

From Corbin and Hillman to Dionysos: The Partial Unveiling of Psyche's Stage

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## Abstract

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This hermeneutic research journey begins with the premise that Jung's and Corbin's works presuppose a visionary capacity far removed from the experience of most people. In Corbin, this capacity is associated with an apparitional imaginal world and creative Imagination depicted in Islamic Sūfism as accessible only to mystics. Hillman's writings in archetypal psychology, which are profoundly influenced by both Jung and Corbin, approach this world of imagination from a literary (or psycho-poetic) perspective that is potentially more accessible to nonmystics. But Hillman's intriguing references to Corbin, which are metaphorically inclined, fall short of providing an explicit knowledge of Corbin's abstruse oeuvre. This research explores the works and hermeneutic approaches of Corbin and Hillman with the aim of learning about the creative Imagination in respect to nonmystics. A third voice, referred to as the Actress, contributes to this dialogue reflecting the researcher's experience. This figure acts as a representative of the nonmystic whose connection to the numinous imaginal world of Corbin's focus can best be described as an associative sense of numinosity experienced through acting. As the research journey unfolds, Dionysos, the god of Greek tragedy, simultaneously provides an environment that corresponds to each of these voices and explicitly brings the worlds of mysticism and theatre together. The Dionysiac cosmos thus leads to a vision of mystic-theatre as an archetypal practice and twofold individuation process for today's world which is informed by Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress.

*Keywords:* archetypal psychology, Corbin, Dionysus, Hillman, creative Imagination, mystic, imaginal, theatre

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The style used throughout this dissertation is in accordance with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th Edition, 2009), and *Pacifica Graduate Institute’s Dissertation Handbook* (2016-2017).

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose Statement**

This dissertation represents a hermeneutic study of Hillman's approach to archetypal psychology and Corbin's interpretation of the creative Imagination in Persian Sūfism. Potential relationships between creativity, soul, and spirit are explored through a dialogue between Hillman's terrestrial hermeneutic orientation and the contrasting celestial orientation in Corbin's interpretations of Sūfī mystic doctrine. Using an imaginal and archetypal approach as exemplified in the writings of Corbin and Hillman and drawing upon the hermeneutic lineage which includes Heidegger, Gadamer, and Romanyshyn, the intent of this research is to further illuminate our understanding of creative imagination for nonmystics.

#### **Introduction to the Topic**

The creative imagination, as a medium through which psyche or soul can be engaged with, is the sine qua non of depth psychology. Our perspectives on creativity and imagination thus shape the very nature of how we view this discipline. Jung's experiential descriptions of a process that he called *active imagination* (Jung, 1997), illuminate a visionary or mystic component of imagination. In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1961/1989), fantasy figures and images are represented as autonomous entities who preexist distinct from his own consciousness.

Jung's (1961/1989) memoir describes several of his visionary experiences. In October of 1913, for instance, an hour-long vision of a monstrous flood appears to him. Images of "mighty yellow waves, the floating rubble of civilization, and the drowned

bodies of uncounted thousands” stream forth before him, and “then the whole sea turn[s] to blood” (p. 175). Recurring variations of this initial vision become increasingly vivid and bloody. The First World War will soon break out but Jung emphasizes the fact that he does not consciously anticipate this. At the time, he interprets his experiences, not as a premonition but rather, as a psychosis.

This period of profound disorientation instigates a conscious experiment and confrontation with the images emerging from a psychic territory that depth psychology has traditionally referred to as the unconscious. Jung’s theory of the archetypes, active imagination, and individuation grow directly from his experiences during this time.

His autobiography describes a variety of poignant scenes, images, and characters who people his visions and dreams. He speaks of a dwarf with leathery skin, of a glowing red crystal rock spurting blood, and of Biblical figures who are curiously matched. An old man with a white beard who calls himself Elijah appears with a young blinded girl who identifies herself as Salome. Present as well, is a huge black serpent who lives with them. Another character soon emerges developing from the figure of Elijah. Jung calls him Philemon. He appears with kingfisher wings and bull-like horns. As a dream figure, Philemon sails across a blue sky filled with clods of flat brown earth. As a fantasy-figure he walks beside Jung in the garden, guru-like, challenging his thoughts about thought itself. It is Philemon’s view, Jung (1961/1989) says, that thoughts are more “like animals in the forest, or people in a room, or birds in the air” (p. 183). We are not the creators of our thoughts. They are not even ours, in fact.

The voices of Philemon and other figures emerge spontaneously, as in the example above, often surprising Jung (1961/1989) with thoughts that he “had not



consciously thought” (p. 183). Jung’s stance is that these entities are not of his own making, and by virtue of their psychic reality he views them as objectively real. His perspective is that the process of entering into dialogue with these unconscious figures is a means for integrating conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche. Acknowledging this dimension of visionary imagination, many depth psychologists have since adopted the term *imaginal* as an adjective that gives ontological status to the world of imagination.

The words *imaginal* and *mundus imaginalis* are terms originally coined by Corbin (1972), a French scholar and theologian born in 1903, who adopted them to support his interpretations of Iranian and Persian Sūfī mystic doctrines. His intention was to distinguish between Western and European perspectives of imagination and the Imagination as viewed in Sūfī cosmology. Corbin was especially known for his numerous translations of these mystic doctrines and his focus on comparative religious studies that aimed to unite the so called religions of the “Book.” This project represented an attempt to link the exoteric and esoteric lineage connecting the prophetic Abrahamic traditions. The scope of his work included an esoteric reading of the Old Testament prophets, the story of Jesus, the life of Muhammad, and the possibility of future revelations. The overarching vision of this project was to provide a spiritual bridge and common ground between East and West perspectives. Corbin’s many roles as theologian, philosopher, linguist, translator, and Orientalist attest to the reach of his erudition and eclectic interests.

The adjective *imaginal* and the noun *mundus imaginalis*, as Corbin intends them, are correlative to the Arab equivalent *’alam al-mithâl* (Corbin, 1989, p. viii), which is an

intermediary realm between matter and pure spirit. The “precise level of Being and Knowledge” attributed to this realm “connotes imaginative perception, imaginative knowledge, [and] imaginative consciousness” (p. ix). It is also known as “*Malakût*, the world of the Soul and of souls” (p. ix). This middle world or dimension of reality is populated by subtle bodies. Here “images subsist pre-existent and pre-ordained in relation to the sensible world” (Corbin, 1972, p. 8) which is the material world of our everyday lives. In contrast to our Western association with the word *imaginary*—which conjures up associations with unreality, pretending, child’s play, and making things up—imagination is viewed from this perspective as divine *Imagination*; it is an organ of perception and creation and the means by which the soul apprehends reality.

The enigmatic gaps between contrasting perspectives on the phenomenon of imagination, as introduced above, imply that imagination plays itself out within a spectrum of possibilities. We have pointed to the imagination’s mundane associations with child’s play, pretend, and unreality; to Jung’s strange and often dark visionary accounts; and to Corbin’s depictions of a spiritual function that grants access to a celestial middle world. Jung (1921/1971) acknowledges this spectral multiplicity through which imagination is made manifest while discussing fantasy in the “Definitions” section of *Psychological Types* (the sixth volume of his *Collected Works*). Here he distinguishes between fantasies which are consciously, intentionally, and voluntarily produced and directed and those which are set in motion by the unconscious, in one of two ways. The first is mobilized by conscious intention through an “intuitive attitude of expectation,” and the second emerges through “an irruption of *unconscious* contents into

consciousness” (p. 427 [CW 6, para. 711]). He also tells us that imagination can be passive or active, and involuntary or voluntary.

In *Alchemical Studies* Jung (1942/1967) says that *imaginatio* is “an image making, form-giving creative activity of the mind” (p. 168 [CW, 13, para. 207]). He also refers to Paracelsus’s view of imagination as “the creative power of the astral man” (p. 168). This idea of imagination as a “form-giving creative activity” associated with the “astral man” has a numinous quality and striking similarities to Imagination as depicted in the mystic world that Corbin illuminates.

The multidimensionality of imagination is addressed in Persian Sūfism as well. Corbin (1958/1997) tells us that Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes between two types of imagination: “an imagination *conjoined* to the imagining subject and inseparable from him . . . and a self subsisting imagination *dissociable* from the subject” (p. 219). The mystic, according to this tradition, is “capable of *creating* objects, of producing changes in the outside world” (p. 223) through the concentrated attention of dissociable imagination. Objects created in this manner subsist in the imaginal realm and can be seen by other mystics. From the vantage point of this worldview Imagination is functionally transformational. It is creative in the sense that it creates change which reverberates through multiple levels of reality.

A question naturally emerges for us as non-Sūfī-mystics who are nevertheless, fascinated by Ibn ‘Arabī’s complex theology of the imagination: How might this paradigm further illuminate the role of imagination for the laity, that is, for nonmystics? Hillman’s (1975) archetypal practice, which calls for “a psychology that starts . . . in the

processes of the imagination” (p. xvii), might be imagined as a partial response to this question.

Hillman's work emerges from within the Jungian lineage and depth psychological tradition, a branch of psychology where the root of its name *psyche* is still recognized and honored as the Latin equivalent of the Greek word for soul. As such, his primary concern is a concern for soul. Hillman is recognized as the founding figure of what is now called archetypal psychology. Following Jung, he suggests that the archetypes—which are essentially indefinable, elusive, and incapable of being viewed or experienced directly—can be imagined in a very basic sense “as the deepest patterns of psychic functioning” (Hillman, 1975, p. xix).

In “Instinct and the Unconscious,” Jung (1919/1969) considers the notion of archetypes as “mode[s] of apprehension” (p. 136 [CW 8, para. 277]), in other words, as ways of seeing, understanding, and knowing. Hillman takes this notion to another level, suggesting that soul itself is an archetype (Coppin & Nelson, 2005, p. 48), in other words, a mode of apprehension, or in his words “a perspective . . . rather than a thing itself” (Hillman, 1975, p. xvi). For Hillman *soul* is “the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image, and *fantasy*” (p. xvi).

Hillman's essentially literary and psycho-poetic approach to archetypal psychology, which is profoundly influenced by Corbin's work, speaks to the role of imagination in everyday life while Corbin's interpretation of the creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī explicitly tells us that direct experience with the imaginal realm is restricted to mystics. While Corbin's hermeneutic writings embrace a symbolic and nonliteral approach to esoteric doctrine, they nevertheless seem to imply that the

imagination is a pathway by which the individual might move closer to an all-encompassing hidden objective truth beyond the merely subjective material world. As unfathomable and always partially unknowable as this objective truth might be, the stance he takes is that one exists. “But for Hillman, psyche becomes all-encompassing” (Cheetham, 2012, p. 198). He bypasses such literal claims about reality, truth, and objectivity. For Hillman, human life is psychological and the purpose of life is soul-making: in other words, the making of imaginative perspectives from life. Even spirit is one of soul’s multiple perspectives according to this paradigm. All of our knowledge “about the world, about the mind, the body, about anything whatsoever,” Hillman (2013) says, “*including the spirit* and the nature of the divine, comes through images and is organized by fantasies into one pattern or another” (p. 70).

*Revisioning Psychology*, Hillman’s (1975) seminal work establishing the key premises of archetypal psychology, is his own sustained “attempt to discover and vivify soul through [his] writing” (xvi). Assuming a poetic, nonliteral, literary posture, he illustrates the art of soul-making through the art of Renaissance rhetoric. Here he rediscovers “the speech form of the anima archetype, [and] the style of words when informed by soul” (p. 213). He practices psychology in practicing this art. Images—which are not limited to pictures, and might take the form of smells, or words, or even ideas—take on lives of their own. They grow: becoming whole environments, scenes, cultural histories; they sing, dance, and debate through the tonality and rhythm in their voices that express the plurality of soul’s perspectives. Mythologizing, deifying, dismembering, pathologizing, and psychologizing are some of the soul-making moves Hillman moves through. He plays associatively, etymologically, phonically, and

rhythmically with words as images. In so doing we might say that he enlivens the world, or in keeping with the panpsychic sensibility of an archetypal approach we might say that the world or even his writing enlivens him. This practice, as a hermeneutic practice, will be further elaborated in Chapter 3 on methodology.

### **Researcher's Relationship to the Topic**

The numinous or visionary quality of experience depicted by Jung and Corbin is somewhat foreign to my own experience. The sharp “not-me,” “not-of-my-making” sense of otherness attributed to things imaginal is not something that I have experienced in my waking life, and most of my dream life goes by unremembered. In aligning with my own phenomenological truth, I have released myself from the assumption that engaging with the so called unconscious psyche is necessarily marked by a sharp sense of something autonomous, of something other, of something not-me. My own subtler sensing of the so called numinous quality that Jung attributed to the presence of an objective unconscious psyche occurs when I am engaged in artistic or creative activity. The bulk of my experience, in this regard, has been in theatre arts and freestyle dance or movement that draws more from my theatrical background and the field of expressive arts therapy than any formal dance discipline. The ostensibly “autonomous not-me numinous entity” that shows up in creative moments feels, in fact, more like “me” (by way of its capacity to make me feel more alive, more energized, more present) than the “me-of-my-most-mundane-moments.” As such, Hillman’s explicitly creative psychology (which leans less toward literal visionary capacities) tends to resonate more fully with how I experience the world.

Hillman's literary perspective leaves more room than Jung's and Corbin's, in my view, for the possibility that numinosity might exist in the act of pretending, that soul-making through play-making might not be considered more inferior in terms of soul than the experience of a visitation from an incontrovertibly autonomous being. In using the term *literary perspective*, I am referring to a nonliteral form of vision. I am referring to the persuasive, transporting, transformative power of language, and to the mediums it moves through. This perspective is a mode of seeing evoked by great fiction, poetic writing, speech, and a metaphoric relationship with the world. Seen through Hillman's lens, "the human being is set within the field of soul; soul is the metaphor that includes the human" (Cheetham, 2012, p. 196). Soul, and hence the imaginal which is the world of soul, is not a place accessible only to mystics; it is everywhere, eagerly or anxiously awaiting recognition. As such, all things—all activities that situate human life, whether subtle or solid—are things of soul, things through which soul might witness and reflect upon itself.

Having grown up with very little exposure to the numinous world of religious education, rituals, and practices, I find myself curious about the mysterious world of so called spirit, and the enigmatic experiences people have that fall under this rubric. A part of me yearns for a phenomenological relationship with this ineffable dimension of lived experience even though it appears, based on my past, to be inaccessible to me. One element that fascinates me about Corbin's work is its framing of the creative Imagination as an organ of spiritual insight and knowing. Here we see the pairing of that which I identify to be the most numinously present and most absent aspects of my lived experience. This pairing makes me curious about how Corbin's interpretations of the

creative Imagination as theophany in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī might further inform us about the potential role and purpose of so called secular creative imagination.

In asking myself how I might belong within the field of depth psychology, the presence of a recurring fantasy (or perhaps we might call it an image) appeared throughout the course of my graduate studies. This image still revisits me at times. It is awakened by my perception of a symbolic resonance between the world of theatre, Corbin’s work on the creative Imagination, and Hillman’s archetypal practice. This image imagines itself as a theatrical space and form of practice seen through the context of Corbin’s and Hillman’s work. The seed image of this practice was actually present in my writing before I associated it with Hillman and before I even knew of Corbin. I have called it “Psyche’s Stage” at times, and “The Sacred Stage” at others. On occasion, I have imagined that my dissertation would imagine the images of these theatrical spaces and practices forward in more depth. For now, however, I am gently holding this complex image and potentiality close at hand without forcing it. In accordance with an archetypal perspective, acknowledging this image’s presence and autonomy as well as the autonomy of the research question raised by this work, means making allowances for *their* prerogatives—for *their* desires, or lack thereof, to be in close relationship with each other. Taking my cues first from the research question itself, my intention is to follow its lead and see where it takes us. It may invite us to the theatre and perhaps it will not.

### **A Word about the Voice of this Work**

The voice of this work thus far—with the exception of the subsection directly above about the researcher’s relationship to the topic—is written in the voice of *we* not *me*, of *our* not *my*, of *us* not *I*. This voice emerged at first inconsistently, not altogether



consciously, and later became a more conscious aesthetic choice. It is *our* view that this voice reflects the archetypal idea of intrapsychic multiplicity. This choice acknowledges that I—the single physical bodied researcher—am constituted by multiple voices, who within the archetypal perspective, are imagined as persons. It also acknowledges the interpsychic dynamic of this research; it acknowledges the surrounding world, the reader, and the unconscious others who are the ancestors of this work, as voices of the work and it welcomes these voices as collaborative researchers. This basic archetypal idea is elaborated upon in the literature review and methodology section below.

Another aspect of the voice of this work is worth mentioning now to avoid confusion going forward. In this introductory chapter, we begin to develop an archetypal and imaginal sensibility in which all things, including ideas, are viewed as persons. The archetypal or imaginal expressions of these persons are, in essence, divine. They are more than personal, universal patterns and gods. This perspective requires that we honor them, in certain contexts, as proper names by capitalizing words that would otherwise not be capitalized. This idea is clarified further in the methodology section to follow.

### **Relevance of the Topic for Depth Psychology**

Many artists and depth psychologists alike have been inspired by a sense of symbolic resonance with Corbin's abstruse and beautiful theology of the imagination. Hillman, as noted above, is one among them. It is important to acknowledge, however, that depth psychology and the creative fields that borrow Corbin's language have expanded its applications beyond his intentions. These expansions have not always been welcomed by him. His interests were expressly oriented towards the imaginative function connecting an individual with the larger spiritual dimension of his or her being. Restoring

our knowledge of and relationship to divine Imagination and its corresponding imaginal realm was a profoundly serious matter for him. The cost of ignoring it or treating it lightly, in his view, could only result in dire consequences. Corbin earnestly feared that depriving the contents and function of *mundus imaginalis* and active Imagination their proper place, would result in them no longer having a place. “With the loss of *imaginatio vera* and of the *mundus imaginalis*” Corbin (1989) says, “nihilism and agnosticism begin” (p. xii). Concerned that the world of imagination had been relegated to the poets and artists in modern Western society, it was his intention “to reclaim it for philosophy and theology” (Cheetham, 2012, p. 3).

But what if we suspend judgment about one discipline’s claim to the imagination over another’s? What might happen in the act of reclaiming the imagination for artists, poets, psychologists, philosophers, and theologians alike by reimagining Hillman’s soul oriented creative psychology and Corbin’s spirit oriented interpretation of the creative Imagination in Persian mystic Sūfism as one body that represents different dimensions of the imagination? Might this not serve the discipline of depth psychology by further informing us about the roles of and relationships between that which we call soul, spirit, art, and the creative imagination?

### **Statement of the Research Problem and Question**

The Jungian lineage of depth psychology from which Hillman’s work springs was inspired by Jung’s (1961/1989) observation that we, as a society, no longer had a strong sense of the myths we live by (pp. 170-199). Christianity, Jung claimed, no longer served this purpose as it had done in the past. A connection to the deep mystery, to the enigmatic, to the numinous that Christianity had once offered us, was replaced—

in his view—with something that failed to satisfy our yearnings. Increasingly institutionalized and dogmatized, the tradition no longer emphasized the individual's direct relationship with spirit. The Jungian lineage of depth psychology is rooted in Jung's search for an alternative myth to live by. The role of imagination, as the means for engaging with numinous unconscious contents of the psyche, thus became the cynosure of depth psychology's healing myth.

While Jung discovered the numinosity which he found lacking within the current culture of Christianity via the field of psychology, Corbin found his healing myth within the esoteric perspective of theological traditions. He, too, was captivated by the potential of imagination as a portal or passage to the world of numinous phenomena. The loss of our direct relationship with spirit, that so concerned Jung, was restored for Corbin through a myth and image that pairs each individual with a corresponding celestial twin and guide who mediates for him or her in heaven by way of divine Imagination. Here, the all-encompassing divine Being—who like the archetypes is not directly accessible—is nevertheless, experienced through a direct relationship with this personal Angel.

One potential problem we see with Jung's and Corbin's approaches to the imagination, however, is that they seem to presume a human predisposition for visionary or numinous experiences that many people have never had. Hillman's literary approach to the imagination offers a lens through which Jung's and Corbin's works might become more phenomenologically pertinent for these individuals. There is, nevertheless, an uncomfortable gap—an awkward silence—it seems, between Hillman's soul work and Corbin's spirit work. Hillman's praise of Corbin does not include a detailed and explicit exploration of his theology. It side steps metaphorically over and around it. The curious

reader of Hillman might feel provoked to read Corbin's own writings for further clarification and insight, but reading Corbin is no easy task. One soon begins to wonder whether his abstruse theology can possibly have any bearing on the life of a nonmystic. The question soon arises, "What is an everyday person like me to do with this?" And then, in our case, another question keeps reemerging: "Is there something significant left unsaid by Hillman's response?"

In this gap between Hillman and Corbin the overarching question of this research emerges: How might a phenomenological engagement with and dialogue between Hillman's work in archetypal psychology and Corbin's interpretation of the creative Imagination in Persian mystic Sūfism further inform us about creative imagination for the nonmystic? And furthermore, what forms of creative practice might emerge from the understanding gleaned by this exploration?

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

In the following section, we introduce the works of Corbin and Hillman as they pertain to the research topic. Opening with a creation story as expressed in the works of Ibn 'Arabī, we discuss the role of sadness, mirroring, and theophany in the act of creation, and as such, of creativity itself. The enigmatic image of primordial Sadness emerges as the driving force of divine expiration and essential source of creative movement. All created beings as theophanies, as epiphanies born of the divine Sadness's sigh, function as mirrors through which the divine Being appeases His yearning to know Himself and be known.

We then describe the mystical hermeneutics of *ta'wīl* and the role of return in the act of creation. Summarily, *ta'wīl* is introduced as a hermeneutic form that returns an object—a text, for example—to the source and yearning through which it sprang into being, by recalling its Presence in the present. *Ta'wīl* is essentially understood as a re-creation and service to this source and yearning that tends to the source's and yearning's present stance and unfinished business. Instigating an exploration of various forms through which *ta'wīl* takes place, we touch upon the dialogic and role-playing work of the *dhikr*, creative prayer, and the visionary recital. Here we recognize a sense of symbolic resonance between the Sūfī mystic world and the world of theatre. Noting the likenesses between practices within these two disciplines, we invite the potential of further inquiry.

A review of Hillman's ideas on psychological creativity then leads to a discussion of the differences and similarities of soul perspectives in the works of Corbin and

Hillman. Themes, ideas, and images corresponding to the research topic, as well as the works of both of these men, emerge as food for further fodder. Introducing love, imagination, the heart, and beauty as images associated with creativity in Corbin's spiritually oriented perspective, as well as Hillman's psychologically oriented perspective, we point to the need for a deeper exploration of these images.

Finally, briefly directing our attention to the pertinence of Hillman's (1983) *Healing Fiction*, we call upon this title's name as a guiding image that speaks to the approach and intent of this research.

### **Creation and Creativity in Corbin's Conception of Ibn 'Arabī's Eternal Cosmogony**

Corbin (1958/1997) poses several questions that are pertinent to this research in his impressive work *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*. "What is the *meaning* of man's creative need" he asks, and "What, essentially, is the creativity we attribute to man?" (p. 180). He responds with the story of Creation according to Ibn 'Arabī's eternal cosmogony. This story begins with "a Divine Being alone in His unconditioned essence" (p. 184). All that we know of this Being is "the sadness of the primordial solitude that makes Him yearn to be revealed in beings who manifest Him to Himself" (p. 184). And so it goes that the Divine Being appeases His sadness, loneliness, and ardent desire to reveal Himself with an exhale and divine sigh. This exhale

gives rise to the entire "subtile" mass of a primordial existentiation termed Cloud. . . . This Cloud, which the Divine Being exhaled and in which He originally was, *receives* all forms and at the same time *gives* beings their forms; it is active and passive, receptive and existentiating. (p. 185)

As such the primordial Cloud and Divine Being is the “Creator–Creature” (p. 186). Many paradoxes are implicated by this image. The Creator–Creature is concomitantly the beginning and end, the hidden and revealed, the veiled and unveiled. The divine Being is, in essence, an all-encompassing Potentiality who recreates Himself anew from moment to moment with every breath He takes. Creation, in this paradigm, is a “recurrent creation, renewed from instant to instant” (p. 187). It is “unceasing theophanic Imagination” (p. 187). Multiple universes and dimensions of being are born of this recurrent archetypal pattern.

Enigmatically, it is an essential sadness that “makes the primordial Being a creative Being; it is the secret of His creativity” (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 185). Imagining ourselves from within this paradigm as creatures of the earth nested in the Cloud which is the substance of the primordial Being’s sigh, which is the appeasement and existentionation of His sadness, means sensing ourselves as derived from and constituted by this very Sadness. Moving forward in this research, our intention is to engage more fully with the mystery of this secret and image that renders sadness as the source and building block of Being and beings. Given our culturally informed sense of sadness as suffering and suffering as sickness (which is generally associated with the mundane rather than the spiritual world) we see this creation story as a place where Corbin and Hillman, where psychology and spirit might meet and dialogue together on their mutual connection to creativity.

After establishing Ibn ‘Arabī’s creation story, Corbin (1958/1997) responds more explicitly to his opening questions regarding the nature of human creativity. “The initial act of the Creator imagining the world” he says, “corresponds [to] the creature imagining

his world, imagining the worlds, his God, his symbols” (p. 188). And though we see Corbin relating mundane human life to Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmogony in this passage, his primary focus is on the exceptional capacities exemplified by the extraordinary lives of mystics. He tells us that the mystic alone can penetrate the *mundus imaginalis* and intermediary realm where all religious histories unfold. It is the mystic who participates in the act of divine Creation which takes place on a non-physical plane of existence, the manifestation of which is perceptible by Active Imagination: “the imaginative ‘Presence’ or ‘Dignity,’ the *Imaginatrix*” (p. 188). Intriguingly, the mystic practices that Corbin describes, and the images he uses to illuminate the mystic’s relationship to the imaginal world are reminiscent of theatrical practices and the actor’s relationship to the terrestrial world. Here we briefly introduce these practices and images as depicted in Corbin’s work to establish a foundation from which an exploration of the symbolic resonances between these worlds might emerge.

### **Mediation, Mirroring, and Mystic Vision in the Act of Recurrent Creation**

In the prelude to the second edition of Corbin’s (1989) *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, he further describes the mediating function of the imaginal world and its Imaginal Forms: “On the one hand it immaterialises the Sensible Forms,” he says, “On the other it ‘imaginalises’ the Intellectual Forms to which it gives shape and dimension” (p. ix). The subtle forms who are also *theophanies*—those same subtle forms born of the divine Sadness and sigh—mirror and reflect the archetypal patterns expressed by, through, and in the Divine Being. As mirrors, they too yearn to be known in concrete form, and in so doing they create the material world. All material things are beings born of this recurrent cycle. Each has a corresponding subtle form—an Angel and Lord, an



Image—for whom he or she is the Beloved and concrete agent of. All things, as differentiations of the divine yearning (including animals, plants, pencils, and even ideas) are persons as such. Each is paired with a celestial Twin and counterpart on a higher plane of existence in a hierarchical structure.

### **The *dhikr*.**

“The imaginative function makes it possible for all the universes to *symbolize with each other*” (Corbin, 1972, p. 9). First-hand knowledge of the imaginal suprasensory non-physical plane of existence which corresponds to the material world of our everyday lives is experienced by Sūfī mystics via their visionary capacities. This capacity is polished by a practice through which the mystic mirrors the divine by releasing the divine element veiled within his body. This can be achieved by the work of the *dhikr*, which involves the recitation of sacred texts. The mystic thus “brings the heart to the state of perfect mirror” (Corbin, 1971/1994, p. 104). Making himself present to his Lord, the Lord becomes present to the mystic as well. As such, the *dhikr* is not a unilateral enactment. It is a dialogue that takes place between the beloved and his Divine Lord. This ritual can be seen as a type of communion between an individual on the material plane of existence and his angelic twin who mediates between him and the celestial plane of existence.

### **Ta’wīl.**

The operation of *ta’wīl*, as conceived by Corbin, has a function of mirroring and unveiling similar to that of the *dhikr* which is crucial to understanding the intent of his spiritual hermeneutics. *Ta’wīl*, as he describes it, “is essential symbolic understanding” (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 13). It is the “transmutation of everything visible into symbols,

the intuition of an essence or person in an Image which partakes neither of universal logic nor of sense perception, and which is the only means of signifying what is to be signified” (p. 13). Here Corbin uses the word *symbol* in the same sense that Jung does. Since the meaning that lies beneath the symbol’s surface cannot be accessed directly, the *symbol* is simply the best possible expression of an implicit, mysterious, and always partially unknowable source. *Ta’wīl*, as the “transmutation of everything visible into symbols” (p. 13), brings the visible that much closer to its inner invisible source and meaning.

Bamford’s (1998) article “Esotericism Today: The Example of Henry Corbin” says that the action of *ta’wīl* saves the appearances of things by “returning them to” or “symbolizing them with” their original forms. “But more than that” he says, “*ta’wīl*, as mystical hermeneutics or spiritual exegesis, also saves, that is, returns to his or her source, the person practicing it” (p. XVIII). The act of entering a text through mystical hermeneutics is thus revealed to us as a return to source and soul that is also creative by way of its theophanic mirroring function in the cycle of recurrent creation. The hermeneut—by entering, imagining, and becoming the text in accordance with his spiritual capacity and relationship to his Lord and celestial Angel—returns to his source. He lives and enacts the text’s present Presence through which the Divine Being knows and re-creates Himself. Through the breathing in and out of reciprocal and mutual breath, the hermeneut and Lord *in-and-ex-hale* an always present *re-creation*.

Bamford describes *ta’wīl* as “a continuous unveiling or revelation of the spiritual beings to which the hermeneutical levels—spiritual organs and worlds—correspond” (p. XIX). Here we see the same *unveiling* language that was present in our discussion of the

*dhikr*. Creativity, seen through this lens, is not truly creativity in the sense that nothing absolutely new is created. Creativity, we see, is an unveiling of the Divine, an uncovering of a subsisting though hidden reality.

In *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Corbin (1964/2014) says that “fulfilment of the *ta'wīl* is inseparable from a spiritual rebirth” (p. 12). It is simultaneously an “exegesis of the text” and “exegesis of the soul”—“a practice known in Ismail gnosis as the science of the Balance” (p. 12). It is an “occulting [of] the manifest and manifesting [of] the occulted” (p. 12). Cheetham (2005) tells us in *Green Man, Earth Angel* that *ta'wīl*, as the Science of the Balance, “is required to maintain the equilibrium between the visible and invisible worlds” (p. 18).

In *All The World an Icon* Cheetham (2012) relates the activity of *ta'wīl* to Corbin’s “search for the interior meaning of the word of God” (pp. 89-90) and describes it as “a process of ‘reading’ and interpreting a sacred text, the text of the world, and the soul itself as *metaphors* for the reality from which they derive. “*Meta-phor*,” he says, “means to ‘carry over’ and the metaphoric vision of reality sees through the literal appearance of things to the ever-shifting and mysterious Presence that lies behind the daylight Face of things” (p. 92). This description tells us that the works of Corbin and Hillman both are examples of *ta'wīl*. While Corbin tends to focus on the world of sacred texts, Hillman’s view reaches more liberally into the text of the world and soul itself.

Hillman (1997b; 1999; 2004) rediscovers soul even in those subjects that shame and haunt us: in suicide, in the aging process, in war. His affinity for returning the gods to man and everyday life, and man and everyday life to the gods, is reflected in many of his essay titles: “Pink Madness or Why Does Aphrodite Drive Men Crazy With

Pornography” (Hillman, 2007e); “Wars, Rams, Mars” (Hillman, 2007f); “Hera, Goddess of Marriage” (2007c); “... And Huge is Ugly: Zeus and the Titans” (Hillman, 2007a); “Apollo, Dream, Reality” (Hillman, 2007b); and “The Inside of Strategies: Athene” (Hillman, 2007d).

Corbin’s exercises in *ta’wīl* tend toward abstruse and fascinating theologies and cosmologies that many of us have never heard of. His interpretations of Persian mystic Sūfism open up an enigmatic spiritual and philosophical lineage that is quite foreign to current European and American mainstream culture. His *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Corbin, 1958/1997), due to its thematic concentration on creative imagination as a spiritual visionary faculty, will serve as the cynosure of our focus on his work. This focus, however, will necessarily incorporate Corbin’s related works that draw upon an expansive family of correlative theosophical thinkers and their associated perspectives. In addition to Ibn ‘Arabī, the Arab from Andalusia, this spiritual lineage includes but is not limited to “Iranians like Abū Ya‘qūb Sejestānī (tenth century), Suhrawardī (twelfth century), Semnānī (fourteenth century), [and] Mullā Sadrā of Shirāz (seventeenth century)” (p. 5).

In Corbin’s (1964/2014) *History of Islamic Philosophy* he considers the source material that has informed and shaped the Islamic spiritual and philosophical tradition. In *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shī‘ite Iran* (Corbin, 1960/1977) he translates eleven spiritual texts of Iranian Islam that span from the twelfth century to current day, and in *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (Corbin, 1983) he explains the notion of cyclical time in Mazdaism and Ismailism. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sūfism* (Corbin, 1971/1994) explores the symbol and suprasensory phenomena

of light and color in the writing of Iranian Sūfīs such as Sohravardī, Semnānī, and Najm Kobrā. In *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* Corbin (1954/1988) describes a visionary phenomenon through which the mystic experiences his deeply personal and unique connection to the more universal philosophical dimension of his teachings.

### **The visionary recital.**

In *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* Corbin (1954/1988) performs an exegesis and *ta'wīl* on a characteristically Persian genre consisting of short spiritual romances, visionary recitals, or *récits* as he variously calls them. Here, he translates three such recitals included in the works of the mystic-philosopher Avicenna. His overarching task is to interpret The Recital of Hayy ibn Yahqzān, the Recital of the Bird, and the Recital of Salāmān and Absāl as a cycle, trilogy, and “spiritual autobiography in the form of symbols” (p. xi).

Cheetham (2012) aptly describes these recitals as a “record of the opening of an inner world that reveals the transcendent individuality of the human person” (p. 68). In *After Prophecy* (Cheetham, 2007), he says that *récit*, as Corbin “intends the term, is the archetypal personal narrative” (p. 141). The visionary recital, Corbin (1954/ 1988) tells us, is not to be confused with allegory. It is a psychic Event, “a personally lived adventure” (p. 4). It is the soul’s own story carried back to its source through an imaginal Event that transmutes its sensible or imaginable content into symbols. This imaginal Event opens into a higher dimension of knowing and clarity where that which was previously known only as dogma becomes personalized. Connections between the philosopher’s prior consciously lived motifs and teachings, and his inmost self are experientially brought to his awareness. “The secret motivations” of these motifs and

teachings of which he “was not yet conscious,” become revealed (p. 4). Corbin tells us that the substitution of dramaturgy for cosmology that characterizes the visionary recital, “guarantee[s] the genuineness of this universe” (p. 4). Participation in this dramatic form, in other words, provides a lived experience that verifies or discredits the mystic’s sense of the ostensibly *objective* truth.

In contemplating the recital as an actual visionary Event experienced by a great mystic, there is an understandable tendency to think of its *ta’wīl* (in other words, the act which carries it back to its source and the original meaning from which it flowered) as a duplication of the mystic’s experience. This would be a mistaken understanding. The cosmological structure of recurrent creation tells us that *ta’wīl* always takes place in the present. The return is not a return to the same. It is a return of the like to its likeness; it is a return to an original intention and meaning pre-existent to the mystic or his personalized experience. The recital is “an initiation that can be given and related only in symbols. It is not a *story* that happened to others, but the soul’s own story” (Corbin, 1954/ 1988, p. 33). This is why the visionary recital is always told in the first person, in the voice of “I,” and experienced in accordance with the level of spiritual development attained by the mystic, the reciter, or hermeneut who has penetrated the world of the text. *Ta’wīl* of the visionary recital might be thought of as an enactment through which the hermeneut moves into *the-I of- the-text*, which is the soul’s (we might also say the Angel’s) own story.

Having begun this literature review describing the creation story upon which Ibn ‘Arabī’s work is built, then following with an introduction to various creative Persian mystic practices and literary forms—namely: the work of the *dhikr*, *ta’wīl*, and the

visionary recital—our intention has been to establish a fertile ground for deepening into the question of this research. The parallels between this creation story, these practices, these literary forms, and the theatre world from which the researcher has emerged, are striking, or perhaps we should say evocative at least. The images of mirroring, of unveiling, of playing and exchanging dramatic roles, are present in each. It is our expectation that a closer look at these parallels will further inform the unfolding dialogic course of this study.

### **Hillman on Psychological Creativity**

Since the question that gives rise to this research emerges from a desire to expand our understanding of creativity for nonmystics through the lens of Corbin's mystic perspective, it behooves us to begin this review of Hillman's work by taking a look at his essay entitled "On Psychological Creativity" (Hillman, 1972a). Here Hillman distinguishes psychological creativity from other types of creativity in naming psyche (soul) as the opus of its fascination. Four conclusions derived from this composition seem particularly pertinent to the task at hand. The underlying themes from which these conclusions are derived will be addressed, readdressed, and deepened throughout this research. A brief mention of them now will serve as an introduction to some of Hillman's general perspectives as they apply specifically to our topic of creativity. It will also establish a greater sense of the contrast between his orientation and Corbin's. The first of these conclusions says that relationships within the world and human life are necessary if psychological creativity is to occur. The second acknowledges the inherently destructive and pathological element in creativity. The third distinguishes creativity from art, and the fourth points to its associations with love, the heart, and beauty.

**The first conclusion: Psychological creativity and the necessity of relationships.**

Regarding the first conclusion, Hillman (1972a) says:

Neither relationships, nor feeling, nor any of the human context in which the psyche finds itself should be mistaken for the soul-making opus. . . . Yet this human circle is necessary for psychological creativity: there seems to be a necessity for a close and personal world—family, tutelary figures, a friendly society, a beloved, personal enemies. *The world and its humanity is the vale of soul-making.* (p. 25)

Hillman tells us that this term *vale of soul-making* comes from the Romantic poets. The idea, he says, appears in Blake's *Vala*, and Keats expresses his sense of its meaning in a letter to his brother (Hillman, 1975, pp. xv, 231). Here, in the present context, however, the word *vale* might be imagined as an implicit reference to Corbin: as a play on words and nuance that brings to mind the beloved who releases the divine element hitherto "veiled" within him. Here we see the contrast between creativity expressed as the "unveiling" and mirroring work of sacred prayer in Corbin's interpretations of Sūfī mysticism and that which is characterized by Hillman as the "vale" of soul-making. The distinction is illuminated by the difference in height that soul occupies within the works of these two men. For Hillman the creative act of making soul takes place in the valley, in the trenches so to speak, with other human beings and terrestrial things while the connection between soul and creativity (which is theophany) for Corbin always involves elevation and dematerialization. While human to human and material world relations are essential to Hillman's image of soul, Corbin's pertains not to relationships between



humans and sensible things but rather to the triad and tiered relationship between the human individual, his or her celestial twin (in other words, his or her soul), and the Divine Being. Hillman's (2013) essay "Peaks and Vales: The Soul/Spirit Distinction as Basis for the Differences between Psychotherapy and Spiritual Discipline," exemplifies and clarifies this distinction between his and Corbin's perspectives. Seeing through the lens of this essay, we might say in a very general sense that Corbin's orientation belongs to the upper half of soul's middle dimension. It is filled with images of light and is closer to the world of pure spirit, while Hillman's orientation belongs more to the lower half of soul's middle dimension. Here, we might think of soul as hugging the grounded and grounding world of concrete matter.

**Secondly: The destructive and pathological element to psychological creativity.**

As indicated above, the distinctions between Corbin and Hillman are necessitated in part by the parameters of their respective disciplines: theology and psychology. This becomes apparent in the second conclusion regarding psychological creativity. Since individuals are naturally apt to seek psychological help during the darkest and most painful periods of their lives the practicality of Hillman's profession requires that he include the odd, morbid, dangerous, destructive, and pathological aspects of the psyche/soul in his archetypal framework to a greater extent than Corbin. "Creative insights," Hillman (1972a) says, "come at the raw and tender edge of confrontation, at the borderlines where we are most sensitive and exposed—and curiously, most alone" (p. 91).

In a discussion that draws upon Jung's notions of creative instinct, Hillman (1972a) directs our attention to the "destructive/constructive poles that describe the instinct in general" as a means for recognizing that "*soul-making entails soul-destroying*" (p. 37). This image or idea of instinct might be visualized by imagining instinct as the preconscious and spontaneous response to an organism's concomitant sense of something wrong and its secret desire: in other words, its sickness, its pathology, its closeness to death on the one hand, and its hunger for satisfaction and fulfillment on the other.

Psychic alteration begins at this instinctual level prior to our awareness of its presence. It too, like the instinct, has a dual structure. This inherent duality at the level of our pre-reflective responses shows us that creation or birth and destruction or death are intimately bound to one another from the outset. One implies the other. "The essence of creativity" Hillman (1972a) tells us "is that these aspects exist within each other *in every act*: that which builds at the same time tears down, and that which breaks up at the same time restructures" (p. 37). A psychologically creative approach, in his view, would not attempt to eradicate our inherent destructive tendencies or to strip us of our pathologies; alternatively, Hillman would ask us to consider the dark and the odd, the distortions and the sufferings of the soul, as necessary to the full range and richness of its creative expression.

This view is probably at the core of what concerned Corbin most about Hillman's adoption of the term *imaginal*. Cheetham (2012), an author of five books on Corbin's work, aptly notes that "Corbin's *imaginal* world is a spiritual world, from which the darkness of evil is banished" (p. 172). Corbin (1971/1995) himself tells us that "something like a secularization of the *imaginal* into the *imaginary* [is] required for the

fantastic, the horrible, the monstrous, the macabre, the miserable, and the absurd to triumph” (p. 20).

**The third conclusion: Distinguishing creativity from art.**

An uncomfortably unsettled and paradoxical relationship between the disciplines of depth psychology and art is present in both Freud’s and Jung’s writings on the topic. The sometimes jarring sense of discord that surfaces reflects, we imagine, an overall societal confusion about the subject of art as well. Here we briefly discuss the means by which Hillman avoids this confusion and establishes an important premise regarding his view of psychological creativity.

In “Psychological Factors Determining Human Behavior,” Jung (1936/1969) discusses what he ambivalently refers to as the “creative instinct” (p. 118 [CW 8, para. 245]). This ambivalence is provoked by Jung’s observation that the creative impulse behaves, on the one hand, “dynamically like an instinct” in that it is compulsive like an instinct, and on the other hand, unlike an instinct because, in his view, “it is not common” (p. 118). Hillman (1972a) aptly points out, however, that the commonality of the creative instinct as such, is implicit in Jung’s descriptions of “the urge toward individuation, or personality development, the spiritual drive, . . . or in short, the drive of the self to be realized” (p. 34). Jung’s psychology, though not an explicitly creative psychology is prevailing, and one might say accurately, thought of in this respect.

Hillman (1972a) explains that “Jung generally writes about creativity in connection with the artistic personality and artistic work” (p. 34). In so doing he makes the common error of confusing and conflating them. Hillman avoids this problem by distinguishing between the two. “The creative as instinct,” he says, “cannot be limited to

the few, to geniuses and artists” (p. 38). In the context of this paper, we might also add that the creative cannot be limited to the mystic or visionary. Hillman tells us that “any notion of two kinds of psychology—one for you and me and one for the creative person—cuts off the creative from common humanity and you and me from creativity” (p. 39).

The following passage taken from *On Psychological Creativity* (Hillman, 1972a), imagines Jung’s hypothesis of a creative instinct forward and hints at how Corbin’s concerns about Hillman’s use of his term *imaginal* might be allayed.

The creative instinct . . . is not a gift or special grace, an ability, talent, or trick. Rather it is that immense energy coming from beyond man’s psyche which pushes one to self-dedication via one or another specific medium. Creativity impels devotion to one’s person in its becoming through that medium, and it brings with it a sense of helplessness and increasing awareness of its numinous power. Hence our relation to creativity fosters the religious attitude, and our description of it often uses religious language. (pp. 35-36)

As uncomfortable as Corbin might have been with Hillman’s use of the term *imaginal*, here we see that Hillman himself did not view his perspective as a “secularization of the *imaginal* into the *imaginary*” (Corbin, 1971/1995, p. 20). Hillman’s image of creative instinct, as expressed above, is distinctive and at the same time similar to both Jung’s conception of individuation and Corbin’s interpretation of the pairing between earthly entities and their corresponding celestial Lords or Angels depicted in Persian mystic Sūfism.

Hillman’s (1997a) archetypal rendering of this theme is variously explored through an image of “the acorn theory” in his book *The Soul’s Code: In Search of*

*Character and Calling.* This theory, as a refreshed expression of the idea put forth in Plato's myth of Er, "holds that each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived" (p. 6). The basic plot of this myth, as Hillman describes it, begins with the gift of a soul companion (which is called a daimon) who guides the soul and chooses the unique image or pattern through which its life will be lived on earth. Since the soul inevitably forgets all that transpired prior to its arrival in the material world, the daimon remembers its unique image and pattern and is as such the carrier of its destiny.

This mythological premise expresses itself in life as calling, fate, and character. The myth's basic plot and themes are reminiscent of those depicted in Corbin's interpretations of Persian Sūfism. Corbin, himself, discusses the confluence of Platonic philosophy and Islamic esoteric theology throughout his many works. He refers to the neo-Zoroastrian Platonic influences of Sohrawardī's work, in which "philosophical speculation" leads to "a metaphysics of ecstasy" (Corbin, p. 43, 1971/1994). He also tells us that Ibn 'Arabī was "surnamed the Platonist, the 'son of Plato'" (Corbin, 1958/ 1997, p. 21).

Here, in the overlap of these mythological premises, creative experience is viewed by both Corbin and Hillman as numinous experience. Creativity itself is an attribute belonging to soul—not the human person. It is ever present, before and after the birth of all things. Seen through this paradigm, acknowledging and honoring the non-secular ubiquity of creative presence means distinguishing it from its limited expression in and through "art" and "artists."

**The fourth conclusion: Associations with love, the heart, and beauty.**

A fourth conclusion discussed in Hillman's (1972a) "On Psychological Creativity" is that "*the creative is an achievement of love*" which is "marked by *imagination and beauty*" (p. 54). Our interpretation of this conclusion depends, in part, on how we understand these words: love, imagination, and beauty. These words as themes, which play significant roles in both Hillman's and Corbin's works, will also play an ongoing primary part in the larger conversation of this research. Here, we turn to Eros (god of love) and Psyche (namesake of soul), to introduce some of Hillman's insights on these themes.

Following a speculative discussion of various culturally informed notions about creativity, Hillman (1972a) explores the story of Eros and Psyche as a possible root metaphor and fundamental myth through which a practice of creative psychology appropriate to today's particular needs, might be viewed. He characterizes Eros as a figure of "the intermediate region," a figure who is "neither divine or human," but rather "the principle of intercourse between them" (p. 70). The function of Eros, as envisioned here, corresponds with the function of the Imagination and imaginal world depicted in Corbin's work. Hillman and Corbin both tell us that Imagination and Love (we might also say Eros) are inseparable; one cannot exist without the other. "The imaginal" Hillman says "is entered primarily through interested love; it is a creation of faith, need, and desire" (p. 86).

He then tells us that seeing through Eros archetypally means recognizing that the complexity of whole love—like instinct, as discussed above—is spectral, and each of its

essential characteristics includes an oppositional pole. Hate, in other words, is part of love's psychological complex.

Hillman then imagines Eros (in the form of compulsion) and Psyche (in the form of inhibition and ambivalence) as oppositional roles in the complex of psychological creativity. "Those twins, compulsion and inhibition," he says "are familiar enough in all creative efforts where one is both driven and blocked, enthusiastic and critical, on fire and fearful" (Hillman, 1972a, p. 74). The movement of Hillman's thought in this passage has moved Eros from his status as an archetype himself to the position of an oppositional pole offset by Psyche who is positioned at the other pole-end in the archetype of psychological creativity. This movement gives voice to the intertwining and tortuous depths and breadths of the archetypes' intra and inter-relationships. Creativity—as an achievement of love which is marked by imagination and beauty—is (as exemplified here) dynamic, intricate, and complex below the surface.

Hillman sees through the myth of Eros and Psyche to beauty's connection with psychological creativity as well. Just as our western culture has lost its connection to and knowledge of imagination as ontologically real, it has also lost its sense of beauty's relationship with soul. "The beauty of psyche" Hillman (1972a) says, "refers to a sense of the beautiful in connection with psychological events" (p. 101). But beauty, in his view, does not refer to a merely abstract or celestial idea. Beauty appears and is recognized via its physicalized form. Eros—before anything else—he reminds us, is attracted to Psyche by her beauty. Beauty is sensuous, seductive, and physically alluring.

Hillman takes issue with the fact that the presence of beauty is rarely acknowledged in the discipline of psychology. The depth of beauty and of body is largely

forgotten in today's cultural landscape. Society's surface layer relationship to them makes it dangerous for the therapist to address the sensuous, seductive, and physically alluring quality of beauty with a client. The potential for abuse or the appearance of abuse and the litigious threats that come with the territory are probably responsible, in large part, for this stifled silence on the topic. But avoiding this danger fails to restore beauty's relationship to the depth of soul. A closer attention to the subjective (psychological, inner, veiled) dimension of exterior world physicality has the potential for leading us back to an experience of Beauty's source and mystery—to the a priori yearning that shines through on the face of all things. This type of attention is exemplified in many forms of poetic writing and other creative mediums of expression. Deepening our sense of connection to the particularities of Beauty as she appears to us in bodies and things is the means by which we might save her and save ourselves from our dissatisfied surface level relationship to her. "By being touched, moved, and opened by the experiences of the soul, one discovers that what goes on in the soul is not only interesting and meaningful, necessary and acceptable, but that it is attractive, lovable, and beautiful" (Hillman, 1972a, pp. 101-102).

