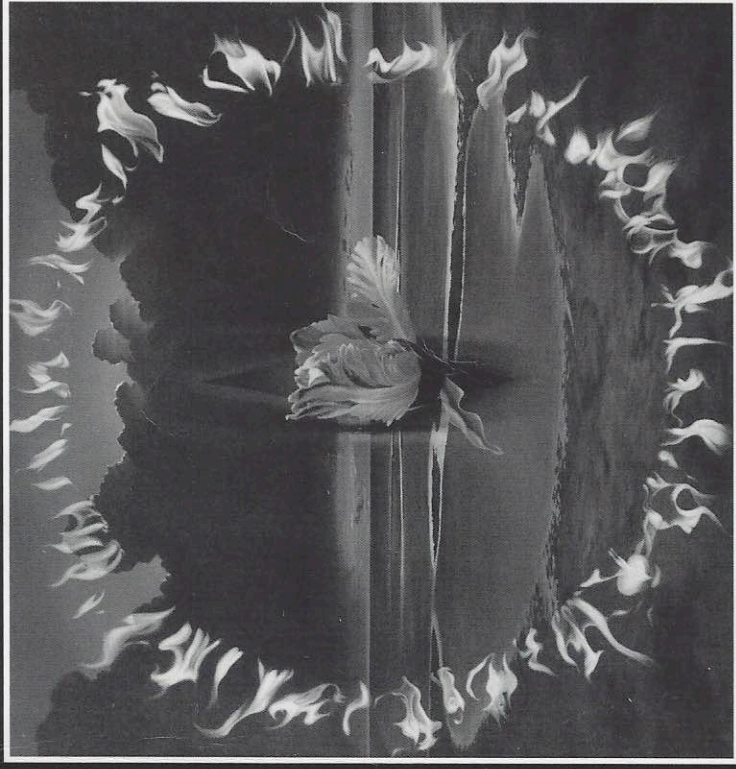


*The Archetypal
Imagination*



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Foreword by David H. Rosen

INTRODUCTION

Archetypal Imaginings

The Golden String Which Leads to Heaven's Gate

What we wish most to know, most desire, remains unknowable and lies beyond our grasp. Each of the chapters that follow begins with this same sentence, a reminder of the central dilemma of our condition—the *Sehnsucht für Ewigkeit* or yearning for eternity, as the Romantics defined it—and our existential limitations, finitude, and impotence before the immensity of the cosmos. Our endeavor here will be heuristic. It will not solve any problem, for the human dilemma is insoluble, but it may allow us to appreciate more deeply the yearning which we embody, and the resources which we have employed to mediate the unfathomable abyss between longing and connection. In a letter the nineteenth-century novelist Gustave Flaubert succinctly expressed this paradox: "Human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that would melt the stars." Such images as cracked kettles and dancing bears hardly ennoble humans, but the juxtaposition with the distant longing, which the stars suggest, certainly creates an affective bridge across that abyss which we all experience. Or we think of Thomas Nashe, in his effort to conjure with the inexplicable horrors of a sixteenth-century outbreak of the Black Death in his "A Litany in Time of Plague."

Brightness falls from the air.

Queens have died, young and fair.

Dust hath closed Helen's eye.¹

It is not so much that death shocks or surprises us, Nashe suggests, but that there are, finally, no exceptions, no exemptions. As Job found to his dismay, we have no signed contract with the Party of the First Part, and all things fall. Brightness itself falls. Even queens, young and comely, are no exception. We are reminded by the death of Britain's Princess Diana that the queenly may die as easily in a squalid Parisian tunnel as in state. But the movement of the images from the abstract brightness to the more particular queens to the individual Helen reminds us of the equality of mortality, the democracy of dust. Here again, the utilization of imaginative figures helps us cross the bridge from the knowable world to the unknowable, just as dreams help us intimate a relationship with that which, categorically, we can never know: the presence and intention of the unconscious.

The thoughts now transformed into the chapters of this book were influenced by the metaphors and inquiring spirits of two imaginative sensibilities: Jung and Blake. Both were intuitives with a keen eye for the suggestive detail, the reading of the surface to intimate the implicit subtext or the layers of meaning which are embodied through the image but which are indiscernible to the sensate eye. Just as any good therapist is obliged to read the surface of presentations and discern the hidden motives, the wounded permutations of eros, and the implicit strategies of healing, so the spiritually sensitive person remembers, in the words of the Surrealist poet Paul Eluard, "There is another world, and it is this one."

