FOCUS AND SCOPE
The Mythological Studies Journal is dedicated to publishing original critical and theoretical essays that explore the understanding of human experience revealed in mythology and in the manifold links between myth, ritual, literature, art, and religious experience. Special attention is given to depth psychological and archetypal approaches to the study of myth.

The Mythological Studies Journal of Pacifica Graduate Institute is a student journal and features writing by current and former students of Pacifica’s Mythological Studies program. A peer-review board of students in responsible for selecting and reviewing writing for publication. The goals of the project are 1) to create a forum for the academic discussion of mythology, 2) to provide a working model for the process of revision and publication, and 3) to engage in an extended conversation with a professional community of scholars.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
The Mythological Studies Journal accepts submissions annually between October and February. All submissions must be accompanied by a cover letter that includes the author’s name, phone number, email address, paper abstract (100-200 words), and the title of the essay. The author’s name should appear on the cover page only. All essay submissions must be between 8-15 pages double-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font. Formatting should follow the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th ed.), with parenthetical citations, end notes, and works cited. For more details on the guidelines for submission and the review process, please visit the journal’s website:

http://journals.sfu.ca/pgi/index.php/pacificamyth/index

Mythological Studies Journal © Copyright 2014.
All rights revert to contributors upon publication.
VOLUME 5 (2014)
ARTICLES

Good Man Down:
The Myth of Masculine Violence in American Society
David S. McCabe
1

Violence and Veneration:
Tapping a Sadomasochistic Vein in the American Psyche
Angelina Avedano
11

Soul-Making and the Colorado Shooting:
James Holmes as the Joker, Trickster, Savior
Michael Bogar
21

Demeter as Temenos:
A Perspective of Understanding Postpartum Depression
Stephanie Zajchowski
31

Shading in a Violent Shadow: A Hero’s Confrontation
with the American Shadow in Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas
Leontine Armstrong
39
Good Man Down: The Myth of Masculine Violence in American Society

David S. McCabe

Abstract
It is a tough time to be a man in America. Young men drop out of high school in far greater numbers than young women. Men are less likely than women to go to college and pursue advanced degrees. Men are more likely to be incarcerated, commit acts of violence and abuse drugs and alcohol. During the current recession, men have been hit the hardest; trades traditionally dominated by men are the slowest to recover. Men have been systematically disenfranchised and isolated in America leaving many men without the support of family, positive male role models and increasingly limited career options. Such contemporary conditions leave one to wonder who benefits from a society where young men are un-mentored, isolated and without direction? This article examines the role that myth has played in helping young men answer enduring questions about what it means to be a man and what consequences emerge when such guidance is absent.

Keywords
masculinity, myth, violence, hero journey, mentor, American studies

It makes no difference what men think of war, said the judge. War endures. As well ask men what they think of stone. War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way.

— McCarthy (Blood Meridian 248)

Myth addresses the eternal questions: What is the world really like? How can I truly be myself in this world? How am I to live my life in it? The answers offered to us by myths are definite and they are intended to reveal an understanding of life and human nature. In Raffaele Pettazzoni’s essay “The Truth of Myth,” he contends that myth is “not pure fiction; it is not fable, but history, a ‘true story’ and not a ‘false’ one. It is a true story because of its contents which are an account of events that really took place” (Pettazzoni 102). He further asserts that these true stories are sacred because they “belong to the beginnings of things, the origin of the world and of mankind” (102). Perhaps then, it is no
surprise that every human civilization has celebrated stories of men overcoming great odds through strength and courage. However, a problem arises when a society produces men who cannot distinguish the difference between courage and righteous anger and senseless violence and savagery.

The late child psychiatrist and writer Bruno Bettelheim defined a paradoxical but inescapable fact that ultimately speaks to our humanity: “Man and society are born out of both: violence and gentle cooperation” (102). In other words, how these two forces are balanced within an individual helps determine their behavior, their character and perhaps even their sanity. One can similarly argue that how these forces are balanced within society helps to determine its political organization, its economy and the overall disposition of its civilization. In the United States today, it seems too much that violence is far surpassing cooperation, chaos trumps order, and brutality eclipses reason. While the overall crime rate in the U.S. declines, the rate of mass murders committed continues to rise. Fear of the darkened urban street has become a maxim of inner-city life, while parents in suburban communities contemplate purchasing bulletproof backpacks in the wake of the massacre at Sandy Hook, Connecticut, where twenty-year-old Adam Lanza fatally shot twenty children and six adults at an elementary school shortly after he killed his own mother (Chumley). While the jarring effects of such senseless brutality may be enough to momentarily jolt Americans from their long nap and prompt parents to send their children to school adorned in body armor, it is doubtful that the events at Sandy Hook, or the 2012 mass shooting inside a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, or the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre will burn into our collective consciousness in the same matter that the Kennedy assassination did for our parents and grandparents.

While the world may be ready to simply judge America as an excessively violent country in which brutal, irrational violence can erupt at any moment, the source of such brutality is complex and might even be nurtured by a degradation of the myths we retell and celebrate as a people. The American folklore of violence is well portrayed throughout the entertainment industry, manifesting itself in big screen cinema, television, children’s cartoons and video games. Such celebration of violence invites speculation as to whether there is a connection between violence embedded in American entertainment and a U.S. murder rate that far exceeds nearly every other developed country. The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program reported that violent crime in the U.S. inched up 0.7 percent in 2012 from the previous year. There were 4.7 murders per 100,000 people. This compares with seven in England, 1.4 in Canada, 1.5 in France, and 0.5 in Japan. The leading violent nation is Mexico where 32 Mexicans were killed for every 100,000 in population.¹

The United States of America is arguably the most masculine nation on earth. It is not possible to fully comprehend our own history without first understanding masculinity. Even neophytes with a limited understanding of the past cannot fail to see the influence of the male in American culture. It is not surprising that characteristics such as dominance, authority, courage and control are viewed largely as manly virtues. Men believe (or ardently wish to believe) that the future depends on them; that within each man rests an inherent ability to sire
or mentor great men who will become the heroes of sons yet unborn. As men, it is our quiet longing that we (or even our own sons) might become, or at least associate with, such heroes. From where, then, do the seeds of violence originate?

Sigmund Freud found a “powerful measure of desire for aggression” in human instincts. He added, “the very emphasis of the Commandment ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’ makes it certain that we are descended from an endlessly long chain of generations of murderers, whose love of murder was in their blood, as it is perhaps also in ours” (Freud 60-61). Additionally Freud held that man possesses a death instinct, which, since it cannot be satisfied except in suicide, is instead turned outward as aggression against others. Even if one disagrees with this premise, the reality is that violence is crude and dangerous not only for the victims, but for those who use it.

Throughout every generation in America, manhood has been placed at the center of life and progress. This prestige creates a tension where men are called upon to uphold traditions associated with masculinity, while simultaneously trying to redefine what it means to be a man. Young men today find themselves in a complex world with few norms, sparse rituals and where gender roles are increasingly difficult to define. The very meaning of manhood is constantly under scrutiny by feminists, religious fundamentalists, and legislators, while popular media makes use of a political and gender stereotyping that promotes its own version of manhood. This effort to change our understanding of masculinity is not foreign for it is human nature to search for new frontiers, for sons to be different than their fathers. How we do this, while cultivating the virtues of manhood, is a significant task.

Perhaps the best ideal of manhood can be found embedded in the mythic motif of the hero’s journey. Man, in search of his own identity and self-realization, discovers the opposites within himself and sets out to reconcile them. Across every mythology the world has ever known, this is the story of the hero’s quest. It is the search for the Holy Grail. It is the courageous search for something lost. In his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes the hero’s journey in the following manner: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (30). This hero’s adventure is carried out in a cycle consisting of three phases: Departure, where the hero courageously leaves his comfortable and familiar world and ventures into the darkness of the unknown; Initiation, where the hero is subjected to a series of tests in which he must prove his courage; and Return, in which the hero brings the boon of his quest back for the benefit of his people. In the Western tradition most discussions of courage have been dominated by the idea that courage “is a virtue that we summon out of ourselves when confronted by someone or something terrifying” (Newell 50) in order to achieve victory through force. However, is this brand of courage a character trait that we should really be cultivating in our young men? Is it, in fact, the same virtue that Homer, Aristotle, and the Bible consistently maintained? Or has the notion of manly courage been corrupted by the same media that celebrates it?
The last three decades have been marked with numerous examples of young men transformed into mass murderers, seemingly without warning. Whether one considers the Tucson shooter Jared Loughner, Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh or Columbine High School killers Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, each tragic event leaves survivors as well as friends and family members of the perpetrator dumbfounded and wondering how they could miss the warning signs.

While it may be an oversimplification to say that young men who commit grave crimes are alienated, detached individuals with weak emotional bonds with their fathers or father figures, recent events seem to reveal a correlation between weak familial bonds, video game obsession and senseless violence. For example, Seung-Hui Cho, the Korean-American youth who killed thirty-two people and wounded seventeen others on April 16, 2007, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia, had a strong fascination with violent video games and mass killers in addition to having weak emotional ties to his family. Similarly in July 2012, James Eagan Holmes killed twelve and injured fifty-eight people in a shooting rampage in an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater. Holmes was described as intellectually gifted, talkative, friendly and an avid video game player. The reported motives for the Sandy Hook rampage have focused largely on Adam Lanza’s mental health, his obsession with violent video games and a fascination with mass killers, however little has been said about his strained relationship with his mother and the breakdown in his relationship with his father. Adam’s mother and father separated in 2001 and later divorced. While Adam and his father had regular interactions after the divorce, when Adam turned eighteen, he stopped communication with his father altogether.

In his essay “A Child’s Need for Magic,” Bruno Bettelheim reminds us that as soon as “a child begins to move about and explore, he begins to ponder the problem of his identity” (47). Just like the great philosophers, children are searching for the solutions to the first and enduring questions: Who am I? How ought I to deal with life’s problems? What must I become? It is important that as children begin to explore and to test these questions that they have a template to follow. Throughout history, myth has served that purpose. What happens, then, when the narrative is altered, clouded or replaced with something cold, numb and fundamentally brutal?

As numerous studies demonstrate, young men are more prone than girls to spontaneous aggressive behavior. The most notorious example of this can be found in Timothy McVeigh, the product of a broken home, who searched for something to blame for his terminal drift and rootlessness. The result was a warped fantasy that the American government is in fact the “Zionist occupying authority” suppressing individual liberties on behalf of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. However, often there are no ideological or political motivations for such violent rampages. The killers at Columbine were simply young men who felt excluded from the “in crowd.”

Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, a retired infantry officer and an expert on the psychology of violence, has worked tirelessly to alert parents and educators to the corrosive effects of what he calls the “virus of violence”
(Grossman 303). He believes there is a direct link between society’s glamorization of violence in video games, television and the movies and the search for recognition and acceptance by alienated young men through rampage killings of the kind that took place at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech. He describes the shocking similarity he sees between violence portrayed through a variety of media (i.e. television, first-person shooter video games, movies) and the techniques used by the Marines and other military organizations to desensitize soldiers to the moral impact of inflicting death in combat. However, killing loses its horror when it becomes repetitive and carried out against your enemies whom you are conditioned to regard as completely alien to yourself. It is important to note that the military uses these techniques only in the dire situation of war, the last resort of national self-defense. Television and other electronic media desensitize young men to the existence of their fellow citizens, classmates, and parents. While professional soldiers are taught to direct ability to kill beyond U.S. borders and restricted to those comparatively rare episodes when foreign combatants imperil Americans, the climate of violence fed by the entertainment industry spreads without such prejudice and without any military safeguards or support.