The leading role that beauty plays in Hillman's work—and by extension in his idea of soul and imagination—can be simply illustrated by the following list of articles and speeches where *beauty* appears explicitly in his titles: "Natural Beauty Without Nature" (Hillman, 2006e); "The Repression of Beauty" (Hillman, 2006f); "Segregation of Beauty" (Hillman, 2006g); and "Justice, Beauty, and Destiny as Foundations for an Ecological Psychology" (Hillman, 2006d). The significance of beauty is also implied by the title of a speech where its opposite is evoked: "The Cost of the Ugly" (Hillman,



2006c). Beauty's close relative, aesthetics, is featured in two more titles: "Aesthetic Response as Political Action" (Hillman, 2006a) and "Aesthetics and Politics" (Hillman, 2006b).

In "On Psychological Creativity" Hillman (1972a) suggests that a practice of psychology which is truly creative would also be an aesthetic practice. The question of what this means more specifically and what such a form of practice might look like will be explored through a closer look at the writings mentioned above as well as other pertinent works of Hillman's and Corbin's.

### **Love, Creativity, Beauty, Imagination, the Heart: Seeing Through an Aesthetic Response to the World, and Panpsychic Sensibility**

Hillman's (1992b) essay "The Thought of the Heart" delves further into the relationship between love, creativity, beauty, imagination, and the heart through the language and ideas put forth in Corbin's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's work, while simultaneously seeing them through the lens of the mundane world. Drawing from Corbin's interpretations of Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy and Sūfism in general, Hillman introduces us to the image of a powerful thinking heart whose intelligence "connotes a simultaneous knowing and loving by means of imagining" (p. 7). This power of the heart which is the power by which mystics create objects in the imaginal world (described in the introduction to this paper) is referred to as *himma*. Telling an imaginative, historical, etymological, and associative story of the terrestrial human heart and weaving it into Corbin's supernal heart story, Hillman recreates our overall sense of the heart. His goal is to "restore the animal sense to imagining" through remembrance of a heart which "awakens in the aesthetic response" (p. 74). This response, he says, "is an animal

awareness to the face of things” (p. 74). This statement and his essay “Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World” (Hillman, 1992a), which picks up where “The Thought of the Heart” (Hillman, 1992b) leaves off, reflects the panpsychic sensibility of Hillman’s approach to archetypal psychology which corresponds to the imaginal world’s panpsychic reality as depicted in Persian Sūfism.

Corbin’s (1960/1977) translation of a section from Ibn ‘Arabī’s *The Book of the Spiritual Conquests of Mecca* describes this panpsychic aspect of the imaginal Earth: “Everything that is to be found on that Earth,” he translates, “absolutely everything, is alive and speaks” (p. 138). The mystic who leaves behind his material body to enter the imaginal world soon discovers that

every stone, every tree, every village, every single thing he comes across, he may speak with, if he wishes, as a man converses with a companion. Certainly they speak different languages, but this Earth has the gift, peculiar to it, of conferring on whomsoever enters the ability to understand all the tongues that are spoken there. (p. 139)

As a nonmystic alternative to the mystic’s experience of the *mundus imaginalis*, Hillman’s psychological use of the imaginal perspective discovers a panpsychic sensibility and attitude toward the world without shedding the material body. He accomplishes an *as if* stance through language that listens deeply for the voice of all things, including ideas as persons. In *Revisioning Psychology* Hillman (1975) tells us that “archetypal psychology envisions the fundamental ideas of the psyche to be expressions of persons—Hero, Nymph, Mother, Senex, Child, Trickster, Amazon, Puer and many other specific prototypes bearing the names and stories of the Gods” (p. 128). These

fundamental ideas are honored and seen through in an archetypal move by which they are personified. His writings, in general, can be viewed as a *ta'wīl* that includes but is not limited to the mundane world: a hermeneutics that carries things back to their soul perspectives through imagination. *Revisioning Psychology* (discussed further in the methodology chapter) is his most comprehensive guide to this hermeneutic practice exemplified within his extensive oeuvre.

### **Re-searching Between the Space of Captive and Self-Subsisting Imagination**

*In Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*

Corbin (1958/1997) says that “the form of every theophany is correlative to the form of the consciousness to which it discloses itself” (p. 232). All human experiences of the imagination, whether self-subsistent or conjoined, are uniquely attuned to and symbolically resonant with the relationship between the individual and his or her angelic Twin. This implies that imagination—in the form by which it makes itself available to each individual—corresponds to that individual’s unique being, purpose, level of development, and place in the world. There is no secular imagination according to Ibn ‘Arabī. All imagination is theophany. Corbin tells us that “even the Imagination *conjoined* to, and inseparable from, the subject is in no sense a faculty functioning arbitrarily in the void, secreting ‘fantasies’ ” (p. 220). The implication here is that conjoined imagination, which is also referred to as captive imagination, serves a purpose that is symbolically related to the self-subsisting Imagination that concerns Corbin. And this perhaps, is one way of reconciling Hillman’s use of the term imaginal with Corbin’s intention for it.

In “The Thought of the Heart” Hillman’s (1992b) task is rediscovering the heart in captive or conjoined imagination. He draws liberally from the language and themes of love, creativity, beauty, imagination, and the heart, all of which are crucial to Corbin’s (1958/1997) treatment of the mystic’s self-subsisting or dissociable Imagination as conceived in *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī*. As such, a dialogue that opens a space between these works may further our search for a mode of thinking and practice that brings captive and self-subsisting imagination closer together. We might think of these two texts as embodiments of the captive and the self-subsisting imaginations, as earthly beloved and celestial Lord symbolizing with each other. In so doing, the question arises: how can the nonmystic approach this task with both respect and authenticity? How does the nonmystic, for whom the self subsisting Imagination is invisible, converse with his or her Angel? Perhaps, we might begin by following the relational and role-playing examples given by the *dhikr*, by *ta’wīl*, by the visionary recital, while simultaneously calling upon the image of child’s play, since we are, after all—as nonmystics—mere children in this territory. Perhaps we might *pre-tend*; in other words, we might tend in advance to that which has not yet presented itself to us.

Corbin (1958/1997) makes a similar suggestion in a discussion on Creative Prayer. Here he instructs the mystic who sees not-yet His Lord to worship Him “*as though he saw Him*” (p. 262). It is noteworthy, we think, that this *as though*, *as if pre-tending* approach to spiritual transformation, which is also present in Hillman’s archetypal approach to psychology, is a characteristic that can be attributed to many and possibly all creative disciplines. Perhaps this has something to say about the function and purpose of creative imagination regardless of the dimensional height from which it

springs. Perhaps the implication is that creative practice on one dimension might present a window through which the next dimension can be entered.

In “On the Necessity of Abnormal Psychology: Ananke and Athene,” Hillman (1980) reminds us that “the ontological priority of Corbin’s world” (p. 33) can only be arrived at by starting from the place where we happen to be at any given moment. Most often, in the field of psychology this is a place of pain and darkness, not of light and spiritual heights. Hillman thus recommends taking the operational approach of Jung’s active imagination technique with Corbin’s vision. For him this means that “active imagination is not for the sake of the doer and *our* actions in the sensible world of literal realities, but for the sake of the images,” for the sake of “where they can take us, *their* realization” (p. 33).

Perhaps we should ask ourselves what imagining for the sake of the images or living for the sake of the Angel means, phenomenologically speaking? How might those of us for whom the images and Angel appear absent, translate this in the details of what we live? How might we practice and tend to the images and Angels that we yearn for but do not as-yet see? What might pre-tending for their sake look like? This is the crux of our research. These are the questions that move our resonant resources (most notably Corbin’s work, Hillman’s work, the researcher’s experience, and the recurring image of theatrical practice) into dialogue with each other.

### **A Bridge Between Corbin and Hillman: Cheetham’s Writing**

Cheetham, an author of five books exploring the works of Corbin, has addressed to some extent, the question of how a nonmystic might respond to Corbin’s ideas in everyday life. His informative and beautifully written books, which are excellent

resources for making Corbin's work more accessible, include: *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism* (Cheetham, 2003); *Green Man, Earth Angel: The Prophetic Tradition and the Battle for the Soul of the World* (Cheetham, 2005); *After Prophecy: Imagination, Incarnation, and the Unity of the Prophetic Tradition* (Cheetham, 2007); *All the World an Icon: Henry Corbin and the Angelic Function of Beings* (Cheetham, 2012); and *Imaginal Love: The Meanings of Imagination in Henry Corbin and James Hillman* (Cheetham, 2015). In each of these books Cheetham compares and contrasts the works of Corbin, Jung, and Hillman, though Corbin is always at the center of his focus. In his fourth book *All the World an Icon*, he devotes three chapters to exploring the similarities, differences, and relationships between their archetypal and imaginal perspectives (Cheetham, 2012, pp. 130-214).

Cheetham's answer to the question of how one might transmute the messages of Corbin's work into everyday life practices is in some ways similar to Hillman's. The tone of Cheetham's response is more reverent; he writes more explicitly and extensively about the details of Corbin's eclectic life and oeuvre but both men, like Corbin himself, discover soul through hermeneutic practices informed by the phenomenological tradition: through reading, writing, and re-searching from within a transformative world of language where metaphor and symbolic resonance have the power to enliven, move, and shape our lives. All three men respond to the world and the subjects of their attention aesthetically, poetically, and dramatically through writing. The event and experience that takes place in the writing is, perhaps, their saving grace and healing fiction.

## Healing Fiction

Hillman (1983) says as much in the following passage from his book entitled *Healing Fiction*:

Psychoanalysis is a work of imaginative tellings in the realm of *poiesis*, which means simply “making,” and which I take to mean making by imagination into words. Our work more particularly belongs to the *rhetoric* of poesis, by which I mean the persuasive power of imagining in words, an artfulness in speaking, writing and reading. (pp. 3-4)

*Healing Fiction* is itself a poesis, an imaginative telling and *re-making* of depth psychology's discipline viewed as a literary genre: as a tradition that constructs and collects healing fictions. It is an unearthing of founding fictions grounded and founded in the stories of its founding fathers: Freud, Jung, and Adler. We return to this work later in the research process, but for now we make two observations that speak to its immediate significance. The first observation is that *Healing Fiction* frequently calls upon theatrical metaphors and the god of Greek tragedy, Dionysus (also Dionysos), to make its case. Since the theatre's relationship to our research question has emerged as a recurrent theme in the initial stages of this inquiry, a closer look at these references and Hillman's other writings where Dionysus appears, is warranted.

Secondly, we would like to direct our attention to Hillman's stance that all our claims, as factual or empirical as they may seem, are always fictions. The writer Alain makes a distinction “between history as stories of outer events and fiction as stories of inner events” (Hillman, 1983, p. 24) but Hillman rejects the duality of this separation. He tells us that “the distinction between a case history of outer events and a soul history of

inner experiences cannot be made in terms of indelible and literal truth” (p. 26). Soul and history (as he envisions them) are names we give to “two perspectives toward events, an inner psychological one and an outer historical one” (p. 26). The movement between soul and history can be viewed as a process which is “continually internalizing and externalizing, gaining insight and losing it, deliteralizing and reliteralizing” (p. 26). Hillman’s telling of Freud’s, Jung’s, and Adler’s lives and works models this type of perspectival movement. The Freud, the Jung, and the Adler of *Healing Fiction* are both more and less than the human Freud, Jung, and Adler ever were. Seen through the image, the idea, the archetype of healing fiction—they *re-present* themselves in service to the image, the idea, the archetype under investigation in Hillman’s treatment of them. We mention this now because it speaks to the intent of this research. In opening to the resources of Hillman’s and Corbin’s work and bringing them together, in allowing them “to symbolize with each other,” to re-create and recreate with each other, our hope is that they might further inform us about their and our potential relationships to creativity. In short, our hope is to expand depth psychology’s repertoire of healing fictions.

Holding the image of healing fiction close at hand allows us to enter this work on its own terms precluding the need for an in depth analysis of the criticism and controversy that Corbin’s and Hillman’s works have been subjected to. Here we briefly mention them as an acknowledgment of opposing perspectives regarding their scholarship.

Tacey’s (2012) memorial article *James Hillman and the Reanimation of the World*, tells us that Hillman’s “efforts to revision psychology along cultural lines met with resistance not only from academic psychology, which dismissed his work as



unscientific, but from Jungian psychology, which tended to regard his 'revisioning' as irrelevant" (p. 175).

Cheetham (2012) says that Corbin:

has been accused . . . of misrepresenting Ibn 'Arabi, of overemphasizing the mystical aspects of Suhrawardi's writings, of seeing Islam through exclusively Shiite eyes, of having a somewhat lax attitude toward standards of historical scholarship, and completely undervaluing the nonmystical aspects of Islam as it is in fact practiced by most believers. (p. 13)

Analysis of such criticisms is inappropriate to the scope and purpose of this research. Our immediate task is not to determine how archetypal psychology, as envisioned by Hillman, measures up to academic or clinical Jungian psychology or to determine how Corbin's project measures up to the spiritual and philosophic traditions he draws from. This research views Hillman's and Corbin's works as archetypal or imaginal creations that symbolize with the sources they draw from for inspiration. Starting from this perspective, our task is to follow the leads that emerge from these creations in hopes of furthering their movement in the mundane world for nonmystics.

This literature review has laid the foundation from which the poesis of this research will build itself in layers. Here we have introduced themes, ideas, and images appearing in the works of Corbin and Hillman that symbolize with the research question. The methodology section below looks to the hermeneutic tradition as a guide to deepening our relationship with the research question and gleaning its response.

### Chapter 3 Methodology

#### Research Approach

Just as Hillman's (1975) *Revisioning Psychology* attempts to restore a sense of soul to psychological language and thinking, Romanyshyn's (2007) *The Wounded Researcher* attempts to do the same for depth psychological research through an imaginal or *alchemical* approach that complements more traditional methodologies. This approach calls for a poetics of research that holds a space for the presence of depth psychology's subject matter: namely, that of psyche or soul. It is a process of research, of searching again, and remembering that which "has already made its claim upon the researcher through his or her complex relations to the topic" (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. xi).

The alchemical hermeneutic approach acknowledges and honors the work of depth psychological research as a life in itself, a life that extends over many generations transcending the individual researcher who searches again in service to this life. By returning to the marginalized, lost, or forgotten ancestral lineage through which the soul of the work has passed, alchemical hermeneutics reaches for the recrudescence of soul's "unfinished business." In its devotion to this cause, the imaginal approach "is attuned to those hidden and not readily present possibilities that linger and wait as the weight of history in the work" (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 291).

Romanyshyn tells us that the depth psychological researcher is drawn into the topic of inquiry through his *complexes*. The term *complex*, originally coined by Jung (1936/1969), refers to the product of a psychic activity that he envisioned as the splitting off of psychic fragments from the conscious psyche in response to traumatic psychic

wounds or contradictory tendencies (p. 121 [CW 8, para. 253]). It was Jung's thought that these split off unconscious parts of the psyche (present in all of us) could be witnessed indirectly through our pre-reflective behavioral responses that are triggered by circumstances correlative to the original wounding experiences. It was his view that these responses hinted at the presence of distinct, complex, intrapsychic, autonomous entities originally developed as defense mechanisms against unbearable psychic contents. Jung called these person-like parts of the psyche that behaved like distinct personalities, complexes. The depth psychological researcher who is drawn into the topic of inquiry through his or her complexes is, in other words, a wounded researcher. The wound that draws one in sensitizes one to the concerns of the research topic. The researcher's complexes, seen through this lens, are correlative to the topic's complexes: to its unfinished business and unanswered questions. Research with soul in mind, Romanyshyn (2007) says, "seeks to transform a wound into a work" (p. 111).

We think it is worth noting here that descriptions of the alchemical hermeneutic approach, like those of Sūfī practices discussed above, are often reminiscent of processes used in the discipline of theatre arts. This can be seen in Romanyshyn's (2007) introduction to Corbin's notion of three hermeneutic levels. The first of these levels is "theoretical certainty;" the second "is the certainty of eyewitness testimony;" and at the third level "the certainty is lived" (p. 117). This is a process of either becoming or of being consumed by the thing that is known. There is a symbolic resonance between this level and the act of taking on a role in theatre. In each case, "the other" is embodied and experienced through embodiment and enactment.

The core of Romanyshyn's (2007) alchemical hermeneutic process is what he refers to as the *transference dialogue*. This dialogic form is viewed as a medium through which the imaginal others who constitute the soul of the work can be engaged with. In describing this process, he calls upon an expression for which he credits the poet Coleridge, though our own association with this expression comes from our experience in the theatre world: the "willing suspension of disbelief" (p. 150). Romanyshyn relates this activity to "the ritual place of play" (p. 151). With regard to transference dialogues, "the willing suspension of disbelief" allows us to experience the livelihood and personhood of our topic "without denial or affirmation of its real existence by some act of judgment that would measure the experience against some preformed notion of the real versus the imaginary" (p. 151). This is an important notion to keep in mind as we move into this work.

Romanyshyn's depth psychologically oriented imaginal approach, Corbin's more mystic imaginal approach informed by Persian Sūfism, and Hillman's archetypal approach to hermeneutics will serve as paradigms that ground this work in an environment suited to the topic and the field of depth psychology. All of these approaches are rooted in the historic lineage of hermeneutics and phenomenology. The confluence of these disciplines reveals itself as a blended-self. The voices of seminal figures who constitute this blended-self overlap, challenge, and play upon each other. Though our intention is to align most closely with the hermeneutic approaches described and exemplified in the works of Corbin and Hillman, we remain conscious of and open to the presence, influence, and potential guidance of this larger family in so doing. In the methodology section below, we begin with a brief and very limited historical overview

then elaborate on pertinent aspects of Corbin's and Hillman's hermeneutic approaches as a means for discovering specific ways of entering into the work at hand.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **A brief historical overview of the hermeneutic tradition.**

The hermeneutic tradition, as a theory of interpretation, reaches back to the philosophy of ancient Greece, continues in the Middle Ages and Renaissance as a form of Biblical exegesis which later includes the study of ancient and classic cultures, then expands with German romanticism and idealism into a branch of study that is phenomenologically, philosophically, and existentially oriented. Beginning with Schleiermacher, hermeneutics turns from its focus on understanding the texts of highly specialized disciplines (religion and law, for example) to the concept of a universal hermeneutics, linguistic meaning in general, and the existential question of how we as humans understand anything in the first place. Dilthey continues along these lines, adapting Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics through a comparative approach with the intent of providing a methodology for objective understanding within the sciences of humanities. This method involves "an initial inductive hypothesis-formation leading up to a process of critical, empirical investigation and historical comparison aiming at revision or improvement of the initial hypothesis" (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2013, p. 6).

The phenomenological turn in hermeneutics is initiated by Heidegger. Drawing upon the methods of his mentor Husserl, Heidegger proposes a "hermeneutic of *Dasein*" (Palmer, 1969, p. 42) in his classic work *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Here hermeneutics becomes ontology: an expression of our fundamental pre-reflective way of being in the world. The overarching thrust of Heidegger's work might be viewed as a

philosophical, phenomenological, and hermeneutic reflection disclosing particularized aspects and levels of being in pursuit of an ultimate goal that reconnects the experience of being human with universal or primordial being—in other words, with that which is common to all beings.

A brief introduction to Heidegger's use of the terms *understanding*, *interpretation*, and *assertion* will provide a sense of his perspective. Understanding for Heidegger “is not something we consciously do or fail to do, but something we are. Understanding is a mode of being, and as such it is characteristic of human being, of *Dasein*” (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2013, p. 7). Interpretation which occurs through “the explicit foregrounding of a given object . . . makes things, objects, the fabric of the world appear as *something*” (p. 7). The world and objects disclose themselves as we discover their *as-structures* through interactions with them. The candle discloses its *candleness*, for instance, when our finger burns from the touch of its flame. The meaning derived from these disclosures is pinned down linguistically through *assertion* but the linguistic identification or meaning conveyed by assertion is not its origin. It is “predicated on the world-disclosive synthesis of understanding and interpretation” (p. 8).

The ontological and phenomenological approach to hermeneutics is continued by Gadamer (1960/2013) with the publication of *Truth and Method*. This comprehensive volume includes a “critical review of modern aesthetics and theory of historical understanding from a basically Heideggerian perspective, as well as a new philosophical hermeneutics based on the ontology of language” (Palmer, 1969, p. 162). Gadamer argues that human being “is a being in language” (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2013, p. 9) and “the linguisticity of being is at the same time its ontology—its ‘coming into being’—

and the medium of its historicity” (Palmer, 1969, p. 177). This linguisticity of being pre-dates and outlasts our individual lives, and this is the basis for an objective interpretive stance that reaches beyond the merely subjective horizons of a text’s author or interpreter alone. The objective meaning of a text seen through this lens is identified as “the what” in living language that repeatedly comes to stand in historical encounters with it.

For Gadamer, interpretation is “dialectical interaction with the text; it is not bald reenactment but a new creation, a new event in understanding” (Palmer, 1969, p. 212). Contrary to “methodical” research approaches characterized by researchers who control and lead the line of questioning through predetermined rules and systems, this dialectical approach calls for a switch in role play. The researcher thus becomes the subject in service to the subject-matter encountered. The matter encountered poses questions to which the researcher responds. It is only through immersion in the subject-matter that the “right” question emerges. Here, the work of art or text acts as a medium through which the question that brought it into being presents and re-presents itself in its present form. The objective “is eminently phenomenological: to have the being or thing encountered reveal itself” (p. 166).

As we can see, Gadamer’s *non-methodical method* is compatible with the panpsychic perspectives of Hillman’s approach to archetypal psychology and Corbin’s interpretation of the imaginal world in Persian Sūfī mysticism. As such, it provides, along with Romanyshyn’s developments in alchemical hermeneutics, and the example of Hillman’s and Corbin’s writings, a guide to entering and enacting this explorative inquiry.

The evolutionary movements of the hermeneutic tradition as described above might be summarily viewed through the shifting scope of what is commonly referred to as the *hermeneutic circle*. This term refers, in general, to the cyclical and relational back and forth movement characteristic of interpretive work. “Originally conceived in terms of relationship between the parts and the whole of the text, the hermeneutic circle [later] includes the text’s relationship to historical tradition and culture at large” (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2013, p. 4). In Heidegger’s ontologically and phenomenologically oriented hermeneutics the term refers to “the interplay between our self-understanding and our understanding the world” (p. 8), and in Corbin’s mystical hermeneutics the relationship between self and world expands to include the higher celestial worlds. Here the circle moves back and forth between the mystic or hermeneut and his celestial twin and Angel.

Having provided this brief historical overview of the hermeneutic lineage that informed and includes Corbin and Hillman, we now turn toward their unique contributions within it. It is here, in an encounter with their actual works, which are peopled by the figures who informed them, that we expect to discover a hermeneutic approach and method that aligns most closely with this particular inquiry.

### **Corbin’s hermeneutics.**

Corbin (1964/1995) describes the overarching project represented in his oeuvre as “a comparative study that consists essentially in the hermeneutics of the ‘phenomenon of the Sacred Book’ ” (p. 40). Cheetham (2012) has said that “the questions [Corbin’s] work raises engage the entire sweep of the prophetic tradition from Zoroastrianism to the Mormons and beyond” (p. 3). The following passage cited from *All the World an Icon* is



an insightful consideration of the profound yearning and intent that drove his project forward:

Among modern theologians and philosophers it is perhaps only Henry Corbin, with a deep knowledge of Greek, Latin, German, Persian, and Arabic, who was able to see the religions of the Book with a sufficiently passionate clarity to grasp their essential unities and to show how we might reimagine the heart of these traditions to bring them alive and whole into a new cosmopolitan world free from the fundamentalisms and conflicts that have nearly obliterated the prophetic message throughout its long history. (p. 3)

Unsurprisingly, Corbin's ecumenical symbolic blending of Islamic and Protestant theologies is often viewed as radically controversial by orthodox thinkers within the fields he draws from. Our intent here, however, is not to analyze Corbin's work through the lenses of these thinkers, but rather, to glean an understanding of his hermeneutic intent and approach as a means for engaging with his work in a manner amenable to the work itself. Clearly, our teasing out of this approach and method has already begun. It shows itself in our discussions of the *dhikr*, *ta'wīl*, the visionary recital, and creative prayer. It shows itself in our exploration of recurrent themes, namely: imagination, mirroring, and unveiling. It shows itself, as well, in the evolving mode of expression and language that emerges in this inquiry.

During the 1920s and early 1930s, while simultaneously studying Islamic thought, Corbin was deeply engaged in the German theological and hermeneutic tradition discussed above. This lineage of thinkers includes such names as Boehme, Luther, Hamann, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Barth. Corbin was, in fact, the first

person to translate Heidegger's and some of Barth's early work into the French language. The impact of Heidegger's ontological perspective on Corbin's thought is apparent in the Heideggerian orientation and language that navigates his theological translations.

Hermeneutics, for Corbin—like Heidegger—was an exercise in phenomenology. Corbin's mission, however, extended beyond Heidegger's conception of "Being-towards-death" to include the phenomena of "Being-beyond-death" inspired by the multiple worlds and levels of being in esoteric Islamic cosmology. Eschewing the "nominalist historical criticism" prevalent in scholastic circles during his time, Corbin expressed the need for a *transhistorical* penetration of sacred texts: "a comprehensive explanation which embraces several levels of being and consciousness" (Corbin, 1998b, p. 95). Challenging the perspective that spiritual themes should be pursued solely for the purpose of demonstrating "a *material* origin or an *objective* genealogy," Corbin's (1998a, p. 20) aspirations centered on reading and understanding sacred texts as spiritually evolved believers had read and understood them. The result he sought was "a hermeneutic of the religious phenomenon" that revealed "both the phenomenon and those to whom it [was] manifest" (Corbin, 1998b, p. 97). In Corbin's (1998a) opinion, "entering into religious consciousness and invoking criteria which are appropriate to it" was a requirement for "speak[ing] meaningfully and convincingly of religious fact" (p. 17). Religious consciousness, from his perspective, was achieved in the experiential discovery of presence: of presences within presences, of an inter-presence that contains both I and World. In considering the sacred, Corbin presupposed an a priori region of being. This region's pre-initially emerged horizon, having always been present, is interpreted as being situated outside the historical world of chronological time. Experiencing the

presence of this a priori Being becomes possible, in his view, through the transhistorical penetration of a sacred text.

In *Comparative Spiritual Hermeneutics*, he likens this transhistorical penetration to the Arabic idea of *hikāyat*. *Hikāyat*, as he describes it, simultaneously connotes the narrative account of an historical event and “an imitation, (*a mimesis*), a repetition” (Corbin, 1964/1995, p. 36). History, from this perspective, is history in the usual sense and concomitantly “history that is essentially an image or symbol” (p. 36). The symbolic quality of this twofold historical phenomenon imparts “an unusual form to the “commonplace texture of external events” (p. 36). This form is “related to a higher requirement,” namely that of the internal and celestial events from which the corresponding external terrestrial events spring.

Corbin refers to this concept of history (which has its origin in the spiritual world or the *anima mundi*) as *hierohistory*. Time, from the perspective of hierohistory is not chronological, but vertical. The process of penetrating the hierohistorical (esoteric, hidden, truly real) dimension of the historic event (which is the exoteric appearance and mimesis of events in the world of Soul) is the process that we referred to as *ta'wīl* and spiritual hermeneutics discussed in the literature review. It is a process that carries each thing, each event back “to its truth, to its archetype, (*asl*), by uncovering the hidden and concealing the appearance” (Corbin, 1964/1995, p. 37). This act of returning, of moving inward, from the hierohistorical perspective, is the act of raising as well. According to the angelology that Corbin writes about, the ascent and return of the beloved to his Lord, celestial Twin, and Angel triggers the ascent of the Lord, celestial Twin, and Angel as well. The ascent of a being on one plane of existence causes the successive ascent of each

corresponding being on the dimension above it. The intent of hermeneutics revealed here is ultimately the spiritual elevation of the hermeneut and those corresponding spiritual worlds above him or her.

Keeping this in mind, it is important to note, that Corbin (1998a) associates the hierohistorical region of being with an already existing “idea of the good” (p. 18) which corresponds to our religious needs, desires, and apprehensions. Bringing this region, this mode of being, this transcendental Presence into the present is the aim of Corbin’s spiritual and phenomenological hermeneutics. As a Presence that has always been, it is universal; it is everywhere, in everything. As experienced by the individual through an intermediate cyclical exchange with his celestial Angel, it is unique and deeply personal. The *ta’wīl* of one hermeneut in relationship with a text, as such, will never be identical to the *ta’wīl* of another, nor will it be identical from one moment to the next. Presence is always unveiled as it stands within the present moment. Always in relationship, it is always moving.

The phenomenological method, as Corbin (1998a) describes it, involves the holding and unveiling of consciousness “just as it reveals itself in the object it reveals” (p. 24). This occurs “through a certain mode of cognition, a *hierognosis* that unites the speculative knowledge of traditional information to the most personal interior experience” (Corbin, 1964/ 1995, p. 38).

Corbin’s (1964/1995) *Comparative Spiritual Hermeneutics* provides us with an example of how this mode of cognition might look in everyday life. This essay explores the symbolic resonance between Islamic esoteric traditions and an esoteric perspective of the Protestant tradition as interpreted by Swedenborg, a Swedish visionary born in 1688.

Here Corbin relates the term hierognosis to the idea of an ancient and first humanity which is fundamental to the work of Swedenborg. According to Swedenborgian hermeneutics, these ancient and celestial humans possessed “an immediate spiritual perception” (p. 40).

A tangible sense of what this means might be imagined through a description of their visual faculties. These celestial humans, it is said, observed objects on earth while simultaneously thinking by means of them. The sight of physical objects, in other words, was immediately understood in terms “of the celestial and divine things that these objects represented or signified” (Corbin, 1964/1995, p. 41) for the person viewing them. Physical objects were more than physical objects in the eyes of these people. They were also mediums through which a deeply personal celestial meaning could be gleaned. Corbin tells us that this higher level of cognition characteristic of this celestial humanity declined when the function of objects as instruments through which true reality could be reflected on, was forgotten. A spiritual hermeneutics that aligns with Corbin’s perspective would ultimately recover this lost mode of cognition—this hierognosis, this double sense of sight—through which spiritual consciousness is held and unveiled “just as it reveals itself in the object it reveals” (Corbin, 1998a, p. 24).

This example hints at a possible nonmystic approach to the hermeneutic journey of our research. As “child mystics,” perhaps we should do what children do. Perhaps we should pre-tend and imagine that the objects of our inquiry are spiritual consciousness revealing itself in the objects it reveals. Reading the material world as the mirroring and unveiling activity of the celestial Lord and image to which we correspond, we might imagine a response to our inquiry that emerges in accordance with and appropriate to our

level of being. In the section below we look to some key points in Hillman's archetypal approach to hermeneutics for further guidance.

### **Hillman's hermeneutics.**

In Hillman's (1975) seminal work *Re-Visioning Psychology*, he builds the case for and concomitantly exemplifies what we now refer to as an archetypal psychology.

Archetypal psychology is itself a hermeneutic practice and as such, it provides us with a primary methodological approach to draw from. *Re-Visioning Psychology* is organized in four sections that illuminate four psychological moves essential to an archetypal perspective. The first section devotes itself to *personifying* or imagining things, the second to *pathologizing* or falling apart, the third to *psychologizing* or *seeing through*, and the fourth to *dehumanizing* or *soul-making*. These categories are not as discrete as the book's sectional organization would imply. As overlapping components of an archetypal purview, they are inclusive of each other, and often present all at the same time.

These archetypal operations all speak in some way, for example, to the psychic activity of personifying: of seeing and experiencing the world's endless plurality and variety—its plethora of things (its frogs, its body parts, its buildings, its events, even its ideas, and words) as persons—persons with personalities, moods, affinities, motives, and persistent wounds that shape them. All of these persons—constituted by multiple persons—show themselves through their particularities, through the oddities that differentiate them from other persons via their styles of dress, modes of expression, gestural postures, and so forth. The archetypal move of pathologizing or falling apart acknowledges the images constituted by our wounds, our sicknesses, our gross and morbid thoughts as persons, and takes the stance that all of them are necessary to psychic

life. Seeing through or psychologizing is an archetypal move that sees through the surface of things to the Gods in our ideas as persons. And dehumanizing or soul-making challenges the human centered perception that human consciousness is the only consciousness appropriate to the status of personhood. It decries the notion that persons are inherently human persons with human attributes, characteristics, reasons, and personalities.

In the subsections below we briefly touch upon elements of each chapter in *Re-visioning Psychology* (Hillman, 1975), as a means of formulating a sensibility and methodological tools for engaging with our research topic archetypally.

***Personifying or imagining things.***

Hillman (1975) uses the term personifying to “signify the basic psychological activity—the spontaneous experiencing, envisioning and speaking of the configurations of existence as psychic presences” (p. 12). He describes it as “a way of being in the world and experiencing the world as a psychological field, where persons are given with events, so that events are experiences that touch us, move us, appeal to us” (p. 13). Hillman makes the case that personifying is a means for “revivifying our relations with the world around us,” for “meeting our individual fragmentation . . . and many voices,” and a means for “furthering the imagination to show all its bright forms” (p. 3). The last descriptor in this list is crucial to understanding his perspective. Over and over again, he reiterates the intent of this work: serving imagination—serving its images—and the middle world of its habitat. The aim is not self-improvement for the human individual, but rather a mythical consciousness that throws us into a more enlivened relationship with the surrounding world and cosmos.

Here, we can see the relationship between the human individual and the image/imagination as reflecting a symbolic correspondence and resonance with the respective relationship between the mystic and his Lord as depicted in Corbin's work. It can also be seen in Hillman's pairing of the words *personifying* and *imagining things* as label for this archetypal move. This rubric "Personifying or Imagining Things" is an intimation of what Hillman (1975) actually means by personifying. This intimation is clarified by his declaration that "we do not actually personify at all" (pp. 16-17). "Mythical consciousness," he says, "is a mode of being in the world that brings with it imaginal persons. They are given with imagination and are its data. Where imagination reigns, personifying happens" (p. 17). We are not, in other words, the agents who personify or imagine things; the attitude and perspective Hillman asks us to consider is one that acknowledges things as imagining entities (persons) whose thoughts become known to us through imagination. Imagination is a place of perspective where the personhood of things and humans meet.

Hillman describes a number of ways that personifying happens and has happened within and throughout history. Personifying happens most unquestionably and perhaps explicitly in visions, dreams, and fantasies. It happens in poetic and religious language and the continual reinvention of persons under the guise of memory. It appears in the traditions of Greeks and Romans who personified "such psychic powers as Fame, Insolence, [and] Night" (Hillman, 1975, p. 13). It happens in the capitalization of such words, charging them with power and affect. It appears, as well, in polytheism where archetypes are personified in the names and stories of the Gods.



Since the task of this research is a hermeneutic one, explored and expressed in and through words, the following passage from *Revisioning Psychology* is instructive on two levels at least. It shows us what Hillman means by personifying while simultaneously evoking a series of questions that we might ask of the words that people the texts of our inquiry.

Words, like angels, are powers which have invisible power over us. They are personal presences which have whole mythologies: genders, genealogies (etymologies concerning origins and creations), histories, and vogues; and their own guarding, blaspheming, creating, and annihilating effects. For words are persons. (Hillman, 1975, p. 9)

***Pathologizing or falling apart.***

Hillman (1975) defines his use of the term pathologizing as “the psyche’s autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering in any aspect of its behavior and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective” (p. 57). Pathologizing, in his view, is a psychological necessity. Its overpowering ability to move us is one of its striking characteristics. Sickness, pain, fear, the unbearable sense that something has gone irreparably and terribly wrong can force us into new perspectives, postures, and ways of being in the world. Hillman says that “pathologizing moves the myth of the individual onward by moving him first of all out of the heroic ego” (p. 89).

Of the four archetypal moves we are discussing pathologizing or falling apart is, seemingly, most at odds within the framework of Corbin’s focus, but Hillman (1975) says that “psychopathology is always present within religion” (p. 96). Exploring Corbin’s

interpretation of the creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī with the sensibility of an archetypal perspective thus requires that we deepen our relationship with the intimations of pathology in this spiritual cosmology.

Hillman (1975) says that “our psychopathologies can be held within the narrative structure of a religious allegory” (p. 95). He tells us that mythology provides “an adequate mirror” for pathology; it “speak[s] with the same distorted fantastic language,” and its distortion of “the natural and actual” (p. 99) forces our questions inward toward a world that lies beneath the surface of things. Reflecting on these insights, a question emerges: What might be gleaned by holding Ibn ‘Arabī’s creation myth as a cosmological pathology that symbolizes with our individual pathologies? How might the holding of this question move us toward a better understanding of nonmystic creativity within the mystic paradigm that we look to for insight?

***Psychologizing or seeing through.***

In *Re-visioning Psychology*, Hillman (1975) describes his chapter on personifying or imagining things as “a reflection from the imaginative psyche;” his chapter on pathologizing or falling apart, he says, is generally speaking “a reflection from the affective psyche;” and his chapter on psychologizing or seeing through is “mainly a reflection from the intellectual psyche” (p. 129). Here he emphasizes psyche’s need for fantasy by means of psychological ideas, meaning ideas that “engender the soul’s reflection upon its nature, structure, and purpose” (p. 117). Psychological ideas, as recurrent representations of our deepest psychic patterns, can also be called archetypal. For Hillman, “archetypal psychologizing [or seeing through] means examining our [psychological] ideas themselves in terms of archetypes” (p. 127). Psychologizing is a

process through which the archetypal fantasy and psychic factor in each of our ideas can be extracted. Hillman tells us that “archetypal ideas are primarily speculative . . . they encourage speculation” and speculation is defined as “mirroring, reflecting, visioning” (p. 118). In this sense, speculation on archetypal ideas is theophany. It is the appearance of the Gods in our ideas.

In psychologizing or seeing through, all ideas of literal actions are changed to metaphorical enactments. Psychologizing is a movement beyond phenomenology whereby events become experiences through fantasies of what lies behind and beneath our ideas of them. The objective is subjectivized. The external is internalized. Seeing through “is a process of deliteralizing and a search for the imaginal in the heart of things by means of ideas” (Hillman, 1975, p. 136). The soul, which needs its own ideas apart from the ego’s, has its own style of reasoning, its own logos and way of knowing which is distinct from the ego’s. Reflecting the soul’s mode of cognition, seeing through involves “a transposition from the logical to the imaginal” (p. 139).

Hillman (1975) describes four steps to the process of psychologizing, all of which are required, though not necessarily in sequential order. Often they occur simultaneously. The first step begins with a curiosity—a spark—a question that drills us down and moves us “through the apparent to the less apparent” (p. 140). As the less apparent becomes transparent a new darkness or question surfaces and the cycle continues: moving us deeper and deeper, layer upon layer like the peeling away of onion skins unveiling the richness and depth that peoples our ideas. Secondly, “psychologizing *justifies itself*” (p. 140); it makes us believe that seeing this way is more powerful than simply seeing that which is evident. Hillman calls the “ultimate hidden value” that justifies this process “the

hidden God' (*deus absconditus*) who appears only in concealment" (p. 140). The third step is mythologizing:

The present event, the phenomenon before us, is given a *narrative*. A tale is told of it in the metaphors of history, or physical causality, or logic. We tell ourselves something in the language of "because." The immediate is elaborated by fantasy, so that a metamorphosis occurs as the immediate becomes part of an account. It is a process of mythologizing. And all explanations whatsoever may be regarded as narrative fantasies and examined as myths. (pp. 140-141)

In the fourth step, we return to what Hillman refers to as "the *tools* with which the operation proceeds" (Hillman, 1975, p. 141). These are the ideas. The ideas, as the soul's tools, provide the means through which the activity of psychologizing or seeing through becomes possible. It is important, however, not to take them literally. The ideas are not the actual unknown factors which are always only partially unveiled in the process of seeing through. Hillman uses our idea of the unconscious as an example of what is meant here. In the act of seeing through our idea of the unconscious we "see through behavior into its hidden unknowns. But we do not see the unconscious" (p. 141). We do not see a literal thing that is literally the unconscious.

Hillman tells us that psychologizing or seeing through is the root activity of the soul. All of the archetypal moves that we discuss here are, as such, part and parcel to seeing through. As the root activity of the soul, psychologizing or seeing through is the means through which soul-making takes place. Remembering that soul, for Hillman, is a perspective rather than a thing, we can see that seeing through is the making of the soul's perspectives; it is soul's making of itself.

Corbin tells us that the imaginal world is the world of soul but the imaginal world can only be penetrated by the nonmystic in accordance with the worldview he adopts. As such, seeing Corbin's work through the moves of an archetypal practice may offer us, as nonmystics, a means of approach and point of access appropriate to our own level of development.

*De-humanizing or soul-making.*

Hillman (1975) says:

the statement that soul enters into everything human cannot be reversed. Human does not enter into all of soul, nor is everything psychological human. Man exists in the midst of psyche; it is not the other way around. Therefore, soul is not confined by man, and there is much of psyche that extends beyond the nature of man. The soul has inhuman reaches. (p. 173)

In acknowledging that soul is everywhere and soul is more than human, we might infer that our thoughts, emotions, habits, behaviors—all those distinct and ostensibly human characteristics so seemingly uniquely our own—are actually communications from the more than human soul. We might then recognize the persons of more than human Gods and creatures in our visages, in the ways we love, the outrages that overcome us, and the symptoms that seemingly betray us. We might then imagine what soul is seeking, what soul is desiring through her making and shaping of us. We might also imagine through a text and through our responses to a text in the same way.

For Hillman (1975), dehumanizing soul means demoralizing soul as well. If we are to acknowledge that soul is beyond human, we must acknowledge that soul's

concerns and values are beyond human as well. *“Rather than looking at myths morally, archetypal psychology looks at moralities mythically”* (p. 179).

Hillman (1975) credits Jung as an “immediate ancestor” of archetypal psychology within a lineage that goes back “through Freud, Dilthey, Coleridge, Schelling, Vico, Ficino, Plotinus, and Plato to Heraclitus” (p. xvii). His revisioning of psychology is inspired by “the imagination of Hellenism, Renaissance Neoplatonism, and polytheism” (p. 223). A primary concern of his is that the current lack of imaginative language and ideas in the field of psychology reflects a loss of concern for its etymological rooting in soul. Calling for a Renaissance psychology and recalling the art of Renaissance rhetoric, Hillman suggests that rhetoric as method, is a way of doing psychology. Seeing through to the backdrop of Gadamer, who sees beings as situated in the ontological being of language, we can imagine where Hillman is attempting to take us with this suggestion. Renaissance rhetoric is both a tool and an enlivening way of being more connected to the fullness of being.

Hillman (1975) tells us that Renaissance language “is brought to life by personified and pathologized figures of speech, by hyperbole and metaphor, by indirection, repetition, allusion, conceit, and innuendo” (pp. 213-214). Wandering and self-contradictory—at times bombastic, pleading, and complaining—its style appeals to psyche’s many sides and faces. Rhetoric’s powers of persuasion, effective only when the mind is open to its passions, persuades by evoking the logos of soul: by speaking to our emotions, senses, and fantasies. It is marked by eloquence and a “belief in the verbal imagination and the therapeutic incantational power of words” (p. 214).

### **Materials and Procedures for Gathering and “Analyzing the Data”**

The primary materials used for this research will be gathered from the oeuvres of Corbin and Hillman. Supplementary authors, called upon as needed, will deepen our contextual, topical, and experiential understanding of the work. These additional sources will include but will not be limited to the authors and texts mentioned thus far. In exploring these additional sources, our intention is to enrich the dialogue between Corbin's works, Hillman's works, and the research questions. Our purpose is not to achieve expertise on the many sources that Corbin and Hillman draw from, but to imagine (in service to their work) the response to our inquiry more fully. In keeping with the phenomenological perspective that characterizes our hermeneutic paradigm, the researcher's background and presence will be viewed as part and parcel of the aggregate presence that populates the work. The relevant thoughts, emotions, and experiences of the researcher, in other words, will at times enter into the research dialogue.

In determining the procedures for gathering and analyzing data, we are guided by Gadamer's view that methodic methods elude truth by attempting to control the subject of inquiry. Since a mapped out plan of definitive steps is thus inappropriate, a preliminary sketch that imagines our task in general terms will provide us with a tangible place to start while leaving room for the research to unfold and reveal itself in the presence of our encounter with it.

We begin by taking as our core text the source through which our research question has emerged: Corbin's (1958/1997) *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*. A dialogue between this text, Corbin's other related works, corresponding selections from Hillman's oeuvre, the research question, and the

researcher's experience will follow. The pertinent themes which have arisen in our conversation thus far will be explored on yet a deeper level through a deeper penetration of these texts. Hillman's archetypal approach to hermeneutics as summarized above will offer us tools for moving into relationship with the texts and our research question as nonmystics, or perhaps we might say as child mystics. Corbin's more spiritually oriented hermeneutic perspective paired with images of the child, of pre-tending, and play (since we are mere children in this territory) will instruct our sense of method as well. In moving through Corbin's treatise on the creative Imagination of Ibn 'Arabī, questions posed by our relationship with the text will direct us toward other sources in search of a deeper understanding. These will include the works of authors who informed Corbin and Hillman as well as writings that provide us with historical and topical context. We may also draw from sources that further illuminate emergent themes, and from the works of writers who have continued to develop Corbin's and Hillman's ideas. In choosing our resource materials, however, we begin by prioritizing the oeuvres of Corbin and Hillman, and the experiences of the researcher, who is considered to be our nonmystic representative. Looking first to these sources will keep us in close contact with the research questions, reiterated as follows: How might a phenomenological engagement with and dialogue between Hillman's work in archetypal psychology and Corbin's interpretation of the creative Imagination in Persian mystic Sūfism further inform us about creative imagination for the nonmystic? And furthermore, what forms of creative practice might emerge from the understanding gleaned by this exploration? The extent to which we explore this secondary question is yet to be determined and depends largely upon the time and space needed for an appropriate response to the primary question. Here



we acknowledge that a comprehensively imagined creative practice viewed through the response to our primary question may possibly be more suited to a follow up project.

Our intent for this research is not to “analyze the data” per se, but rather to deeply experience the call and response of the creative imagination’s reflection upon itself within the context discussed throughout this preparatory stage of our inquiry.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The American Psychological Association has established a set of ethical standards for psychological research in which human participants are to be involved. These are categorized and elaborated upon under the rubrics of: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and types of harm. While our research will not involve human participants this does not preclude the need for ethical consideration. Romanyshyn (2007) specifically tells us that alchemical hermeneutics, as a method of depth psychological research that would keep soul in mind, is a movement towards an “ethical epistemology.” *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1992) defines *epistemology* as “the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity” (Epistemology, p. 619). An ethical epistemology would thus take into account the other side, the shadow, the unknown, marginalized, hidden, and unconscious aspect inherent to our traditionally respected ways of knowing—to our variously created bodies of knowledge. Without this consideration our epistemologies become “one-sided, fixed truths and ideological exercises of power” (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 336).

Romanyshyn (2007) has identified “a metaphoric sensibility” as a quality of consciousness that is necessary for keeping soul in mind and speaks of “two moments

that comprise this sensibility, each of which is essential to an ethical way of knowing” (pp. 339-340). The first moment acknowledges the self and other as perspectives. It points to the need for curious exchange and dialogue between them. The second moment requires that we listen from the heart. Remembering the heart’s correspondence with imagination points to the largely unrecognized role that imagination plays in research ethics. Assimilating a felt sense of stepping into the other’s shoes, of experiencing the other’s perspective—which involves thinking from the heart—is the work of imagination. The ethical responsibilities that we have to human participants and to our topics in traditional forms of research apply to imaginal/alchemical/archetypal hermeneutics as well, but Romanyshyn tells us that the range of responsibility is extended because research with soul in mind extends itself to those voices in the work of whom we are not wholly conscious. This means that the imaginal hermeneut who is called through his or her complexes to act as agent of the work itself, accepts full responsibility for it while concomitantly acknowledging that it is “not fully of his or her making” (p. 344). At some point, having done one’s best to remain “faithful to the dialogue with the others for whom the work has been done” (p. 344) the researcher accepts its imperfections and incompleteness knowing full well that its life continues on beyond the medium through which it has most recently emerged.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

As already noted, the aim of this study is to explore our research question through a contextual lens that includes the works of Corbin, Hillman, and the researcher’s experiences. In staying close to these three primary sources, we hope to provide a manageable container that concomitantly allows for the discursive wanderings that soul

oriented research demands. In exploring the others who inhabit the work, we implicitly acknowledge the many others who cannot be addressed within the limited time and space allotted to this composition. In responding to the material as it presents itself through and in imagination, our hope is to evoke the presence of imagination for and through others. In adopting a metaphoric sensibility our conclusions will necessarily be qualitative, suggestive, and hopefully evocative—moving the inquiry toward further explorations. This study is not designed to gather precisely measurable and quantifiable data, but rather to further explore the nature, potential roles, and workings of imagination through imagination.

In honoring the autonomous nature of the work itself and acknowledging the researcher as its agent, we also acknowledge that the delimitations and limitations of this study are still partially unknown to us. Having begun this initial phase of the research process with an affinity for movement toward imagining a form of theatrical practice founded on the contextual overlap between Corbin's work, Hillman's work, and the discipline of theatre—we are now aware that doing justice to the breadth and depth of both the primary and secondary research questions might be more readily achieved in the space of two studies that build on each other. For now, we would like to suspend any decisions about this matter and allow the soul of the work to lead us.

