is considered to be a female normative religion” (Tunáker 137), harkening back to Yoruba religion’s precolonial and mythological roots. Likewise, as Cuban Santería (or less pejoratively, Lucumí) is characterized by in-home worshipping—with home being where women maintain control due to the imposed patriarchal dichotomy of *casa/calle* (139)—women have an immense amount of influence because of and through the tradition (141). Mary Ann Clark, argues of Cuban Lucumí that women hold a privileged status in the religion because of how large a part Ifá divination and the home play in Cuban society (qtd. in Strongman, “Reseña” 276).

However, this view can be a dangerous romanticism, considering the “exclusion women face within the religion” (Strongman, “Reseña” 276). Recall the prior mythology and the embodiment of this mythic narrative in precolonial Yoruba: women had access to leadership at all levels of society, both spiritually and physically. Unfortunately, due to the marriage of Roman Catholic misogynistic beliefs to Yoruba ones (in which, as aforementioned, women held powerful and important roles), Lucumí women are only able to be ordained as orisa priestesses, called “Oyalo-sha,” or, more informally, “Santera” (Ifadamilola 1). Indeed, Strongman asserts that Lucumí is steeped in heteropatriarchy and machismo, as nearly all the leadership of Lucumí is male while at the “level of performance and trance possession, it is women who are predominant” (“Queering” 131-2). This stands in stark contrast to precolonial Yoruba women holding the title of Iyanifá, the highest possible position within their religion. David Brown, in his book *Santería Enthroned*, points to how “Cuban Lucumí is the most macho of the religions. In this tradition, male initiates wear male clothes regardless of the gender of the deity, but female initiates wear clothes that reflect the established gender identity of their deity” (qtd. in Strongman, “Queering” 129). Further exemplifying the contradiction in Clark’s words, Strongman brings attention to how: “[Women] cannot kill 4 legged animals, cannot be oriatés, italeros, babalaos, tocadores de tambor, osainistas. Women can only be apetebí [wife of a Babalawo]” (Robaina qtd. in Strongman, “Queering” 123). Strongman likewise states that “[Robaina’s] acknowledgment of misogyny in religion through the subordination of women in certain ritual contexts presents how Lucumí, in spite of the malleability of gender performance, does not constitute a gendered utopia” (“Queering” 123). Thus, even with physical and cultural restrictions placed upon them by men, Lucumí women demonstrate what Yoruba women have done throughout history. Where they cannot make change or hold power on an individual level, women channel the fire of Osun and do so as a collective, maintaining their autonomy in whatever creative capacity they can. Here, that looks like subversively driving Lucumí forward via their household influence and

directly linking to the divine in prayer and trance possession.

Alongside Lucumí, Ifá divination is practiced in Cuba. To give insight into women’s roles in Cuban Ifá, as well as the influences of colonialism and Christianity, it is helpful to explore the Iyanifá debate of 2005. The debate sparked when the *Casa-Templo* Ifá Iranlówo (African-styled Cuban priests who openly criticized the nationally recognized Cuban-styled Ifá) initiated three women as Iyanifá. The *Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba* (ACYC), the nationally sanctioned organization of Cuban-styled Ifá, spoke against the women’s initiation, saying it was a criminal scam and that the *Casa-Templo* priests were selling fake rituals to tourists, thereby making a mockery of Cuba’s Yoruba inheritance (Jesús, “Contentious” 821). The ACYC then attempted to blacklist the priests who had conducted the initiations. The House-Temple Ifá Iranlówo fought back, saying that the “ACYC was a sexist arm of the Cuban government that only wanted to keep women for ‘sex and plucking chickens’” (Hernández qtd. in Jesús, “Contentious” 821). The House-Temple priests also claimed it was the ACYC priests who were “... ‘bastardizing’ African religions by performing rituals that they did not understand,” for “Ifá-Ocho practices in Cuba had been distorted through the processes of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism” (Hernández qtd. in Jesús, “Contentious” 822-3). Consequently, they asserted that Cuban-styled Ifá subscribed to this “colonialist misogyny that maintained the subordination of women and only served to promote religious tourism in Cuba” (Hernández qtd. in Jesús, “Contentious” 822-3). In return, the Cuban-styled Ifá priests accused the House-Temple priests of being colonized themselves. The Cuban-styled Ifá priests drew “on the affective threats that have historically been launched against liberal and neoliberal (white) feminists to situate the practices of Iyanifá as an imperialist agenda to colonize ‘age-old’ African-Cuban traditions” (Jesús, “Contentious” 823). All the while, it was men on both sides who spoke for, over, and about women’s roles in Ifá. This debate exemplified the patriarchy inherent in the Afro-Cuban styles of Ifá. Yet, despite the monopoly of the conversation by men’s voices, women interjected. Many Afro-Cuban Ifá practitioners who are women or support the initiation of women into Ifá priesthood did not claim their support of Iyanifá initiation as a feminist stance. Instead, these women stated they had “situated their form of Afro-Cuban religious practice in tradition rather than modernity” (Jesús, “Gender”), pulling from precolonial Yoruba religious ideologies of interdependency.

The evidentiary influences of patriarchy and colonialism on Yoruba religion and Ifá discussed above do not imply that diaspora traditions are “impure,” or that women within them need to reclaim their “true roots” of perfect precolonial Yoruba religion (Udo 39). Instead, these Yoruba

diasporic religions can be celebrated as forms of resistance and resilience (39), flames of women's creative spirituality that have survived through times of darkness. While Lucumí and Ifá in Cuba stand as examples of how colonialism has abusively influenced Yoruba religion and African people, these traditions have also served as alternative spaces in which women of African heritage have practiced resistance and self-care and creatively subverted the Euro-centric patriarchal expectations ascribed to them. In short, as do all human belief systems, Yoruba religious tradition and diaspora traditions have flaws. Neither can be lauded as perfect, no matter their veneration of women (Strongman, "Reseña" 276, Jesús, "Contentious" 824), but they cannot be overlooked as vital sanctuaries for women, either.

Yoruba religious traditions have found a home in Cuba, and in other countries, as well. In the modern United States, Lucumí and Ifá are spreading with a force, and they are doing so particularly among women (Pitts). In various forms, Yoruba religion is a place where Black women, who have been belittled by the United States' Western culture and religion, can hold positions of power and access spirituality that uplifts them. Dr. Tracey Hucks of Haverford College explains that Ifá can allow African Americans to feel free and at home, and can allow them to "affirm their Black physicality in a place that has said 'You represent anti-beauty in this culture'" (qtd. in Pitts). Indeed, Ifá and other diasporic Yoruba religious traditions assert that Black women, who have for so long been associated with ugliness, a lack of sexuality, and/or a deviant sexuality in the United States (Williams 202), look like the goddesses of Africa. Ifá declares that Black women's beauty and sexuality are to be celebrated, seen as vibrant, spiritual, and divine. According to Aisha Beliso-De Jesús, Lucumí and Ifá have given Black and African women who practice in the United States an alternative way to conceptualize spirituality, and, thus, to challenge the racist heteropatriarchy present in many sects of Abrahamic traditions (Pitts).

Under the pressure of colonization, Yoruba women have found hope in their religion while creatively refusing to allow their spirituality to become conflated with the colonizers' misogyny. In Christian and Catholic spaces, women have been traditionally barred from positions of power and deemed inferior—and this inflexible prescription has bled into certain sects of Cuban Ifá and Lucumí. However, Cuban Ifá and Lucumí are also places where women can determine their personal narratives, be leaders, dig into their roots, and refuse to be dominated by Western constructs of gender that are Euro-centric, divisive, and non-mutualistic, and that depend upon women's subservience. Despite being subjected to forceful, destructive colonial religion and ideals, women in Yoruba religious traditions have proven repeatedly that they are individually and collectively a force, subversively stepping outside the plane of misogynistic modernity to define their religious selves in their own way. When ignored

and squelched, like Osun—and with Osun—they have found alternative routes to be heard and have proven that they and their asé are necessary in the operation of the world.

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# Persephone in Jabba's Throne Room

## or The Princess and the Penis

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### KEYWORDS

*Star Wars*  
*Jung, Carl*  
*Persephone*

For my eighth birthday, my mother took me and my friend to a Saturday matinee showing of *Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi*. The year was 1983. The theater was only half full, and we sat in the middle section. The lights lowered, and the opening prologue crawl of the *Star Wars* films rolled. I was twenty-two minutes away from an anchoring experience in my developing sexual psyche. The film opened on the desert planet of Tatooine as the heroes, one after another, attempted to rescue their friend Han Solo from imprisonment by the crime lord Jabba the Hutt, a monstrous slug-like creature. Each attempt failed. In one of the more disturbing failures, Princess Leia was captured by Jabba. I experienced a cocktail of complicated emotions as I witnessed the ensuing scene and its provocative central image: Leia arrayed in nothing but a

gold bikini, sprawling next to Jabba, as the camera panned slowly across her body. This shocking, sexualized depiction—so unexpected from the thus-far puritanic *Star Wars* films—burned into my brain.

I was not alone in the impact of this cinematic moment. It has become a pop culture touchpoint. As example, in the third season of the television show *Friends*, Ross entices his girlfriend Rachel to wear the famous gold bikini of Princess Leia in captivity. Confused as to why this fantasy is so important to him, Rachel asks her friend Phoebe for insight. Phoebe replies, "Oh, Princess Leia and the gold bikini? Every guy our age loved that. It's huge. That's the moment when she stopped being a princess, and she became, like, a, you know, a woman" (*Friends*, Episode 49). The episode is titled "The One with the Princess Leia Fantasy."

Part of me resists discussing actress Carrie Fisher's sexualized portrayal. I feel juvenile even writing about *Star Wars* and the infamous gold bikini. Surely, there were other things that

helped shape my sexuality. However, raised in a deeply religious family and community that did not discuss sex (I was 23 and married before my father and I had our first serious conversation about the subject), I must acknowledge that I sought education from the media I was allowed: science fiction and fantasy books, comic books, TV, and films. As I catalogue the shaping of my sexual understanding, so many distinct moments from those sources stand out: the constant allusions to sexual trysts within the teenage boarding house of *The X-Men* comics, a mountain-destroying romp between Superman and Wonder Woman, and the odd flirting of superheroes amidst the technicolor pages. Amid these memories, Princess Leia's surprising portrayal as a sexualized slave is paramount. Not simply because of the image it lodged in my mind or the awakening that it anchored, but also because of the heavy reinforcement the film provided my already poor understanding of women's sexual agency. In reflection, I am working to comprehend what I

saw, what I understood, and what I did not realize I understood—I am still working to explore each as stations on my road to development, as Carl Jung notes regarding his own childhood memories: “They are like individual shoots of a single underground rhizome, like stations on a road of unconscious development” (27). Due to the pervasiveness of this image on myself personally, and its placement in the larger American male collective, at least of my generation, and with the lens of mythology and my own personal narrative, this pop culture moment both damaged an entire generation of men’s view of female autonomy and simultaneously has been redeemed through feminist efforts.

George Lucas and his creation Luke Skywalker brought the study of mythology (through Joseph Campbell) into popular culture. Yet, Luke Skywalker’s story is not the only story that reinterprets and repeats mythic themes. Leia’s does, as well. In particular, Leia’s subjugation reimagines Persephone’s abduction by Hades. Persephone’s story, as told in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, is that of a young fertility goddess, the daughter of Demeter, who is abducted by the god of the Underworld, Hades. After much time, of which little is known, is returned to the surface world only to discover that she is bound to return to the underworld and serve as queen and consort to Hades himself, seasonally. The two, Persephone and Leia, both royalty, are brought into the underworld of their universes against their will, abducted by chthonic deities—arrangements made by a close male relatives (Luke Skywalker for Leia and Zeus for Persephone). Both narratives reveal little of their protagonists’ time in the underworld, only focusing on the women’s entry and escape. What happens down there is overlooked, and so much of the women’s experience, and potential trauma, is ignored. As I attempt to view a significant station on my developmental road through a mythological lens, I cannot help but see Leia’s abduction by the underworld mobster Jabba as a reimagining of Persephone’s journey. While I doubt I can bring much to the myth, I acknowledge that the myth brings much to me and provides a lens with which to reconsider critical stages of adolescent growth.

*Star Wars* has become a mainstay of modern pop mythology—yet seems designed for only half of the population. Scholar Jean Pfaelzer, in her article on feminism in science fiction, defines *Star Wars* as “male conquest narrative” (47). Fisher, the actress who portrayed Leia, reflected:

There are a lot of people who don’t like my character in these movies; they think I’m some kind of space bitch. She has no friends, no family; her planet was blown up in seconds—along with her hairdresser—so all she has is a cause. From the first film, she was just a soldier, front line and center . . . In *Return of the Jedi*, she gets to be more feminine, more support-

ive, more affectionate. But let’s not forget that these movies are basically boys’ fantasies. So the other way they made her more female in this one was to have her take off her clothes.

If *The Hymn to Demeter* depicts “a patriarchal cosmic order that has not yet reached its final form” (Thalmann), *Star Wars* is that patriarchal cosmic order’s final form. Historian Robin Wood, discussing the impact of *Star Wars*, argues: “The Father must here be understood in all senses, symbolic, literal, potential [including] the young heterosexual male, father of the future, whose eventual union with the ‘good woman’ has always formed the archetypal happy ending of the American film, guarantee of the perpetuation of the nuclear family and social stability” (172). Within *Star Wars*, Leia is that “good woman,” which makes her overt sexualization more disturbing—in the shared silence of both narratives, the audience recognizes something is going on behind the curtain (or, in this case, between the scenes) but in order to achieve the “archetypal happy ending,” we pretend everything is just as it appears on screen. We know there is an underworld journey that the women of both stories experience which occurs only in silence and darkness.

In a Dionysian switch, Leia’s entry into the underworld is in drag. Leia enters Jabba’s palace in the guise of a bounty hunter—a male figure. As the bounty hunter Boushh, she is demanding and in control. Until she reveals herself by pulling off her helmet and allowing her long hair to flow, the members of the criminal collective give her respect. This highlights the nature of her sudden sexualization: Leia’s transformation is not from princess to sex slave. It is from male warrior to female sex slave.

Jabba declares, “Bring her to me.” She reacts viscerally to his elongated tongue. Jabba’s intent for her is clear: she is to serve him. Within seconds, she’s moved from being the heroine who rescued her lover from captivity to being nothing more than a sexual object. When we next see her, she is sleeping next to Jabba, completely at rest, while a gremlin-like alien (the audience’s proxy) ogles her nearly naked form. Leia is shown arrayed in her slave uniform—a gold bikini with small pieces of burgundy cloth. She is now wearing makeup, not having had any on while sporting her bounty hunter mask. Around her neck is a collar attached to a chain gripped by Jabba. She has been made one of Jabba’s slave girls. Her appearance in the slave uniform is highly sexualized. The entire design implies that her use to Jabba and his court is for sexual purposes.

Later, as Luke negotiates with Jabba, Leia sits still without an ounce of resistance. She has been fully acclimated to the underworld court. While talking, Jabba yanks her chain and she shows surprise but no disturbance—this treatment is something that has happened before, maybe often.

Whatever has happened to Leia while in chains in Jabba's palace has primarily occurred off-screen. Leia's initial defiance ("We have powerful friends. You're going to regret this!") has diminished into reluctant compliance within just a short few seconds of the film's runtime. Yet, her slavery and subjection must have taken much longer. Her slave outfit obviously has been custom-designed, and her initial utter disgust of Jabba has evaporated, even when her body is pressed against his slimy, worm-like flesh—clues that several days, if not longer, have transpired between her entrance into captivity and her subsequent rescue by Luke.

Earlier, prior to Leia's captivity, another slave girl, a green-skinned twi'lek, resists Jabba's pulling of her chain. The scene is chilling. The girl, obviously frightened of what Jabba is intending to do next, pulls with all her force away from him. The implication of forced sexual activity pervades these few seconds of her resistance—before Jabba hits a button and drops the floor out from under her, dooming her to be eaten by the monstrous rancor monster in the palace's dungeon. Jabba demonstrates no patience for defiance amongst his slave girls. Moreover, he considers them quite disposable. It is on the heels of this scene that Leia arrives at Jabba's palace, in her guise as Boushh, the bounty hunter.

Unlike the prior slave girl, Leia never pulls against her chain while in Jabba's service. The implication is that she has fully succumbed to the whims of Jabba and perhaps others of his court. We can assume that she has been fed by him and has danced for him. Because she is still alive several days after her capture, we can also assume she has not resisted his sexual demands. The loudest argument for the reality of her sexual abuse is her transformation to a completely submissive attitude. Leia had maintained agency in everything until her captivity, but her determined, at times, defiant, persona has withered entirely in Jabba's grasp. The opening crawl of the first film, *Star Wars: A New Hope*, begins with the words: "Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy." The entire *Star Wars* story begins with Leia's decision to rebel. For two films, her determination drove the story. Ultimately, the kidnapped princess image is what rose to the top of memory—in a roast of George Lucas for the American Film Institute, Fisher noted: "George is a sadist. But like any abused child wearing a metal bikini changed to a giant slug about to die, I keep coming back for more." Fisher views her role in that scene as that of an abused child. Her comment ratchets up the unseen horror the audience has to work hard to pretend is not happening.

In the final battle between Jabba's court and the heroes,

Leia blackens the lights and uses her own chain to choke Jabba to death in a remarkable moment of strength and determination. As he lolls forward, she gazes at him with anger, disgust, and satisfaction. She communicates a conclusion that his death was well-deserved and that she is proud to have been the one to deliver it. Leia reclaims her agency in that moment, being the one to kill the monster. Finally, she aims a cannon at the main deck of the barge, destroying Jabba's entire retinue in a fiery explosion. Yet, she does all this in the skimpy bikini. The cloth flaps around as she races across the screen.

Like Zeus to Persephone, Leia enters Jabba's captivity by the will of a family member, in this case, by her brother, Luke Skywalker. While at that point in the story, the revelation that they are siblings has not occurred, the film ends



Illustration: Still from *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. Directed by George Lucas. 21st Century Fox. 1983

on that revelation of their familial connection. Luke resists the thought of sacrificing Leia to Vader once he knows she is his sister, but earlier he had risked her well-being to ensure the release of their friend Han Solo. Leia's role in the third film, from beginning to end, is as an object moved around the board by the male characters. This is a significant change from her decisive, charge-ahead persona in the first film, *Star Wars: A New Hope*. The "hero of a thousand faces," Luke, is the mastermind of the entire scheme to free Han Solo, acting much like Zeus, who devises a marriage plan for his brother Hades. Scholar Virginia White, in an artistic review of the Persephone texts, notes:

While Hades is trading an abstract good, Zeus offers up a woman, a sentient being. Persephone moves from an autonomous individual to simply the means to an end. Using women as the object of exchange

entails a certain amount of risk. The success of the exchange relies on women maintaining their status as objects rather than actors. If Persephone were to become recalcitrant, she would jeopardize her father's arrangement. For this reason, she is given no warning or choice, she is abducted. Throughout the poem she is described as . . . Unwilling, in spirit, but passive in action. (25)

That passage could also apply to Leia. If Leia were to become recalcitrant, she would jeopardize her brother's plans. For this reason, she is abducted. For her time in the underground lair of Jabba, she is unwilling, in spirit, but passive in action. Was her captivity as a sexual slave the original intent all along? Was it to allow her to be moved into close proximity of the monstrous, well-guarded Jabba? Should we see her decision to bravely enter the underworld of Jabba and ultimately acquiesce to the sexual demands of a monster as heroic? Did Luke consider that a fair trade? Cole Bowman, writing in *The Ultimate Star Wars and Philosophy*, asserts a different interpretation of the moment:

When Leia is held captive in Jabba the Hutt's court, wearing the infamous gold bikini, she becomes a representative of the power of female sexuality. Because her outfit also involves a neck-chain attached to a crime boss, her situation is blatantly oppressive. Does this render Leia merely a token of sexual objectification? Certainly not! Even when chained to Jabba, Leia exerts *command* over her sexuality. While both Han and Jabba—in quite different ways—attempt to gain control over Leia's sexuality, she accepts neither of them. She *intentionally* got herself into Jabba's company to help Han. Once captured, she uses her sexuality to exploit the situation, placing herself in a position to kill Jabba with her own chain at the opportune moment. (166)

Yet, the juxtaposition of the prior slave girl's rebellion against Leia's acquiescence hints at something far more gruesome. She might have chosen that path, or perhaps she did not. Yet, it does not erase the likelihood that, between the scenes see onscreen, Leia endured a horrific trauma that goes unaddressed by the male characters surrounding her. For both Leia and Persephone, the concern that weighs on my mind as I work to deprogram my psyche is the implication of the gap. Something happens in the gap that goes unseen. We are left to conclude: "What happens should not be seen. What happens is not important." We never see the heroes discuss the horrors of their captivity. Never does Luke ask Leia if she is okay. All that happened to her off-screen seems to be entirely planned and completely acceptable. The film did nothing to disturb the world of male hierarchy that I found myself within.

In an article titled "7 Reasons So Many Guys Don't Understand Sexual Consent," writer David Wong digs further into the subjugation of Leia by the adolescent male audience:

Sexy. Slave. I mean, everybody gets this, right? The fantasy isn't that she's showing skin; the fantasy is that *she didn't choose to wear that*. She's a princess, she's regal, she's a noble warrior . . . and now we're going to masturbate to her wearing a humiliating, skimpy costume that she was forced to put on, presumably under the threat of death by rancor.

