

Myth as Symbol

Myth as Symbol:
A Psychoanalytic Study in Contemporary
German Literature

By

Sonia Saporiti

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V. B.
ad memoriam

*Wer Strophen liebt, der liebt auch Katastrophen;
Wer für Statuen ist, muß auch für Trümmer sein.*
—Gottfried Benn, *Drei alte Männer*

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INTRODUCTION

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part, “The Creative Unconscious. Myth and Symbolic Dimension”, aims to be a critical recognition of the psychoanalytical interpretations of the mythological symbol and symbolism and provides the tools for a reading of the phenomenon of the literary rework, in the modern age, of certain themes and mythological figures. With reference to the interpretation of a work of art, Jung writes the following statement, with which I completely agree:

Um dem Kunstwerk gerecht zu werden, muß die analytische Psychologie das medizinische Vorurteil gänzlich abstreifen, denn das Kunstwerk ist keine Krankheit und verlangt daher eine ganz andere Orientierung als eine ärztliche [...]. Er wird nicht die für das Kunstwerk überflüssige Frage nach den ihm unzweifelhaft vorgegangenen allgemein menschlichen Bedingungen aufwerfen, sondern *er wird nach dem Sinn des Werkes fragen, und dessen Vorbedingungen werden ihn nur insoweit interessieren, als sie für das Verständnis des Sinnes in Betracht kommen.*¹

The discussion focuses on the creative function, essentially mythopoetic, recognised to the unconscious by the psychoanalysis and by the dynamic psychology, starting from Freud up to the most recent considerations of Ignacio Matte Blanco and Silvano Arieti.

According to Jung, such creative skill consists in the possibility of producing images that become symbolic only in contact with the conscious Ego: In fact it is only when consciousness recognises the unconscious images projected onto the object as such (and not as attributes of the object itself), that it can access the symbolical dimension. The symbolic work in conscious-unconscious dynamics thus contributes to the constitution of reality as other than itself at the same time allowing the access to the creative dimension that appears to be specifically human. In such sense, mythological patrimony is an excellent example of the unconscious creative ability that brings reason both to the existence of myth as well as to its symbolic function. If the symbol, as Barthes writes, is not the image, but the very plurality of the senses, then neither is the myth, just as a symbol, ever intended as a totality of sense, closed and definable in an univocal manner: It is in fact its metamorphic and irreducible ambivalence that marks it to make its infinite re-readings and reworks possible. The elaboration

tion of the identity of a culture in a certain age and of the issues that are perceived to be more urgent and relevant centre around a myth and a constellation of figures and elements that constitute its tale. In this sense, revising and rewriting the myth means thinking again about one's own culture within its own tradition, attempting to re-propose in a new dimension the ever present questions that have not found an answer and which the figures of the myth symbolise across the time.

If this is the task of mythology, the refiguration of the myth in the modern age must be interpreted, I believe, in reference to that foundational character of mythology that was suggested in the German-speaking countries, at the turn of the 19th century, by the romantic experience of Jena. The constant reference to an age, the mythical "Golden Age", in which poetry and mythology were indistinguishable and where the human kind lived in harmony with the cosmos is in fact a fundamental aspect of the revolutionary thought of the first Romanticism. The reference to a place and to an age where men and gods lived together on the earth becomes therefore an ideal tension, a yearning for an unattainable condition beyond time and space; thus the reestablishment of the original harmony assumes regressive features and presents itself as a return to the origin, lived with the tragic awareness of its impossibility and, as such, the great Romantic utopia creates from itself the germ of those regressive tendencies that will determine its failure.

The second part of the book, "Water Spirits", is dedicated to the mythical figure linked to the romantic imagery, that of the *Wasserfrau* and ends with an analysis of a twentieth-century reworking/reinterpretation of the myth of Undine. The romantic *Wasserfrau* is the ambiguous and double symbol of a seductive and dangerous womanhood, and of a reassuring femininity perfectly integrated within the social order that contributes to maintaining a utopian place in which it is possible to restore the original harmony between humanity and the world; yet all these *Wasserfrauen* are also part of a nocturnal and deadly nature, place of election of regressive fantasies and desires for annulment. The famous fairy tale of Fouqué, precisely through the pluridimensionality of the figure of Undine, expresses a tension and a dissonance that permeates all the German Romanticism, and that becomes progressively more obvious starting from the dispersion of the group of Jena, that marks the end of the short subversive and more properly revolutionary period of the German Romanticism. Through the ancient motif of the union between a human being and a *Naturwesen* are thematized the rift between nature and culture and between the opposite poles of the masculine and the feminine, identified *tout court* with nature in its dual maternal and deadly aspect: In fact the *Naturwesen* is always of

feminine genre, fatally marked by an ambiguity that causes restlessness and that projects itself onto other figures of the narration (this is the case of Undine) or onto the same body of the protagonist (as in the story of Melusine).