### **Organization of the Study**

Honoring the work's unfolding voice and fantasy of itself as an autonomously emergent form, the organization of this project—like the procedures for gathering and analyzing its data—cannot be definitively mapped out in advance. For now, we simply begin with an image of Corbin's (1958/1997) *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination*

*in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* as a central thread, a through line, and a medium through which the call and response of our inquiry is woven.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Contextualizing Ibn 'Arabi Through Mazdaism**

#### **An Initial Disclosure and Confession**

The first three chapters of this work reflect an initial phase of the research process preparing the researcher and the reader for the work that lies ahead: for the project of engaging with the research question from this point forward. Let us begin by saying that the beginning of this project, as it stands before you here, is not the beginning as it emerged initially. Much has been rewritten and deleted prior to this writing. Having followed our research impulses from start to near finish, it is our hope that we now have a greater sense of where this healing fiction wants to lead us. During our initial plunge into the resources from which this fiction emerges, we focused on understanding the material to the best of our abilities, and to expressing its ideas with greater clarity for the layman. A serious concern for “getting it right,” for sorting through the seemingly endless layers of data, the ambiguities, the contradictions, the abstruse language, and the implications of what was left unsaid, was present during this time. Our fear of misconstruing and misrepresenting these works led at first to a rather dry and barren accounting of them. This process was necessary to the discovery of our working map. It has also provided us with a means for retaining a working knowledge of these complex works, but the life of the story that wants to emerge, yearns to be engaging; it yearns to be both vitally personal and universally significant. In service to this yearning, our intention, going forward, is to loosen the grip of these initial and once necessary concerns to invite the blossoming of a liminal space where the researcher’s experience, Corbin’s vision, and Hillman’s perspective stand most poignantly in relationship with each other. Our purpose, after all,

is not to become scholars on Corbin or Islamic mysticism. Our purpose is to allow the imagination—in the crossfire of Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress—to work on us, and in so doing to potentially expand the disciplinary fields that they inhabit. Going forward, we shall do our best to respectfully honor the texts we draw from while concomitantly tending to the yearning from which this project springs.

### **Corbin's Introduction to Ibn 'Arabī**

Corbin's (1958/1997) introduction to the creative Imagination begins with an overview of the esoteric family that provides Ibn 'Arabī and his school with its context. Suhrawardī's theosophy of light, Neoplatonic Avicennan angelology, and Zoroastrian Mazdaism are included in this family. Corbin also tells us that Ibn 'Arabī's work anticipates the Renaissance Neoplatonic projects of Pletho and Ficino. This is the same Ficino whom Hillman (1975) has called the "Renaissance patron of archetypal psychology" (p. 200). Our own exploration of this contextual family began with the most ancient of its members mentioned here: the Mazdean tradition. This initial plunge into Corbin's works on the Mazdean tradition has steered our course throughout the poiesis of this healing fiction (which is still unfolding in the writing and rewriting of this work). Knowing its place as a major player in what follows, it begins our story once again. Here we draw upon Corbin's texts to reimagine the Mazdean myth as a presence that the nonmystic may glean insight from. The mythical narratives, as recalled throughout this work, reflect the resource materials that we draw from, in accordance with our understanding of them in the moment of putting them into writing. Due to the complexity, density, and ambiguity of our source materials, this understanding will certainly differ, to some degree, from the understanding that the authors who wrote them

had. Because we are dwelling within the context of mytho-history we are more often than not dealing with multiple versions and offshoots of myths and principles within a tradition variously influenced by different peoples, geographies, and historical time periods. These variations will, at times, be blended in our narratives while imagination unveils the overall content's vital presence as it comes to stand within the present. That being said, our intention is not to misrepresent the views and scholarship of our source authors or to conflate them with our own. Our intention is to strike a balance that honors the texts we draw from while serving the interests of this research and its potential readers.

### **The Mazdean Dramaturgy in Three Great Acts**

Corbin's (1951/1983) *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* investigates the Mazdean tradition in its various transmutations as viewed by its devotees throughout history. This tradition is also explored in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shī'ite Iran* (Corbin, 1960/1977). While some of the content in these pieces overlaps, the first source takes the twofold conception of time in Mazdaism as its central theme and the latter focuses on the role of earth within Mazdean cosmology.

Let us for a moment imagine ourselves as Mazdeans. The prescosmic drama upon which our worldview is based thus begins with Ōhrmazd—the Lord Wisdom, born of eternal Time—to whom every Mazdean devotee belongs. Consulting our fourth century religious manual, we are asked “to think of Ōhrmazd as present Existence . . . which has always existed . . . and will always exist . . . [We are asked] to think of him as immortal sovereignty, as Unlimitation and Purity” (as cited in Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 2). It is Ōhrmazd, the Lord Wisdom who dwells in eternal and unlimited Time, “adorned with

omniscience and goodness” (p. 7). It is Ōhrmazd, who is surrounded by an infinite height of Light which is also his abode.

In Zoroastrian Mazdaism he is characteristically “surrounded by six Powers of Light with which he himself (as the first, or as the seventh) forms the supreme divine Heptad” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 7). By some accounts, Ōhrmazd—the Lord Wisdom—created these six other Powers of Light and divided amongst them the task of creation; it has also been variously said that “all seven together produced the Creation by a liturgical act” (p. 272) and that each of them “produced its own Creation” (p. 272). Corbin notes a certain oscillation in the texts he draws from which enhances at times the primacy of Ōhrmazd, and stresses at other times “his *unio mystica* with the (six) other Powers of Light” (p. 8). This oscillation is also expressed in language that emphasizes the qualitative plurality of the Archangels in certain contexts and their singularity in others. These seven powers known as the Zoroastrian Archangels are understood “as a transitive, active, and activating Energy that communicates being, establishes it, and causes it to superabound in all beings” (p. 7). In mental iconography Ōhrmazd is traditionally flanked by three masculine Archangels on his right and three feminine Archangels on his left. “Each of the Seven Powers of Light, by virtue of the Energy that overflows from its being, brings forth the fraction of the beings that in the totality of creation represents its personal hierurgy” (p. 8). This energetic overflow from divine Light beings is, in other words, the product and activity of their own creative prayers and sacred rites.

Ōhrmazd’s own hierurgy and “the object of his creative and provident activity” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 8) is the human being. Of the other masculine Archangels, *Vohu Manah* (excellent thought) undertakes “the whole of animal creation” (p.8); *Arta*



*Vahishta* (perfect existence) is responsible for “the government of Fire in all its different manifestations” (p. 8); the “government of the metals” (p. 9) is undertaken by *Xshathra Vairya* (desirable reign). Of the feminine Archangels, *Spenta Armaiti* or Spendarmat “has as her own hierurgy the Earth as a form of existence whose Image is Wisdom, and woman regarded as a being of light” (p. 9). *Haarvatat* (integrity) oversees the Waters, and *Amertāt* (immortality) has the vegetable kingdom as her jurisdiction.

Mazdean ontology is characterized by a twofold state of being expressed in the terms *mēnōk* and *gētīk*. Corbin tells us that *mēnōk* is “a celestial, invisible, spiritual, but perfectly concrete state” (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 4) and *gētīk* is “an earthly visible, material state” (p. 4). Matter, as expressed by the term *gētīk* is described, however, as luminous and as immaterial in relation to matter as we know it today. The *mēnōk* and *gētīk* states of being represent the twofold nature of all being in Mazdean ontology. Each entity is constituted by a pairing of its *mēnōk* and *gētīk* counterparts. From a uniquely Mazdean perspective the transition from the *mēnōk* to the *gētīk* state of being is not a fall in itself but rather a “fulfillment and plenitude” (p. 4). Mazdean mytho-history (which includes the eventual fall and subsequent restoration of the *gētīk*) is told by Corbin as a dramaturgy that unfolds in “three great acts which extend over twelve millennia” (p. 6).

The first act includes the primordial creation of the world in its *mēnōk* spiritual state of being during the first three millennia as well as the ensuing period from the fourth to the sixth millennium when creation is transferred to the *gētīk* state. The catastrophe comes in the second act during the “period of mixture” (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 6) when Ahriman—the Spirit of Evil, of negation and darkness—emerges from an outside abyss of undisclosed origin to invade and attack the abode of infinite Light and purity wherein

Ōhrmazd dwells. Here, Ahriman, who is variously referred to as a “Contrary Power” (p. 5) and “The Negator” (p. 6) ravages the world of spiritual matter: the *gētīk*. The outcome of this invasion is “the state of infirmity, of lesser being and darkness represented by the present condition of the material world” (p. 4). Ōhrmazd, who is omniscient though not omnipotent, is unable to destroy outright, the “pure negativity” (p. 2) that is Ahriman. It is only with time and with help that Ōhrmazd will succeed in casting Ahriman forever back into the abyss from which he came.

And so it goes that Ōhrmazd creates “from eternal Time and in the image of eternal Time . . . the limited Time he require[s] to frustrate the challenge of Ahriman” (Corbin, 1951/1983, p.7). The “person” of this time made in the image of Ōhrmazd is “an eternal liturgy within the being of Ōhrmazd” (p. 10). In celebration of this liturgy—which apparently takes place on multiple dimensions—an array of celestial beings set to work in defense of the world of Light, with each doing its part in support of a being that is its counterpart or angel in the dimension above it. Amongst these beings, are the supreme Archangels, the Yazatas, and the Fravartis.

From end to end, the work of Creation and the work of Redemption constitute a cosmic liturgy. It is in celebrating the celestial liturgy . . . that Ōhrmazd and his Archangels establish all creation, and notably awaken the Fravartis. (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 10)

As a compassionate and suffering god, Ōhrmazd offers the feminine archetypal entities called Fravartis a choice between two options: One option is to remain in heaven safe from Ahriman’s demons; the other is to descend in terrestrial bodies as soldiers who join the fight for restoration of the *gētīk* on the battlefield of earth. The Fravartis take the

second choice and here “a kind of duplication occurs” (p. 18); a kind of *twins*hip (described below) is formed.

“Every physical or moral entity, every complete being or group of beings belonging to the world of Light, including Ohrmazd . . . has its Fravarti” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 9). The Fravartis are “celestial archetypes of the creatures of Light, acting as the tutelary angels of earthly creatures” (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 17). They “are celestial entities and human potencies or faculties as well” (p. 27). The Fravartis announce an “essentially dual structure” to earthly beings, giving “each one a heavenly archetype or Angel, whose earthly counterpart he is” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 10). This structure “establishes a personal relationship that parallels . . . the distinction between the *mēnōk* state and the *gētīk* state of beings” (p. 10). It is the Fravarti aspect in humans that couples them with their celestial counterparts. Together, the incarnate Fravarti and her angelic Twin form a partnership, which is respectively identified with the soul and its corresponding celestial archetype. In the passage below, Cheetham (2012) beautifully describes this relationship and its place in the Mazdean myth:

The Persons of Light provide archetypes for all the beings of Light who live in the world invaded by Ahriman, the world of Combat. Every creature of Light has an Angel—a being who is its “double” and eternal Twin and to whom it is battling to return. We live in a time of “mixture,” struggling to separate the Light and the Dark, and we are involved in a battle *for the Angel*, for our own individual Heavenly Twin as well as for the salvation of the world. Success in this battle will mean redemption for the soul and a return of the material creation to its luminous, paradisiacal state. It is a battle for the Angel in a double sense. We are battling *to*

*unite with* the Figure who completes our being, without whom we are not even human; and we are battling *along with* the Angels who are engaged in combat with the demonic forces of Ahriman. (p. 45)

The nature of this battle is revealed by the devotee's essential task within it: to embody the mode of being of his celestial Twin.

This is how we imagine the process: Each twin in this terrestrial–celestial pairing moves toward reunion with its other half via the mirroring process. On the one hand, the celestial mirror shines forth as the constantly renewed, always present, positive, and pure form of the soul's yearning—unhindered, but also informed by the physical world's opposing forces. On the other hand, the soul's mirroring activity—expressed through its incarnate form—is concomitantly a movement toward this celestial beacon and a revelation of the gap between its physical and purely celestial self. This movement while unveiling the soul's light also exposes the limitations of its current state, the challenges it faces when faced by Ahriman (who is described as evil but more mysteriously as pure negativity) in the world of mixture. The celestial archetype thus comes to know itself via the reflection of this half lighted mirror, adjusting itself, clarifying itself in response to the double exposure of each snapshot in the mirroring dance of its incarnate twin. By extracting, holding, and radiating the moment to moment pure and positive essence or image contained within the soul's mixed physical world experiences, a renewed real-time primordial yearning that never forgets its essence is made eternally present in spirit. The incarnate soul's eventual recognition, mirroring, and unveiling of this presence within itself returns it to its celestial origin.

This recurrent exchange reveals the necessity for both roles (that of the incarnate soul and that of the celestial archetype) in this drama, which is played in cyclical time. Here there is an intimation of Hillman's archetypal premise regarding the soul's necessity for pathologizing. The soul's pathologizing, as seen in this context, is necessary not only from a soul perspective but also from the perspective of spirit. It is soul that carries and digests the invasive negativity represented in Ahriman's attack on spirit. It is soul that risks losing itself so that spirit can remain intact, untarnished, pure, and positive in the moment to moment present presence of its purity, on the far side of soul's pathology in the world of mixture. Let us remember that Ōhrmazd is unable to defend his creation without the Fravartis' help. Humans and all earthly creatures are thus necessary to the divine creative process, for without them, the entire celestial Creation in eternal Time is unable to defeat the demonic forces of Ahriman.

In the third act of this Mazdean dramaturgy the Savors born from the race of Zarathustra (also known as Zoroaster) make their entrance; here the "final 'separation' [and] . . . 'transfiguration' of the world" (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 7) takes place as Ahriman and his demons are permanently cast back into the abyss from which they came. This dramaturgy illuminates the foundational eschatological hope and teleology of Mazdaism.

### **Ōhrmazd and Ahriman Informed by a Zervān Tale of Origin**

Intriguingly, some Zervān versions of Mazdaism put forth a contrasting story about Ahriman's origins. In these tales, Zervān—who is unlimited Time—is the father of both Ōhrmazd and Ahriman. Here Ahriman is Zervān's own child, born of his doubt. Corbin tells the story as follows:

For one millennium Zervān performed sacrifices in order that a son might be born to him, a son who would be called Ōhrmazd and who would be the Creator of the Heavens and the earth. But then a doubt arose in Zervān's mind: is this solitary liturgy not in vain? Is it effective? Would Ōhrmazd, the child of his thought and his desire, really be born? And then, from this thought *and* this doubt, two beings were conceived: one was Ōhrmazd, child of his liturgical act, the other Ahriman, the child of the Shadow, of the Darkness of his doubt. (Corbin, 1951/1983, pp. 15-16)

Ōhrmazd is then described as having “the loyalty and simplicity of a being of Light” (p. 16). He is “fragrant and luminous” (p. 16). In contrast, Ahriman's is described as having “retarded knowledge” (p. 16). He is “dark and foul smelling” (p. 16).

In this Zervān version of Ahriman's origins, we discover that he is poignantly associated with doubt, with a sense of unknowing, a lack of confidence, and a secular (non-liturgical) mode of thinking. And this, we infer to be the source of Evil as seen through the context of this Mazdean paradigm. While Ōhrmazd represents the positive preexistential potential of a primordial yearning (which is definitively identified with goodness) and its subsequent manifestation, Ahriman represents its oppositional counterpart: the possibility of its not being—of its not coming to fruition. As such, we might imagine Ahriman as the archetypal barrier or opposition to the manifestation and individuation of celestial potentialities through concretized forms, and Ōhrmazd might be imagined as the archetypal actualizing force and actualization of these same potentialities. While Ōhrmazd might be imagined as “the voice of me within me,” Ahriman might be imagined as “the voice of not me, within me.”

### **Ōhrmazd's Liturgical Theatre**

The image of Ahriman sensed as “something other” or foreign that resides within an entity is present in both the Zervān and Zoroastrian mythical variations reviewed here. In the pure Zoroastrian drama, Ōhrmazd's protection from this corruptive otherness resides within him as a liturgy and person of limited time made in his image. This limited time is cyclical, eternal, and measured in liturgical moments so the periods of time indicated by the dramaturgy recalled above are not to be taken literally. This liturgy takes the form of a celestial battle and dramaturgy which is enacted on the terrestrial world stage. The implication is that we, as humans (or at least as humans in the Fravarti aspect of our humanity), are actors in Ōhrmazd's internal battle and players in his liturgical drama. As “his own hierurgy,” as “object[s] of his creative and provident activity” (Corbin 1960/1977, p. 8), we—as humans—are participants in a theatrical ritual which prepares and provides for his future. Because it is said that Ōhrmazd is unable to win the battle against Ahriman without the help of the Fravartis, we can infer that his goodness, his purity, and the eternal Light and Time that is his dwelling is preserved by this liminal theatre, which is within him, and at the same time paradoxically distinct from him. Epic dramas are staged and enacted in this liminal theatre. Scripts are written and rewritten as recurring expressions of liturgical moments in cyclical time; casts are assembled and reassembled. Battles between contrary powers are fought and won on this stage. Our whole human world, as such, is Ōhrmazd's theatre! Here, within this Mazdean worldview (as we imagine it) we are persuaded to take Shakespeare's famous line literally: “All the world's a stage” he says, “and all the men and women merely players” (Shakespeare, 1604/1974, 139-140).

The entity and activity of theatre as both numinous and necessary has been unveiled here in our exploration of the three great acts in which the Mazdean dramaturgy unfolds according to Corbin. Our own sense of theatre's possible correspondence with visionary or numinous experience has thus been affirmed and heightened. In chapters one through three we showed that the acts of mirroring and unveiling, seen through the lens of Corbin's works, are viewed as activities through which a mystic is carried back to the source from which he originates, back to the yearning that propels him into being, and back to his celestial Twin or Angel. This movement is also viewed as a spiritual ascension. If we imagine Ōhrmazd's liturgy as an image suggesting how we might mirror the spiritual world and in so doing potentially meet our Angels, we might do well to reimagine theatrical practice as a spiritual practice. We might do well to imagine the stage (a space that resides within our world and paradoxically distinct from it) as a place where inner battles are fought and eventually won. Here the destructive forces of contrary powers, of negation, and doubt might be engaged with and sorted through before the unchecked rawness of their intensity lashes out in literal acts of violence, potentially destroying us and the terrestrial world that we inhabit. Because this practice would give voice, body, and space to both the light and the dark, to the heights and the depths of being, to "the me and not me," it is a psychological as well as a spiritual one. And because it steps definitively away from a purely literal perspective into a metaphorical, poetical, speculative, imaginative one informed by myth, it is also archetypal. As we move through the healing fiction which continues to emerge in the process of reimagining and rewriting, we expect to glean a fuller sense of what this reimagined practice might look like.



### **The Mazdean Imago Terrae: The Earth as Angel**

In the section above we affirmed and strengthened our sense of theatre's potential belonging within the framework of Corbin's spiritually informed lens. A specific type of theatre, which corresponds with this lens, might thus be seen as kind of imaginal world which is more accessible to the nonmystic. We now turn to Corbin's (1960/1977) *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* as further insight for the nonmystic. The first chapter of this book, entitled "The Mazdean Imago Terrae," reflects upon the Mazdean perception of the Earth as person and Angel. Rather than asking ourselves: "What is the earth?" Corbin would have us pose this question differently: "*who* is the Earth? *who* are the waters, the plants, the mountains? or, *to whom* do they correspond?" (p. 5). We have already seen the innately Mazdean presence of this sensibility in its seven Archangels or Powers of Light through which the being of human, animal, fire, metal, earth, water, and vegetation is expressed. Corbin's interest lies in recapturing "the phenomenon of the Earth as an angelophany or mental apparition of its Angel" (p. 5), in other words, recapturing an experience through which the earth appears to the human as a vision of the Angel of the Earth—which is to say "the ideal Earth" (p. 56). "The figure of the Angel takes shape" he says "exactly at the point where the data of sensory perception are raised . . . to the diaphanous state by the active Imagination" (p. 12).

In the mystic physiology and subtle body system which is "composed of psycho-spiritual organs" (Corbin, 1958/1997 p. 221) in Sūfism, it is precisely the subtle body's *heart* that operates as the organ and medium through which the active Imagination functions. It is important to distinguish this organ from that of the physical heart,

although there is an essentially unknown connection between them. And though this organ is certainly related to love, the *pneuma* (the breath and spirit), is generally considered “the specific center of love” in Sūfism. As an “organ of perception which is both experience and intimate taste,” the subtle heart “produces true knowledge” and “comprehensive intuition” (p. 221). It “is not a sensory faculty but an *archetype-Image*” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 11) with a property effecting “the transmutation of sensory data . . . into the purity of the subtle world” (p. 11).

For the purpose of clarity, we have tended here to describe the active Imagination as a verb: as the active force moving and pulsing within the noun and medium which is the subtle heart. But the two words, as Corbin uses them, are conceptually inseparable and also interchangeable. The active Imagination, for instance, as in the following statement, is described as the organ itself. “The active Imagination” he says, “is the organ of metamorphoses” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 12).

In this essay, Corbin uses the terms *active Imagination* and *subtle heart* to definitively refer to an archetypal activity and entity which pertains to all things and beings. The content represented by these terms encompasses and permeates subset archetypes through which individuals or groups of beings and things are further designated. Each of these subset archetypes can be viewed as having an active Imagination and subtle heart that reflects the particularities of its own being. Corbin designates the term “Light of Glory,” for instance, to a sacralizing Energy (and archetype) which plays a crucial role in the process by which the essential pair and unity of the active Imagination and the subtle heart organ affect the phenomenon of visionary experience. This Energy, this Light of Glory, he says, is the “archetype-Image of the

Mazdean soul” and “the organ by which the soul perceives the world of light that is of the same nature as itself” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 14). Light of Glory is, as such, not only the archetype-Image, but also the active Imagination of the Mazdean soul. In the Avesta, this Energy is designated by the term *Xvarnah* (p. 13). This Energy, this Light of Glory, this archetype-Image, and active Imagination of the Mazdean soul—this *Xvarnah*—is an “all-luminous substance” (p. 13). When the soul projects this Image, which is its own Image, a transmutation of the Earth is effected, simultaneously establishing an *Imago Terrae* (an Image of the Earth which expresses the deepest being of its Person). The Earth, and earthly things and beings are thus “raised to incandescence” (p. 11). This transparency “allow[s] the apparition of their Angels to penetrate to the visionary intuition” (p. 11). The Energy which effects this transmutation of the Earth allowing for the appearance of its Angel is the same Energy of the soul’s own projected Image. In summation:

It is by this projection of its own Image that the soul, in effecting the transmutation of the material Earth, also establishes from the beginning an *Imago Terrae* that reflects and announces its own Image to the soul, that is to say, an Image whose *Xvarnah* is also the soul’s own *Xvarnah*. (p. 14)

This exploration of the phenomenon of terrestrial earth as an angelophany compels us (and we believe this is Corbin’s intention) to view it as a literal sighting of Earth’s Angel by a human. But what if we were to take this image of mystic vision less literally for the potential benefit of those who feel excluded from this type of experience? Or suppose we shift the viewpoint from which our literal stance is taken?

Sight, as seen by active Imagination, we are told, corresponds not with the eyes, but with the heart. Might we not then expect that the act of seeing through active

Imagination could be phenomenologically different from seeing through our physical eyes? We might even surmise that active Imagination (because it functions as a suprasensory organ) has multiple modes of seeing which correspond with all of our so called established senses as well as with other unacknowledged ones. Perhaps these ways of seeing manifest themselves at times in experiences which are unrecognizable to us as experiences of mystic sight because we expect something more visibly extraordinary and concomitantly tangible. What if we were to shift our definitive sense of this sight as glorified eyesight? Perhaps we could then take Corbin's stance literally (that the terrestrial earth *is* the appearance and mental apparition, or in other words, the vision of its Angel). In taking this stance literally, seeing something extraordinary or characteristically celestial would be unnecessary. This move, which greets our everyday world as a vision, moves those of us who thought we were nonmystics into the imaginal world where mystics dwell because the imaginal world, we are told, is the world of visions. Viewing the terrestrial earth as a vision, we come to realize that we are embedded in visions. All the world is visions, and in this sense, we might reconsider the difference between mystic and nonmystic as a difference in perspective. Perhaps the difference between these two perspectives depends upon whether we receive the world (in whatever form it presents itself to us) as "a what" or "a who." Perhaps the mystic perspective is characterized by one that senses (imagines) in its face to face encounter with each thing, the presence of each thing's Angel—its ideal. In Mazdaism this ideal is present in both the primordial yearning for manifestation of the soul's Essence as a being, and the actualization of this yearning as its being (which is its future celestial "I," expressed in the Mazdean figure of Daēnā). Daēnā is the daughter of the Archangel of the

Earth, Spenta Armaiti. (Further discussion of these key figures will follow.) This mystic perspective, which sees all earthly things as Who, would not definitively require that we literally see an apparition of the earth's Angel. Instead, it would require that we enter the terrestrial world through the imagination's unfolding story informed by the overlap between lived experience and our source texts.

**Imagining a practice.**

Here we feel compelled to put this emerging mystic perspective and healing fiction into a preliminary form of practice through which it might be further discovered and exemplified. This form, as it is now imagined, moves away from an explicit rendition of the Mazdean myth, toward a lived event that appears to reflect some aspect of it, as we enter into a relived fantasy of the event. In concomitantly holding the myth and the event together, our narrative account creates a fiction which is both and neither of them. Lifted by association and metaphor into the bodies of each other, the event and Mazdean myth symbolize with each other causing the Angel, shared and constituted by both, to appear. Seen through the lens of Hillman's work, the activity by which this form is constituted could be likened to his archetypal move of mythologizing, discussed in Chapter 3 on methodology. Here an event is given a narrative; a tale of it is told in metaphors. We mythologize by "tell[ing] ourselves something in the language of 'because'" (Hillman, 1975, p. 140). The event "is elaborated by fantasy so that a metamorphosis occurs" (p. 141). Our story, told below, represents our attempt to exemplify and discover this form in the making. It is told in a third person singular voice to deepen our sense of the lived event from within a fictional mode of being.

**The fiction.**

It all started with an assignment at a workshop in Costa Rica: to create a ritual—to enact an initiation of sorts—inviting the manifestation of one's current deepest calling into the world. It was the sort of assignment that she would normally struggle with to finish on time, even though most people would probably find the three and a half-hour long window allotted for the project to be more than sufficient. Coming up with an appealing plan could easily have swallowed up the entire afternoon or more. But she was lucky on this occasion. The perfect plan came instantly so there was plenty of time to enact it. The ritual was to be an audition.

It had been her habit to walk in the wee morning hours along the wide green canopied trail that led (in three miles or so) to an open stage adjacent to the river. She would take this route again, stand upon the stage, and recite two of her tried and true, trusted audition monologues as a gesture, as a welcoming back, as an ushering in of an as yet still unknown vocational calling—as an invitation to the vitality that she once felt in her days as a young actress.

Her two great loves—the forest and the theatre—filled her to the brim as she clipped and bounced along the floor and stage that opened up in the trail as her rehearsal space. Over and over again, she recited piecemealed versions of the two monologues until they returned to her memory intact. The song of them enticed the enigmatic song of the Costa Rican forest. The place was alive with hidden creatures and unanticipated potential dangers. She was happy.

And then it happened. A creature appeared in the middle of the trail that stopped her in her tracks. The rehearsal was abruptly interrupted. It was close, close enough to

lunge and eat her. At the time, she had no known name for this creature—this odd-looking wildcat. It was dark chocolate brown. The body was long like a sausage, low to the ground—with legs, oddly short; the tail was long like the body; the eyes looked crossed—the face strangely smooshed. Creature to creature—they stared.

She was not afraid, or so it seemed, though she was aware that perhaps she should be. There was no time in that moment to entertain the yearning lurking beneath the surface of the moment. It all flashed by too quickly, but lastingly. Slowly, she turned, with her neck craned cautiously around to watch the wildcat's response as she stepped gingerly back down the trail in the direction from which she had come as if to say: "No worries. This is your trail."

Almost perkily, or so it seemed, the creature followed behind her. She turned back around; both of them stopped—the two of them face to face again. Perhaps neither of them knew exactly what to do. From her point of view, she had been given no safe option. Continuing along the path as planned was certainly out of the question. Standing her ground in stillness might be too enticing or threatening as well; but taking the return path left her dangerously vulnerable too.

Was that curiosity in the face of the creature? It certainly did not seem like ferocity. But who could know? And even if it was a joyful curiosity, who could say when it might turn to something dangerous or lethal? The moment—staring face to face—was long enough to be uncomfortable. She turned and walked gingerly away again—craning her neck backwards again, and the wildcat pranced after just as it had before. She could not continue in this fashion and see the way in front of her as well. Taking her eyes off the creature to see the path seemed terribly inadvisable so she turned around again ever

so slowly. Face to face again, each stared at the other frozen in place for the third time. It was like a game from childhood called Red-Light, Green-Light. Did the creature want to play, to follow in parade wherever she might lead? She started down the trail once more, perhaps not knowing what else to do. The wildcat followed suit. But her next turn would be the last. She held her gaze this time—too long perhaps, to hold the creature's interest. Finally, it wandered off the side of the trail, into the dense forest beyond and became instantly invisible. She continued on to the stage at the river and performed her audition, but it seemed as if the initiation had already taken place. Later, she came to know the creature as a panther called jaguarundi—also known as *leoncillo* (little lion), the otter-cat, and weasel-cat.

### **Reflections on the fiction.**

Might we not view this rehearsal in the forest as a projection of our own soul's Image? Can we not say that the matter of the Earth is somehow changed in the presence of its Image, its Energy? Might we not see that this Energy raises and restores the Earth and things and beings of the Earth, as Corbin has said, to another dimension of being where things appear "as symbols to be deciphered" (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 11)? Let us remember that symbols, as viewed by him and Jung, are always partially unknowable. Restoring the Earth and things and beings of the Earth to their symbolic dimension is thus a move that carries us back to the mysterious wonder that each thing, each being, brings to the Earth as its unique expression of a primordial yearning and source to which we all belong. When imbued by this Image, Energy, or Archetype things appear in the form of their deepest longings; things are seen as the seed of an initial desire to manifest beauty and goodness from pure potential. This mode of seeing is essentially a mode of being. To



be is to see, and to see is to be. Being as a mode of seeing is a sensibility of the Actress that is present in Mazdaism as well. Below, we look to the figures of Spenta Armaiti and the Angel Daēnā to explore this sensibility from a uniquely Mazdean tinted perspective.

### **Spenta Armaiti or Spendarmat and her Daughter Daēnā**

Corbin (1960/1977) tells us that Spenta Armaiti, who is also referred to as Spendarmat, is translated as “perfect Thought” (p. 15) in the Pahlavi texts of the Avesta. This perfect thought is “the active Imagination of the celestial Earth” and “a power capable of ‘substantiating’ and ‘vivifying’” (p. 40). Corbin says that Spenta Armaiti is translated as *Sophia* in Plutarch. Praising this translation, he describes the Zoroastrian Mazdean tradition as a “*Sophianic* mystery of the Earth, whose consummation will be its eschatological Transfiguration” (p. 15). Here Mazdaism becomes *geosophy* and its essential function is “prepar[ing] the birth of the earthly human being to his celestial ‘I’” (p. 36). The celestial “I” is typified in the Person of Spenta Armaiti’s daughter: the transcendent Angel Daēnā who is “the *vision* of the celestial world as it is *lived*” and the soul’s “celestial Idea” (p. 42).

It is said that the Angel Daēnā appears to the soul at dawn following the third night after departure from this world. As the celestial “I,” and Resurrection Body, the Angel Daēnā is “engendered and formed from the celestial Earth” which is definitively “the Earth perceived and meditated in its Angel” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 15). This statement intimates the nature of the Fravartīs’ battle on Earth against Ahriman. Let us remember that the incarnate Fravarti has been identified with the soul, and its angelic Twin has been identified with its corresponding celestial archetype. The incarnate Fravarti’s task is to project, to mirror, and unveil the Image of her own celestial Twin and

in so doing to restore the *gētīk*. This is the process through which the Celestial Earth is constituted. The relationship between the Fravarti and the Earth is a reciprocal one. The destinies of Fravarti souls who are entrusted with the destiny of the terrestrial Earth, are in turn entrusted to the celestial Earth, through which each celestial “I” is engendered. The potential for meeting with our own celestial selves, and for the actualization of our eschatological hopes, is thus dependent upon the manner in which we meet the terrestrial Earth.

### **Spendarmatīkīh: A Process**

One of the processes through which the mystic develops an appropriate relationship to the terrestrial Earth is especially intriguing because it builds upon a theme and image that has recurred throughout this research: that of theatre as a living presence. This presence has been associated with particular words and activities: with role play, mirroring, and unveiling. Corbin adds another word and activity to this family: *Spendarmatīkīh*. This word is derived from Spendarmat, also referred to as Spenta Armaiti, the Archangel of the Earth. Approaching the angelology of Mazdaism as a Sophianic mystery of the Earth, Corbin (1960/1977) tells us that the devotee’s task is “becoming invested with Spendarmatīkīh” (p. 38). This process is essentially one of embodiment; it is an enactment. The human being, in assuming Spendarmatīkīh, exemplifies “the mode of being of Spenta Armaiti” (p. 38). Corbin recommends studying the features of Spenta Armaiti (much like an actress would in researching and preparing for a role) as a means for discovering what this implies and how it might be possible. Plunging into the details of the Archangel’s familial background, it becomes apparent that the individual human who assumes the role of Spenta Armaiti assumes the role of the

mother of his future celestial Self or Daēnā. In studying Spendarmat's features, as Corbin suggests, we also discover that other multiple and paradoxical roles emerge from her Person.

The Mazdean devotee, for instance, knows himself as the son of Ōhrmazd, the Lord Wisdom, who is his father, and as the son of Spendarmat, who is his mother (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 2). But Spenta Armaiti or Spendarmat, as we already know, is Ōhrmazd's creation—his daughter. Here it follows that she is both wife and daughter to Ōhrmazd, as well as mother and sister to the human being. This would also make her both sister and mother to the other Archangels of the divine Heptad as well as mother to her very own self. Additionally, “mental iconography attributes features to the person of Spenta Armaiti that relate her closely to Sophia considered as master craftsman of Yahweh's Creation” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 39). As we can see, the Archangel of the Earth expresses herself through the medium of many faces. Perhaps this is an intimation of what it means to be “master craftsman of Yahweh's Creation” (p. 39). Perhaps this is an intimation of what Spendarmat's own hierurgy or ritual, which is “Earth as a form of existence” (p. 9) is reaching for. Perhaps the Wisdom of the Earth as a form of existence has something to do with the capacity for stepping into the embodiment of all things and negotiating the familial relationships that come with this differentiated embodiment.

Ōhrmazd (the Lord Wisdom), as we know, is included as the first or seventh Power of Light in the Mazdean Heptad. Spenta Armaiti's hierurgical “Image is Wisdom, and woman regarded as a being of light” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 9). These Images, taken together, evoke our sense that Ōhrmazd and Spenta Armaiti can be imagined as masculine and feminine counterparts of Wisdom and Light as a being.

Two related points might also be relevant. The first is that the human feminine presence seen through this Mazdean lens is associated with the future. Humans in their “prehistoric or supraterrrestrial condition” are Spenta Armaiti–Sophia’s sons, and humans in their “*post mortem*” condition are her daughters typified in the figure of Daēnā, the celestial “I” (Corbin, 1960/1977, p. 48). Today’s “sons,” in other words, become tomorrow’s “daughters”. The implication here is that human evolution, seen through this myth, moves the individual from a masculine to a feminine manifestation. Both of these manifestations are born of Wisdom and Light. So, what is the difference between them, we might ask? What is it then, that this movement implies?

A possible response might be viewed through a second striking point: Corbin (1960/1977) describes the “perfect mental activity” involved in exemplifying the mode of being of Spenta Armaiti as “perfect thought under the pure gaze of love” (p. 39). Perhaps “the pure gaze of love” (p. 39) involved in this mode of being is a distinguishing characteristic of this apparent evolution from masculine manifestation to feminine manifestation. But what exactly does Corbin mean by this phrase: “the pure gaze of love” (p. 39)? The response to this question, we expect, will emerge as a gradual unfolding over the course of several chapters. At this preliminary stage, we imagine that it involves a sense of sight which sees in each thing and being, its Angel—a sense of sight which sees in each thing the beauty of that thing’s soul’s Image—a sense of sight that sees, in each being, the primordial yearning of that being’s soul and the forms that each of these souls long to manifest. We imagine that this sense of sight sees this (even in the midst of the world’s mixture), and that it holds all things in this Image, this pure gaze of love.

There is yet another character who we expect to include in our reimagined Mazdean drama—a character who was bypassed in our original draft of this work. His name is Gayōmart, Spenta Armaiti's preterrestrial son. We expect to recall his story later, within the context of as yet untold discoveries (related to Dionysos), but now we turn our eyes from Mazdaism to Avicennism—another tradition that Corbin places within the spiritual–philosophical family that includes Ibn 'Arabī.

## Chapter 5 Avicennism and a Suhrawardian Theosophy of Light

### Avicennism

In Chapter 2, the Iranian mystic Avicenna was brought to our attention via a brief discussion of the characteristically Persian literary genre that Corbin refers to as the visionary recital. A precursor to the visionary experiences which constitute these recitals is the mystic's recognition of himself as a Stranger in the physical world. Here we look to Avicenna's philosophical work and his cosmological system, which is phenomenologically supported by these deeply personal dramaturgies. As is the case with all our discussions of Corbin's work, the summary below attempts to strike a narrative balance that makes this system accessible on the one hand, while retaining its paradoxical, not fully graspable, and strikingly beautiful complexity, on the other.

Corbin tells us that Avicennan angelology puts forth a triple hierarchy. First, we have the Archangels or pure Intelligences, also referred to as Cherubs. Second, are the Angels who emanate from them. These Angels are celestial Souls "possessing pure Imagination" (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 260), who move the celestial spheres. Third, are "the human souls, or 'terrestrial angels, who move and govern earthly human bodies" (p. 46). The relationship between human souls and the Angel or Active Intelligence from whom they emanate corresponds to the relationship between the celestial Angels and the Archangels from whom they emanate. Here we see, as we did in Mazdaism, a correspondence between originating beings of higher dimensions and the beings of lower dimensions who emanate from them.

The procession of Archangel-Cherub-Intelligences in Avicenna's cosmology corresponds with a passage from the primordial Unity of the absolute One to a Unity which incorporates "the multiplication of being and the multiplicity of beings" (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 56). The First Being and all being, as imagined by this philosophical system, is born of an Intelligence and Principle upon which its Being is based and founded. Corbin tells us that the First Being is "precisely the Thought eternally thought by the Thought that thinks itself" (p. 57). The First Being is the First Intelligence's intellection, thought, or idea of itself: as, through, and in Being. It is a step out of pure Thought or Potential into the Being of its own Thought—the Being of its Principle or Essence. The First Being is also variously referred to as the "First Consequent," the "First Caused," and the "primordial Originated" (p. 57). Because the First Being (as the First Intelligence's intellection of itself) is already a step out of itself, it already includes a duality and as such, it determines a passage from the absolute pure Unity to a Unity of unities.

Corbin (1954/1988) tells us that the First Being of Avicenna is "sovereign Beauty and Goodness and primordial Love" (p. 57). From this we might infer that the constitution of Beauty, Goodness, and primordial Love is an expression of the First Intelligence's Essence or Principle. We see a similar dynamic in Mazdaism as well: Being, in its original and originating forms, is here equated with beauty, goodness, and love. In *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*, we learn that Ōhrmazd's goodness has "existed as long as Ōhrmazd himself" (Corbin, 1951/1983, p. 7), and in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Corbin (1960/1977) tells us that Ōhrmazd's creatures at their origins are "good," "beautiful," and "marvelous" (p. 13). We are also told that the perfect mental

activity of Spenta Armaiti, his daughter, is “perfect thought under the pure gaze of love” (p. 39).

The angelic procession from the First Intelligence in descending order to the Ninth Intelligence follows a recurring pattern of ternary geneses. Initially, the procession is set in motion by the First Intelligence’s threefold mode of considering its own being. From the First Intelligence’s threefold intellection of itself, a Second Archangel, the First Angel-Soul, and the first heaven is hypostatized. Each corresponds respectively with the First Intelligence’s three modes of considering its being. The procession of Archangel–Intelligences continues in descending order following the same pattern, until the Tenth Archangel is reached. At each level an Archangel–Intelligence, an Angel–Soul, and a heaven emanates from the Archangel–Intelligence who precedes them. At each level of this hierarchical system the Intelligences “give origin to a world and to consciousness of a world, which is the consciousness of a desire, and this desire is hypostatized in the Soul that is the motive energy of that world.” (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 266). After the Ninth Intelligence, the cycle of ternary geneses changes. Because the Tenth Intelligence’s thought no longer has sufficient energy to engender one Intelligence who resembles him, one Soul, and one heaven through which his intellection can be hypostatized, it splinters into the multitude of human souls and terrestrial matter.

The role of Soul within this cosmological structure, provides us with a bridge by which the heights of Corbin’s sense of soul and the depths of Hillman’s sense of soul might be reconciled.

In Avicennism, the eternal motion imparted to the sphere by the Soul expresses not an intellectual desire—that is, the intellectual act representing its good and its



perfection to itself, and thus actuating and realizing the cosmic Order—but an incompleteness, an unfulfillment, an aspiration toward the still Unrealized. (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 71)

From our vantage point, this view of the Soul, as an Intelligence's residual sense of incompleteness, aligns with Hillman's view of psyche's pathological aspect. Both paradigms conjure up images of a soul who bears the burden of sensing but never quite realizing its potential, of a soul who senses the actuality of its being as less than the essence of its entirety. Both conjure up images of soul as that unrelenting yearning always searching for some untapped, unmanifested aspect of itself, some still hidden beauty: unseen, unrecognized, ungraspably sensed, weighty, and bulging just below the surface. Here, in the Avicennan soul of incompleteness, the space between Hillman's depth perspectives and the lofty spiritual heights of Corbin's perspectives seem to grow together. The soul's pathological tendencies and its interminably painful insistence that something is terribly wrong (as viewed through Hillman's lens) might be read as intuitive precursors or symptoms that, from the Avicennan perspective, lead to its recognition of itself as a Stranger in this world. This recognition anticipates the characteristic psychic event that finds its expression in the visionary recital which represents the soul's journey of return to its angelic source. The point here is that the distinct narratives of these two authors, which might be read as two conflicting stories, can also be read as different aspects or phases of the same story. The narrative connection between Hillman's sense of soul and Corbin's sense of soul, as unveiled here, prompts us to suggest that the creative imagination and the Creative Imagination might be seen in a similar light: as two figures, both of which belong within the same plotline.

We might also read the necessity of soul's pathologies, as viewed by Hillman, into the Avicennan narrative. Corbin (1954/1988) tells us (if we understand him correctly) that the Avicennan soul's purpose and role as situated in the manifest world, is to reconcile the doubts, improbabilities, suspicions, and ambiguities which have entered the world of true Reality (p. 27). Here we see, as we did in Mazdaism, the creatures of lower worlds working through the ambiguities (dare we say pathologies) that originate, not from the physical worlds, but from the spiritual heights. The implication here is that soul's pathology is necessary even within these celestial oriented paradigms. It is built into the veritable preexistential structure of all being. It is the motivating force of Creation itself.

### **Theosophy of Light: Suhrawardī, Najm Kobrā, and the Actress**

Our original inclination for including Suhrawardī's theosophy of Light in this selective summary of the lineage which informs our understanding of Ibn 'Arabi's conception of the creative Imagination was inspired, in part, by an imagined correspondence between the theosophy of Light, described in Corbin's (1971/1994) *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, and our own somewhat enigmatic experience of flashing colored lights in a meditation class two or so years prior to reading this text. Subsequent discoveries, which are discussed in Chapter 11, have since shown the pertinence of this theosophy in another intriguing respect. Corbin tells us that Suhrawardī (also Sohravardī) initiated the project of reviving this ancient pre-Islamic wisdom and theosophy of Light in the twelfth century. His personalized system had elements of Hermetism, Zoroastrianism, Neoplatonism, and the Sūfism of Islam. In *Man of Light*, Corbin explores the evolution of this restoration through an analysis of Sohravardī (Suhrawardī) and other

key figures who contributed to the revival. In Corbin's (1997/1958) book on the creative Imagination he specifically notes a "coalescence between the esoteric doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī and Suhrawardī's theosophy of Light" (p. 9). He also directs our attention to a similar coalescence between Suhrawardī's work and Shī'ite Ishrāqī Avicennism.

It is Najm Kobrā, however, who he credits as the first Sūfī master "to focus his attention on the phenomena of colors" or "colored photisms" perceived by the mystic in various spiritual states (Corbin, 1971/1994, p. 61). These colors are understood as "signs revealing the mystic's state and degree of spiritual progress" (p. 61). They are not to be understood as physical perceptions. "Najm Kobrā alludes several times to these colored lights as something 'seen with the eyes closed' " (p. 62). Our own experience admittedly occurred with eyes open and was qualitatively subtler, we imagine, than those that Corbin refers to. Most academics and mystics alike would probably discount the idea that the material in Corbin's book and that of our experience is related. In the literal sense we would not argue with this assessment. In a functional sense, however, the imagined connection between them arouses our curiosity and fosters a more intimate relationship with the world of the text. We would like to suggest that seeing the possibility of our own experience as part of that world may be altogether appropriate to our research topic: namely, the creative Imagination's role across all dimensions of reality.

In the section that follows, we switch to a first person singular voice to tell the story of this experience, as it was described shortly after it happened.

### **The meditation.**

It happened during the third session of a brief introduction course to three Eastern contemplative meditation techniques. The evening was devoted to a fostering of

compassion and more specifically to the Tibetan practice of *tonglen* which refers to the act of “giving and taking” (Glaser, 2005, p. 118). Chödrön (2000), an American Buddhist nun and teacher, describes this process as a method for connecting with the suffering of others as well as that of our own. The discipline’s broader intention is to awaken compassion for all beings. Additionally, the practice of *tonglen* is said to potentially connect us with “the open dimension of our being,” (pp. 93-97) which serves as an introduction to “a far larger view of reality” or “unlimited spaciousness that Buddhists call *shunyata*” (pp. 93-97).

The last meditation exercise of the evening involved a pairing into groups of two. Looking into our partners’ eyes, we were asked to breathe in their suffering then to breathe out with an offering of loving kindness, compassion, and wishes for their happiness and well-being.

Generally speaking, guided meditations are ineffective for me. In an effort to follow the instructions I tend to become overly cognitive which inevitably negates the purpose of the exercises. On this occasion, however, I received the gaze of my partner and held the instructor’s words gently in the background of my attention without being unduly distracted by them. My partner, likewise, seemed instantly ready to receive my gaze in turn. The first tear that streamed down my face appeared almost immediately. Relatively free of thoughts—I was held by a paradoxically intense equanimity and heightened sense of attention that came without me willing anything. Tears flowed in streams down my face. At times, they subsided but the heightened sense of attentiveness—of being present—remained stable. This so called suffering was not accompanied by the struggle and sense of depletion that I normally associate with the word *suffering*. A subtle

thought hovered in the background of my experience. It was a curious awareness of the loop that united me with my partner. As I looked at the “suffering” I saw in her face I was conscious of the fact that she was supposedly taking in my suffering while I took in hers, which meant that the pain I saw in her face was a reflection of what she saw in mine and vice versa. The divide between us was thus muddied. This muddied place prompted the questions: “Who was I looking at? Was it her or me? And who was she looking at?” I also noted that the distinction between the taking in of suffering and the giving out of compassion, loving kindness, and wishes for the other’s happiness was very slight. The movement between them was subtle for me and both were felt as equally profound. I had no negative judgment of “suffering” in this context. In hindsight, I wondered if a shift in our cultural perspective of suffering might better serve us.

Interestingly enough, I find that the etymology for the word *suffering* supports this realignment. Tracking it back to its Indo-European root *bher*, I discover other important derivatives that *suffering* keeps company with: *bear* (as in to bear or carry children), *burden*, *birth*, *bring*, *fertile*, *differ*, *offer*, *prefer*, *transfer*, *furtive*, and *metaphor* (Bher, 1992, p. 2097). What a rich and wonderful family this word *suffering* has.

The poignancy of this experience is not altogether foreign to me. It may sound odd to a devout Buddhist but my past as a professional actress has afforded me with countless comparable experiences. Embodying and relating to the other—in other words, acknowledging the other in oneself and living the stories of others who live inside us all—is very much a part of what the acting experience is. Doing it well has been an act of compassion for me. I suppose that this association with the acting experience has something to do with why this particular practice involving partnership with another—

with a tangible human being as opposed to a mental image without flesh—was the one practice from this meditation class that proved most meaningful and accessible to me.

After fifteen minutes or so, the instructor brought the exercise to a close, suggesting that we either exchange thoughts about the experience with our partners or write in our journals, but neither my partner nor I were ready to stop. We continued on, looking into each other's eyes. I could hear the susurrant of conversation hovering in my background, soft and whisper-like—like a song almost. I imagine now that the conversation may have sounded more distant to me than it did to the others in the room; I suspect that my partner and I were somewhat suspended in a limbic loop that existed halfway in and halfway out of the space that our classmates were engaged in. It was during this time of extended meditation while our fellow cohorts chatted that I saw the light in the room change colors in slow intermittent flashes a number of times. It was as if the room was a stage and the lighting designer had inserted colored gels into the stage lighting instruments to evoke the mood of a particular scene. Everything became a dullish blue-green, then yellowish, then blue-green, and my partner's face became tinted by each flashing change. It happened three or so times then subsided and happened again a while later.