Wong, after recounting the numerous moments in 1980s films of men taking advantage of women against their choice, concludes: "Long before I was old enough to date or even had female friends, it was made more than clear: In any relationship, men are the predators, women are the prey. Their expressions of fear and rejection—including *defensive physical attacks*—are a coy game to be overcome, like a tricky clasp on a bra." In reflection, I cannot remember a single film, TV show, or book that demonstrated consent in sexual activity—women simply did not possess agency within sex in the male-dominated fictional world I grew up in.

Later, as a teen sitting in youth groups at church, I was never taught about consent. We only heard that sexual activity outside of marriage was wrong. In this mindset, of course rape was evil and wrong—because it occurred outside of marriage, not because it violated the understanding of consent. Rape was on the level of masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, or any form of sexual activity I could participate in as a teenager: wrong because it was not within marriage. Rape and masturbation received the same consequence: an eternity of burning in Hell. We were never taught about consent because it was the act of sex that was evil—consenting to have sex would have equated to consenting to commit a diabolical action.

Within this framework, I was taught that women did not have much interest in sex. By either lack of clarification, insinuation, or sometimes outright instruction, I learned that sexual pleasure was just for males. In my adult years, I even heard (on multiple occasions) women speakers in Christian environments encouraging wives that it was their duty to have sex with their husbands even if they did not want to. One of the most surprising things for me in life was discovering that women were actually interested in sex.

Through years in an ultra-religious family and church, I came to view all of humanity as separated into two categories: sex-craving males and pure, virginal women. For men, the urge to have sex is acknowledged. With that acknowledgment, along with the constant reinforcement that any sexual activity outside of marriage is evil, without ever referencing consent, the very idea that women have any

form of agency within sex is erased. It played out often that sexual indiscretions on the part of men were part of their nature and thus excused. The elimination of any form of sexual agency from women reimagines women as simply objects, under the guise of "Let's protect women," while in truth, the underlying intent is "Let's protect our property." This culture created boys that did not understand that women enjoy sex. Thus, their approach to sex is very much the old "male-pleasure focused" of the Greek Gods. Zeus would have been at home in this dehumanizing environment.

My first misreading of the journey of Leia in the underworld was to not consider whether she had agency at all. It was not that I doubted it; what was horrible was that I never considered it. Whether she had agency in what happened to her never occurred to me. At that time, she was simply an object. The implications of her potential abuse were right there in front of me, yet I never considered it. In my second misreading, I assumed that Leia was simply victim. I feel ill-equipped to come to a conclusion regarding Leia's potential agency. Seeking exploration, I return to Persephone. Classicist I. Hurst, in her article "Love and Blackmail," argues: "The possibility that Persephone is not compelled to eat the honey-sweet seed opens up narratives in which the daughter's sexual awakening and separation from her mother are more or less consciously chosen" (178). Poet Louise Glück in "Persephone the Wanderer" writes:

Persephone's initial  
Sojourn in hell continues to be  
Pawed over by scholars who dispute  
The sensations of the virgin:  
Did she cooperate in her rape,  
Or was she drugged, violated against her will,  
As happens so often now to modern girls. (16-19).

That Persephone's myth is often titled the "Rape of Persephone" assumes a lack of consent. Yet, she ultimately stays with her abductor. By choice? Or deceit, as various texts conclude?

In one account, Hades is described as deceiving her:

secretly  
he slipped her  
a pomegranate seed,  
a sweet one,  
to eat,  
a precaution  
so that  
she would not stay  
everyday  
up there. (Boer 149).

When retelling this to her mother, Persephone goes further:

and force me,  
unwillingly,  
violently,  
to eat it. (153).

Helene Foley, in her essays on *The Hymn to Demeter*, notes that "the bride's acceptance of food was a form of acknowledging the groom's authority over her" and that sexual intimacy soon followed this activity (107-109). Like Leia, is there an allusion here to something else that has occurred "off-screen" or, in this case, "off-page"? Is the tasting of the pomegranate an allusion to the virginal maiden having tasted of sex? Hades gives her his seed and thus she is bound to the underworld. But is her resulting abduction devoid of any agency? Scholar Jennifer Larson states that "nothing is said about the female partner's will or desire; she is a simple vehicle for the god's pleasure" (65). So, what did Persephone as Leia desire in her situation? Certainly not to be sexually abused. Yet, journalist Tricia Barr, in her article on "Slave Leia," finds something to celebrate in this scene:

Leia, practically naked, chained up to the front of Jabba's dais, has become an iconic image of sexual objectification by a villain, but the most important thing is that she is never once shown lacking dignity. Stripped of everything, in the depths of what some women might perceive as their own version of hell, Princess Leia remains poised and in possession of her self-worth, reminding us that there are some things a woman can refuse to give away—that we always have the power. (That's not to say some women aren't horribly victimized by physically more powerful men, or even other women, but . . . I think it's undeniable that a woman can escape slavery with her sense of self.)

Both Persephone and Leia do end their stories in power—both become the ultimate royalty of their domains. In Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Persephone is always pictured as the consort of Hades, sharing his authority of the kingdom of the dead (Gantz 64). Noah Berlatsky, in an article for The Guardian, provides a different interpretation:

Slave Leia fascinates the fandom because of sex. But I don't think it's just sex. Luke may be leaping around with his lightsaber in the foreground, but the backdrop of the Jabba arc is the Han and Leia romance. What would you do for love? What do you want to do, and who do you want to be, for love? The slave-Leia approach to these issues is clumsy and sexist, but the questions themselves are nei-

ther of those things. Almost by accident, *Star Wars* stumbled briefly into material with some consequence.

So, perhaps Leia does exercise agency. She does stay within sexual captivity out of desire for Jabba. And not for Luke. But potentially for Han. However, personally, I hesitate to conclude that and risk ignoring Leia's potential trauma, and I also resist my assumption that she did not exercise agency.

Oddly, during the same year *Return of the Jedi* premiered, 1983, *Rolling Stone* hailed Princess Leia as "the feminist from the fourth dimension" (Caldwell). The magazine issue featured photos of Fisher in her Leia slave bikini rolling around on beaches in the surf. She smiles while left to run in the water, with no Jabba in sight—a juxtaposition to the film's portrayal of her in costume. Yet, in the text of that issue, Fisher analyzes her approach to portraying Leia as a strong female lead: "You can play Leia as capable, independent, sensible, a soldier, a fighter, a woman in control—*control* being, of course, a lesser word than master. But you can portray a woman who's a master and get through all the female prejudice if you have her travel in time, if you add a magical quality, if you're dealing in fairy-tale terms. People need these bigger-than-life projections." So, there is potentially another reading of this: Leia's status as a "feminist icon"<sup>1</sup> is defined by her agency in three decisions: first, in starting the rebellion, second, the acknowledgment of her undesired sexual trauma at the hands of the monster Jabba, and, finally, her recovering control of her life and becoming the willful, bold, and determined leader of the galaxy.

Rewinding back to that moment in the theater, there's something else that gnaws on my memory. The image of Jabba the Hutt himself. Jabba's visage resembles a penis. His actions follow a stereotypical personification of male genitalia: always amorous, insisting, demanding, ravenous, and leaking. This image reminds me of Jung's own phallic childhood dream (and in a way, *films are a collective dream*): "The thing did not move, yet I had the feeling that it might at any moment crawl off the throne like a worm and crawl toward me. I was paralyzed with terror. At that moment I heard from outside and above me my mother's voice. She called out, 'Yes, just look at him. That is the man-eater'" (Jung 11-15). This description could be found in the script of *Return of the Jedi* and little in the film would change. Jabba, as phallus, clearly rests upon a throne in an underground chamber—all must descend into darkness to enter his court before "the subterranean God" (11-15). The whole of Jabba's palace appears to have been a rendering of Jung's phallus dream to be consumed by the masses.

I now look back and have to ask, "Was I Jabba?" This is the

difficulty of the religious culture I grew up in. I was repeatedly told women had no interest in sex, and everything reinforced their objectification. Simultaneously, I was reminded I was a monster. This was another aspect of the Christian purity culture: while women were considered to be pure and untainted by sexual desire, men were consumed by sex, and sex outside of marriage was evil. Thus, I concluded I was evil. Most of my adolescence was a pendulum swinging between overwhelming sexual desire that I would work to not act upon and the guilt that would overwhelm me when I did. I had developed a deep, growing hatred for myself. The energy of sexual libido was both energizing and abhorrent. Now, I wonder how much of my own religious life was motivated by a desire to be free from the burden of this monster that lived inside me. I felt torn between two selves.

Returning to Tatooine, the final battle with Jabba occurs above another sexual image: the great Sarlacc. Portrayed as a gigantic hole in the earth, the Sarlacc flexes and moves in a viscerally organic manner. Its outer lips rimmed with great teeth, it is a haunting science-fiction version of *vagina dentata*. The death of the great phallus occurs as the feminine regains her agency above the enormous vagina of the desert. As Jung stood "suspended between opposites, between the pull to creativity represented by the phallus and the pull to inertia represented by the mother," (Downing 97), Leia is suspended between the Sarlacc and Jabba, the monstrous vagina and the monstrous penis. Likewise, the audience finds itself suspended between the two. The monstrous quality of these two forces suggests that they are translations of pre-pubescent conceptions of genitalia—the audience watching the film collectively generates those very images.

As a Jungian review of sexual imagery that created the stations on my road, my efforts are just beginning. Yet, this is the start of a process of active, intentional deconstruction of the powerful, persistent patriarchal programming that I was raised in. How have I stumbled out of it? I am unsure if I completely have. I feel a deep sense of urgency to unwind these many cords and come to a place of health, at least a place healthy enough to ensure that I do not carry the programming the patriarchal legacy insists upon to my son and daughters. The path forward is to untangle each and every knot and deconstruct the framework upon which I have built my perceptions and assumptions. I suspect there is an underworld journey ahead of me. I am frightened of the monsters that await in the darkness, at each station. Perhaps I will escape, redeeming my own identity and thus my own independent sexual agency.

1 In recent years, Leia's image has been used on posters and signboards in various pro-women marches. She has evolved to a feminist icon and the portrayal of her as a sex slave appears to have disappeared—albeit one hauntingly accurate poster has the bikini-clad Leia choking a MAGA hat-wearing Jabba (Knopf).

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# Bring Back the Burn:

## The Generative Role of Fire in Kumeyaay Ecology and Mythology

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### KEYWORDS

*Fire*

*Traditional Ecological Knowledge*

*Indigeneous*

**K**umeyaay writer, educator, and environmental resource management consultant Michael Connolly Miskwish writes that his tribe's word for soul, *Maat-'aaw*, means the "fire that burns within our body" (3). He explains that this soul-fire brings humankind the gift of creativity (3). With this said, the importance of fire and its relationship to creativity is evident throughout Kumeyaay cosmology, mythology, and rituals, and it is also apparent in the tribe's traditional land management practices. One aspect of traditional Kumeyaay land management is a practice in which small, controlled burns clear space for beneficial plants, strengthen existing species, release the seeds of conifers, and regenerate soil. This essay will explore how human engagement with fire in Kumeyaay land stewardship, cosmology, stories, and ceremony

brings both environmental and cultural flourishing. It will also discuss how these Kumeyaay fire-laden practices and tales exemplify some of the traditional lifeways and worldviews being reclaimed by California's Indigenous populations—for the health and sovereignty of both people and land.

Early European and American explorers marveled at the abundance of flora and fauna they encountered throughout California. Spurred by their own cultural mythologies, these people assumed they were encountering a "wild Eden" that provided its native inhabitants ample nourishment without the need for labor (Anderson 1). The commonly held belief was that "prior to Europeans arriving to the region, the Indigenous peoples merely foraged the land in a way that required no particular degree of intelligence" (Newcomb). What the new arrivals did not understand is that California's Indigenous peoples had a "system of planting, harvesting, and managing the environment that was very different from that practiced in Europe,"

and that human interaction with the landscape was responsible for the flourishing they found (Newcomb). This system of Indigenous interaction with land is today called "traditional ecological knowledge," or TEK, "referring to ecological management practices formed over generations and based on observation, experimentation, and long-term relationships with plants, animals, climate, and environment" (Clarke 256). Central to this Indigenous system of land management in California is the practice of controlled burning, which historically "created better habitat for game, eliminated brush, minimized the potential for catastrophic fires, and encouraged a diversity of food crops" (Anderson 1).

The Kumeyaay, whose ancestral lands span the southernmost portion of California and the northern Baja peninsula, were one of many California tribal groups who engaged in sophisticated ecological husbandry that included regular burns. There is evidence that Kumeyaay burned deergrass, the

bunchgrass favored for coiled basketry, "to clear away accumulated dead material and increase flower stalk yields" (Anderson 145), as well as other grasslands to replenish the soil and foster seed harvest in edible plants such as wild-flower chia (264). There is likewise evidence the Kumeyaay practiced TEK in areas filled with Torrey Pine groves to enhance conifer populations and encourage the trees to produce more of their treasured nuts, which were "eaten raw or roasted and used as flavoring in seed porridges and pinole" (330). These prescribed burns and other TEK practices of the Kumeyaay and Indigenous Californians, which benefitted not only humans but also other plant and animal species, stemmed from an understanding of reciprocity: namely, that humans have an obligation to care for the species and environments that sustain them (121). This mutuality—so contrary to the beliefs of the Euro-American colonizers, which pitted man against nature—is part of what Rarámuri ethnobotanist Enrique Salmón calls "kincentricity," a shared awareness that "life in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin" and that kin "includes humans as well as the natural elements of the ecosystem" (21). Salmón writes: "The interactions that result from this 'kincentric ecology' enhance and preserve social structure and the ecosystem" (21). In other words, human culture and nature are intimately connected.

Indeed, for the Kumeyaay, humans are a keystone species not only on Earth, but also in the larger cosmos. Miskwish writes: "The harmony of the celestial cycles is dependent on our faith, understanding and gratitude for their existence," noting out of all the cycles that the fiery solar cycle is the most important to his people (1-2). According to Miskwish, "burning was an essential part of the interrelationship between people and the land," and "the timing, frequency, magnitude and duration of fire was critical to ensuring that the environment maintained its abundance" (9). To this end, the Kumeyaay carefully observed celestial movements and utilized "natural and manmade formations as land calendars to perceive the cycles of the sun" (9). All the while, "ceremonies to acknowledge the celestial cycles and show gratitude were considered most important to ensure the continuation of the annual cycles" (31). Historically and presently, these ceremonies express the Kumeyaay understanding of humanity's necessary, beneficial role in the continuation of the universe.

Stories are also essential to the Kumeyaay people's understanding of their relationship to the Earth and cosmos, and, unsurprisingly, fire figures

prominently within Kumeyaay origin myths. One myth is the tale of two brothers who arise from the primordial elements to create the world, a Kumeyaay iteration of the male hero twins found throughout the mythologies of the Americas (Campbell 208). In the latter part of the tale, the people whom the brothers create acquire culture after burning a great serpent.

There are many different versions of this story, but a basic outline remains constant throughout most accounts. The tale begins with two brothers, an older and a younger, living in relationship with the primordial elements. In



Illustration: Arthur Schott, Sarony & Co. (Napoleon Sarony) NY 1857, digitalized by Kosi Gramatikoff

some versions, the brothers simply exist within an all-encompassing sea (Waterman 338), while in others there is a female earth and a male sea who mate to create the brothers (Toler 5). The brothers decide to fashion the world, which happens in some stories with the help of little red ants that fill their bodies with water to make land (Waterman 339), and in others by the boys raising the water until it forms a sky (Toler 5). The brothers then use clay to fashion the moon, sun, and the first people. In the second part of the story, the people wish to have a ceremony and need to call a great serpent who lives on an island in the ocean. They build a ceremonial house out of brush and summon the snake, whose body marks the land as he migrates across it (Waterman 340). When the snake reaches the ceremonial house, he spends days coiling and coiling within it, until the people set fire to both structure and snake. Kumeyaay storyteller Jose Bastiano LaChappa says: "His body exploded and scattered. Inside his body was all knowledge, comprising songs, magic secrets, ceremonies, languages, customs. Thus these were scattered over the land and different people acquired different languages and customs" (qtd. in Toler 5). The serpent's body then disseminates to form various landmarks, such a great white ridge of rock and a black mountain near the Colorado River, and the people, likewise, disperse (Waterman 341).

This myth posits creation within the specific ecosystems of the Kumeyaay people, explains the Kumeyaay's presence on their ancestral lands, and demonstrates the propagative role of fire in Kumeyaay culture, a function that mirrors the use of fire in the tribe's traditional ecological practices. Vine Deloria writes that "Indian tribal religions could be said to consider creation as an ecosystem present in a definable place" (77), and this myth—through the migration of the great snake, which encompasses the extension of the Kumeyaay's territory, from the coastal islands to the Colorado River—clearly communicates the emergence and boundaries of the ecosystems particular to the Kumeyaay people. The story, with its human dispersion, also explains the presence of the Kumeyaay's bands across these ancestral lands. Likewise, the role of fire in this story is generative, just as it is in ecological burning: the burning of the snake releases culture and knowledge to the people and creates the various groupings of Kumeyaay, who then scatter like seeds across the landscape. In addition, the evocative image of the great snake coiling round and round within the ceremonial house conjures the image of the coil baskets essential to Kumeyaay traditional food processing and lifeways; notably, this basketry is often formed from deergrass, one of the plant species the Kumeyaay regularly burned to strengthen stalks and increase yield. Thus, this myth shows the relationship of culture and ecology—and puts fire at the heart of creation.

A second origin myth is "The Story of the Chaup," a

complicated narrative recorded by anthropologist Constance Du Bois. This story tells of a character named Chaup and his relatives, whose interactions within "an already existing world" appear to create the models and templates for certain Kumeyaay practices and rituals (Waterman 337). Emphasizing the importance of fire to Kumeyaay lifeways, the hero Chaup is also the personification of a type of lightning.

"The Story of the Chaup," is long and complex. The first part begins with two sisters, one of whom becomes mysteriously impregnated while bathing in the waters. She births twin boys, whom she gives the same name: Cuy-a-ho-marr. The precocious youths begin to show interest in hunting, and so their mother, whom they call Sin-yo-hauch, which Du Bois notes is a name for the Earth Mother, teaches them how to make bows and arrows from the strong, pliable willow trees, how to discern which animals are appropriate for human consumption, and how to hunt ethically. She magically resurrects those animals whom her sons kill improperly, and forces the boys to make things right, much to their chagrin. Notably, as part of one of her corrections, she uses fire to encourage the movement of deer down the mountain. She gives her instructions with the statement that "the people who come after" will also do as they do (Du Bois 217-25).

The last part of the story begins with Sin-yo-hauch showing her sons how to make flutes, which they then use to court women from the four directions. The brothers fall in love, finally, with two women from the east, who are of the Buzzard clan. After a rather complicated courtship process, the boys set off for the east to be with their wives. When they leave, they fashion effigies of themselves out of grasses and feathers and leave them behind for their mother, who, with a presentiment of the hardship to come, clutches them in sorrow. To enter the village of their wives, the boys make themselves appear as fire balls and descend amongst the houses. Even once they regain their human forms, however, their eyes and bodies shine bright and alarm the villagers, who can tell the youths have magical powers. They decide to kill the brothers, and many attempt the task, but only an old wizard is powerful enough to dispatch them. He does so, and the villagers, being of the Buzzard clan, eat the bodies. The wife of the younger brother gives birth to a son, who calls himself Chaup and, filled with magic like his father and uncle, begins to avenge their deaths by killing the people of the village. After a long journey and much destruction, Chaup finds his way back to his grandmother, Sin-yo-hauch, who is now old and blind. They grieve together, and then he burns down her dusty home and carries her off to the mountains, toward a new beginning (Du Bois 229-42).

"The Story of the Chaup," rather than being concerned with the origins of the known world, seems to explain the

origins of tribal traditions within a preexistent landscape. It reveals how tribal traditions are about the relationships of the human and nonhuman worlds, and the interactions that result. Such kincentric interactions are, as Salmón writes, "the commerce of social and ecosystem functioning" (21). Deloria writes that the fundamental task of Indigenous origin stories and religion "is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within that tribal community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures" (87). Sin-yo-hauch's instructions to her sons in the first part of the Chaup narrative seem to offer a model for right relationship and interaction with plants and animals for the Kumeyaay people, "those people who come after" the mythological time of the tale. Indeed, this account from *The Way We Lived* reveals the true care with which young Kumeyaay boys were educated in the art of hunting:

While men and boys hunted as a matter of course, carelessness toward the animal world was severely disapproved of everywhere in California, especially among the Kumeyaay. Big game was relatively scarce in their arid environment, and a boy underwent a long and detailed training as a hunter. If he displayed proficiency and luck at hunting rodents, lizards, and other small game he would be taught to hunt rabbits. If successful at that he might eventually be trained to stalk deer and perhaps even mountain sheep. The hunting of big game animals fell under the close supervision of the clan's huntmaster and was invested with considerable ritual and honor. (Margolin 17)

The progression from rodents, lizards, and rabbits to deer and mountain sheep described here follows almost exactly the progression of the mythical brothers' hunting education, suggesting a true parallel between the narrative and the actual ecological practices of the Kumeyaay. The fact that Sin-yo-hauch demonstrates controlled burning as a proper method of influencing the movement of big game animals again puts fire at the center of right relationship between humans and the land, while the meaning of her name implies that these directives for stewardship are coming straight from the Earth.