Humankind has developed resources to intimate the unfathomable, to help us reach for the hem of the gods and goddesses, and to stand in the presence of infinite values. We call these resources *metaphor* (something that will "carry over" from one thing to another) and *symbol* (something that will "project toward" convergence). With metaphor and symbol, we are provisionally able to approximate, to apprehend, to appreciate that which lies beyond our powers to understand or to control. Unfortunately, our species is prone to fall in love with its own creations and to reify them, converting them from intimations to concepts. By encapsulating the mystery, we lose it entirely. This is the terrible temptation of literalist fundamentalism of all kinds. When the temptation triumphs, the images that arise out of primal experience,

phenomenological in character, are subordinated to the needs of consciousness and thus become artifacts of ego rather than intimations of eternity. Reifying Jung's rich metaphoric mosaic, which tracks the mysterious movement of energies, similarly reduces such metaphors as anima or shadow or complex to metaphysical concepts or the closed systems of allegories. Whatever the gods and goddesses are, or whatever the psyche intends through our dreams, is surely driven from those images when we encapsulate them in concepts. We then lose the tension of ambiguity that would allow images and dreams to suggest, intimate, and point beyond themselves toward the precincts of mystery.

Perhaps life is inherently meaningless, the raw flux of molecules forming, interacting, dissolving, and forming anew elsewhere. We have to be intellectually honest and admit this possibility and restrain the ego's nervous protest. Yet we find it difficult if not impossible to believe that such a purposeless concatenation of subatomic particles could have written the Ninth Symphony or the Declaration of Independence, or even built the airplanes that destroyed a small town, thus inspiring Picasso's *cri de coeur*, *Guernica*. But we do not have to answer this question here, or now, or ever. We can abide the tension of ambiguity in respectful service to mystery. Jung's concept of the archetype is an eminently useful tool for us to employ in service of meaning while still respecting the ambiguous character of the cosmos.

The concept of the archetype has attained such celebrity as to suffer the worst of two extremes—to be misinterpreted by otherwise intelligent persons, and to become a simplistic, popular term found at least monthly in such venues as *Time* magazine. The former have accused Jung of Lamarckism, a theory of organic evolution suggesting that what is learned in one generation is biologically transmitted to the next.² Rather, Jung speaks of the archetype as a formative process, more properly understood as a verb than a noun. The psyche has an apparent desire to render a raw flux of atoms intelligible and meaningful by sorting them into patterns. These patterns themselves form patterns, that is, archetypes create primal forms which are then filled with the contents unique to a particular culture, a particular artist, or a particular dreamer.

On the other hand, the popularization of the term *archetype* has so reduced its radical significance that at best the word means something

important, universal, or moving. The idea of the archetype deserves better than this vague definition. Indeed, our capacity for symbol making differentiates us from all other natural species and makes our spirituality possible. It is our imaginal capacity (our ability to form images which carry energy) that constructs the requisite bridges to those infinite worlds which otherwise lie beyond our rational and emotional capacities. Without the archetypal imagination, we would have neither culture nor spirituality, and our condition would never have transcended brutish rutting in the dust en route to becoming dust itself.

We owe thanks to the Romantics for reminding us of the power of imagination, the power to create dynamic images (*Einbildungskraft*). In his *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge differentiates "primary imagination," "secondary imagination," and "fancy." The last is what today we would call taste or, at best, aesthetics: the arrangement of form and color in pleasing proportions. But primary imagination, Coleridge suggests, was incarnated in Hebraic mythopoesis with Yahweh's primal "I Am that I Am." That is, such metaphor symbolizes the primordial constitutive act, the summoning up of something out of nothing, as in the Genesis announcement, "and God said it was good." For the Hebrew sensibility, then, the logos, or act of speech, symbolically represented the mystery of creation, especially the *creatio ex nihilo*, for to our limited human condition, nothing exists until we summon it to consciousness. Theretofore, creation may have existed independently, but it was beyond the sphere of human awareness and thus lay in the realm of non-being.