I wondered if perhaps some light from outside the room that I was not aware of—a passing car (with greenish and yellowish flashing lights?) or a lighting effect announcing the grand opening of a store or entertainment event, or some such mundane phenomenon—had been the cause of this. I inquired with my partner the following morning, and discovered that she had not seen the colors that filled the space and flashed throughout it, as I had.

**Our current reflections on the meditation, viewed in the context of this research.**

At the time that this occurred, we had no knowledge of Corbin or Islamic mysticism. The description of this meditation above is included here for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a phenomenological account of an experience that might be justifiably viewed as visionary in the apparitional sense that Jung and Corbin tended to use the word. As such, it narrows the gap between us and them. Secondly, the experience is identified as being familiar to us through the practice of acting. This phenomenological coalescence of theatrical practice and visionary experience gives further credence to our sense that the two may be related. Lastly, we recognize a likeness between this human-to-human practice and various mystic-to-Divine dialogic processes discussed by Corbin, namely: Ibn 'Arabi's dialectic of love (discussed in Chapter 7), "Creative Prayer" (mentioned in Chapter 2 of this work and discussed more extensively in Chapter V of Corbin's [1997/1958] *Alone with the Alone*), and the *dhikr* (discussed below). The phenomenon of colored lights, in mysticism and in association with theatre, will surface again in Chapter 11: this time, within the context of Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation.

Corbin (1971/1994) tells us that the mystic's "capacity to perceive suprasensory lights" (p. 104) is directly related to the *dhikr*, a process which involves the recitation of lines or sayings from sacred doctrines. Functionally speaking, the divine light or spiritual energy released by the mystic's body as a result of this process becomes a mirror and unveiling of the Divine. In making himself present to his Lord, the Lord becomes present to the mystic as well.

Najm Rāzī, a direct disciple of Najm Kobrā, enumerates five subtle organs: “the intellect, the heart, the spirit, the superconsciousness (*sirr*), and the *arcanum* or transconsciousness (*khafī*). Each of these suprasensory faculties perceives its own world” (Corbin, 1971/1994, pp. 109-110). Corbin associates certain types of experience with “unveilings” to corresponding subtle organs. Of particular interest, in respect to our meditation experience, is the pairing between “visions of various colored lights” and an unveiling to the subtle heart. It may be helpful here to remind ourselves that the organ of active, creative Imagination in Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology is the heart. Corbin says:

The capacity to perceive suprasensory lights is proportionate to the degree of polishing, chiefly the work of the *dhikr*, which brings the *heart* to the state of perfect mirror. In the beginning these lights are manifested as ephemeral flashes. The more perfect the transparency (the “specularity”) of the mirror, the more they grow, the longer they last, the more diverse they become, until they manifest the form of heavenly entities. (p. 104)

Setting aside our doubts in respect to own our mystic and visionary capacities, we can begin to imagine our experience within the context of this passage. We can imagine that those visions of colored lights were flashing on the border between our usual consciousness and that of an imaginal one. Who is to say what might have happened on this liminal border? Perched on the edge of two worlds, perhaps a double-faced mirror was coming into being: a mirror, reflecting the face of our human meditation partner on its terrestrial side, and almost reflecting the face of our divine counterparts—our Angels—on the celestial side. We can imagine that in perfecting this mirroring activity we might



expect to reach the other side of this border—the imaginal side—where colored lights become visionary figures (like those that Jung and Corbin refer to).

Curiously, it is our mutual suffering and compassion in dialogue with itself and with another that transported us to this edge.

Notably, the experience itself did not feel foreign to us. It is only the subtle flashing of lights from an unseen source that leaves a trace of an unknown presence, of something hidden amidst that which is familiar.

Seen through the lens of this mystic tradition, we can imagine our meditation experience as a borderland experience balanced on the edge of every day consciousness and the imaginal world as it is understood by Corbin. For us it represents the possibility of many in-betweens between the physical, imaginal, and spiritual realities pure and simple.

### **Summing Up the Last Two Chapters**

Among Corbin's many works, it is *Alone with the Alone: The Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (1997/1958) which is explicitly dedicated to the topic of the creative Imagination, as perceived by Islamic mysticism. With this in mind, we imagined from the outset of our research that this book, in particular, would provide us with the core material through which our inquiry would be most readily responded to. It is the introduction to this text, however, that directed us toward some of Corbin's other works as a means for acquiring knowledge of a spiritual lineage that he believed was crucial to an understanding of Ibn 'Arabī's school of thought. We have since realized that these supplemental works, which have been the focus of the last two chapters, provided us with more than a prelude and background to our main story. They have informed our

idea of the creative Imagination as much as Corbin's book which is dedicated to the topic. In some respects, our exploration of these distinct spiritual–philosophical traditions precludes the need to review certain portions of *Alone with the Alone*. This is not to say that these various schools of thought should be conflated with each other. It simply means that the symbolic resonances between them, allow them to speak for each other in respect to the purpose of this study. The hierohistorical correspondences they share allow us to incorporate portions of each distinct tradition in a patchwork plot that constitutes a unified vision, through which hitherto nonmystics might find a glimpse of themselves.

In the last two chapters, we have been witness to a number of recurring themes, images, and philosophical–spiritual ideas that begin to respond to our research question. In our exploration of Mazdaism, we discovered a place where the Actress might feel at home—a place where the Actress is valued, necessary, and essential—where the Actress provides the medium through which individuation takes place. The Actress is here embodied by the terrestrial world of mixture with one eye tilted toward the primordial yearning that brought her into being, and another eye focused on the actualization of this yearning as a being. These two “I(s)” are expressed in the dual aspect and characters of Fravarti and Daēnā. The Actress is, as such, the celestial world's own ritual and provident care—a player in Ōhrmazd's passion play staged on the terrestrial world stage. The quality of her vision—which is the quality of her becoming—constitutes new worlds. Our deepest selves—that is, our celestial “I(s),” our Daēnās, our ideal Selves—are born of these worlds. As Mazdean inhabitants on Earth, we are all the Actress. Seeing through this lens, the Actress is also a Mystic whose suprasensory vision might be not be recognized as sight per say but rather felt from within as an embodiment and enactment.

Her scripts when recited in a manner appropriate to them, (like the *dhikr*), bring ordinary things to Light.

In taking the Mazdean view of terrestrial earth as an angelophany (as an apparition of the celestial Earth Angel), we have here unveiled a sacral sense of the so called mundane world. Viewing the Earth itself as a world of visions has contributed to our shifting definitive sense of what it is to be a mystic. The mystic, like Hillman's sense of soul, is fast becoming a matter of perspective—a perspective that begins with addressing all things as persons—as Who, not what.

This perspective has led us to Spenta Armaiti (Spendarmat)—to a feminine archetype and Archangel whose Wisdom is the Earth as a form of existence. The mysteriousness of her distinctly feminine Wisdom which is related to love has been linked with an expressly Mazdean eschatological hope and human evolution that leads to embodied immortality—to the individualized self, typified in the figure of Daēnā: the celestial “I.” During the preparatory stage of our inquiry (chapters one through three) we did not foresee that the transformative nature and eschatological hope expressed by the idea of feminine consciousness in both Corbin's and Hillman's works would emerge as an indispensable theme in this research, but it has. As we shall see, going forward, it will reemerge in every step of our journey. Our sense of what we mean by these very big words *feminine consciousness* will continue to unfold along the way. This holds true, as well, for our sense of how they relate to mysticism and creativity.

Our brief look at Avicennism brought forth its symbolic resonance with many aspects of Mazdaism. This resonance is shared between Avicennism and Suhrawardī as well, and between Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī. Of particular note, is Avicennism's

definitive view of the soul as expressing “an incompleteness, an unfulfillment, an aspiration toward the still Unrealized” (Corbin, p. 1954/1988, p. 71). This view has brought us closer to a place where Corbin’s and Hillman’s conceptions of soul might constitute a shared narrative and story.

Dipping our phenomenological toes into a theosophy of Light informed by Suhrawardī, Najm Rāzī, and Najm Kobrā, we deepened our sense of connection between mysticism (Corbin), depth psychology (Hillman), and theatre (the Actress) through lived experience. This connection was expressed in the embodiment of another’s suffering as shared between two partners (a practice familiar to the Actress) which culminated in an experience with elements that can be likened to a visionary phenomenon. This cursory glance at the phenomenon of visionary light in mystic practice will also prove useful in respect to the unfolding of later discoveries in this research.

### **Going Forward: A *Re-visioned* Approach**

Our next chapter (which directly followed the chapter on Mazdaism in our initial draft of this work) looks to Dionysos, the Greek god of theatre, for further insight. Submerged in the labyrinthine depth and breadth of Corbin’s work while writing our first draft of this dissertation, it was our concern that we had neglected the voices of Hillman and the Actress, so we followed our chapter on Mazdaism with Dionysos as a means for including them, then returned to Corbin’s work with our introduction to Avicenna and the Suhrawardīan theosophy of light. The voices of Hillman and the Actress have since found their place in the first two chapters on Corbin’s work to a greater degree, and our sense is that this new order will provide an easier, more comprehensible flow for the reader. At the outset of this research process, we turned to Hillman’s works on Dionysos as a means

of continuing to explore links between theatre and spirituality that emerged in our exploration of Mazdaism, while concomitantly giving voice to Hillman and the Actress. We imagined that this chapter would include a brief overview of the god which provided context for understanding Hillman's writing on Dionysos, but our intention, as stated in Chapter 3, was to remain as close as possible to Corbin's and Hillman's own works in order to keep the scope of our research within a manageable range. Dionysos, we soon found, had his own agenda. He required more attention from outside authors. We had not anticipated the degree to which he needed to be heard—not simply as a vehicle for exploring Hillman's ideas, but as an entity in himself that penetrates into all aspects of this research. As a result, we have looked beyond Hillman's writings on Dionysos to additional sources more than we had expected to. The surprisingly leading role that Dionysos plays in this research from this point forward has also resulted in a change of Hillman's role in this research. While Hillman remains a central character in the healing fiction which is unfolding here, we draw less profusely from his many works than we had once envisioned we would. Nevertheless, his archetypal approach and ideas on key themes related to our research question maintain a strong presence throughout this work. In general, we have found that focusing in greater depth on fewer texts has been necessary in order to tell a coherent and comprehensible story based on very complex, multifaceted, and abstruse materials. (This holds true for our use of Corbin's writings and for authors who have written about Dionysos, as well.) While our approach, as initially imagined, may have shifted, our research question continues to steer this work, setting its own limitations on our wanderings. The degree to which we cover each exploratory lead, and the number of sources we draw from in so doing, is still necessarily bounded by

parameters set forth by the research design (Chapters 1 through 3) and ultimately, by this emerging healing fiction's own sense of how it wants to unfold.

## Chapter 6

### Dionysos

#### Overview

Evidence from classical philologists, archaeologists, and linguists show Dionysian influences in Greek culture dating back to pre-Greek Minoan or Mycenaean civilizations on the island of Crete. The *Minoan* civilization (named as such by a British archaeologist after the legendary King Minos in Greek myths) emerged around 2,000 B.C. and lasted until 1,400 B.C.

Mysterious, enigmatic, and paradoxical—Dionysos (also Dionysus) is “the god of epiphany” (Otto, 1960/1965, p. 79), the god who comes and goes. He appears suddenly. And just as suddenly, he disappears—both geographically and chronologically. Known for his travels through Greece, through Egypt, through Syria, up the Asian coast, into Phrygia, Thrace, and India—Dionysos is the god of wine, inspiration, and drama celebrated in boisterous processions where spirits of the earth appear, evoked by masks. His chariot—adorned with vine branches and ivy—is drawn by panthers. He is accompanied by a motley crew of legendary figures. These include the maenads (his female votaries, often depicted naked carrying flutes and tambourines, dancing as if possessed) and the satyrs or silenoi (mythical creatures with “perpetually erect penis[es] of enormous proportions” [Grimal, 1951/1990, p. 394] who have physical features of both man and goat).

Dionysos is a mystic god of ecstasy, known also as a feminine bisexual god, a god of women, of nature, and the founder of a mystery-cult that embraces these elements. He is associated with sensuality, dance, flow, music, joy, festivals, tragedy, suffering,

madness, life, death, primordial oneness, and dismemberment. The list does not end here. He is a god of intoxication, a foreign god, and stranger (at least associatively speaking, if not in actuality). He is friendly, but also bestial, and wild. A number of sources refer to his miraculous appearances in a variety of forms including bull, lion, panther, many-headed dragon, young girl, boar, bear, tree, fire, water (Otto, 1960/1965, p. 110), and goat (p. 168).

As we shall see throughout our exploration of the god, Dionysos's encounters with various mystic cults in Asia Minor often led to the absorption of them by his own cult and to colorful syncretic variations of the tales that he appears in. Contrasting stories about his lineage emerge from the dynamic interplay of these peregrinations, as do multiple tales of his episodic adventures that sometimes overlap and sometimes conflict. The tales below provide a further sense of the god and his story.

### **Stories from the Myth**

#### **Dionysos, Demeter, and Persephone.**

In an Orphic version of Dionysos's birth, the god is born of Zeus *Katachthonios*, the "subterranean Zeus" (who is also identified with Hades), and his very own daughter Persephone, "queen of the Realm of the Dead" (Kerényi, 1980, p. 250). Persephone is also identified with her mother Rhea—the Great Mother of the Earth, or Demeter (who is described as Rhea's alter ego). As we can see, even at first glance, the relations and identities of the gods are far from straight forward. In this story, we see that Zeus, more commonly known as a sky god, is also revealed to us as having an underworld identity. He is identified, not only with Hades, but at times with Dionysos himself (pp. 250-251). Mothers are here confused with daughters, and daughters with wives. It strikes us that the



labyrinthine paradoxes of identity and relations that we see in Dionysos's domain are oddly reminiscent of those we uncovered in our exploration of Spenta Armaiti, Ōhrmazd, Daēnā, and the other Mazdean beings of Light. But we digress. Let us return to the birth of Dionysos.

In one version of the tale, Demeter—the Great Mother of the Earth—arrives in Sicily from Crete, where she discovers a cave that she uses to house her young daughter Persephone. She guards the entrance with two serpents from her chariot and goes about her business. This apparent effort to safeguard her daughter is, in fact, part of a plot between her and Zeus. There in the cave, Persephone busies herself like a proper young maiden working in wool “weaving a great web, a robe for her father or mother which [is] a picture of the whole world” (Kerényi, 1980, pp. 252-253). While engaged in this project, Zeus appears in the form of a serpent and seduces her resulting in the birth of Dionysos: the son, who according to the Orphic tales is to be Zeus's successor—the fifth ruler of the world.

### **Dionysos and the Titans.**

Another story adopted by Orphic followers tells of the god's destruction as a young boy at the hands of the Titans: giant deities with incredible strength who preceded and were overtaken by the Olympian gods. In this tale, the Titans emerge from the Underworld, with chalk whitened faces like ghosts, to frighten the child Dionysos who is taken unaware while distracted by his toys. They attack him, tear him to pieces, boil the pieces, and proceed to roast them for a feast.

This tale has many variations. In one of them, an outraged Zeus appears on the scene thrusting the Titans back into the Underworld with the force of his lightning. A

sort of ash is formed from the steam which rises when the lightning strikes them, and from this ash—it is said—that the human race was formed. In the original tale, Dionysus's body parts are woefully lost to the fire, all excepting one. And a later tale serves as an intimation of what the extant part might have been. In this story, Pallas Athene, who is present at the feast, manages to retrieve and hide a piece of the god's dismembered body in a covered basket, which is later given to Zeus. The rescued body part—it is said—was Dionysos's heart.

### **Dionysos and Semele.**

A second Dionysos, of later stories, is said to be the son of Zeus and the mortal Princess Semele, daughter of King Kadmos (also Cadmus). The name Semele, according to Kerényi (1980), was given by Phrygians and Thracians “to Chthonia, ‘the subterranean’” (p. 256). Semele is thus enigmatically associated, like the god's first mother, with the Underworld. In one version of this story Zeus prepares a potion from the rescued heart of Dionysos and serves it to Semele, who then becomes impregnated by it. Zeus's wife, Hera, is overcome with jealousy when she discovers this. Plotting her revenge, she disguises herself as Semele's nurse, and taking advantage of the young girl's confidence, she instills the Princess with fantasies of Zeus appearing before her in the form that he takes when mating with the goddess Hera so that she too might know the power of a god's embrace.

Tutored by her imposter of a nurse, Semele subsequently convinces Zeus to grant her but one wish (without disclosing its content in advance). Her wish, of course, is that same wish instilled in her by none other than Hera, herself. Bound by his promise, the lightening bearing god of Heaven bursts forth in all his elemental glory, and Semele (who

is stricken by flames) perishes, just as Hera had planned. Meanwhile, the infant Dionysos, who is trapped within the Princess's womb, is seized by Zeus who fashions a makeshift womb in his thigh, and carries the child god to term. Dionysos has thus been called the twice-born god. But we might also think of him as the thrice-born god. First, he is born of the subterranean Zeus and Persephone, but perishes at the hands of the Titans in childhood. Second, he is born again when Zeus rescues him from Semele's womb. And third, he is born again when he emerges fully formed from Zeus's thigh. As we shall see later, these are not the only tales where a recurring cycle of death and rebirth appears in the course of the god's story.

**Phase one of his myth: Dionysos, the child.**

It is noteworthy, perhaps, that ample attention is given to the mythology of Dionysos's childhood, especially in light of the fact that he is often associated with the child archetype. It is generally agreed that Dionysos was reared chiefly by women. In one version of the story his father Zeus entrusts the infant god to Semele's sister Ino and her husband King Athamas with instructions to raise the boy as a girl to avoid detection by Hera who has plans to destroy the child. Hera is not outwitted by this strategy, however. Infuriated that Ino and King Athamas have agreed to this arrangement, she proceeds to drive them mad with the same sort of delusionary visions that Dionysos will magically inflict on those who cross him in later years. The consequence of these mad visions is dire, indeed. In mistaking his son for a deer, King Athamas tragically spears his son to death. Ino, meanwhile, murders their second son then throws herself into the sea with his dead body (Grimal, 1951/1990, p. 65, 128, 246). As for the child Dionysos, Zeus rescues him again, transforming him this time into a baby goat (another disguise), and transports

him via the wing-footed Hermes to Mount Nysa where he is nursed and tended to by the nymphs who live there.

**Phase two: Madness and dismemberment.**

Madness and dismemberment appear again and again in the stories that inhabit the world of Dionysos. Dionysus himself, is the victim of madness and dismemberment, but he also inflicts them upon those that he perceives as having wronged him. He plays both the victim and the victimizer. His essential role embodying both roles will become increasingly significant as our discussion deepens.

When fully grown Dionysos wanders off into the country side and again he is surrounded by women. The nymphs of Nysa who were once his caretakers and nursemaids now become the initial maenads, possessed by the god, known for their ecstatic dancing and ritual hunts in the deep forest. Often “depicted as riding panthers and holding wolf cubs” (Grimal, 1951/1990, p. 255) who suckle at their breasts—the maenads have also been known to tear these self-same animals apart with their bare hands once they have matured. Grimal tells us that the female votaries of the god’s mystery-cult, who came thereafter, sought to imitate the behavior of these original divine followers. We shall return to our discussion of them, following a brief excursion into Dionysos’s own madness.

***Dionysos: The mad god.***

According to one story, it was Hera, Zeus’s jealous wife, who drove the youthful Dionysos into madness after he discovered the vine (Grimal, 1951/1990, p.128). Grimal has him wandering throughout Egypt and Syria, up the Asian coast, then into Phrygia during this phase of his life. Here, the young god is initiated into the mystery cult of

Cybele the “Great Mother” who “governed the whole of nature” (p. 112). “Cybele,” he says “was often identified by the Greek mythographers with Rhea” (p. 112). Rhea, we should remember, was Persephone’s mother in our first tale of Dionysos’s birth—and Demeter, who was described as Rhea’s alter ego, was also identified with Persephone herself. These associative relationships between Cybele, Rhea, Demeter, Persephone, the earth, and death play a provocative role in this enigmatic stage of the god’s story. Perhaps it is worth noting that this initiation into the cult of Mother Earth appears to be what cured Dionysos of his madness. Perhaps we might infer from this that losing our sanity has something to do with losing a sense of right relationship with the world we are embedded in. The importance of the quality of this relationship between the human and the Earth is also highlighted, as we know, in Mazdaism.

***Dionysos and King Lykourgas: A tale of persecution and dismemberment.***

Kerényi (1980) refers to this second phase of Dionysos’s young life following early childhood as a period of suffering and persecution. Death and the Underworld are thematically prominent during this time. In one tale, which seemingly takes place in the very early stages of this period, Dionysos is depicted as a young lad with human-like vulnerability. When the maenads (who, in the not so distant past, served as his nursemaids and caretakers) are viciously hunted down like cows by King Lykourgas “the Wolf-man” (p. 262), the poor youth flees in terror, seeking escape from the frightening figure by leaping into the sea. The sea, in the worlds of myth and depth psychology, is often associated with the Underworld, with death, the unconscious, and the unknown. So here we see Dionysos (a god, and as such a supposed immortal), yet again, living through a sort of death experience.

Lykourgas, as punishment for his misdeeds, is subsequently stricken with madness. As is customary in these stories, tragic events come to pass in this delusionary state. In a fit of anger against the god, the murderous king hacks down Dionysos's most precious plant: the vine (which he has also been identified with). Unsurprisingly, "the vine" that Lykourgas sees is actually his son and "the vine branches" that he hacks apart are his own son's limbs.

***Dionysos and Perseus: A tale of Dionysos's own death.***

In another very old tale Dionysos is killed by Perseus who hurls him into the deep spring of Lerna (Kerényi, 1980). Again, we see an association between Dionysos, the watery depths, death, and the Underworld. Again, his helplessness in this situation is rather human-like. In yet another story, the god uses this self-same spring (which is also called a bottomless lake) as a passageway into the Underworld to retrieve his mother Semele from the land of the dead, because it "offer[s] the quickest access to Hades" (Grimal, 1951/1990, p. 129). According to Kerényi's (1980) account of this event, Dionysos needed a guide and pathfinder to successfully carry out this task. The price he paid for this service was a "promise to complete female surrender. . . . He fulfilled his promise with the help of a phallus made of fig-wood, which he erected on this spot" (p. 259). Our sense of this mysterious image of "complete female surrender" (p. 259) will continue to unfold throughout this inquiry: first, when we engage in a discussion of Hillman's speculations about Dionysiac consciousness, and later when we look to Corbin's call for a restoration of feminine consciousness, as seen through the lens of mysticism. Ultimately, Dionysos does find his mother in the Underworld. Both ascend to Olympia together and are immortalized. A corresponding descent, and ascension occurs

again with his wife Ariadne. We shall return to these stories when discussing the third phase of Dionysos's life because they thematically exemplify the transition out of this second phase of persecution, suffering, and death into a period characterized by joy and ascension. For now, we return to the topic of madness as seen in the maenads.

***The madness of maenads.***

Kerényi (1980) cautions us against taking the maenads' mania too generally. Dionysos himself was called *mainomenos* or *mainoles* which means "raging," and this, etymologically speaking, is where the name *maenad* comes from. A fuller understanding of the god's votaries would thus include this fuller sense of their namesake. Kerényi would have us imagine their characteristic *mania* "as bearing all its various senses at once—that of raging love as well as that of raging anger" (p. 260). This extended sense of the word is best exemplified, perhaps, in Euripides' (trans. 1959) tragic play "The Bacchae" (which receives our more extensive focus in the latter chapters of this research). For the time being, we direct our attention toward a particular scene that evokes a visceral sense of the maenads. Here a messenger (and herdsman) reports on his experience with the Theban women who have gathered in the mountains of Cithaeron to dance and hymn the god. Characteristics of the first maenads, who were mythical beings, are here imaginatively superimposed onto the later human members of the god's cult following.

***The Theban "maenads" of Euripides', "The Bacchae".***

From the messenger's report, we learn that the women, when left to themselves, exhibited an exquisite panpsychic communality and coherence between each other and all of nature. The morning light had just begun to shine when he spotted them strewn about

on boughs of fir and beds of oak leaves fast asleep (apparently having danced the night away). Agave was then suddenly alerted by the mooing of the herdsmen's cows.

Instantly, she sprang to her feet with a great cry to awaken the other women. "And they too, rubbing the bloom of soft sleep from their eyes, rose up lightly and straight—a lovely sight to see: all as one" (Euripides, trans. 1959, 690-695). First, they fastened their fawn skins with straps of writhing snakes who licked their cheeks. Then they adorned their hair with ivy, leaves, oak, and flowering bryony. Young mothers, having left their own infants at home, nestled and suckled baby gazelles and wolves they held in their arms. Many of them (like the god by whom they were possessed) carried a pinecone tipped staff of fennel twined with ivy—a *thyrsus*.

Then one of the women struck her thyrsus against a rock and a fountain of cool water bubbled forth. Another drove hers into the ground and a spring of wine miraculously appeared. Still others, who desired milk, scratched the soil with bare hands as the white fluid welled up from beneath and "pure honey spurted, streaming, from their wands" (Euripides, trans. 1959, 710-711).

But then, the awe-stricken cowherds and shepherds who witnessed these wonders decided to hunt the dancers down, expecting an impressive reward from the king for capturing them. From this point on, the women's instinctual bond with nature is violently channeled in a brutal battle against their would-be captors. They cry aloud "with one voice," calling upon the god by shouting his various epithets: "*O Iacchus! Son of Zeus!*" "*O Bromius!*" (Euripides, trans. 1959, 725). And as they shout, the beasts and the mountain itself seemingly become "wild with divinity" (727), apparently taking their side in the fight. The herdsmen narrowly escape, but their cattle are torn apart and clawed to



pieces by the bare hands of the raging women. And then their fury moves them from the forest to the town as they are lifted into the sky by their own speed. Flying across fields and streams, they swoop down on the surrounding towns pillaging everything in sight. Plunder, piled high on their backs, magically stays in place with no binding to secure it. And the villagers, who take up arms, soon find that their spears draw no blood from the raging women. Nor does fire burn them. But the women's wands, on the other hand, inexplicably inflict wounds like daggers upon their attackers.

***The maenads' madness in full identification with the god.***

While Dionysiac women were called "Bakchai" (female Bacchantes), Kerényi (1980) says "they were more properly 'Bakchoi,' in full identification of the worshipped with the worshippers" (p. 260). Many images of the maenads dancing ecstatically "in long robes, with heads thrown rigidly back, wreathed with ivy, carrying the thyrsus" (p. 260) are strikingly similar to those of Dionysos himself. The madness of the maenads is the shared madness of the god. Their enactments through dance, music, and the hunt are rituals by which the god is mirrored. They are an unveiling of his differentiated presence within the individual worshipper and the means by which the boundaries between man and the divine are lifted. Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether this mirroring activity corresponds in any respect with the mirroring activities which have emerged in our exploration of Islamic mysticism. Is there not a hint of *Spendarmatīkīh* in the maenad's practices by the very fact that both sets of practices aim to embody the mode of being of the god who is worshipped? There is a similarity it seems, but the differences between the two traditions—both in content and in tone—caution us about the dangers of likening them to each other at this time. Nevertheless, in knowing—to some degree—where this

story will eventually lead us, we anticipate that an appropriate means of bringing them closer together may unfold in the course of our journey. Our present task, however, is stressing the unavoidable significance of madness and dismemberment in the myth of Dionysos by pointing to further instances of them in the stories that constitute Dionysos's mythical oeuvre.

***More tales of madness, dismemberment, and the killing of kin.***

A number of stories in the myth of Dionysos tell of mothers who are provoked by delusionary visions in states of madness, to unknowingly kill their own children, and in some cases to literally tear their offspring to pieces with their bare hands. Variations and combinations of these paradigmatic plot points are present in the tales of the daughters of King Minyas, King Proitos, and King Cadmus (Kerényi, 1980, pp. 260-262). In the first of these, Minyas's daughters (who refuse to honor the god at his mountain rituals) are frightened when Dionysos appears to them in a flashing epiphany as a bull, then a lion, and finally as a leopard. To appease him, they offer one of their children as a sacrifice, and all three of them tear the child to pieces. In the second story, King Proitos's daughters are driven mad at the age of ripening for failing to take part in the secret rites of Dionysos. After Proitos refuses the help of the seer Melampous—who offers to cure the girls in exchange for one third of his kingdom—the madness of his daughters becomes effectively infectious. Other women—overtaken by the same rage—kill their children, leave their families, and wander off into the forest.

The tales of King Cadmus's daughters (Ino, Autonoe, and Agave) provide additional examples of these Dionysiac plot patterns, and further inform our later exploration of Euripides' tragedy, "The Bacchae". Let us here remember that the mother

of Dionysos, named Semele, was also one of King Cadmus's daughters. Each of Semele's three sisters who refuse to believe in their nephew's divinity, fall upon a similar fate which involves the loss of their children. We have previously spoken of Ino, who was driven mad by jealous Hera, and who consequently killed her own son. In another version of this story, however, it is Dionysos—not Hera—who causes Ino's madness. The death of Autonoe's son, Aktaion, has a characteristically Dionysiac twist as well. He, we learn, is torn to pieces by his own hounds, and his mother is made to reassemble the bones of his dead body. Agave's story, which is central to "The Bacchae" is the most notorious of the three. She, famously kills her son in a ritual hunt at Mount Cithaeron with the help of other frenzied women who are possessed by Dionysos. Ino and Autonoe are among them. "Playing the role of hounds, and calling out to the god as huntsman and companion in the chase, they [tear] Pentheus [her son, who is also now the king] to pieces" (Kerényi, 1980, p. 262). Agave, who sees the head of a lion in the place of her son's own head, mounts it on a thyrsus and parades it proudly into town.

**The third phase: Joy and ascension.**

The second phase of Dionysos's life characterized by persecution, suffering, and death eventually gives way to a third which is marked by triumph, festive joy, immortality, and ascension. This third phase is paradigmatically preceded by the elemental presence of water, and the Underworld experiences which appear in the second phase. Some of our tales exemplifying this pattern involved the young god's descent into the Underworld by way of the sea. First, there was the tale of King Lykourgas who frightened the tender boy to such a degree that he leapt into the sea to escape him. And then there was the tale of Perseus who killed Dionysos and threw his body into the deep

spring of Lerna. Dionysos's associations with the sea reach far beyond these isolated tales. Otto (1960/1965) tells us that Dionysos was worshipped as god of the sea in Pagasae, and also as god of the seacoast in Chios (p. 163). Seaford (2006), drawing from Plutarch, has said that the Greeks regarded him as the master of all "liquid growth" (p. 23).

The paradigmatic movement from persecution and suffering into triumph and joy is symbolically expressed by our story of Dionysos's descent to Hades via the Lake of Lerna and his ascent to Heaven with his mother Semele, thereafter. This pattern of descent followed by ascension is mirrored in other tales as well.

### **The pirate story.**

One tale of Dionysos's capture by pirates and the epiphanic manifestations by which he frees himself is particularly representative of the movement from the persecution phase of his life, characterized by a temporary death (or, historically speaking, a temporary disappearance), and his subsequent triumphant reemergence. The tale begins with Etruscan pirates who spot Dionysos upon a promontory in the form of a stunning young man draped with lustrous purple raiment. Imagining him to be the son of a king or someone of similar rank and wealth, the pirates swiftly seize him with expectations of commanding an impressive ransom for his return. But much to their surprise, they find themselves unable to restrain the extraordinary youth. The cords they attempt to bind him with simply fall from his hands and feet.

The helmsman, witnessing this miraculous phenomenon, soon realizes the grave mistake they have made. "We have surely attempted to entrap some god" he says, "Apollo perhaps, or Poseidon! Free him at once, here on the land before we set out to

sea” he begs. But the captain and crew refuse him. The sail is hoisted. The wind carries the black ship all too swiftly out to sea. And now, wine begins to flow—swirl—ripple—and gurgle throughout the ship. It is sweet to the taste and divinely fragrant. And the crew are aghast with wonder. At the top of the sail an enormous vine suddenly sprouts forth spanning across the entire length of the ship, and plump grapes in all abundance dangle from the vine’s leafy twining stem. Ivy blooms and twists around the mast. And the oarsmen, who finally grasp the gravity of the situation, holler to the helmsman commanding him to return to land at once, but alas, it is too late. The youth suddenly transforms into a lion, roaring mightily. Then a bear appears from nowhere ominously raising itself up upon its hind legs. And the crew, all affrighted, rush toward the stern as the lion springs upon and seizes the captain. Desperately they hurl themselves into the sea, and miraculously, they are all transformed into dolphins as they hit the water. Only the helmsman, who had warned them, is spared (Kerényi, 1980, pp. 266-267).

As noted above, this epiphanic victory has been considered as a symbolic representation of Dionysos’s transition from the second phase of his life (which is characterized by suffering and persecution followed by his temporary historical disappearance or mythical death) into the third phase (which is characterized by his joyful reemergence from the sea). From this point forward the raging maenads, known to accompany him during the second phase, are converted to “transfigured happy companions” (Kerényi, 1980, p. 268) who parade in mirthful procession with his characteristic train of odd creatures: including Satyrs, exotic wild animals, “and all sorts of minor deities such as Priapus” (Grimal, 1951/1990, p. 128).

Another figure is especially significant (and enigmatic) in the tales associated with this joyful and triumphant phase of the god's life. Her name is Ariadne, and she alone, amidst the many females that contribute to his story, plays the unique role of Dionysos's wife.

### **Ariadne.**

There are multiple versions of tales concerning Ariadne. (We shall address these more directly in Chapter 8.) While Hillman makes little mention of Dionysos's enigmatic bride, Kerényi's (1976, pp. 89-125; 1980, pp. 268-272) and Otto's (1960/1965, pp. 181-188) analyses of her—like their analyses of Dionysos, himself—are tortuous and complex. Both Otto and Kerényi look to the etymology of Ariadne's name as an indication of her nature. The word Ariadne (originally "Ariagne" and variously translated by both authors as pure, holy, and untouchable) is a form of Hagne, which is the surname to the Queen of the Underworld (Kerényi, p. 269; Otto, 1960/1965, p. 183). Ariadne—though a mortal born maiden—has thus been identified with the goddess Persephone via this etymological connection. This connection also occurs associatively by way of the similarity between Ariadne's ascension to heaven with Dionysos, and the ascension of Dionysos with his mother who has been variously identified as both Semele and Persephone. This mother-wife conjunction shows itself as well in tales where Ariadne plays a motherly role to Dionysos as one of the female nurses who cares for him during the first phase of his young life. Ariadne's enigmatic role as a mortal born maiden with divine status is strengthened by the fact that she is also identified with yet another goddess: Aphrodite (the goddess of love and beauty). Otto says that "the nature of the Dionysiac woman is exalted to marvelous heights" (1960/1965, p. 181) with Ariadne. He

tells us that she is the perfect image of a beauty that gives life immortality when it is touched by its lover. But he also says that the road to this beauty unavoidably ends in sorrow and death. The writings of Otto and Kerényi on the subject of Ariadne have a mystical quality that is oddly and surprisingly reminiscent, in many respects, of Corbin's works. Time and time again, we have found ourselves struck by the presence of themes, plots, images, and language that carried us through imagination back to our exploration of Mazdaism (and other Corbinian works) during our repeated readings of their Ariadnian analyses. Within a combined Dionysiac–Mazdean context, we even came to imagine the ascendant Ariadne as a form and representative of Daēnā (who is the daughter to the Sophianic figure Spenta Armaiti and the human's celestial "I"). Here, it may help to remind ourselves that Daēnā personifies the eschatological transfiguration and individuated manifestation of the human person in Mazdaism. She is the actualization of a person's primordial image and individuality. In discussions to follow we shall further imagine the correspondences between Ariadne and Daēnā. Both, if viewed through the lenses of Otto and Corbin, lure us with beauty into love on a path that ends with our death in this world while bestowing immortality in another.

In the person of Ariadne, we see intimations of the Fravartī, as well. She descends and ascends to lower and upper worlds or dimensions of being, as do they. Her namesake, Ariadne (a designation meaning holy, pure, and untouchable) links her to the celestial world but she resides on earth in a human form like the incarnate Fravartī. And like the Fravartī, she too, has various double aspects or counterparts which are mysteriously reminiscent of the pairings between the incarnate Fravartī and their celestial twins. On the earthly plane this double aspect appears as a rival sisterhood

between Ariadne (the pure or untouchable one) and Phaidra (the bright one). For us, these names evoke a sense of the twofold nature of all being as put forth in Mazdaism, and expressed in the words *mēnōk* and *gētīk*. Seen through this lens, we imagine a correspondence between Ariadne (the pure or untouchable one) and the *mēnōk* state of being which is celestial, invisible, and spiritual. In the same vein, her sister Phaidra (the bright one) can be viewed as an expression of the *gētīk* state of being, which is an earthly visible, and material state. We find it intriguing that Ariadne (in the myth) is jilted by her mortal lover Theseus, who proceeds to marry Phaidra. Ariadne becomes the bride of Dionysos instead. These two marriages might be viewed as one marriage expressing its earthly, visible, material aspect (embodied by the mortals Phaidra and Theseus) and its celestial, invisible, and spiritual aspect (embodied by the immortalized Ariadne and Dionysos).

A similar Fravarti-like pairing in the person of Ariadne exists between dimensions, as well. Ariadne, after she ascends to heaven with Dionysos, is known by another name: “Aridela, the visible from afar” (Kerényi, 1980, p. 269). Kerényi also tells that Ariadne and Aridela were known on the southern islands of Greece as the names of a goddess “under two aspects with a twofold destiny, a dark one and a bright one” (p. 271). On the mainland, this same goddess was known as Semele and Thyone. Here again we see the blending of identities between Dionysos’s mother and wife. To complicate things further, Kerényi tells us that this goddess with a double aspect and a name for each was also known as Persephone and Aphrodite (p. 272).

Here, we have seen in the person of Ariadne a complex web of conjoined relations and paired identities, just as we have in Mazdaism. We have seen the thematic



presence of light and dark, of upper and lower worlds which are both divided and undivided in a figure who appears to be both one and many. The persons of Ariadne, Aridela, Persephone, Aphrodite, Semele, and Thyone are individualized and united—divided and undivided in accordance with their associative and qualitative relationships to each other, and to Dionysos in his many forms. Dionysos's mother and wife are thus identified with each other in this plexiform web. Seeing through a Dionysiac–Mazdean double lens we might envision the god's mother in the person of Semele–Persephone–Ariadne, and the Archangel Spenta Armaiti (Daēnā's mother). As his mother, they are the primordial source and yearning from which his manifested being emerges. The fully individuated and matured manifestation of this yearning might then be envisioned as the person of Thyone–Aphrodite–Aridela, and Daēnā. As we make this move, we realize that Dionysos is now being viewed as a god and person who is also the world which includes within him the persons and relations who constitute him. These women—who are at once mortals and goddesses, and mothers and wives in their own right—are also aspects or dimensions of the god himself.

The figure of Ariadne (as informed by Kerényi and Otto) adds an enigmatic celestial aspect to the Dionysos story. She enters the myth as a mortal and is immortalized by her ascent with Dionysos (who is the god) but it is her nature, not his, that has a quality more likely to be associated with the celestial world. It is her identification with Aphrodite that brings the words love and beauty to the Dionysiac universe which is more commonly associated with ecstasy, dismemberment, and joy. The presence of beauty and love, brought with the marriage of Dionysos and Ariadne, opens us up to a new sense of the Dionysiac cosmos at large. This opening gives space to the

psychological depths where Hillman tends to dwell and the spiritual heights that attract Corbin.

### **Dionysos as an Image of Indestructible Life; Ariadne as a Life Individualized**

Kerényi (1976) views Dionysos as an image of “indestructible life,” using the Greek connotation of *zōe* to clarify his meaning: “The significance of *zōe*,” he says, “is life in general, without further characterization” (p. xxxii). An expanded sense of *zōe* can be gleaned through its contrast with *bios*: “When the word *bios* is uttered,” Kerényi explains, “something else resounds: the contours, as it were, the characteristic traits of a specified life, the outlines that distinguish one thing from another” (p. xxxii). When Kerényi speaks of Dionysos, he speaks of *zōe*—of the indestructible life that extends beyond the boundaries of individual form—of the surge that flows through *bios*, but is not contained by it.

While Kerényi (1976) views Dionysos as the “archetypal reality of *zōe*,” (of indestructible life), he envisions Ariadne as “the archetypal reality of the bestowal of soul” (p. 124). He imagines her as that which “makes a living creature an individual” (p. 124). Here again, we see intimations of the Mazdean figure of Daēnā. She too, reflects the unique individuality of a manifest being. But there is a significant difference between the way Kerényi speaks of Ariadne here, and Corbin’s treatment of Daēnā. Daēnā is the celestial and eschatological individuality of a person. She is the figure who greets the human individual upon his passing from this world. But Ariadne, as Kerényi speaks of her in this section of his text, appears to be more closely associated with *bios*—with that which expresses the individuality of a terrestrial being. It is true that both Dionysos and Ariadne ascend to heaven and are immortalized. In this sense, the biunity constituted by

their marriage and ascension might be imagined through the celestial image of Daēnā. But Dionysiac and Ariadnian tales are generally oriented toward the vicissitudes of middle and underworld plots. They act as mirrors that reflect soul's experience in the "world of mixture" so to speak. Here, both darkness and light must play a role within the whole. This inherent duality, while reflecting the definitive "mixture" of terrestrial existence (in Mazdean terms), also serves as a metaphor for a corresponding relationship between the lower and higher dimensions of being. This inherent duality and biunity, which constitutes the whole (on Earth and between dimensions), was reflected in festivals and rituals that honored both Ariadne and Dionysos. The passage below exemplifies this duality as enacted in Naxos, an island most believed to be the nuptial site of Dionysos and Ariadne:

The Naxians saw and celebrated Ariadne in two forms. According to their historians, a gloomy festival was devoted to a mortal Ariadne and a joyful one to another whom Dionysos took for his wife. The god himself was also celebrated in two forms on Naxos. In one form he was called "Dionysos Meilichios," and his mask was carved of fig wood. In the other he was the ecstatic "Bakcheus," and his mask was carved from the wood of the vine. (p. 123)

This passage seems to express a human need for paying homage to the inherent dualities and opposing potentialities of our natures. It seems to express the importance of heeding and respecting the power of both the light and the dark—the visible and the invisible. The "bothness" that characterizes this sensibility carries us appropriately into an exploration of Hillman's Dionysos and all which follows thereafter.

**Dionysos in Hillman's Work**

Hillman's (1972b) essay "On Psychological Femininity" is an exercise in revisioning the feminine, seen through the myth of Dionysos. In our exploration of Mazdaism the idea of feminine consciousness presented itself as a dominant theme. Within the context of Corbin's perspective of the Mazdean tradition, feminine consciousness is associated with the wisdom of the celestial earth as a form of existence, and with the future transformation from our terrestrial selves to the embodiment of our celestial or ideal selves. This point of view expresses an eschatological hope which is unattainable on the terrestrial plane; its consummation can only be realized once we have left this world.

Here on earth, history reveals a view of the feminine that stands in stark contrast to this celestial perspective of it. Here on the terrestrial plane, the feminine has been paradoxically associated with that which we perceive to be inferior: with the unconscious as opposed to consciousness; with darkness as opposed to light; matter as opposed to spirit; evil as opposed to goodness; and with instinct, emotion, and the physical as opposed to intelligence and mind. As Jung (1938/1969) has said, the feminine has long been associated with the "abysmal side of bodily man" and his "animal passions" (p. 107 [CW 9.1, para. 206]). Hillman's (1972b) essay "On Psychological Femininity" reveals the unrelenting human perception of the feminine as inferior by surveying ideas in theology, science, and philosophy that demonstrate its persistence throughout all periods of history. While countless specific facts, theories, and socially accepted truths constructed in support of this perception have been debunked time and time again, the underlying idea of feminine inferiority nested within the generally accepted notions of each new current

day, has endured. Hillman tells us that this unyielding perseverance, even in the face of our debunked theories, points to an archetypal reality that is psychological rather than biological in nature. The impetus for his essay begins with the following foundational premise: By failing to recognize the culturally informed characteristics of this ostensible inferiority as expressions of necessary psychic patterns which are essential to our humanity, we project this label of inferiority onto our image of the female body as literal biological fact. The female sex has thus been made to carry the burden of our human disdain for that which is viewed as inferior or weak. In the section below, we touch upon some of the colorful historical ideas in religion and science that Hillman draws from in constructing his argument for a restoration of feminine consciousness seen through the myth of Dionysos.

In religion, the primacy of the masculine surfaces in the story of Adam, the first created, made in the image of God. The feminine, represented by Eve, is made from Adam's rib and "extracted from [his] deep sleep" (Hillman, 1972b, p. 218). She is thus secondary, merely a part of Adam—not an image of God in herself. She is inessential, less perfect, less conscious. "The male is the precondition of the female and the ground of its possibility" (p. 218).

In the history of medicine, Hillman points us to a long-held belief that the substance from which an infant is engendered came from the male sex alone. In this medical fantasy, the male was all that was needed for the constitution of new human life, substantively speaking. There was no contribution of female seed. The woman, it was imagined, acted as carrier and provider of nutrients to the new embryo planted within her, but played no role in the act of creation itself. It was not until 1827 that the human egg

was discovered, and final experiments demonstrating that the sperm penetrates the egg, and that new life is formed from this conjunction, did not occur until 1875. The relation between menstruation and ovulation was not clearly established until the turn of the century. Even in cases when the existence of female seed was acknowledged, it was persistently considered to be inferior to that of male seed. This ambivalence about a woman's role in child-bearing shows up in the mythic imagination of Greek tragedy as well. In Aeschylus's (1953 trans.) *The Eumenides*, Apollo says that: "The mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts" (pp. 658-660).

Hillman's account of numerous once reputable theories in embryology, physiology, and reproduction—which seem absurd today—shows us that even our discoveries in science (a discipline supposedly based on fact, objectivity, and reason) are limited by the content and capacity of our imaginations. Since physicians, until recently, were almost exclusively men, our discoveries regarding the female body, throughout most of history, have been limited to peculiar biases of the male imagination. Hysteria, which is indelibly linked to the birth of depth psychology as a discipline, provides us with a fascinating example of this. Originally perceived as a woman's disease, it was once believed that hysteria was caused by a wandering womb—envisioned as a sexually charged autonomous creature-like entity in itself—which travelled restlessly throughout the body when its urges were repressed and denied. This wandering womb was thought to be the cause of all sorts of obscure physical symptoms that symbolically reflected its pathologized objections.

While relatively recent developments in the disciplines of religion (the Assumption of Maria) and science (quantum physics) have begun to shift the culturally dominant philosophical stance that divides mind from body, matter from spirit, and as such the feminine from the masculine, it is Hillman's (1972b) view that these movements in our thinking will fail in effecting actual change unless we transform our view of the feminine—unless we shift our “consciousness in regard to bodily man”—in regard to our “own materiality and instinctual nature” (p. 217). If a tangible change is to be effected, the “uniform world-image” that has emerged in the fields of mysticism and science must be accompanied by “a uniformity of self-image in psychology, a conjunction of spirit and matter represented by male and female” (p. 217). This transformation would require a *bisexual consciousness*: a consciousness that includes both representations as a priori and primary givens. The dominant psychic structure, which is exemplified by the philosophical stance of Adam before Eve, would require rebalancing. The feminine and masculine in this restructured consciousness would both be recognized and experienced as necessary within the cosmological wholeness to which we belong.

Hillman suggests that Dionysos provides a structure of consciousness through which we might envision this transformation. But first, we must begin from the place we currently find ourselves in. This means acknowledging the dominant structure of over-weighted masculine consciousness in society today. Seeing through the lens of myth, Hillman calls this structure of consciousness Apollonic, and describes it as follows:

Like its namesake [the god Apollo], it belongs to youth, it kills from a distance (its distance kills), and, keeping the scientific cut of objectivity, it never merges with or “marries” its material. It is a structure of consciousness that has an

estranged relation with the feminine, which we have taken to mean “the abysmal side of bodily man with his animal passions and instinctual nature, and ‘matter’ in general.” (Hillman, 1972b, p. 250)

The model of objectivity upon which classical science is built is evident within the imagery of this passage. While its valuable contribution to scientific development is undeniable, taken alone—forgetful of the other gods and archetypal dominants—Apollo’s power, like the sun itself (which is lacking in conscience and compassion) has the potential to destroy us outright. This objectifying style of imagining stands in stark contrast to that of Corbin’s philosophical stance inspired by Mazdaism, which views the earth and the things of the earth as “Who” rather than “what,” while perceiving them as reflections of celestial yearnings—as epiphanies and angelophanies reflecting aspirations toward manifestations of their ideal selves. From within this style of consciousness, knowledge comes not from standing on the outside of things as an objective onlooker, but rather, from placing oneself subjectively inside of them and embodying the energy that brings them into being. This type of knowing requires a relationship between the “observer” and the “observed,” and an act of becoming the other as the other’s idealized essence. The energy embodied in this act of becoming is the same energy as that of one’s own idealized essence. In this sense, there is no real other and no real distance between the human, the earth, and the things of the earth.

The lopsided weight of Apollonic consciousness within our current society pertains not only to men, but to women as well, because the archetypal structure is “independent of the gender of the person through whom it works” (Hillman, 1972b, p. 250). In Hillman’s view, the uniform imagery which has emerged in spirituality and



science, fails to effect a change in our everyday lives because it is constituted from within the same Apollonic structure of consciousness that marginalizes our view of the feminine. Hillman says that as long as our solutions are sought from within this archetypal base, which is inherently masculine, an “elevation of the female principle and a new psychic recognition of female physicality seem structurally impossible” (p. 251).