The extraordinary diffusion of the figure of the *Wasserfrau*, that during the Romantic age becomes a vehicle of a reflection on art and creativity and on the relationship between silence and poetical word, allows recalling its presence through a few semantic pointers. In the lines of Eichendorff or of Brentano for example, the long hair, the water, just only a song are sufficient to suggest and to arouse, in the lyrical Ego, those ambivalent feelings of desire and fear linked to the presence of the *Wasserfrau* and that constitute every event of "love and death" that the lyrical Ego himself projects onto the figures that inhabit the poetical landscape. In the 20th century reworking of Ingeborg Bachmann, who regains the most genuine romantic events, Undine returns to represent the privileged figure around which the speech on creativity and on poetical language finds its ultimate centre.

The third part of the book, "Medea", is dedicated to another figure of the myth, Medea, in particular to the late twentieth-century reworking of Euripides' tragedy, and to the reflection on the fundamental and characterising issue of the infanticide. My intention is to reconsider the myth of Medea starting from the contradiction implicit in this figure (and in that of every Mother Goddess as also shows the history of Melusine, ancient Mother Goddess and medieval fairy at once) in order to then explore the most problematic and conflicting aspect of this image of womanhood, which over time becomes the symbol of the denial of the maternal principle. Starting from Euripides, the story of Medea attracts artists and writers, and the infanticide mother becomes the object of infinite re-workings and reflections on the nature of the so called maternal instinct. Kaleidoscope of images, crossroads of conflicting aspects, difficult figure as it belongs to various traditions often in contrast with each other, Medea becomes representative of political, psychological, and social circumstances linked to the hand of those who, from time to time, design her outlines.

Already in Euripides' tragedy, but above all in Ovid and Seneca, one of the characteristic features of Medea is her destructive passion, her inability to act according to reason. This aspect of the figure of Medea is drawn on and positively refunctionalised, various centuries later, by an exponent of the *Sturm und Drang*, Friedrich Maximilian Klinger: In *Medea in Korinth* of 1786, the protagonist becomes the incarnation of the spirit of revolt against the values imposed by the society, a woman whose heroic and tragic solipsism reflects the cult of the artist/genius typical of the cultural environment from which the writer comes. In the 20th century Hans

Henny Jahnn and Mattias Braun accept the image of a hot-blooded and destructive Medea. While Braun remains linked to Seneca's model and to that, of the same descent, of Jean Anouilh, in the drama of Jahnn Medea becomes the ideal exponent of a society crossed by violent and destructive impulses. In his *Medea*, which is a "Weimar drama" of remarkable literary quality and with a strong originality with regard to Euripides' model, Jahnn paints a racist society ready to neglect and to demonise diversity (represented by a Medea with a dark skin), blindly running towards self-destruction. Between the forties and the fifties of the 20th century, the figure of Medea arouses the interest of various German writers, who seem to be attracted by the negative and dark charm of this mythological figure: In the texts of Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Anna Seghers and Elisabeth Langgässer, Medea remains a marginal character, incarnation of an ambiguous and alarming womanhood, an impossible figure of identification. However, the attempts of refunctionalisation of the myth in the Eastern Germany area are in my opinion more interesting, in particular that of Heiner Müller, whose drama leads back Medea on the stage. In fact the chapter with which the third part of my work ends is precisely dedicated to the Medea of those authors who lived in the Eastern German area, namely, Katja Lange-Müller, Heiner Müller, and Christa Wolf.

Notes

¹ Carl Gustav Jung, "Über die Beziehungen der analytischen Psychologie zum dichterischen Kunstwerk" (1922), in Jung, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Franz Riklin et al. (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 1995), vol. 15: *Über das Phänomen des Geistes in Kunst und Wissenschaft*, 82 (my italics).

PART I

THE CREATIVE UNCONSCIOUS. MYTH AND SYMBOLIC DIMENSION

Du magst uns Symbole nennen, mit dem gleichen Recht, mit dem du auch deine Mitmenschen Symbole nennen kannst, wenn du Lust dazu hast. Aber wir sind ebenso wirklich wie deine Mitmenschen. Du entkräftest nicht und löst nichts dadurch, daß du uns Symbole nennst.

Carl Gustav Jung, *Das Rote Buch*

CHAPTER ONE

THE CREATIVE UNCONSCIOUS

1. C.G. Jung: *Die Komplexenlehre*

Beginning his career as assistant at the Burghölzli, the psychiatric hospital of Zurich managed by Eugen Bleuler, on the 11th December of 1900, Jung entered a psychiatric monastery: "Für ein halbes Jahr schloß ich mich in die Klostermauern ein, um mich an das Leben und den Geist einer Irrenanstalt zu gewöhnen und las mich durch die fünfzig Bände der *Allgemeinen Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie* hindurch, seit ihrem Anfang, um die psychiatrische Mentalität kennenzulernen."¹ The environment in which Jung found himself working was described in a very clear and brief way by Ellenberger in *The Discovery of the Unconscious*:

Eugen Bleuler was the personification of work and duty. He was exacting toward himself and toward his staff. He demanded a strenuous amount of work and unlimited devotion to the patients. The residents had to make the first rounds on their wards before the daily staff meeting that took place at 8:30 a.m., where they had to report about their patients. Two or three times a week at 10:00 a.m. there was a meeting called the *Gemeinsame* (a common discussion among the staff about the case histories of new patients), under the direction of Bleuler. Evening rounds had to be made between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m. There were no secretaries, and the residents had to type their case histories themselves, often working until 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. Hospital doors were closed at 10:00 p.m. Junior residents did not have the key and if they wanted to come back after 10:00 p.m., they were obliged to borrow one from an older resident. Bleuler showed the utmost devotion to the patients; he used to make short visits on the wards up to four or six times a day.²