Elements and actions present in the latter part of "The Story of the Chaup" bear similarities to certain Kumeyaay mourning rituals described by the anthropologist T.T. Waterman. In particular, the effigies the brothers fashion and leave with their grieving mother, seem remarkably close to those constructed for what Waterman describes as "the image burning ceremony," a ritual held when several members of a family have died within a short time. The images of the deceased, "together with considerable property, are burned amid elaborate rites" (312). The fire that Chaup ignites at

the end of the story, incinerating his grandmother's house and possessions, seems comparable to the burning of the ceremonial structure holding the deceased's possessions that Waterman describes in his account of the ritual (314). Notably, in pre-Mission times, the Kumeyaay cremated all of their dead and burned their possessions (305), with the idea that this would help send their loved ones' essences to the afterlife (314). It appears, in part, that the myth either reflects or instructs Kumeyaay ritual practices regarding the grieving and handling of the deceased, and both mythic and ritual practices echo the ecological function of fire as a means of clearing dead matter and generating new life.

Finally, it is significant that the tale identifies Chaup, his father, and his uncle as forms of lightning. Du Bois footnotes "Chaup" as: "the great fire-balls of electric or meteoric origin which are sometimes seen in the clear air of the Southwest, illuminating the ground with a bright light and accompanied by a sound like thunder" (217). By positing that even this dramatic phenomenon once lived on the earth in the shape of a man, the story, perhaps, helps people find relationship with this awesome supra-human power, enabling them to understand it as yet another kind of kin. Hence, the name Chaup and the tale's emphasis upon the characters as being bright and blazing strengthens their connection to the element of fire, and, in a way, turns fire itself into a protagonist of the tale.

These Kumeyaay stories reveal how, in the Indigenous kincentric imagination, resource management techniques (such as controlled burning) and cultural practices (such as ritual and storytelling) are not separate, but rather part of a larger living corpus of traditional ecological knowledge. Many of California's Indigenous peoples are trying to reinstate these traditional practices "to reclaim their cultural sovereignty, improve the health of their people, and assert an alternative approach to modern life," writes Gerald Clarke, an enrolled member of the Cahuilla Band and a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, Riverside (254). Illustrating this revival, in 2003, the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation opened the Kumeyaay Community College "to strike a healthy balance between traditional Indigenous and Western systems of knowledge" (Clarke 272).

However, recognition of the importance of TEK must extend beyond Indigenous peoples. Numerous areas of California—including San Diego County, part of the traditional ancestral lands of the Kumeyaay—are seeing a marked increase in destructive mega fires and dramatic species loss, the result of decades of fire suppression efforts and the absence of beneficial land stewardship once performed by tribal peoples (Clarke 270–71). In order for California's Indigenous populations to practice TEK, they need state and federal authorities to grant them access to their traditional homelands, which many tribes have been

denied for more than a century. Clarke writes, “It is within this reality that California Native people are trying to rehabilitate their own tribal ecosystems as well as educate federal, state, county, and city governments and agencies about the traditional management practices that were uniquely designed for California’s diverse ecology” (272).

Fortunately, some government agencies are beginning to listen. In 2004, for example, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management enacted the Tribal Forest Protection Act to prioritize tribally proposed stewardship initiatives, which led to cooperative efforts to manage pinyon pine groves in Southern California’s Riverside County. Indigenous leaders educated government officials about how their ancestors had pruned, weeded, and conducted controlled burns in the area, techniques that had prevented the dramatic mega fires that scorch the forest canopy and kill the pines. In 2006, as a result of this exchange, native and non-native volunteers began working together on the Parry Pinyon Pine Protection Project to clear brush and care for the trees (Clarke 270-71).

More of such collaboration and communication will be necessary to secure a healthy future in California. Considering this, it is interesting to contemplate the potential role of stories in the TEK education process. Perhaps Indigenous-led communication of cosmologies and mythologies to both native and (where culturally appropriate) non-native people could prove vital. Pointing toward this, Salmón, as an Indigenous ethnobotanist, explains how he views the connection between Indigenous stories and ecology:

... the stories serve as conduits through which I can express my culture’s perceptions of how the natural world developed and why it acts the way it does. The stories also provide metaphors and cultural models from which I can interpret actions and interactions between the people and the plants. The stories are essential for understanding Rarámuri models of the natural world. (13)

Salmón’s words highlight the importance of stories and storytelling to achieving real understanding, which is arguably at the heart of effective change. Clearly, engagement with Kumeyaay stories reveals the truth of his words: the stories do provide metaphors and models that help listeners understand the relationship of burning practices to creation and creativity, as well as humanity’s obligation to become tenders of generative cultural and ecological fire.

In short, mythology matters. The stories people tell and don’t tell matter. The stories that have been driving the colonization and development of California—which set people apart from or in opposition to nature—have been overwhelmingly damaging to both human and nonhuman life. As the kincentric worldview reveals, just as humans are not separate from nature, Indigenous stories are not separate

from Indigenous land management, but rather demonstrate models of relationship and reciprocity with other species, the larger environment, and even the cosmos. As long as these stories are alive, perhaps so are the chances of repairing the egregious wrongs spun from settler mythologies that have scarred the peoples, land, and soul of California. According to Miskwish, the burning of the great snake that happened at the dawn of creation is still renewing humanity: sparks of knowledge from his body continue to fall to Earth in the form of fiery meteor showers (29). The great serpent is still sharing his wisdom, and the embers of that first fruitful fire are still raining down, bringing revelation to all who are able to recognize and receive it.

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# Saluting the Center of the World:

## The Military Way of Ren

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### KEYWORDS

*Confucius*  
*Eliade, Mircea*

During my eight years of service in the United States Army, it never occurred to me to conceive of the military as a ritual society. We practiced what I then thought of as cultural traditions and understood simply as expressions of the rich heritage of the warrior profession. In retrospect, I realize that these cultural traditions are necessary and meaningful mythico-religious rites. Herein, I would like to discuss the phenomenon of flagpole rituals as a means of establishing the spiritual center of the American military world and the flagpole as the *axis mundi* around which that military cosmos takes shape. Music is integral to the effectiveness of flagpole rituals and may even be substituted for the physical flagpole as the center around which these ceremonial

gestures are performed. Such practices articulate the American civil religion<sup>1</sup> that permeates military consciousness as mythic, symbolic, and sacred while simultaneously conveying an unarticulated and intuitive realization of the Confucian way of ren.

Mircea Eliade writes at length about sacred space and the function of the *axis mundi* in his book, *The Sacred and the Profane*. “When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany,” when, in other words, the sacred reveals itself, “there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse” (Eliade 11, 21). Proximity to this absolute reality, what the *Encyclopedia of Religion* calls “the heart of reality” (“Center of the World” 1501), informs the geographical placement of the *axis mundi*. Within the

“infinite expanse” of homogeneous space, “in which no point of reference is possible and hence no *orientation* can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center” (Eliade 21; original emphasis). This fixed point becomes the spiritual center of the world. “The multiplicity, or even the infinity, of centers of the world,” writes Eliade, “raises no difficulty for religious thought. For it is not a matter of geometrical space, but of an existential and sacred space” (57). Within a framework of American civil religion, especially as it is experienced in the military, few phenomena evoke the sense of hierophany as successfully as the sight of an American flag undulating slowly on invisible currents of air. Naturally, the flagpole becomes an *axis mundi*. Nowhere is this more conspicuous than in the rigid and hierarchical structure of the military.

Every American military installation has at its spatial or operational center a flagpole upon which the national flag is flown every day from reveille in the morning until retreat in the evening. All buildings on military installations are numbered, and the base

<sup>1</sup> In his essay, “Civil religion in America,” sociologist Robert Bellah argues that American civil religion “has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding that any other religion does” (40). He goes on to define civil religion as the “public religious dimension [that] is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals” (42).

of the flagpole (according to oral tradition) is identified as building number one, indicative of its function as a cosmic center. Though I have not been able to confirm this fact in any military regulation or manual, its widespread belief among members of the military community should serve as adequate evidence of the flagpole's central position *within the military consciousness* as the fixed point around which every installation is oriented. The installation represents a military world whose spiritual heart is the conceptual home country that is symbolized by the national flag.<sup>2</sup> Hence the flagpole serves as the *axis mundi* which literally supports the spiritual heart of the military world. Just as the sacred pole of the nomadic Achilpa ensures that throughout the course of their wanderings they always remain in "their world" (Eliade 33), the installation flagpole and the flag it supports ensure that American service members stationed overseas remain in *their* own world. Thus, overseas installations—surrounded completely by foreign soil—are more distinctly felt to represent the home country, and these in particular (but to some extent all military installations) establish a clear and defensible boundary between the "inhabited and organized" military world and the "unknown space that extends beyond its frontiers" (Eliade 29). On American soil, this unknown space beyond is the civilian world. During deployment to a combat environment, the unknown space beyond is the battlefield peopled with enemy combatants. Outside the wire, or threshold, is a "chaos," and inside the wire is a "cosmos" (Eliade 29-30).

The ritual raising and lowering of the national flag,<sup>3</sup> known as "reveille" and "retreat," function on the most basic level as temporal boundaries which signify the beginning and end of the military day. They are in this sense what Catherine Bell would term "calendrical rites" which "give socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time" (102). According to *Field Manual 3-21.5: Drill and Ceremonies*, reveille was originally "a drum call to signify that soldiers should rise for day duty and sentries should leave off night challenging" (United States, FM 3-21.5 § 13-2). The English word "reveille" derives from the French *réveillé* which means "awaken." Over time, reveille came to mean the "sounding of reveille" which now occurs while the national flag is ritually raised and honored each morning (§ 13-2), and in common parlance, reveille refers to

the flag-raising ceremony itself as well as the bugle call. The significance of retreat has similarly changed over time. Originally used by the French army during the Crusades, retreat was the bugle call sounded at sunset to signify that sentries should begin night challenging and that soldiers should return to their quarters (§ 13-1). Retreat, like reveille, eventually came to mean the "sounding of retreat" that occurs just before the national flag is honored and ritually lowered each evening (§ 13-1), and in common parlance, retreat refers to the flag-lowering ceremony as well as the preliminary bugle call. The French word *retraite* translates as both "retreat" and "retirement," and the modern sounding of retreat likewise connotes several meanings, the most immediate of which is the cessation of work.

The nightly sounding of retreat is colored, however, by the rich, emotional complexities associated with retreat from the enemy and withdrawal from the unknown space beyond to the safety of the installation. Thus, while reveille feels like an enthusiastic call to action—during which the flag is raised rapidly, as if it were leading a charge—retreat is a reassuring yet solemn song, the emotional effect of which is greatly intensified by the poignant sight of the slow and dignified descent of the flag, which commences immediately after the sounding of retreat with the first note of "To the Color" (§ K-2). As musicologist James A. Davis discusses in his essay, "Music and Gallantry in Combat During the American Civil War," such historical martial melodies are beloved components of the American military heritage, and they continue to have a powerful impact on troop morale.

Peter Yih-Jiun Wong, a professorial fellow of philosophy at the University of Melbourne, discusses the philosophical importance of music and ritual in Confucian writings in his essay, "The Music of Ritual Practice—An Interpretation." Music in the Confucian philosophy performs the necessary "functions of enhancing, refining and promoting a greater degree of engagement for those participating in ritual practices" (Wong 244). Music and ritual are, in fact, inseparable in this school of thought and are known by a single term, *liyue*, which literally means "ritual and music" (Wong 245). "In Confucian literature, *liyue* is often given an inner-outer distinction according to function," writes Wong. "Music works on aspects of the person that are considered more elusive: the emotions and feelings; in turn, ritual works on those that are more apparent and concrete: gestures, postures, speech, dress and so forth. [. . .] Through being attentive about sound and comportment, the person is formed in both feelings and conduct" (248-249). The soldier is formed in remarkably similar fashion; attention to detail, developed largely through drill and ceremony, leads to precision in both physical appearance (dress, once signified by highly shined boots and flawlessly pressed uniforms) and execution of military maneuvers (gestures, postures,

2 Besides the national flag, units at every echelon down to the company level have their own central flag and flagstaff, known as a guidon. The guidon, which symbolizes the spiritual heart of the unit, is treated as a sacred object whose pennant, like the national flag, must never touch the ground. Every guidon is flown throughout the day at the operational center of the unit, and every formation is centered on the unit guidon and guidon-bearer. The guidon therefore becomes an *axis mundi* that reinforces the structure of the military cosmos at every echelon of command.

3 These ritual sequences are performed meticulously by a flag detail according to exact and fairly complex specifications; above all the national flag must never touch the ground (United States, FM 3-21.5 § 13-2).

speech, etcetera). This heightened self-discipline eventually leads to mastery of the emotions and achievement of proper military bearing. Music and ritual are essential components of drill and ceremony that convey a rich understanding of the military ethos through immediate, phenomenal, and emotional experience. As Wong notes, there is a “perennial Chinese belief” that “the songs of a region can be revealing about the character, feelings and thoughts of its people” (253). Certainly this is true of the cadences, songs, and bugle calls that melodize the military world.

While stationed in a garrison environment—any military installation situated outside a combat zone—most personnel stand in formation facing the flagpole and render the salute during reveille and retreat, as described in *Army Regulation 600-25: Salutes, Honors, and Visits of Courtesy* (United States, AR 600-25 § 20). Those not in formation stop what they are doing, stand at attention facing the flagpole, and render the salute as the flag is raised or lowered (§ 20). In the event the flagpole is not visible *and* its specific location is unknown, soldiers stand facing the source of the music. This underscores the role of music in military rituals that establish the center of the world. During the twilight tattoo known as “Taps,” all of those who

as I have found, there is no regulation that requires this behavior during the nightly sounding of Taps. However, its widespread practice indicates that Taps is *experienced* as a ritual closely related to reveille and retreat.

Taps as we know it today is a beautiful and mournful tattoo. The original call, known simply as “Tattoo” and used primarily to signify “lights out” until the American Civil War, was revised by Union General Daniel Butterfield in July of 1862, and Taps was first played at a military funeral shortly thereafter (Villanueva). This practice was quickly adopted throughout the Army of the Potomac and became official United States Army policy in 1891 (Villanueva). Thus the nightly sounding of Taps resonates deeply among the military community for it is played in honor of the fallen. Although there are no official lyrics, many different verses have been written to the music; these seem to be the most common: “Day is done / Gone the sun / From the hills, from the lake, from the sky / All is well / Safely rest / God is nigh” (Villanueva, my line breaks). Through the ritual of Taps, the flagpole and music are both explicitly associated with hierophany *and* with death and together serve as a point of communication with the heavenly world above and the un-



**Illustration:** The teaching Confucius. Portrait by Wu Daozi, 685-758 CE, Tang Dynasty. Public domain.

are awake and outside stop, face the flagpole or the source of the music, and stand at attention. Those wearing civilian attire place their right hand over their heart, and those in uniform render the salute for the length of the call. As far

derworld below (“Center of the World” 1503, Eliade 36).

Interestingly, the twilight ritual of Taps is performed after the flag has been retired for the night. Since the flag may be thought to enliven the flagpole with the presence

of the sacred (i.e. the nation, which is roughly the civil religious equivalent of god), the retirement and restoration of the flag might be interpreted as the nightly death and daily reincarnation of the nation/god. The national flag is brought to life each day by the divine breath of the wind and upon removal from the flagpole becomes still and lifeless once again. Within such an interpretation, lowering the flag is synonymous with a descent to the underworld. The requiem of Taps occurs each night while the nation/god inhabits the underworld, and each morning the nation/god ascends once more to the heavens. Because "the center of the world is associated with creation," and every "consecration of sacred space undertakes to [symbolically] create the world" ("Center of the World" 1504), the daily raising of the national flag may be understood as a form of ritual re-creation through which cosmic order is reestablished. This notion is supported by the fact that all personnel are accounted for during the first formation of the day—the formation during which the flag is raised. While the flagpole as *axis mundi* may serve to "bring multiple realms together in the same *place*," the broadcasting of reveille, retreat, and Taps as "sacred music and sound may bring together multiple realms of being in the same *time*" ("Center of the World" 1504, emphasis added). Furthermore, Eliade writes that ritual participation "in the end of the world and in its re-creation," represented here by lowering and raising the flag, allows participants to become "contemporary with the *illud tempus*" (80). Therefore, from an American civil religious perspective, every reveille ritual may be considered a reenactment of the American cosmogony, and the dynamic tension between reveille and retreat may be understood as a tension between creation and destruction that is emotionally characterized by the absence and presence of god.

Effective ritual performances, writes Wong, "[become] memorable, powerful and transformative because a genuine communication has taken place, whether it be through listening to a tune engagingly played, or witnessing a ritual action elegantly and sincerely performed" (252). As calendrical rituals, reveille and retreat communicate the national "historical narrative" as a "cyclical sacred myth" (Bell 105). Reveille and the triumphant raising of the flag always call the national anthem to my mind, and I think about how it once felt to see that star-spangled banner unfurling in the dawn and know by its presence that our country survived the night. Like Wong's description of *liyue*, here ritual music encourages an inwardness that effects the emotions directly. Similarly, Davis observes that "patriotic music in battle could reach beyond the visceral to a higher brand of courage—a conscious, nationalistic, and romantic form of bravery prized by generations of Americans" (158-159). He illustrates this beautifully with Union Colonel Frederick Hitchcock's description of the Battle of Chancellorsville:

Imagine the strains of our grand national hymn [...] suddenly bursting upon your ears out of that horrible pandemonium of panic-born yells, mingled with the roaring of musketry and the crashing of artillery. To what may it be likened? The carol of birds in the midst of the blackest thunder-storm? No simile can be adequate. Its strains were clear and thrilling for a moment, then smothered by that fearful din, an instant later sounding bold and clear again, as if it would fearlessly emphasize the refrain, "Our flag is still there." (Hitchcock, qtd. in Davis 159)

Whereas the United States is a country born from war, both reveille and the national anthem are renditions of our creation myth. Retreat and the reluctant lowering of the flag serve as another kind of retelling. They are the daily remembrance of sacrifice, the reminder that all gave some and some gave all *in illo tempore* for our cosmos to come into existence and to go on existing. Although this is an American myth that is shared on some level by all citizens, it is understood uniquely by members of the armed forces who have sworn to give their lives for this sacred narrative. "With every note of Reveille or Retreat," states *The Soldier's Guide*, "we call to mind our common bond with soldiers of the Continental Army and the sacrifices soldiers have made ever since" (United States, *FM 7-21.13* § 4-9).

Service members may be understood in this context as the initiated for whom the myth reveals a deeper meaning. As noted in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "the journey to the center may be arduous and dangerous. No one may have access to the center, to different states of being, without careful preparation and spiritual strength. The journey to the center may require a complete transformation of one's spiritual being" ("Center of the World" 1504). Any true approach to the spiritual center of the military world requires many levels of initiation, beginning with basic and advanced individual training. New recruits do not become soldiers until they have proven themselves through "physical removal from the rest of the world, physical changes of appearance (through shaved heads and identical, utilitarian clothing), and basic conceptual changes in [their] sense of self (through physical challenges, lessons in submission, and new achievements)" (Bell 95). Even when the initiate has joined the ranks as a full-fledged service member, he or she has only taken the first step toward a full understanding and appreciation of the spiritual center. Every promotion, every special assignment, every deployment is a new initiation that demands greater responsibility.

At my first duty station, the true significance of the flagpole was suggested through another important oral tradition. The finial, known as the "truck," of every installation flagpole is said to contain a razor blade, a book of matches, and a single round of ammunition, and the base

is said to contain a disassembled handgun of the same caliber. According to this oral tradition, in the event that the installation is ever overrun by enemy forces, the installation commander must lower the flagpole, use the razor to cut the union of stars from the field of stripes, and use the book of matches to burn the flag—the preferred and proper method of retiring the national flag—in order to prevent this sacred symbol of the home country from falling into enemy hands. Finally, the commander must assemble the firearm and use the one bullet to take his or her own life. Although such an act is incomprehensible within civilian reality, belonging solidly to the unknown chaos beyond the civilian world, it represents the ultimate reality of the military world.

While a civilian might regard the flagpole as mere metal and the flag as mere cloth, hardly worth giving one's life to defend, a soldier understands them as physical embodiments of the home country.<sup>4</sup> Not every soldier will sacrifice him or herself in their defense, but throughout history many have. Here again, the ways of the Achilpa may shed light on the military consciousness that makes such sacrifice possible, for they believe that destruction of their sacred pole “denotes catastrophe; it is like ‘the end of the world,’ reversion to chaos,” and it was once observed that “when the pole was broken, the entire clan were in consternation; they wandered about aimlessly for a time, and finally lay down on the ground together and waited for death to overtake them” (Eliade 33). Similarly, soldiers who lived to witness the fall of an installation and the desecration of the national flag by an enemy would likely feel an almost unbearable guilt simply for having survived rather than joining their comrades in death.