Of all the traditional virtues, none is more intimately connected with masculinity than courage in war. In fact, in both ancient Greek and Latin, the words for courage are synonyms of the words for manly virtue. Andreia, the Greek word for courage is derived from the word for a “manly man,” Aner; similar to the Spanish word hombre. In Greek, a manly man is understood in contrast with anthropos (“mere human beings”), the undistinguished mass of mankind that includes women, children, slaves and others who did not own the privilege to bear arms. As for the Latin, the word associated with manly man is vir. This term is connected with virtue of any kind, or virtus, implying that all excellence of character can be summed up beneath the banner of manly courage. The full story of the traditional morality of manhood is a bit more complicated. Philosophers have argued that courage is a necessary but not sufficient condition for becoming a fully virtuous man. According to Western canon, every man needs to acquire courage in order to defend his country and family in war. Bravery in a just war is to be admired and is deserving of public honor and commemoration in art and literature. In the instance of a just war, violence is sanctified and is the story that the rulers told each other and their subordinates and is what we today might call the myth of redemptive violence. It enshrines the belief that violence can save, that war can bring peace, that “might makes right.” It is one of the oldest stories in the world.

The idea that violence “saves” is so prevalent largely because, at first glance, it does not seem to be mythic in the least. Freud contends in his psychoanalytic theory that aggression is an innate personality characteristic common to all humans. Therefore, it is easy to adopt the belief that violence simply is the natural order of things. It is what works. It seems inevitable and serves as the last and, often, the first resort in resolving disputes. If a god is what you turn to when all else fails, arguably, in every human society, violence certainly functions as a god. This godliness reveals to us the religious character of
violence. It demands from its devotees an absolute obedience unto death, whether that end comes in the heat of conflict or, as often happens, by the young men who carry out massacres with their own hands.

Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* is unquestionably the most violent novel ever written. It is also one of the most powerful literary attempts to capture man’s propensity toward violence. The carnage that rises so sharply from the pages exists seemingly only to break one’s spirit as a reader. The mercenaries in the book and the narrative that follows present us with a nonstop onslaught of cruelty after cruelty as if to make our minds numb to the unspeakable inhumanity that McCarthy presents to us. For example, early in the book, we find the Glanton Gang are greeted with one grotesque act after another, from a mule impaled with a lance and left to die in the desert to a mesquite bush adorned with dead infants:

[...]

For the characters in this novel, the world is a violent place where war is not merely a conflict between men, but a god. With rare exception, the characters do not seem to be bound by any sort of morality, but adhere to what the Judge refers to as “historical law,” which seems to grant permission for the strong to manipulate or prey on the weak, which the characters do without hesitation.

The inspiration for this novel comes from the autobiography of Civil War Commander Samuel Chamberlain, *My Confession*, where he recounts his youth with the notorious Glanton Gang, a group of American mercenaries hired by the Mexican government to slaughter Native Americans. Even though the characters repeatedly demonstrate courage in battle, the actions taken by these soldiers of fortune in no way approximate the criteria for a just war. They are violent because the environment they inhabit is violent and they are numb to it.

Similarly, Grossman believes that violence has been trivialized by its prevalence in the entertainment industry, to the point where the young people watching it are so desensitized that they cannot distinguish between the fantasy version and the real thing. Even when they confront it directly, children can confuse real-life violence with something they have seen on a screen and react as if they were detached spectators enjoying a completely fictitious act of carnage (Grossman 310). Dr. Paul Weigle, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Joshua Center in Enfield, Connecticut, cites cases where young men like Adam Lanza trained for their violent rampages through the use of first-person shooter video games like *Doom, Call of Duty* and *Grand Theft Auto*. Dr. Wiegle also cited the case of Devin Moore, an Alabama teen with no prior convictions or history of violence when he was brought in by police on a minor traffic violation. Once inside the police station, Moore seized a gun from a police officer and shot three officers, the n stole a police cruiser to make his escape. After his capture, Moore said he was inspired by the game *Grand Theft Auto*, explaining to the police,
“Life is a video game, everybody’s got to die sometime” (“Devine Moore”). What is missing from such logic is the recognition that violence is not power. In the end, it is an admission of failure and an act of cruelty. Violence is not the only narrative left in which to appeal for resolution or to call out for help.

In his thesis Myth and Story, Theodor Gaster effectively distinguishes myth from story. He informs us that the difference between the two is not simply semantics, but in the function and motivation for each. He clarifies the distinctions of the two by suggesting that all tales are not myths: “A myth is, or once was, used; a tale is, and always was, merely told” (Gaster 123). The efficacy of the myth lies in its ability to make meaning of and preserve the world. The authority of myth lies in the magic of the word, in its evocative power to call order out of chaos. The apparent rise in mass murder perpetrated by young men begs the question: Has the entertainment industry, with its glamorization of violence filled the void left by absentee parents and mentors and ultimately sequestered the sacred function of myth?  

It is important to acknowledge the fact that most young men who play video games, such as the ones described in this paper, do not emerge from their bedrooms, arm themselves and engage in acts of carnage against the innocent. Unfortunately, however, there are a few that choose to exercise in the real world the violence that they engage in in their virtual domain. There was a time that young men might strive to imitate the courage and valor demonstrated by the heroes and gods celebrated in the Homeric Hymns, the Iliad and the Odyssey. Therefore, it gives one reason to pause at the thought that now young men instead aspire to imitate car thieves and mass murderers portrayed in the entertainment culture. It is reminiscent of the heated exchange between President Andrew Shepherd and Lewis Rothschild, the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, in the 1995 film The American President, where Rothschild challenges Shepherd to take a stand and lead the nation:

ROTHSCHILD. The American people want leadership. And in the absence of genuine leadership, they will listen to anyone who steps up to the microphone. They’re so thirsty for it, they’ll crawl through the desert toward a mirage, and when they discover there’s no water, they’ll drink the sand.

SHEPHERD. Lewis, we’ve had presidents who were beloved, who couldn’t find a coherent sentence with two hands and a flashlight. People don’t drink the sand because they’re thirsty, Lewis. They drink it because they don’t know the difference.

Being a male in our contemporary society is difficult. What is happening throughout America today is a psychological, cultural and economic shift in how we understand masculinity. Statistically, young men drop out of high school in greater numbers than young women; they are less likely than women to pursue advanced degrees, and more likely to be incarcerated and commit acts of violence and abuse drugs and/or alcohol. Additionally, as a result of the Great Recession, the unemployment rate of men aged 18 to 30 far exceeds that of women, as the vocational trades currently dominated by men continue to be the slowest to
recover. These circumstances disenfranchise young men in America. Such conditions provoke inquiry regarding who in our society benefits when young men are left un-mentored and without a sense of purpose or direction? Are we raising men in America who truly cannot distinguish between courage and carnage? Are we cultivating multiple generations of young men who are “drinking the sand” because they do not know the difference?

NOTES

1 All statistical data was acquired from a 2013 report published by the official Federal Bureau of Investigation’s website.


3 In the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle and Socrates assert that virtues, such as courage, seem to require intellectual virtue.

Works Cited


Good Man Down


About the Author

DAVID S. McCABE has been a professor of education and education program coordinator at Pasadena City College since 2005. He holds a BA in History from UC Riverside and a Masters in Public Administration from CSU San Bernardino, and is currently completing coursework in Pacifica Graduate Institute’s PhD program in Mythological Studies. He has presented papers at more than two dozen conferences and has been published in numerous journals. His novel *Without Sin* was published by Sunstone Press in 2012. David’s entire career has been dedicated to education and improving the lives of children. Issues of diversity and equity are at the heart of his pedagogy. His thirst for adventure and social justice have provided him with the opportunity to travel the world, even earning him the distinction of spending the night in jail with Tom Morello. Despite donning a suit and tie for his professional work as an educator, David is a country boy at heart, who is most comfortable in cowboy boots and jeans, and prefers dirt roads rather than paved streets and quiet starry nights to city lights.
Violence and Veneration: 
Tapping a Sadomasochistic Vein in the American Psyche

Angelina Avedano

Abstract
The recent hype about E. L. James’ Fifty Shades of Grey has reinvigorated a dialogue about sadomasochism. Even more compelling, however, is the notion that the desire to exert power over and to surrender oneself to another is an inherent part of being human. Duality is part and parcel of power dynamics. Likewise, the potential to subvert traditional representations of these dynamics plays out in a sadomasochistic terrain, where boundaries between Dominant/submissive, Divine/human, and violence/veneration become fluid. These principles extend to the Divine/human relationships evidenced in the Hebrew scriptures, which inform Judaism, as well as Christian traditions. Such sadomasochistic ideologies have become, implicitly and explicitly, fundamental to American social consciousness. This, in part, explains the fetishistic fascination of Fifty Shades. Often overlooked is the recognition that the sadomasochistic terrain is a locus of transformation: a domain of release, transmutation, and ecstatic experience.

Key Words
sadomasochism, divine/human, polarity, power, transformation

Much to the chagrin of the literary community, Fifty Shades of Grey created a firestorm in early 2013. E. L. James’ inane treatment of the complexity of sadomasochism, otherwise known as Dominance/submission (SMDS), trivializes a sophisticated subculture. Nonetheless, evidenced by its tremendous popularity, Shades tapped a deep vein in the collective American psyche. It is irrelevant whether or not James adequately portrayed the subversive dynamics at work in SMDS, also known as BDSM—a blended abbreviation for bondage/discipline, Dominance/submission, and sado-/masochism. What is more compelling is the overwhelming response her pedestrian and, frankly, juvenile approach garnered. James became the world’s highest earning author in 2013 with sales topping $95 million (Bury). The numbers speak for themselves; and one cannot deny the public’s voracious, voyeuristic appetite to vicariously play out, what might be interpreted as, violent fetishistic fantasies.
Dualistic aspects of power and subordination appear to feed these, arguably, sexualized desires. However, a question emerges whether the complex interactions that comprise the dynamics of Dominance/submission replicate, or are being replicated by, divine/human relationships and their corresponding ritualized manifestations, where god/s (and their representatives, such as priests, prophets, and gurus) are venerated. This essay will specifically focus on Hebraic treatments of the Divine/human relationship in an attempt to excavate a sadomasochistic terrain, which undergirds Jewish and Christian monotheistic traditions, and as such, is a part of the warp and weft of the fabric of American consciousness. It is, likewise, a call to suspend assumptions about SMDS, since what may masquerade as violence may actually be a mechanism to recover and/or reenact religious or spiritual ecstasies, which also carry a therapeutic potential.

Downing recognizes that there are myriad “mythical illuminations of the psyche”; “each god represents a different aspect” (194). As such, the Hebrew god Jehovah, or Yahweh, elicits certain facets in the psyche, as well as specific dynamics in terms of the Divine/human relationship. Jack Miles stipulates this all-encompassing and contradictory Lord God is “he” who is ever-caught in an interminable double bind of being “Lord of Heaven” and “Friend of the Poor,” “tender, solicitous husband” and “sword-in-hand butcher”: a divine being with “no cosmic opponent but himself” (408). Jehovah is, at once, violent and valiant, castigating and compassionate, sadistic and sympathetic. This Lord God illustrates and illuminates conflicting aspects within the individual psyche, as well as the overlapping boundaries between them. Discovering those boundaries, toying with and transgressing them, is the human project of individuation. Furthermore, per Miles’ view, “Our nearest approach to [God] may be through human beings whose own psychosocial development has been forced out of the usual order” (231). Being engaged in relationships with others is, therefore, a viable means of working out, or working at, our connection to the Divine.