Bleuler, who had taken over from Auguste-Henri Forel in 1886 the management of the Burghölzli, had previously managed the psychiatric hospital of Rheinau, inhabited by seriously ill elderly people and was renowned for being one of the most backward retirement homes of Switzerland. The psychiatrist, who lived in the hospital, stood out due to his self-

abnegation and the care with which he treated his patients, with the result of acquiring an increasingly deep knowledge of the personal experiences of psychotic patients. During the twelve years he spent in Rheinau Bleuler tried to understand what was hiding behind the “insane talking” and the hallucinatory delirium of the schizophrenics by attempting to establish an emotional relationship (*affektiver Rapport*) with the individual patient. To this approach, which constituted an important change in the treatment of schizophrenic pathology—still indicated by the term of *dementia praecox* attributed to it by Kraepelin—Bleuler combined, as manager of the Burghölzli, the experiments carried out through the testing of verbal association. It was precisely Bleuler that assigned to the schizophrenic pathology the name that is still used today (as an alternative to that of *dementia praecox* attributed in 1893 by Kraepelin to a group of degenerative psychotic disorders) in an article written in 1908 for the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie*, “Die Prognose der Dementia Praecox – Schizophrenien-gruppe”.

Starting from when he first began working at the psychiatric hospital of Zurich, Jung directed his attention to research into the meaning that lay behind the “fantasies” apparently devoid of logical and causal links of patients, finding deep associations between the psychotic symptoms and the personal experiences of the patient. In 1903, having returned from Paris where he had studied for a six month period under the guidance of Pierre Janet, Jung began to conduct experiments with the psychological testing at Bleuler’s request.

As Jung recalls in a note of 1906, “Die psychopathologische Bedeutung des Assoziationsexperimentes”, the testing was invented in the psychological experimental field by Galton and was re-established by Wundt and Aschaffenburg. It was then also used by Kraepelin and by Ziehen, who pointed out how the speed of reaction of the verbal stimulus increased when the word-stimulus was connected to painful experiences of the patient and that words subjected to longer response times were linked to a same representation, defined by him as *gefühlstonter Vorstellungskomplex* (feeling-toned group of representations). On the basis of the results obtained by Ziehen, the complex would be defined by Jung as a network of representations composed of analogically linked sensorial perceptions and ideational components whose common determiner is the same emotional tonality: “Die einzelnen Vorstellungen sind unter sich nach den verschiedenen Assoziationsgesetzen verbunden (Ähnlichkeit, Koexistenz usw.). Zu höheren Verbänden ausgelesen und gruppiert werden sie aber durch einen Affekt.”³

The technique of the associative experiment consists of two phases: in the phase of associative reaction the subject must react with the first verbal response that comes to its mind to a hundred of words-stimulus read by the experimenter, who measures the reaction times with regard to an average time and the “unusual” associations. During the phase of associative reproduction the experiment is repeated so that the tester can note eventual uncertainties or mnemonic falsifications. The disorders identified in the course of the experiment, similar to symptoms of neurotics and psychopaths, are considered a product of a psychic complex. In particular, according to Jung the disorders of reaction and reproduction—the long periods of time, unexpected verbal associations, gaps in someone’s memory—assume a symbolic function because they refer to another meaning that is in close relationship with the experiences of the patient and with the occurring of the pathology itself.

The discovery of psychic indicators of complexes and the symbolic relevance of representations associated to these complexes makes Jung state that it is the complex and not the dream that constitute the *via regia* that leads to the unconscious.⁴ In this way Jung arrives, with methods that differ from those of Freud, at what he considers the empirical proof of the existence of the unconscious.

The identification of complexes through the experiments with the testing of verbal association represents the first step towards the shaping of a different pattern of psyche, even if it is not yet necessarily opposed to that elaborated by Freud in the first and then in the second topic. The complexes, defined as an organised set of representations to which an emotional charge is associated, become, according to Jung, the real structural elements of the psyche. As Jung writes in “Die Beziehungen zwischen dem Ich und dem Unbewußten”, the psyche is not a unity, but a contradictory variety of complexes.⁵

Therefore, the mind is constituted by a plurality of representative complexes in dynamic relationship between each other and with the so called complex of the Ego, a sort of organizing principle of the conscious activity. The other complexes come to consciousness only when they relate to the complex of the Ego, that in this way sees threatened its own integrity—that is then the integrity of consciousness—by the emerging of unconscious matter. These are events such as the “abaissement du niveau mental” (Janet), determined by physiological factors such as sleep and fatigue or due to a substantial frailty of the complex of the Ego, that allows the activation of a part of the unconscious matter up to that point in dynamic balance with consciousness.