Hillman makes a compelling argument that Dionysian consciousness, as a bisexual consciousness from the start, may provide a model through which our attitude toward “feminine inferiority,” toward “the abysmal side of the bodily man” might be transformed. Dionysos is widely known as a bisexual god. Kerényi has said that Dionysos, “in one of his appellations, is ‘man and woman’ *in one person*” (as cited in Hillman, 1972b, p. 258). He also refers to “the god’s half female character” (Kerényi, 1980 p. 268), and even details the manifestation of this half female aspect physiologically. Describing the young god approaching manhood, he says that Dionysos is depicted “as a handsome boy or as a delicate half-womanly stripling resembling Adonis or Attis” (p. 262). Hillman (1972b) says that the potential shift in consciousness “indicated by Dionysus is one where female is not added or integrated by male; rather, the image shows an androgynous consciousness, where male and female are primordially united. The *coniunctio*,” he says “is not an attainment but a given” (p. 259). Within the Dionysian consciousness that Hillman envisions, those so called “inferior” characteristics which are archetypally deemed feminine, are not viewed as inferior. They are recognized as necessary within the overall Dionysiac cosmology. These purported inferiorities—which are variously expressed in the frailness of physical stature, in a weak emotional constitution, or an unbridled passion; in an ostensibly unsound mind, an immoral

character, childish behavior, unbearable suffering, or any number of other classic examples concretized in the female body by an Apollonic perspective—all of these, play vital and indispensable roles in a Dionysian cosmos. The so called inferior images that populate the feminine psyche have their own peculiar consciousness, their own particular light, and way of knowing. This consciousness does not seek healing via the transcendence of its darker light by ridding itself of its afflicted images. To do so would be to deny its foundational primordial bothness where the affliction and its cure are inherent to the cosmology of its wholeness. In Hillman's words: "Our afflictions and psychopathologies evoke the feminine side as carrier, [as] sufferer, as nurse to that sufferer and to the child. The feminine side also holds out joyful abandonment to them and so a release through them" (pp. 262-263). Each affliction, each pathology plays a part that is essential to the whole. Each has a role in the movement of consciousness that unfolds as a story to which they all belong.

Here we see an example of that which Hillman (1983) calls a "Dionysian logos," a "dramatic *logic*," and "the logic of theater" (p. 37) in *Healing Fiction* "The particular embodiment of Dionysian logic" he says, "is the actor" (p. 39). The actor hones his craft by playing manifold roles. He steps inside the child, and the child's nurse, the hunted and the hunter, the persecuted and the persecutor, the victim and the victimizer. He discovers within him an expression of the god, the panther, and the vine. He sees and lives, for the duration of a play from the perspective of his given role—not from the outside as objective observer and judge, but rather, from the character's interior subjectivity—guided, moved, compelled by the peculiar dark light unique to the being he inhabits, and in so doing he comes to know the rush of *zöe* pulsing in all its manifold forms. Schooled

in the nature and logos of earth's multitudinous creatures by the masks of Imagination, the actor expands his skin, and *zōe* relishes in the instrument through which it plays. The actor receives (is made by) and makes the world, (which is the play) wherein he plays as player and played.

Hillman (1972b) says: "In Dionysus, borders *join* that which we usually believe to be separated by borders" (p. 275). He reminds us that "one of the names for Dionysus was 'The Undivided' " (p. 263). In *Mysterium Coniunctionis* Jung (1956/1970) says that he was also called "The Divided One" (p. 260 [CW 14, n. 5]). He is both. Otto (1960/1965) tells us that "all earthly powers are united in the god . . . . The fullness of life and the violence of death both are equally terrible in Dionysus" (pp. 140-141). Hillman (1972b) says that Dionysus "rules the borderlands of our psychic geography" (p. 275). Surprisingly, we have found this "psychic geography" to be strikingly reminiscent of the "spiritual geography" put forth by Corbin's work on the creative Imagination of Ibn 'Arabī. Here we see an enigmatically similar image of bothness, and the presence of something that can appropriately be called "The Undivided." Here we are also witness to the call for a return of feminine consciousness, embedded in what Corbin (1958/1997) variously refers to as "the sophianic religion of love" (p. 139), "the religion of mystic love" (p. 144), and Ibn 'Arabī's "dialectic of love" (p. 145), the subject of our next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Ibn 'Arabī's Dialectic of Love and a Return to Dionysos

The images of bothness, of The Undivided, and of feminine consciousness, as seen through Hillman's perspective of the Dionysos myth take on a decidedly different tone when seen through Corbin's exploration of Ibn 'Arabī's Sūfism. The horrific Dionysiac tales of violence and dismemberment seem a far cry from the celestial figures and principles that await us in this chapter. The striking differences and equally striking similarities provoke us to look closer.

Corbin (1958/1997) tells us that the supreme Godhead or *Theos agnostos* (the unknowable God) for Ismailian Gnosis "cannot be known or even named as 'God'; *Al-Lāh*," he says, "is a name which indeed is given to the created being, the Most-Near and sacrosanct Archangel" (p. 113). The sadness and nostalgia of the first Being or Archangel is "identical with the Sadness of the *Theos agnostos* yearning *to be known* by and in that same creature" (p. 113). This basic paradigm permeates each dimension of Ibn 'Arabī's mystic cosmology. Divinity, at its very core, even from its all-encompassing position beyond all being, is characterized as a twofold simultaneous and eternal yearning: by a sadness and aspiration for self-knowledge through and in being (which is instantly realized), and a concomitant nostalgic longing to return to the source beyond this being. In sharp contrast to the all-knowing and omnipotent God put forth by "rational theodicies" (p. 113), the divine Being put forth by Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology is a pathetic God, a suffering and compassionate God. This is the "the secret of a human-divine *sympathetism*" which "determine[s] the sympathy between the invisible and the visible" (p. 114).

### **The Sadness of Divine Names and the Aspiration of Forms**

Now a brief word about Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of divine Names will help to orient us going forward. The divine Names, which have existed through all eternity, designate attributes of the divine Essence itself. “Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes between [the divine Name] *Allah* as God in general and *Raab* as the particular Lord, personalized in an individualized and undivided relation with his vassal of love” (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 94). (Let us, here, take note of the words “individualized and undivided.” In the undivided pairing of Lord and vassal as in Dionysos, borders have the paradoxical quality of joining that which is usually believed to be separated by borders.) The Lord or Angel, as it appears in the description above, is the Divine as personified in one of its attributes (p. 122). But the Lord or Angel plays a double role. On the one hand, He is Lord to His vassal (or soul), who personifies Him to the extent that his belief and aptitude allows, but He is also the vassal or soul of an unrevealed Lord and Angel on the dimension above Him, whom He personifies to the degree that His belief and aptitude allows. The double role and relationship of these two figures—Lord and vassal—binds us on the borders of each dimension because each figure plays the role of both figures. That which is vassal to the unrevealed Godhead, is Lord to the vassal who names Him in the manifestation of a more concrete form, and this pattern continues at the undivided borderland of each dimension of being. Again—the supreme Godhead, cannot be known directly. What the concrete being or creature knows of God comes only through knowing his Lord. Knowing his Lord comes only from knowing himself, and knowing himself means recognizing his Lord in that which he loves. As Corbin says, “God epiphanizes Himself to each of us in the form of what we love” (p. 124).

The “meaning and full reality” of the divine Names is dependent upon the epiphanic forms in which they are manifested (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 115). Forms, having existed from all eternity in the divine Essence, are latent individualities and substrates of the divine Names which aspire to concrete being. Corbin equates the aspirations of these forms with the nostalgia of the divine Names, and then he equates the divine Names’ nostalgia with “the sadness of the unrevealed God, the anguish He experiences in His unknownness and occultation” (p. 115). The sadness, nostalgia, and aspiration of the Names and forms is ultimately the unrevealed Godhead’s sadness, nostalgia, and aspiration because the divine Names and forms have existed within Him since pre-eternity. Everything which is and all that is not is only Him. And from this situation, because all beings are permeated by this Divinity beyond all being, an essential community between all beings, visible and invisible, is presumed.

### **Ibn ‘Arabī’s Dialectic of Love**

This “essential community between visible and invisible beings” (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 106) is the principle upon which Ibn ‘Arabī’s dialectic of love is grounded. This essential community is eternally established in the act and phenomenon variously referred to as divine sympathy, *sympatheia*, and divine compassion. Definitively speaking, it is the reciprocal aspiration and interdependence of invisible and visible beings, of Lord and vassal, and the infinite pairings as connotes a relationship between the Creator and created beings through which He is named.

Corbin (1958/1997) tells us that Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes “three kinds of love which are three modes of being” (pp. 148-149): divine love, spiritual love, and natural

love. A brief description of each will serve to clarify the relationship between Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love and divine sympathy or divine compassion.

*Spiritual love*, situated in the creature, "has no other concern, aim, or will than to be adequate to the Beloved" (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 149), to the role of loving vassal for a divine Name and Lord. The Beloved, admitting of no division, would ultimately love only Him as, for, through, and in Himself. His love is a longing for return, a love for no other.

Natural love "desires to possess and seeks the satisfaction of its own desires without concern for the satisfaction of the Beloved" (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 149). Its inspiration is "the hope of finding itself" (p. 150).

Divine love, has an undivided double aspect which corresponds with the roles of Lord and vassal as described above in the subsection on divine Names. Divine love is:

"on the one hand the love of the Creator for the creature in which He creates Himself . . . and on the other hand the love of that creature for his Creator, which is nothing other than the desire of the revealed God within the creature, yearning to return to Himself, after having yearned, as the hidden God, to be known in the creature; this is the eternal dialogue of the divine-human *syzygia*. (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 149)

Divine love, we see, loves both from the perspective of Creator and creature. Both are eternally in dialogue with each other, constantly exchanging roles as part, then whole, then part, and so on in mutual yearning, in divine sympathy moving from one position to another and back again. Corbin tells us that a restoration of sympathy between spiritual

and natural love is needed if the bi-unity of the Lord of love and the vassal of love is to be realized in the creature (pp. 150-151).

Corbin refers to this process, which unifies the twofold structure of the soul, as mystic love, but he fails to clarify the difference between mystic love and divine love. We have thus inferred that mystic love, in accordance with his sense of its meaning, refers to a type of love situated on the terrestrial plane that corresponds with a divine love that is situated on the imaginal plane. Prior to our repeated readings of Corbin's chapter on Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love we took it for granted that the word *divine* could be taken as a synonym for spiritual, celestial, or heavenly, but our sense of it here is definitively closer to the imaginal. The divine, like the imaginal seems to imply a conjunction of spirit and matter—a concretized spirit or spiritualized matter. Going forward we expect to view the word *divine* through this more specific lens sensing whether this meaning holds up under our closer attention.

Corbin describes the phenomenon of mystic vision as follows: The “divine Beloved, who defines Himself as admitting of no division” synchronizes the soul's dual nature by “produc[ing] Himself for the soul in the physical form of a theophany” (1958/1997, pp. 150-151). Here “the two forms of love springing from the two facets of the soul” (p. 150) are joined. The soul, which is identified by the active Imagination, recognizes that this physical Form is the Beloved, and drawn to this Form which expresses its physical and spiritual nature, it sees its Lord. The soul then comes to an awareness that the medium through which it loves, sees, and contemplates Him is not itself; it is Him. It is He who sees, loves, and contemplates Himself. The soul realizes, in other words, that “it loves only *through* Him, not *by* itself” (p. 151). From the soul's point



of view its Lord of love is “the organ of *its* perception” (p. 151). But from the His point of view, “the soul itself is His organ of perception” (p. 151). The Lord is the organ of the soul’s loving perception, and the soul is the Lord’s organ of perception. They see through each other but both are none other than Him. He is the Lover and the Beloved. “It is in His essence to be *both* one and the other . . . and the eternal dialogue between the *two*” (p. 152). It seems that He, like Dionysos, might be called The Undivided.

### **The Creative Feminine**

The totality of a divine Name is comprised of both the Name and the Namer; one supplies being; the other reveals it. Each of them puts the other in the passive; each of them is the action of the other. Both play both roles. The Name who yearns to be known is the passive receiver of the Namer whose action bears His name, of the Namer who acts in concrete being playing the role of mirror to the Name he names. The Namer who actively names is also a passive receiver and receptive vessel to the Name whose active breath breathes His yearning into His being. This unity, which is the *sym-pathetic dialogue* of an interdependent bi-unity, necessitates that each role plays both roles and all roles are played by Him. The dialectic of love, here described, is set in motion by the active, creative Imagination on the theophanic (imaginal) plane. Phenomenologically speaking, Corbin (1958/1997) refers to it as a “sophianic experience” (p. 157). Initiation into this mode of being, he says, must be sought in sophiology. A passage from his article *The Eternal Sophia* (abridged, translated, and reprinted in the *Harvest* journal) clarifies his meaning:

[In] ‘sophianity’, the world has become the mirror of the divine world, or *creaturely* Sophia—To transcend this duality of the divine Sophia (eternal form

and created form) is to divinize the created, to bestow upon it the divine life . . .

that is the process of humanity's divination. (Corbin, 1985, p. 20)

This same eschatological hope, as we have seen, was present in the worldview described in our chapter on Mazdaism. Here the human individual who projected his celestial Image upon the terrestrial earth effectively co-created the celestial earth wherein the human's celestial "I" emerged in the feminine figure of Daēnā.

The citation below describes part of the preinitiation process through which the mystic gains access to the imaginal realm, to the creative, active Imagination, and the sophianic experience designated as Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love.

The Godhead must be contemplated in a concrete form of mental vision[;] this form must present the very Image of His being. And the contemplation must be effective, that is its effect must be to make the contemplator's being conform to this same Image of the Divine Being. For it is only after his being has been molded to this Image, only after he has undergone a second birth, that the mystic can be faithfully and effectively invested with the secret on which rests the divinity of his Lord. (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 159)

And here Corbin poses the question: What is the most effective image of the Godhead? In response, he says: "A mystic obtains the highest theophanic vision in contemplating the Image of feminine being, because it is in the Image of the Creative Feminine that contemplation can apprehend the highest manifestation of God, namely, creative divinity" (p. 159). The Godhead, he tells us, is most effectively meditated upon through the Image of feminine being because this Image incorporates both of His active and passive—His creative and receptive aspects, while the Image of masculine being

embodies only one of the two. Somatically speaking, this idea can be illustrated by the female's biological capacity to embody the dual aspect of the Godhead as both the Creator and the created. She embodies these roles as both the infant and the mother. She is born, and also gives birth. She is the created and the creator.

Corbin tells us that Ibn 'Arabī had a predilection for seeing disclosures of a higher metaphysical reality in the intricacies of how language was used. This is exemplified by his observation that all terms in Arabic which indicate origin or cause are feminine. In Corbin's (1958/1997) opinion this and corresponding interpretations of grammar and lexicography, indicate that "the Prophet wished to suggest that the Feminine is the origin of all things" (p. 167). Corbin's own complex and convoluted analysis of the feminine, which draws from Christian and Islamic mysticism, places the original masculine *Noūs* (mind, reason, knowing) between two feminines: the Divine Essence and the universal Soul (p. 168). For Corbin, the Image of feminine being is designated and represented by many names and archetypal figures. She is variously called the "Creative Feminine," the "Eternally Womanly as an Image of the Godhead" (p. 159), "the Feminine Creator" (p. 160), and the "Image of creative divinity" (p. 160). She is "contemplated as the Image of Wisdom or Creative Sophia" (p. 165). She is *Sophia aeterna* (p. 159), and paradigmatically seen through such figures as: "the person of Fātima, considered as 'Virgin Mother' giving birth to the line of Holy Imāms" (p. 160)—the *Fravashi* or Fravarti in Mazdaism, those feminine archetypes and individual angels who designate the "eternal existence latent in the Divine Being" (p. 169)—and a figurative pairing of Eve-Maryam seen through Corbin's analysis of Adam and Eve, and Maryam and Jesus as a quaternity (p. 165).

Thematically speaking, Corbin's interpretations revolve around a central idea and paradox: "The essence of the Feminine is to be the creatrix of the being by whom she herself is created, just as she is created only by the being whose creatrix she herself is" (p. 169). The Godhead's twofold structure and His story are mirrored in this paradox. From within this central paradox, we might detect the com-passionate divine Sigh which receives and releases being, which encompasses and penetrates all beings, which actively frees them from the expectation of their virtualities and passively receives being through them because nothing exists outside of Him. This is why the unrevealed God, the primordial source of Being beyond and within all beings might most effectively be imagined as She rather than He.

Here we have seen that the preinitiatory process of envisioning the Godhead through the Image of feminine being most effectively prepares the mystic to access the imaginal world and sophianic experience which Ibn 'Arabī refers to as the dialectic of love. We imagine this process as a rehearsal of sorts—as a pre-enactment that anticipates and mirrors, here on earth, the initiation experience to follow on the imaginal plane in active, creative Imagination. The mystic is prepared, in other words, for the sophianic experience and dialectic of love through which he sees and knows the particularized Name longing to be named through him, by way of a corresponding experience on the terrestrial plane that places him in the receptive and active position which is characteristic of the Godhead in general. This preparation is necessary because the wholeness of his particularized being can only be known from within the perspective of essential bi-unity which is characteristic of all being. From this perspective the essential pairing and bi-unity of a divine Name's totality, of the hidden and revealed God, which constitutes the

wholeness of a Name, can be put into dialogue. From the standpoint of this bi-unity the constant exchange of roles between Creator and Created in mutual yearning, between the Lord and Vassal, the Lover and the Beloved, might be manifested in a sophianic experience that joins natural and mystic love.

### **Ibn ‘Arabī and Dionysos in Concert with Each Other**

Here in our explorations of Corbin’s perspective of Ibn ‘Arabī’s dialectic of love and Hillman’s Dionysos, we have uncovered the dual presence of interrelated themes and images: most prominently, those of bothness, The Undivided, and the restoration of feminine consciousness. We are also struck by the image of a “second birth” which emerges in both of these explorations. As we know, Dionysos who is taken prematurely from Semele’s womb and redelivered from Zeus’s thigh, is called the twice born god. Corbin refers, as well, to a “second birth” which occurs when the mystic molds his being to the receptive and creative Image of the Godhead. It is only in the sequel to this second birth that the mystic is invested with the secret on which the divinity of his Lord depends. (p. 159).

In our view, the mutual presences in the saliently contrasting worlds of Dionysos and Ibn ‘Arabī are striking, and enigmatically jarring. The thematic presences of rebirth and bothness, the figurative presence of the Undivided as a bi-unity of parts and whole, the presence of transformation via the restoration of feminine consciousness—these interdimensional presences—appear in both narratives as crafters of dramas that individuate, that move us toward our unique individuality and larger selves.

Perhaps we might read these two dramas—so different in tone and quality—as corresponding episodes and dimensions within the same multidimensional story and

imaginal space that encompasses both. And from within this perspective which holds these two worlds and stories as one that encompasses both, we might feel justified in pulling from the narratives of either for guidance depending upon the degree to which one or the other becomes present within our own mundane lives in a given moment. From this interdimensional perspective the Dionysian and Ibn 'Arabīan traditions would not negate or marginalize each other. One drama or another might prove more accessible, within the context of a specific life or situation depending upon the receiver's unique capacity to receive. The interdimensional presences in both dramas might also be imagined as stepping stones that open up possibilities for movement between dimensions via their metaphoric overlay. The Actress, the Dionysiac, and the Sufi mystic, for instance, might symbolize with, mirror, and unveil each other, in concert with each other. The borders that generally appear to separate them, might join them, and expand the possibilities for each in the metaphoric play of their tri-unity.

As we wander in this direction, the potential resistance, objections, and ridicule of Corbin and those purist academics who would accuse us of blasphemous and ignorant conflation give us pause. Would they not be appalled by the thought of viewing Dionysian and Ibn 'Arabīan aspects of feminine consciousness in concert with each other? The Dionysiac images of humans dismembering humans and feeding on the raw flesh of their victims are admittedly hard to reconcile with the celestial tonality of Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love. But our task—we must remember—is one of bringing the distinct worlds, where Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress dwell, together in service to the creative Imagination and those would-be mystics who have hitherto judged themselves as nonmystics lacking in “visionary” capacity. Our task, as such, is one of allowing

imagination—as it presents itself to us in the context of this intention—to carry us where it will.

That being said, one might still understandably question whether Dionysiac feminine consciousness (so fraught with visions of madness that lead to horrific violence in the god's myth) has any relation to feminine consciousness as it unfolds in Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love. Do these two sets of imagery belong in the same all-encompassing story, one might ask? In response, we look to Hillman's own defense of feminine consciousness as seen through the myth of Dionysos.

First, he observes that Dionysos appears to punish his enemies, and not his followers. It is not the Dionysian aspect itself but the denial of or resistance to one's Dionysian aspect that leads to Dionysiac madness, he concludes. Then he reminds us that the violent and gruesome cruelty of humans in Dionysian tales occurs during temporary madness and visionary states. Within these states the victimizers experience themselves as something other than they are and at the same time they see their human victims as plants or animals (as something other than themselves, in other words). The dynamic of their shared human to human and familial relationships thus become malformed. Agave becomes, for instance, a hunter and her son, a lion.

Hillman (1972b) has suggested that the symptomatic similarities between the maenads and hysteric women of early psychoanalytic history, indicate a Dionysian impulse within hysteria. Hysteria, he says, can be "best explained by the cult of the God as an archetype that has become repressed and dissociated so that its way of informing consciousness shows certain distortions" (p. 272). Dionysian madness is not, in other words, the whole of Dionysian consciousness. Dionysian madness points to the

imbalance of that which has been repressed, marginalized, denied, and deemed inferior within it (namely the feminine), as a result of our increasingly over weighted Apollonic society. This madness expresses itself in destructive distortions that demand attention when subtler calls for awareness have been ignored. The maenad who tears her own child from limb to limb and devours its raw flesh speaks to the hauntingly real danger of forgetting the essentially and necessarily double aspect and double role of Dionysian consciousness. Using Corbin's language, we might also call it Sophianic consciousness. Both Hillman and Corbin were concerned about such dangers.

Dionysian consciousness addresses the danger by living it, by including it within the god's story. But it also speaks to the possibility of celestial transcendence (exemplified in the tales of Dionysos's ascent with Semele, his mother, and with Ariadne, his wife). The presences of these tales in the Dionysian oeuvre craft an imaginal bridge that joins the world of depth where Hillman dwells and the celestial heights that Corbin is so attracted to. It is by way of this bridge, we imagine, that Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress might discover themselves as vital players within a Dionysian world that incorporates each of their lived realities.

While Semele and Ariadne are both said to have ascended to heaven with Dionysos, it is the figure of Ariadne who is treated by Kerényi and Otto with especially reverent and celestial language. Because it is her image that appears to us as a bridge between the Corbinian and Hillmanian worlds, it now behooves us to deepen our sense of her story once again.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Ariadne: A Series of Fictions in Alternate Voices**

We have spoken briefly of Ariadne in our chapter on Dionysos, for the most part from a somewhat mystical philosophical perspective without recalling much of her actual story. In this chapter, we continue our Ariadnean conversation with an eye directed toward the tales that constitute the myth she inhabits. In reviewing the first draft of our attempt to do this, we found ourselves terribly distraught by the dullness of our narrative. Ariadne had been slaughtered, it seemed, by our efforts to best represent the scholars who have interpreted her. In that which follows, we have attempted to revive Ariadne by reimagining her life from within the style and fictional tone of a novel-like form that reaches for an understanding of her perspective while incorporating those of the scholars as well. Our immediate goal is threefold: firstly, our intention is to familiarize the reader with the myth of Ariadne; secondly, we hope to enrich our view of her as a figure who constitutes a bridge that brings the worlds of Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress together in a Dionysiac world that encompasses them all; thirdly, we hope to evoke a sense of fictional insight as a potentially imaginal insight for “nonmystics.”

#### **Ariadne's Tale: A Third Person Narrative in a Fictional Style**

Ariadne was a stunningly beautiful young maiden with an enigmatic reputation. Her father, King Minos, was by some accounts, the son of Zeus and Europa, though he (and his brothers of the same parents) were raised by Asterion, the king of Crete (also known as Asterios: meaning “King of the Stars” (Kerényi, 1980 p. 110). It was on the beach at Sidon or possibly at Tyre that Zeus, Ariadne's purported grandfather—inhalating the scent of sand and sea—was filled with love for Europa, Ariadne's ostensible future

grandmother. Transforming himself “into a bull of a dazzling whiteness, with horns like a crescent moon” (Grimal, 1951/1990, p. 147), Zeus threw himself before her grandmother’s feet (swooning perhaps). Europa was filled, at first, with fear at the sight of this awesome creature, whose fall had just missed crushing her big toe. Fear was soon followed by curiosity, however. Allured by the light that filled his whiteness, she crawled then sat—like a queen on a throne—upon his back, and was consequently taken aback by the bull’s power who hastened at once into the sea. Plunging into the waves, he swam mightily, and she was swept away from the seeming safety of the shore. Reaching the island of Crete, he settled near a spring beneath some plane trees whereupon they mated. Together they had three sons, one of which was Minos, Ariadne’s father.

With the gift of hindsight Ariadne might have seen, here in the imagery of the courtship of her grandparents, an intimation of her own fate or a suggested destiny, perhaps. The white bull’s visage, as she imagined it many decades hence, could be likened to the horrific bull-headed man monster who was her half-brother—the Minotaur—and also to her husband Dionysos, with his affinity for making appearances in the form of a bull.

When King Asterion passed from this world Minos (Ariadne’s father) took the throne, but his brothers objected and a quarrel regarding the rightful king ensued. In order to resolve the issue Minos, it is said, made a sacrifice to Poseidon, god of the watery depths, asking that he send a bull from the sea as a sign that the gods wished for him to be the king. In return, he promised to make a sacrifice of that same bull back to the god. Minos’s wish was granted (by Poseidon in some accounts, though others say that the bull who emerged from the sea was a manifestation of Zeus himself). Regardless of its source,

the god-sent bull was incredibly beautiful and radiant. Minos thus found himself unable to part with it. His promise of reciprocal sacrifice was never fulfilled. Some say that Poseidon took his revenge by driving the divine bull mad. But perhaps the real revenge took its form in the actions of his wife Queen Pasiphae—Ariadne's mother—who fell madly in love with it. Queen Pasiphae's longing for the divine bull was so great that she commissioned the court artist, architect, and inventor Daedalus to construct a hollow wooden cow in which she hid, then wooed the marvelous creature, who in turn impregnated her. The monstrous offspring of their coupling was born with the head of a bull and the body of a man. He was widely known (and still is) as the Minotaur (Minos's bull) but his other name was Asterios (Star) just like the name of Ariadne's terrestrial grandfather (Kerényi, 1980, p. 269).

The genius of Daedalus was then put to work on two additional projects. The first was a prison, the Labyrinth, built for the purpose of hiding Queen Pasiphae's illegitimate son, the Minotaur, from public view; the other was a dance ground for Ariadne. By some accounts, they were one and the same. The Labyrinth was an enormous palace designed as an inescapable maze of rooms and corridors. The beast was imprisoned within its walls and was fed each year by a tribute of seven young men and seven girls exacted by Minos from Athens to avenge the death of his son Androgeos.

There were many versions and variations of Ariadne's story in circulation. It was difficult, we imagine, even for her to sort it through and decide which of them was true or even truest. Some stories felt truer, perhaps, in one moment and others in another. In some respects, Ariadne was like any other teen girl. In some respects, we imagine, that she failed to fathom where all this talk about her supposed "purity" was coming from.

When setting her eyes for the first time on Theseus—the handsome, strong, and heroic young man, who according to some accounts was Poseidon's very own son—she fell instantly in love. He was all that she could see. She simply could not believe that she, even at this time, like some have said, was already the bride of Dionysos. How could there have been another when all she could see was Theseus?

She was “Mistress of the Labyrinth” at the time, and tasked with the job of releasing the annual tributes (the Minotaur's food) into the maze. Theseus, that year, had bravely volunteered himself as one of the seven men to be sacrificed, though his intent was to kill the beast and return in victory. She could not help herself. He was so beautiful. And so it goes that she conspired to save him. But first, she secured his promise to flee with her by sea and marry her once they had escaped. Then, she provided him with a ball of thread by which he could navigate his way out of the maze.

But there were other versions of this tale as well. Those who have said she was indeed the bride of Dionysos even then, have claimed that the object which Ariadne gave to Theseus was not a ball of thread at all, but rather a precious gift which she had received from Dionysos, himself—a bejeweled wreath which she used to light Theseus's passage through the Labyrinth. By these accounts, she betrayed not only her father and her half-brother, the Minotaur, but Dionysos as well.

By all accounts, Theseus killed the Minotaur. He escaped from the labyrinth and saved the other young tributes as well, thanks to Ariadne's help. All of them, along with Ariadne, and her sister Phaidra, boarded a ship and set out to sea. They then decided to make a short pit stop at the tiny uninhabited island of Dia (meaning heavenly or divine). For some reason, Ariadne disembarked while the others stayed aboard. She was resting

on a hillock within plain sight of the ship when she fell asleep and the entire party sailed away abandoning her. Left there to die, after essentially rescuing them all: it was then that the god of wine, Dionysos, found and rescued her. They drank of his elixir washing her woes away and mated on the isolated island before ascending to Olympus together. Ariadne was thus immortalized.

Some say “Theseus abandoned Ariadne because he was consumed with love for Aigle, a girl whose name means ‘light’ ” (Kerényi, 1976, p. 102). And some say he abandoned her for love of her very own sister Phaidra whom he subsequently married. Others say that Dionysos appeared to Theseus in a dream claiming that Ariadne was his own true bride and this is why Theseus reneged on his promise to marry her.

There are other stories as well, about the plights and heights of Ariadne before her eventual ascendance. In a number of them, she dies before she is immortalized. By some accounts, she perishes before Dionysos discovers her on the island of Dia. In one story, she is killed by Artemis at the request of Dionysos who seeks to avenge her betrayal. In another tale, she hangs herself. And in yet another, she dies in child birth, delivering her infant in the Underworld. Some people have even surmised that she was impregnated by Dionysos and then gave birth to an infant who was also Dionysos. (Kerényi, 1976, p. 106-108).

### **The Labyrinth**

As we twist our minds around Ariadne's life stories we begin to wonder how she might have seen herself if all the tales that constitute her life and death were laid before her all at once as a tri-unified Dionysiac world where Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress

all dwell? The image of the labyrinth becomes more and more present in the presence of this wondering.

Kerényi (1976) tells us that the labyrinth is represented by meander patterns and spirals on Attic vase paintings illustrating the Minotaur legend. Both are taken as paths in which the inhabitant is led involuntarily back to the beginning (pp. 92-93). We are reminded here of *ta 'wīl*, the hermeneutic process which returns the mystic to his source and celestial counterpart. The labyrinth, like Dionysos, is paradoxical in nature. It is a place of death (when closed) and rebirth (when open). Kerényi has said that the spiral and meander lines on Cretan art point to a labyrinth which is a passage to the light if one reaches the center and turns (p. 94). He also says that the frequency of spiral decorations on Minoan walls should “be interpreted as directly relating to *zōe*, which suffers no interruption and permeates all things” (p. 95). Dionysos (who Kerényi refers to as the archetype of indestructible life aptly expressed by the word *zōe*) is thus identified with the labyrinth. And Kerényi tells us that Ariadne is the mistress of the labyrinth (p. 99).

In the narrative below we enter a labyrinthine fiction and monologue from within the voiced reflections of Ariadne as situated in a Dionysiac world where Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress all dwell.

### **Ariadne's Reflections in a Tri-unified Universe**

As I reflect and reminisce, I find it curious how the images of my lives and loves twist and turn back and forward toward each other always pointing to an enduring aggregate image, love, and mystery. I imagine them for a fleeting moment as one person, one world, one god. My grandfather Zeus, my half-brother the Minotaur, and my husband Dionysos merge together and split apart in the simultaneous commonality and

distinctiveness of their bullish role and roles, playing all at once within the darker and lighter aspects of them-self always seeking a deeper and higher wholeness.

It has been said that Zeus who is my grandfather was, in his subterranean aspect, Dionysos who is my husband, and some people have also said that the Minotaur who was my brother was a manifestation of Zeus himself. And so it follows that my brother is my husband. Both were bull and both were “men” of sorts. Both were ruthless hunters and eaters of raw flesh. Each of them, perhaps, is an aspect of some being which encompasses both.

And what if I viewed this wandering train of thought like a Mazdean devotee? Would the humans (as terrestrial sons of Spenta Armaiti who then become her celestial daughters in the figure of Daēnā) not suggest that brothers also become sisters? Would it not then follow that I might be, in my ascended aspect, my brother's Daēnā? And by this account, my lover Theseus, who slayed my brother would be the murderer of my human self and the agent through which my rebirth in marriage to Dionysos is made possible. And what am I to think of all those theories that elevate me to the status of goddess? I am identified with Aphrodite—goddess of love and beauty, and Persephone—goddess and Queen of the Underworld. I am the “mistress of the labyrinth.”

When I thread all these pieces together, I imagine myself so differently. As Persephone and Aphrodite, I am the navigator who holds the thread or lights the passage which leads the terrestrial lover back to his primordial image and forward as well to the manifestation of his feminine celestial “I” and Daēnā. I am the lure and beacon that leads creatures toward their variously called celestial Twins, Daēnās, daimons, or individuated selves. The light and thread by which I lead is none other than a beauty and love which

steers beings toward their centers in the maze of disorienting possibilities—toward themselves, even in darkness. The presence of my beauty and love is the human's indication that he has reached the labyrinth's center and pivoted. The path of light which opens in this turning is, I imagine, the marriage of me to Dionysos—the marriage of indestructible life to me, who bestows individuality upon a creature via the lure of beauty into love.

### **The Maze Above Us**

The spotlight on Ariadne now fades to black as her monologue concludes, and another light comes into view as we glance upward after a long moment of silence. It is a single spiral shaped energy efficient light bulb hanging above our writing desk. The cord from which it hangs dangles from the center of a six-foot diameter wooden puzzle that is also a painting suspended from the ceiling like an immense chandelier. A youthful dancer with golden dancing curls is leaping in a blue circle filled with lively translucent white spirals. She smiles at us from above. The scene is full of movement and vitality. The circular puzzle has a thick black border around its rim. The fingers that lead the dancer's leap just barely penetrate the border in front of her and the pointed toes of her outstretched trailing leg touch the edge of the border left behind. The painted puzzle is the product of an assignment from a movement based expressive arts training program at the Tamalpa Institute some six or seven years ago. The assignment was to create a life-sized self-portrait and then to engage in a twenty five minute ritual-performance with it. The puzzle's painted sky of spirals, and the spiral shaped bulb fed through a centered hole in the middle of the dancer's hip line is what strikes us in this moment. It seems that Dionysos, Ariadne, and the labyrinth—all of which are connected to dance—have been



present for quite some time in the puzzle suspended above our head. This puzzle, as an open labyrinth, has taken center stage at a seemingly pivotal point in our work here.

Our journey throughout this research process has been tortuously labyrinthine and puzzling. Its winding path and many rabbit holes have left us confused, disoriented, and spent. We have experienced ourselves as rent apart by the push and pull of its nonlinear force. We have lost, at times, our strength of mind and sense of purpose like captives within a research maze of distorted fun-house mirrors. The identity and relationships of the characters who populate its space have been continually put into question, and so have our own. But a moment of hopeful anticipation sets in as we gaze at the dancer above our heads. We imagine that this chapter marks the central turning point in the labyrinth of this work. The fictional style with which we approached a narrative of the Ariadnian myth, and the dramatic style through which we embodied Ariadne's own reflection of herself have moved us into a Dionysiac world where Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress might each discover a resonant space which reflects his or her experientially derived affinities for so called numinous creativity, whether they emerge from spiritual, psychological, or theatrical paradigms. The Dionysian myth, in its wholeness, is inclusive of each of them, without marginalizing any of them. Since the myth of Dionysos embodies a space that includes each of their contrasting phenomenologically known realities, we would like to suggest that it might provide an insightful response to our research question. In other words, a further penetration of Dionysos's world just might be the central turn that opens to a passage of light which leads us to the conclusion of this inquiry. But first we have one last stop to make along the way.

Our next chapter is devoted to beauty because it is Ariadne's beauty (which is her thread and light wreath) that navigates the return of captives from the labyrinth. Once we are better equipped to recognize this guiding light, we expect our pivot at the central point of this research labyrinth, to carry this work homeward toward its Lord and Angel.

## Chapter 9 Beauty

### **Beauty Seen Through the Lens of Corbin's Work on Ibn 'Arabī**

In Chapter 7 we discussed the Creative Feminine or Feminine Creator as an image through which the mystic can most effectively prepare for the sophianic experience that Ibn 'Arabī refers to as the dialectic of love. Corbin's exploration of this idea naturally leads him to a discussion of beauty within its context. While Beauty is considered a divine power and also a spiritual power, the significance of its role in the terrestrial world can be inferred by the characteristic sacral feeling for sensible beauty amongst the Sūfīs of Ibn 'Arabī's school. Beauty is often referred to as theophany par excellence; it is, in other words, the ultimate exemplification of god as He appears to the human. The idea of beauty as the manifestation of a god is also expressed in the narrative account of the divine Sadness (and Hidden Treasure) whose existentiating sigh creates, as mirrors, the world of beings, through which He "contemplate[s] His own Image, His own beauty" (Corbin, 1997/1958, p. 148).

Corbin (1997/1958) tells us that a "form of being which is invested with Beauty . . . is the image of the divine Compassion, creator of the being by which it was itself created" (p. 163). A being who is invested with Beauty is, as such, a "manifestation of the Creative Feminine" (p. 166). Corbin says that beauty's potency, because it is spiritual, is also creative. The power of beauty, he says, "creates love in man" (p. 164), and arouses the nostalgia which carries him beyond mere appearances to the imaginal dimension. This potency provokes the active Imagination to produce spiritual love which leads the mystic "to self-knowledge, that is, to the knowledge of his divine Lord" (p. 164). Beauty

leads us, in other words, toward our highest, deepest, unique selves. Beauty is a whisper that hints at who we are; it is the beacon of an individual's *eachness*, and an intimation of his distinct purpose. Sacral Beauty, when recognized within the mundane world, instigates an act of *ta'wīl*. It sparks the imagination. It carries the mystic who perceives Sophia in all things back to the source and primordial yearning from which he came. It carries him back to the Name which longs to be named through him—the Name whose very existence depends on this naming.

### **The Odd Mix of Beauty and Fear**

In teasing out a sense of Beauty's role in Ibn 'Arabī's cosmogony, the passage cited below stands out as one that deserves further attention. Describing his understanding of Beauty as theophany par excellence, Corbin says:

We are dealing not with a purely aesthetic pleasure accompanied by a joyful tonality but with the contemplation of human beauty as a *numinous*, sacral phenomenon which inspires fear and anguish by arousing a movement toward something which at once precedes and transcends the object in which it is manifested, something of which the mystic gains awareness only if he achieves the conjunction, the conspiracy . . . of the spiritual and the sensory, constitutive of mystic love. (Corbin, 1997/1958, p. 274)

Here the words fear and anguish (by the very fact that they seem anomalous within the context of Corbin's work) provoke us into deeper inquiry. We ask ourselves how this connection between Beauty, fear, and anguish might be further imagined. How, we ask, might the presence of Beauty (which seems almost analogous with Goodness and Love within this mystic paradigm) be frightening and painful? Beauty, we are told, is a force

that moves us backwards, toward something that precedes the object through which it presents itself, and simultaneously forward towards some predestined becoming. So how might this double movement inspire fear and anguish? Perhaps the experience demands something of us, something that our customary logic cannot deliver. Perhaps we fear Beauty's controlling power over us, and the unreasonable risks it drives us to take.

A brief etymological excursion will further our sense of this intuitive leap. The definition given to the Indo-European root (*per-3*) from which the word *fear* derives is: "to try [or] risk" (Per-3, 1992, p. 2119). Other important derivatives of this root are "*peril, experience, experiment, expert, and empiric*" (p. 2119). These words are the blood relatives of *fear*. We can imagine the familial bond between them and the human's burden of carrying their shared DNA by recognizing *fear* in the danger of *peril*; by sensing the closeness of *fear, risk*, and the act of surrendering to *experience*; by acknowledging the *fear* inducing *risks* at stake in pursuing *expertise* as well as the potentially *perilous* consequences of knowledge gained *empirically*, that is through action, through *experiments* which take place not merely in our minds, but rather, in partnership with the world. Hillman has said that beauty arrests motion, but here we see that beauty is simultaneously a call to action. Since Beauty creates love in man and love (as Corbin [1997/1958] has said) "never ceases to anticipate something that is still absent, something deprived of being" (p. 155), the fear and anguish aroused by Beauty just might be related to the impossible demands of love. Perhaps this fear and anguish which accompanies Beauty anticipates the responsibility that comes with following Beauty's lure into love—the responsibility of transforming the absence anticipated by love into the fullness of manifested being. We can imagine that the soul (with its definitive sense of

incompleteness, and as such of inferiority) faced by the demands and promise of Beauty's lure would most certainly be aroused with fear and anguish. The redoubtable possibility of failure, of not living up to the task at hand, would certainly loom large in the background of Beauty's alluring presence.

Hillman (2016) has explored the enigmatic mix of beauty and fear psychologically through the myth of Aphrodite's sexual union with Mars (the god of War). He views this coupling as a *syzygy* (meaning a "conjunction of two organisms without [the] loss of either's identity" [p. 320]). This view adds another dimension to Aphrodite's beauty. "Internal to her nature," he says, "is the trembling fear, the dissolving terror and immensity given by Mars, which philosophers have named the Sublime." (p. 326).

Extreme displays in the natural world have long been viewed as expressions of "the Sublime," and so it follows that the beauty of Sophia's wisdom, which is the wisdom of the Earth, inspires both reverence and fear. This sensibility is exemplified by Dennis's 1693 description (excerpted in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*) of "Fury," "terrible Joy," and "transporting Pleasures" mingled with "delightful Horrour" and "despair" in the landscape of the Alps (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 59). In another passage from 1712, Addison (1996) similarly describes the "agreeable horror" of sea and mountain tempests (p. 69). These examples speak to the overwhelming presence of Aphrodite–Mars in Earth's most dramatic presentations of herself. Ultimately, her powers defy our attempts to grasp her intellectually. Her whims are capable of re-creating or destroying us in an instant. Tsunamis, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, lightening, and flash floods are all Aphrodites: hypnotic conveyors of

“transporting Pleasures” and “agreeable horrors.” Sublime beauty stuns us with her awesome presentations—engulfs us in the sheer drama of the moment—and strips us from our smaller selves. She shocks us into life—sometimes in those very moments where our literal deaths are met.

### **Incorporating Hillman’s Work**

While Corbin draws our attention to the Sūfī’s affinity for sacral beauty in the sensible world and reminds us often that the physical world is theophanic, his focus tends to quickly shift toward spiritual heights and visionary experiences which are inaccessible to most people. Hillman’s extensive writings on the subject of beauty (informed by Corbin’s mystic perspectives and Platonic as well as Neoplatonic ideas) provide a terrestrial orientation through which the sacral nature of beauty might be more readily recognized, approached, and tended to in all aspects of everyday life. Our discussion here focuses on passages within these writings that contribute most directly to this dissertation’s emergent narrative which seeks to respond to the research question.

Hillman engages with the subject of beauty by way of “reversion,” borrowing the idea of *epistrophē* from Plotinus: an idea “that all earthly things, all human themes seek to return to their *archai*, their *a priori* nature or imaginal reality unlimited by the human” (Hillman, 2016, p. 315). This idea might be viewed as a Greek version of the Islamic concept of *ta’wīl*. As it pertains to our current task, *epistrophē* “means carrying the theme of Beauty back to Aphrodite” (p. 315), the goddess of love and beauty who we have already identified in previous chapters with the immortalized mortal born Ariadne. While Hillman has scarcely mentioned Ariadne in his writings about Dionysos she has certainly played a crucial role in bringing Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress together within the

Dionysian world as reimagined by this dissertation. As such, the most fruitful and insightful means for viewing Ariadne through the lens of Hillman's perspective might be accomplished by way of his writings on beauty and Aphrodite.

Just as beauty and spirit are inseparable in the celestial world that Corbin leans toward, beauty and soul are inseparable in the world of Hillman's leanings. Here Aphrodite is variously imagined as both the soul itself, and as the revelation of soul's essence within things. Hillman directs us to several passages in the *Enneads* where the Neoplatonist Plotinus (trans. 1992) refers to Aphrodite as the soul itself: "Aphrodite of the myth is the Soul" (3.5.8), he says, and "Every soul is Aphrodite" or "the Soul is always an Aphrodite" (6.9.9). Another, as translated in Hillman (2016), is : "Soul of All is beautiful, that is Aphrodite is beautiful" (p. 315). The sine qua non of Hillman's work is his unrelenting concern for soul and here we see that this concern requires an analogous concern for beauty.

Following Hillman's (1992b) interpretation of Plato's *Phaedrus*: beauty is "the showing forth of the hidden noumenal Gods and imperceptible virtues like temperance and justice. All these are but ideas, archetypes, pure forms, invisible didactic talk unless accompanied by beauty" (p. 43). Plato (trans. 1961) tells us that beauty, which is itself one of these virtues or noumens, is the "most manifest to sense" (*Phaedrus*, 250d). Beauty thus becomes the means by which we recognize and know the hidden and less perceptible Gods and virtues as living entities who permeate both world and self. As Aphrodite, beauty makes them visible. Hillman (1992b) expresses this idea as follows:

With Aphrodite informing our philosophy, each event has its own smile on its face and appears in a particular mode, fashion, style. Aphrodite gives an



archetypal background to the philosophy of “eachness” and the capacity of the heart to find “intimacy” with each particular event in a pluralistic cosmos. (pp. 45-46)

In this passage, we see a correspondence between Aphrodite who bestows “eachness” upon events (as well as humans, things, and ideas) and Kerényi’s Ariadne who bestows individuality upon a living creature. Aphrodite’s beauty moves us from abstract concepts into the world itself, giving flesh to principles. Physical, visible, and sensuous: beauty’s hidden depths shine forth in the mere appearance of things. Aphrodite’s “beauty refers to the luster of each particular event—its clarity its particular brightness” (p. 43). Aphrodite is “the golden one, the smiling one, whose smile made the world pleasurable and lovely” (Hillman, 2006f, p. 178). Hillman (1992b) says: “All things as they display their innate nature present Aphrodite’s goldenness; they shine forth and as such are aesthetic” (p. 44). His view of beauty is related to the “ancient notion of *aisthesis* (sense perception)” (p. 42), to “the very sensibility of the cosmos” with its “textures, tones, [and] tastes” (p. 43). It is the inner subjectivity of “objects” shining through on the face of things. It is sense perception as it appears to the imagination. “It is appearance itself” (p. 45) It is “the manifest *anima mundi*” (p. 43). Likening beauty to an aesthetic instinct, Hillman says: “*Psyche is the life of our aesthetic responses*, that sense of taste in relation with things, that thrill or pain, disgust or expansion of breast: those primordial aesthetic reactions of the heart are soul itself speaking” (p. 39).

Aphrodite, like Dionysos, joins at the borders that which is usually thought to be divided by borders. Hillman tells us that she is as apt to appear in the country as she is within the city walls, but belongs to neither city or country. Such divisions do not apply

to her. Something about her defies the very nature of walls, for walls “make separations where she makes new unions” (Hillman, 2006e, p. 161). Aphrodite, like Dionysos, is an embodiment of bothness. We have viewed her as both the soul itself, and as the revelation of soul’s essence within things. As soul, she is also Psyche, for Psyche is soul, and Hillman says that Psyche is beautiful by her very nature. Aphrodite (the goddess of love and beauty) is therefore beautiful too. But paradoxically, Hillman tells us that beauty for Plato and Plotinus is, in fact, not beautiful. Here he is speaking in terms of the Apollonic sense of the word which encloses beauty within the walls of museums, galleries, and didactic academic principles. Beauty is, on the contrary, present everywhere. Following Hillman’s view of soul, if Aphrodite is soul, she is a perspective and not a thing: a soul-making perspective who makes herself by way of reflection upon her nature and purpose, dwelling in imagination, seeking herself in seeing through the world.

The myth of Hephaestus (Aphrodite’s husband) provides a salient example of beauty as not “not beautiful,” of beauty in the unexceptional, and the ordinary. Hephaestus, god of fire, born of Hera, was a mere craftsman and metalworker: a weapon’s maker and the object of his mother’s shame. “Though married to Aphrodite, he was solitary, lamed, and ugly, a marginal Olympian” (Hillman, 2016, p. 322) who was thrown out of heaven. (His story is elaborated upon in Chapter 10). In contrast to beauty’s most grand displays, Hillman tells us that Hephaestus’s marriage to Aphrodite reveals that Beauty is more permanently at home and “divinely yoked” to “the odd, the unglorified, [and] the marginalized” (p. 322). He asks us to “imagine that beauty is permanently given, inherent to the world in its data, there on display always.” (Hillman,

2006f, p. 178). He says that “this inherent radiance lights up more translucently, more intensively with certain events, particularly those events that aim to seize it and reveal it, such as art works” (p. 178). Along these lines, Hillman (2016) suggests that a closer understanding of Beauty might be reached by “enter[ing] the mind of the ‘different,’ long . . . approach of the artist” (p. 322). We are inclined to read this sentence from the perspective of the Actress whose “long approach” is one of becoming and embodying that which is imagined. This embodiment is embodied within a world whose whole is expressed as a play wherein she plays a part. The whole which is the play and its inhabitant parts constitute each other as a drama. They are always inseparably related to one another.