In order to subvert the self or ego, whether it is under the command of God, the rigorous instruction of the guru, or the Master’s leather whip, the task is to identify and disengage from the will. The presence of the Lord/Master confronts and incites the devotee/submissive; and through a series of increasingly difficult tasks, sacrifices, and renunciations the ego is laid bare. Once laid bare, only then can the ego be transcended, or rather, holistically integrated. The sadomasochist dynamic thus serves to expose the self to the Self. It reveals the ego to the integrative consciousness within each individual, illuminating the bondage and boundaries encountered in binary perceptions. This view correlates with Ken Wilbur’s Integral Theory, an approach he describes as the “coherent organization, coordination, and harmonization of all of the relevant practices, methodologies, and experiences, available to human beings” (“Who is Ken Wilbur?”). Integral space, thus, expands into transgressive space; it is precisely this transgressive space in the SMDS arena that has the potential to disrupt and dislodge polarities, as well as the internal tension inherent in holding them simultaneously. SMDS players, in their roles as Doms (Dominants) and subs (submissives), enact these dynamics; and ideally, tap into their therapeutic and/or transformative potentials.
Violence and Veneration

Borrowing definitions from sociologist Staci Newmahr, certain notable Divine/human interactions between the Hebrew God, Jehovah, and his prophets can be juxtaposed with the sophisticated “play” of SMDS practitioners. Intrinsic aspects of sovereignty and surrender evidence similarities between the two. While a veiled sadomasochist dynamic between God and his people is considered sacred, sadomasochism in its more explicit applications is identified as sensual, or rather, consensual. “SM” refers to activities that involve the mutually consensual and conscious use among two or more people of pain, power, perceptions about power, or any combination thereof, for sensory or erotic pleasure, in the context of a public community. “Play” is used as both a noun and a verb to describe SM interactions and “scene” refers to an instance of play as well as to the broader SM community. (Newmahr 315-316)

Newmahr is careful to stipulate that the SM communities she focuses on in her ethnological analysis are not to be confused with individuals who practice “kinky bedroom games” or practice BDSM behind closed doors; they are established groups “organized around SM, who practice and observe SM in particular public spaces and attend informational and educational meetings” (316). As a participant observer in the SM community, Newmahr was able to explore the eroticism and experiential principles of SM; however she differentiates complex SM behaviors from sex, in that they are not coextensive; while they are, often, perceived as such (316). Newmahr’s analysis deviates from the caricature of sadomasochistic play that, for many, has become a point of entry (due in large part to misinterpretations like Shades). This distortion perpetuates the belief that SMDS is nothing more than a series of adult play dates where kink is the order of the day.

Conversely, the therapeutic and psychological benefits of SMDS mirror those found in religious practice. This raises questions about innate desires for, or psychological proclivties toward the transgression of boundaries related to power and concurrent explorations of mechanisms that trigger transcendent experience. Newmahr lists similar “durable benefits” of “serious leisure,” which can include activities like kayaking, mountain climbing and snowboarding”; these experiences instigate a host of positive experiences that comprise “self-actualization, self-expression, feelings of accomplishment, self-renewal, self-image, social interaction and attraction, a sense of belonging, and lasting physical products” (327; 322). Such beneficial outcomes are similar to those induced by ritual observances in religious communities. In addition, the relational dynamics between worshippers and the Divine—either directly, or through intermediaries (rabbis, priests, prophets, and imams)—include, but are not limited to, monotheistic traditions wherein dynamics of sovereignty and surrender are assumed, and/or reversed.

Individuals charged with the responsibility of acting as guides, protectors, and/or mediators in religious communities serve dual purposes. While they represent and enact submissive devotion to the Divine they, likewise, hold a position of spiritual authority, which situates them in a dominant role. Adherents defer to their spiritual masters. Alternately seen as prophets, teachers, and servants, these leaders model sovereignty and surrender; they straddle the
Dominant/submissive divide. Their existence signals that duality is both reality and illusion.

In Hebrew Scriptures, those called by God, for one reason or another, characteristically wrestle with the Divine. Often, they may resist the call; however, they eventually surrender to God’s relentless pursuits. This raises the question whether engagement with the Divine is consensual or coerced. For Jacob, the scene is played out literally when he wrestles with, and is wounded by, God’s messenger on the eve of a reconciliation with the brother he betrayed years earlier. Jacob, escaping fourteen years of servitude under his father-in-law, Laban, directs his family and servants to take everything he owns across the Jabbok River into his brother Esau’s territory. He is then left to reflect on his transgressions and to ultimately fight for a blessing from God; here, he must fight for that which he purloined from his brother.

Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched his hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for dawn is breaking.” But he answered, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” (Gen. 32:25-27)

A sadomasochistic terrain is mapped in this overt act. However, it is but a recapitulation of an ongoing dynamic that has been set in motion long before. In Rebekah’s womb, Jacob and Esau were contentious opponents. Rebekah’s concern led her to seek Jehovah’s intervention, whereupon God declared a prophecy: “There are two nations in your womb. From birth they will be two rival peoples. One of these peoples will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). As such, the patterns of Dominance and submission that were established in utero reflect a much deeper truth: they are congenital.

The sadomasochistic dynamic between Jacob and Esau is, by its very nature, paradoxical. Tension ensues from the inevitability of birthright and prophecy at crosscurrents with will and agency. Echoes of this tension can be traced to accounts of Adam and Eve in the Hebraic text. As a result of human transgression and the “fall” from Divine favor, the Hebrew God curses Eve: “I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). Similarly, God castigates Adam: “Accursed be the soil because of you! Painfully will you get your food from it as long as you live” (Gen. 3:17). Pain and submission are forever commingled in God’s prophetic pronouncement. The first couple made a choice and took action. As such, they unknowingly entered the masochistic realm. Their exile becomes the point of separation from the Divine that gives rise to the initial tension of polarities, from which desire is born. Desire comes as pain and promise—as curse and pledge—and therefore, inherently engenders the paradox of the sadomasochistic dynamic. The fruit of this reinvented relationship between Adam and Eve is Cain and Abel. The relationship
between the two brothers signals the first violent eruption in the Hebrew text (unless one considers expulsion from the garden a “violent” severing of humanity from Divine presence). Regardless, as Cain kills Abel, the polarity of domination and subordination is replicated to its most sadistic end; and the precedent is set.

When Jacob colludes with his mother, Rebekah, to steal Esau’s blessing, a sadomasochistic dynamic is evident once again. Yet, the fundamental essence of this dynamic is its tendency toward reversals. Much like the proverbial wrestling match, where opponents find themselves alternately in dominant and submissive positions, the notions of power throughout the story are questioned. Jacob, above all, displays this volte-face.

Jacob obtains a blessing that sets him above his brothers; he has dominion over them, as well as all the surrounding territories, according to his father Isaac. The blessing illustrates a sadomasochistic terrain, when Isaac pronounces: “Let people serve you, And nations bow to you; / Be master over your brothers, / And let your mother’s sons bow to you. / Cursed be they who curse you, / Blessed be they who bless you” (Gen. 27:29). In his annotation of the text, Levensen points out that the “reversal of the order of fertility and domination” in Isaac’s blessing, “reflects the reversal of Esau’s expectations” (Jewish Study Bible 57). There is indeed an explicit reversal of the natural, patriarchal order, wherein the eldest son receives the father’s blessing. Moreover, Jacob’s servitude, and subsequent triumph following Isaac’s declaration, illustrates that established power structures will be characteristically thwarted in a sadomasochistic terrain. Jacob must leave his home to escape Esau’s wrath, and finds himself enduring anything but the dominion he was promised. He becomes the indentured servant of his father-in-law, Laban.

Once Jacob extricates himself from fourteen years in Laban’s service, he is no longer under the control of a master. He journeys out of familiar territory, and alone, he must confront his most significant transgression: the betrayal of his brother. It is here that he encounters his Divine opponent. Jacob’s supernatural adversary, however, does not subdue him, though he does injure his thigh. Instead, the reciprocity of the sadomasochist dynamic comes into full view when the grappling match ends at daybreak and Jacob receives his blessing along with a new name, and a permanent limp.

Jehovah’s role in the sadomasochistic dynamic is revealed in the patterns of pursuit and punishment throughout the text. Moreover, the Lord God initiates, and simultaneously identifies with, human suffering. Fishbane stipulates God’s punitive tendencies are coextensive with his empathic sensibilities when he analyzes the paradox of the Divine (163). Jehovah is illustrative of the notion that dominant power is inextricably linked with subservient surrender. Thus, a reciprocal suffering is implied in the sadomasochist dynamic that queries the very nature of the Dominant as sadistic, and worries the line between aggression and agony—God’s aggression becomes his own agony. Violence becomes the mechanism through which veneration is realized.

Jehovah God is the ultimate Dom: a “permanently threatening presence,” which is “dangerously unpredictable” (Miles 46). The masochistic response to His immanence is enacted through traditionally accepted notions, or paradigms, which
identify the principal elements of masochism as a contract (or covenant), anticipation, and surrender (MacCormack 111). Once the covenant is established, the “persecutor,” according to MacCormack, “incarnates variously as Oedipal mother or father, as imagined sadist or, most commonly, as slave to the masochist’s demand for mastery of their own pleasure” (111). Therein lays the reciprocity. In the Dom/sub exchange, the Master exposes insecurity and shame, isolating and manipulating them, while paradoxically surrendering to the submissive’s sine qua non need to be dominated. In turn, participants find that shame and surrender have the potential to be transmuted into release, transformation, and/or ecstatic experience.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben contemplates the notion that shame can be transformed into pleasure in the domain of sadomasochism. He asserts that shame, at crucial moments, occupies the space where the masochistic subject confronts himself only in response to his Master; likewise the Master can only “assume” his role “by transmitting pleasure to the slave through infinite instruction and punishment” (108). Agamben notes that the masochist’s suffering can be immediately transformed into delight only through the Master’s utilization of shame—that which instigates an awareness of duality: “self-loss and self-possession, servitude and sovereignty” (107-109). The Master enacts subjectification for both parties. The derivative consciousness is a resurgence of presence that can be tolerated only in the fluidity between Dominant and submissive, an interplay that reveals their opposition as indistinguishable (127; 109). Shame becomes the intolerable space in which annihilation and presence become, if only briefly, united.

In a discourse that invokes the atrocities of the Holocaust, the validity of a perspective that implies any remote possibility of pleasure is called into question. Agamben’s project to delineate subjectivity and desubjectivity under the gloss of shame is eclipsed by what might be considered a lack of sensitivity, savvy, or common sense. However, by toying with an ultimate taboo (the Holocaust), Agamben situates the dialogue directly in a sadomasochistic territory, and signals the epitome of transgressive space, where sacred and secular collide.