Fundamental characteristic of the complexes is their autonomy in relation to the Ego; in fact Jung talks about feeling-toned group of representations: Their development occurs outside of consciousness, in an area, the unconscious, in which the removed matter is collected. There are six modes of complex manifestation:

1. It is unconscious, but still devoid of great autonomy and manifests itself through small symptoms such as *lapses*, or lapses of memory.
2. It is unconscious, but has such an autonomy that it is perceived as a sort of *alter ego* that leads to automatisms that consciousness recognizes as irrational but which it cannot avoid, as in the case of certain obsessive neuroses.
3. The complex becomes totally autonomous and detaching from the conscious Ego gives life to a second Ego and to a second personality.
4. The complex is so powerful and full of energy and contents that it starts a process of partial or total identification of the conscious Ego with the complex itself (serious psychotic break with loss of the principle of reality, as in the cases of identification with God or with Satan, or even with an animal or with imaginary beings).
5. The autonomous complex, as it is unconscious, is not experienced by the subject as part of itself, but it is projected onto the object and performed as a quality of the object itself. If the complex is full of persecutory contents it can take the shape of an entity that menaces the subject from the outside or from the inside (ideas of persecution by men or spirits, diabolic possessions, or even voices that menace the subject from within).
6. Finally, the complex can be known to consciousness, but not integrated since it is not sufficiently elaborated at an emotional level. In such case it continues to act on the subject beyond any kind of rationalization.

Therefore, the relationship between the conscious Ego and the complexes configures itself according to four modes—unconsciousness, identification, projection, comparison—that in turn become relevant factors for the setting up of a psychopathology, when it turns out to be impossible to integrate the unconscious materials within the conscious psyche through a process of elaboration and identification. The emergence of the complex becomes problematic when the conscious personality is so fragile that it is unable to integrate it, remaining submerged beneath it. Neurosis lies

hither, psychosis beyond the boundary drawn by conscience to oppose resistance to the irruption of unconscious contents.⁶

2. The Complex Doctrine and the Archetypal Hypothesis

Starting with the study of parapsychological phenomena such as spiritualism, mediumistic skills, possession, and with the daily contact with patients who suffered from serious and mainly irreversible psychosis, Jung thus formulated a “doctrine of complexes”, according to which complexes constitute the fundamental structures of a psyche in which conscious and unconscious are in a constant relationship. It is from this doctrine that two strong theoretical hypotheses, in contrast with each other, originated in 1913, that of the “unconscious imaginal invariants” and that of the “pluralistic perspective of the psyche”. The first one paves the way to a structural pattern of the psyche that has as its conceptual crux the archetype and its *modus operandi*, the second one, instead, leads to the “principle of relativity of every structural conception of the psyche”.⁷ There emerges a dialectic conception of the psyche as a dynamic structure in which opposed events relate to each other according to a constant process of subsequent consciousness’ attempts of elaboration and integration of the unconscious material.

Jung formulated an energetic conception of the psyche based on a notion of libido which was no longer meant as sexual energy, but as resulting from a tension of opposites: The evolutionary process of man is based on a tension that moves it on the one hand to allow it to adhere in an immediate way to driving demands, while on the other to distance itself from it, overcoming the opposition of forces through the mediation of the symbol.⁸

The notion of archetype, instead, derives essentially from the theory of the invariants of the unconscious collective imagination and from the development of research on symbolism and mythology. Most of the works during the later life of Jung, written between 1928 and 1934, are dedicated to the notion of archetype, that, as a model of the universal invariants of human imagination, derives conceptually from the Complex doctrine re-read in a Kantian key, according to which archetypes are “forms and categories” that represent the possibility of transposing experience into image. The universal innate and eternal idea of archetype as a *a priori* within the psyche, as image, and predisposition to images is already found in Jung’s *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* (1912). “Man kann den einen Archetypus nicht durch einen anderen erklären, d.h., man kann überhaupt nicht erklären, woher der Archetypus kommt, weil es keinen Archimedischen

Punkt außerhalb dieser apriorischen Bedingungen gibt".⁹ As a predisposition to images the archetype recalls the Kantian notion of an *a priori* form, yet with the fundamental difference that the archetype is not linked to the possibility of conceptualization of experience, but of production of universal images.

In Anbetracht solcher Tatsachen müssen wir wohl annehmen, daß das Unbewußte nicht nur Persönliches, sondern auch Unpersönliches, Kollektives in Form *vererbter Kategorien* oder Archetypen enthalte. Ich habe daher die Hypothese aufgestellt, daß das Unbewußte, in seinen tieferen Schichten gewissermaßen, relativ belebte, kollektive Inhalte besäße. Ich spreche darum von einem *kollektiven Unbewußten*.¹⁰

Jung elaborates the concept of archetype meant as innate possibility of representation that controls the imaginative/symbolic activity on the basis of the analysis of mythologems and of the fairy motifs that are always equal in their structure in every place and period, starting from the representations of the primitive mankind up to dreams, fantasies and psychotic delirium of the contemporary man. Exactly referring to mythology Jung talks at first about *Urbild* or *urtimeiches Bild*, comparing the archetype to those *représentations collectives* with which Lévy-Bruhl designates figures and symbolical images of the first visions of the world.

Along with its psychological aspect, according to which the archetype is the driving force of the activity of unconscious symbolic representations, Jung also emphasizes the biological aspect of the archetype, when he compares it to the "pattern of behaviour" with which the evolutionary biology indicated patterns of phylogenetically planned behaviour.