The fully realized soldier, as characterized above, embodies what Wong describes as “the most profound music that is central to the Confucian tradition: the music” known as *ren* (254–255). Scholars have not come to an agreement on the precise meaning of *ren*, although its conceptual importance is undisputed (Wong 255). The “common understanding of *ren*” may be found, writes Wong, in the work of literary critic I. A. Richards (255). In his book, *Mencius on the Mind: Experiments in Multiple Definition*, Richards writes that *ren*, which is “a character made up of a man and the number two, can be rendered as *love* if we are careful to exclude romantic, passionate, and sexual associations. Humaneness, reciprocity in desirable acts, fellow-feeling, all come near it. But it is more a form of activity or a general tendency to act in certain ways than an emotion” (Rich-

ards 69, qtd. in Wong 255). This idea would be expressed in military terms as unit cohesion, camaraderie, and esprit de corps, all of which are aspects of a greater whole known as the conduct becoming of a soldier.

To be *ren* is to realise a sustained performance in which one's life is completely ritualised: there is no moment in which one does not effect the ritualised self. *Ren* is not another musical quality among other qualities. But it is all the qualities working together in concert such that the ritual self can appear. In other words, just as music is the counterpart of ritual, *ren* would be the counterpart of the ritual self. (Wong 255)

Perhaps *ren* is best understood in musical terms because sound, according to musicologist Bruce Cook, is “a carrier wave of consciousness” and “a unifying force, the vibrations of which may serve to engender the experience of oneness with the cosmos” (49, 51). Following this line of reasoning, perhaps *ren* is best taught through sound and music. Confucius himself said that the “way of *ren*” is learned through ritual (qtd. in Wong 255). If the soldier, who has been formed with music and ritual, is understood as an individual's ritual self, then the conduct becoming of a soldier—an individual's soldierness—may be considered as *ren*.

*Ren* suggests an existential harmony, and individual soldiers are the most basic components, the notes in the harmonious composition of a cosmos whose structural pattern is concentric and hierarchical. Within this cosmos, military service is considered a sacred responsibility—living up to this responsibility is the way of *ren* that is learned through the crucible of initiation and the liue of drill and ceremony. Through official and unofficial ritual gestures and oral traditions, the flagpole is continually reestablished as the *axis mundi* which supports the spiritual heart of the military world. Through remembrance of the fallen, reenactment of the cosmogony, and phenomenal embodiment of the military heritage, flagpole rituals foster an experience of oneness with the military cosmos that becomes the essence of the military way of *ren*. As a result, when we soldiers leave the military, we leave behind an entire cosmos and enter the unknown space beyond: we experience the chaos of knowing no cosmos and the catastrophe of having no center.

<sup>4</sup> “The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are *hierophanies*, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the *sacred*,” Eliade explains. “A *sacred* stone remains a *stone*,” and from the profane perspective, “nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality” (Eliade 12; original emphasis).

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# Order and Disorder in the Cosmos:

## Slaying the Dragon or Engaging with the Goddess

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### KEYWORDS

*Dragons*  
*St. George*  
*Shiva*  
*Kali*

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*Interactions are inconceivable without disorder, that is to say without inequalities, turbulences, agitations, etc., which provoke encounters.*  
—Edgar Morin, *The Nature of Nature*

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From ancient myths and heroic legends to comics, science fiction, or the latest hospital and crime dramas on prime-time television, the struggle between the forces of Order and Disorder has always been a profoundly compelling theme for the human psyche. A central concern in religion, science, and medicine, as well as in humbler domains such as gardening or housecleaning, it is an infinitely variable motif that engages not only gods and priests, warriors and superheroes, detectives and doctors, but each and every one of us in our everyday lives. We humans toil incessantly at establishing and re-establishing order in our corner of the cosmos. One way of wrestling with the recurrent messiness of the world is to approach it symbolically and vicariously through narrative. To the eternal question of how to deal with disorder when

it erupts, stories provide us with culturally coded solutions that will differ according to the worldview they undergird. These differing solutions can be immensely instructive in two ways: first, they present us with new strategies that enrich and diversify our own possibilities; secondly, they can be instruments of defamiliarization, prodding us to (re)consider our home-grown strategies from an unfamiliar and indeed “foreign” perspective, and thus to step out of the bubble of our own worldview and see ourselves through different eyes. In other words, they offer us both new knowledge and self-knowledge.

Let us take two concrete examples: the Christian legend of St. George and the dragon and the Hindu myth of Shiva intercepting Kali on the battlefield. In their respective corners of the world, these two widely celebrated stories of the struggle between Order and Disorder continue to be told and retold in religious as well as popular contexts today. They are both about an uncontrollable agent of dis-

order whose insatiable appetite wreaks havoc and terror in the world until a divine agent of order finally comes to the rescue and puts an end to the destruction. Order is re-established in each case, but the strategies employed are quite literally antipodal. More than just a variation on a theme, the manner in which each situation is resolved reveals, in fact, two radically different visions of what we might call the cosmic relationship between Order and Disorder. The legend of George and the dragon illustrates an “either/or” relationship of deadly opposition and mutual exclusion, while the myth of Kali and Shiva portrays a “both/and” relationship of mutual benefit and intimate interaction. How can Shiva’s strategy, representative of an Eastern/Hindu solution, shed light on George’s strategy, which is rooted in the Western/Christian vision of the problem of evil? What do each of these strategies reveal about the worldview they undergird? How does their comparison defamiliarize our own (historically Western and Christian) perception of

the place of chaos in the cosmos and, by analogy, in the microcosmos of our individual lives? Over the centuries, the popularity of these two stories has given rise to an abundant iconography. In order to explore these questions, I have chosen two emblematic images to serve as portals into the narratives.

Before we enter through these portals into our explo-

Shiva). The upright figures are both divine warriors. They are attired in the symbols of their physical and spiritual power. George, the Christian warrior-saint, is armed with a sword, a lance, and a shield; his armor is emblazoned with a cross and his head illuminated by a halo. Kali, the Hindu warrior-goddess, brandishes a sword and a bloody head. Decked out in her customary accouterments, including a girdle of severed arms and a garland of decapitated heads, she is illuminated by a halo of flames. The two vertical figures are standing with at least one foot planted on top of the horizontal figure on the ground; this foot will turn out to be a significant detail in both pictures. The body on the ground is lying on its back in a vulnerable position with its belly exposed. Both of the horizontal figures represent corpses and this too is a significant factor.

Of course, it is the differences *within* these similarities that will be revealing. For our investigation into the relationship between Order and Disorder, there are two key differences that will be of particular interest. The first concerns the vertical/horizontal positioning of the pairs, which is inversed: the European image has the agent of order in the upright position and the agent of disorder on the ground; the Bengali image, on the contrary, depicts the agent of disorder in the upright position and the agent of order on the ground. The second difference concerns, as we shall see, the figure of the corpse and the significance of its supine presence in the image. In both stories, the key to the solution lies in the corpse.

The legend of St. George and the dragon was popularized during the Middle Ages through the manuscripts and translations of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (*Golden Legend*). This compilation of hagiographies has been called a medieval "bestseller," and George, the warrior-saint who would become the patron saint of England, was one of the most celebrated superheroes of the day. The story may be summarized as follows:

*St. George is passing through a town in Libya that is being terrorized by a dragon. The voracious beast lives in a nearby pond, and the people are forced to provide it with animals and then with humans in order to satisfy its appetite. The victims are drawn by lot, and one unlucky day it falls on the king's daughter. The king begs the people to spare her, offering to give them all of his gold and silver, but they refuse to make an exception for the princess. George rescues her and slays the monster, whose body is cut up and carted away. The grateful king and his people agree to convert to Christianity and a church is built to commemorate the event (de Voragine).*

In terms of the struggle between Order and Disorder, the plotline is straightforward. A dragon (agent of disorder) literally overturns the order of the land. The monarch (supreme representative of order and authority) is reduced



Fig. 1. Petrak, Alois. "Saint George with his foot on the neck of the dragon he has just slain." *Fineartamerica*. [fineartamerica.com/featured/saint-george-with-his-foot-on-the-neck-mary-evans-picture-library](http://fineartamerica.com/featured/saint-george-with-his-foot-on-the-neck-mary-evans-picture-library). Accessed 18 May 2019.

ration of the struggle between Order and Disorder, let us first stand back and examine them side by side. Both of the images depict the dénouement of the narrative, the moment in which order is restored. One is a European engraving (fig. 1) and the other a Bengali painting (fig. 2). We might begin by observing their astonishing similarities. In terms of formal composition, they each contain two protagonists, one in a dominant vertical position (St. George, Kali), the other in an inert horizontal position (the dragon,

to impotence and unable to control his own subjects. The warrior-saint (agent of order) takes control, exterminates the dragon, and re-establishes order under the sign of a powerful new order.

In the classical iconography, St. George is often shown fighting the dragon on horseback, but there is also a tradition of portraying him standing over the defeated beast. In the engraving in fig. 1, he is depicted in the posture of the conqueror, vertical and victorious, with his foot planted on the enemy's throat. The slain reptile, on the other hand, is lying ignominiously on its back in a most humiliating position. The archetypal figure of the dragon embodies, in Western and Near Eastern narratives, the dark, turbulent powers of chaos.<sup>1</sup> The legend of St. George can be linked to a long line of *chaoskampf* ("struggle against chaos") stories, in which a divine hero, after battling a dragon or a sea serpent, imposes a new reign of order. Here the heroic knight has defeated the diabolical monster, whose corpse illustrates the unequivocal demise of the forces of darkness and disorder under the new order of Christianity.

This picture perfectly illustrates the mutually exclusive relationship between Order and Disorder that forms what French philosopher Edgar Morin calls in *The Nature of Nature* "the impossible couple." He writes: "The relation order/disorder has been repulsive, not only in classical physics, but in Western thought. The ideas of order and disorder oppose each other, deny each other, flee each other, and all collision entails the disintegration of one by the other" (70). Their interaction is perceived as a binary opposition between two antagonistic forces in which the outcome can only be the annihilation of one side or the other. The world interpreted through the lenses of Christianity and Western science—of our mythologies—is a world divided into antithetical pairs: good/evil, God/Satan, mind/body, rational/irrational, light/dark, civilization/nature; and so forth. Since the first element in each pair is equated with Order and the second with Disorder, according to the *either/or* logic that structures our way of thinking, the former must necessarily conquer, repress, exorcize, or otherwise eliminate the latter. This hermeneutical opposition between Order and Disorder is the master paradigm that has shaped the Western worldview and its dominant religious and scientific narratives since Antiquity (Morin 29–85).

The message conveyed by George's heroic stance on top of the dragon is thus clear and simple: there can be nothing but deadly opposition between the forces of Order and Disorder, and if the outcome of the battle is to be (as it is here) a happy ending, the former must vanquish the latter to reign triumphantly ever after. There is no possible am-

biguity: the chaos monster may be mighty, but the Hero is mightier still. In contrast, the image of Kali dancing on top of Shiva is highly ambiguous, and the message it expresses is, at least from a Western perspective, far from clear and simple. The couple's relationship is defined not by a Manichean logic of binary oppositions, but instead by a complex fabric of interactions that weave an entirely different picture of the struggle between Order and Disorder.

Known as the black goddess, Kali revels in death, destruction, terror, and chaos—the dark aspects of life embodied by the dragon in the Western imagination. She is, as David Kinsley points out in *Hindu Goddesses*, "a goddess who threatens stability and order" (117). Revered by many and rejected by some for her sensationally unorthodox behavior, she is often shown, for example, standing on the inert body of her divine consort, Shiva. Various interpretations have been offered for this intriguing arrangement. One is that she is dancing on the corpse of the world, represented by Shiva, whose cosmic function in the Hindu *Trimūrti* is the destruction of the universe. Another is that Shiva is so overawed by Kali's powers that he has cast himself at her feet in a gesture of devotion. Perhaps the most prevalent view is that it depicts the final scene of a popular myth in which Kali is called upon to fight a host of demons. After a ferocious battle in which the raging goddess tears her adversaries apart, crushes them between her teeth and drinks their blood, this is how the story ends: *Having whipped herself up into a frenzy, Kali becomes so intoxicated by the blood of the demons she has slaughtered that her rampage continues unabated even after she has massacred all of her foes. The gods begin to worry and, knowing they can do nothing to stop her, plead with Shiva to find a solution. Covering himself in ashes, Shiva lies down like a corpse amongst the corpses on the battlefield. As Kali dances over his body, she looks down and recognizes her husband. This brings her to her senses and her frenzy comes to a halt.*<sup>2</sup>

Here we have a situation in which the divine agent called upon to restore order turns into an agent of disorder, who must in turn be neutralized before order can finally be restored. Kali goes from being a demon-slayer to a voracious "dragon" herself. Her insatiable thirst for blood upsets the order of the Universe to the point that, as in the Christian legend, even the highest powers, in this case, the gods themselves, are reduced to impotence. Shiva, as the agent of order in this myth, comes to the rescue and saves the world from being destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

2 According to Kinsley, the myth is found in the *Adbhutamayana*, the *Oriyan Ramayana* of Saraladasa, and the Bengali *Jaiminibharata Ramayana* and is mentioned in Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya's *History of the Sakta Religion* (Hindu 236n39). Patricia Dold also attributes it to the *Adbhuta Ramayana* (54). Elizabeth U. Harding recounts the story in length, but provides no source (Introduction).

3 Interestingly, it is Shiva, the designated "destroyer of the cosmos" in the Hindu triumvirate, who saves the world from being destroyed.

1 On Western and Near Eastern narratives, see George. It is significant that in the most ancient myths featuring the duo dragon of chaos vs. warrior-hero, the dragon was often a female power or divinity (Dexter; George; Zeitlin), thus echoing the pairing of Kali and Shiva.

The Bengali painting of Kali and Shiva shows the goddess in one of her most iconic poses, standing on the corpse-like body of her consort with her right foot on his chest. The configuration of the two protagonists is thus inversed with regard to the protagonists in the European image. Here we have the agent of disorder on top, in the dominant position, and the agent of order on the ground, in what would appear to be the subordinate position. What is the significance of this inversion? In other words, why do we have the figure of the savior in the inferior position and the purveyor of devastation and chaos in the superior position?



Fig. 2. "Kali and Shiva." *The Feet of Kali*. [theftotkali.tumblr.com/post/34841999391/bengali-oil-painting-of-kali-standing-on-an](https://theftotkali.tumblr.com/post/34841999391/bengali-oil-painting-of-kali-standing-on-an). Accessed 19 March 2019.

According to the myth, Shiva has voluntarily put himself in this position. It is part of his scheme to stop Kali's destructive behavior by trying to reconnect with her. If the principle of order is associated in both narratives with the male protagonists, the methods they employ are completely different. Shiva and St. George are both exemplars of

This may be because destruction by Shiva is in the "order of things," while destruction by Kali at that moment would be "out of order" and untimely.

certain qualities designated as "masculine" by their respective cultures. The Medieval saint fights and overcomes the dragon mainly due to his knightly skills, his brawn and his weapons, which feature prominently in the picture. From the Hindu perspective, however, the masculine quality embodied by Shiva is pure awareness or consciousness. Shiva is aware that he, like the other gods, cannot overpower Kali. Therefore, his strategy (which would probably appall any self-respecting knight) is essentially to lie down and submit to her. He does not seek to fight and defeat Kali, but rather to reach out to her. . . as a corpse. And his ploy works, for when she steps on him—when she reconnects with him—she reacts by stopping her destructive frenzy. Shiva's strategy, in other words, is to provoke interaction.

In both of these pictures, it is the presence of a corpse (or pseudo-corpse) that represents the solution to the problem of disorder. In each case, the solution is based on the relationship between the standing figure and the dead body. Although George may be looking down at the dragon, his adversary can no longer return his gaze, can no longer react. The immobilized beast, nailed to the ground by George's lance, reflects the static, fixed-for-all-time nature of their relationship, which is in fact the negation of a relationship. The dragon's carcass simply represents death: the forceful elimination of the agent of disorder and, as a consequence, the termination of any further interaction between the two protagonists. Shiva's corpse-like body represents, on the contrary, the potential for renewed life, for re-establishing a dynamic, interactive relationship with the agent of disorder. The two corpses thus signify two radically different if not opposing methodologies for dealing with disorder. In a nutshell, they might be described as: kill it (George vs the dragon) or interact with it (Shiva and Kali).

This notion of interaction, which is fundamental to the Tantra tradition of Hinduism, contrasts with the Western logic of mutual exclusion. It is also related to another layer of meaning that is embedded in our image. When Kali is paired with a male god—usually with Shiva—she embodies both the destructive as well as the creative forces at work in

the cosmos. Dancing on Shiva's body, she is Shakti, the primordial creative energy associated with the feminine, while he represents the stillness of pure consciousness that passively observes her. This is another reason why Shiva is portrayed as a corpse. As David Kinsley explains it in *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*: "A common theme in *s'akta* theology, and in many tantric texts as well, is that Siva is ultimately dependent upon *s'akti*. This theme is succinctly and vividly expressed in the well-known saying, 'Siva is a

mere *s'ava* (corpse) without *s'akti*" (36). In other words, without the energizing power of Shakti, Shiva is nothing more than a *shava*, a lifeless body.

This also explains why the goddess remains in the dominant position. It is not because she has defeated or destroyed Shiva, but because she alone has the power to act and, above all, to activate him; she is the creative stimulus that can bring him to life. According to Kinsley, "Kali's standing on Siva, for example, is often interpreted as symbolizing the interaction of Siva and Sakti and the ultimate superiority of the latter. The image, that is, is taken as an icon suggesting the essential nature of reality as Siva and Sakti and the priority of Sakti" (*Tantric* 86). Ultimately, she is superior because "Kali is that reality without which nothing would be effective" (*Tantric* 86).

At the same time, Kali's furious dance constantly threatens to whirl out of control. One of Shiva's roles, when they are paired, is thus, as in the myth, to counteract and contain her. In this relationship, Shiva and Kali, Order and Disorder, are understood as interdependent and complementary. In *Awakening Shakti*, Sally Kempton refers to the couple's iconic pose as an expression of this Tantric concept of the interdependence of opposing forces:

Cosmically speaking, the Tantras say that without the dynamism of Shakti—the feminine—the masculine, Shiva, is inert. Yet, without the awareness and stability of Shiva, Shakti is uncontrollably wild. A dramatic image from Tantric iconography conveys this essential Tantric viewpoint about reality. The image shows the goddess Kali—naked but for an apron of hands and a necklace of skulls—dancing on the prone body of Shiva, her eternal consort. (31)

Rather than a relationship of mutual exclusion, the relationship between Shiva and Kali is instead one of mutual benefit in which each side complements and counterbalances the other.

Let us take a closer look at a small but eloquent detail that connects the two vertical figures in the pictures: the foot. George's foot, placed on the dragon's neck, is easy to decipher. This is a gesture of conquest and subjugation, a sign that the hero has throttled the adversary. Kali's right foot<sup>4</sup> placed on Shiva's chest has a very different meaning. First of all, as we have seen, according to the Tantric interpretation, her touch awakens the god from his inertia. At the same time, in this particular narrative, when she steps

on Shiva's body, she herself is awakened—in this case, from her delirium. Recognition leads to self-awareness and then to self-control. Kali's foot thus represents quite the opposite of conquest and subjugation. For her consort as well as for herself, its touch creates awareness and stimulates consciousness. This simple anatomical detail thus underscores the same fundamental difference between the Western "kill it" approach and the Eastern "interact with it" strategy: the foot of the Christian knight signifies death, domination, and the suppression of any possible relationship; the foot of the Hindu goddess symbolizes awakening, interconnection, and the rekindling of a relationship.

Finally, all of these characteristics combined—interaction, interdependence, complementarity—express a fundamental principle of Tantra praxis and philosophy: the union of opposites. Whereas in the antithetical pairs that structure Western thought and experience, the second element, associated with the dragon of disorder, must be banished or eliminated, in Tantric Hinduism everything and its opposite, no matter how dark or dreadful, is to be wholly embraced as an essential part of reality. This ability to hold a "tension of opposites" is what the goddess Kali teaches to those who, like Shiva, do not fight but embrace her. In *Awaken The Slumbering Goddess*, Ashok Bedi writes:

She gives context to why we have disease, disorder and anarchy, why the dark side prevails over the light forces of the numinous. She imparts a view that existence is not only about life but also about death, not only about order but also about chaos, not only about health but also about illness, not only about virtue but also about vice. These polar opposites create tension that we call life. (Ch. 7)

Similarly, Kinsley argues that Kali enables her devotees to apprehend the whole of reality with greater clarity by allowing them to see beyond the "neat vision of the order of dharma." He writes: "Kali puts the order of dharma in perspective, perhaps puts it in its place, by reminding Hindus that certain aspects of reality are untamable, unpurifiable, unpredictable, and always a threat to society's feeble attempts to order what is essentially disorderly: life itself" (*Hindu* 129).

This approach to reality—embracing the dark with the light, the negative with the positive—is what Kempton calls the Tantric "principle of nonrejection" (29). It is this principle that the image of Kali dancing on the body of Shiva seems to communicate in visual form. Conversely, the image of St. George and the dragon illustrates the principle of rejection inherent in the logic of binary oppositions that undergirds it. Unlike the reviled figure of the dragon, Kali the fearsome goddess, the ever-present threat of disorder in its myriad manifestations, is not rejected, but instead reintegrated into the ordinary rhythms of the

4 The right foot signals her benign form as Dakshina Kali. According to Harding, "[T]he Hindu distinguishes a benign (dakshina) from a fearful (smashan) Kali by the position of her feet. If Kali steps out with her right foot and holds the sword in her left hand, she is a Dakshina Kali. And if she steps out with her left foot and holds the sword in her right hand, she is the terrible form of the Mother, the Smashan Kali of the cremation ground" (Ch. 2).

world by Shiva's strategy of reconnection.