Prior and Cusack’s research on the socio-religious function of gay bathhouses in Sydney, Australia, in the mid-20th century has determined the blurred lines between sacred and secular spheres. Similar to Newmahr’s acknowledgement of the benefits of serious leisure, their work recognizes that the sacred is found in secular activities including “sport, rock music, psychoanalysis, and sexuality” (271). Acknowledging that these gay bath houses became “crucial transformative space[s]” for the men who frequented them, Prior and Cusack have contributed to a discourse that recognizes transgressive space as a potential site for psycho-spiritual work. From there, the leap is not insurmountable to SMDS as a mechanism for spiritual transformation. Furthermore, what these exercises in alterity uncover is that, indeed, sacred and subversive are not mutually exclusive when it comes to matters of therapeutic relationships. Downing affirms:

\[\text{Healing love is mutual love seen in Jungian terms as the sacred marriage and sometimes envisioned through what is taboo or}\]
Sadomasochistic relationships are, more often than not, considered “deviant” love. However, in the context of a consensual SMDS contract, they enact a similar covenant to that between Jehovah and his people. When sadomasochism is pathologized, as it often is, the dynamic principles at work are overlooked for a simplistic version that can only be defined in terms of polarity. Polarity can lead to an imbalance of power that foments abusive, colonial oppression in all its forms, which has been a predominant point of contention for advocates of feminism, who rightly deem such pathological behavior as a threat. Yet, to pathologize behaviors related to Dominance/submission is to inevitably pathologize a God who most evidently embodies these characteristics. As such, Jehovah becomes the gleeful sadist who derives pleasure from inflicting pain in his intimate interactions with the Israelites. He is portrayed as a capricious persecutor—a Divine bully arbitrarily wielding a magnifying glass poised over an anthill.

On the other hand, the sadomasochistic dynamic can be recognized for its potential to radically re-envision power exchanges by realizing and overturning the balance of power between the Master and submissive—a reversal close to the heart of the feminist ideal. Fishbane goes one step further when he asserts that the “balance of power” between the Hebrew God and his people is “given into the hands of humans, whose every action is deemed a crucial component of the divine whole” (313). These perspectives indicate that the Master/Lord is defined by the sadomasochistic exchange in much the same way as the devotee/submissive. In fact, perceived polarities (including gender) become fluid once they are identified and accepted as intrinsic aspects of all human and/or divine beings.

Hebrew prophets exemplify the extreme nature of living in the sadomasochistic terrain. They embody the Divine/human polarities to such a degree that their presence is intolerable. Heschel’s analysis of the Hebrew prophets points out, “[The prophet] suggests a disquietude sometimes amounting to agony. Yet there are interludes when one perceives an eternity of love hovering over moments of anguish; at the bottom there is light, fascination, but above the whole soar thunder and lightning” (7). The prophets’ radical presence insults and instigates the status quo. These “assaulter[s] of the mind” are characteristically able to “hold God and man in a single thought” (Heschel 7; 25). They become a lightning rod for a collective projection of God-aversion in the face of the intimidating intensity of the Divine. On the fringes of society, in the sadomasochistic terrain, the prophets enact bondage rituals through renunciation, asceticism, and radical submission to Jehovah. They, likewise, demonstrate how sadomasochistic reversals manifest.

The vastness and the gravity of the power bestowed upon the prophet seem to burst the normal confines of human consciousness. The gift he is blessed with is not a skill, but rather the gift of being guided and restrained, of being moved and curbed: “‘Cords will be placed upon you…and I will make your
tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, and you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord God’ [Ezek. 3:25-27]” (qtd. in Heschel 26).

Bent under the will of God, the prophet endures ultimate surrender and sacrifice, moving toward sanctity and single-mindedness. Here, the sadomasochistic exchange between Jehovah and his prophets clearly maps out how power can be radicalized and reoriented in the covenant relationship. Heschel asks the provocative question: “Is the covenant a tether, a chain, or is it a living intercourse?” (62). The fact is that it is both. The sadomasochistic exchange is an essential part of the process of transformation; it illustrates the human desire to create, interpret, and engage with a God who is a guiding light for, and a reflection of, humanity. It acknowledges that which blurs the line between human and divine: an innate capacity to exert power over another, and surrender to something outside oneself. In coming to terms with these compulsions, which are an intrinsic part of human existence, the path toward comprehending divine love is less obscured.

Heschel puts forth the question: “How does one reconcile the tenderness of divine love with the vehemence of divine punishment?” (61). Truly, how is a landscape of violence and veneration negotiated? If Jehovah’s purpose is to “purify” and not destroy, a “dramatic tension in God” is revealed, one which gestures toward the sadomasochistic potential (Heschel 57). Further, this dramatic tension is the site of the sadomasochistic terrain. Jehovah is in good company. Similar power exchanges are evident in stories related to other gods and goddesses: Inanna, Prometheus, and Persephone, to name but a few. All navigate sadomasochistic spheres in the process of transformation. SMDS or BDSM communities in contemporary society reenact and reinterpret similar rituals of power and submission. Much like religious communities, there are those who “play out,” and those who “play at,” these dynamics. Trivializing either severs them from their transformative potentials, and robs them of their inherent transcendent possibilities.

Works Cited


**About the Author**

In addition to a MA in Mythological Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute, ANGELINA AVEDANO has earned a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Master of Arts in English from Boston College. Embarking on her dissertation work in the PhD program at Pacifica, she has finally found the ideal proving ground for her research on masculinities. Angelina is exploring the relationship between divine and human representations of masculinities in an effort to re-imagine how they may be interpreted in contemporary society. Currently living on the East Coast, Angelina teaches writing at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, and provides individualized tutoring for students of all ages. She has also developed a course entitled “Literature and Spirituality/the Sacred” for Ottawa University Online. She has been published in Harvard Divinity School’s literary journal, *The Wick*, in 2008 and 2009; *West Virginia University Philological Papers* in 2011; and Pacifica’s own *Between* in 2013.
Soul-making and the Colorado Shooting: James Holmes as the Joker, Trickster, Savior

Michael Bogar

Abstract
On July 20, 2012, 24-year-old James Holmes invaded the Century movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, killing 12 and wounding 70 people. Some initial police reports said that Holmes claimed to be the Joker, an iconic villain from the Batman comic book series, bringing to mind an image of the Trickster archetype for those of us involved in archetypal psychology. After Holmes’ attack, the usual litany of solutions was wielded by law enforcement, journalists, and politicians on both sides of the ideological aisle: gun control, mental health, better security, school bullying, absent parents, and moral values. This paper, while recognizing all of these as legitimate concerns, explores the possibility that there is a deeper unseen issue that has to do with our current assumed Western psycho-cosmology that seeks to eliminate suffering. What if the ultimate aim of human existence is not to eradicate violence and suffering, but to make souls through such struggles? And of course we need to work to lessen suffering, but what if that work itself, in conjunction with the suffering, is why we are on this planet? Jung said that all neuroses arise from the refusal to legitimately suffer. Is it possible that our disdain for and disrespect of legitimate suffering is giving rise to these complementary acts of unspeakable violence?

Keywords
Aurora shootings, James Holmes, violence, trickster, soul-making, suffering

There is no consciousness without discrimination of opposites.
— Carl G. Jung (CW 9i, § 178)

In 1965, a broadly published debate was held between two philosophical adversaries named Arnold Gehlen and Theodor Adorno regarding the nature of suffering and violence in the world. At one point Ghelen questions Adorno about the necessity of suffering, incredulous that one would doubt that the aim of human existence is to emancipate people from all suffering. Here is part of that debate:
GEHLEN: “Mr. Adorno, you see the problem of emancipation here once again, of course. Do you really believe that the burden of fundamental problems, of extensive reflection, of errors in life that have profound and continuing effects, all of which we have gone through because we were trying to swim free of them—do you really believe one ought to expect everyone to go through this? I should be very interested to know your views on this.”

ADORNO: “I can give you a simple answer. Yes! I have a particular conception of objective happiness and objective despair, and I would say that, for as long as people have problems taken away from them, for as long as they are not expected to take full responsibility and full self-determination, their welfare and happiness in this world will merely be an illusion. And will be an illusion that will one day burst. And when it bursts, it will have dreadful consequences.” (italics mine) (Safranski 407-08)

Perhaps 24-year-old James Holmes who killed 12 and wounded 70 people at a Century movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, on July 20, 2012, is a current example of what Adorno is talking about—“a bursting-forth with dreadful consequences” in a world that expects to avoid all discomforts in life. Or perhaps Ghelen is right when he suggests that the aim of human existence is “to swim free of them [problems].” This controversial debate addresses not only the issue of “violence” but the larger role that violence plays in the cosmic scheme of things. Is it possible or even desirable to end violence? Does violence play a necessary role in human existence? Ghelen and Adorno hold two very different positions. Let’s explore these positions from a depth psychological perspective.

First off, such “bursting-forths” of violence and public mayhem may be found throughout recorded human history. Mythically, the perpetrators of such antisocial actions have been labeled “Trickster” by academics. Tricksters appear in stories and rituals from every culture as socially disruptive characters who might defecate in public, engage in inappropriate sexual liaisons, deceive without shame, or commit felonious acts of violence and other lawless exploits. The trickster’s demeanor covers a broad continuum, ranging from slapstick comic to homicidal rapist, with many variations in between those two extremes. Paradoxically tricksters are also frequently portrayed as cultural hero/heroines, pulling the rug out from under the established order so that something revelatory and innovative might appear in its place. One such character in popular American culture is the Joker, Batman’s archenemy appearing in comics, television shows and movies. The Joker is a highly intelligent homicidal psychopath, always smiling during his antinomian escapades. He, like most tricksters, is a strange concoction of despairing anomie mingled with manic extroverted energy, which is how James Holmes was described just before his violent outburst in the Colorado movie theater as it premiered The Dark Knight Rises. In fact some sources reported that Holmes told the police, as they arrested him without a struggle, that he was Batman’s nemesis, the Joker (Winter).
In the comic books, Joker makes it clear that he will never kill the Batman because the caped crusader is the necessary counterweight that keeps the Joker animated and thriving. Batman stands for complete law and order, while the Joker stands for lawlessness and chaos. Neither can meaningfully exist without the other. This is an archetypal pattern that can be traced back to ancient Egyptian mythology. The Egyptians imagined two contrasting deities named Isfet and Ma'at, who personified the cosmic drama between chaos and order. Isfet represented injustice, evil, chaos and “socio-political unrest, forming the necessary counterpoint to Ma'at, who personified justice, harmony and sociopolitical law and order. The two gods formed a complementary and paradoxical dualism that kept each other and the cosmos in balance. According to Maulana Karenga in his book *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, the role of the Egyptian pharaoh was to destroy Isfet in order to attain and maintain Ma'at (71-73). In the Batman comics Gotham City is like Egypt, a dwelling where people are trying to carve safety and cultural order (Ma'at) out of terror and chaos (Isfet). The Batman (Bruce Wayne) is akin to the pharaoh working incessantly to attain and maintain law and order. As a boy, Bruce Wayne’s parents were killed by the forces of evil, and Wayne grew up to become the Batman, a wealthy corporate billionaire who developed personal discipline and technological inventions to secure an orderly existence in Gotham by subduing all disorder and instability. In both the Egyptian and Batman mythologies there is no possibility of one without the other. As with Aristotle’s notion of a great plot, there is no drama without conflict. A similar idea is found in the Hebrew Bible and Hesiod’s *Theogony*, where primordial Chaos is a murky void from which night and day, light and darkness and all created order emerge. Similarly, the Chinese yin/yang symbol portrays light and dark swirling (like gas or air) together as the primeval elements of creation from which all order emerges and returns. Even the secular Freud eventually identified *Eros* and *death* to be the two most basic instinctual constituents of the human psyche, locked in a perpetual struggle for obliteration or civilization. Freud writes:

> After long hesitancies and vacillations we have decided to assume the existence of only two basic instincts, *Eros* and the *destructive instinct*...The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus—in short, to bind together; the aim of the second is, on the contrary, to undo connections and so to destroy things. In the case of the destructive instinct we may suppose that its final aim is to lead what is living into an inorganic state. For this reason we also call it the *death instinct*. (148)

With this background, let’s return to the opening words of the debate at the point where Ghelen incredulously asks Adorno if he actually believes that all humans “ought” to go through problems *reflectively* rather than strive to create a world where we can “swim free of” all problems. Adorno argues that avoidance of problems will not make things better, but will actually bring about the opposite
effect, resulting in what he calls “dreadful consequences.” Adorno believes that struggling with problems and overcoming them is the ultimate source of all real happiness. Similar to the struggle between the Egyptian *Isfet* and *Ma’at*, Adorno believes that life presents each individual with experiences of “objective despair” (chaos), which have the potential to be turned into “objective happiness” (order) by taking “full responsibility and full self-determination.” If humans do not personally or collectively enter into the grappling match between order and chaos, “their welfare and happiness in this world will merely be an illusion.” In other words, if we humans were to live in a problem-free world, the resultant “happiness” would be illusory and superficial. But then Adorno adds the troubling conclusion: Whenever humans do succeed in temporarily eliminating the struggles of existence, opting for an easier version of happiness, such happiness “will be an illusion that will one day burst. *And when it bursts, it will have dreadful consequences.*” In other words, externally bequeathed happiness that is not achieved through personal effort is always ephemeral, and when real life (problematic life) catches up, the consequences will be “dreadful”—not just disappointing, but dreadful—filled with terror, fear, and what Mel Brooks called “high anxiety”!

Let’s consider this from a depth psychological perspective, specifically with regard to the Colorado theater massacre perpetrated by James Holmes, as well as other acts of mindboggling social violence being broadcast in the media these days. Ours is a culture obsessed with law and order, justice for all and equality without discrimination—and I concur that these are all virtuous and worthy goals. I am not for one second denigrating these righteous and humane intentions. Justice and order (*Ma’at*) are always noble and desired goals for any civilized culture—however, when viewed myopically, as the sole aim of human existence, we set ourselves up for increasing disasters and *dreadful consequences.* If, as Adorno suggests, problems are required for human development, then our efforts to eliminate them entirely sets us up for equilibrating and compensatory consequences that may be devastating. The attempt to eliminate all madness and disintegration from human existence is tantamount to making a bowl of plastic fruit that will never decompose. Everything appears perfect, until one is actually starving—then the happy artifice becomes a nightmare. Let’s now apply this to the extreme situation of James Holmes’ homicidal behavior at the theater. What are we to make of this horrific “problem”? What are we to do about it, or with it?

Law enforcement agencies, journalists and politicians on both sides of the ideological aisle immediately made this horrific act a “problem” about guns, mental health, better security, political legislation, functional parenting, school bullying, moral values and 101 other important yet secondary literalisms. Their answers are almost always more laws and regulation. Others, the more spiritual types, typically remind us, or preach to us, to “just love one another.” James Hillman reminds us that in a soul-making approach, love is a means, not an end: “Love [is] neither the goal nor the way, but […] one of many means of putting our humanity through a complicated imaginal process” (189). The soul-making process is primary, and not to be confused with the innumerable means to that end. We live in a world of countless negative and positive dualities, but these striking
phenomena are merely the pencils and erasers that compose the unique psychological poem that each of us is becoming. While law and love are legitimate concerns and necessary means, perhaps the deeper unseen problem is our lack of comprehending the role that such tragedies are meant to play in psychological development. External solutions provide comfort, for a time, but they do not grapple with the “objective despair” that permeates the personal and national psyche in the wake of these unimaginable atrocities. A depth psychological approach would encourage our politicians, educators, therapists, journalists, ministers and parents at the dinner table to revolve the kaleidoscope of imagination in order to “see through” the banal and literal. We must allow the human heart to be broken by the “objective despair” felt in this mindless horror show—the same heart residing in the chests of both liberals and conservatives. Perhaps these palpable disasters arise from an archetypal Isfet or the cosmic Freudian death instinct in order to equilibrate our psychological indolence, or to move us beyond our bipartisan political squabbling, or to move us to actual cultural concerns rather than pedantic academic theorizing. In addition to external legislative and the clichéd “all you need is love” solutions, we might also explore the deeper psychological effects of movies, movie theaters, shopping malls, university educations and culture in general on the state of the soul. Will we take this approach? Not likely. And the Joker/Trickster will strike again and again, doing what tricksters have done throughout mythic history—pull the rug out from under human stability, reminding us that we live in a cosmos where chaos and order are always swirling together to facilitate deeper soul-making experiences.

The ambush from a “Trickster” is not meant merely to be managed externally, but to be explored internally resulting in lived results based on such reflections, in that order. The chaotic trickster exists to present us with “objective despair” in order to move us along in the soul-making experience toward real happiness and genuine joy. This developmental aspect of the Trickster archetype is what makes him/her a kind of “Savior” as well. Jung addresses this issue by referring to the biblical God Yahweh as both heroic Savior and sociopathic Trickster:

If we consider […] the daemonic features exhibited by Yahweh in the Old Testament, we shall find in them not a few reminders of the unpredictable behaviour of the trickster, of his pointless orgies of destruction and his self-appointed sufferings [of human beings], together with the same gradual developments into a saviour and his simultaneous humanization. It is just this transformation of the meaningless into the meaningful that reveals the trickster's compensatory relation to the “saint” […]. (qtd. in Radin 196)

This same Trickster/Savior paradox may be found in Jesus’ frequent violations of the Jewish ceremonial laws, his associations with notorious tax collectors and prostitutes, his felonious cleansing of the temple and his treasonous claim to
kingship, resulting in his crucifixion between two convicted terrorists. Jesus is quoted as saying:

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matt. 10:34-37)

Theologians and ministers often attempt to soften these antisocial Trickster activities of Christ the “Savior,” yet in Jesus’ day they garnered him the sociopathic epithets of madman, sinner, demon-possessed and felon—appellations worthy of all Savior-Tricksters. Here my point is not to say that Yahweh and Jesus are just like James Holmes, but rather to suggest that all psychological and social change arrive via some kind of chaotic disintegration. Trickster/Savior, Isfet/Ma’at, Batman/Joker, Eros/Death always work in tandem in a soul-making universe.

Chaos is not the problem. How we view chaos is the problem. Chaos is the source of all creativity and psycho-spiritual transformation. I believe that is what Adorno is getting at when he says he sees a world that yields “a particular conception of objective happiness and objective despair.” Without the objective despair, there is no happiness; without the objective chaos, there is no creativity; without necessary destruction, there is no development. It seems to me that Adorno is saying that when we fail to integrate this dualistic nature of reality into our lives by attempting to eliminate the uncomfortable side of the equation, the chaotic and destructive experiences will burst onto the scene in a compensatory fashion. Pushing the hellish nature of re-creative chaos away from us is like jamming a clown back into the proverbial jack-in-the-box. Eventually the tension will cause the Joker to pop out and terrify all who are nearby, calling each to examine his or her existential priorities.

Is this a pessimistic view? If we are able to rid ourselves of all suffering and create a legislated Utopia of unceasing love and peace, then yes, I am a pessimist. However, if chaos is as necessary to this human condition as is order, then I am providing a very optimistic corrective. If all chaos and suffering exist as part of the package in order to call attention back to the soul-making endeavor of human existence, then to believe we can eliminate all chaos is a malevolent fantasy. If we have been put on this planet to conquer all disease and eliminate all chaos, then I am a gloomy naysayer. But if the basic cosmic pattern, which manifests in the human psyche, is that of perpetually moving from chaos to order, and then into more chaos and subsequent order, I am providing a necessary reminder: that the ultimate and primary aim of human existence is not to end suffering, but to make soul at the personal, cultural and cosmic levels. I am proposing a view that will not end all suffering, but it will help to end the kind of
suffering that results from the illusion of ending all suffering. I am arguing that if this Colorado event and others like it are unheeded by our individual and collective psyches, and if we place all of our energy into “solving the problem” rather than seeing such events as symptomatic and purposeful, actions like it will be repeated over and over. Such occurrences may become pandemic. Perhaps even some rogue nation will take on the role of the World-Trickster as did Nazi Germany in 1939.

It would appear that the tacit assumption, of many modern Westerners at least, is that our politicians can eliminate all pain and suffering, creating a society and eventually a world of ease and abundance from the cradle to the grave. Our television shows are filled with Law and Order, CSI, hospitals fixing all medical problems, Judge Judy and half a dozen other court programs distributing perfect justice. Many people seem to be increasingly concerned with social justice, fairness, equity, and never hurting anyone’s feelings. And we have come to expect our leaders to solve the injustices, to make everyone safe and secure 100% of the time. We elect politicians who promise to make us free from all possible chaos. Laws proliferate, from wearing seat belts to whom we may marry, from dictating what we can smoke or eat. Approximately 40,000 laws were passed by Congress in 2013 and are scheduled to be implemented in 2014 (“2014’s New American Laws…”). I acknowledge and applaud the noble and good intentions behind such aims, but when legislated without recognizing the purposeful necessity of their opposites as inevitable and even oddly beneficial, we are inviting Trickster to show up with a vengeance in order to equilibrate our hubris and arrogance. Carl Jung noted, from his therapeutic practice, that most people look outside of themselves for a Savior to solve their calamities—to politicians, lovers or moralists to “fix” things—but this is looking in the wrong place. He writes:

In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness. This gradually brings liberation from imprisonment in ayvōta [agnoiā], unconsciousness, and is therefore a bringer of light as well as healing. As in its collective, mythological form, so also the individual shadow contains within it the seed of enantiodromia, of a conversion into its opposite. (CW 9i, § 487)

The Game of Life will always have two opposing teams, internally and externally. The ancient Greeks did this by creating the Panhellenic Games from which our modern Olympics derive. From this depth psychological perspective, our primary goal is to find the most creative and humane ways to allow for the creative clash of dualities rather than try to eliminate the disturbing opposite. In this view, human development always requires some form of psycho-spiritual isometrics—strength through resistance. Even infants require the bumps and bruises bequeathed through gravity and hard objects in order to develop healthy musculature and skeletal structure. A newborn raised in zero gravity would shrivel up and die. The psychological analogue is obvious.
The role of the trickster in all cultural myths is to fracture the pervading psycho-social structure—to bring fragmentation into the logical order by yanking the civilizing rug out from under us. Trickster’s aim is always to overturn the established rules, laws, order, norms, safeguards and the security of a people trusting solely in the laws of the sociopolitical routine founded on human ingenuity—as if the aim of life were to never experience any distress. Even our medical profession has become a system that aims at pharmaceutically induced orderliness via drugs—“keep ‘em flat-lined and unaffected” so they can go to work and buy more stuff or pay more taxes. The goal of the Trickster archetype is to return us to raw creative chaos—to the untidy disorder that precedes new ideas and attitudes of soul. If we fail to consider James Holmes’ atrocity as a kind of cultural Trickster phenomenon—as a collective dream (nightmare) with archetypical images for us to gather insights from—such incidents may escalate in frequency and scope. The next Joker may not toss a smoke bomb into a theater while wielding an assault weapon, but a dirty radioactive bomb into a shipping container, or launch a nuclear missile into a major urban center.