Die Archetypen sind Bereitschaftssysteme, die zugleich Bild und Emotion sind. Sie vererben sich mit der Hirnstruktur, ja, sie sind deren psychischer Aspekt. Sie formen einerseits ein stärkstes, instinktives Vorurteil, und andererseits sind sie die denkbar wirksamste Hilfe für instinktive Anpassungen. Sie sind so recht eigentlich der *chthonische* Anteil der Seele – wenn wir diesen Ausdruck gebrauchen dürfen –, jener Anteil, durch den sie an die Natur verhaftet ist oder in dem wenigstens ihre Verbundenheit mit Erde und Welt am faßbarsten erscheint.¹¹

Es handelt sich dabei keineswegs etwa um Vorstellungen, sondern um instinktive Gegebenheiten, um Grundformen der phantastischen Vorstellungsbildung, also um eine Art von "pattern of mental behaviour", das schlechterdings zur menschlichen Natur gehört [...]. Ihr apriorisches Vorhandensein beruht auf der Tatsache, daß sie, wie die Instinkte, vererbt sind und daher – *cum grano salis* – in jedem Individuum mythologische Motive immer wieder erzeugen, sobald der Phantasie freier Lauf gelassen wird

oder das Unbewußte sich aus irgendeinem Grunde stärker als das Bewusstsein erweist.¹²

In fact, the fundamental question of evolutionary biology—what is passed from one generation to another one, what leaves a trace in the gene pool of species and by what means—was the focus of the interests of the early Jung, who had dedicated different psychiatric studies to the problem of memory, from those regarding spiritualistic and mediumistic phenomena to the essay on cryptomnesia up to the experiments with the testing of verbal association and to the development of the theory of the phylogenetic and species-specific unconscious. Therefore, the idea of the archetype is closely connected to that of the collective unconscious.

Das kollektive Unbewußte ist ein Teil der Psyche, der von einem persönlichen Unbewußten dadurch negativ unterschieden werden kann, daß er seine Existenz nicht persönlicher Erfahrung verdankt und daher keine persönliche Erwerbung ist. Während das persönliche Unbewußte wesentlich aus Inhalten besteht, die zu einer Zeit bewußt waren, aus dem Bewußtsein jedoch entschwunden sind, indem sie entweder vergessen oder verdrängt wurden, waren die Inhalte des kollektiven Unbewußten nie im Bewußtsein und wurden somit nie individuell erworben, sondern verdanken ihr Dasein ausschließlich der Vererbung.

Der *Begriff des Archetypus*, der ein unumgängliches Korrelat zur Idee des kollektiven Unbewußten bildet, deutet das Vorhandensein bestimmter Formen in der Psyche an, die allgegenwärtig oder überall verbreitet sind.¹³

The Freudian topic (the one of “conscious, preconscious, unconscious”) is hypothetically changed by Jung into a “topography” of psyche that, besides contemplating a personal unconscious (the product of primary and secondary removals described by Freud), also includes a collective unconscious that, in its being meant as repository of archetypes, precedes each individual experience and is the formal matrix of determined fundamental experiences.

In the “Theoretische Überlegungen zum Wesen des Psychischen”, Jung underlines the distinction between “archetype in itself” as unconscious structure that is imperceptible and unknowable and yet makes the processes of representation and symbolization possible, and the perceptible and represented archetype, the so called “archetypal image”.

Die archetypischen Vorstellungen, die uns das Unbewußte vermittelt, darf man nicht mit dem *Archetypus an sich* verwechseln. [...] Man muß sich stets bewußt bleiben, daß das, was wir mit Archetypus meinen, an sich un-

anschaulich ist, aber Wirkungen hat, welche Veranschaulichungen, nämlich die archetypischen Vorstellungen, ermöglichen.¹⁴

The genetic inheritance of the archetypes was already the subject of discussion among the early Jungian followers, who moreover only used it as heuristic hypotheses to be assessed. The oscillation of the theoretical statute attributed to the notion of archetype (to which Jung repeatedly returns and that he modifies and revises more than once) and the distinction between the archetype in itself and the archetypal image, let us presume that it is not the archetypal representation (myths, symbols, recurrent images within one or several cultures) that has been genetically inherited, but the archetype itself; it is this kind of structure or form of the unconscious psyche (specifically human) that is inherited and allows the process of symbolization thus creating contents of intuitions, of perceptions, of thoughts. In the “Psychologischen Aspekte des Mutterarchetypus” Jung writes, “Der Archetypus ist ein an sich leeres, formales Element, das nichts anderes ist als eine *facultas praeformandi*, eine *a priori* gegebene Möglichkeit der Vorstellungsform. Vererbt werden nicht die Vorstellungen, sondern die Formen.”¹⁵ I personally think that myths and symbols are not genetically inherited but are handed down culturally, and that the ability to produce symbols and operate with them is species-specific (thus phylogenetically inherited), as it is a specifically human capacity, common to all mankind (which, on the other hand, would seem to suggest the same Jungian distinction between archetype in itself and archetypal image).