When Hillman calls upon the artist’s approach as means for coming closer to an understanding of beauty, he is displaying his own Dionysian tendencies for bothness. While he rejects the act of holding beauty hostage in art museums and galleries, he acknowledges the capacity of art to heighten its radiance. The artist’s job, he says, is to “reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary” (Hillman, 2006f, p. 179). We would like to suggest that this revelatory capacity might be a visionary and numinous power that corresponds on the terrestrial plane, with the power of a mystic’s visionary flights to celestial planes. We would like to suggest that art, in other words, has the potential for unveiling the sacral nature of our everyday world. Hillman appears to affirm this idea when saying that the job is “not to distinguish and separate the ordinary and the extraordinary, but to view the ordinary with the extraordinary eye of divine enhancement” (p. 179).

Hillman, as we know from our introduction, distinguishes art from creativity. His intention in so doing is to dispel psychologies that separate artists or so called creative geniuses from so called ordinary persons, thereby cutting ordinary persons off from creativity, and creative geniuses off from common humanity. While we support the idea of giving creativity back to the commons, our sense is that distinguishing art from creativity misses the mark by severing art from its creative home. We prefer the idea of opening the role of artist (and of mystic as well) up to ordinary persons, giving art more space in common humanity through an exploration of its potential as a sacral practice. We imagine this practice as one that opens itself to so called common folks as potential artist–mystics. Artists and mystics, released from their former elitist enclaves, in hyphenated form, thus become mediums by which the sacral nature of the world's presence as currently given might be seen, deepened, further illuminated, mirrored, unveiled, dismembered, remembered, and transformed in service to the yearning that brings all things to being. Here the lines dividing dissociable and captive or conjoined imagination would no longer serve as judges who favor one side over the other. Following Dionysos, who joins at the borders that which is usually separated by borders: the practice of art (and more specifically for the purpose of this study, of theater) and that of mysticism would rediscover a practice that weds the two. This practice would spring from an essential premise: all that is given has a sacral dimension, and all vision can be read as such. Here the line between secular and sacral becomes a matter of perspective and intention. The border between dissociable and captive imagination is no longer a concern, nor does it distinguish the mystic from the nonmystic. The unveiling of beauty

in all things by way of imagination becomes the concern, and following the lure of beauty toward transformative love becomes the goal.

In imagining the idea of a non-elitist, artist-mystic theatre by way of our discussion on beauty as viewed by Corbin and Hillman, our labyrinthine pathway is turning back to the world of Dionysos: a world where theatre and mysticism go hand in hand. In our next three chapters, we turn to Seaford's research on Dionysos in hopes of gleaning a better understanding of the historical connection between the two. From there, we hope to develop a sense of how this understanding might inform our emergent vision of an artist–mystic theatre for today's world.

## Chapter 10

### Seaford's *Dionysos*

The religious or mystic nature of Athenian tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays performed at Dionysiac festivals during the classical period is apparently an enigma to scholars who have written about the god. The authors who inform Hillman's work have clearly shown more interest in the secret rituals and philosophies of older mystery-cult traditions than they have of later developments in formalized drama. The nominal attention given to these developments, implies a prevailing attitude that Athenian drama is somehow not truly Dionysiac. Our particular interest in the potential of theatre for evoking a kind of numinous experience has prompted us to search for alternative perspectives. Seaford's (2006) *Dionysos* has provided us with an explicit and in depth inquiry that speaks to our purpose. The following exploration discusses his research as a means of grounding ourselves within a reality through which an idea of the actress–mystic might be affirmed and further imagined. We have chosen to call this figure the actress–mystic, as opposed to the actor–mystic, to reflect our vision of mystic-theatre as an individuation process which aims for a restoration of feminine consciousness. Here we are referring to feminine consciousness in the sense that it has been regarded throughout this work.

Seaford's (2006) introduction to *Dionysos* begins with a concise review of other notable authors' interpretations of the god. Many of his sources draw from the same pool of scholars who informed Hillman's writings. Seaford's own work aims to address what he views as the "over-abstractness" of Dionysiac material from Nietzsche on, by grounding his perspectives in ancient practice and belief. His stance is that "Dionysiac

ideas of the unity of opposites and the dissolution of boundaries are comprehensible only if envisaged as *pragmatic*, as grounded in the reality of mystery-cult and its concomitant beliefs” (p. 11).

Dionysos's name appears for the first time in the thirteenth century BC on a clay tablet containing economic records from Chania in Crete. Seaford (2006) refers to the god as “our oldest living symbol” (p. 3), attributing his survival throughout antiquity (and still today in the adjectival sense of the Dionysiac) to his continuous adaptation to evolving needs, and to his likeliness (more than other gods) to embody that which has been lost (p. 146).

That which is manifest and that which is hidden is eternally changing places in the Dionysiac cosmos; Dionysos mixes things up. In Mazdean terms we could say that Dionysos represents both the *mēnōk* and the *gētīk* by allowing the hidden and the revealed to periodically switch positions. Plato's Socrates affirms this sense of his relationship with mixture by evoking “Dionysus or Hephaestus” (gods assigned with the “function of mingling”) to aid his search for the good in a well-mixed life (Philebus, trans. 1961c, 61c). Since the terrestrial world in Mazdaism is definitively a world of mixture, Dionysos might be imagined as a god who helps us find balance amidst the vicissitudes, challenges, and fears we face as inhabitants of this inherently mixed world. But he is also a god who facilitates the crossing of boundaries beyond this world. As we shall see in the discussion that follows, the secret rituals of Dionysos's mystic cult deal with the process of overcoming our fears of leaving it, in other words, our fears of death.

Seaford (2006) says that “Dionysos exists in our own world, as an irreducible symbol for the antithesis of something basically wrong with our society” (p. 12). As we

imagine it, the gnosis (or knowledge) which this antithesis makes available to us, is offered up in the activity of drama; the gnosis is embodied by way of enactment within a living story that plays the role of a whole where all its parts are necessary. The playing of the story's parts constitutes this whole, and the whole—in turn—constitutes the parts. They create and re-create each other, in constant relationship with each other. Perhaps it is worth noting the similarity of this relationship between the whole as a play, and its players as its parts—and the relationship between a divine Name, and the being who names it (as discussed in our chapter on Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love).

Seaford's (2006) overall conception of Dionysos arises from the god's power "to transform individual identity" (p. 11). This transformation has a unifying function which serves the needs of an encompassing group or relative whole to which the individual belongs. For the purpose of this study, we shall focus on the role that dramatic enactment has played in this transformational process by calling upon examples within the myth itself, within mystery-cult ritual, and finally, within the evolution of Greek tragedy. Seaford argues that Greek tragedy, comedy, and satyr plays—which were performed at Dionysiac festivals in the classic era—evolved (at least in part) from mystery-cult initiation practices, as a response to the evolving needs of the community. This community found its expression in the development of the Greek polis. Our task will be to enter and to engage with the world constituted by his argument, allowing its presence, as it comes to stand in the present, to respond to our research question.

Seaford discusses four important themes associated with Dionysos as a means for establishing the pragmatic functions of the god's cult, as they evolved throughout its history, in accordance with shifting societal demands. These themes are nature,



communality, epiphany, and death. Our discussion of them below will provide the necessary context for an exploration of mystery-cult ritual and the emergence of Greek tragedy.

### **Dionysos and Nature**

Dionysos has been viewed as the god of wine and “the unrestrained joys of nature” (p. 15) for many centuries but this idealistic perspective of nature is a relatively recent conception constituted in large part by the fantasies of those who live in cities. As Hillman and Seaford have both observed, nature throughout most of human history has been known as an ominous entity full of destructive powers which needs to be controlled. Hillman (2006e) expresses this idea in the following passage taken from his essay “Natural Beauty Without Nature”:

During many periods, nature—or the physical world “out there” including the seas, and the mountains, and the forests—was considered to be demonic. . . . The forests were places of miasma, of disease, of pagans . . . of all kinds of bad things. What we now call “nature” was not a good place. The wilderness was for centuries dreaded. (p. 157)

These so called “demonic powers” of nature were once imagined as gods. Dionysos is a god who both embodies and cultivates these powers. For this very reason, he has the potential to be both devastatingly dangerous and equally valuable to mankind. Powers of destruction and transformation belong to Dionysos.

### **The vine and wine.**

The powers of nature attributed to Dionysos are perhaps most commonly represented by his role as the god of the vine and of wine. Dionysos is a god who

cultivates raw nature with the transformative but also ambiguous gift of viticulture. The power of wine to induce laughter, encourage joyful dance, loosen sorrow and inhibition, relieve pain, and break down social barriers inspiring communality is seen as a boon on the one hand. But this same gift has the power to engender death and violence on the other. In myth, this danger is represented by a story in which Dionysos first introduces the magic of the vine and winemaking to a man called Ikarios (from Ikarion). Thankful for the gift, Ikarios generously shares his wine with the neighbors who suspect him of poisoning them after experiencing the unfamiliar sensation of drunkenness. Consequently, they murder him. His daughter Erigone, discovers the body and is so aggrieved that she hangs herself. In Kerényi's (1976) complicated analysis of this myth, Ikarios is considered as a kind of double for Dionysos and Erigone is viewed as the Ariadne figure of Ikarion and Athens (p. 155).

Seaford (2006) says that "religious ritual, and indeed religion in general, attempts to control the power of what is unknown" (p. 74). In ritualizing the process of cultivating and imbibing wine, the entire community benefited from its power to inspire communality and joy while minimizing the unknown consequences of unleashing its more destructive capacities. Dionysiac ritual often took the form of an encompassing occasion and event with two foundational components: a festival in which the entire community participated, and a private gathering of female cult members where secret rites and initiations were performed.

Seaford mentions two seasonally recurring festivals in which the production and tasting of wine were ritualized. The Oschophoria was celebrated in autumn by the Athenians at the joyful and economically significant time of the vintage and wine-

pressing. The Anthesteria, celebrated in late February, was centered on the opening of the wine produced the previous autumn. As the oldest known Dionysiac festival, it was celebrated in many Ionian communities, though our more detailed knowledge of it comes mostly from Athens. These festivals (and Dionysiac festivals, in general) provided ritualistic containers through which the god's ambiguous powers could be embodied and balanced to benefit the individual and community as a whole. Dionysos's capacity for providing this balance is tangibly exemplified by the practice of drinking wine mixed with water at the Anthesteria. This custom has been envisaged by historians as a commemoration of the introduction of the practice by Dionysos himself (Seaford, 2006, pp. 21-22). Here we see a lesser known side of the god who is more readily associated with madness and ecstasy than balance. But both are inherent to his nature. From Herodotus (trans. 1952) we learn that drinking unmixed wine could cause madness (6.84). We can thus infer (in accordance with Hillman's perspective) that Dionysos—who is widely known as a mad god and the god of wine—embodies both the affliction and its remedy within the wholeness of his cosmology.

While Dionysos is associated with numerous aspects of nature, it would be remiss of us to apply this association indiscriminately to nature in general ignoring the distinguishing characteristics of these associations. As god of the vine and wine, Dionysos's affinity for dissolving boundaries expresses itself in the cultivation of raw nature and in the synthesis of nature and culture. From this association, we see that Dionysos's relationship with nature and borders, is essentially creative, involving a collaboration between the manifest world and its latent potentialities in an act of re-

creation which can be metaphorically likened to the Islamic cosmologies previously discussed.

### **Other associations and identifications.**

Dionysos's relationship to nature is not solely one of association; it is also characterized by his identification with it. As exemplified by the tales of his myth, these associations and identifications with various aspects of nature are many. They include a variety of specific plants, animals, natural phenomena, and mythical creatures such as satyrs (who embody the animal, human, and divine immortal all in one being). In the plant world Dionysos is most known for his association with the vine, the grape, and its cultivated form: wine. But he is also identified with them. At times, he *is* the vine; he *is* the grape; he *is* the wine. And this is the case with other associations as well. Dionysos becomes his associations. He embodies them. They are, as such, epiphanies. Other vegetative life associations of his include ivy, fruit, flowers, and trees—especially pine and fig. “According to Plutarch (*Moralia* 675) all Greeks sacrifice to Dionysos as tree god (*Dendrites*)” (Seaford, 2006, p. 23).

Dionysos is also associated with the personified seasons in Greek texts from the classical period onward. Seaford (2006) interprets these texts, in conjunction with artwork on mosaics and sarcophagi of late antiquity, as indications that Dionysos symbolizes “the cycle of the rebirth of nature” (p. 23). As we have seen in the tales of his myth, he is also associated with the element of water. Otto (1960/1965), drawing from Plutarch, says Dionysos “was the lord and bearer of all moist nature” (p. 156) according to Greek belief. He is associated and identified with certain natural forces as well. He is

invoked in a number of sources, including Euripides' tragedy "The Bacchae" as "*Einosi*s, i.e. Earthquake" (Seaford, 2006, p. 42).

In the animal-world he is variously associated or identified with the snake, bull, goat, and panther. In the pirate story (recalled in Chapter 6) he transforms himself into a lion. Seaford (2006) observes that "the god has a unique rapport with those beasts that are uncontrollable by humans" (p. 23). Dionysos becomes the things we fear.

Not only Dionysos, but his followers as well, are often associated and identified with animals. They too, embody the things we fear. The initial maenads suckle and slaughter wild beasts as if they are wild beasts themselves. They are often represented "wearing the skins of fawns or leopards" (Seaford, 2006, p. 24). In Chapter 6, we witnessed the most extreme and gruesome examples of humans identifying with animals in stories where Dionysos's nature within them was resisted. For example—when Agave and other housewives resisted Dionysos's cult, they were identified as hounds who hunted down and ripped apart her son because they imagined he was lion.

Identification with nature, as we have seen, is abundantly present within the myth of Dionysos. It also plays a crucial role in Dionysiac ritual. Scenes depicted on vase paintings—which are most likely inspired by the public processions that set the Anthesteria festivals in motion—show men or boys dressed as satyrs, playing pipes, and escorting a ship-shaped cart that transports Dionysos himself (who is represented by a statue or citizen who acts the part). At the Great Dionysia festivals, chorus members of satyric dramas were dressed as satyrs. And in mystery-cult, initiates were thought to imitate Sileni, satyrs, rams, bulls, Nymphs, and Pans.

Lastly, Seaford (2006) tells us that “nature itself joins in Dionysiac cult” (p. 25). The rocks, rivers, and the very ground we walk upon become enlivened and engaged as fellow players in *anima mundi*’s drama. Like Dionysos turned lion, bull, goat, vine, or wine—like the human turned hound or Satyr—in Dionysiac cult the rock, river and ground become figures of enactment playing roles in concert with nature’s other players, transforming their prior identities. This dynamic is especially vivid in Euripides’ drama “*The Bacchae*,” which depicts the establishment of Dionysiac mystery-cult in the city of Thebes.

When the play opens, Dionysos has already entranced the Theban women and driven them into the mountains at Cithaeron where they experience a strange and magical coherence with nature. Here, a woman strikes a rock with her thyrsus and a fountain of cool water bubbles up. Another drives her fennel into the earth and a spring of wine pours out. Others, who desire milk, scratch at the soil with bare fingers as white milk and honey emerge and spurt from the earth’s floor. The Dionysiac women thus display seemingly wondrous powers, but Seaford’s view that “nature itself joins in Dionysiac cult” (p. 25) suggests that the rocks, the earth, and the soil might be imagined as creatures who transform their identities via enactment just as the god’s other followers are prone to do. The soil thus comes to know herself as a hybrid creature—part mother, part bee—nursing her infant with milk and honey; the rock, in turn, embodies the fountain gushing forth with water. The earth plays winemaker; thyrsus plays god; and who is to say, whom amongst them, authored the play that they all take part in? Dionysos is, after all, the Undivided.

In “The Bacchae” we see this coherence intensify when a group of cowherds and shepherds decide to win the favor of the king by hunting down the Dionysiac revelers. Now the whole of nature seems to rise up against these schemers in support of the women. A messenger reports that the devotees cried aloud “until the beasts and all the mountain seemed wild with divinity. And when they ran, everything ran with them” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 725-730).

**Two themes which inform our emergent vision of an artist–mystic theatre.**

Considering Dionysos’s relationship with nature, in terms of how it might inform the idea of a current day non-elitist artist–mystic theatre, we would like draw upon two salient themes from the discussion above. The first theme, which finds its expression in the cultivation of raw nature and the synthesis of nature and culture, is essentially about Dionysos’s capacity to transform himself and the world he inhabits. The second theme is identification. In the Dionysiac world, fulfillment of the first of these is made possible via the activity of the second. Transformation (as the cultivation of raw nature and the synthesis of nature and culture) occurs, in other words, when nature’s others are embodied and known from within *their* reality. An artist–mystics’ theatre informed by these themes and by their correspondence with the god’s relationship to nature, might thus foster an environment where plants, animals, humans, the elements and forces of nature, as well as gods and hybrid creatures could be embodied and or addressed as characters that constitute and are constituted by the world which they inhabit (the world of the play). Going forward, these two themes—transformation and identification—will be explored as they apply to the Dionysiac world more broadly.

**Communality**

The content of Seaford's key themes (nature, communality, epiphany, mystery-cult, death, and theatre) overlap and incorporate each other. Dionysos's associations and identifications with nature are present within the theme of communality, and certain Dionysiac patterns or aspects which have surfaced in exploring the god's relationship to nature will emerge again as we investigate the other key themes. We would like to suggest that these recurring patterns or aspects might prove instructive as we imagine the making of a current day artist-mystic theatre. In our section on nature, we learned that Dionysiac festivals provided structures in which raw nature could be cultivated, and containers in which nature's ambiguous powers could be embodied and benefitted from through a balanced approach inherent to the god's own nature. These festivals also provided a structure and container in which Dionysos's "overwhelming power to inspire communality" (Seaford, 2006, p. 26) could be engendered, promoted, and developed via enactment (which is a form of identification). Identification (or enactment) is thus an essential aspect of the god's relationship with both nature and communality. Another aspect of Dionysos's correspondence with nature, which is reiterated by his correspondence with communality, is ambiguity. These three topics—enactment, ambiguity, and the festival—will play a central role in our discussion of Dionysiac communality.

Seaford (2006) defines communality as "the sum of the feelings and actions of several individuals that promote and express their simultaneous belonging to the same group" (p. 26). Historically speaking, communality has variously expressed itself in accordance with the issues, circumstances, and concerns particular to the inhabitants of a



given space and time. In the context of our discussion above, we can imagine that Dionysiac inspired communality arose initially as a human defense against the potentially life threatening forces of nature, and a corresponding collaborative effort to cultivate nature for the good and safety of a group of individuals and families as a whole. Seaford tells us that “communality breaks down individual self-containment and may replace it with a sense of wholeness” (p. 26). During the classical period the contextual “whole” or group to which Dionysiac inspired communality refers, is the Greek city-state polis, characterized by Athenian democracy which “emerged from tyranny at the end of the sixth century BC” (p. 37). Dionysiac festivals thus played a crucial role in expressing, promoting, and displaying the unity and strength of the polis to its citizens and others who might have otherwise felt compelled to threaten it.

**Inclusion of the weak and marginalized classes.**

Dionysos’s power to inspire communality is associated “with the celebrations of a *whole* community” (Seaford, 2006, p. 27), even its marginalized citizens. At the Anthesteria, for instance, children and slaves were included in the wine drinking (p. 18), and during the City Dionysia (a spring festival important to the genesis of Greek tragedy), it is said that prisoners were released from jail, and “the freeing of the slaves was announced in the theatre” (p. 29).

Tales from the god’s myth show us that Dionysos is both identified and associated with members of the weak and the marginalized populations. First, we might recall the child god who is literally torn apart by the Titans. And then we might remember the young deity who is displaced and disguised again and again for his own protection from the jealous Hera’s plots to destroy him. And later, as a youth, Dionysos is so frightened

by the violent pursuits of King Lykourgas that he leaps into the sea to avoid capture. He is also a god who experiences madness. Each of these cases are examples of the god as weak or marginalized. Dionysos is portrayed as having humanlike vulnerabilities: to such a degree, that he—like all humans—is even subjected to death.

A tale of Hephaistos and Dionysos further exemplifies the god's association with the marginalized classes. Hephaistos was initially introduced during our discussion of Hillman's speculations on beauty. As established there, he was considered an inferior god, but paradoxically he was married to Aphrodite—the goddess of love and beauty. A mere craftsman, a metalworker, and a weapons maker, “he was solitary, lamed, and ugly, a marginal Olympian” (Hillman, 2016, p. 322). In the version of his story entertained here, Hephaistos is born lame. His mother, the goddess Hera, who is shamed by his deformity, casts him out of Olympus and throws him down to earth. The justifiably bitter Hephaistos then crafts a throne of gold equipped with concealed fetters designed to bind whomever sits upon it, and sends it anonymously to his mother as a gift. Predictably, Hera sits upon the throne. Bound to it by her hands and feet, she is instantly trapped. No one, except Hephaistos, is capable of releasing her, so the Olympians recall him back to Olympus, but he stubbornly rejects the summons. Dionysos, the god who dissolves differences, is sent to fetch him. And so the story goes that Dionysos makes Hephaistos drunk. When the emotionally hardened castaway is sufficiently loosened by the socially integrating power of the wine, Dionysos sets the once dejected god upon a mule who returns him home to Olympus.

Dissolving the societal boundaries by which some are privileged and others are marginalized, be it in heaven (i.e. on Olympus) or on earth, Dionysiac consciousness

acknowledges the necessity for that which is generally discounted and rejected. This consciousness is present in Seaford's vision of the god's capacity to inspire communality via the transformation of individual identity, and in Hillman's vision of a reimagined feminine. Associating the tale of Hephaistos's return to Olympus with Dionysos's practical role inspiring communality in the Greek city-state polis, Seaford (2006) reminds us that craftsmen (though marginalized) "are necessary, and so their political exclusion threatens the community" (p. 30). In this reminder, we hear an echo of Hillman's stance that the marginalized feminine characteristics which our excessively dominant Apollonic society would annihilate if it could, are also necessary.

If we were to speculate on the theme of communality in respect to the genesis of a current day artist-mystic theatre based on our discussion up to this point, we would venture to say that special care should be taken to assure the inclusion of marginalized or weak individuals and classes of people, as well as their concerns. As we continue to explore the theme of communality we shall see how Dionysos's "*inclusiveness*" (Seaford, p. 27) relates to the topics identified above: ambiguity, identification, and the festival.

Dionysos's inclusiveness has a contradictory, paradoxical, ambiguous side to it. His inclusiveness includes, in other words, an element of *exclusiveness*. In Euripides' "The Bacchae," which "dramatises the 'aetiological myth' of the cult" (Seaford, 2006, p. 33), the god's intention is to gain the praise of all Theban citizens. His desire is for the young and old alike to join his dances. The character of Teiresias says Dionysos "desires his honor from all mankind. He wants no one excluded from his worship" (Euripides, trans., 1959, 208-209), but the Theban women who dance in the mountains of Cithaeron and the chorus of Asian Bacchae who joined the god during his travels in distant lands,

represent an exclusive band of Dionysiac female followers. This paradox also expresses itself in a common characteristic of Dionysiac festivals, in general, where public rituals in which the entire community participated were celebrated along with separate secret rituals performed by a select group of female mystery-cult initiates and initiands.

We shall now look to the Anthesteria festival as a means of further imagining how Dionysos's association with the marginalized classes, and his ambiguous inclusiveness manifested themselves in practice. Here again, we shall see that enactment (identification) plays a primary role.

### **Thiasos and the procession.**

Dionysos's power to inspire communality, which includes the entire polis, is mythically evoked by the cortege that accompanies him: his thiasos. In practice, the concomitant diversity and unity expressed by Dionysos's ecstatic train of revelers was embodied in public processions that led the entire polis to a central location where the festivals that honored the god commenced. These processions incorporated music, dance, costumes, role play, and even functional scenery. Piping boys and men dressed as satyrs marched victoriously from the sea or outskirts of town into the city's center flanking a ship shaped cart on wheels carrying Dionysos who was embodied by a statue or citizen dressed for the part. In vase paintings depicting this event, Dionysos is seated in the processional cart holding a vine in the sky that spans the length of the ship, like a canopy, with bunches of grapes that dangle from its stem. Scholars have suggested (based on these paintings) that the Anthesteria processions commemorated the god's epiphanic victory over the pirates who kidnapped him and his victorious arrival on land thereafter. (We recalled this story in Chapter 6). Festival processions have thus been imagined as

reenactments of the god's own procession to the city center, accompanied by his characteristic exotic train of wild animals and mythical creatures, announcing his return. His triumphant arrival on land from the sea has been interpreted as a return from death, and a rebirth signifying the transformation from the suffering and persecution in the second phase of his life into the joyful transcendence and immortalization of the third.

**Transformation of the marginalized via the enactment of myth.**

As we have just seen, Dionysiac processions have been viewed as commemorations and reenactments of myth. The commemoration and reenactment of myth has also been attributed to various secret mystery-cult rituals. One such ritual provides us with an intriguing example of Dionysos's astonishing power to dissolve differences between the marginalized and ruling classes. It has been imagined that a secret ritual, which followed the Anthesteria public processions, involved a select group of women and the sexual union between Dionysos and the wife of the king (in actuality, the magistrate) at the royal house. This ritual resembles a myth in which King Oeneus of Calydon is rewarded with the gift of wine after respectfully withdrawing while Dionysos has sex with his wife (Seaford, 2006, p. 19; Kerényi, 1976, p. 76). Here the social boundaries that divide the ruling and marginalized classes are dissolved via enactment and role reversal. Coveted privileges of the powerful are ritually withdrawn from those who are advantaged and embodied by the disadvantaged. Dionysos thus promotes the unity of the polis in playing the role of leveler. In Seaford's (2006) words: "This symbolic limitation on the autonomy of the royal household benefits—as does the opening of new wine—the community as a whole" (p. 19).

### **Tension between communalities.**

In the discussion above, we identified a seemingly contradictory aspect to the communality inspired by Dionysos, which is exemplified in the contrast of both inclusive and exclusive activities characteristic of his cult. Perhaps the contradiction is an essential given, necessitated by the a priori conditions of our earthly existence. As the Mazdeans might say: we live in a world of mixture. In a world of mixture, we naturally belong to multiple groups, and sometimes the interests of one seemingly conflict with those of another. The customary responsibilities and expected benefits of household communality, for instance, might be trumped by those of the more encompassing polis and whole to which Dionysiac inspired communality in the classical period refers. The mystery-cult enactment of Dionysos copulating with the king's wife ritually resolves this contradiction.

A similar paradox is exemplified by a general practice in which the women of various city-states temporarily left their homes and household duties to gather in the mountains where they "sacrifice[d] and hymn[ed] the presence of Dionysos in imitation of his ancient companions the maenads" (Seaford, 2006, p. 34). Seaford refers to this contradictory dynamic as a "tension between communalities" (pp. 35-36). In a discussion to follow, we shall explore his argument that "the *opening up* of the mystic ritual to the whole polis at the City Dionysia, was a factor in the genesis of tragedy" (p. 35). Performance of Greek tragedy (as well as other dramatic genres) might thus be imagined as a form of non-elitist mystic practice with the affirmative strength of historically informed imagination to back it.

## Epiphany

In the *American Heritage Dictionary*, *epiphany* has been generally defined as a “revelatory manifestation of a divine being” (Epiphany, 1992, p. 619). Angelophanies and theophanies (frequently discussed in Corbin’s works) are, as such, also epiphanies. Visions too, are epiphanies. Sightings of these phenomena are most often associated with a gifted few, who are designated as mystics (and sometimes madmen). Throughout this dissertation, however, we have continually expanded our definitive sense of these concepts, allowing them to penetrate our perception of the everyday terrestrial world and person. Seaford’s insights on epiphany serve this intent as well. In our discussion above we learned that Dionysiac festivals are often characterized by a combination of public rituals, on the one hand, in which the entire community participates, and private mystery-cult rituals on the other which are secret to all but a select group of women. Two types of epiphany respectively correspond with these distinct classes of ritual activity. For the moment, we direct our attention to epiphany’s more public face. This face lends itself more easily to less literal views of vision. It smiles more readily and inclusively at the layman mystic. We shall return to the more literal and exclusive epiphanic vision, characteristic of mystery-cult, later. Seaford (2006) says:

Epiphany occurs when deity (or its manifestations) is perceived by one or more of the senses. It will include for instance even the arrival of a statue of a deity in a procession, in so far as the onlookers imagine themselves to be seeing the deity.  
(p. 39)

This passage, when taken within the context of our discussion on Anthesteria processions, tells us that the public reenactment of myth by the whole community serves

as an invocation to the god whose consequential epiphany is variously sensed, imagined, and experienced by its citizens. The communal re-creation and embodiment of Dionysos's world, person, and story seemingly call him forth. Seeing him becomes an act of imagining that he is sighted, while simultaneously creating the conditions in which this sighting would be likely to occur.

Of all the Greek deities Dionysos has been considered the "most manifest" of the gods, "the most given to epiphany," the most likely "to manifest himself among humankind; and to do so in various forms" (Seaford, 2006, p. 39). It has even been thought that Dionysos is "present within his worshippers" (p. 39). Seaford says that "the miraculous appearance of ivy or vine, or of wine seem to indicate his *presence*, or even his embodiment in what appears" (p. 39). This statement reminds us of Hillman's description of beauty as the mere appearance of things—as the very fact that they appear at all, and appear as they do. This remembrance gives way to another: Hillman's image of beauty as the shining forth of Aphrodite's smile in the face of things. And from here we are carried back to Ariadne's identification with Aphrodite. These free associations, taken together seem to imply the presence or embodiment, not only of Dionysos, but also of Ariadne in that which appears. Perhaps this is an intimation that beauty and love play an integral part in epiphany.

### **Epiphany as responses to ritual and crisis.**

Seaford (2006) discusses two main contexts in which epiphanies tend to occur: ritual and crisis. He tells us that both of them are "occasions for the enactment of human control over disorder" (p. 40). These contexts are not necessarily distinct from each other; they often interpenetrate. In the context of ritual, one might seek control over actual



disorder or potential disorder. Sometimes, in the context of crisis, epiphany occurs spontaneously. But the pursuit for control over disorder during crisis, can be consciously sought through ritual as well. Temporary crisis can also be intentionally effectuated in rituals designed to prepare an initiand for situations of anticipated potential disorder. This appears to be the case with mystery-cult initiation which prepares the initiand for “life” beyond death. Here a crisis is simulated to create the conditions by which epiphany and a corresponding transformation has been known to occur spontaneously. Seaford likens this ritually imposed crisis and resultant transformation to a death rehearsal through which the initiand overcomes the fear of death.

**Epiphany as a response to invocation.**

Epiphany might also “occur in response to invocation” (Seaford, 2006, p. 40). Rituals are, in other words, mediums through which the god might be invoked. As we have seen, in the case of Dionysiac processions, and as we shall see with mystery-cult, and then with the dramatic performances of Greek tragedy, rituals are often based upon myths that serve as models of transformation. The dramatization of myth is, as such, a form of invocation—a means of calling upon a god or gods—and concomitantly a form through which the god or gods might appear in response. From this viewpoint, the dramatization of myth—because it constitutes an intermediary space between matter and spirit—might also be called imaginal.

## Chapter 11

### Seaford on Mystery-Cult

Our earliest detailed evidence of mystery-cult (which in this case refers to Eleusinian initiation) is provided by *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, composed sometime between 650 and 550 BC. Intimations of Dionysiac mystery-cult in particular, have been observed by Isler-Kerényi in Attic vase paintings of the sixth century BC, and inscription evidence gathered by Seaford (2006) suggests that it existed at least by the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Shrouded in secrecy at the time—our knowledge of Dionysiac mystery-cult (and mystery-cult in general) remains limited, even today. Seaford's analysis of the topic is based on evidence gathered from a variety of literary and visual sources in multiple disciplines. His visual resources are illustrations of Dionysiac scenes which seemingly correspond to the initiatory practices, philosophies, and beliefs of the cult. These scenes are depicted on various mediums including: Attic vase paintings from the sixth century BC, various works of art from the imperial period of Roman Italy, terracotta plaques from the mid-first century to the mid-second century AD, and Roman Empire sarcophagi from the first to the fourth centuries AD. Of particular note, in respect to the research at hand, is the frequent “presence of mythical followers of Dionysos . . . [and] of *masks*” (p. 64) in these initiatory renderings. It is also of note that several representations depict the initiands as children. The significance of these observations will become clear in what follows.

Seaford also draws from various forms of inscription evidence dating from the fifth century BC into the third century AD. Among these are inscriptions found on small bones plates, which appear to be tokens given to the initiated. Three of these, “dated to

the fifth century BC, contain various inscriptions including the name of Dionysos, and the words 'life death life', 'peace war', and 'truth falsehood'" (Seaford, 2006, p. 52). Further evidence has been found on "so-called gold leaves, small inscribed strips of gold buried with the dead" (p. 54). These tokens have been viewed as records of what initiates learned about the underworld during initiation. Some inscriptions indicate that the performance of drama or at least the enactment of myth was involved in Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation and ritual. In one such inscription various persons are designated with the title "nurse of Dionysos" (p. 68). Seaford says that this suggests "either the performance of a drama about the infancy of the god or at least dressing in costumes of the Nymphs or Silens who were his nurses" (p. 68). Another detailed inscription puts forth the rules for admission and the disciplinary requirements related to the feasts of an all-male association called *Iobakchoi*. This inscription tells us that participants are required "with all good order and calm to speak and perform the parts (*merismous*) under the direction of the *archibakchos*" (p. 68). This evokes, from our viewpoint, an image of the relationship that exists between a cast of actors and the director who guides them for the sake of the play as a whole. We also learn that "the *archibakchos* is to perform a sacrifice and libation" (p. 68) on the tenth of the month of Elaphebolion. This timing coincides with the first day of the City Dionysia—a festival in which drama was performed. (We shall speak of this festival again regarding its importance to the development of Greek tragedy.) In several inscriptions from the first and second centuries AD there is mention of an association called "the assembly of *technitai* (i.e. actors)" (p. 68). Other inscriptions and multiple visual sources "seem to indicate the impersonation of satyrs and silens" (p. 68). One inscription from the third century AD which refers "to a

water-organist awakening the god may suggest a ritual in which the experience of the initiate returning from death is modelled on the awakening of Dionysos” (p. 69). This sampling of inscription evidence suggests that Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation involved dramatic performances or mythical enactments in which the themes of birth, death, and rebirth were central. Other sources support this theory as well. Seaford tells us that an epitaph from southeast Bulgaria suggests that the deceased woman to which it refers may have been involved in a mystic ritual in which she was imagined to have participated “in the death and apotheosis of Semele” (p. 69). In an anonymous Orphic Hymn composed for the use of initiates somewhere in western Asia Minor, there is mention of a ritual in which “Semele’s birth-pain for her son Dionysos” (p. 70) is re-enacted every other year.

Seaford’s research draws from Euripides’ “The Bacchae” as its richest literary source. As a dramatization of “the aetiological myth of the Theban cult of Dionysos, i.e. the myth that explains and narrates its founding” (p. 54), this tragedy prefigures the secrets of Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation, and the festival which is open to all. This resource, when properly understood, is “invaluable evidence of the subjective experience of the Dionysiac initiand” (p. 52). Many characteristics of Dionysiac initiation, as depicted in “The Bacchae,” are strikingly analogous to various aspects of Corbin’s interpretations of mystic doctrines, especially those elaborated in his book *The Man of Light in Iranian Sūfism*. As such, we shall explore these similarities and simultaneously imagine the world of Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation through the lens of this tragedy. Our hope is that this approach will further our hierohistorical sense of correspondence between Corbin’s Iranian inspired mysticism and the universe where Dionysos dwells,

while concomitantly enhancing our vision of a non-elitist artist–mystic theatre for today's world.

Seaford (2006) says that mystery-cult initiation is a “rite of passage,” in other words, “a ritual that changes fundamentally the state or status” (p. 49) of a person. In his view, “mystery-cult involves the incorporation (or ‘initiation’) of an individual into a real or imagined group which belongs at least in part to the next world” (p. 49) The successful completion of initiation begins with the initiand's choice to undertake a “secret and frightening ritual” which ultimately “consists of a transition from the anxious ignorance of an outsider,” through a death-like experience, “into a new blissful state as an insider (initiate)” (p. 49). This is a broad definition which does not apply to mystery-cult in all cases, but it does describe a basic structure for ritual enactments that honored various deities for many centuries (including Dionysos, Demeter, Isis, and Attis).

The plot of “The Bacchae” can be interpreted as a dramatized initiation in itself. Seaford tells us that the odd behavior and experiences of King Pentheus correspond with those attributed to the anxious reluctance, resistance, and fear of the paradigmatic initiand. Additionally, the conditions by which the young king's responses are incited, correspond with the transformative methods used in mystery-cult initiation rituals. Many of these experiences and methods metaphorically parallel aspects of Corbin's mystic translations as well. These, in particular, shall be given our special attention.

### **Resistance, Confusion, Disorientation, Anxiety, and Fear in Mystery-Cult**

Ritual often includes the characteristic resistance of a potential initiate. By including resistance in the process of ritual, a space which allows for the possibility of overcoming it, is created. This phase is represented in “The Bacchae” in a number of

ways. At the outset of the play, Dionysos has recently arrived in the city of Thebes (his birth place) after several years of foreign travel establishing his mysteries and rites in Lydia, Phrygia, Persia, Bactria, Media, Arabia, and Asia. Upon arrival, the god is disguised as a Dionysiac priest, and accompanied by his female devotees—the Asian Bacchae—amassed from this journey. These followers—who serve as the contemporary equivalent of the god's original mythical thiasos—are represented by the chorus. The grave site where Dionysos's mother, Semele, was struck by Zeus's lightning some sixteen or so years prior, still smolders in the background. From Dionysos's opening speech, the audience learns that he is offended by the royal house and Theban citizens who stain his mother's name, denying his status as a god and Zeus's son. This city-wide rejection of the god serves as a symbolic representation of the initiand's characteristic resistance expressed in the Theban civic body as a whole.

Prior to the opening scene of the play, Dionysos has cast a form of madness over the Theban women. His aim is to restore his mother's honor and establish his cult in Thebes. The women have abandoned their homes in a frenzy and wandered into the mountains of Cithaeron where Dionysos's secret mystery rites and ecstatic dances have captivated them. The tragic events which unfold during the course of the play have been interpreted by a number of scholars (including Hillman and Seaford) as consequences of the women's initial resistance to the god. As we shall see in that which follows, the character of Pentheus exemplifies, most explicitly, this resistance to the cult (and other paradigmatic aspects of the initiatory process).

During the period in which the play is set, Cadmus (who was Semele's father and the king of Thebes at the time of her death) has abdicated the throne to his grandson

Pentheus. Several mystery-cult methods for invoking confusion, anxiety, and fear in the initiand are vivified in the plot that surrounds this character. Pentheus enters the stage for the first time incensed by strange reports of the Theban women “frisk[ing] in mock ecstasies among the thickets on the mountain, dancing in honor of the latest divinity” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 217-219).

“I have captured some of them” (p. 164) he says defiantly, “[And] my jailers have locked them away in the safety of our prison. Those who run at large shall be hunted down out of the mountains like the animals they are.” Regarding Dionysos (the “charlatan” priest) he says: “By god, I’ll have his head cut off!” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 225-240). Here resistance takes the form of extreme and antagonistic denial.

Of particular note is the fact that Pentheus becomes the object of his very own threats during the course of the play. It is Pentheus himself, who is eventually hunted down by those so called animals like an animal and tragically beheaded by his own mother. There is something characteristically Dionysiac in this turn of events. It exemplifies the bothness and undividedness that we have come to associate with feminine consciousness, Dionysos, and Islamic mysticism. Pentheus is both the creator of the world he intends to create, and the creation itself. He becomes the substance of his “vision” in becoming the hunted animal and the beheaded lion. His vicious “vision,” which he would inflict on his very own mother, becomes her vision of him, and the birth of his death. The Undividedness of the Creator and the created is expressed in a labyrinthine back and forth of their exchanging visions and roles.

### **The use of riddling language.**

Seaford tells us that riddling language is used in an initial stage of mystic transition to confuse and disorient the initiand. This tactic is represented in “The Bacchae” during the first verbal exchange between Dionysos (disguised as a Bacchic priest) and King Pentheus. The scene begins as several attendants approach the palace, escorting Dionysos, whom they have captured at the king’s behest. By all rational appearances, Pentheus should have the upper hand. As a king, his status certainly outranks an itinerant priest’s. As a captor, his captive should be greatly disadvantaged. In terms of sheer man power, his prisoner is unquestionably out-numbered by him and his men. But the lines below, spoken by one of the king’s messengers shows us that the “priest’s” demeanor defies all sense of this social hierarchy. With all due caution, the messenger recalls the events which precede the scene currently unfolding:

We captured the quarry you sent us out to catch. But our prey here was tame: refused to run or hide, held out his hands as willing as you please, completely unafraid. His ruddy cheeks were flushed as though with wine, and he stood there smiling, making no objection when we roped his hands and marched him here. It made me feel ashamed. “Listen, stranger,” I said, “I am not to blame. We act under orders from Pentheus. He ordered your arrest.” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 435-443)

As we can imagine from the passage above, at this point in the play, everyone—except the king himself—clearly sees that there is more to this stranger than meets the eye, and crossing him could be exceedingly dangerous. From Pentheus’s perspective, the priest is weaker and lower in status—but the disguised god’s quick, witty, riddling banter clearly



gives him the upper hand from the audience's point of view. Dionysos's witticisms, which prove in hindsight to be prophetic, are baffling to the king who expects a certain decorum that reflects his noble status. Disoriented by the inexplicable sense of reversed order in the socially established hierarchy between them, the king works all the harder to display his power and ultimate control over the situation. Nevertheless, Dionysos's easy free-flowing quips that contrast with the exasperation and barked commands of Pentheus, reveal him as the sharper threat despite the fact that the scene ends as the king's attendants lead him offstage with orders to imprison him in the dark stables below the palace.

In the attendant's speech above, Dionysos—like the Theban women—is imagined as Pentheus's "quarry" and "prey". When viewed in hindsight, with knowledge of his eventual fate as the quarry and prey of his very own quarry and prey, we might question whether this recurring dynamic reveals an essentially Dionysiac principle. Perhaps the power of Dionysos to transform individual identity and inspire communality relies on a capacity to embody that which apparently separates one from something perceived as other than oneself. In exercising this capacity, one might experience oneself as both and undivided: as a moving and interchangeable part that serves the interests of a whole to which each being belongs and plays a vital role.

In the case of Pentheus (as our example of a paradigmatic initiand), the use of riddling language begins to throw his sense of identity and privileged status off balance despite his resistance and denial of what is happening. The king's relative lack of power is amplified further when his attendant recalls a miraculous turn of events by which the imprisoned Theban women are freed. "The chains on their legs snapped apart by

themselves” he says. And then, “untouched by any human hand, the doors swung wide, opening of their own accord” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 447-449).

**The escalation of resistance, confusion, disorientation, anxiety, and fear into epiphany.**

In the scenes that follow, there is an escalation of Pentheus’s confusion, disorientation, anxiety, and fear. The chorus of Asian Bacchae, who are now imprisoned, evoke the god with their chanting cries.

The epiphanies that follow begin with the sound of Dionysos’s booming voice. “*Let the earthquake come! Shatter the floor of the world!*” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 585), it says.

The chorus of Bacchae now cheer in adoration of their god, as an earthquake rocks the grounds, and the palace collapses.

The voice of the god roars again. “*Launch the blazing thunderbolt of god! O lightnings, come! Consume with flame the palace of Pentheus!*” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 594-595).

And the lightning responds, flashing across the front of the palace. Flames burst forth from Semele’s tomb and a great crash of thunder resounds. The chorus falls to the ground bowing to the god and Dionysos enters smiling, “picking his way among the rubble” (Euripides, trans. 1959, p. 181).

Relieved to see him freed from the clutches of the king, the women inquire after his well-being, eager to hear about his escape from Pentheus. The god recalls the incident as follows:

He [Pentheus] seemed to think that he was chaining me but never once so much as touched my hands. He fed on his desires. Inside the stable he intended as my jail, instead of me, he found a bull and tried to rope its knees and hooves. He was panting desperately, biting his lips with his teeth, his whole body drenched with sweat, while I sat nearby, quietly watching. But at that moment Bacchus came, shook the palace and touched his mother's grave with tongues of fire. Imagining the palace was in flames, Pentheus went rushing here and there, shouting to his slaves to bring him water. Every hand was put to work: in vain. Then, afraid I might escape, he suddenly stopped short, drew his sword and rushed to the palace. There it seems, Bromius had made a shape, a phantom which resembled me, within the court. Bursting in, Pentheus thrust and stabbed at that thing of gleaming air as though he thought it me. And then, once again, the god humiliated him. He razed the palace to the ground where it lies, shattered in utter ruin—his reward for my imprisonment. . . . For my part, I left the palace quietly and made my way outside. (Euripides, trans. 1959, 616-636)

As we shall see, Seaford's (2006) assessment of these events (cited below), is strikingly analogous to aspects of Corbin's mystic hermeneutics. Seaford says:

During his unsuccessful attempt to imprison Dionysos in the darkness of his house, Pentheus exhibits very odd behaviour, which corresponds in many details to descriptions we have of the initial anxiety of the mystic initiand. For instance, as the culmination of Pentheus' anxiety there appears a miraculous light, which he attacks with a sword, identifying it with the god (editors, not understanding the mystic allusion, generally change the manuscript "light" to "apparition"). This

corresponds with the mystic light (in the darkness) that brings salvation. Whereas the isolated and terrified chorus-members greet Dionysos as “greatest light.”

Pentheus persists—horrifically—in his stubborn hostility. (pp. 52-53)

Seaford likens this light, which emerges from darkness, in mystic initiation to modern day near-death experiences. A frequent core element in research on this topic is a “‘being of light’, a wonderful light that transforms anxiety into bliss and is also somehow a person” (p. 53). The identity of this “person” varies in accordance with the culture of the individual witnessing it. In our exploration of Mazdaism, this figure was typified in the Angel Daēnā who is the celestial “I” of a human soul.

Another element of Dionysos’s speech strikes us as oddly and qualitatively Mazdean. There is a certain terrestrial–celestial twinship implied by the god’s grammatical use of language. The character of Dionysos refers to Bacchus and Bromius in the third person, yet both of these names are epithets that refer to Dionysos himself. It is Bacchus, he says, who “shook the palace and touched his mother’s grave with tongues of fire” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 623-624). And then he says that “it seems” as if Bromius made a phantom that resembled him. In both statements Dionysos appears to be delineating between himself as the god in a human form and a larger aspect of himself. The indefinite language in the second statement even suggests that the god in human form is incapable of fully knowing the actions of his larger self. One might argue that Dionysos speaks of himself in the third person to maintain his disguise as a priest but this argument is flawed, given the context of the scene. Here the god is speaking with his intimate circle of initiated followers who know him as Dionysos, the son of Zeus and Semele. He is no priest in their eyes, but the god himself.

But most of all, we are struck by Seaford's interpretation of Pentheus's attack on the "thing of gleaming air" (Euripides, trans. 1959, 632) amidst the darkness, as a representation of "the mystic light (in the darkness) that brings salvation" (Seaford, 2006, p. 53). This image is poignantly reminiscent (in our view) of the mystic concept of black light as described in Corbin's (1971/1994) *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (pp. 99-120). In Chapter 5, we mentioned Suhrawardī's project to revive the ancient pre-Islamic wisdom and theosophy of light, and Najm Kobrā's work, which interprets the specific colors of suprasensory light perceived in meditation as signs that reveal the mystic's state and degree of spiritual progress. These colors and corresponding spiritual stages vary to some degree in the systems put forth by different mystics. For Najm Rāzī, black light indicates the last stage in a system of seven spiritual states. It is "the sign of passionate, ecstatic love" (p. 107).

The first six steps . . . correspond to the lights which Najm Rāzī describes as lights of the attribute of Beauty, theophanic lights which *illuminate*. The "black light" is that of the attribute of Majesty which sets the mystic's being on fire; it is not contemplated; it attacks, invades, annihilates, then annihilates annihilation. (p. 108)

Considering this passage through the lens of "The Bacchae" we might consider Dionysos himself as a symbolic representation of the black light who sets the mystic's very being on fire. Let us remember: In the same scene where Pentheus battles the light in darkness, he also rushes frantically about calling for water, believing his palace to be in flames. By the end of this episode the palace is reduced to rubble, and the epiphany of Dionysos, has taken a number forms: light beam, thunder, lightning, fire, and earthquake. While

Pentheus continues to resist the truth, his human identity encapsulated by his title as king and symbolized in the image of his palace, has certainly been annihilated.

While an in-depth discussion of black light as seen through the lens of this philosophical spiritual lineage is beyond the scope of our work here, we feel compelled to touch upon some further images that move the world of Dionysos and the worlds of Corbin's mystic focus enigmatically closer together, as we imagine them. Corbin (1971/1994) has said that the "Water of Life" is found within this dark light. We imagine this as further evidence of Dionysos's hierohistorical correspondence with Corbin's mysticism, given Dionysos's role as the god of all liquid growth. Corbin tells us that "find[ing] this wellspring demands the penetration of the meaning of the twofold face of things" (p. 114). Who embodies the twofold face of things better than Dionysos?