Lastly, let me state clearly that I am neither justifying nor excusing Holmes or any other heinous acts of violence. I am not minimizing the unimaginable losses and grief of the families. I lost a son to war in Afghanistan and know the reconstructive hell of the Trickster pattern. I am not asking people to stop seeking justice as they perceive justice, or to cease seeking cures for deadly diseases or the end to war. Our aim as humans, in my view, is to love and care for others, to bring healing and order to life. However, I am asking that we look more deeply into the significance of cultural and personal tragedies. If Adorno is correct, then this “bursting forth” in Colorado may carry a revelation from the unconscious—that life is comprised of “objective happiness and objective despair,” and that “as long as people have problems taken away from them [...] their welfare and happiness in this world will merely be an illusion. And will be an illusion that will one day burst. And when it bursts, it will have dreadful consequences.” If we continue to deny or ignore the necessity of problems by numbing ourselves with distractions and by insisting on creating utopian external solutions, then we can expect greater and greater compensatory nightmares to get our attention. If the pain of ordinary events does not call us to reflective soul-making, the pains of extraordinary events will, and such events may escalate, forcing us to do what must be done for our psycho-spiritual development.
NOTES

1 In the study of mythology, folklore and religion, a trickster is a deity, spirit, human or anthropomorphized animal who violates social standards and plays tricks on others. According to George P. Hansen in *The Trickster and the Paranormal*, the term “Trickster” was probably first used in this context by Daniel G. Brinton in 1885.

2 This is a state of mind officially designated by modern psychiatry as “Dysphoric Mania.” In this state a person may feel depressed and hopeless, while feeling activated and energetic at the same time (Chan).

Works Cited


**About the Author**

MICHAEL BOGAR is currently completing his doctoral degree in Mythological Studies with an emphasis in Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, CA, and already holds graduate degrees in theological and biblical studies. He is the spiritual director at the Bainbridge Island Spiritual Enrichment Center. He is an adjunct instructor at the Holmes School of Consciousness Studies, and teaches regularly at the Seattle Center for Spiritual Living. He has spoken at various venues, including the Seattle Rotary Club, the King County Alternative Dispute Resolution Center and various other places. He is a regular guest on *Mantz and Mitchell*, Alternative Talk Radio at KKNW 1150 AM. Michael lives in Seattle and conducts seminars, classes and workshops on spirituality and psychology, combining scholarship, humor and practical wisdom in his presentations. His work underscores *soul-making* as a dynamic process that values both positive and negative emotions as normal and necessary. There is no wasted moment in a soul-making life. He is available for guest speaking, teaching classes, and one-on-one counseling and mentoring.
Demeter and Persephone as *Temenos*:
A Perspective of Understanding Postpartum Depression

Stephanie Zajchowski

Abstract
Bringing life into the world is an awe inspiring endeavor. Few walk away from the experience unchanged. Yet, the transformation of the feminine body mirrors the transformation of the feminine psyche, what occurs physically also occurs instinctually. One does not develop without affecting the other. Often these ripples of change can tear open the psyche causing a loss of self that is labeled as postpartum depression, anxiety, or depression. This article explores a postpartum loss of self and the personal experience of postpartum depression through the myth of Demeter and Persephone. There is an unaided search for meaning in motherhood that is explored in this article through myth. It aims to pursue a deeper understanding of women through a conversation of the feminine soul.

Keywords
Demeter, Persephone, postpartum depression, motherhood, women’s studies, mothers groups

“Once you shave your legs, you can not go back.” Wise words spoken from a knowing mother watching her daughter “lingering on the borders of Hades [...]” (Jung and Kerényi 108). Many events in life hold this truth - the death of a loved one, the submission of our body to the pleasure of another, the birth of a child. Events such as these alter us. And though the decision to descend is sometimes our own, the descent never feels completely willing. “The ego still yearns for the status quo, but further down the price has been paid, and we can’t go back” (Luke 195). We can simply succumb, falling into the cocoon of metamorphosis to arise anew, into a deeper understanding of ourselves.

The loudest voice of postpartum depression is infanticide. A mother’s destruction of her own bloodline is a horrific loss in American society. Rare occurrences such as these are given a great deal of attention, while little attention is given to the whisper of self-destruction. Infanticide’s silent sister is the destruction of the mother from within. An exploration into the experience of postpartum depression through the myth of Demeter and Persephone, alongside the archetypal images of the Great Mother and the Kore, could introduce an additional perspective for understanding postpartum depression, and perhaps offer some source of healing. For often when we encounter an archetypal image, a deep
root into our psyche, the energy we source can manifest “in anxiety, in manic and depressive states, and in the feeling that the ego is being overpowered” (Neumann 3). According to C.G. Jung, when we encounter the “psychic organ” of the archetype, “the most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress” (Jung and Kerényi 79). And to do this we fall into the myth, dance with the archetypal images, and internalize them until their story becomes our story as well. Christine Downing so beautifully states that “truly to know these myths means recognizing ourselves within them. One learns about myth from myth—from the discovery of what it means to live a myth” (Downing, Goddess 26).

**A Story of Postpartum Depression**

The earth stood still in the arms of my mother. Rocking to the rhythm of a Navajo chant, circled in the earthly scent of coffee, listening to the beat of her eternal heart - I have known the love of a mother. As I stepped into the sacred space of motherhood, I envisioned myself as a mother through my own mother. I marveled at the instincts of my body in the creation of this child. The tightness of my belly, the swelling of my breasts, the separation of my pelvis in preparation for birth all felt so natural and primal. However, no amount of Lamaze classes, What to Expect When You Are Expecting research, or birth-plan preparation could prepare me for my encounter with the chthonic creatrix. The spiral of postpartum depression seized me as the “sharp grief seized [Demeter’s] heart, and she tore the veil on her ambrosial hair with her own hands” (Foley 4).

A recent meta-analysis of multiple studies found that 15% of women struggle with postpartum depression, making it “the most frequent form of maternal morbidity following delivery” (Letourneau et al 345). There is a wide definition of postpartum depression and diagnosis is a struggle. Despite the research available, postpartum depression and its violence is silently prevalent. Letourneau states further, “Factors contributing to the symptoms of postpartum depression are low self-esteem, inability to cope, feelings of incompetence and loss of self, and social isolation” (346). Often mothers cannot sleep and struggle with indecisiveness and lack of concentration. There is also a strong sense of guilt felt by postpartum mothers, for this is supposed to be a happy time and a mother should be happy. And I was happy for this child lying in my arms, but on a deeper level, I was in awe of him and of me. My ability to sustain life, to produce milk and to create such a creature placed me in a numinous womb of my own, and I was drowning in the power of it. I could not function. On one spring evening while watching my newborn sleep, I fell to my knees convulsing in tears, telling my husband that creating this child was my entire reason for living. I wanted nothing but this child and I could not reconcile this obsession with the working responsibilities of my current world.

Through worried eyes, my mother asked me to go to the doctor. By the next day I sat in a cold sterile room surrounded by the symbiotic sounds of ultrasound heartbeats and piercing infant cries causing my milk to let down. The OB/GYN’s calm eye, ever searching for the madness within, observed my sunken
Demeter and Persephone as Temenos

face, milk-stained clothes and disheveled hair. She handed me a small business card that led me to the woman who would diagnose me with postpartum depression.

The time spent with the psychologist would be the unspoken place of Persephone to me, the going “down into mist darkness” (Boer 118) where the sacred fire of the underworld would transform me. The psychologist worked with me to begin interacting with others again and a paradox presented itself to me. Depression in my understanding is sadness, and I was not sad. In fact I was completely captivated with love for this child. For it was not so much that I did not want to go out into the world as I did not want to let anyone in to this sacred space I held with my child. Because this child was mine and mine alone and it was in these moments that I realized that somewhere along the way, this child had erased me.

The Paradox of Myth

Kerényi speaks of the paradox of the mythological idea. Myths hold a “structure [that] combines contradictions in perfect equilibrium” and can only be known by “immediate revelation” (Jung and Kerényi 104). This can be seen in Persephone, as she holds the tension of being the goddess of death in the underworld as well as the carrier of life to the upper world each spring. Through the darkness that Persephone holds so unwillingly I can begin to see “how much of motherhood is loss” (Downing, “Persephone” 222). For once a woman gives birth, she is forever known as mother. Though there is joy in new life, there is also loss, as the maiden she has known will never be the same. M. Esther Harding develops the idea of the in-one-selfness of the maiden in a way that personifies the rape of Persephone. To be a virgin is to belong to one-self. To lose that virginity means to have “no separate existence of [our] own” but rather to be defined through another be it our mother, our husband or lover, or our child (Harding 104). In light of this definition, the loss of self is a kind of abduction and “depression is a defense against experiencing the deep pain of loss of self” (Bushe 175). Society has no structure for navigating the heroic journey of motherhood. Loss of self is rarely acknowledged and the search for meaning in motherhood unaided.

On the other side of this coin, I want to sit in the paradox and honor the depression. I want to hold onto it and let it form me. “For if a woman is in resistance to any part of her own nature she cannot garner its values, but experiences only its negative aspect [...]” (Harding 74). Depression exists for a reason and the emotions are real. Our task is to listen to what is being said and sit in the crucible of change. Harding describes it as the dark moon:

So the woman also has an opportunity at the dark of the moon to get into touch with a deeper and more fundamental layer of her own psychic life. Symptoms of physical or emotional disturbance at that time, indicate that there is a conflict between her conscious attitude and the demands of her own nature, [...] because an inner
necessity is calling to her to introvert, to withdraw psychologically from the demands of her external life and live for a little while in the secret places of her own heart [...]. (74-75)

Pathology tells us that depression is a disease that needs to be cured and to be sure, left untreated there is a great risk of harm. However, perhaps a better understanding to the mysteries of women is not only through the clinical eye but also through the eye of the feminine psyche. The Demeter and Persephone myth ends in reconciliation. This is simply stated but the importance is immense. We experience the abduction, the loss of self, the madness, the fear and confusion, however, in the end, Persephone’s return to Demeter is a “restoration of meaning” (Young-Eisendrath 215). To live in the myth means to understand this paradox. These experiences of being lost to ourselves are most evidently times we are being pulled into ourselves (Downing, Goddess 45). So how do we, as women, begin this reconciliation, this restoration of meaning in motherhood? Perhaps we begin by looking to the feminine images that have walked with us throughout human history. Perhaps their ancient story holds pieces of ours as well.

*The Archetype of The Great Mother and The Kore*

Erich Neumann describes an archetype as an “inward image at work in the human psyche” (3). Humans manifest images through our imagination in order to find meaning; however, we must remember that these apparitions are more than the image by which they are found. There is always a deeper psychic root to an archetype image, and that root often leads to a spiritual awakening. An archetype “demonstrate[s] its workings in the rites, myths, symbols of early man and also in the dreams, fantasies, and creative works of the sound as well as the sick man of our own day” (Neumann 3). History presents us with primordial beings living in the distant past and also existing in the present. Our psyche carries these archetypes always; they are not bound by time. Humans trip on archetypes like invisible furniture in an open room in order to reconcile “a dissociation having previously taken place between past and present” (Jung and Kerényi 81). These energies linger in the liminal space between the conscious and unconscious waiting to be utilized for the compensation of this imbalance or to manifest in some other physical form in the body.