As unconscious structure and as form that structures the unconscious, the archetype takes part in the same qualities attributed to the unconscious. It is only under the form of image shaped by individual psychic material that the archetype enters the sphere of consciousness, where it takes on positive or negative connotations: “Ich begegne immer wieder dem Mißverständnis, daß die Archetypen inhaltlich bestimmt, das heißt eine Art unbewußter Vorstellungen seien. Es muß deshalb nochmals hervorgehoben werden, daß die Archetypen nicht inhaltlich, sondern bloß formal bestimmt sind.”¹⁶ The collective unconscious and its contents are, from every aspect, “neutral”, lacking in moral and values, that are instead attributed to it by the individual or collective consciousness. In this sense the archetype is “beyond good and evil”, as Jung likes to state by quoting Nietzsche. “Wie alle Archetypen einen positiven, günstigen, hellen, nach oben weisenden Charakter haben, so auch einen nach unten weisenden, teils negativen, und ungünstigen, teils bloß chthonischen, aber im weiteren neutralen Aspekt.”¹⁷

3. The Symbolizing Unconscious

3.1 *The Archetype as Symbolic Operator*

The possibility of the conscious psyche to produce representations is, according to Jung, based on a creative mythopoetic unconscious, able to create images and symbols, and to work with them thus constituting a symbolic dimension parallel to that of objective reality.

Über das *Symbolische* müssen wir uns hier kurz auseinandersetzen. *Symbolisch* brauchen wir im Gegensatz zu *allegorisch*. Allegorie ist uns eine beabsichtige, durch Sinnbilder verstärkte Ausdeutung eines Gedankens, während *Symbole* nur undeutliche Nebenassoziationen zu einem Gedanken sind, die ihn mehr verschleiern als verdeutlichen.¹⁸

In Jungian conception, the symbol configures itself as a sensitive form of the archetype. Therefore, each symbol is the expression of an imperceptible archetype, and in this sense it is also the “proof” of the existence of the archetype. Each archetype in its turn, that doesn’t coincide necessarily with a symbol, is yet a potential symbol. In short, the unconscious archetypal work is a condition of the process of symbolization, providing a link between unconscious and consciousness, and whose product, the symbol, configures itself as a link between unconscious processes and determinations of consciousness, thus playing an active role in the creative process.

Das Unbewußte [...] enthält die Quelle der treibenden seelischen Kräfte und die diese regulierenden Formen oder Kategorien, eben die Archetypen. Alle stärksten Ideen und Vorstellungen der Menschheit gehen auf Archetypen zurück [...] denn es ist die Funktion des Bewußtseins, nicht nur die Welt des Äußeren durch die Sinnesportalen aufzunehmen und zu erkennen, sondern auch die Welt des Inneren *schöpferisch* in das Außen zu übersetzen.¹⁹

The archetypal image, sensitive representation of the archetype or of one of its aspects, is the result of the relationship between an archetypal form which is in itself unimaginable and unknowable and the contents of the individual consciousness: “Das Unbewußte liefert sozusagen die archetypische Form, die an sich leer und daher unvorstellbar ist. Vom Bewußtsein her aber wird sie sofort durch verwandtes oder ähnliches Vorstellungsmaterial aufgefüllt und wahrnehmbar gemacht. Aus diesem Grunde sind archetypische Vorstellungen immer örtlich, zeitlich und individuell bedingt”.²⁰ In this sense the archetype in itself coincides with the possibil-

ity of access to the symbolical dimension typical of the human psyche. As expression and function of the archetype the symbolic ability of mind is essentially unconscious, yet become a fundamental experience for the constitution of the subject and of the reality/object only when it materializes as a symbolical form. Therefore, in Jungian conception, the symbol is the sensitive representation of unconscious contents and, being involved in both realities, makes the contents of the unconscious intelligible to the consciousness and allows its integration.

Jung formulates a concept of symbol, the “living symbol”, that is opposed to the Freudian meaning of symbol as substitute formation. The Jungian living symbol doesn’t refer to something already known by replacing it, but refers to something undetermined, that cannot replace and from which it cannot be replaced. In this sense the symbol is never completely decipherable and cannot be interpreted in an univocal way. Therefore, symbols would lose their function to arouse and create meanings if they were ascribed to a unique and steady meaning.

In Freudian psychoanalysis the symbol (oneiric, but also the neurotic symptom) that initially seems to be indecipherable because of psychic processes of defence and censorship actually refers to a latent, precise, ascertainable, and definable content. The Freudian symbol, that Jung calls “sign” or “dead symbol” (as it is limited in its meaning) would therefore be a sort of signifier that refers to a meaning to be deciphered. However, it is possible that the same image can be sign and symbol at the same time, depending on the disposition of the subject. Of course it is possible that a symbol can exhaust and degenerate into a sign, and vice-versa, that a sign can acquire a symbolical depth.