The image of Kali dancing on Shiva's body tells us that order and disorder, creation and destruction, life and death are interdependent, are equally present and equally necessary in the dynamics of the cosmos. Rather than using brute force to slay the agent of disorder, along with the dark powers it represents, we can, like Kali's devotees and Shiva, adopt another more creative strategy by engaging with it. It offers a more integrative and indeed a more liberating approach to life, which can lead to new insights or to transformation. As Kinsley remarks, "To meditate on the dark goddess, or to devote oneself to her, is to step out of the everyday world of predictable dharmic order and enter a world of reversals, opposites, and contrasts and in doing so to wake up to new possibilities and new frames of reference. . ." (*Hindu* 130). Order—stasis, the status quo—needs to be shaken from its slumber, stirred from its lethargy by the dynamic, provocative, potentially revolutionary action of disorder. In the cosmos as well as in the microcosmos of our individual lives, we need both quiescent awareness and explosive energy, both a grounding Shiva and a dancing Kali.

As an interesting note, the above description of the Eastern "interact with it" strategy embodied by Kali and Shiva corresponds in striking ways to the behavior of what modern science calls complex adaptive systems.\* All systems (natural, social, economic, psychological, technological, etc.) need to change and adapt in order to thrive. Contemporary studies show that creative change or adaptation emerges through co-constructed, self-organizing processes that are characterized by bidirectionality, interconnectivity, and interdependence. These complex processes operate at what has come to be known as "the edge of chaos" or zones of dynamic interaction between order and disorder, stability and instability (Chan 6; Stirling 3). This new vision of the role of chaos in the cosmos is now endorsed not only by the sciences but also by a growing number of revolutionary Christian theologians. Among them is Ilia Delio, who writes, in *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey*: "We constantly pray to God to make order of our chaotic lives, but what if God is the very source of our chaos? What if chaos and disorder are not to be shunned and avoided but attended to and embraced? Nature shows us that life is not meant to be nice, neat, and controlled but lived on the edge between order and disorder" (9). These discoveries are leading to a paradigm shift. The new narratives are refashioning the universe into a place of radical interconnectivity and co-emergent creativity in which chaos and instability play a vital role. We might say, in other words, that Western science is finally catching up to the traditional wisdom embedded in the mythologies of the East.

The engraving of St. George and the dragon and the

painting of Kali and Shiva reveal two fundamentally different pictures of the universe. In the first, Order reigns supreme after vanquishing Disorder and extinguishing any potential relationship between the two adversaries. In the second, Order and Disorder co-exist and interact in a potentially fruitful and mutually beneficial relationship. In the first, Order and Disorder are, to use Edgar Morin's expression, the "impossible couple," combatting each other in absolute enmity until the bitter end. In the second, they form a healthy, self-organizing couple in which both sides confront, counteract, and complement each other.\*In the end, however, we do not need to choose one couple over the other, to favor one vision over the other. We might be wiser to take a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" perspective. Sometimes we genuinely need to eliminate an element of disorder from our lives. At other times, it may be better to reach out and engage with that element. From a Western point of view, the myth of Shiva playing the corpse to intercept Kali offers us an alternative approach to dealing with the dragon of disorder. In an essay on the devastation caused by the disasters of 9/11 and the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, the mythologist Wendy Doniger writes: "Myths from other peoples' cultures often provide us with useful metaphors that are more refreshing than our own" (17). In the increasing complexity of the world today, mythology is still relevant. Comparing the myths of other cultures with those that dominate our own encourages and enables us to zoom out of our own restrictive worldview. In pluralizing our horizons, we may encounter fresh perspectives and strategies for interacting with the vicissitudes of an unpredictable world.

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# Euripides' *Medea*

## and the Psychological Roots of Misogyny

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### KEYWORDS

*Medea*  
*Misogyny*  
*Euripides*

In Euripides' play *Medea*, the title character may be the ultimate depiction of a woman scorned. Her husband, Jason, wishes to replace her with a new, politically advantageous wife, so he plots to send Medea and their two young sons into exile. Unwilling to accept this injustice passively, Medea concocts a surprising plan for revenge against Jason: she decides to kill their two little boys. The chorus predicts that Medea will be unable to go against her motherly instincts, telling her: "[The children] will huddle at your knees, / and you will not be able / to spill their blood / with steady heart" (lines 262-65). Yet, she goes through with her filicidal revenge plan, cruelly killing her two boys with a sword.

The drama, along with its two companion plays, placed last in the Festival of Dionysus playwriting competition where it was first performed (Murnaghan xii). Yet, today, Euripides' *Medea* survives as one of the most embraced and oft-performed dramas from classical Greece. Why would a play that failed on its first performance and that features a bloody scene of child murder become such a classic piece of drama? Perhaps, like so many other works of great literature that transcend time, *Medea* touches on something primal in the human psyche. The play offers a critique of sexist attitudes in society that, quite likely, appalled early Greek audiences, but resonates with modern ones. However, Euripides' choice to portray Medea as killing her own offspring goes beyond this commentary; the murders present a subversive act that directly confronts the deepest, darkest fears that have given rise to misogyny in patriarchal cultures.

While scholars can only speculate about the emotional reaction of the original audience in response to the child killings in *Medea*, they do know

that this version of *Medea* was not embraced in its first iteration since, along with its two companion plays, it earned Euripides a last-place finish in the festival's playwriting competition (Murnaghan xii). Although this play presents the version of the Medea story most familiar to modern audiences, other versions of the story from classical Greece did not depict Medea killing the boys. Classicist Michael Evans argues that this gruesome plot change is the reason that Euripides lost the competition: the audience would have expected the Corinthians, not Medea, to murder the boys. This reversal of gender expectations would likely not have been welcomed (55). The sight of Medea killing her sons may have also been particularly disturbing to the men in the audience because, as Nancy Demand asserts, "women's central role was as child bearers," especially of male offspring (1-3), so the act is in direct opposition to her proper role. Upon a child's birth, fathers had the right to decide whether an infant lived or died, and offspring found to be unacceptable due to physical condition or gender were left to die outdoors of

exposure (Demand 6). To see a woman, in this case Medea, determining the fate of her small sons in this way, rather than Jason or the Corinthians, may have been seen as a true insult to masculine power and control in the Athenian society of 431 BCE. Euripides, however, was influenced by the Sophists, a group that encouraged its adherents to question Greek beliefs (Allan 145-46), and, through *Medea*, Euripides questioned Greek gender norms so directly that the play may have been uncomfortable for the original audience, which would have been mostly, if not entirely, men (Evans 55).

The play both exposes misogynistic stereotypes and questions them in the scene in which Medea divulges how she will conspire against her husband and his new bride. Medea concludes her speech with derogatory remarks about women, saying of herself, “You have skill, and along with that / a women’s nature—useless for doing good / but just right for contriving evil” (lines 407-9). While these lines could be considered a perpetuation of misogynistic notions, their proximity to Medea’s long monologue about the mistreatment of women (lines 230-51) renders her statement ironic, since she has already laid bare women’s powerlessness in society. Someday, according to the chorus, women will receive their “rightful honor,” if only these “ugly rumors” about their character are one day put to rest (lines 417-20).

Immediately after Medea makes her statement, which suggests her internalized misogyny, the chorus contradicts the notion, saying: “Sacred streams are flowing backwards; right and wrong are turned around. / It’s men who do the shady scheming, / swear by the gods, / then break their oaths” (lines 410-14). Medea’s plan to do harm is, according to them, unnatural, causing “sacred streams” to flow back-

ward. The strophe radically highlights how men are the ones who usually participate in this kind of “shady scheming,” but, in this case, a woman, *Medea*, takes on such traditionally masculine characteristics.

For modern audiences, Euripides’ *Medea* is the most well-known version of the Medea myth, and its protagonist is embraced by many as a feminist heroine, even with her horrific act of vengeance. To many contemporary audiences, *Medea* is more than just a woman jealous of her husband’s sexual infidelity, as Jason tries to claim: rather, she is perceived as a woman who built a powerful empire in tandem with Jason, as his equal (if not as his superior) in their quest to seize the Gold-



**Illustration 1:** Medea killing one of her sons. Side A from a Campanian (Capouan) red-figure neck-amphora, ca. 330 BCE. From Cumae. [Louvre]

en Fleece. Much of the feminist scholarship devoted to *Medea* focuses on Euripides’ proto-feminist questioning of gender roles and societal norms within the play (e.g., Bettine Van Zyl Smit’s “Medea the Feminist” and Nancy Rabinowitz’s *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*). Van Zyl Smit writes, “. . . for the modern world, *Medea*

can be made to represent not only betrayed women, but also oppressed racial groups, exploited colonials and women" (102). Likewise, many retellings of the myth champion Medea as a feminist heroine who takes a stand against the patriarchy, such as in Cherríe L. Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. Similarly, in playwright Suzie Miller's 2015 adaptation of *Medea*, Medea is portrayed as a woman standing up in defense of her own power, which has been usurped by a man: "If it is only the dominant culture that writes history, then I craved an opportunity for Medea, the woman, the foreigner, the dark-eyed, passionate and brilliant soul struggling against her fall from power, to tell her own story—to be fully rounded and hot blooded but not mad—and more importantly for Medea to own this narrative."

Although Euripides lived many centuries before the advent of modern feminism, several details in *Medea* can be read constructively through modern feminist frameworks and other psychological theories. Before examining *Medea* through these lenses, it is important to state how some psychoanalysts theorize that misogyny is rooted in Freud's Oedipus complex, a male child's unconscious sexual desire for his mother and competitive hatred of his father. According to this theory, the young boy both desires his mother, his first love object, but also fears his mother because his survival depends on her and because she wields the capacity to castrate him. The boy at first wants to kill the father, to get rid of his competition for the mother, but then later, when he becomes a man and consequently identifies with the father, he projects that hatred back to the mother (Auchincloss 110). This castration anxiety leads to denigration of the female body and hatred of women in general, which is "reflected in the myths and legends of horrible female castrators and Medusa-like mutilators of manhood" (Gilmore 153). With this said, Medea and Jason's sons are at the age when the initial Oedipal ambivalence occurs, between about three to five years old, and so their presence in the play and victimization at the hand of their mother may have stirred up unconscious Oedipal fears in the Greek male audience. In this, it is significant that the boys appear to have taken sides with the mother against their father, since Medea must instruct them to behave lovingly toward their father (Euripides lines 896-97). Because Medea ultimately does kill the boys, the worst Oedipal fears are realized before the boys are old enough to transfer their identification to Jason. Medea proclaims, "... so it is right / that I who gave them life should kill them" (lines 1240-41). The giver of life becomes the taker of life, a fulfillment of the Oedipal nightmare.

Another theory explaining the psychology of misogyny which can be applied to *Medea* is womb envy, a concept introduced by Karen Horney in her book *Feminine Psychology*. A response to Freud's notion of penis envy, the

theory suggests that men's creative prowess and their need to control women's bodies is rooted in envy of women's ability to give birth (46-47). Unable to resolve their sense of lack, men feel compelled to both denigrate and idolize that which they envy, a well-documented response to jealousy and the root cause of the "Madonna/whore" view of women (Gilmore 27). Erik Fromm explains that the male need to dominate women, along with men's desire to gain preeminence in all areas of human endeavor, is rooted in this fundamental reproductive difference: "But how can they win when they are inferior to women in one essential aspect? Women have the gift of natural creation, they can bear children ... the male must prove that he is not inferior, that he has the gift to produce. Since he cannot produce with a womb, he must produce in another fashion; he produces with his mouth, his word, his thought" (qtd. in Bayne 150). Indeed, Jason overtly expresses this neurosis when he remarks: "We should have some other way of getting children. / Then there would be no female race, / and mankind would be free from trouble" (Euripides lines 573-75). In addition to expressing his resentment about women's reproductive role, Jason states that he plans to make his sons into leaders after their period of exile with their mother, and after they have become men free of motherly influence. Although he does not have the power to give birth to sons himself, he emphasizes that he has the power to rebirth his sons into society in his own image within the patriarchal hierarchy.

This notion of womb envy may also explain Jason's brazen unwillingness to keep his oath to Medea: he cannot share power with her because she already possesses a power that he cannot possess. Instead, he seeks to subdue and exploit this feminine power as he pits Creon's daughter and Medea against each other. Medea, recognizing this, declares the logic of her revenge tactic: "He won't see the children we had grow up / and he won't be able to have any more / with his brand-new bride" (Euripides lines 803-5). Through her murderous act, Medea deprives Jason of the one thing he must rely on women to provide for him: sons to carry on his lineage of patriarchal power.

In fact, Medea's reaction to Jason's betrayal is more like a warrior's response to insult than that of a stereotypical Greek woman. As Sheila Murnaghan writes, Medea illustrates "a set of attitudes and values typically associated with Greek men: she presents a mixture of qualities that unsettle the categories of male and female" (xvi). Because Medea is a woman, Jason fails to recognize that her motivations are very much like his own. Medea comments: "No one should think I am meek and mild / or passive. I am quite the opposite; / harsh to enemies and loyal to friends, / the kind of person whose life has glory" (lines 807-10). Jason presumably constructs his plan based on his assumption that women are naturally submissive and that Medea will

acquiesce for the sake of her own protection and that of her children. But, as her nurse remarks: "She is relentless and will not put up / with being mistreated" (lines 38-9). Power, honor, and glory are clearly important to Medea, and she will do what she must to maintain it, regardless of consequences. In terms of moral sensibility, she is again like Jason, who is quite cavalier about breaking his oath for the sake of growing his own power. Medea and Jason's marriage was also based on the pursuit of power, since the two bonded in the process of recovering the Golden Fleece, an act which required Medea's deadly magical powers (*Argonautica* 4.1638). Jason thus owes his power to Medea, because without the fleece she helped him obtain, he has no claim to kingship. Yet, he is willing to disregard this and is "willing to hurt his own family" (line 84) to increase his power still further—a brazen attitude that Medea merely matches in her defense. By becoming ruthless in regard to women's greatest power—the power to bring human lives into the world—she is mirroring the warrior values that Jason lives by and that the classical Greek audience accepts.

In Cherríe Moraga's version of the play, a retelling of the Medea myth that incorporates the Mexican "Hungry Woman" folktale, Medea tries to prevent her son Chac-Mool from joining his father for the harvest, fearing Jason's corrupting masculine influence over the boy. Alas, Chac-Mool goes anyway, finding the lure of patriarchal power irresistible. The implication here is that little boys becoming warrior men is as inevitable and natural as the ripening of the corn. As Perez points out: "As a young man, the lure of patriarchal power is too great for [Chac-Mool] to resist" (qtd. in Padilla 213). Medea, in both this contemporary revisioning and Euripides' play, has given birth to her own oppressors, who are promised the power that she has been denied. In killing the boys, Medea is killing "little Jasons," and future patriarchal persecutors. Through Medea's questionable and abhorrent act, Euripides exposes an ironic truth to his masculine Athenian audience: if all women chose to assume a warrior's mindset and take revenge on patriarchy as Medea has, male dominance would be doomed. Classical Greek society depended on the presumed passivity of women to keep patriarchal lineages alive.

With this uncomfortable truth in mind, Medea's filicidal act cuts especially deep. Women must not only birth boys, but they must also nurture and care for them. Women's caring for children frees men from that burdensome duty and allows them to participate more actively and competitively in cultural activities and training for warfare, which, according to the womb envy theory, they are driven to do because of their inability to give birth (Gilmore 28-40). While the conscious masculine sense of egoic superiority grows, the frustrated unconscious resentment against women's procreative power also grows. This, in turn,

gives rise to more and more forms of misogyny and female oppression as men's power grows along with their worldly accomplishments (Gilmore 217-30). Medea's frightening choice is understandable when seen from a warriors' point of view because it is a combative, warlike act taken directly against an enemy who seeks to conquer her through trickery and deceit.

In a review of a 2014 production of *Medea*, classicist Laura Smith remarks: "[I]n the case of Medea, the tragic action seems to fit today's world as well as that of the mythological past. It speaks to our imaginations with incredible power." As a dramatist influenced by the Sophist movement in classical Greece (Allan 145-46), Euripides questioned the status quo in ways that were most likely off-putting to many in his original audience, but which are embraced by contemporary productions. For modern audiences, Medea's filicidal revenge against Jason, while extreme and shockingly amoral, may also represent a spectacular release of the explosive energies that lie under the surface of the patriarchal systems still evident today.

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# Princesses Abound:

## Fairy Tale Elements in Edgar Allan Poe

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### KEYWORDS

*Edgar Allan Poe*

*Fairy Tales*

*German Romanticism*

Writing in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Edgar Allan Poe had all manner of European literature from which to draw inspiration. The sources most commonly referenced are the Gothic novels of the mid to late eighteenth century, as elements of the Gothic style are abundant and easily recognizable in his work. In addition to the Gothic, there are fairy tale elements and motifs in several stories and poems in addition, especially if one considers that stories “like ‘Bluebeard’ prefigure the gothic plots of modern horror” (Tatar 184). Much of Poe’s work illustrates “trading in the sensational,” as Maria Tatar claims folklore does, “breaking taboos, enacting the forbidden, staging hidden desires, and exploring pathologies with uninhibited investigative energy” (184). Thus, just as a careful reading of the classic fairy

tales yields allusions, direct and indirect, to the mythological canon, so too a careful reading of Poe’s works yields allusions to the fairy tale canon, even if none of his pieces fit perfectly into the genre. While many pieces could be read in light of the rich European fairy tale tradition, this analysis focuses on the poem “Annabel Lee” and the short story “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

While maybe less famous than “The Raven,” Poe’s “Annabel Lee” is a familiar poem replete with allusions to well-known fairy tales, and although they may not be as explicit as a glass slipper, a poison apple, an evil enchantress, or a beastly lover, they are present from the very beginning. The poem is an ode to Annabel Lee, spoken by her lover who tells the story of their young love, and the untimely death of the beloved. The opening lines, “It was many and many a year ago, / In a kingdom by the sea, / That a maiden there lived whom you may know / By the name of Annabel Lee” (lines 1-4), are reminiscent of the common fairy tale opening, “Once upon a time, in a land far away,

there lived a princess.” According to Jack Zipes, this familiar beginning “is not a past designation but futuristic: the timelessness of the tale and its lack of geographical specificity endow it with utopian connotations—‘utopia’ in its original meaning designated ‘no place,’ a place that no one had ever envisaged” (xiii). Despite the poem’s line “It was many and many a year ago,” suggesting a past designation, an exact point in chronological time is not given, rather a vague description from the speaker’s point of view. This, in addition to the vague geographical designation, suggests Zipes’ timeless and utopian connotations. In the next lines, the poem continues to yield examples linking the story of Annabel Lee and her young lover to the rich lineage of European fairy tales: “And this maiden she lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me. / She was a child and I was a child, / In this kingdom by the sea” (lines 5-8). The word “maiden,” and the explicit statement that both the speaker and his beloved are children, places them

in the common age group of fairy tale heroes and heroines and suggests they bear the innocence, purity, and naïveté of young characters such as Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, Cinderella, Jack of the beanstalk, and the children in "The Juniper Tree."

The second stanza ends with, "But we loved with a love that was more than love— / I and my Annabel Lee— / With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven / Coveted her and me" (lines 9-12). While the supernatural characters of fairy tales are more likely to be named "fairy," "witch," "dwarf," or "enchantress" rather than "seraphs of Heaven," it never bodes well when a supernatural being is jealous of a human. For example, in the Grimms' "Snow White," the driving action is the jealousy of Snow White's enchantress stepmother toward the heroine's angelic youth and beauty. Thus the final lines of "Annabel's" second stanza immediately foreshadow the action of the third and fourth stanzas:

And this was the reason that, long ago, [. . .]  
A wind blew out of a cloud by night  
Chilling my Annabel Lee; [. . .].  
The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,  
Went envying her and me:—  
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,  
In this kingdom by the sea) [. . .]. (lines 13, 15-16,  
21-24)

The speaker explicitly links cause and effect by illustrating how divine jealousy of mortals is what inspires the fatal blow, just as in other stories in which powerful characters who feel slighted exact extreme revenge. In addition to "Snow White," in Apuleius' "Cupid and Psyche" and the Grimms' "Briar Rose," would-be lovers are kept apart by vengeful acts of supernatural mother figures such as: Cupid's mother, the goddess Venus, and the thirteenth Wise Woman of Briar Rose's father's kingdom, respectively. The apparently supernatural event of Annabel Lee's death also places the story in the realm of the wonder story, a distinct type of fairytale in which, "Wonder causes astonishment, and as manifested in a marvelous object or phenomenon, it is often regarded as a supernatural occurrence and can be an omen or a portent. It gives rise to admiration, fear, awe, and reverence" (Zipes xiv). According to Annabel Lee's lover, the speaker of the poem, the wind that "blew out of a cloud by night / Chilling my Annabel Lee" (Poe lines 15-16) is a supernatural occurrence, which the lover attributes to the angels who envied the young lovers.