Kerényi introduces an interesting idea regarding the archetypes found within the goddess. Through a comparative study of the Greek mythos, Kerényi begins to see the pattern of the triune nature of the goddess (112). The maidenhood of the Kore, the motherhood of the Great Mother, and Hecate, the goddess of the moon, all intermingle in a primordial dance that at times presents them as one all-powerful feminine only then to dissipate into separate images to be found in another story (113). Kerényi begins to see that these images are all aspects of one divine feminine.

Visioning the Demeter and Persephone myth in this way adds a layer of depth. In one telling of the story in Arcadia, Demeter is also raped (Jung and Kerényi 122). “This mythological elaboration doubles the rape, for the goddess
experience[s] the rape in herself, as Kore, and not in a separate girl” (123). Therefore the myth becomes a story of the individuation of a woman, of what it is like to be maiden and mother at the same time. The goddess manifests as the Kore and embodies “in-one-selfness.” She is abducted and raped in the belly of the earth. “The goddess [then] becomes a mother, rages and grieves over the Kore who was ravished in her own being, the Kore whom she immediately recovers, and in whom she gives birth to herself again” (123). The beauty in the paradox is that in losing ourselves women bring life and in life there is also death; so that the divine feminine holds immortality, a vitality that is tapped by all women who give birth.

The question that lingers is what implications do these archetypal images have for healing postpartum depression? The answer must begin with a conversation about women and the transformative mysteries of the Feminine. To start the process of healing, women must first start the process of understanding and that begins by honoring the numinous force living within us. “[...] Instinct can no longer be regarded as an asset to be exploited for the advantage of the personal life; instead it must be recognized that the personal I, the ego, must submit itself to the demands of the life force as to a divine being” (Harding 124). One of the hardest tasks of women is to let go, to fall into the abyss and suffer dismemberment, to understand that we cannot fully understand and yet ultimately experience what we cannot fully know. For as Kerényi shared, so much of being a woman is loss, letting go, and not understanding (Jung and Kerényi 123). At the same time being re-born, experiencing the power of giving life and the ethereal experience of sustaining that life, is a gift for the Feminine alone.

Perhaps Sylvia Brinton Perera states the point better, in that a story such as this “presents a model for health and for healing the split between above and below, between the collective ideal and the powerful bipolar, transformative, processual reality underlying the feminine wholeness pattern” (Perera 94). For women, life is process not vision. In mystery, we ebb and flow as the tides to the moon, so are we. To truly begin healing we must look to one another, to the divine Feminine within one another, and sit with Her.

**Thesmophoria as a Means of Healing through the Love of Women**

One of the first questions the psychologist asked me was if I was a member of a mothers’ group. I still remember how odd this question felt and the terrifying experience of my first play-date. I did not understand how being around other mothers would help me find myself. However, there was an immediate connection with these women who were, in actuality, in the abyss with me. All of us were torn between motherhood and working, all of us had lost the self we once knew and spoke of so fondly, and almost all of us were on anti-depressants. While our children destroyed our homes, we restored our souls. What I found in these women was solidarity, community and understanding. These women reconstructed me.

The Thesmophoria was an ancient woman’s ritual that took place in autumn. According to Jane Ellen Harrison the ritual is of “immemorial antiquity”
and Herodotus attributes the Thesmophoria rites to the Egyptians (Harrison 120-121). The rite lasted for three days and involved fasting, sacrifice, and mourning along with feasting, lewd jesting, and celebration (Foley 73). The three days entailed a re-enactment of the myth, though Harrison tells us that the myth “arose from the ritual, not the ritual from the myth” (Harrison 124). Most of the actions within the rite promoted agriculture as Demeter was the goddess of the grain, and honoring her would ensure continued life for the community. However, what is inherent in the understanding of being a woman is the cathartic nature that a gathering of women such as this can hold. It is impossible to grasp the spiritual nature except through experience. These women could heal through shared vulnerability, something that women of today struggle to give one another. At the foot of the goddess Demeter, they surrendered their rage and shared in her loss as in their own. In this symbiotic relationship with the goddess, women’s basic emotions were given divine meaning and became a sacred rite all their own (Downing, Mysteries 108). In the hallowed realm of the goddess, initiates could weave stories that are older than time and in return receive enlightenment and soulful meaning to the journey of life. As Harrison tells us, the Thesmophoria “has the blood of religion, or rather magic, in its veins” (137). The mysteries existed to connect women with the nature of the Feminine. There is an intrinsic need “[...] for the Goddess to teach [women] the meaning of the deep transformation of [their] being from daughter to mother to daughter again” (Luke 190). The need for rites such as these are even greater today as we search for meaning in motherhood in a patriarchal world instead of experiencing motherhood physically and intrinsically through the Feminine (190).

_Temenos_ is a Greek word for “a piece of land separated and dedicated as a sacred space” (Crane). Rites of passage often took place on a _temenos_. C. G. Jung took the spirit of the concept of _temenos_ and applied it to a sacred space within ourselves for the work of the soul. This inner sacred space is a place “in which an encounter with the unconscious can be had and where these unconscious contents can safely be brought into the light of consciousness” (CW 12, § 63). This is a hallowed realm where narratives of meaning can be written.

As new mothers we too need a sacred space for the work of soul. A place where we can see postpartum depression as a rite of passage, an opportunity for depth into the unconscious realms of Persephone’s underworld, of the Feminine. A place where we can fall apart, be dismembered, hold the hurt and let it transform us. A place cradled in love by women who understand the immortal intertwining dance of death and birth. A place held by women who, as Demeter, cry out until we are pulled back into consciousness and through their loving wisdom we are re-membered. This is not simply healing, this is a deeper understanding of women. In order to receive such a glorious gift of divine revelation, in order to sit in the womb of the Goddess, we must first let go and be abducted, destroyed, dismembered. For how could we experience such divine love without first feeling the divine flame.
Works Cited


**About the Author**

STEPHANIE ZAJCHOWSKI holds a Bachelor of Business Administration, with a concentration in Marketing, from Texas Wesleyan University. She spent many years working in Flight Operations and then Marketing at Southwest Airlines while pursuing artistic endeavors such as marble sculpting and metalworking, which she still practices today. Stephanie has her certification in Spiritual Direction from SMU Perkins School of Theology, in Dallas, Texas, and serves as Communications Director for the Metro District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church. Stephanie is currently in her first year of studies, pursuing her Master’s and Ph.D. in Mythological Studies, with an emphasis in Depth Psychology, at Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California. Living the multi-faceted and somewhat insane life of a modern day woman, she lives with her husband and two often filthy young sons, in a North Texas house full of books.
Shading in a Violent Shadow: 
A Hero’s Confrontation with the American Shadow in Tim Burton’s The Nightmare Before Christmas

Leontine Armstrong

Abstract
The movie, The Nightmare Before Christmas, by Tim Burton contains several violent confrontations with the unconscious and conscious shadow as reflected from American culture. The hero of the story, Jack Skellington, ventures across realms to not only develop a sense of himself, but to ultimately bring what he learns from the “otherworld/realm” back to his community. Traversing these worlds brings about the obvious: chaos, destruction, and violence. However, by engaging the shadow aspect of the individual and collective community, Jack embraces this chaos to transform it into hope, togetherness, salvation, and love. By acknowledging, accepting, and addressing the issues of the shadow archetype, Jack begins his development in his quest for individuation and wholeness. Confronting the Oogie Boogie Man, the accumulated manifestation of the shadow, Jack brings order to his personal world and the lives of his community members. This creative film brings an awareness of Carl G. Jung’s shadow archetype to its audience. American culture reflects its shadows through cinema, thus bringing light to the darkness that may consume us all at one point or another in our lives. Learning, as Jack does, to approach our shadows and fears strengthens who we are as individuals, and as a cohesive community.

Keywords
shadow archetype, Jungian themes, American culture, Nightmare Before Christmas

Everyone holds a certain level of darkness within his or her unconscious and conscious awareness. Through the individuation process they either repress or acknowledge this fundamental shadow archetype so prevalent in the American society. Tim Burton’s 1993 claymation movie The Nightmare Before Christmas contains several violent confrontations with the unconscious shadow and the conscious sphere of existence. Jack Skellington, the main character of the film, leaves his home in Halloween Town to breach the consciousness of another world, Christmas Town. By traversing into another space, he confronts his own
unconscious and returns home to engage his hard-learned discoveries. Jack is dead, an afterlife-alive-skeleton; and is already classified as a dark character on the strict principle of life standing for light, and death representing decaying darkness. The movie is concerned with Jack’s search for another purpose because he has become tired of his role as the Pumpkin King every single Halloween. During the search for something that is different, he comes to the cliché realization he is already the individual he wants to be. However, to get back into his routine, he must confront his developed shadow, the Oogie Boogie Man. Oogie is the manifested essence of violence and selfishness Jack struggles with during the movie. This confrontation resonates with Carl G. Jung’s conception of the shadow archetype and its purpose within the psyche. Jack’s character is a stereotype in the notion of learning from his mistakes and correcting them through a noble, selfless act; although, what is uniquely menacing in the story is the accumulation of Oogie’s violent character.

In the film created by Burton, light and dark imagery relates to the very powerful parts of the human psyche. Jack is a human skeleton playing several major roles in the society of Halloween Town; he is the Pumpkin King, leader, and hero of the film. He is the well-known protagonist battling with his inner urge for a different purpose in his lively afterlife, and does not appreciate his role in the community. The community has become so attached to his role as the Halloween ritual master they are unable to separate themselves from him. This longing for something different from his normal routine brings about his intrusion upon another holiday, Christmas. However, his altered Christmas takeover plan must go up in smoke before he is ready to realize that everything he needs is waiting for him at home with his friends. The experience Jack goes through during the devastating Christmas fiasco, loss of his friends, and battle with Oogie, brings about a new realization in his personal consciousness, allowing him a deeper understanding of what he really wants for his afterlife and community. The opening of the film begins with the narrator telling the audience that this story comes from “a place that you’ve seen perhaps in your dreams,” providing a creative, intense allure to the creative possibilities in this old time and unique location. Dreams reveal the inner nature of humans, while creating a new plane of existence and understanding for us. This is the interactive realm the narrator introduces to the audience. Setting the scene of the story in such a way is an advantage because it directly addresses both the conscious and archetypal world in which society has inherited. The narrator emphasizes the time the story takes place to open the imagination of what is to come next by saying: “Twas a long time ago, longer now than it seems...[and] took place in the holiday worlds of old,” to introduce the dateless domain in which the characters are living. The narrator provides a hint of this story’s relevance to everyone because it is an ancient moment both meaningful and applicable to modern American society.