3.2 *The Freudian Unconscious*

“Die Verdrängungslehre ist nun der Grundpfeiler, auf dem das Gebäude der Psychoanalyse ruht”, states Freud in “Zur Geschichte der psychoanalytischen Bewegung”. Establishing itself as defence mechanism already in the first *Studien zur Hysterie* (1895), the notion of *Verdrängung*²¹ is soon related to that of unconscious, thus becoming its synonym at least up to the discovery of the unconscious defences of the Ego. The contents suppressed, removed from consciousness, become a “separate psychic group”, ruled by its own laws (the so called “primary process”) and able to attract other representations. Between 1911 and 1915, starting with the case of Schreber, Freud postulated, hypothetically, a process of original repression as the earlier phase of repression in the strictest sense of the word, through which is determined the split of consciousness with

the genesis of a first unconscious nucleus, known as “primal repression”, that exerts an attraction on the contents of consciousness.²²

Wir haben also Grund, eine Urverdrängung anzunehmen, eine erste Phase der Verdrängung, die darin besteht, daß der psychischen (Vorstellungs-)Re-präsentanz des Triebes die Übernahme ins Bewußte versagt wird. Mit dieser ist eine Fixierung gegeben; die betreffende Repräsentanz bleibt von da an unveränderlich bestehen und der Trieb an sie gebunden.²³

The hypothesis of a “primal repression”, with which Freud attempts to establish what the ultimate origin of the unconscious is, is thus found in close relationship with that of “primal fantasy” (*Urphantasie*), according to which the unconscious is constituted by phylogenetic contents that form its original nucleus.

The genesis of notion of primary fantasies, expression that appeared for the first time in 1915, is to be related with the ever increasing importance recognised to the phantasmatic life as a form of “psychic reality” by the psychoanalysis. Freud is pushed to deepen the notion of *Urphantasie* in the analysis of the “Wolfsmann” (1918), struck by the hypothesis of Jung according to whom the primary scene could be a fantasy of the adult subject, and not the recollection of a real event of which the child would have been an observer. In the concept of primal fantasy it is shown not only the need to link the fantasy to a truly “perceived” event—in the history of man or in that of the species—but also the reference to a subjective structure preceding the experience, the “scheme”.

Wo die Erlebnisse sich dem hereditären Schema nicht fügen, kommt es zu einer Umarbeitung derselben in der Phantasie, deren Werk im einzelnen zu verfolgen, gewiß nutzbringend wäre. Gerade diese Fälle sind geeignet, uns die *selbständige Existenz des Schemas* zu erweisen. Wir können oft bemerken, daß das Schema über das individuelle Erleben siegt.²⁴

In *Fantasme originaire, fantasme des origines, origine du fantasme*²⁵ Laplanche and Pontalis underline the importance of the notion of *Urphantasie* admitting that, in the phantasmatic activity, there is a possibility of finding the original structures preceding the individual experience. They link those kind of fantasies to the myths of origin. If we consider the topics that are encountered in the “primary fantasies” (primary scene, castration, seduction), we are struck by a common characteristic, they all refer to the origins. On a par with collective myths, they tend to carry a representation and a solution to that which appears to the child as a fundamental enigma; they dramatize as a moment of emergence, as origin of a story, that which

is for the subject a problematic reality that requires an explanation, a “theory”. In the “primary scene” the origin of the subject is represented; in the fantasies of seduction the rise of sexuality; in the fantasies of castration, the origin of the difference of sexes.²⁶

Therefore, the Freudian unconscious, dominated by the primary process,²⁷ shows many different characteristics in common with the Jungian one, including dynamism, the absolute absence of a temporal dimension, the substitution of external reality with the psychic one and the unknowability of its contents, that only in part become accessible through dreams, neurotic symptoms and delusions, that must be interpreted and read, precisely, as a manifestation of unconscious and of repressed contents.

Der Kern des *Ubw* besteht aus Triebrepräsentanzen, die ihre Besetzung abführen wollen, also aus Wunschregungen [...] Es gibt in diesem System keine Negation, keinen Zweifel, keine Grade von Sicherheit. All dies wird erst durch die Arbeit der Zensur zwischen *Ubw* und *Vbw* eingetragen [...] Die Vorgänge des Systems *Ubw* sind *zeitlos*, d.h., sie sind nicht zeitlich geordnet, werden durch die verlaufende Zeit nicht abgeändert, haben überhaupt keine Beziehung zur Zeit [...] Ebensowenig kennen die *Ubw*-Vorgänge eine Rücksicht auf die *Realität* [...] Die unbewußten Vorgänge werden für uns nur unter den Bedingungen des Träumens und der Neurosen erkennbar [...] An und für sich sind sie unerkennbar.²⁸

The manifestations of the collective unconscious, are, instead, the archetypal images, which are also present, according to Jung, in dreams, in delusions and in the hallucinations of psychotics and, above all, in the mythological and fairy tales of mankind.

Im Traum sowohl in den Produkten der Psychose haben sich zahllose Zusammenhänge ergeben, die man nur mit mythologischen Ideenverknüpfungen parallelisieren kann (oder eventuell mit gewissen poetischen Produkten, die sich öfters durch nicht immer bewußte Entlehnungen bei Mythen auszeichnen) [...] In Tat und Wahrheit aber wurden typische Mythologeme gerade bei Individuen beobachtet, wo dergleichen Kenntnisse ausgeschlossen waren [...] Solche Ergebnisse nötigten zur Annahme, daß es sich um “autochthone” Wiederentstehungen jenseits aller Tradition handeln müsse, mithin um das Vorhandensein von “mythenbildenden” Strukturelementen der unbewußten Psyche.²⁹

Freud too, on the other hand, notes the decisive affinities between dreams and mythological narrations, when he states that images or situations that recall famous motifs drawn from fairy tales, myths, legends, appear very often in the evident content of dreams.