The black light's association with death and annihilation in Sūfī mysticism (as indicated in the passage from *The Man of Light* above) seems pertinent in the Dionysiac world given Pentheus's paradigmatically analogous experience, and Seaford's view that mystic initiation includes an experience which simulates death. According to Corbin, 1971/1994) "the black light is the light of the pure Essence in its ipseity, in its abscondity" (p. 111). He tells us that the ability to see this light "depends on a spiritual state described as 'reabsorption in God'" (p. 111). Later he says that the supreme test of reabsorption, in Najm Kobrā's system, is marked by the visionary apperception of a "red sun standing out on a black background" (p. 117). This test "comprise[s] an experience of death and annihilation . . . [it] marks [the mystic's] hour of greatest peril" (p. 117). Fear and death-like experiences, in other words, precede transformation for the Sūfī mystic and the Dionysiac initiand alike.

Corbin's discussion of black light reveals another poignant connection between the two initiatory processes. The test of reabsorption is dangerous. Corbin (1971/1994) acknowledges two possible outcomes: on the one hand, the initiand might be "swallowed up in dementia"; and on the other, he might "rise again from it, initiated in the meaning of theophanies and revelations" (p. 117). In other words, the unprepared Sūfī mystic and the Dionysiac initiand both face the possibility of madness.

But the danger of madness has not always been seen as wholly negative in the sense that it is today. According to Plato's (trans., 1961b) "Phaedrus," madness was once held as "a valuable gift, when due to divine dispensation" (244c). "The greatest blessings" Plato says, "come by way of madness . . . that is heaven-sent" (244b). Later, he draws distinctions between two kinds of madness "one resulting from human ailments, the other from a divine disturbance of our conventions of conduct" (265). Then he distinguishes between four types of divine madness ascribing them to different gods. The type of madness ascribed to Dionysus is that of the mystic (265).

In the discussion above, two scenes from Euripides' "The Bacchae" have served as paradigmatic examples that correspond with an initial phase of mystery-cult initiation whereby the evocation of confusion, disorientation, anxiety, and fear are used to effect epiphanic (visionary) experiences. The first example pointed to the use of riddling language to arouse a sense of confusion and disorientation. The second example illustrated an exacerbation of this phase which culminated in a series of epiphanic experiences that correspond with our section on various forms of Dionysiac epiphany. These experiences were explored within the context of an analogous resonance with various mystic interpretations of Corbin's. In that which follows, we explore another

method by which confusion and disorientation was evoked in cult initiation practice. We then point to a possible implicit reference to this method in "The Bacchae." Here again we shall see images that carry us back to aspects of Corbin's mystic works.

### **The use of mirrors in mystery-cult.**

In addition to the use of riddling language, Seaford (2006) tells us that mirrors were used in mystery-cult initiation to effect the "the transition from the phase of ignorant anxiety to the phase of joyful knowledge" (p. 123). Both of these techniques purportedly "gave an obscure image of what was subsequently revealed" (p. 123). Ancient mirrors, he reminds us, were much more obscure than modern ones. The practice of using them in mystic initiation is all the more intriguing given the importance of "mirroring" and "unveiling" in Corbin's interpretations of Sūfism and Islamic mysticism. Seaford directs us to a fascinating line in "The Bacchae" that derives, in his opinion, from the widespread use of the mirror to intrigue and confuse the initiand in mystery cult. Seeing this piece of dialogue within the context of Corbin's work, we are drawn to it on a number of additional levels which deserve our further attention. But first it behooves us to review the plot which leads us to this point in the story.

Following Dionysos's account of the king's failed attempt to imprison him (cited on page 205), an infuriated Pentheus enters the stage, in search of his escaped prisoner. Here, another round of banter between Pentheus and the god ensues. Dionysos's use of riddling language to befuddle the king continues, as does Pentheus's refusal to acknowledge his obvious lack of control over the situation. Soon, a messenger arrives with updated reports of awful miracles performed by the Theban Bacchae in the forest. His detailed account of these events reveals an extraordinary coherence and cooperation



between the Bacchic revelers and the natural world that they inhabit. But the power of this coherence makes for tragic results when Dionysos's devotees are threatened by cowherds and shepherds (the messenger, being one of them) who attempt to capture the women in hopes of securing a sizeable reward from the king. Agave, who narrowly escapes the messenger's seizing arms, suddenly leaps away and cries aloud to the other members of her dancing thiasos: "Hounds who run with me, men are hunting us down! Follow, follow me! Use your wands for weapons." (Euripides, trans. 1959, 730-732). Here a dramatic exchange of roles takes place. The devotees' thyrsi, (which, but moments before, were magically coaxing wine from rocks, and milk and honey from the soil) suddenly take the role of Weapon, and the hunted women embody the role of Hunter on command. The messenger, who recalls these events to the king, reports that he and his comrades barely escaped from being torn to pieces by the women, but the fate of their cattle was less fortunate. He describes the horrific sight of calves, heifers, and bulls being clawed, torn, and skinned by the bare hands of the Bacchae in graphic detail. "There were ribs and cloven hooves scattered everywhere" he says, "and scraps smeared with blood hung from the fir trees" (740). And then he says that the women, carried into the sky by their own speed, "flew like birds" (748) over nearby fields, and swooped down on neighboring towns snatching up children and piling plunder on their backs that stayed in place untied. Magically, "flames flickered in their curls and did not burn them" (757-758). And the spears of men who took up arms against them drew no blood from the women, but the women's fennel wands miraculously inflicted wounds upon their male attackers.

Even the report of these unfathomable horrors fails to inspire caution in the king who responds by calling for an all-out war against the women, commanding his attendant to rally his troops and collect his weaponry. Dionysos alerts Pentheus to the consequences of waging war against a god, but he refuses to heed the warning. The god then takes another tactic. Intuiting the king's underlying curiosity about the Bacchae's "licentious" rituals in the forest, Dionysos offers to accompany him to the spot where the women have gathered allowing him to view the revels in secret before attacking. Pentheus is enthused by this prospect and Dionysos persuades him to dress as a maenad for the occasion (a protective measure in the event that one of the women should spot him). They now exit to prepare for the expedition.

When the two of them re-enter, Pentheus  
*wears a long linen dress which partially conceals his fawn-skin. He carries a  
 thyrsus in his hand; on his head he wears a wig with long blond curls bound by a  
 snood. He is dazed and completely in the power of the god who has now  
 possessed him.* (Euripides, trans. 1959, p. 195)

Gazing (as we imagine it) beyond the fourth wall of the audience, Pentheus says: "I seem to see two suns blazing in the heavens. And now two Thebes, two cities, and each with seven gates" (Bacchae, p. 918-920).

Seaford (2006) believes that this line of dialogue is derived from the widespread use of mirrors to confuse and disorient the initiand during the initial stages of mystery-cult initiation (p. 54). Seen through the context of Corbin's work, we find ourselves reimagining this piece of dialogue in respect to its Mazdean sensibilities, and the mystic phenomenon of black light in Najm Kobrā's system. The visionary presence of two

blazing suns, two cities, and two Thebes evokes our sense of that essential pairing and relationship between terrestrial and celestial twins so crucial in Mazdaism. This essential twinship exists in all things—including suns and cities. We are also reminded by the presence of these double images, that the projection of the archetype-image of the Mazdean soul on physical data, effects a transmutation of the material Earth and also establishes an *Imago Terrae* that “reflects and announces” (Corbin, 1960/1970, p. 14) the soul’s own Image to itself upon its passing from this world. Viewing the Dionysiac and Mazdean worlds superimposed upon each other, we might imagine that Pentheus’s double vision straddles both of these worlds in the moment before his death. Expanding our view of potential overlap between these worlds, we might even imagine that Pentheus’s twinned vision of “seven gates” relates in some way to the seven powers of Light (the supreme Divine Heptad) in Zoroastrian Mazdaism.

Our sense that this line of dialogue expresses a correspondence between Dionysiac and Corbinian mysticism extends beyond a mere intimation of its qualitatively Mazdean imagery. The more explicit similarity between the images contained by this line of dialogue, and the imagery in Najm Kobrā’s system of colored lights (introduced above), is especially intriguing. Pentheus’s vision with “two suns blazing in the heaven” (Euripides, trans. 1959, 918) superimposed on his earlier vision of light emerging in the darkness, is strikingly reminiscent of the visionary apperception of a “red sun standing out on a black background” (p. 117) described by Kobrā. And Pentheus’s vision of two Thebes, “each with seven gates” (920) brings Kobrā’s system of seven spiritual stages and corresponding colored lights to mind.

As the presence of these mystic worlds blends in the presence of our captive imagination, our writing is interrupted by the bursting forth of an enigmatically synchronistic event in the physical world. This poignant offering is described below from the perspective of an appropriately first person narrative.

**The terrestrial world's mirroring offering.**

It is fire season in Southern California. My husband calls to say he is coming home. "Go outside. Take a look at the sun," he says. A giant fire is currently blazing in the city of Santa Clarita, and the sky in Atwater Village is thick with a blackened charcoal coloring. A red sun blazes on its background. I am stirred by its dramatic presence and timing. I have never seen anything like it. When my husband arrives, we walk to the river a few blocks away and the sun's red globe dances on the wrinkles of the dark water's face. I have just witnessed two red suns (on sky and water) against black backgrounds in the terrestrial world. Might I not imagine this phenomenon as part of a collaborative effort between the multiple dimensions of this work?

**The Role of Enactment in Mystery-Cult**

Our focus in the section above was twofold. On the one hand, we discussed the role of resistance, confusion, anxiety, and fear in mystery-cult initiation rites. On the other, we concomitantly allowed various mystic presences from Corbin's work to penetrate our perception of Dionysiac mysticism by way of imagination and Euripides' tragedy "The Bacchae." Finally, these presences enigmatically penetrated our everyday world as well. In this section, we focus on various aspects of enactment in mystery-cult discussed by Seaford. These include: (a) the practice of dressing up as mythical figures of the god's thiasos, (b) gender reversal, (c) the use of masks, (d) the activity of dance, and

(e) the enactment of death. Each of them plays a role in the later development of tragedy, comedy, and satyr plays at Dionysiac festivals.

**Dressing up as mythical characters.**

An inherently dramatic aspect of Dionysiac ritual, as we have seen from our discussion of public processions, is exemplified by illustrations of devotees dressed as the original mythical companions of the god. Various works of art showing Dionysiac scenes of initiation indicate that similar costuming practices were used in the secret rites of mystery-cult as well. Plato (trans. 1961a) refers to dances called “ ‘mimic’ exhibition[s]” performed by bacchanals “under the designations of nymphs, panes, [and] sileni, or satyrs . . . as part of certain rituals and initiations” (815c). In “The Bacchae” the chorus (who represent the god’s inner circle of initiates from Asia) are dressed in fawnskins and crowned with ivy. They “carry thyrsi, timbrels, and flutes” (Euripides, trans. 1959, p. 157). The Theban women who dance at Cithaeron, and the characters of Cadmus and Teiresias, who plan to join their secret revels, are all attired in this same manner. And Pentheus, who becomes possessed by Dionysos, dresses as maenad.

**Gender-reversal and transvestism.**

Pentheus’s maenad costume illustrates another form of Dionysiac enactment in mystery-cult. In Seaford’s (2006) view, Pentheus’s disguise as a female follower “reflects the gender-reversal characteristic of rites of passage” (p. 53). He attributes Dionysos’s manifest effeminacy and transvestism, at least in part, to “a projection of the practice of transvestism in his ritual” (p. 53). This embodied practice of gender-reversal is intriguing given Hillman’s suggestion that our culturally ingrained projections of inferiority onto the female body might be lifted via a restoration of Dionysiac consciousness. It is also

fascinating when viewed through the lens of Corbin's work. In Mazdaism, we saw that the human being, as Spenta Armaiti's son, became her daughter in the eschatological figure of Daēnā. In our exploration of Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love we were encouraged to meditate on the godhead via an image of the Creative Feminine. In each case, a traditionally masculine image is viewed as a feminine form. Mystery-cult apparently takes this vision a step further in actively imagining the transformation via a dramatic embodiment of it as a female body.

### **Masks.**

Seaford (2006) tells us that "masks of satyrs and masks of Dionysos predate drama" (p. 90). In his view the frequent presence of masks and mythical followers of the god in various artworks depicting scenes of initiation, suggests that masks (and costumes) were used to embody mythical roles in Dionysiac mystery-cult rituals.

In Otto's (1960/1965) *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, an entire chapter is devoted to the symbolism of the mask. In his view, evidence (based on a series of vase paintings assembled by Frickenhaus) shows that gigantic masks of Dionysos were also used "to represent the god at his epiphany, all by themselves" (p. 88). Dionysos, himself, in other words, was meant to appear in these masks (p. 87). In some of these vase paintings a mask of the god is mounted on a column which is draped with a long robe giving the "impression of a full-figured idol" (p. 86). In many, however, one and sometimes two enormous masks are shown without the robe. The mask, in itself, seemingly evoked and embodied the presence of the god. Many large-scale masks of Dionysos made from lasting materials are still extant today. Otto tells us that one such "more than life size"

mask made of marble from the second half of the sixth century BC “was obviously used in the cult practices” at the sanctuary of Dionysos of Attic Icaria (p. 88).

In accordance with Seaford's view, we might imagine that masks were used to embody the mythical companions of the god and even the god himself in mystery-cult initiation. Taking Otto's perspective into account, we might also imagine that masks three times the size of a human being were also used to evoke the presence of the god and his enormity in these initiation rites. In both cases, masks are put into the service of a dramatic enactment through which the world of humans and the world of gods seek reunion.

### **Dance.**

Seaford (2006) draws from various inscriptions and pieces of literature (pp. 69-70) as evidence that the practice of “dancing in Dionysiac mystery-cult prefigured the joy of the next world” (pp. 103-104). This connection between a dimension of reality beyond our terrestrial existence and the activity of dance is also implied in the opening monologue of “The Bacchae.” Here Dionysos says: “I taught my dances to the feet of living men, establishing my mysteries and rites that I might be revealed on earth for what I am: a god” (18-19). Seen in the context of Seaford's evidence, the implication of this line is that Dionysos's dances—in contrast with those of living men—hail from a world which is characterized by immortals: gods, in other words. But the world of which we speak—by the very definition of mystery-cult—must, paradoxically, include the dead as well.

Plutarch said “that the experience of the soul on the point of death is like being initiated into the great mysteries, that after various kinds of anxiety and suffering there is

a wonderful light, meadows, and (among other delights) dancing” (Seaford, 2006, p. 70). Correspondingly, purification through mystic rituals, purportedly allowed one to “continue playing and dancing in Hades” (p. 69). This association between purification and dance in mystic initiation is implied by the following line from “The Bacchae” as well: “Blessed are the dancers and those who are purified, who dance on the hill in the holy dance of god” (Euripides, trans. 1958, 76-77). This line is spoken by the chorus—a unified group of initiated women. In both of these examples from Plutarch and “The Bacchae” it seems that dance is related to the joyful conclusion of the initiatory or death experience which is characterized by rebirth. But Seaford (2006) tells us that “dance was not necessarily restricted to this phase (at Eleusis it occurred in various phases of the festival)” (p. 70).

#### **The enactment of death and dismemberment.**

In Seaford’s (2006) view “most of the forms of association between Dionysos and death are derived, directly or indirectly, from the attempt by humans to control their experience of death, in mystery-cult” (p. 76). This observation leads him to a supposition: Perhaps Dionysos’s role in Ariadne’s death (as told in some versions of the myth) derives “from mystery-cult, expressing a deep structure in which Dionysos imposes death as a preliminary to immortality” (p. 77). In this same vein, Seaford claims that the myth of Dionysos’s “dismemberment at the hands of the Titans, followed by his restoration to life, is (at least in part) a projection of the experience of the mystic initiand” (p. 85).

In *Ritual and Reciprocity: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State*, Seaford (1994) mentions the existence of various texts that refer to the enactment of Dionysos’s dismemberment in initiation ritual (p. 283). These resources are rather



vaguely dated by him as “much later” than Herodotus (who he references in the same sentence on a related matter). “The Bacchae,” however, (given our view of Pentheus’s role as a symbolic representation of the initiand’s experience) indicates that this practice may have existed in some form much earlier. Seaford’s research suggests that the enactment of Dionysos’s dismemberment and resurrection in mystery-cult may have evolved from the use of animal sacrifice to evoke the fearful experience of death that led to the initiand’s joyful transformation.

**Animal sacrifice as a form of enactment.**

In *Reciprocity and Ritual*, Seaford (1994) tells us that secret ceremonies which were attended by an initiated group of women during Dionysiac festivals may have involved the initiation of new members, and a sacrificial meal expressing the group’s solidarity. It is also likely that initiands were associated at the outset of the ritual with the sacrificial victim. This was apparently the case with certain Eleusinian rites where the initiand sacrificed a pig that was “envisaged as a substitute for himself” (p. 282). There is also “evidence of a mock sacrifice of the initiand” in Dionysiac initiation.

The significance of the association between the participants and the sacrificial victim in Greek sacrifice more generally, is crucial to understanding its power in mystic initiation rites. “The anxiety of the human participants is based at least partly on fellow-feeling with the victim which is almost always a domesticated animal and so belongs in a sense to the human community” (Seaford, 1994, p. 45). The characteristic closeness between the opposing parties in the sacrifice is evoked by Seaford’s description of a scene depicted in a fourth century relief. Here, a family group with three children stand at an altar preparing to sacrifice a pig to Zeus Meilichios. All of them, including the pig,

wear crowns, and each of them are sprinkled with sacred water “at which the victim may not assent to the sacrifice” (p. 286).

Drawing from scholarship on sacrifice, in general, Seaford (1994) compiles an informed image of its more specific application in mystery-cult initiation. The initiand in mystery-cult, he says, is associated with the victim like the human participants in general sacrifice, but more-so “and to a further point in its transition” (p. 287) toward death. The initiand, like the victim, “must be detached from his previous, everyday existence, consecrated, brought into the sphere of deity [and] like the victim, he is adorned, at the centre of attention, [and] isolated” (p. 287). Like the sacrificial animal: the initiand submits to the unknown, ignorant of what awaits him, and lacking knowledge of what other participants know about his fate. His closeness to the animal carries him into death with the animal—almost, but not quite. Ultimately, the initiand’s “death” happens on a different dimension. “Rather than being eaten, he becomes part of the [initiated] group invigorated and united by killing and eating the very animal with which he had been identified” (p. 287).

It has been said that human sacrifice was once practiced in Dionysiac cult, but then replaced by animal sacrifice (Seaford, 1994, p. 294). Perhaps a similar shift occurred when the practice of enacting Dionysos’s dismemberment was adopted (possibly as an alternative to sacrificing a domesticated animal). Each of these approaches to the evocation of a fearful deathlike experience in mystery-cult is shaped by a particular historical and cultural context. Seaford (2006) attributes Dionysos’s survival throughout antiquity, and beyond, to the “continuous adaptation of deity to evolving needs” (p. 146). In our chapter on Greek tragedy, to follow, we explore the emergence of theatre at

Dionysiac festivals as one of these adaptations. But first we return to the plot of Euripides', "The Bacchae".

Our purpose here, is threefold. First, a summary of the events leading up to Pentheus's death will serve as a symbolic representation of the initiand's dismembering experience, with one noteworthy exception. In a successful initiation, the initiand undergoes a deathlike experience which leads to epiphany and then to a joyful transformation of identity—not to a literal death like Pentheus's. Seaford suggests that Pentheus's mythical death may have served a practical function in mystery-cult. As we have already learned, the desired transformation sought by initiation rites is elicited by an extremely frightening experience. Since the myth of Pentheus's death was known to the public at large and mystery rites were secret, it may be that Pentheus's literal death in the myth was necessary to promote sufficient anxiety in potential initiates. If general knowledge foretold a guaranteed happy ending, the initiatory process may not have evoked the fear required to trigger an epiphanic transformative experience. In our view, the myth of Dionysos's dismemberment and consequent resurrection, taken together with the myth of Pentheus's literal death illuminates both the potential and the very real dangers of close association with the god.

Secondly, in resuming our synopsis of "The Bacchae", we aim to expand our sense of the imaginal presence of Corbin's mystically informed world within the Dionysiac world via a continued exploration of images and plot points that populate both worlds.

Thirdly, we intend to provide our reader with a context for understanding further discussions related to "The Bacchae" in the chapter to follow.

**A Return to the Plot of Euripides' "The Bacchae"**

Previously, we broke from our narrative account of "The Bacchae" at the moment when Dionysos escorts Pentheus offstage to spy on the mystic rites at Cithaeron. Shortly thereafter, the king's attendant arrives onstage with news of Pentheus's death. A long monologue ensues as the messenger recalls the horrific events leading up to it. In brief, he says that a great voice cried out from the heavens and instructed Dionysos's devotees to take vengeance upon Pentheus for mocking the god's mysteries. At the sound of this voice the female votaries are overcome with madness, possessed by the god. Agave (who is Pentheus's mother) and her sisters are among them. Spotting Pentheus perched atop a giant fir tree spying on their rituals, they attempt to attack him with rocks and thyrsus spears but their target sits safely just beyond their reach. Then, circling round the tree, in a joint effort, the Theban maenads miraculously uproot the giant fir with their bare hands, and their victim falls to the ground with it. Deaf to Pentheus's pleas for mercy, they proceed to rend his limbs apart—again with their bare hands. Agave, thinking herself a hunter and her son a lion, impales his head with a thyrsus and proudly marches off toward town as if to flaunt the prize of the hunt.

Having grievously recalled these events, the messenger exits, and the chorus rejoices over Dionysos's victory.

Then Agave enters with some of her female accomplices. Still possessed, she boasts of their successful hunt holding her thyrsus high in the sky with Pentheus's head perched atop it, for all to see.

Meanwhile, Cadmus, having heard of his grandson's gruesome death by the hands of his own daughters, has wandered throughout the forest reassembling the scattered

limbs of Pentheus. Followed by attendants who bear the dismembered body on a bier, he now enters. Agave's madness gradually fades over the course of the scene, and eventually she sees things as they are. Aghast by the sight of her son's severed head, she has no memory of the events that led to this calamity, and Cadmus is left with the heart-wrenching task of telling her what happened.

Here there is a break of about fifty lines of lost text which have been reconstructed from fragments and later materials which drew from "The Bacchae." Within this section: Agave expresses her grief and torment over what she has done. She lifts each of Pentheus's limbs, mourning each one, and asks for Cadmus's help to piece the body back together on the bier. Once finished, they place the head with the rest of the body, attempting the best they can to make it whole again.

#### **A Mazdean excursion.**

Here we are struck, once again, by a similarity between the plot and imagery in "The Bacchae" and certain details from Corbin's writings. In this case, the image of Agave reassembling the bones of her dead son in an effort to make him whole again carries us back to the tale of Gayōmart from Corbin's analysis of Mazdaism.

Let us take a moment, however, before we engage in Gayōmart's story, to briefly note the recurrence of these same patterns within different Dionysiac tales. Agave's sister, Autonoe, for instance, is made to reassemble the bones of her dead son, killed by his own hounds while hunting. Analogously, Agave and her female accomplices (including Autonoe) are "playing the role of hounds and calling out to the god as huntsman and companion in the chase" (Kerényi, p. 262) during those fateful moments when Pentheus is torn to pieces by them. This archetypal pattern is present in a version of

Dionysos's dismemberment as well. In this tale, the Titans tear the child god to pieces and boil him, but Demeter (who is identified as his mother in this myth) gathers the limbs together (p. 255).

As for the Mazdean Gayōmart, he too, might be viewed as the victim of a hunt who is torn apart, dies, and is then reassembled by his mother. Corbin (1960/1977) tells us that Gayōmart is “the primordial Man” (p. 46), who is “composed of pure ‘metal’ ” (p. 47). He is the son of Spenta Armaiti—the Archangel of the Earth. Because of Ahriman (who we have previously identified with evil and pure negativity) Gayōmart is penetrated by Death.

As formerly discussed, Ahriman has also been known as one of the two children born to Zervān (who is unlimited Time). One of these children is Ōhrmazd—born of his liturgies. The other is Ahriman, born of his doubt and fear that the child he longed for would never be born. Seen in this context, Ahriman might be viewed as a seeker, always doubting, as a hunter—a hound, who (like his father) tears the pregnant world apart with his need to dissect it, to know it, and possibly to control it.

When Gayōmart dies, he falls on his left side, and seven metals emerge from him, each proceeding from a part of the body corresponding to it. (Here we are reminded that the Titans tore Dionysos into seven pieces and roasted them on seven spits [Kerényi, p. 254]). Gold, as an eighth metal—because of its preeminence—issues from Gayōmart's very soul and his seed. Spenta Armaiti collects this Gold for forty years at which time an extraordinary plant is germinated from it, and from this plant the first human couple is formed.

Touching down on the enigmatic similarities between the two myths: Gayōmart and Dionysos, both die. Both are essentially divided into seven pieces. And both undergo a form of resurrection. In respect to Agave, Autonoe, Demeter, and Spenta Armaiti: all are mothers who gather the dismembered parts of their dead sons in an attempt to make them whole again. These observations continue to grow our sense that the Dionysiac world and the mystic worlds represented by Corbin ineffably and imaginally correspond with each other.

**The final moments of “The Bacchae”.**

Returning to the plot of “The Bacchae”: After Agave’s attempt to reassemble the bones of her dead son, Dionysos appears in epiphany. He reiterates the story which has just unfolded and announces its corresponding moral message declaring that Pentheus has rightfully died for the wrongs he committed against the god. Then, Agave and her sisters, (who denied that Dionysos was a god thus sullyng his mother’s name) are banished.

Here the script returns to the original text. In short, each member of the royal family, including Cadmus, is forced to leave the city and go their separate ways. Agave and Cadmus, stricken with grief, stripped of their good name and status, filled with the sorrow of parting from each other say goodbye and take their leave. The royal family is thus replaced by the cult of Dionysos.

On this note, we are now prepared to begin the next chapter, exploring Seaford’s view of the development of Greek tragedy.

## **Chapter 12**

### **From Mystery-Cult to Theatre**

We have previously discussed the Anthesteria festival to exemplify characteristics which apply to Dionysiac cult in general, but the theatre and sanctuary of Dionysos Eleuthereus at City Dionysia provide us with the greatest context for the genesis and performance of drama. While Anthesteria (the oldest known Dionysiac festival) was centered around traditional seasonal and viticultural elements, a “more political aim of displaying the coherence and magnificence of Athens (to itself and to others)” (Seaford, 2006, p. 88) was seemingly the bigger concern at City Dionysia. This Athenian festival was considerably amplified (if not established) in the second half of the sixth century BC, probably during the tyranny of Peisistratus. In 510 BC—a crucial time in the genesis of tragedy—Athenian tyranny was overthrown and Athenian democracy emerged (p. 97).

In the midst of these circumstances, the need for a strong city-state presence and sense of unity among the members of the polis was critical to discourage would-be tyrants from future appropriation attempts. Seaford views the emergence of formalized drama at City Dionysia as a response to the ambiguity of Dionysiac communality expressed, on the one hand, by the god's demand for the entire polis's participation in his cult, and on the other hand, by the seemingly contradictory practice of secret rituals performed by an exclusive group of women. In his view, the performance of tragedy at Dionysiac festivals represents an opening up of secret mystery-cult ritual to the entire polis. According to Seaford (2006), “Greek ritual tends to enact its own aetiological myth” (p. 90), and in his opinion, the first tragedies were probably “dramatisations of the



aetiological myths enacted in mystery-cult” (p. 90) just as “The Bacchae” was a century later.

Dionysiac communality, which aims to dissolve the boundaries between the living and the dead in mystery-cult, is expressed in drama as a corresponding human “need for a community to feel itself united” (Seaford, 2006, p. 97). In each case the identity of an individual is superseded by a larger sense of identity within a unified whole. Seaford suggests that tragedy “develops the *political* significance latent in the Dionysiac myth” (p. 97) Dionysos, he says,

had long been associated with the dissolution of boundaries inherent in the communality of the thiasos or of the whole community, which required the departure of the women from their households. And this departure was easily—especially in the extremist logic of myth—imagined as rejection of the enclosed household for the open space of communal celebration. Loyalty to thiasos or polis seems to threaten loyalty to household. Further, the transformation of identity required for joining the initiated community (thiasos) might require the individual to be subjected, in the process of initiation, to a fictional death. These tensions, between household and community and between individual suffering and the well-being of the community, come to express something new—a political transition from tyrannical rule to communal well-being of polis cult. (p. 97)

Viewing the performance of tragedy through this lens, the performance of tragedy potentially becomes a response to our research question in two respects. First, if tragedy is viewed as an opening up of mystery-cult to the entire polis, it dissolves the usual boundaries between so called mystics and nonmystics. Second, the convergence of the

spiritual and political in tragedy (as viewed in the passage above) suggests that tragedy constitutes a space that spiritualizes matter and physicalizes spirit. In other words, the world of tragic performance (appropriately defined in accordance with the context of this research) can be imagined as an imaginal world and expression of the active or creative Imagination itself. The spiritual yearnings and principles that necessitate our manifested being are put into dialogue with manifested beings.

In the discussion that follows, we explore similarities and differences between the Anthesteria and City Dionysia. We identify aspects of mystery-cult that contributed to the development of tragedy, and significant resemblances between the two disciplines. From here, we address the question of whether Greek drama can be viewed as Dionysiac even though Dionysos does not appear in the majority of extant tragedies. And finally, we explore the implications of our findings in respect to the potential of a mystic-theatre for today's world that is informed by Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress.

### **From Anthesteria to City Dionysia: The Emergence of Formalized Drama**

Seaford (2006) directs our attention to three significant similarities and two differences between the Anthesteria and the City Dionysia festivals. In respect to the similarities: First, both festivals were held in spring and both were attended by the entire community. Second, both festivals apparently involved processions in which Dionysos (represented by a statue of the god or a citizen dressed for the part) was escorted from the outskirts or periphery of town to a centralized location. And third, the processions, in both cases were associated with myth: at the Anthesteria, probably with the liberation of Dionysos from pirates and his sexual union with Ariadne; at the City Dionysia, with his original arrival from Eleutherai (p. 88).

Regarding the differences between these festivals: the heart and center of the Anthesteria involved secret mystery-cult rituals including a sacrifice performed by a group of women at the royal house, and an enactment associated with the sexual union between the queen and Dionysos (mentioned above). It also seems that the Anthesteria involved large groups of men and boys dressed as satyrs. At the City Dionysia, the omission of these practices is replaced instead by an absorption of them within the development of drama. Evidence shows that the content of tragedies was at first about Dionysos and the myths associated with him. Soon thereafter the scripts of tragedy turned toward non-Dionysiac myths. The *satyr play*, “a burlesque drama with a chorus of boisterous satyrs” (Seaford, 2006, p. 88), was then incorporated at the festival, apparently to appease the audience’s sense of loss over Dionysiac characters in tragedy. According to Aristotle’s (trans. 2013) *Poetics*, tragedy “began with the leaders of the dithyramb” and “originally took shape out of improvisation” (5-15). The dithyramb is a hymn to Dionysos, originally performed in procession. Evidence shows that a significant step in the development of tragedy from the dithyramb was the transformation “from a traditional processional hymn into a scripted song sung at a fixed point (the destination of the procession, at an altar, in the city centre rather than at the periphery)” (Seaford, 2006, p. 89).

Traces of mystery-cult exist in dithyramb, satyric drama, and tragedy. The practice of mystery-cult at the Anthesteria was absorbed by the development of drama at the City Dionysia in a number of ways. The most obvious of these is the use of enactment to transform identity. According to Seaford, the activity of abandoning one’s everyday identity to perform in a completely new one was very rare in pre-dramatic societies

(outside of ritual). Mystery-cult and drama both made use of masks, costumes, the evocation of ritual, and transvestism to facilitate transformation. The latter of these is exemplified by the fact that male and female roles, including those of chorus members, were played by men in Athenian theatre (Seaford, 2006, p. 89). Additionally, mystery-cult and drama both involved the enactment of myth. In mystery-cult, the initiand—like the tragic actor—might also undergo a fictional death. Elements of song and dance were incorporated in both traditions too. In mystery-cult female votaries left their homes to hymn and dance the presence of Dionysos in the mountains. In “The Bacchae”, the chorus members also engaged in dance, and their dialogue (spoken in unison) has the quality of dithyramb. Mystery-cult and drama share another characteristic; in each of them, socially marginalized populations play a crucial role. We have previously provided examples of this in myth and mystery-cult. In tragedy, the choral structure provides another example. The people represented by the chorus are central to the tragic play but the roles that constitute the group identity of its members are enacted on the periphery from within the orchestra pit. In contrast with tragedy’s characteristic representation of the “common” and “marginalized” souls amongst us, is its concomitant frequent portrayal of epiphanic appearances. As Seaford says: “Much of what is imitated in tragedy is . . . *above the human level*. Drama, like mystery-cult, tends to reveal important truths about deities” (p. 102). When exploring Hillman’s work, we observed a similar dynamic in archetypal psychology’s move of psychologizing or seeing through. Here all ideas of literal actions were changed to metaphorical enactments thus allowing the gods in our ideas to shine forth.

**Is Tragedy Dionysiac?**

Tragedy, as discussed above, was derived in part from mystery cult and performed along with rituals for Dionysos during his festival, at his sanctuary. While evidence shows that there were a significant number of tragedies about myths that Dionysos appeared in or was associated with, for the most part only fragments of this material has survived. Comedy and satyric drama were also performed at Dionysiac festivals. While Dionysos himself seems to have been largely absent from satyric drama, the chorus always consisted of his thiasos of satyrs. In extant comedies Dionysos plays a central role, and titles of lost comedies indicate that he appeared frequently in Old Comedy. In the sixty to ninety estimated titles ascribed to Aeschylus the content in seven of them are certainly about Dionysos and two others might have been. Nevertheless, with the exception of Euripides' "The Bacchae", the content of the surviving tragedies has little to do with the myth of Dionysos, explicitly speaking. This provokes Seaford to ask whether tragedy is truly Dionysiac. Considering the lack of attention paid to Greek tragedy by scholars that both Seaford and Hillman draw from—the question seems valid. It is certainly crucial to this research, given our interest in the potential of theatre as a mystic and archetypal practice. Dionysos's connection to theatre and to mysticism is apparent, and our discussion of Hillman's perspectives on Dionysos has clearly shown that he has much to offer to archetypal psychology. As such, it follows that tragedy, if it is Dionysiac, should be considered as a form of mystic-theatre potentially contributing to our re-visioning of the theatrical discipline for today's world.

A brief definitive summary of our findings on Dionysiac mystery-cult and related patterns in Dionysiac myths will provide the necessary context for understanding

Seaford's response to the question of whether tragedy is truly Dionysiac. Previously we have discussed various themes associated with Dionysos broadly categorized under the rubrics of nature, communality, epiphany, and death. Each of these plays a significant role in mystery-cult ritual. Fundamental to Dionysiac mystic initiation is the radical transformation of individual identity which leads to a group identity that inspires a greater sense of belonging within a unified and more encompassing whole. This transformation may be expressed in the temporary dissolution of boundaries between vegetative nature, animal, and man—between male and female—individual and household—household and polis—polis and autocratic family—life and death—and even man and god. Initiatory dissolution, like death, is generally met with fear and resistance on the part of the initiand and this phase of transformation is incorporated into initiatory rites. The initial disorientation, confusion, anxiety, and fear evoked in ritual eventually gives way (if successful) to an epiphany of the god which “serve[s] both as a focus for the unity of thiasos or of community and as the embodiment of salvation for the terrified initiand” (Seaford, 2006, p. 95). We have previously explored many characteristics of this process in “The Bacchae” which serves as a symbolic representation of Dionysiac initiation. Seaford directs our attention to yet another characteristic action of Dionysos in “The Bacchae” (and other Dionysiac myths), which frequently occurs in tragedy, even when Dionysos does not himself appear: Dionysos inspires a kind of frenzy and madness in people who resist introduction to his cult, and this provokes them to kill their own kin. In myth, this resistance to the cult is often represented by members of the autocratic family whose “self-destruction (albeit inspired by Dionysos) . . . leads to cult for the whole community” (p. 95). Seaford imagines that this pattern of action which is most at

home in the earliest tragedies based on myths about Dionysos “was then transmitted to subsequent tragedies in which Dionysos himself does not appear” (p. 96). Ultimately, Seaford comes to the conclusion that

tragedy can be called Dionysiac (even where Dionysos is not mentioned) in the limited sense that it often represents such processes as tend to be imagined as caused by Dionysos: reversal of identity, the frenzied killing of kin (self-destruction of the household), the (fictional) death of an individual surrounded by a group (thiasos, chorus), leading to cult for the whole community. (pp. 96-97)

Such politicizing of Dionysiac mysticism (as with any attempt to view the physical world through the lens of a spiritual one) is admittedly a risky move that potentially invites the misuse of spiritual principles for personal gain and abuse of power. In Athenian democracy (for instance) it was imagined that Dionysos, the god of communality, subverted autocracy. Paradoxically, several autocrats throughout history (Mark Antony being one among them) have cleverly identified or been associated with the god for this very reason (p. 46). In other words: The powerful image of Dionysos—as a stranger, god, and outsider who arrives at the center of town (from the periphery, by way of procession accompanied by an intimate thiasos of devoted followers) offering gifts of wine and dance that bring liberation and joy to all who worship him, has been manipulated to promote autocratic rule because it projects the power of a unified group onto a single controlling entity. The autocrat thus becomes a figure who is viewed as a god.

But tragedy, if approached with a mystic sensibility and intention, may offer us a paradigmatic jumping off point for developing an imaginal practice that provides a check and balance against such abuses of powerful spiritual imagery, while simultaneously

giving body to the primordial yearnings and spiritual aspirations represented in Corbin's writings. Seaford's (2006) view of the historical period and context when tragedy was developing provides us with a glimpse of this potential. During this time, the advanced city-states of Greece became "the first society in history to be pervaded (and so transformed)" (p. 148) by the widespread use of money, largely due to the invention of coinage. Dodds (1951), and other scholars, have viewed this era as a period characterized by "growing emancipation of the individual from the old family solidarity" (p. 150). Expanding upon this idea, Seaford (2006) suggests that the individualism which characterizes the Greek archaic and classical eras "occurs in part as a result of the isolating effect of monetization" (p. 148). In *Reciprocity and Ritual* (1994) he discusses this theory in great depth. The passage below from *Dionysos*, encapsulates the role of tragedy, as he imagines it, within this movement. Seaford (2006) says:

This brave new world of money is a very recent development in the experience of the human species, and the first poetic genre to be created in it was tragedy, which centres around an unprecedented individual known also from historiography and philosophy: the *tyrant*, isolated from the gods and even from his own kin, obsessed with money, a transgressor against the ancient moral codes of reciprocity, the sacred, and kinship. Because money embodies interpersonal power, and lends itself to individual possession, it promotes an unprecedented degree of individual autonomy, and so it seems to loosen its possessor from the old moral codes, even from dependence on kin and gods. The tyrant is the new individual, the man of money, writ large. In the Dionysiac genre of tragedy the



isolated autocrat is generally destroyed, whereas his opposite, the anonymous choral collective, uphold traditional morality and survive. (pp. 148-149)

In viewing tragedy through this lens, we can imagine that it provided a space where new-world innovations and movements could be embodied and questioned within the context of longstanding communally held beliefs. It provided a place where part and whole could be put into dialogue with one another—where the bond between them could be dissected and “re-membered” time and time again within the context of the unstable changing world of mixture. As Seaford has said: Dionysos, more than other deities, is likely to embody that which has been lost.

We are also admittedly struck by the poignant correspondence between the world-shaping effect of monetization in the Greek world during the historical period when tragedy was being developed, and the overpowering influence of money that shapes our experience of the world today. The godlike quality of “the dollar” looms larger now than ever (or so it seems to us). The tyrant individual and “man of money writ large” is now accompanied by invisible Persons who go by an assortment of institutional names like Corporation and Wall Street. This correspondence between our world now and the Greek world then (at least as it is imagined by Seaford) heightens our sense that today’s world may benefit from a practice informed by tragedy. If the act of opening mystery-cult up to the entire polis responded to a societally held need during a time in Greek history when circumstances were much like our own, might this not be taken as an indication that a theatrical practice informed by this tradition could serve us now as well?

Seaford argues quite convincingly that Dionysiac transformation of identity in mystery-cult initiation rites contributed to the Greek developments of drama, and another

discipline which we have yet to mention: namely that of philosophy. In short, he builds an interesting case suggesting that mystery-cult might be “the context of ‘philosophical’ exposition of the deeper meaning of a mythical narrative” (Seaford, 2006, p. 111). This is intriguing, given the significance of both philosophy and visionary experience in Corbin’s interpretation of Islamic mysticism. “In the fifth century AD the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus regarded Plato as following the Orphic myths and interpreting mystic doctrine” (p. 115). Since Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation rites contributed to the Platonic philosophical tradition that influenced the mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sūfism and other related Islamic mystic traditions, might we not justifiably take the stance that viewing the creative Imagination from within a Dionysiac world is a form of *ta’wīl*—in other words, a means of carrying these mystic traditions back to an earlier source from which they sprang (at least to some degree)? We might also say the same for depth and archetypal psychologies since these disciplines draw from this same Greek philosophical tradition that Dionysiac mystery-cult contributed to.

With this observation, we feel ourselves approaching the conclusion of this leg of our research journey. Much of our work has focused itself on the process of unveiling theatre’s potential as a numinous practice via an engagement with Corbin works; Hillman’s writings and archetypal sensibility; and the Actress’s experience. Our initial sense of purpose for putting Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress into dialogue with each other did not emerge as a preconceived aim to make theatre our focus per se, but rather, from a desire to discover what this dialogue might say about the creative Imagination in Islamic Sūfism as it relates to nonmystics, in other words, as it relates to individuals who lack access to so called visions in the literal apparitional sense of the term. One of the

teachings which emerged from this dialogue is that the vision of a non-elitist mystic-theatre for today's world might rightfully serve the creative Imagination (as put forth in Corbin's works) and make a worthy contribution to the spiritual and psychological lineages of Corbin and Hillman. In the course of our journey, our three-way dialogue was surprisingly engulfed by a Dionysiac cosmos that incorporated each of their three voices in some form or another. In our view, a mystic-theatre—informed by Corbin, Hillman, the Actress, and the Dionysiac cosmos—could potentially serve the creative Imagination itself, by following its lead: by mirroring its practices, principles, and intentions within the context of our lived experiences here on earth. At moments throughout this exploration we have hinted at how our findings might color the practice and entity of a mystic-theatre for today's world, but our focus—for the most part—has been on establishing a healing fiction that justifies the very idea of this theatre. In some respects, it seems as if the theatre itself needed this elaborative fiction to heal its own wounds. It too, has become the victim of monetization's godlike takeover. Perhaps the theatre, torn from its mystic roots by the force of capitalism, wanted to be “re-membered.” Let us imagine for a moment that the theatre, itself, needed soothing. Perhaps it longed for the boosting balm and elixir of historically informed myth, compiled as a compassionate fiction, to incite its return to the Angel from which it springs, and its eventual comeback via the aspiration of a divine Name longing to be named in a concrete being.

### **Chapter 13** **Gathering the Bones and Parting Words**

The time has come, it seems, to follow the path of Agave, Autonoe, and Spenta Armaiti. Essentially, all are mothers who gathered the bones of their dead children in an effort to make them whole again. We too, find ourselves, as a mother of sorts to this work, in the position of gathering its bones with hopes of engendering a second birth and vision of a non-elitist mystic-theatre. For the moment, we shall call this theatre Psyche's Stage. In retrospect, it seems that this gathering of bones has been our task throughout the entire research journey. The somewhat fragmented and dismembered quality of our narrative flow and progress appears to us now as the innards, limbs, organs, eyes, and heart of a deceased child who is older than time itself yearning to be "remembered" and born again. This child has had many mothers in the course of terrestrial and imaginal history. We are but one of them, but all of us, in a sense are also one mother. In true Dionysiac form, we feel ourselves as both the impregnated mother of this child and the inchoate child itself.

#### **A Retrospective of the Nature and Structure of this Study as a Whole**

If we are to gather the bones of this research, it may behoove us to first reflect on the nature and structure of the study as a whole. This move reflects the cyclical and relational back and forth movement between an encompassing whole and its parts, which is characteristic of the hermeneutic circle itself. In hindsight, it seems that the hermeneutic ancestral lineage—as put forth in Chapter 3 on methodology—has much to do with the labyrinthine, fragmented, and dismembered quality of our search, herein. Taking an essentially panpsychic perspective informed by Gadamer, Romanyshyn,

Corbin, and Hillman, we set afoot on the research path with minimal boundaries—giving agency to the research topic itself—allowing the conscious and unconscious aspects of the topic's own questions to direct us throughout the process. The open-ended nature of this approach was designated in the "Organization of the Study" section of Chapter 3. Here, instead of mapping a chapter-by-chapter plan as might be expected, we simply stated an intention to allow our relationship with the subject to steer the work in accordance with the unfolding of its own needs and desires.

Veiled dimensions of the research question began to surface in the slow surrender of cooperation with the unseen others of the work. This phenomenon aligns with Gadamer's view that the "right question" in hermeneutic studies emerges only through immersion in the subject-matter. It is in this immersion that the work of art or text acts as a medium through which the question that brought it into being presents and re-presents itself in its present form.

Our primary and secondary research questions, as initially stated, were put forth as follows:

How might a phenomenological engagement with and dialogue between Hillman's work in archetypal psychology and Corbin's interpretation of the creative Imagination in Persian mystic Sūfism further inform us about creative imagination for the nonmystic? And furthermore, what forms of creative practice might emerge from the understanding gleaned by this exploration?

Drawing from Romanyshyn's alchemical or imaginal hermeneutic approach to depth psychological research, a third figure (unnamed in the question as stated above) was necessarily included in this dialogue from the outset. We have variously referred to

her as the Actress and nonmystic. This archetypal figure has served as a reflection of our own complex relations to the unfinished business and unanswered questions of the research topic. Her Presence acknowledges and includes our own conscious and unconscious voice as the wounded researcher within the depth psychological research process. It is the yearning of this Wound that allowed us to detect her Presence within the terrain of Corbinian and Hillmanian texts alike. It is Her desire to see Herself within these worlds that unexpectedly led us to the world of Dionysos as a place where all three worlds might dwell together. Inhabiting this desire, certain elements of our core texts highlighted themselves in our presence. These lighted elements became the stepping stones of our path—the emergent themes, images, and mythical plots as persons—who unveiled their multidimensional presences across the various texts we landed in by their direction.

Many of these elements made an explicit appearance in the preparatory stage of the research (represented in first three chapters of this work) but others unexpectedly and persistently forced themselves upon us thereafter. For example, we had no intention of exploring the role of the feminine as part of our investigation and yet this exploration is now clearly a *sine qua non* of this work.

Nor did we expect that the Dionysiac cosmos would encompass and engulf the entire body of this inquiry. Dionysos—the Undivided—essentially became the answer to our primary research question as it was initially expressed. The marriage of Dionysos and Ariadne (who is identified with Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty) essentially became our lesson about the creative Imagination for so called nonmystics. With this marriage as our answer, our question implicitly shifted from its explicit focus on Corbin's

texts and Hillman's texts to a focus that sensed their presences from within a focus on the Dionysiac cosmos. Special attention, at this juncture, was given to Seaford's work on the evolution of tragedy from its roots in mystery-cult initiation ritual, and to Euripides' "The Bacchae", as a dramatization of the myth that explains the foundation and practices of Dionysiac mystery-cult. With this move, the theatrical element in Corbin's and Hillman's texts could be explored through an explicit connection between mysticism and theatre.

Intriguingly, the piecemealing—the gathering—the revisiting experience of recurrent creation gifted by our methodological approach, mirrored the contents of our research material. For instance, our hermeneutic experience mimicked the mystic initiation process before we even knew that mystic initiation would become a crucial player in our inquiry. Additionally, our research process set us on a course of gathering and piecing together a collection of scattered bones, and this process mirrored the content of our findings in myth. We might ask ourselves whether one was the cause of the other, or whether both belong to an encompassing whole and collaborative effort beneath our level of conscious awareness. Perhaps both and all are true. Perhaps each of them caused the other, and perhaps they are also part of an encompassing collaborative whole. This response honors the thematic presences of bothness unveiled throughout this work.

In the conclusive exploration which follows we shall set on a course of collecting the bones of our research herein, by reflecting on the narrative flow of our research journey from Chapter 4 on. Along the way, we shall imagine how these bones might contribute to our emerging vision of a mystic-theatre informed by Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress. The form of this vision presents itself to us at this stage of our development, in pieces, in dismembered fragments, in mere flashes, like the flashes of light that the

mystic sees in the preparatory stages of his spiritual maturation which eventually lead to a full figured apparitional vision of his Angel.

#### **A Gathering of Mazdean Bones: Recapping Chapter 4**

##### **The first Mazdean bone: Envisioning theatrical practice as a spiritual practice.**

From the outset of this research our attention has been drawn to the theatrical imagery and practices embedded in the texts of our core authors. In Chapter 4 on Mazdaism, we explored this affinity through Corbin's analogy of the Mazdean myth as an eschatological dramaturgy which unfolds in the course of three great acts. The entire human race, as we imagined it, was here unveiled as a world of players in Ōhrmazd's liturgy. Drama, as such, was seen as a form of prayer that aims to mirror the divine Principles or Angels from which beings originate. The consummation of this process was viewed as the transformation and immortalization of the human being symbolized in the feminine Angel called Daēnā—the human's celestial "I." The script and plot of Ōhrmazd's dramatic liturgy enigmatically unfolded here as a battle—a battle with Ahriman—variously interpreted as a Contrary Power, as the Negator, the doubt, and the not-me-within-me.

Psyche's Stage, informed by these images might thus be envisioned as a liminal space in which individuation is sought: as a space where we, as individuals, can gather with the soul-aim of unveiling the a priori yearnings that necessitate our being. On Psyche's Stage our human battles—like Ōhrmazd's celestial battle—might be metaphorically fought as a play. And like the Fravartīs—who join the fight on terrestrial Earth to protect the world of Light where Ōhrmazd dwells—humans might join in



“fights” on Psyche’s Stage to protect the sacred dimension that penetrates the very world we live in.