Jack’s journey to individuation begins by entering the world of Christmas Town as he literally dives into this other realm of consciousness in order to find his own identity. This is a violent, violating act he embarks upon for his quest. By going into another world, Jack is able to see himself as a separate entity from the landscape around him. Jack becomes aware of his own strangeness in another,
different world. In “Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious,” Jung writes, “Primitive man is not much interested in objective explanations of the obvious, but he has an imperative need—or rather, his unconscious psyche has an irresistible urge—to assimilate all outer sense experiences to inner, psychic events” (70-71). This concept is still true today and framed within this movie. The physical presence and feeling of being immersed in Christmas Town triggers Jack’s own consciousness as he absorbs the surroundings and new stimuli to improve his own personality and character. He feels, sees, hears, tastes, and smells all the beauty there is in the awkwardly peaceful place. Jack takes note of the beautiful and bright colors in the re-discovered land he experiences because he is not used to them. He has physically moved across a threshold into another world, while mentally thinking and feeling differently, making this adventure an important turning point in his afterlife. This is a transition for Jack because he is looking for something else that will motivate him to keep up his tired, drawn-out persona of being the Pumpkin King for Halloween Town, which is to the sole benefit of the community and not himself, or so he feels.

This persona of what he knows he must be, yet is unable to accept for a period of time, is what Jack struggles with throughout the film. In “The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious,” Jung writes, “The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual” (94). The first image of Jack the onlooker observes is a character’s face concealed within a pumpkin. Jung would say that this is a manifestation of his persona because Jack is the Pumpkin King. Jack no longer wants to hold the role of Halloween master for the community. He has outgrown the role he once found so invigorating. He consciously understands that he wishes to be something different from his persona, yet maintains a facade until coming across another intriguing, curious plane of existence. Jung goes on to write, “The construction of a collectively suitable persona means a formidable concession to the external world, a genuine self-sacrifice which drives the ego straight into identification with the persona, so that people really do exist who believe they are what they pretend to be” (“Relations...” 95). Jack feels the strain of constantly living out a persona that no longer serves him. He does not want to pretend to be something he feels he is not. He resists the pull to be consumed by the persona. Towards the end of the movie, Jack realizes he wants to continue to live as the Pumpkin King, but has developed enough individuation for the strength to lay down his boundaries, so the persona does not consume his ego. From a Jungian perspective, Jack in this scene ritualistically is a performing sacrifice to the external world in his persona because in the opening scene he takes a torch, puts it in his mouth, and executes his pumpkin head as it bursts into flames. This is a lively scene in which the community idolizes Jack. Shortly after the performance, he is bombarded with compliments from the witches, vampires, ghouls, and dead creatures who make up the grotesque but admiring community. They quite literally worship his persona, while ignoring the individual located behind the mask.
The interaction Jack has with the characters of his community directly relates to his persona. The community feeds off of, thrives from, and worships it as they continue to try and sustain the idea of the Pumpkin King. However, he tries to get away from this worshiped position as much as possible by escaping to the cemetery in which he feels comfortable and at home. From a Jungian perspective, the emergence of Oogie is the retaliation of the repression of Jack’s longing for something different than his exhausted persona. For Jack, the persona has created negative energy giving form to and feeding his dark shadow. The first scene of the film introduces the community of Halloween Town in their musical, and shows Oogie’s shadow on the moon. Oogie is scary, menacing, and playfully enticing as he sings, “I am the shadow on the moon at night, filling your dreams to the brim with fright.” This introduction of Oogie is memorable because he claims to be a shadow and represents scary moments during the time people are unconscious. Dreams may possess violent interactions, and this is what Oogie threatens. He is quite menacing towards other’s unconsciousness. However, only the shadow of Oogie is shown, instead of his real, solid form. This shadow of Jack does not have enough power to manifest until the third instance he is introduced. The second scene, in which Oogie is presented, still shows a shadow and not a fully formed creature as he feeds on a helpless, caged insect. During this scene, Oogie listens in on what his henchmen, Shock, Lock, and Barrel, discuss concerning capturing Santa Claus, the lord of the other realm Jack invades, Christmas Town. Only after this scene do solid forms of Oogie appear. He finally gains enough strength to reveal himself.

In the third scene concerning Oogie, he finally appears in the solid mass of a deformed potato sack. This emergence is because he now has Santa as his prisoner, and has gained enough power from the darkness he inhabits. The darkness has captured the light, and Oogie has enough power to fully manifest. As this scene goes on, Oogie sings, “I’m ancient. I’m ugly. I don’t know which is worse,” in the hopes of scaring Santa. Jung would refer to this moment as an exposing of the shadow, revealing its archetypal nature to Santa, an outside presence and a threat to his existence. The shadow is part of the collective unconscious, but Oogie specifically is Jack’s inner demon. Oogie is the representation of what everyone dislikes about their shadow; it knows secrets, is dark, and has more power when it is repressed. In “The Shadow,” Jung writes, “Though the shadow is a motif as well known to mythology as anima and animus, it represents first and foremost the personal unconscious, and its content can therefore be made conscious without too much difficulty” (93). The conscious confrontation of the shadow by Jack later in the movie is his understanding that the darkness of oneself should not be suppressed, but should be brought to the light, made conscious, and addressed in a balancing action. The only way to defeat the shadow is to accept the dark aspects, confront them, and treat the issues that have come to the surface from the unconscious. Jung goes further in saying, “With a little self-criticism one can see through the shadow-so far as its nature is personal” (“The Shadow” 93). The only person Oogie is afraid of is Jack. It is therefore Jack’s responsibility to defeat and/or balance Oogie because he is the only character in the film capable of conquering this evil manifestation. Jack was
locked into a vicious cycle, unappreciative of his afterlife, and Oogie appeared as
the part of what Jack discarded. Jack wanted no more parts in the construction of
the Halloween tradition and this brief refusal comes back in full circle to haunt
him. The shrugging off of responsibility for his own shadow tapped into the
collective unconscious of the shadow archetype and Oogie was born.

Jack is not capable of recognizing the danger of Oogie until he is ready to
go back to his world, Halloween Town, and assume ownership of his
responsibilities. Jung explains in “On the Psychology of the Unconscious” that
“The devil is a variant of the ‘shadow’ archetype, i.e., of the dangerous aspect of
the unrecognized dark half of the personality” (79). Oogie is the dark part of Jack.
This American film creatively reveals the character trait of the shadow aspect of
the American psyche. Society craves a protagonist who is relatable, strong, and
virtuous, and has just as many issues as any expected hero. Modern American
consciousness relates to this movie and its themes because the process of
embracing the shadow with a better understanding further develops an
individual’s personal world, just as Jack has shown the audience.

The vicious cycle of Jack pushing away his responsibility perpetuates the
situation in which the darkness goes elsewhere. The shadow will not simply
disappear and be forgotten, it will rot and decay until it becomes destructive to the
community, or individual. Jung writes, “The most accessible of these [archetypes],
and the easiest to experience, is the shadow, for its nature can in large measure be
inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious” (“The Shadow” 91).
Jack’s shadow of Oogie is an ideal example of the modern American
consciousness. Society is becoming more involved with the idea of understanding
that there is darkness inside everyone, and that there are ways to deal with the
darkness before it becomes violent. Recognizing personal darkness is what
individuals must continue to work on for mental health purposes. This ordeal
connects directly to Jack’s character making the conscious decision to ensure
Oogie is not involved in any aspect of the Christmas takeover plan the community
is undertaking. To continue the issue of forgetting and leaving darkness, Jung
writes, “They must not be suppressed out of hand, but must be very carefully
weighted and considered, if only because of the danger of psychic infection they
carry with them” (“Psychology of the Unconscious” 78). Jack did not deal with
his shadow appropriately, and the shadow uses the negative energy surrounding
his unconscious to attack others who do not belong in the shadows within the film.

The concept of belonging somewhere and understanding everyone is
trying to find their place in the world is an old story that still holds relevance to
each and every person today. In order to go back to where Jack lives, he must
confront his shadow and send Santa back to where he belongs. Oogie is not afraid
of anyone or anything, with the exception of Jack. This antagonist-protagonist
struggle clearly defines the essential moment of Jack’s coming to terms with his
shadow and keeping it from hurting anyone else. Jung writes, “it is quite within
the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his nature, but
it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil”
(“The Shadow” 93). Jack confronts his shadow and defeats the evil lurking within
it. Oogie is comprised of a burlap sack filled with bugs and is exposed when Jack
Leontine Armstrong

pulls apart the whole bag with a small tug on a single strand, symbolizing how easy it is to reveal one’s darkness when actually putting forth effort. Performing this act unveils the inner darkness of Oogie, and as the bugs are scurrying around, Santa squashes one himself. In “The Fight with the Shadow,” Jung writes, “The archetypes I had observed expressed primitivity, violence, and cruelty” (“Fight with the Shadow” 194-95). This confrontational scene with Oogie and Jack exposes the cruel intentions of this particular shadow. Looking at this scene through a Jungian perspective, one would say that because Jack opened up the floor for recognizing Oogie for what he is, this then provides an opportunity for others such as Santa to take his personal revenge.

As Jack pulls the string on the sack destroying Oogie, he says, “How dare you treat my friends so shamefully!” Jack is mortified both by the exposure of the shadow and of its actions. However, he does recognize that it is his job to fix things and put them back to how they should be for the community. This is a moment in which Jack consciously explains that the way others were treated by his darkness is not appropriate, because he should have taken better care of them himself. He also recognizes he should have dealt with his shadow long ago. The defeat of the shadow gives Jack an opportunity to watch how he projects his negative energy and use it constructively. Jack’s individuation process is greatly affected by addressing his shadow and recognizing who he really is as a person/skeleton. Jack acknowledges he has a shadow, pushes it aside in the beginning, and then ultimately confronts it in hopes “there’s still time to set things right” (Nightmare Before Christmas) after he fails to merge his reality with another consciousness. As Jack understands his mistake in an entire plan to take over a holiday that is not his own, he comes to the realization that he is actually happy with himself after all. This cliché moment is a reflection on modern American society’s grasp on the concept of individuation. When someone comes to the understanding they are in a place, or space they do not belong, and must move or change in order to fit into it, they have grown. Jack tries to change himself when he did not need changing. He simply needed the experience of finding where he does not belong, in order to confront his shadow in his own world/consciousness.

Jung would have been surprised to see the kind of facetious characters Tim Burton uses reflecting American society in an undead and comical version of reality. From a Jungian perspective, The Nightmare Before Christmas is a play on the conscious and unconscious scenarios with which American society is plagued. The creative representations of the struggles every person goes through in this movie are entertaining, intriguing, and useful to remember when thinking about conscious and unconscious acts. Repressing darkness only leads to negative outcomes, as this film fully represents the events and strange repercussions of what such an action will produce. Violent actions within the film represent the American society’s ongoing struggle for control over the unconscious. The confrontation with the unconscious is never cut-and-dried, and in Jack’s case, leads to a great deal of shadow management, which could have easily been avoided. The process of individuation for the character of Jack derives from his experience in Christmas Town, the confrontation of his shadow, and his
realization that he must accept his responsibilities in order to maintain a healthy ego.

Works Cited


About the Author

LEONTINE ARMSTRONG has taught English Composition for Victor Valley Community College and California Baptist University for approximately four years, and has taught for Ashford Online University for approximately one year. She holds a BA in English Literature from California State University San Bernardino, a MA in English Composition with a concentration in Literature from California State University San Bernardino and a MA in Mythological Studies with an emphasis in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, California. She is currently enrolled in Pacifica Graduate Institute’s Mythological Studies PhD program. Leontine serves as a Vice President at large on the Adjunct Faculty Executive Union Board at Victor Valley Community College. She also serves on the Legislative Analysis Committee and Honors Committee as an active member at Victor Valley Community College. She also serves as a faculty sponsor for the Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society at California Baptist University. Leontine currently resides in Southern California with her family, Siberian Husky, friends, and colleagues.