The fifth stanza boasts of the strength of the love between the speaker and Annabel Lee as "neither the angels in Heaven above / Nor the demons down under the sea" can sever the lovers' souls from each other (Poe lines 30-31). The sixth and final stanza illustrates the lover's commitment to his deceased beloved as he states, "For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams" (line 34) of her,

"And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes / Of the beautiful Annabel Lee" (lines 36-37). He concludes: "And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side / Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride, / In her sepulchre there by the sea— / In her tomb by the side of the sea" (lines 38-41). While these proclamations may be nothing more than those of a heartsick young lover, the language of these final stanzas, as well as in the lines prior, invite a deeper reading.

In all literature, and especially in poetry, repetition is an important convention as writers repeat elements to catch a reader's attention. In addition to making multiple statements about the heavenly beings' envy of the lovers and the depth and strength of their love, Poe repeatedly mentions the sea, Annabel Lee's sepulcher, and her death, and in so doing presents allusions to other tales. The placement of the story "in a kingdom by the sea" (Poe line 2) calls to mind other love stories taking place near a body of water. Fairy tales, and the folk and mythological traditions that they grew from, are full of stories involving women connected to water and the men who love them. For instance, the swan maidens and nixies whose unions with mortal men end less than happily, if not outright tragically, with the disappearance of the magical woman—often returning to her original watery realm—after some misdeed of her human lover. The mysterious death of Annabel Lee, "the wind [that] came out of a cloud, chilling / And killing" her (lines 25-26), and her "tomb by the side of the sea" (41) may indicate her returning to her original otherworldly realm.

The repeated reference to Annabel Lee's sepulcher indicates importance, as well, and most of the poem's narrative takes place after she has been "shut up" in her seaside tomb. In general, the coffin, grave, or other final resting place elicit the imagery of the tomb, rich with fairy tale implications. Perhaps the most common tomb image in fairy tales is that of Snow White in her glass (or gold or jewel-encrusted) coffin, which the prince discovers before waking her from her enchanted sleep. As in mythology, tomb imagery in fairy tales suggests womb imagery, the place of transformation and metamorphoses, which is also one of the key themes of fairy tales (Zipes xvi). Tatar writes that in fairy tales, "Again and again we witness transformations that create a crisis, breaking down the divide between life and death" (xii). Death is certainly a transformation for Annabel Lee, and her death is indeed a crisis for her lover.

The speaker's repeated statements about being inseparable from his beloved, even to the extent of lying down by her side in the sepulcher, alludes to the enduring, if also sometimes off-putting, love present in fairy tales. After the dwarves entomb Snow White, "They [bring] the coffin up to the top of a mountain, and one of them was always there to keep vigil" (Brothers Grimm qtd. in Tatar 101). Then the prince insists on taking her in her coffin with him, rather than be separated from her beauty, saying,

“[. . .] I can’t live without seeing Snow White. I will honor and cherish her as if she were my beloved” (Brothers Grimm qtd. in Tatar 101). In the stories of Briar Rose, or Sleeping Beauty, princes fight their way (though all but one fail in their attempts) to the bedside of the sleeping princess, “the most beautiful princess ever seen” who is “supposed to sleep for one hundred years [. . .] destined to be awakened by a chosen king’s son” (Perrault qtd. in Tatar 126). Both Snow White and Sleeping Beauty/Briar Rose are under spells that make their sleep appear to be death until a prince can save them. This is perhaps the greatest plot difference between these classic tales and Poe’s poem, in which there is no “happily ever after,” as Annabel Lee shows no sign of waking upon her lover’s appearance or touch.

While the poem “Annabel Lee” invokes fairy tale allusions in a fairly straightforward manner, Poe’s short story, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” does so more subtly. Additionally, many fairy tale conventions are broken or skewed, providing a kind of commentary on the genre, reminiscent of the German Romantics, whose work sought philosophical engagement beyond mere entertainment.

Of the fairytale allusions in “Usher,” Snow White and Sleeping Beauty/Briar Rose are again evoked, as are the macabre Bluebeard tales, such as “La Barbe Bleue” by Charles Perrault and the Grimms’ “Fitcher’s Bird.” Poe’s story opens with the narrator describing the eerie scene of the Usher homestead as he approaches it, having been summoned by Roderick Usher, a friend from his childhood. He experiences an “insufferable gloom” as he looks upon the scene, “upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul” (Poe 95). This foreboding sight elicits the image of the castle in Perrault’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” and in the Grimm Brothers’ “Briar Rose,” surrounded by thorny hedges after the princess falls under the sleeping curse. It is a sight that serves to keep people away, not beckon them.

“Nevertheless,” the narrator states, “in this mansion of gloom I now [propose] to myself a sojourn of some weeks” (Poe 97). After “Shaking off from [his] spirit what *must* have been a dream” (98), he approaches the house and is met by a servant to take his horse before proceeding inside. However, unlike those stories in which the prince seeks the sleeping princess, this scene does not change for the narrator, with “the trees and brambles [separating and making] a path of their own accord,” (Perrault qtd. in Tatar 126) or the prince finding “nothing but big, beautiful flowers [that open] to make a path for him and to let him pass unharmed” (Brothers Grimm qtd. in Tatar 132). However, a valet does guide him into the house, “in silence, through many dark and intricate passages” full of objects—“the carvings of the



Illustration 1: Harry Clarke's illustrations for Poe's Tales of Mystery & Imagination.

ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which [rattle as he strides]"—that, although familiar, somehow serve "to heighten the vague sentiments of which [he has] already spoken" (Poe 99). The narrator's feelings are reminiscent of the prince's upon his entrance into the courtyard where "[the prince's] blood [is frozen] with terror at what he [sees]. A frightful silence [has] descended on the palace. Death [seems] to be everywhere. All you [can see are] the bodies of humans and animals stretched out on the ground, apparently lifeless" (Perrault qtd. in Tatar 126). Again, unlike the situation of the prince, who realizes that all are merely asleep and not dead, and thus everything will be fine once he finds and wakes the princess, the situation in "Usher" offers no hope for the narrator as he continues on his way to meet his friend.

Once in the house, the narrator is met by a distraught Roderick Usher who requests his friend's help in retaining his sanity whilst caring for his dying sister, Madeline. Though the narrator does what he can to comfort his friend, Usher's mental state declines as his sister's physical state declines. Upon Madeline's death, as they temporarily entomb the body in a vault beneath the house, the morbid-ity of the "Bluebeard" stories appears:

The vault in which we [place the encoffined body. . . is] small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which [is] my own sleeping apartment. It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and, in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, [are] carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, [has] been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight [causes] an unusually sharp grating sound, as it [moves] upon its hinges. (Poe 108)

The narrator then describes the vault as a "region of horror." While the description of the room differs among variations, sometimes forbidden and full of dead bodies, other times an ominous storage room, "The 'terrible place' of horror, a dark, tomblike site that harbors grisly evidence of the killer's derangement, manifests itself as Bluebeard's forbidden chamber" (Tatar 184).

The sleeping princesses of the fairy tales are again called to mind as the men take a last look at the deceased Madeline: "Our glances, however, [rest] not long upon the dead—for we [cannot] regard her unawed. The disease which [has] thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, [has] left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face,

and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death" (Poe 108-109). After the dwarfs discover Snow White's lifeless body but are unable to revive her, "They [are] about to bury her, but she still [looks] just like a living person with beautiful red cheeks. [. . .] Snow White [lays] in the coffin for a long, long time. But she [does] not decay and [looks] as if she [is] sleeping" (Brothers Grimm qtd. in Tatar 101). This is the scene upon which the prince stumbles. The prince of the Sleeping Beauty/Briar Rose stories finds a similar sight: "On a bed with curtains open on each side was a princess who appeared to be about fifteen or sixteen years old. Her radiant charms gave her such a luminous, otherworldly appearance that he approached her trembling, so full of admiration that he knelt down beside her" (Perrault qtd. in Tatar 126), and "he opened up the door to the little room in which Briar Rose was sleeping. There she lay, so beautiful that he could not take his eyes off her, and he bent down to kiss her" (Brothers Grimm qtd. in Tatar 132). As with the princes' gazes at their princesses, the men's last look at Madeline "elicits a purely aesthetic viewing of the female body, one that replaces the notion of decay and death with permanence and plenitude. [. . .] the [men's] prolonged gaze creates a reassuring moment in which aesthetic pleasure appears to displace anxieties about mortality" (Tatar 121). Unfortunately, Madeline is left locked in the tomb, buried alive, for a week before she is able to free herself, as some of the Bluebeard heroines also manage. However, she does not live "happily ever after" like her fairy tale sisters do.

While more-or-less direct allusions are one convention for calling to mind a work's literary ancestors, so too are conventional reversals (as in Annabel Lee's death, rather than a sleeping curse that will be broken, and Madeline's being buried alive, rather than being kept safe while she sleeps). One mark of mastery is the ability to break the rules of conventional expectations to further one's purpose in the craft. In discussing the literary fairy tales that came later in the European tradition, Jack Zipes writes: "Once certain discursive paradigms and conventions were established, a writer could demonstrate his or her 'genius' by rearranging, expanding, deepening, and playing with the known functions of a genre that, by 1715, had already formed a type of canon" (xx). By breaking the rules set forth by the canon of fairy tale stories, Poe leaves readers with a wealth of associations to explore, as questions about the human condition rather than amusements. In this way, Poe echoes the choices of German Romantic writers:

Very few of the German Romantic tales end on a happy note. The protagonists either go insane or die. The evil forces assume a social hue, for the witches and villains no longer are allegorical representations of evil in the Christian tradition but are symbolical-

ly associated with the philistine bourgeois society or the decadent aristocracy. Nor was the purpose of the Romantic fairy tale to amuse in the traditional sense of *divertissement*. Instead, it sought to engage the reader in a serious discourse about art, philosophy, education, and love. (xxiii)

In addition to offering the aforementioned fairy tale allusions, “The Fall of the House of Usher” breaks conventions to provide a literature through which readers can engage the darker aspects of life, without the promise of a happy ending. These broken conventions are examined in light of the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp’s thirty-one functions necessary for the fairytale story to develop (summarized into eight conventions in Zipes (xiii)). In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” understanding Roderick Usher to be the protagonist, rather than the narrator through whose perspective we read the story, Poe inverts many of the rules and simply ignores, or outright breaks, the others.

To begin, rather than being confronted with an interdiction or prohibition which he then chooses to violate (Zipes’ first convention (xiii)), Roderick Usher is confronted with, in the form of “an excessive nervous agitation,” (Poe 100), the curse of his ancestors, “that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain” (97). Usher describes his malady as “a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy,” and the narrator adds that it “displayed itself in a host of unnatural sensations” (101). The narrator states that Usher is a slave to “an anomalous species of terror” and Usher states, “I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. [...] I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR” (102). Usher has inherited this curse because for generations his family violated the societal prohibition against incest, and he believes his only salvation from it will be death.

Reversing the second convention—“Departing or banished, the protagonist has either been given or assumes a task related to the interdiction or prohibition. The task is assigned, and it is a sign,” marking the protagonist’s character (Zipes xiii)—Roderick Usher becomes a shut-in. This is “another singular feature of his mental condition. He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted” and had not left for many years, “in regard to an influence [...] which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit” (Poe 102). Usher also admits, albeit hesitantly, that much of his despair is due “to the severe and long-contin-

ued illness—indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution—of a tenderly beloved sister” who has been his only companion for many years and who is his only living relative (102). With a “settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character,” Madeline’s disease “had long baffled the skill of her physicians,” (103), and when the narrator steals a glimpse of her, he “regard[s] her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread” and a “sensation of stupor [oppresses him]” (102). Though not stated, Usher appears to be Madeline’s caregiver, a task that would certainly mark his character, in addition to bearing the family curse.

The third convention states that the protagonist encounters either: a villain; “a mysterious individual or creature, who gives the protagonist gifts”; “three different animals or creatures, who are helped by the protagonist and promise to repay him or her”; or “three animals or creatures who offer gifts to help the protagonist, who is in trouble. The gifts are often magical agents, which bring about miraculous change” (Zipes xiii). The narrator serves as the “mysterious individual . . . who gives the protagonist gifts” in the form of distractions from Usher’s despair by way of his company: “For several days [...] I was buried in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of [Usher’s] speaking guitar” (Poe 103). However, reversing the fourth convention—the protagonist is tested, then battles and conquers the opposing forces (Zipes xiii)—Usher is continually tried by his sister’s worsening illness, which has relegated her to her bed, and, the narrator states, “thus, as a closer and still intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of [Usher’s] spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom” (Poe 103). Thus, Usher’s inability to move on and “to battle and conquer the villain or inimical forces” (Zipes xiii) foreshadows the unhappy ending.

Fifth, Usher suffers a “sudden fall in [...] fortunes” for which “a wonder or miracle is needed to reverse the wheel of fortune” (Zipes xiii). In addition to robbing him of his sister, “his sole companion of long years,” the death of Madeline leaves “him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers” (Poe 102). After abruptly informing his friend of Madeline’s death, Usher explains that he wants to preserve “her corpse for a fortnight, (previously to its final interment) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building” (108). Usher explains that he wants to protect his sister from the curiosity of the doctors who oversaw her treatment, as the family burial ground is unsecure. The narrator agrees

to help Usher with the temporary entombment and the two men, "the body having been encoffined," carry it to the vault described above (108). After a last look at the deceased Madeline, they secure the iron door and return to the upper part of the house.

A week after securing Madeline in the vault, on a stormy night, the narrator finds himself unable to sleep, "An irrepressible tremour gradually [pervading his] frame; and, at length, there [sits] upon [his] very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm" (Poe 109). Having sat up in bed, trying to shake the eerie feeling, he "hearkens," prompted by "an instinctive spirit [. . .] to certain low and indefinite sounds which [come], through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, [he knows] not whence" (110). Shortly after, Usher knocks at the narrator's door and enters, "his countenance [. . .], as usual, cadaverously wan [. . . with] a species of mad hilarity in his eyes—an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanor" (110). Usher throws open the window to show his friend the uncanny nature of the storm outside, but the narrator pulls Usher away from the window, sits him down, and decides to read him a romance, "the *Mad Trist* of Sir Launcelot Canning," indulging "a vague hope that the excitement which now [agitates] the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read" (112).

After some time, they reach "that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the *Trist*, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force" (Poe 112). The narrator goes on to read three passages, each containing the description of a loud, distinct sound, and after each the narrator believes he hears the echo of the sound just described. After the third instance, "Completely unnerved," (114), he jumps up; however, there is no change in Usher from the previously noticed "strange alteration [. . .] in his demeanor" (113). His "measured rocking movement [. . . is] undisturbed," his eyes are "bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there [reigns] a stony rigidity" (114). However, when the narrator touches his shoulder Usher shudders and smiles sickly, and rambles:

'Not hear it?—yes, I hear it, and have heard it. [. . .] many days, have I heard it—yet I dared not—oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! [. . .] I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!* [. . .] I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them [. . . yet. . .] *I dared not speak!* And now—to-night—Ethelred—ha! ha!—the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangour of the shield!—say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles with-

in the copped archway of the vault! [. . .] Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? [. . .] *Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!*" (114)

And now Poe provides the required miracle "to reverse the wheel of fortune" (Zipes xiii): "As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there [has] been found the potency of a spell—the huge antique panels to which the speaker [points, throw] slowly back," and "without those doors there [stands] the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher" (Poe 115). Unfortunately, while Madeline's appearance does indeed change Usher's fortunes, it does not do so for the better. Additionally, because she was buried alive, Madeline's emergence from the vault perverts the "breaking of a magic spell" (Zipes' sixth convention, xiii); rather than a prince kissing a princess to wake her from an enchanted sleep (Snow White and Sleeping Beauty/Briar Rose), Madeline violently breaks out of her coffin, more like a vampire than a princess.

Finally, like German protagonists, who "either go insane or die," the last two conventions—"the villain is punished or the inimical forces are vanquished"; and "the success of the protagonist usually leads to: (a) marriage; (b) the acquisition of money; (c) survival and wisdom; or (d) any combination of the first three," (Zipes xiii)—are either perversely enacted or reversed in the death of a now completely unhinged Usher at the hands of his "resurrected" sister. With "blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame," having broken out of her tomb and found her brother, after a moment of "trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold," Madeline, "with a low moaning cry, [falls] heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, [bears] him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (Poe 115). At this, the narrator flees the house, and upon reaching a safe distance away, he turns, the light of the blood-red moon startling him as it shines from where the house once stood, and he watches "the mighty walls rushing asunder," with "a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters," as "the deep and dank tarn" closes "sullenly and silently over the fragments of the '*House of Usher*'" (116). Through Usher's death, the "inimical forces," of both his mistakenly burying his sister alive, and the curse of the family line, are vanquished, effectively converting him from hero/protagonist to villain. Additionally, Usher's, "success" leads to his death, rather than some kind of good fortune.

With this final, tragic, and fairly inexplicable end, not only of the protagonist, but also of the "house" as both family lineage and residence, Poe utterly deprives his readers of anything close to the "happily ever after" of the fairy tale tradition of the Grimm Brothers and Charles Perrault.

Instead, this ending aligns him with the German Romantics whose aim was not entertainment, but philosophical engagement. However, as traditional fairy tales, with their “high quotient of weirdness, [. . .] recruit the extraordinary to help us understand the ordinary and what lies beneath it” (Tatar xi), the bizarre elements of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and many of Poe’s other works, invite the reader to view otherwise mundane events through spectacular lenses.

The stories possess [. . .] ontological vehemence, a bracing liveliness that challenges us to think more and to think harder,” delivering the shock of beauty and also “jolts of horror, rewiring our brains and also charging them up, challenging us to make sense of the harsh realities exposed in them. (xxiv).

“Usher” certainly delivers jolts of horror which challenge readers to make sense of the monstrous in the Gothic author’s work.

As with all art, there are many lenses through which to view, appreciate, and analyze Poe’s work—concentrating on the influence of the fairy tale tradition is simply one of them. Tatar states:

The marvelous messiness of fairy-tale networks defies the systematic classification [. . .] When Carrie loses a shoe in [. . .] *Sex and the City*, has she turned into Cinderella? [. . .] Perhaps not, but the stories flash out at us, deepening and complicating the quests undertaken. (xxiii).

Allusions and conventional reversals in Poe’s work, intentional or otherwise, link literary texts together in an endless web of enjoyment and inquiry, allowing an American Gothic writer’s work to be considered alongside that of European folklorists and German Romantic authors and enhancing the experience of each text individually, and the great art form of literature as a whole.

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# A Visit to Speculum Alchemiae: Prague's Forgotten Subterranean Alchemy Lab

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## KEYWORDS

*Alchemy*  
*Prague*

Underneath one of the oldest houses in Prague's Jewish Quarter lies a secret alchemy lab, commissioned in the sixteenth century by King Rudolf II. Once sealed, the multi-chambered underground lab was forgotten and remained hidden. Fatefully, a heavy rain season led to its rediscovery, and the site is now a museum, Speculum Alchemiae, that is open to the public. The museum offers guided tours of the house and the original underground laboratory, and features a collection of authentic artifacts, replicas of artifacts, and period-specific decor. On my first visit in October 2016, I was one of many visitors touring the property; however, I was lucky enough to take a private tour when I returned in June 2018. I obtained most information in this paper through my observations and the information I received from tour guides and

museum employees during my visits. Using a combination of this first-hand experience and academic research, this paper will explore the history, rediscovery, and artifacts of Speculum Alchemiae and its famous patron, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Bohe-

mia and Hungary Rudolf II.

King Rudolf II, also known as the "German Hermes," reigned from 1583-1612 (Linden 174). The king was a member of the House of Habsburg, and, as an Austrian, was expected to choose a home in the capital city of Vienna. Instead, Rudolf II chose to live in Prague, thereby establishing the city as his capital and turning it into a cultural and scientific center. Rudolph II did not have any officially recognized children, so when he died his brother Matthew succeeded him on the throne. Matthew promptly moved the capital back to Vienna, but Rudolf II's relatively short influence on the city is still referred to as the Golden Age of Prague.

One of the main reasons that Rudolph II funded Speculum Alchemiae was reportedly to discover a cure for his madness. Scholars debate what type of mental illness the eccentric emperor suffered. Marie-Louise von Franz suggests that perhaps it was Rudolph II's lifelong obsession with alchemy itself that exposed him to lead



Figure 1: Speculum Alchemiae.



Figure 2: Author sitting at the desk in the office.

poisoning, eventually driving him mad (91). The emperor is reported to have suffered a nervous breakdown around 1600, which today would perhaps be diagnosed as a manic depressive, or bipolar, episode (Marshall 4, 199, 209).

Alchemy is an interdisciplinary practice entrenched in magic and mythology and is probably best known for its pursuit of the philosophers' stone, which legend states can turn base metals such as lead into gold. As a discipline, alchemy has often been disparaged as a pseudo-science along the lines of astrology; however, alchemists see their art as the fusion of science and spirit. These ideas date back to Egypt in the fourth century CE, when Zosimos of Panopolis first described alchemy as a "spiritual practice due to championing the idea that the purification of metals corresponds to the purification of the soul" (Grimes 15). Zosimos is widely considered the first alchemist, although the term did not exist in his time. He would have identified his work as the *heir technē*, the sacred art; *chrysopoeia*, gold-making; and *argyropoeia*, silver-making (Shannon 19). Zosimos's work formed the foundation for the alchemical work happening in Europe over a thousand years later.