**The second Mazdean bone: The mystic as a perspective.**

Having imagined theatrical practice as a spiritual practice through the medium of Ōhrmazd’s liturgy, we then turned to Corbin’s (1960/1977) essay on the Earth as Angel to further our search on behalf of the nonmystic. This writing prompted us to address the Earth and the beings and things of the Earth as Person: as “Who” rather than “what.” All things were thus viewed as the epiphany of their Angels. Ordinary things in the terrestrial world, as Persons, became visions, and our definitive sense of the mystic began to shift. The difference between the mystic and the nonmystic became a matter of perspective, and the mystic perspective emerged as one in which the Earth and beings and things of the Earth were engaged with as epiphanic appearances of their Angels. In a preliminary practice that incorporated this sensibility, we reimagined a lived event in our own life as a reflection of our Angel from within a fictional style.

Psyche’s Stage might thus begin with similar exercises which apply our reimagined definitive sense of the mystic to the development of its scripts and characters from within the sensibility of fiction. Aligning with this perspective, all things and beings of the Earth could be potentially engaged with and embodied as Persons and visions of their Angels—visions which long to be known as such. Psyche’s Stage would thus become a search that aims to unveil Earth’s Angels—its primordial essences and yearnings. This search (because visions always appear to the mystic in a form which is appropriate to his own level of development) would also be a search that aims to unveil the mystic-actress’s own Angel—her own sense of purpose to herself.

### **Finding blood in the idea of feminine consciousness.**

Continuing our journey, we deepened our sense of Mazdaism, as it was once practiced, through an exploration of Spendarmatīkīh (the process of assuming the mode of being of Spenta Armaiti, Archangel of the Earth). We likened this discipline to the actor's preparation for embodying a character. The complex web of Spenta Armaiti's familial roles and relationships in this exploration hinted at the profound significance of the idea of feminine consciousness which unfolded throughout our research from this point forward. Here we saw intimations that the attainment of Daēnā was marked by a transformation from masculine consciousness to feminine consciousness. This led to a supposition that the difference between the wisdom of feminine consciousness and the wisdom of masculine consciousness, as put forth in Corbin's essay, had something to do with the pure gaze of love attributed to the feminine. The themes of love, beauty, and feminine consciousness (characterized by bothness and undividedness), played an unrelenting role in our study thereafter.

In hindsight, these themes appear to us now as the life's blood which flows throughout the entire body of this research. As such, they most certainly have an essential bearing on all visions of Psyche's Stage.

### **The Bones of Avicennan and Suhrawardīan Lineages: Recapping Chapter 5**

**The first Avicennan bone: The soul's sense of incompleteness and aspiration to the still Unrealized.**

In Chapter 5, our brief sketch of Avicennism served our overarching purpose in three notable respects. First, it acquainted us with an idea of the Soul that (from our perspective) moves Corbin's sense of soul closer to Hillman's. In Avicennism, the

intellectual desire attributed to the Archangel Intelligences is viewed as “the intellectual act representing its good and its perfection to itself . . . thus actuating and realizing the cosmic Order” (Corbin, 1954/1988, p. 71). In contrast, “the eternal motion imparted to the sphere by the Soul expresses . . . an incompleteness, an unfulfillment, an aspiration toward the still Unrealized.” (p. 71). In our view, this description has intimations of Hillman’s restless, unsatisfied, and even pathological soul—intimations of a soul forever searching for something as yet undone, unseen, unmanifested. Seeing through this lens, we imagine that the Soul’s purpose (even in Corbin) resides in Hillmanian trenches—that tending these trenches is, in essence, the Soul’s job.

Psyche’s Stage, informed by these images and Hillman’s concern for soul, would thus incorporate a sense of this unfulfillment and incompleteness. It would embody our imperfections and aspirations toward the still Unrealized including the pains, sufferings, and distorted pathological leanings that necessarily accompany these aspirations.

Psyche’s Stage, placing itself between the at least partially eternally unknown reality of our celestial selves, and the reality of our current existence, would aspire to move each of them closer together, not by eradicating the one for the sake of the other, but instead by discovering and tending to the shared yearning between them.

**The second Avicennan bone: The return to source as a return to sovereign Beauty and Goodness and primordial Love.**

Corbin’s definition of the First Being of Avicenna as “sovereign Beauty and Goodness and primordial Love” (Corbin, 1954/1988p. 57) provided us with a sense of how this shared yearning between the Soul and the Archangel Intelligence might be recognized. If Beauty and Goodness and primordial Love, as one, are viewed as the

divine root and ruling Principle from which all beings spring, then the saving return of ta'wīl is a return to the Beauty and Goodness and primordial Love that all things are rooted in. The aim of ta'wīl might thus be imagined as an aspiration to embody, in essence to become, this Beauty and Goodness and primordial love.

Informed by this perspective, Psyche's Stage, in an effort toward bringing celestial and terrestrial realities closer together, would endeavor to lovingly unveil the Beauty and Goodness of the beings and stories it contains.

**Bits of a Dionysiac bone in Avicenna: Dismemberment and “re-membrance.”**

In sorting through the bones of our brief excursion into Avicennism, searching for bits that most poignantly contributed to our vision of Psyche's Stage, we stumbled upon a hint of Dionysiac imagery embedded within it. Here in the procession of angelic Intelligences of Avicennism, the Tenth Intelligence, lacking the energy to engender one Intelligence, one Soul, and one heaven like those Intelligences who came before him, splinters into the multitude of human souls and terrestrial matter. The human race, seen through this lens, is as such, the dismembered Tenth Intelligence. We have also witnessed this thematic presence of dismemberment in the myth of Gayōmart from Mazdaism. The somewhat veiled images of this recurring dismemberment theme in Corbin provides us with yet another sense of connection between the celestial imagery of his work and harsher, more visceral correspondences in the Dionysiac world. Notably, in both worlds, dismemberment is followed by re-membrance.

Psyche's Stage can thus be imagined in terms of a cyclical process of dismemberment and remembrance which simultaneously expresses itself on multiple dimensions. These expressions might draw upon different styles of delivery: different

rhythms, tones, types of movements, gestures, dialects, and linguistic personalities that strip us of our habitual selves in the process of piecing together alternative ways of being and seeing. These piecemealed constructions might then offer up new insights and fresh perspectives that are potentially transformative for earthly and heavenly being alike.

**Sifting through bones in the Suhrawardīan lineage.**

Following our brief summary of Avicennism, we touched upon the Suhrawardīan lineage and theosophy of light for two primary reasons. Regarding the first, our intention was to engender a sense of personalized connection between the Actress and Corbin's mystic works by seeing our own lived experience of flashing lights in a meditation class, through Corbin's interpretation of the theosophy of light. Our second reason was to become familiar with this mystic lineage as a preparation for exploring its seeming correspondence with Pentheus's experience in "The Bacchae" which symbolically represents the experience of the mystic initiand.

This brief exploration of the Suhrawardīan lineage and theosophy of light supported our vision of Psyche's Stage by making archetypal connections between the worlds of mysticism and theatre. These connections, as unveiled here, were related to a practice of embodying compassion via a shared suffering between differentiated beings. Psyche's Stage might thus be imagined as a place where the actress becomes the mystic in the act of embodying the world's suffering as her own, while the world of the play simultaneously embodies her suffering as its own.

**The Dionysiac Boneyard: Recapping Chapter 6**

In Chapter 6 we formally introduced Dionysos into our study. In our initial draft of this dissertation, most of our focus up to this point had been on Corbin's works. At the

time, we viewed this chapter as a way of bringing Hillman and the Actress into the mix via a topic that pertained to both of them. Given our prior explorations of theatrical imagery and practices within the mystic focus of Corbin, this seemed appropriate. Nevertheless, we had not anticipated that Dionysos would present us with such rich and enigmatic correspondences to Corbin's works. As Dionysos became more and more significant to every aspect of the study, Chapter 6 became a means of introducing Dionysiac themes, images, myths, and perspectives that would prepare the reader for chapters 10 through 12 which focused on pertinent aspects of Seaford's research on Dionysos. It was here that mysticism and theatre would come explicitly together.

Initially, we resisted plunging into the depths of Ariadne's role in the mythical healing fiction that had begun to emerge via the paradoxically unifying myth of Dionysos. The complexity of our unfolding plot had been growing to an overwhelming extent since the moment we set foot on the research path and, quite frankly, we felt an anxious need to contain it. But Ariadne simply would not allow us to diminish her role, so our introduction to Dionysos necessarily included an introduction to Ariadne. It should be obvious by now that her persistence was warranted. The figure of Ariadne has emerged over the course of this journey as one of our primary bridges between the mystic worlds of Corbin's focus and the Dionysiac world.

With Ariadne in mind, we imagine Psyche's Stage as a similar bridge between the spiritual and physical worlds. Additionally, Ariadne—as the Mistress of the labyrinth—has provided us with an image that mirrored our writing and researching experience. The Ariadnean bridge and labyrinth both appear to us now as symbols that indicate how Psyche's Stage might appear and unfold in practice.

In our exploration of Hillman's writings on Dionysos we focused on themes that overlapped with those of Corbin's work. At the end of this discussion we called upon Hillman's (1972b) poetic image of a Dionysos who "rules the borderlands of our psychic geography" (p. 275). We likened this psychic geography to the spiritual geography put forth in Corbin's work on the creative Imagination of Ibn 'Arabī by way of a prominent theme that poignantly populates both worlds. This theme can be variously expressed via the words "bothness," "the Undivided," and "feminine consciousness," as well as other nuanced sophianic terms that dwell in the overarching idea that encompasses them.

The scattered bones in Chapter 6, as they relate to Psyche's Stage, illuminated themselves further in later chapters, most notably in Chapters 10 through 12 which focused on Seaford's interpretation of the Dionysiac cosmos. Based upon the correspondences that unfolded from this point forward, we imagine Psyche's Stage as an environment where the meaning of bothness, of the Undivided, and of feminine consciousness can be explored in embodied practices informed by Corbinian, Hillmanian, and Dionysian perspectives.

### **Ibn 'Arabian Bones: Recapping Chapter 7**

**The first Ibn 'Arabian bone: Intimations of the dialectic of Love as a twofold individuation process.**

In Chapter 7, bothness and undividedness referred to "an essential community between visible and invisible beings" (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 106), which is the principle upon which Ibn 'Arabī's dialectic of love is grounded. This essential community is eternally established in the act and phenomenon referred to as divine sympathy or divine compassion. Definitively speaking, we described this sympathy and compassion as the

reciprocal aspiration and interdependence between paired entities that connote a relationship between the Creator and created beings. The divine Names and beings who name them; the Beloved and the lover; and the Lord and his vassal are some of these designated pairs. Divinity, at its very core, even from its all-encompassing position beyond all being, was characterized as a twofold simultaneous and eternal yearning: as a sadness and aspiration for self-knowledge through and in being (which is instantly realized), and a concomitant nostalgic longing to return to the source beyond this being.

Allowing this overview to inform our vision of Psyche's Stage, we imagine the world of the play and the actress-mystic as one of these divinely yoked pairs. This pairing, situated on stage between terrestrial and celestial world realities, would embody potentialities that respond to both of these realms. The relationship between the world of the play and the actress-mystic, modeled after the relationship between Creator and created beings, would essentially emerge as a reciprocal aspiration and interdependence which expresses a mutual sadness and yearning to know oneself. Seen through this lens, the aim of Psyche's Stage appears to us as a twofold individuation process for the actress-mystic (who represents individual) and the encompassing play (who represents the world).

**The second Ibn 'Arabīan bone: The Angel's Presence is in that which we love.**

In Ibn 'Arabī's system we saw that the essential community between visible and invisible beings was encountered first hand via the dialectic of love: an encounter through which the mystic sees a vision of his god. Here we learned that Ibn 'Arabī distinguished between god in general and the particular Lord "personalized in an individualized and



undivided relation with his vassal of love” (Corbin, 1958/1997, p. 94). The epiphanic figure who appeared to the mystic as the culmination of the dialectic of love was this particularized Lord and not the all-encompassing Divinity beyond all being. It was only through knowing his Lord that the mystic knew God. And the mystic knew his Lord only through knowing himself. The mystic, we were told, knew himself through that which he loved.

We imagine that the participants in Psyche's Stage, thus informed, would approach its twofold individuation process via a perspective which gravitates towards that which they love, so that they too might move closer to knowing themselves, their Angels, and their relationship to God (the whole) in general.

**A third Ibn ‘Arabīan bone: The Undivided as the player of both roles.**

At a certain point within the process of the dialectic of love, the mystic's soul comes to realize that it loves not through itself but only through its Lord. From the soul's point of view its Lord of love is “the organ of *its* perception” (p. 151). But from His point of view, “the soul itself is His organ of perception” (p. 151). The Lord is the organ of the soul's loving perception, and the soul is the Lord's organ of perception. They see through each other but both are none other than Him. He is the Lover and the Beloved. “It is in His essence to be *both* one and the other . . . and the eternal dialogue between the *two*” (p. 152). As one (or shall we say, as the Undivided) both play both roles.

Informed by this snapshot of the dialectic of love, we envision Psyche's Stage as a space where actress-mystics have an affinity for switching roles—for discovering and embodying the Angel in one character, then switching places with opposing characters—embodying aspects of the Angel in and as each.

**A fourth Ibn ‘Arabīan bone: The image of the Feminine Creator.**

Corbin has told us that the mystic prepares for the dialectic of love which culminates as a vision of his Lord, through contemplation of an effective image of the Godhead. He has said that the Image of feminine being—of the Creative Feminine or Feminine Creator—is the most effective Image for this meditation because it incorporates both of His active and passive, His creative and receptive aspects, while the Image of masculine being embodies only one of the two. When the mystic successfully shapes his entire being to the receptive and creative Image of the Godhead, a “second birth” occurs. It is only in the sequel to this second birth that the mystic is invested with the secret on which the divinity of his Lord depends.

Informed by this image, we imagine that the actress-mystic of Psyche’s Stage embodies her character as its Creator and simultaneously as its child. In a similar vein, she enters the world of the play as a child of that world and concomitantly as its mother-Creator. It is from within this perspective that she might expect the twofold individuation, which is the aim of Psyche’s Stage, to unfold.

**Bones that join worlds.**

Nearing the end of Chapter 7, we came to imagine the mutual presences of bothness, of the Undivided, of the call for the restoration of feminine consciousness, and of the image of a second birth (all of which populate both Corbin’s interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s dialectic of love and the Dionysian cosmos) as an invitation to view these two distinct worlds as different dimensions of one multidimensional universe, drama, and story. With this move, we gifted ourselves with the license to call upon particularly resonant aspects of either camp for guidance in accordance with their correspondences to

the presences in our lives as they appeared in each moment. Psyche's Stage, we imagine, would be afforded with this same gift.

### **Ariadnean Bones: Recapping Chapter 8**

#### **The first Ariadnean bone: Joining worlds from within a fictional sensibility.**

Ariadne, having presented herself as a particularly poignant bridge between the higher and lower dimensions respectively tended to in Corbin's and Hillman's works, became the focus of Chapter 8. This chapter eventually emerged as a series of voices who variously explored Ariadne's story from within a fictional sensibility. Our threefold intention here, was to familiarize the reader with stories from the myth of Ariadne—to bring the worlds of Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress closer together in a Dionysiac world—and to evoke an awareness of fictional sensibility as a potentially imaginal sensibility for nonmystics. Experientially, this was accomplished. The richness of the tri-unified Dionysiac cosmos constituted by these exercises in fiction was deeply moving to us.

We imagine that Psyche's Stage would draw from this fictional sensibility expanding upon the world-joining art of literary approaches via the spoken word and embodied practices moving printed contents off the page and onto a stage as a play and exchange with others.

#### **The second Ariadnean bone: The center of the labyrinth**

In this chapter, we also highlighted the significance of the labyrinth image within the context our work. Kerényi's interpretation of the labyrinth, as a place that opened to a path of light when its inhabitant reached the center and turned, seemed to mirror our experience of the research process. In some respects, the Ariadnean fictions, which held

our three key dialogical voices together in a single world, struck us as a turning point: as a moment through which we reached our center within the work and turned towards its light. The labyrinth—as a dark, confusing, disorienting, life threatening place—and the light at its center strikes us as analogous to the mystic light in darkness (or black light) discussed in our chapter on mystery-cult. This association strengthens our sense of Ariadne as a bridge that brings the worlds of Corbin's focus and the Dionysiac world together in a unified cosmos. Allowing these associations to work on us, the twofold individuation process of Psyche's Stage strikes us as a labyrinthine form in search of its center and black light.

### **The Bones of Beauty: Recapping Chapter 9**

#### **Corbinian bones.**

Throughout our inquiry, we have referred to the profound significance of beauty in both Corbin's and Hillman's works. Chapter 9 was thus devoted to the meaning of beauty seen through their perspectives. In Corbin, beauty is seen as a divine and spiritual power that creates love in man. It carries the mystic beyond mere appearances to the imaginal dimension which leads to self knowledge. It is "theophany par excellence." Corbin (1997/1958) tells us that, a "form of being which is invested with Beauty . . . is the image of the divine Compassion, creator of the being by which it was itself created" (p. 163). A being who is invested with Beauty is, as such, a "manifestation of the Creative Feminine" (p. 166). The act of contemplating the sacral Beauty in things is thus a meditation on the Godhead via an image of the Creative Feminine—which is a meditation that Corbin recommends as a preparatory step to the dialectic of love wherein the mystic sees a vision of his Lord. In Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology the divine Sadness and

Hidden Treasure contemplates his beauty through the world of beings which He creates as mirrors, and so it follows that we might mirror Him via a similar process—contemplating our beauty (which is ultimately His beauty) in a theatrical world of beings that we create as mirrors—that we create so that we too might come to know the Hidden Treasure which longs to be known—which longs to be unveiled on every dimension of being as Beauty. Here, it helps to remember that Corbin seemingly equated Beauty with Goodness and primordial love in his treatment of Avicennism. The work of Psyche's Stage seen through this lens is thus the work of unveiling the Beauty and Goodness and primordial love that exists in all things and necessitates their being.

**The bone of fear and beauty.**

Continuing our investigation, we discovered an enigmatic connection between beauty and fear which is touched upon in the writings of both Corbin and Hillman. In Hillman, this connection was explored in terms of the Sublime, as experienced in the midst of extreme displays of nature. This fearful element of beauty seems especially pertinent given Dionysos's connection with dangerous elements in nature and our later investigations of fear as it pertained to mystery-cult.

Attempting to enrich our sense of Corbin's writing on the association of fear and Beauty, we teased out the relationships between members of fear's etymological family. In this exercise, we learned that the definition given to the Indo-European root (*per-3*), from which the word *fear* derives, is: "to try [or] risk" (Per-3, 1992, p. 2119). Other important derivatives of this root are "*peril, experience, experiment, expert, and empiric*" (p. 2119). Following Corbin and Hillman, it seems appropriate that we should take this fearful aspect of beauty (and its linguistic family) into account when we think about

Psyche's Stage as a practice of unveiling the Beauty and Goodness and primordial love that exists in all things. Fear, as we learned from our exploration of mystery-cult rituals, has transformative properties and the aim of Psyche's Stage, as a twofold individuation process, is—after all—transformation. The process of embodying and unveiling the Angel in the characters we play (especially those who mirror the egregious and marginalized classes amongst us) is risky, on a number of levels. This unveiling destructs, at least for the duration of the play and possibly beyond, the protective walls upon which our society is built, by exposing the inequities that we support—sometimes willingly, sometimes not—sometimes through our actions, and sometimes through a lack of action. The unveiling of Beauty and Goodness and primordial love in all things is threatening to those who seemingly profit from the veil and this potentially exposes the exposers to danger. On a more personal level, the work of unveiling beauty's depths is demanding. It takes time, effort, and dedication. As is true with any profound learning process, it exposes one to numerous vulnerabilities and potential humiliations. This exposure is admittedly frightening.

**Hillmanian bones of beauty.**

Following our exploration of beauty's association with fear, we directed our attention to Hillman's archetypal move in *epistrophē*, carrying the theme of Beauty back to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. Since Ariadne has been identified with Aphrodite, and even a mention of Ariadne was scarce in our readings of Hillman's work, this move afforded us an opportunity to imagine Ariadne through the lens of Hillman's perspective by way of his writings on beauty and this goddess. Aphrodite was here envisioned as both the soul itself, and the revelation of soul's essence within things.

Seeing through Hillman's lens, Aphrodite became both visible and sensuous. The goddess's smile shined forth as the subjectivity of objects on the face of things bestowing eachness (like Ariadne), in a pluralistic cosmos. Aphrodite was viewed as "the luster of each particular event—its clarity its particular brightness." (Hillman, 1992b, p. 43).

Hillman (1992b) has said that: "all things as they display their innate nature present Aphrodite's goldenness; they shine forth and as such are aesthetic" (p. 44). According to his perspective, beauty is sense perception as it appears to the imagination. "It is appearance itself" (p. 45). Likening beauty to an aesthetic instinct, Hillman encouraged us to imagine it as a "sense of taste in relation with things" and as "primordial aesthetic reactions of the heart" (p. 39).

These descriptions prove instructive when Corbin's talk of celestial Angels, Archangel Intelligences, Fravartir, and Daēnās seem far beyond anything that pertains to us. They gift us with a way of seeing for the sake of soul, here on Earth, further illuminating the unveiling work of Psyche's Stage. They enrich our view of Ariadne's thread and light as it appears and steers us in our day-to-day life.

Continuing in this day-to-day vein, we turned to the myth of Hephaestus, as an example of beauty's appearance in the odd, unglorified, and marginalized. This myth would significantly come to our attention in a later discussion on Dionysos's association with communality, but in this moment, it simply asked us to "imagine that beauty is permanently given, inherent to the world in its data, there on display always." (Hillman, 2006f, p. 178). This premise directed us to Hillman's observation that beauty's radiance shines forth more brilliantly in certain events "that aim to seize it and reveal it, such as art works" (p. 178). Our hearts skipped a beat as he suggested that a better understanding of

Beauty might be gleaned by “enter[ing] the mind of the ‘different,’ long . . . approach of the artist” (Hillman, 2016, p. 322). It was in the midst of this conversation that our research explicitly called for a vision of non-elitist mystic-theatre which opened the role of actor and mystic up to ordinary persons in a sacral practice. Here Ariadne’s thread and light steered us back to the Dionysiac world where an explicit connection between mysticism and theatre could be explored.

### **Dionysiac Bones in Seaford: Recapping Chapter 10**

#### **Three Dionysiac bones: Nature, transformation, identification.**

In Chapters 10 through 12, we looked to Seaford’s research and Euripides’ tragedy “The Bacchae” as a means of exploring this connection. At the same time, we continued to foster a space where Hillman, Corbin, and the Actress might find a home within the Dionysian cosmos by acknowledging and deepening our sense of their likenesses as they appeared within this exploration. In Chapter 10, we discussed three key themes associated with Dionysos: nature, communality, and epiphany. Each of these themes (along with the theme of death, discussed in Chapter 11) were absorbed in Dionysiac mystery-cult and later in the development of drama at Dionysiac festivals. Our investigation of these themes, and Seaford’s work in general, focused on aspects related to the topic of enactment. In our exploration of Dionysos’s association with nature, two pertinent themes arose: transformation and identification. In respect to the first, we learned that Dionysos’s association with nature finds its expression in the cultivation of raw nature and the synthesis of nature and culture.

Regarding the second, we observed that Dionysos has a tendency to become his associations. He becomes the vine, the wine, the bull, the lion, the earthquake, and the



lightning. His associations are his epiphanic appearances. Going forward, these two themes—transformation and identification—were explored as they applied to the Dionysiac world more broadly.

Psyche's Stage informed by these observations would aspire to become a comparable force of Dionysiac creativity—embodying that which currently is, sensing its a priori nature—its uncultivated form as an essential yearning, and from this place of knowing transform itself into the being that it longs to be.

**The bone of communality: Inclusive and paradoxically exclusive.**

In a section on communality we discussed Dionysos's desire to initiate entire communities into the worship of his cult. His characteristic inclusiveness, illustrated by the embrace of weak and marginalized populations, was contrasted by the seemingly contradictory practice of secret rituals which excluded all but an inner circle of female initiands and initiates.

In our effort to imagine the tangible operations of Psyche's Stage put into practice, we find ourselves bumping up against a similar paradox. The intimacy and concentrated devotion represented by Dionysos's thiasos and inner circle of initiates certainly offers something of value that a more general form of public communality cannot. When we begin to imagine a non-elitist mystic-theatre that invites an entire community to participate as actors and mystics, related concerns (further discussed in what follows) arise. As former actresses, the particular quality of theatrical work matters to us. Our vision of a theatre that opens the role of actress and mystic up to all, is not akin to our perception of community theatre, various manifestations of activist theatre, or volunteer productions as vehicles to raise money for charities. In many cases (not all, of

course) these venues, lack an essential element that (in our experience) contributes to the powerful and sacred potential of theatre. For now, we shall simply identify this element as a concern for beauty.

### **The bone of epiphany.**

A discussion of various private and public forms of communality prepared us for a later exploration of Seaford's view of tragedy as an opening up of mystery-cult to members of the Greek city-state polis in general. Descriptions of epiphany in its public manifestations supported our earlier inference that all vision can be viewed as visions—as visionary entities. According to Seaford (2006), “epiphany occurs when deity or its manifestations is perceived by one or more of the senses” (p. 39). Seeing through this definitive lens, the arrival of a statue of Dionysos in a procession was viewed as an epiphany as long as the spectators imagined themselves to be seeing the god.

Based on inscription evidence from the third century AD, Seaford (2006) has characterized Dionysos as the god “most given to epiphany,” the god most likely “to manifest himself among humankind and to do so in various forms” (p. 39). References to Dionysiac possession (in “The Bacchae”, for instance) suggest that Dionysos may also “be thought to be present within in his worshippers” (p. 39) and Seaford has suggested that the miraculous appearance of the vine or wine in myths of Dionysos may “indicate his *presence*, or even his embodiment in what appears” (p. 39). This suggestion reminded us of Hillman's view of beauty as the mere appearance of things. Taken together with Aphrodite as the personification of beauty, and Ariadne as an identification of Aphrodite, we imagined the couple (or marriage) of Dionysos and Ariadne as *their* presence or embodiment in what appears.

A further exploration of epiphany revealed two contexts in which it tends to occur: ritual and crisis. We also learned that epiphany might occur in response to invocation. Mystery-cult and performance which are based upon myths as models of transformation, were thus viewed as a form of invocation—as a means of calling upon a god or gods—and concomitantly as a potential medium for epiphany through which the gods might appear in response. Psyche's Stage, as we imagine it, would serve a similar function.

### **Gathering the Bones of Mystery-Cult: Recapping Chapter 11**

In Chapter 11, our discussion of mystery-cult began with a sampling of evidence indicating that some form of dramatic performance was involved in Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation. Based on this evidence, we compiled an idea of various aspects that may have contributed to initiatory performances. In general terms, these included ecstatic dance; the use of masks and costumes to embody and evoke the god and his mythical companions; and dramatic enactments in which the themes of birth, death, and rebirth were central. Further imagining the initiatory experience via an exploration of Seaford's research within the context of "The Bacchae", we followed the character of Pentheus as a symbolic representation of the paradigmatic initiand.

In Seaford's view the aim of Dionysiac mystery-cult initiation ritual was to assist the initiand in preparing for his eventual transition into the next world. This ritual was characterized by the initiand's exposure to a frightening deathlike tribulation as an uninitiated outsider, which led to an epiphany of the god, and a blissful transformation through which the initiand became an insider and initiated member of the group. During

our exploration of this process we illuminated various stages and characteristics of it, as exemplified within the text of “The Bacchae”.

### **The Bones of Resistance, Confusion, Disorientation, Anxiety, and Fear**

From this investigation, we learned that the initiand's characteristic resistance to the cult was incorporated in the initiatory process. The evocation of confusion, disorientation, anxiety, and fear was stimulated by various techniques including the use of riddling language and mirrors. Intimations of both of these techniques were present in the plot of “The Bacchae”. In the progression of this tragic text, the escalation of Pentheus's initiatory tribulation is expressed in epiphanic imagery that we associated with aspects of Corbin's work in *The Man of Light*. The mystic image of light in darkness, referred to as black light by Corbin, was the central image from which other related analogies were made. Pentheus's vision of two red suns within the context of this black light symbolically represented in a prior scene, was likened, for instance, to the visionary apperception of a “red sun standing out on a black background” (Corbin, 1971/1994, p. 117) discussed by Najm Kobrā.

From here we engaged in a further discussion of various forms of enactment in mystery-cult as described by Seaford. These included the use of masks, the activity of dance, the practice of gender reversal, the custom of dressing up as mythical figures of the god's thiasos, and the enactment of death through animal sacrifice whereby the initiand was identified with the sacrificial victim. In a later phase of the cult's evolution this transformation may have been sought in the practice of enacting Dionysos's dismemberment by the Titans followed by his subsequent rebirth.

Chapter 11 concluded with a synopsis of “The Bacchae’s” remaining plot and an excursion likening the story of Gayōmart in Mazdaism to dismemberment stories in the Dionysiac cosmos. Each of these are characterized by mothers who were tragically put in the position of reassembling the bones of their dead children.

Our discussion of mystery-cult’s potential influence on Psyche’s Stage will be postponed until the conclusion of our brief recap of Chapter 12 which focused on the evolution of Greek tragedy. The influence of these two topics will be explored in aggregate since the key features of Dionysiac mystery-cult, as discussed here, were absorbed in one form or another by formalized drama at the City Dionysia.

### **Gathering the Bones of Greek Tragedy: Recapping Chapter 12**

In Chapter 12, we explored Seaford’s view that Greek drama performed at Dionysian festivals developed, at least in part, as an opening up of secret mystery-cult rituals to the citizens of the city-state polis in Athens. Dionysiac communality—expressed in mystery-cult as a dissolution of boundaries between the living and the dead—was expressed in drama as a corresponding human “need for a community to feel itself united” (Seaford, 2006, p. 97).

The inclusiveness of human communities was also explored as paradoxically exclusive, by the very fact that nonmembers of the so called unifying entity are definitively excluded from it. The entity engendering a sense of wholeness and belonging is, after all, only a subset of some larger wholeness, and the interests of one whole were often seen as detrimental to a larger more encompassing one. A tension between communalities could arise from this situation. These tensions could emerge between the communality of a family household and that of the polis community, for instance. During

a crucial time in the development of tragedy, this tension between communalities was expressed in “a political transition from tyrannical rule to communal well-being of polis cult” (Seaford, 2006, p. 97). In Seaford’s view, tragedy thus “develop[ed] the *political* significance latent in Dionysiac myth” (p. 97).

Seeing tragedy through this lens, we envisioned the performance of tragedy as a response to our research question in two ways. First, we imagined that tragedy, as an opening up of secret mystery-cult rites to members of the polis at large, was a dissolution of the boundaries between the mystic and nonmystic. Building upon on this idea, we imagined that the convergence of the political and the spiritual in the tradition of tragedy constituted an imaginal world through which the spiritual yearnings and principles that necessitated our manifest being could dialogue with manifested beings. Then we explored Seaford’s argument, which supports the stance that tragedy can be viewed as Dionysiac despite the fact that Dionysos (with the exception of “The Bacchae”) does not appear in the extant tragedies. Taking this stance, the adjectival sense of Dionysos surfaces, not only in the myth of god, but also in the presence of Dionysiac archetypes or patterns as they appear in other myths and life itself.

During this exploration, we were also struck by Seaford’s view of tragedy’s mediating function during the historical period when widespread monetization in Greece was having a profound effect on traditional values and customs. Within the tragic world of the play, the tension between these traditions and contradictory innovations could be embodied as one story from within the perspectives of all involved. The gains and losses of societal movement could dialogue with each other. Perspectives of communality could be expressed amidst the counter movement toward individualism and promotion of self

interest. The synchronistic correspondence between the effects of monetization during this period, and its manifestations in extreme capitalism today, heightened our sense that the tragic form might have something to contribute to our current revisioning activities. While our gathering of bones from chapters 4 through 10 provided us with mostly philosophical and intentional support for a vision of Psyche's Stage, the bones of mystery-cult and Greek tragedy provide us with an additional sense of actual practices and tools that potentially inform our vision. They make the vision more tangible—more concrete. They provide us with ideas about how we might actually begin and what we might actually do. They instill us with visions of what mystic-theatre productions might actually look like. But it is only within the context of philosophical and intentional support that these practices and tools become specifically oriented toward mystic-theatre. In and of themselves, these practices and tools might pertain to theatre, in general. The use of masks, dance, costumes, initiatory props, music, riddling language, mirrors, and gender reversal; the practice of playing multiple roles; and the enactment of myth and death do not make theatre mystic in and of themselves. The philosophic intention and the tools are both necessary, and these specific tools are merely sources of inspiration. They are not the requirements of Psyche's Stage.

Having devoted this chapter to gathering the bones of our research as a means of informing our vision of Psyche's Stage, we now feel compelled to an additional backwards glance for further support. In the section that follows, we return to an excerpt from an essay written during the first quarter of our doctoral studies. At the time, we had had minimal exposure to Hillman's work and no knowledge of Corbin or Seaford, but the theatrical space and practice that we actively imagined, even then, has many attributes in

common with the vision which has unfolded throughout this research. At that time, we called this space “The Sacred Stage.” We are including our description of it below, and will follow with a discussion of its relevance to our exploration of mystery-cult and tragedy.

**Actively imagining The Sacred Stage: A narrative fantasy.**

The sign outside a building reads “The Sacred Stage.” The playing space inside is a theatre with seating for three hundred sixty five participants. The arena fans out like a three-quarter round bowl that cups a thrust stage. There are seven aisles that lead down to the seats. In addition to multiple design possibilities for exits and entrances via the upstage backing, there are two vomitories that lead offstage from the downstage area and into a basement. There is a camouflaged trap door in the floor mid-stage as well. The lights are hung on a grid overhead and accessed via a catwalk. It is a fine theatre. This is a place where “actors” and “audience” and “Jungian analysts” are all players—where “actors” and “directors” and “analysts” simply set the scene and hint at possibilities. They guide the movement in meaningful directions with exercises that tease out metaphoric narrative. The performance here is not polished and perfected; it is process; it is always rehearsal; it is always improvised; it is play. People attend—whether they intend to actively participate or to watch—to be a part of the playing space.

On this particular evening, a woman descends from an audience seat into the pit of the thrust stage. No one knows if she is an “actor” planted there or a “real audience member.” She reads from a scrap of paper that tells of a dream she had the night before.

“My mother I and are walking down a village sidewalk,” she says. “We happen upon a beaming father who opens his briefcase unveiling a baby. Wrapped from toes to



neck in a blanket of knit and topped by a knitted hat—she looks like an egg with eyes. My mother and I ‘ooh and ah.’ She lifts the child out of the briefcase. The eggshell blanket, like a second skin, is left behind. I pick it up—its eggshell shape still perfectly intact—and hold it up for the infant to see the soft pink knit insides and she giggles sweetly.”

As the woman recites her dream, others begin to play with the images in movement. She is handed a microphone and a piano player positioned upstage begins to play in the background of her words. The lights swim like a dream and the woman turns around a painting that she holds to her chest.

“I tried to paint the dream,” she says, “but I’m not an artist so I couldn’t do what I wanted to do. By the time, I managed to get a picture I could live with, this is what it turned into.”

The painting that she unveils depicts the upper torso and face of a young child with red hair and a bright red and green jester’s hat framed by a white background shaped like an egg and outlined with a framing reminiscent of gold leaf.

“The baby seems to have grown up,” she says, “And she kind of looks like a he...don’t you think?”

The sound booth operator plays a dissonant offbeat song reminiscent of carnival music and the players dance and contain the interplay of images that move them. Someone runs diagonally across the stage with arms stretched out wide on either side like a child pretending to be an airplane exclaiming “Weeeee!” as she leaps down the vomitory ramp to her left, and exits into the basement. “Weeeee!” Another person shouts,

holding his arms straight up. "Weee!" Someone spins around. "Weeee!" "Weeee!" A whole chorus of "Weees!" resound.

A man grabs a microphone center stage and sings a string of "wees," beginning with the giddy note of his companions' "wees" and trailing into lower and lower notes. Finally landing on a low and sober "wee," he says, "Weee...are the ninety nine percent!" He grabs a stick and militantly stomps it on the ground as he marches pulling his knees upright and barking like a martinet, "We are the ninety nine percent; we are the ninety nine percent." Others join in and play along.

A spotlight operator, in the meantime, shines his light on the woman who had earlier recited her dream. She sits on the steps that surround the perimeter of the stage, staring quietly at her painting. Occasionally, she glances at the marching brigade, but she keeps returning to the image of the child jester framed by an egg with gold leaf trim.

An audience member notices silent tears streaming down her face. He walks onto the stage with a sense of command, and takes the microphone away from the ringleader of the ninety nine percent chanters. "Quiet in the house"; he says, "Quiet in the house."

Silence presides and the march turns to stillness as he walks downstage, and holds the microphone up to the woman sitting on the sideline staring at her painting. She looks up at him with wide wet eyes, and then she faces the painting out towards the audience as if to put them in conversation with each other. A small childlike voice swallowing its tears gulps and says, "I am not the ninety nine percent."

Center stage, a woman repeats her. "I am not the ninety nine percent." She pauses then hops to her right and says, "But I am the ninety nine percent." Then hops back, "I

am not,” and jumps to the right again, “Yes, I am” Her arms reach right, then left, then right.

A man nuzzles up to her back. His arms reach out from beneath her armpits to become hers. She reaches right and he goes left. “Yes” she says, and he says, “No.” They split as they reach in opposite directions and they dance the story of “yes” and “no” in dialogue with each other. The man takes the painting and dances with it as his mask, and the painter joins the dance. The painting looks to the audience and speaks again. “I am both,” it says.

**Our postscript comments to the fantasy: A continued imagining.**

Directly following the narrative fantasy excerpted above, we included the following commentary in our essay as a continued imagining of this theatrical medium.

I do not expect that this exercise in active imagination has explicitly laid out the details or scrutinized the complexities of creating a Sacred Stage where the soulful characters and questions of a community engage at playing seriously together. I do hope, however, that it hints at possibilities. I imagine small Sacred Stage workshops where people begin to learn the tools, etiquette, and sensibility of intimate creative engagement within a group. As these students enter into the larger performance space, I imagine them along with their teachers: creative artists, directors, and Jungian analysts, encouraging and guiding the audience by example and instruction. I imagine them setting the tone, and educating others about the subtleties of holding a creative space in community. I imagine this inchoate form of serious play discovering the contents of its tool box in its predecessors' practices, borrowing from a variety of expressive arts

modalities, and therapeutic institutions that incorporate them. I imagine the Sacred Stage, not as a novelty act to be experienced once like the latest Broadway show, but as a practice—as a place where people enter into an individuation process that becomes both personal and transpersonal—a place where the rational and irrational discover the intimate expansive dance that tends to Anima Mundi.

**“The fantasy of the Sacred Stage” in dialogue with Seaford’s research on mystery-cult and tragedy.**

In revisiting this fantasy of the Sacred Stage, we are struck by the uncanny presence of our current research findings embedded within it. We are especially drawn, in this moment, however, to its inclusion of both the specialist and the lay person as participants. Ongoing “Sacred Stage” workshops which provide opportunities for intensive learning, exploration, and innovative discovery are analogous in some respects to mystery-cult rituals. Both offer the boon of a more intimate environment and support for deepening one’s commitment in a concentrated practice. Just as mystery-cult contributed to the discipline of public performance in Greece, we imagine that workshop participants and specialists would contribute to Psyche’s Stage theatrical performances, imbuing them with a sense of aesthetic instinct (beauty, in other words) and instilling this sensibility in more novice participants by way of example and instruction. Beauty is key to the effectiveness and draw of this theatrical medium because beauty lures us into love and love is a mediating power through which transformation takes place.

## **Implications of the Research and Suggestions for Further Methodological Development**

In this final chapter, we have gathered the bones of our research journey, viewing them as visionary objects, as flashes of light that inform our inchoate vision of Psyche's Stage. These flashes make impressions, but the bones, as they appear to us now, are rather illusive. They resist our efforts to shape them into a cohesive whole. They yearn for an embodied approach to the archetypal, philosophical, spiritual gold they hold. All our attempts to sum the vision up fail us. The writer within us is very uncomfortable with this resistance but the Actress thinks it is altogether appropriate. The Actress says that Psyche's Stage longs to discover a more cohesive sense of herself in collaboration with others through embodied exploration in workshop and production settings over time through trial and error.

As we try to envision how this process might begin, an image of "The Bacchae" comes to mind. We imagine that a performance workshop that explores "The Bacchae" through the lens of this research, then moves to a larger venue inviting and encouraging some form of audience participation may be a fascinating place to start. We are particularly drawn to the idea of reimagining the choral structure of tragedy to encourage participation among audience members in a way that concomitantly fosters an aesthetic instinct and communality among the participants of Psyche's Stage.

A key concern of ours, which warrants attention in future research, is the need for discovering fresh ways of inspiring "non-actors" to embrace the participatory nature of Psyche's Stage on the one hand, and the need to instill a sense of aesthetic instinct in all participants, on the other hand. Psyche's Stage is, as we imagine it, is a medium for

serious play that seeks the illumination of beauty in all things, as part of an individuation process that reverberates on multiple dimensions of being. The fact that it emerges as an image of non-elitist mystic theatre which opens the role of actor and mystic up to the entire community, does not preclude the need for approaching it with a religious attitude which requires a reverence for and sensitivity to its transformative power. This concern admittedly emerges, in part, from a personal distaste as an audience member for various forms of participatory theatre: including community theatre, theatre which aims for reform in the arena of socially and politically oriented causes, and theatre produced by volunteers primarily to support charitable causes. In our experience, the cause writ large or layman casualness, tends to drown out the potentially transformative power of the theatrical medium itself in these venues. The magic and special something that holds us, engages us, transports us into an imaginal world that wants our attention becomes lost in these environments.

This is not to say that Psyche's Stage is nonpolitical. Tragedy, at least in Seaford's view, drew out the latent political significance of the Dionysiac. Our view of this significance is informed by Hillman's idea of political activism via an aesthetic response to the world. Works of art that aim to seize and illuminate the beauty of the world lure us into love with the world. While anger and fear might motivate us to fight the wrongs of society temporarily, these activating emotions are prone to burnout. Our efforts in love are more sustainable and enduring. Finding ways of luring the nonprofessional into participatory action and concomitantly fostering a sensitivity to the theatrical medium as an unveiling of beauty is, as such, a central concern for further Psyche's Stage research. This investigation would best be explored through

experimentation in intimate workshop settings and followed by theatrical productions that aim to include audience members in the making of the play.

### **Conclusion**

This hermeneutic research journey began with the premise that the fruits of Jung's and Corbin's works presuppose a literal visionary capacity which is far removed from the experience of most people. In Corbin, this capacity is associated with an apparitional imaginal world and creative Imagination depicted in Islamic Sūfism which is accessible only to mystics. From within this perspective Imagination creates autonomous beings who have existences that are not attached to the imaginer. Hillman's writings in archetypal psychology, which are profoundly influenced by both Jung and Corbin, approach the world of imagination from a literary perspective which is potentially more accessible to nonmystics. But Hillman's intriguing references to Corbin, which are metaphorically inclined, fall short of providing an explicit knowledge of Corbin's abstruse oeuvre. This research explored the works and hermeneutic approaches of Corbin and Hillman with the aim of learning something about the creative Imagination for nonmystics. Our dialogue between these two voices included a third figure, referred to as the Actress, who played a twofold role as representative of the researcher's own experience and an archetypal presence reflecting the Actress's more than personal essence within the world at large. This archetypal figure was a representative of the nonmystic whose connection to the numinous imaginal world of Corbin's focus was best described as an associative sense of numinosity experienced through acting. In the course of this research journey, these three voices traversed the worlds of Mazdaism, Avicennism, the Suhrawardīan theosophy of Light, and Ibn 'Arabīan Sūfism. From the

outset, the presence of theatre within textual images, mystical practices, and mythical plotlines began to appear.

This trail led to Hillman's writings on Dionysos, the god of Greek tragedy. As the journey unfolded, profound correspondences emerged between the Dionysiac cosmos and the distinct worlds where Corbin, Hillman, and the Actress were most at home. Our threefold dialectic thus became an exploration of the Dionysiac cosmos that incorporated their voices. This led to Seaford's research on Dionysos as a resource for drawing explicit connections between mysticism and theatre. In the course of this expedition our definitive sense of the mystic and mystic practice was opened up to those who formerly considered themselves nonmystics. A vision of mystic-theatre for today's world, began to emerge in the gathering of our findings along the way. We called this theatre Psyche's Stage.

Psyche's Stage, as informed by the vision of this research, has emerged as a space which fosters a twofold individuation process for the actress-mystic (who represents the individual) and the encompassing play (who represents the world). The essential aim of this process is to unveil the beauty and goodness of the beings and stories contained within the space of the play via love, and in so doing, to constitute a world of beings who unveil the a priori yearnings that necessitate our being. The ultimate goal of this process is based on an eschatological hope of manifesting our ideal selves. Psyche's Stage, as indicated by its name, always proceeds with a concern for soul in mind. The meaning of soul, beauty, and goodness as viewed from within this theatrical world is informed by the work of Corbin and Hillman. Psyche's Stage, as a vision that emerges via a dialogue between these authors and the figure of the Actress who represents our own experience, is largely informed by a Dionysiac cosmos which is imagined as a place where the



respective worlds of the mystic, the archetypal psychologist, and the actress come together. This universe is given to certain themes, and an embodied reflection of their meanings, informed by our core authors (including Seaford). These themes include bothness, the Undivided, feminine consciousness, and second birth (which might also be phrased as rebirth).

This theatre has been imagined as space that opens the role of actress-mystic up to the laity. The mystic, from within this paradigm, is characterized as a perspective which views the Earth and beings and things of the Earth as persons and visions of their celestial counterparts or archetypal images. All things are, as such, viewed and engaged with as persons who are reaching toward the manifestation of a uniquely designated a priori yearning. Following Corbin, we have also called these persons Angels.

Proceeding from this perspective does not mean that the scripts and plots of Psyche's stage are necessarily about literal Angels and other worldly dimensions depicted in Corbin's descriptions of the imaginal world. Psyche's Stage can be imagined as a space where the substance of our everyday battles are metaphorically fought through enactment within the context of this mystic perspective. A literary approach, a panpsychic engagement, and a fictional sensibility are key elements of this practice.

Psyche's Stage is currently imagined as a practice that navigates between the space of our realities as currently lived and the space of our celestial or ideal realities. It is a process of discovering and tending to the shared yearning between soul and spirit in accordance with the limits of our imagination as it comes to stand in the present moment.

Psyche's Stage is further informed by Seaford's research on Dionysos which provides us with an explicit connection between mysticism and theatre. We imagine that

key themes associated with Dionysos would naturally inform Psyche's Stage productions and approaches on multiple dimensions. These themes include nature, communality, epiphany, mystery-cult, and death. Each of these themes encompass informative sub-themes as well. Psyche's Stage informed by Dionysos's association with nature discovers its affinity for the cultivation and synthesis of and between raw materials. Informed by the theme of communality, Psyche's Stage gives voice to marginalized persons. Informed by the theme of epiphany, the presence of the gods in our ideas enters the play.

Our investigation of mystery-cult ritual herein revealed a methodological approach to transformation through resistance, anxiety, confusion, disorientation, fear, and a death-like experience leading to epiphany and rebirth. In myth and ritual this cycle was embodied through identification or enactment. The themes of nature, communality, epiphany, and death were incorporated in mystery-cult rituals which, in turn, contributed to the development of tragedy. While the unifying dynamic of mystery-cult apparently satisfied a human need to dissolve the boundaries between life and death, tragedy may have satisfied a corresponding need to feel united as a community. Here, spiritual principles were communally put into dialogue with the dilemmas of physical world existence. Psyche's Stage, informed by the mystical correspondence between mystery-cult and tragedy, imagines itself as an imaginal and potentially transformative space that mediates between physical world existence and our spiritually oriented aspirations.

Various forms of enactment used in mystery-cult and tragedy provide us with tangible practices for imagining how we might begin to formulate a re-visioned theatrical approach today, though Psyche's Stage would not be limited to these forms.

Transvestism; the use of mirrors, riddling language, masks and dance; the act of dressing

up as mythical companions to the god; the performance of myths; and the enactment of death and rebirth via dismemberment and re-membrance are but a few forms of enactment that have symbolic Dionysiac significance. These and other approaches might be readily drawn from in the explorative process of discovering ways to support Psyche's Stage's unique signature based on its intentions. But ultimately, we imagine that this inchoate vision of mystic-theatre will best discover its many forms in workshop and production settings.

We would like to close with a few brief observations on how this research potentially contributes to the field of depth psychology. In redefining our sense of the mystic, we have opened the doors of mystic gnosis, welcoming those who might have felt excluded or intimidated by their seeming lack of visionary capacity (which is presupposed in the works of Jung and Corbin). By engaging explicitly with many nuanced details in Corbin's mystic translations, we have deepened our sense of the imaginal roots that so profoundly influenced Hillman's work in archetypal psychology. In tending to the theatrical presences that permeate Corbin's and Hillman's works, we have begun to imagine how the medium of theatre might make further contributions to archetypal psychology and the spiritual tradition. Finally, in imagining the possibility and attributes of a mystic-theatre informed by Corbin's and Hillman's oeuvres, this work potentially serves the depth psychological mission of discovering new ways for expanding its consulting room practice into the world.

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