Im manifesten Inhalt der Träume kommen recht häufig Bilder und Situationen vor, die an bekannte Motive aus Märchen, Sagen und Mythen erinnern. Die Deutung solcher Träume wirft dann ein Licht auf die ursprünglichen Interessen, die diese Motive geschaffen haben, wobei wir aber natürlich nicht an den Bedeutungswandel vergessen dürfen, der im Laufe der Zeiten dieses Material betroffen hat. Unsere Deutungsarbeit deckt sozusagen den Rohstoff auf, der häufig genug im weitesten Sinne sexuell zu nennen ist, aber in späterer Bearbeitung die verschiedenartigste Verwendung fand.³⁰

Unlike Jung, Freud doesn't explicitly indicate the need to analyse symbols as expression of a supra-personal unconscious. However, on the other hand, the recognition of the existence of symbols independent of personal living of the subject determines the issue of the genesis of such unconscious material that finds its expression in the symbolism typical of certain dreams and myths.

Moreover, if it is true that Freud never talked about "collective unconscious", and instead opposed the Jungian archetypical hypothesis, it is equally true that the idea of a phylogenetic inheritance and of a supra-personal unconscious underpins certain fundamental concepts of the psychoanalytical theory; less, perhaps, of the real analytical praxis. Actually, not so far from Jung's theory, already in *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) Freud writes that

das Träumen sei im ganzen ein Stück Regression zu den frühesten Verhältnissen des Träumers, ein Wiederbeleben seiner Kindheit [...] Hinter dieser individuellen Kindheit wird uns dann ein *Einblick in die phylogenetische Kindheit*, in die Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts versprochen [...] Wir werden zur Erwartung veranlasst, durch die Analyse der Träume zur *Kenntnis der archaischen Erbschaft des Menschen* zu kommen [...] Es scheint, daß Traum und Neurose uns mehr von den seelischen Altertümern bewahrt haben, als wir vermuten konnten, so daß die Psychoanalyse einen hohen Rang unter den Wissenschaften beanspruchen darf, die sich bemühen, die ältesten und dunkelsten Phasen des Menschheitsbeginnes zu rekonstruieren.³¹

For example, those that Freud defines "unconscious contents" allow the *Verdrängung* through the attraction that they exercise on conscious contents to be removed; this shows a strong analogy with the Jungian archetype considered in its energetic function able to attract contents from consciousness. It is conceivable to talk about unconscious contents preceding the process of an individual repression only by postulating an analogous process of original repression (*Urverdrängung*) and the existence of a "supra-personal" unconscious, whose contents are not constituted by those

of the individual repression, but by original structural elements of unconscious psyche. If the most Freudian reflection preceding the second topic allows the unconscious to coincide with the individual repression, in several later texts a phylogenetic unconscious is mentioned as “the heart of the same unconscious”, whose contents are not the result of the individual repression, but of that which is defined *Urverdrängung*, whose conceptualization occurs, perhaps not by chance, during the reflection on the only case of full-blown psychosis followed by Freud, that of the President Schreber. Faced with a case of psychosis, analysed indirectly through the memories of the subject, Freud sees himself constrained to change the concept of repression linked to the work with neurotic patients.

3.3 *The Freudian Symbol*

As already mentioned, Jung, also referring several times to the *Traumdeutung*, criticises its assumption according to which the oneiric symbol, as the neurotic symptom, is a kind of substitutive formation, the manifestation of a latent content. In psychoanalytical praxis, symbols are, according to Jung, univocally determined and their ambivalence dissolves when the repressed contents are revealed, contents of which the symbol would simply represent the “cover”. The repressed material, that determines the appearance of the symptom (and of the oneiric symbol) would already be known by the subject called to achieve a new awareness of it. And it is precisely the dimension of the “already known” referred to the symbol that Jung intends to criticise. In “Über die Beziehungen der analytischen Psychologie zum dichterischen Kunstwerk” (1922) he writes,

diejenige Bewusstseinsinhalte, welche unbewußte Hintergründe ahnen lassen, nennt Freud unrichtigerweise *Symbole*, während sie in seiner Lehre nur die Rolle von *Zeichen* oder *Symptome* von Hintergrundvorgängen spielen und keineswegs diejenige des eigentlichen Symbols, welches als ein Ausdruck verstanden werden muß für eine noch nicht anders oder besser zu fassende Anschauung. Wenn zum Beispiel Platon das ganze erkenntnistheoretische Problem im Gleichnis von der Höhle ausdrückt, oder wenn Christus den Begriff des Gottesreiches in seinen Gleichnissen ausspricht, so sind dies echte und rechte Symbole, nämlich Versuche, eine Sache auszudrücken, für die noch kein Wortbegriff existiert.³²

If the Jungian symbol is part of an unconscious reality of which is the direct expression, the Freudian one would, instead, be an expression of the work of the pre-conscious censorship and, therefore, a “figure of cover”.