In the European Middle Ages, many of these early alchemical experiments were not approved by the Catholic Church. Because of this, alchem-

ical records that exist from this time are highly coded and shrouded in myth and mystery. For example, one text references a "cold dragon" who "creeps in and out of the caves." Researchers have determined that this is code for "saltpeter (potassium nitrate)—a crystalline substance found on cave walls that tastes cool on the tongue" (Conniff). It was only in the 1980s that academics translated these esoteric records and acknowledged alchemy's contributions to the foundations of modern chemistry (Conniff).

Rudolf II's lab is located in the Jewish Quarter of Old Prague, in a small neighborhood surrounded by other homes, a bookshop, and a few cafés. The former residence that houses the Speculum Alchemiae museum was preserved during the redevelopment of the Jewish Quarter in the nineteenth century. No one knows exactly why it was spared when nearly all other houses around it were demolished; local lore suggests the alchemical history of the property may have provided it with magical protection. The museum claims that the first written record of the house dates to 900 CE, which suggests that this is the second-oldest building in Prague. Unfortunately, much of the original house was damaged in a fire in the seventeenth century and subsequently updated in the baroque style. Sometime after the fire, the entrance to the underground laboratory was bricked over and the lab lay in wait,



Figure 3: The four elements painted on the ceiling and featuring metal starbursts in their creators.



Figure 6: The entrance to the lab.

abandoned for hundreds of years until it was uncovered by chance.

In 2002, heavy rainfall resulted in massive flooding that caused extensive damage throughout Prague. The floodwaters led to the collapse of the street in front of the entrance and part of the house floor, along with several other sections of the city. These collapsed areas revealed a series of interconnected secret tunnels running under the streets of Prague. The alchemy lab was discovered through the tunnel that runs to it from Staroměstské Náměstí, the Old Town Square. Eventually, officials unearthed the entire subterranean network connecting the alchemy lab to the Prague Castle, the Old Town Square, and the barracks in Náměstí Republiky, Republic Square. All of the underground tunnel entrances to the lab have been sealed off since, and now the only way to enter the laboratory chambers is through the house on a guided tour.

It took ten years to clean up the house and the lab, and the museum officially opened in 2012. Because of the floods, some of the rooms and the underground tunnels had collapsed or suffered significant damaged. As a result, much of the alchemy lab was reconstructed. Efforts were taken to ensure that the reconstruction remained as faithful to the original look of the lab as possible, using a combination of artifacts found in situ on the property and reproductions based on records from alchemy labs of the same period.

The front of the home is simple and unassuming, and it would be very easy to pass it by without a second thought (fig. 1). The entryway has been turned into a small gift shop featuring alchemical elixirs. Their labels tempt customers with promises such as eternal youth and everlasting love. These souvenir elixirs are prepared by the Benedictine Monks according to original recipes and are presented in hand-blown glass finished with the Speculum Alchemiae wax seal. There are other small trinkets and magical charms for sale, as well as a ticket counter for tours. At the time of publication, an adult tour costs 200 Czech crowns (about \$9 US) and is led in English by a knowledgeable historic guide.

The office features a large desk with feather writing quills and books (fig. 2). While almost all decorations here are reproductions, a chair, a bench, and an armchair date to the sixteenth century. These three pieces are set in a corner of the office, within view but out of reach.

The dramatic vaulted ceilings display four sixteenth-century circular paintings representing the elements (fig. 3). Earth (*terra*) is depicted in greens with leaves; air (*aer*) in blue with wind; fire (*ignis*) as a dark circle with red, orange,



Figure 5: A closeup of the bookcase door closed. The statue on the third shelf from the top turns to move the bookcase and reveal the stairwell to the lab.

and yellow flames; and water (*aqua*) as blue with waves. A metal starburst fixture sits in the middle of each painting. Legend has it that energy is sent from those stars and channeled through the chandelier in the middle of the ceiling, straight down to the furnace below. While the chandelier on display is not original, the paintings, starburst fixtures, and furnace are.

The upstairs apothecary and underground alchemy lab were overseen by Tadeáš Hájek, Rudolf II's personal doctor, astronomer, and friend. Hájek reportedly exposed the king to several philosophical texts that were forbidden by the Vatican (Marshall 104-5). As the head of the lab, he was in charge of making sure that the only people working there were legitimate scientists seeking knowledge, not charlatans seeking money or fame. This is because "if an alchemist was not spiritually pure, he would never achieve success in his experiments" (Marshall 104).

*Speculum Alchemiae* attracted many well-known academics, including astronomers, astrologists, and of course alchemists who worked at the lab for Rudolf II. These men came from countries all over Europe—including Poland, Germany, and Denmark—to settle in Prague. Their quest for knowledge is displayed on a plaque (fig. 4) that reads in Latin: *non pudor est nilscire, pudor nil discere velle, aurum nostrum non est aurum vulgi*—"it is not shameful not to know, but it is shameful to not have the desire to learn. Our gold is no ordinary gold." Portraits of many of these men line the walls of the office alongside shelves containing in-

tricate hand-blown bottles covered in alchemical symbols. One portrait depicts the astronomer Tycho Brahe, who was famous for the golden nose that he wore as a result of a duel. Another painting is of Rabbi Judah Loew from

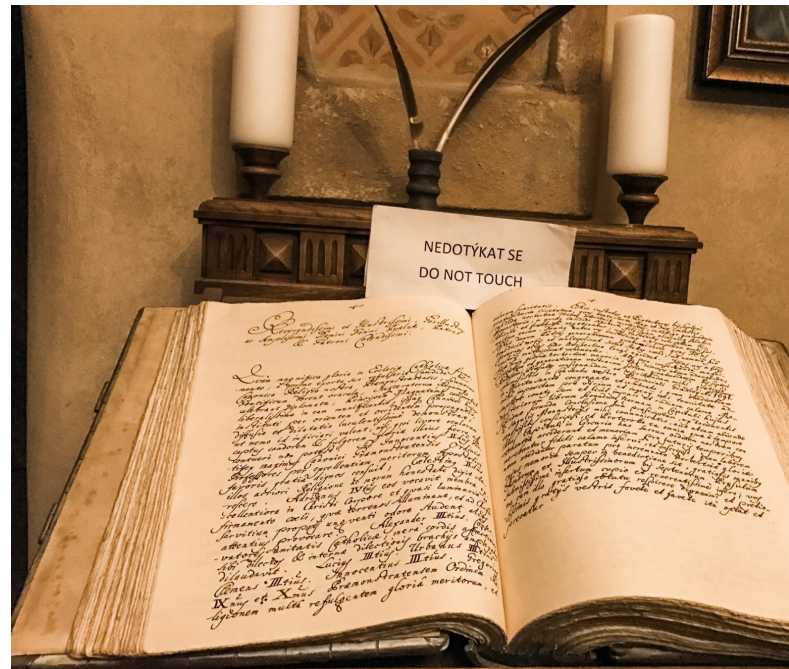


Figure 8: A replica of the sixteenth century manuscript.



Figure 7: The plaque stating the lab was under the protection of Rudolph II.

Poland, also known as the Maharal of Prague, who was a friend of Rudolf II and worked at the lab, as well. He was a teacher of Kabbalah and is perhaps most well-known as the creator of the alchemical golem, the legendary creature made from dirt and clay to protect the Jewish people of Prague from anti-Semitic attacks.

Another portrait hanging in the office is that of Katarina Stradová, the most famous lover of Rudolf II. While the Elixir of Eternal Youth was made for Rudolf II, the Elixir of Love was made for them to drink together. Rudolf II requested that it look like wine so nobody would be suspicious. It is uncertain whether she had knowledge of this love potion or consented to consuming it. The love elixir, according to the original recipe, mainly comprises herbs and wine. While the specifics of the recipe is still kept secret, the museum shares that the main herbal ingredient is goat's head (*tribulus terrestris*), an aphrodisiac from Asia. It must have worked, because even though Katarina was a commoner, the pair had six children together. Unfortunately, because she lacked royal status, the two lovers never married and their children were never accepted as royalty.

At first glance, there is no way to access the subterranean chambers from inside the office. But those in the inner circle know that, to enter the laboratory, one must simply approach the bookshelf and choose the correct stat-

ue. Turning and pulling this statue in the correct pattern opens the bookshelf to reveal a set of spiral stone stairs descending to the underground laboratory complex. While built over the original entrance to the lab, the bookcase and the statue mechanism are not original (fig. 5 and 6). It is likely that the laboratory entrance was concealed in its prime, but exact details are unknown.

Those descending the stairs into the dark, damp earth are supported by a modern banister and, upon close inspection, can see evidence of where the original rope banister attached to the wall. The stairwell leads to a dimly lit walkway that smells of ancient dirt and stone, and it is almost possible to catch a whiff of the alchemical herbs and elixirs prepared there nearly 500 years ago. Of course, today the subterranean chambers are wired for electricity. Even so, it is easy to step into the 1500s, as the candles lighting the hallway outshine the electric lights deep inside the chambers and a symphony of bubbling potions drowns out the sounds of the modern city streets above.

The first sight in the complex is a large ancient-looking iron door with a small window. This door opens to the tunnel that leads to Staroměstské Náměstí, the Old Town Square. This is the only tunnel entrance that can be easily seen on the tour, as the other two doors are located inside the chambers. The chambers are filled with artifacts and replicas depicting the supposed appearance of the rooms when the lab was active. Metal fences block tourists from entering but still allow full view of the chambers and their contents.

Displayed in the hallway in front of a small alcove is a plaque (fig. 7) that features a Latin inscription proclaiming that the lab is operating under King Rudolf II's permission and the alchemists and their work are under his protection. This plaque is a reproduction of the original that was discovered broken on the ground after the flood.

In addition to the Speculum Alchemiae lab discussed in this paper, the Bohemian king also had an alchemy lab in the Powder Tower in the Northern wall of Prague Castle, and it is believed that he had at least two more, one in the cellar of his summer house and another under his private apartment, dedicated to his intense interest in the alchemical process and his quest for the infamous philosophers' stone, a substance that would have given him the ability to transmute base metals into gold (Marshall 105, 199).

While it is unclear if the alchemists of this lab ever produced gold, they definitely made elixirs. Inside the alcove in the hallway is an iron box containing a bound manuscript of alchemical recipes and several hermetically sealed glass bottles dating to the sixteenth century. Since the original position of the plaque likely blocked the secret cache, the contents of the box were protected and survived undamaged for over 400 years. A replica of this manuscript

and one of these original elixir bottles are on display in the museum (figs. 8 and 9).

The manuscript is written in Latin, and the current owner of Speculum Alchemiae is working with Benedictine monks (the same ones that make the elixirs sold in the museum shop) to translate the contents. The Benedictine monks are uniquely suited to this task, as they have been creating herbal liquors for hundreds of years. The French herbal liqueur Bénédictine is rumored to have been invented in 1510 by a Benedictine named Dom Bernardo Vincelli "to fortify and restore weary monks" (Foley). This liqueur is still sold today, and the herbal ingredients remain proprietary. While different in name, elixirs are basically herbal liquors: they have an alcohol base and herbs.



Figure 9: A sixteenth century elixir bottle found in the underground well.

The elixirs in the box had ceased to be liquid and were gelatinous upon discovery. Even so, there was still enough left to test and compare the contents to the recipes that were attached. The preserved bottles of elixir and the original manuscript are stored in a secret location of the depository of monastery archives.

In the manuscript, 25 pages are devoted to the recipe and preparation of the Elixir of Eternal Youth alone. According to the recipe, it takes six to eight months to prepare one batch—a small price to pay for eternal youth. This recipe was specifically developed for the emperor himself.

Rudolf II drank this regularly and lived to be 60 years old at a time in history when the average lifespan for a European was around 30-40 years (Roser). The recipe calls for 77 herbs in a base of alcohol and opium. The ingredients, specific steps, conditions, and procedures necessary to prepare the elixir properly are all written down in Latin. The Elixir of Eternal Youth can be purchased at the gift shop, made from the lab's original recipe—excluding the opium, of course.

Because the alchemists needed to practice in secret to avoid detection by the Catholic Church, the lab is made up of several subterranean chambers connected to tunnels that lead to Prague Castle, the Old Town Square, and Republic Square. These individual rooms contained all the space and tools needed to blow glass bottles, dry herbs, and produce and bottle the elixirs. The rooms are set up to display what they would have looked like when they were in use, with a mixture of original artifacts and reproductions. The dim lighting is just bright enough to reveal skulls and other oddities dotting the stone walls—and leaves just enough damp darkness to create goosebumps.

The first chamber is where the elixirs were produced (fig. 10). The original furnace sits in the middle of the room, located directly under the chandelier to receive the energy channeled through the metal starbursts in the office above. The furnace was used to distill alcohol, the base ingredient for all the elixirs. The first step from the bottom of the furnace contains the original bottles that were found during the excavation, and all other bottles on display are reproductions. Oven exhaust was funneled through the house and out the chimneys to avoid suspicion. This chamber houses the long, seemingly impossible tunnel that burrows under the Vltava River uphill to the Prague Castle. This tunnel was most likely a personal passageway for King Rudolf II so he could discreetly travel through the Jewish Quarter and into the alchemy lab without arousing suspicion.

The second chamber in the subterranean complex is the main laboratory. The room contains an apparatus for plant distillation and elixir blending, as well as a transmutation oven. Here the alchemists probably heated mercury, lead, and other base metals and observed different types of reactions. The heat created in these chambers combined with the smell of their work is difficult to imagine. They were trying to create different forms (such as gold) from the base metals, but the tour guide claims that they probably never succeeded.

The next chamber was mainly used to store charcoal, bottles, and containers. This room was covered in cobwebs,

and I asked the guide about their authenticity. She laughed and said that the cobwebs are all real and the museum director keeps them there for a spooky vibe. The room is puzzlingly decorated with several crocodiles. The tour guide explained that this is because people in medieval Prague confused them with dragons. They are there to represent the international symbol of alchemy, the ouroboros, the dragon or snake eating its own tail that is described as the guardian of the underworld in Egyptian alchemical texts (von Franz 70). The ouroboros is also seen painted on several decorative bottles around the museum.

Next is a small chamber for drying herbs, and it was decorated with herbs tied and hanging to depict that process. The final chamber contains a glassblowing furnace used to make any type of bottle or glassware needed. The alchemists had unique needs for the shape and size of their bottles, and like everything else in the alchemical process, conducted the glassblowing on-site. This chamber also contains the third tunnel to Náměstí Republiky, which was outside Prague's city gates at the time. This tunnel was likely used when the scientists needed a quick escape or just wanted to get out of the city to pick herbs under the full moon. The city gates were locked at night, so this tunnel allowed the alchemists and their guests to come and go as they pleased.

As the group ascended the stairs back during my first trip to *Speculum Alchemiae*, I lingered alone in the subterranean tunnel. The sounds of the other tourists' footsteps and chatter drifted down the stairs, but I barely noticed them as I lost myself in my thoughts, daydreaming about the lab in its heyday. The damp, primeval air lightly danced on my skin and transported me to another time. The flickering electric lights were enough like candlelight to get lost in the fantasy, and the sound of brewing elixirs bubbled around me. I was keenly aware of my footsteps on the cobblestone, wondering how many people had walked this same path. The tour guide called then, snapping me out of my reverie. I raced back up the stairs, resurfacing into the modern world.

The *Speculum Alchemiae* museum is a unique extant site of alchemical, historical, and archaeological significance. From the original recipe book, to the intact elixirs, to the proof of King Rudolf II's involvement, the impact of this discovery will likely continue to contribute to our modern understanding and the cultural and religious context of European alchemy in the Middle Ages. While Prague offers many sites of historical significance, this museum alone might be worth a visit to the city. Are there more secret subterranean complexes lying beneath other cities, just waiting to be discovered? Hopefully we won't have to wait for the next big flood to find out.



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# Traversing Boundaries: The Coyote Trickster Archetype in Don Juan du Matus and Carlos Castaneda

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## KEYWORDS

*Don Juan du Matus*  
*Carlos Castaneda*  
*Coyote Trickster*

In the social and cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, many young adults raised in the Age of Science rejected its linear rationalizations and absolute interpretations of religious text and embraced a more phenomenological approach to life, creating a “New Age.” This generation “[preferred] to arrive firsthand, experimentally, at their own conclusions as to the nature and limits of reality” (Harner, *Way* xiv). Searching for a roadmap to navigate this unfamiliar territory, many turned to Carlos Castaneda’s chronicles of his apprenticeship with Don Juan du Matus, a Yaqui sorcerer who routinely traveled between ordinary and non-ordinary reality. The ability to traverse boundaries is characteristic of the trickster, and in Castaneda’s writings, the trickster appears both through Don Juan and through an entity he calls Chicano Coyote,

who embodies characteristics of the Aztec god Huehucóyotl. In this essay, I will follow the trickster as he weaves through the text and the relationship between student and master. I shall wander through the hunger of Castaneda as he attempts to fill his belly with the phenomenological teachings of the sorcerer. Then I shall examine Castaneda as a scholarly warrior whose wounds are inflicted by the tricks of his master, who blurs the boundaries of reality by “stopping the world” and “seeing.” I will then discuss how the knowledge gifted to Castaneda from the Chicano Coyote and Don Juan obscures the authenticity of hegemonic Western scientific scholarship while creating a different type of gnosis. Although there was and still is much controversy regarding the authenticity of Castaneda’s experiences with Don Juan and his subsequent chronicles of them, much wisdom and knowledge presents itself within the pages of his books.

Castaneda’s mentor, Don Juan du Matus, embodies the trickster as a

sorcerer, a *brujo*. Castaneda first meets Don Juan by chance on a bus. This chance encounter provides the perfect opportunity for Don Juan to gift his knowledge about the peyote to this curious and hungry scholar. Castaneda introduces himself excitedly to Don Juan, his mouth watering, as he expounds his desire to Don Juan to learn the secrets of these medicinal plants. He trips over his tongue with excitement, but then silence ensues between the two men. No addresses or phone numbers are exchanged as Don Juan exits this bus and transfers to another. Embarrassed, Castaneda states, “I was annoyed at having talked nonsense to him, and being seen through by those remarkable eyes” (*Teachings* 1).

Although this chance encounter appears to be a “one-stop” journey, it leaves the scholar hungry for more information about Don Juan and peyote. Castaneda ravenously searches for the mysterious passenger during the next year. By the time he finds Don Juan, his empty belly is primed for initiation, ready to receive the wisdom of Don

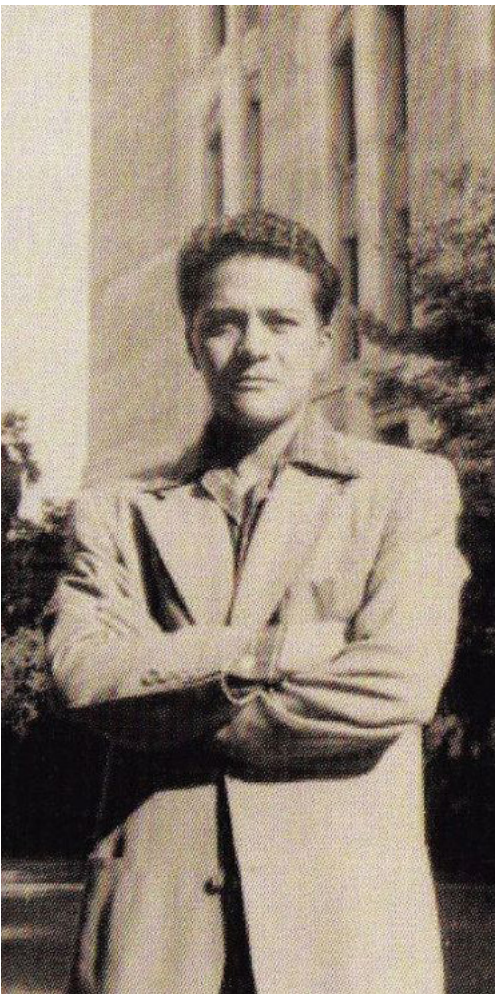


Illustration 1: Carlos Castaneda, UCLA, public domain.

Juan and the encounter with the trickster Chicano Coyote. Throughout Castaneda's hunt for Don Juan, people tell him that the mysterious passenger is a *brujo*, which translates as witch, medicine man, curer, or sorcerer—essentially someone with extraordinary and usually evil powers. One would think that a classically trained scholar would stop his relentless search after the discovery of such information. However, Castaneda craves more than information, although he does not initially realize this. The intensity of this craving leads him to abandon caution to the wind and board the apprentice bus, unsure of its destination yet hopeful that it will nourish his soul with the sorcerer's intuitive wisdom and deep-seated knowledge (*Teachings* 1-6). He comes to understand that Don Juan's wisdom stems from the *brujo's* ability to *stop the world*, a technique that allows the sorcerer to know other realms of existence, and then to see with shamanic eyes. Don Juan explains: "... seeing happens only when one sneaks between the worlds, the world of ordinary people and the world of sorcerers ... In order to see one must look at the world in some other fashion ..." (Castaneda, *Journey* 254).

As a Yaqui sorcerer, or shaman, of many years, Don Juan is revered for his wisdom, his ability to "stop the world," thus moving freely between realms and mediating with otherworldly beings for himself and others. Chicano Coyote, working through Don Juan, guides Castaneda within these non-ordinary realities and helps him navigate his experiences within those worlds. Michael Harner writes:

Another basic implicit principle in shamanism is that there are two realities and that the perception of each depends upon one's state of consciousness. Therefore, those in the "ordinary state of consciousness" (OSC) perceive only "ordinary reality" (OR). Those in the "shamanic state of consciousness" (SSC) are able to enter into and perceive "nonordinary reality" (NOR). These are both called realities because each is empirically encountered. Each is recognized to have its own forms of knowledge and relevance to human existence. ("Science, Spirits, and Core Shamanism")

These non-ordinary states of reality can be accessed through sacred medicine, drumming, meditating, or by other means. The scholar's obvious obtuseness and naivete regarding other structures of reality, produce the perfect open mind and opportune door for this trickster within Don Juan to cross through. As Lewis Hyde states, "A pore, a portal, a doorway, a nick in time, a gap in the screen, a looseness in the weave—these are all opportunities in the ancient sense" to allow for the discovery of new knowledge (46).

Repeatedly Castaneda emphasizes his naivete regarding what it means to be a sorcerer—his insistence on Western

rationalization and his literalization of experiences—portraying Don Juan as the wise mentor patiently tutoring his slow student. Scholar Richard McDermott writes of their relationship:

Don Juan is continually obliged to give a careful and detailed account of the meaning of Castaneda's experiences to his "slow" apprentice. As a result, we may not only find Don Juan more attractive, but we may also be able to attribute some of the inconsistencies and incongruities in the narratives to Castaneda's literal-mindedness. We may be able to say with Don Juan that what seems to be a paradox to Castaneda is only his failure to understand properly. (33-34)

At this moment, Castaneda's inability to understand what he is experiencing and the wisdom that Don Juan is sharing demonstrates the limits of literal scholarly observations of the metaphors embedded within the experience of non-ordinary reality.

It is as if Castaneda is constipated with Western ideology and disbelief and Don Juan is a plant laxative to help metabolize and push out that excrement (Hyde 40). Just as Don Juan sees through Castaneda's original request and insatiable desire to learn about medicinal plants, realizing the scholar's desire for experiential knowledge beyond Western research, Castaneda lacks the skills to truly see the significance and value of the plants and his experiences with them. We can compare Don Juan's ability to see beyond ordinary reality to James Hillman's notion of "seeing through," or psychologizing. To elaborate on this idea, Hillman states: "It suspects an interior, not evident intention; it searches for a hidden clockwork, a ghost in the machine, an etymological root, something more than meets the eye; or it sees it with another eye. It goes on whenever we move to a deeper level" (Hillman 134-135). Don Juan sees with another eye, which Hillman might call a psychologizing eye. He has the ability to procure wisdom and knowledge *through* the images within his visions, by viewing them as metaphors rather than literal happenings. In this way, he is able to live in both the sorcerer's trickster world and the world of ordinary man. As he tells Castaneda: "You can tell things apart. You can see them for what they really are" (*Separate* 37). In other words, Don Juan is expressing that one can see the metaphors within the visions to come to a greater understanding of self, community, and world.

Our journey into the realm of trickery leads us to wander through the liminality with Chicano Coyote, who acts like the Aztec god Huehucóyotl as he works with Don Juan to teach Castaneda about the ambiguity of reality. In "Minor Gods and Aztec Demons," Kirby Vickery writes: "Huehucóyotl, the Old Coyote is the Teotl (God) of dance, song, and mischief; he is the trickster who leads men astray ... He is a patron of liars, male sexuality, good

luck, story-telling, and hedonism" ("Minor"). According to poet and writer Karl Young, in the *Aztec Codex Borbonicus*, Huehuecōyotl is the trickster god that whimsically and unpredictably transforms himself into other animals or people. He delights in pranking both gods and humans. ("Iconographic Text 1: Huehuecōyotl: The Old, Old, Coyote"). In Aztec mythology, the prefix "hue," which means "old," was attached to those gods revered by humans for their age along with their wisdom, philosophical insights, and association with the divine. Huehuecōyotl translates to "Old, Old Coyote" or as "Old Man Coyote." As Chicano Coyote is a spiritual guide from an alternate reality for Castaneda, he very much behaves like Huehuecōyotl (Vickery "Minor").

As a trickster, Huehuecōyotl shares characteristics with gods such as Hermes and Mercury. Such tricksters are "lords of in-between" (Hyde 6). They have no home or hearth. Hyde writes:

[H]e does live in the halls of justice, the soldier's tent, the shaman's hut, the monastery. He passes through each of these when there is a moment of silence, and he enlivens each with mischief, but he is not their guiding spirit. He is the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town (the one where a little market springs up). He is the spirit of the road at dusk, the one that runs from one town to another and belongs to neither. (6)

Acting as such a trickster, as Huehuecōyotl, our Chicano Coyote first appears far away on the horizon at dusk to Castaneda. There on the horizon, a trick of the light within the shimmering waves of the desert oasis illuminates the possible figure of a man. Throughout that day, Castaneda manages to meander his way to the top of a high mesa with minimal food and water per Don Juan's instructions. Don Juan assigns him to climb and wander the mesa until he finds what he is searching for; yet, as a scholar, Castaneda has no idea what that might be. Don Juan instructs: "Now you must employ all the *not-doing* I have taught you and *stop the world*" (*Ixtlan* 247). Castaneda is lost in the liminality between literalism and metaphor, between science and phenomenology. As he sits, waiting and wondering, a sound storm of "sharp metallic" whirring that slowly diminishes into "a mesmerizing, melodious sound" announces Chicano Coyote's arrival. He gently trots towards Castaneda to help him stop the world and show him how to see (*Ixtlan* 247).

Chicano Coyote is a trickster in his wanderings and spirit-like appearances on the road at dusk; he occupies that liminal space and time between illumination and darkness—and he begins to show Castaneda the trickster within himself. Hyde writes that another important characteristic of the trickster is his almost insatiable appetite: "He

starts out hungry, but before long he is master of the kind of creative deception that, according to a long tradition, is a 'prerequisite of art'" (17). Huehuecōyotl materializes in answer to Castaneda's growling belly, which lacks the phenomenological teachings necessary to supplement his own scholarship. In other words, Castaneda has the training but not the experience to fully *know*—or to fully *embody*—what those teachings truly mean inside his own gut. He has knowledge, but no intuition, no inkling of how to employ that knowledge. However, Chicano Coyote is filled with such wisdom, which he willingly shares with Castaneda to transform his teachings into an embodied experience that fills his belly and feeds his soul. Don Juan states: "We men know very little about the world. A coyote knows much more than we do. A coyote is hardly ever fooled by the world's appearance" (*Separate* 41). In responding to the scholar's hunger, Chicano Coyote reveals Castaneda's own insatiable trickster appetite, which is perhaps the prerequisite to his "art" as a writer and researcher. Chicano Coyote, like Huehuecōyotl, possesses the uncanny ability to *stop the world* and *see* into other realms, beyond the veil. He is there to teach and to guide, to push gently toward wisdom and knowledge.

Castaneda sees the coyote trotting toward him, calm and unafraid. His friendly brown eyes meet Castaneda's. The scholar starts talking to the coyote as though he were a known dog who stopped for a visit. Then Chicano Coyote talks back, not so much in words, but in feelings that somehow communicate thoughts. The coyote asks Castaneda what he is doing there, and the apprentice replies that he is there to "stop the world." Chicano Coyote replies, "*Que bueno!*" At that moment, Castaneda comprehends that this is a bilingual coyote, who states nouns and verbs in English, and conjunctions and exclamations in Spanish. After a strange discussion and much laughter, Chicano Coyote rouses himself and again gazes into Castaneda's eyes. He transforms into an unforgettable iridescent, luminous being, liquid and fluid—and then disappears. Castaneda knows that he has discovered a secret but cannot put it into words or even thoughts, yet his body knows it (*Ixtlan* 250-53).

Castaneda was in that liminal space, that doorway to other realities. This creative chaos of visions maps a new road to different worlds, other realities. The birthing process of these possible alternative realities begins with altering our perception of formerly agreed-upon societal constructs of reality. For Castaneda, this means that he, too, is a trickster, his belly is filled with knowledge and the wisdom of utilizing it, he has experienced other realities. Likewise, Huehuecōyotl artfully shapeshifts into humans or other creatures to gain knowledge, share wisdom, or disrupt ordered truths. Don Juan also shapeshifts and moves freely between realms and has his world and understanding of it

disrupted. Don Juan reminds us, "the trick is to feel with your eyes" (Castaneda, *Ixtlan* 51).

Castaneda returns to Don Juan's house and recounts his adventure. Don Juan replies that the scholar has simply "*stopped the world*" of his eyes and witnessed the world through different eyes. He has felt with his eyes. He has seen the world as a sorcerer does. Castaneda cannot fathom what has happened. Finally, Don Juan tells him:

What stopped inside you yesterday was what people have been telling you the world is like. You see, people tell us from the time we are born that the world is such and such and so and so, and naturally we have no choice but to see the world the way people have been telling us it is . . ." (*Ixtlan* 254).

In other words, we perceive the world as we have been taught to see it. It takes strength and energy to see a different world, a different reality. Don Juan continues:

Yesterday the world became as sorcerers tell you it is. . . . In that world coyotes talk . . . But what I want you to learn is seeing. Perhaps you know now that seeing happens only when one sneaks between the worlds, the world of ordinary people and the world of sorcerers. You are now smack in the middle point between the two. Yesterday you believed the coyote talked to you. Any sorcerer who doesn't see would believe the same, but one who sees knows that to believe that is to be pinned down in the realm of sorcerers. By the same token, not to believe that coyotes talk is to be pinned down in the realm of ordinary men." (*Ixtlan* 254)

In other words, Castaneda met the Chicano Coyote, in the sorcerers' world. The coyote is real in that world. So, to understand, to make sense of this new knowledge, this unusual encounter with an iridescent, luminous talking coyote, he needs to be in that liminal space between worlds. Residing in that liminal space, Castaneda can bridge both worlds of reality. Does this mean that he has nowhere to go? No, he lives in the world of men, but keeps the portal open to journey into the sorcerers' world to gain otherworldly knowledge. Castaneda will interpret his experience with the coyote for himself while gaining a companion for life.

These traits also reside in Don Juan, as evidenced in his conversations with Castaneda, during which the scholar teaches the sorcerer how to become a "man of knowledge" (Castaneda, *Teachings* 62). A "man of knowledge," Don Juan explains, has four natural enemies: fear, clarity, power, and old age. When one starts learning, one never learns what one expected to learn. These unfulfilled expectations create a sense of fear, the first enemy. In order to rise

beyond fear, one must defy it and continue to learn even with extreme fear. In this manner, one conquers fear and achieves clarity. This sense of clarity erases fear, yet it is the second enemy because it leads one to stop questioning their thoughts, conclusions, and actions, for they think they can see clearly into all. This is make-believe power. The person with clarity will hesitate when they need to act and rush headlong into a situation when patience is the right move. To defeat this enemy and understand the next move one should make, one must use clarity to see, while simultaneously realizing that one's sense of clarity is ultimately an illusion. Then they have achieved true power—power that is seemingly at their command. Don Juan explains: "He will know at this point that the power he has been pursuing is finally his. He can do with it whatever he pleases, his ally is at his command. His wish is the rule. He sees all that is around him, but he has also come across his third enemy: Power!" (*Teachings* 64). In order to defeat the third enemy, power, one must defy it and discern that the power gained does not belong to them. Without self-control, clarity and power are worse than misconceptions. If one can reach this perception and hold oneself in check, one will know how and when to use power (Castaneda, *Teachings* 65).

The last of the enemies then, is old age. One can never completely defeat old age, but one can fight it. By that time, one will have a bone-deep tiredness and a desire to rest. One must then push forward or succumb and become a feeble creature (Castaneda, *Teachings* 65). Don Juan states: "But if the man sloughs off his tiredness, and lives his fate through, he can then be called a man of knowledge, if only for the brief moment when he succeeds in fight off his last, invincible enemy. That moment of clarity, power, and knowledge is enough" (*Teachings* 65). Although Don Juan sets forth explicit instructions for becoming this man of knowledge, embedded within those teachings are implicit, trickster-like warnings. Tricksters, especially coyotes, have an insatiable appetite that constantly moves them toward trouble. The trickster element within Don Juan's instructions lies within the conquering of one enemy in order to gain the next quality of a man of knowledge. Basically, the trick is to temper fear, clarity, and power with self-awareness, discernment, and self-control, while realizing that death will eventually win.

In order to master these enemies, Don Juan instructs Castaneda in "Eagle Emanations" (see Appendix A) which provide the keys to shift and play with his perception of reality. This reveals knowledge of an entirely different world that is just as real as the one we ordinarily inhabit. Sorcerers who journey to other realms do so to obtain energy, power, or keys to troubling issues for themselves and others, or even to face the imagined unimaginable to regain new insights on a subject. "Power is the strongest of all enemies," yet it can also be the strongest of allies if you are

willing to see through it, according to Don Juan (Castaneda, *Teachings* 64). When a sorcerer, shaman, or any person with power uses their influence and insight for betterment, they feed their belly with wisdom and enlightenment; or they can ignore the teachings, perhaps contorting them to the detriment of others, and create a “bellyache.”

Huehucóyotl’s ability to shapeshift makes him the perfect Aztec god to play with magic that can bring merriment to humans—or disaster if handled incorrectly. While many are familiar with his animal form, he can also shapeshift into a human, which allows him to dance, sing, and write poetry (Vickery “Minor”, Miller, and Taube 92). Castaneda can tap into that ability to shapeshift by smoking devil’s weed, also known as jimson or datura, with Don Juan. According to Andrew Weil, datura “is a common weed of Mexico and the American Southwest. It is known here because of its long association with Native American medicine, religion, and magic” (165).

Castaneda reports that on February 7, 1965, Don Juan guides him in smoking datura and shapeshifting into a crow. His mentor tells him that his body is disappearing like smoke, yet only his head remains. From his chin, two crow feet descend. Castaneda writes:

[Don Juan] commanded [me] to feel the legs and observe that they were coming out slowly. He then said that I was not solid yet, that I had to grow a tail and that the tail would come out of my neck. He ordered me to extend the tail like a fan, and to feel how it swept the floor. (*Teachings* 132).

Then crow’s wings emerged from his cheeks, which he had to flap until they were real wings. Next, the mentor instructed his student to wink until his head became the size of a crow while walking around and hopping until he lost stiffness (132–33). Castaneda slowly began to see the world through the eyes of a crow, and upon recording the experience as field work said:

I had no difficulty whatsoever eliciting the corresponding sensation to each one of commands. I had the perception of growing bird’s legs, which were weak and wobbly at first. I felt a tail coming out of the back of my neck and wings out of my cheekbones. The wings were folded deeply. I felt them coming out by degrees. The process was hard but not painful. Then I winked my head down to the size of a crow. But the most astonishing effect was accomplished with my eyes. My bird’s sight! (Castaneda 133)

Then on March 28, as Castaneda smokes again with Don Juan, he has a vision. His mentor throws him up into the air to fly, much like a mother bird does when it is time

to leave the nest. Castaneda falls and “walks” through the sky, where he meets “three silvery birds.” He writes: “They radiated a shiny, metallic light, almost like stainless steel, but intense, moving, and alive. I liked them. We flew together” (Castaneda 135). Datura, and other hallucinogenic drugs are used not only for flight, shapeshifting, and divination, but also to gain power. Indigenous peoples conceive the world as inundated with supernatural power which is not intrinsically good or evil, for its virtue lies in its potency. This power typically bellies up to people through the agency of a plant, animal, or natural phenomenon in the way of a dream or other hallucinatory experience. An ordeal or ritual instruction by a shaman or sorcerer generally, accompanies its acceptance (Harner, *Hallucinogens* 155). For Castaneda, Don Juan’s initiation in becoming a sorcerer included a hallucinogenic drug and ritual instruction on how to shapeshift into a crow for the flight that he took with the silvery birds.

In the real world, the one in which books are written and read, Castaneda’s first three books are considered by many to be the driving force behind neoshamanism and have sparked a renewed interest in pagan religions. He was awarded his doctorate by the University of California, Los Angeles, due to his research and his unforgettable accounts of sorcery and shamanism in *Journey to Ixtlan*. His works were accepted as authentic until 1976, when Richard DeMille debunked him and his writings with a very thorough analysis (Wallis 40). After DeMille’s critique, UCLA took back the Ph.D. in anthropology it had granted the scholar. As a result, Castaneda’s first three books, published initially as nonfiction, were later classified as fiction.

Yet the mystery remains. In 2013 in an excerpt of *The End of History: A Commentary On The Warrior’s Way: A System Of Knowledge First Reported In The Books Of Carlos Castaneda*, James L. Desper, Jr examines DeMille’s analysis, poking holes in many of the researcher’s claims. For instance, Desper writes that DeMille took certain entries out of context when it came to the concept of “seeing.” As an apprentice, Desper notes, Castaneda would have learned about seeing one step at a time, culminating in the event of seeing Chicano Coyote and integrating this vision into a new body of knowledge (1). DeMille’s analysis did not recognize the gradations of this learning, which may have resulted in a misconstrual of Castaneda’s account. Desper continues debunking the debunker, noting DeMille’s dismissal of the opinion of R. Gordon Wasson, an ethnobotanist who reported that Castaneda had answered and explained all of his questions concerning Don Juan and the authenticity of the gathering process of the plant hallucinogens. Furthermore, Wasson states that Castaneda represented himself as a serious and honest scholar, and that as a researcher, he has no reason to change his opinion of Castaneda and his work. DeMille states earlier that he

values Wasson's professional opinion, however he refuses to accept Wasson's evaluation of Castaneda and his work as authentic (Desper 2).

Whether or not Castaneda's books are fiction or non-fiction, all twelve continue to be read around the world, and none have gone out of print. He continues to have a devoted following. Staying true to the liminality of the trickster, Castaneda neither confirmed nor denied the authenticity of his writings. He remains an enigmatic figure, with an air of mystery surrounding his name and birthplace, his reclusiveness, his limited public appearances and interviews, and even his death. If his works are really fiction, he tricked many people in the field of academia and anthropology into not only accepting them but also praising them. It seems the trickster coyote continued to thrive as Castaneda made money, but lost respect and credibility. After studying Castaneda's life and works, it is my personal opinion that the wisdom he learned from the scandal, from Don Juan, and from Chicano Coyote kept him an outlier, a reclusive person still living in liminality and laughing uproariously at the chaos of humanity.

In conclusion, by exploring Castaneda's texts and reported experiences, we have filled our bellies with new knowledge and understanding of "stopping the world" and "seeing." The wounding of spirit and health during and after Castaneda's use of hallucinogenic plants prescribed by Don Juan leads to alternate realities of the world as he meets and converses with Chicano Coyote, opening his mind to a different way of gnosis. No longer can Castaneda live in a world governed totally by science. He must coexist in both worlds, the world of men and the world of sorcerers, with true understanding of knowledge occurring only in the liminal space between. As Don Juan states, "only as a warrior can we survive the path of knowledge" (Castaneda, *Separate* 214).

## APPENDIX A: DON JUAN'S INSTRUCTION ON THE ART OF INTENT AND AWARENESS

The mastery of intent is the riddle of the spirit [or the paradox of the abstract-sorcerers' thoughts and actions projected beyond our human condition] . . . [The mastery of intent] depended upon his instruction on the mastery of awareness, which was the cornerstone of his teachings, and which consist of the following basic premises

1. The universe is an infinite agglomeration of energy fields, resembling threads of light.
2. These energy fields, called the Eagle's emanations, radiate from a source of inconceivable proportions metaphorically called the Eagle.
3. Human beings are also composed of an incalculable number of the same threadlike energy fields. These Eagle's emanations form an encased agglomeration that manifests itself as a ball of light the size of the person's body with the arms extended laterally, like a giant luminous egg.
4. Only a very small group of the energy fields inside this luminous ball are lit up by a point of intense brilliance located on the ball's surface.
5. Perception occurs when the energy fields in that small group immediately surrounding the point of brilliance extend their light to illuminate identical energy fields outside the ball. Since the only energy fields perceivable are those lit by the point of or brilliance, that point is named "the point where perception is assembled" or simply "the assemblage point."
6. The assemblage point can be moved from its usual position on the surface of the luminous ball to another position on the surface, or into the interior. Since the brilliance of the assemblage point can light up whatever energy field it comes in contact with, when it moves to a new position it immediately brightens up new energy fields, making them perceivable. This perception is known as seeing.
7. When the assemblage point shifts, it makes possible the perception of an entirely different world—as objective and factual as the one we normally perceive. Sorcerers go into that other world to get energy, power, solutions to general and particular problems, or to face the unimaginable.
8. Intent is the pervasive force that causes us to perceive. We do not become aware because we perceive; rather, we perceive as a result of the pressure and intrusion of intent.
9. The aim of sorcerers is to reach a state of total awareness in order to experience all the possibilities of perception available to man. This state of awareness even implies an alternative way of dying. (Castaneda, *The Power of Silence* xv-xvi).

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Above image: Fresco of the house lararium, with Bacchus in the form of a bunch of grapes; below the agatodemon snake, a genius loci, looks towards an altar; in the background is the visible mountain of Vesuvius as it appeared before the eruption of 79 CE. National Archaeological Museum of Naples (inv. no. 112286. Image from Wolfgang Rieger / Public domain. Originally published in Marisa Ranieri Panetta (ed.): Pompeii. Geschichte, Kunst und Leben in der versunkenen Stadt. Belser, Stuttgart, 2005.



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