What Coleridge called the secondary imagination was what Jung means by the archetypal power, the capacity to echo, perhaps replicate, the original *creatio* through the generative power of an image. This generative power redeems image from the vagaries of human fancy, the velleties or inclinations of fashion, idiosyncrasy, and complex, and resonates with the power of divine creativity. As the poet Rilke claims, all of creation itself awaits this naming power to bring it into being. Other so-called Romantics sought to redeem the worth of imagination from the *Aufklärung* where John Locke defined imagination as "decaying sense." According to Locke, the power to summon up the

image of a tree depended upon the fading sensate inscriptions of past experience on the *tabula rasa* of the mind. However, for Goethe, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and such thinkers as Kant and Schlegel, the imagination was the door to divinity. No one spoke more eloquently about the divine power of the imagination than the engraver William Blake. In a letter written in 1799 he noted, "to the eyes of the man of imagination Nature is imagination itself. As a man is so he sees . . . to me this world is all one continued vision." For Blake and the Romantics, imagination is our highest faculty, not our reason, which is delimited by its own structures. Kant clearly proved that point in *A Critique of Pure Reason*, and Blake wittily remarked upon reason's limits in his lines "May God us keep / from single vision and Newton's sleep."⁴ (While Blake admired the imaginative power of Newton and his dynamic metaphor for the cosmos, he despised the mechanistic mentality which it had begotten in Newton's successors, much as we today may decry the banishment of psyche from the practice of most psychology.) It is the archetypal imagination which, through the agencies of symbol and metaphor and in its constitutive power of imaging, not only creates the world and renders it meaningful but may also be a paradigm of the work of divinity. On another occasion Blake wrote with stunning emphasis: "The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination / God himself that is The Divine Body . . . In Eternity All is Vision."⁵

Huston Smith, a historian of religion, once asked me this question: Does the archetype originate in the human psyche alone or does it have a function transcendent to individual experience?⁶ While we cannot know the answer to that question definitively, I surmise that the archetypal function (remember archetype as verb) does both. It is the means by which the individual brings pattern and process to chaos, and it is the means by which the individual participates in those energies of the cosmos of which we are always a part. The archetypal imagination is, as Wordsworth defined it in "Tintern Abbey,"

a motion and a spirit, that impels
all thinking things, all objects of all thought,
and rolls through all things.

Our intuition of this power fits what Wordsworth described as

*a sense sublime
of something far more deeply interfused,
whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.*⁷

A practical manifestation of this process of archetypal imagining and a practical illustration of where our confusions arise can be seen in analysis.

I once worked with a Western physician who also practiced Eastern healing arts, both in private practice and at a major East Coast hospital. He knew Western surgery, pharmacology, nosology and diagnosis, emergency procedures, and family practice well. But out of his own curiosity and desire for a more balanced picture, he had undertaken formal study and certification in herbology, shiatsu, and acupuncture.

He felt that these two approaches to healing, while employing different root metaphors, were compatible and probably even more efficacious when combined. One system, employing mostly surgery and pharmacology, was allopathic, that is, invasive and counterposing certain effects with opposing, more powerful effects. The other was more homeopathic, operating from the view that health is the natural state and that the restoration of the ordinary flow of energy, called *ki*, *shi*, or *chi*, returned the person to that homeostasis we call health. While the physician believed that both Western and Eastern medicine were helpful, together they surely were even more powerful in activating the mystery of healing. In this scenario, the physician was not the cause of healing but rather the midwife of the organism's own intention.

But the physician faced continuing opposition from his frustrated medical colleagues. They not only demanded empirical data but also resisted the metaphors implicit in an alternative healing practice. While he was no stranger to, nor opponent of, standard research methods, he knew that what he had observed in his practice bespoke the efficacy of those Eastern healing traditions of several millennia. What he was confronting is common: the limited acceptance of the archetypal imagination and the anxiety with which the familiar picture is defended.

As director of the C. G. Jung Educational Center of Houston, I have

had numerous opportunities to develop and find funding for programs that use the expressive arts to help ordinary individuals attain greater personal growth and development. These programs reach out to special populations, such as the homeless, the chronically or terminally ill, or disadvantaged children. Studies at Baylor College of Medicine have indicated that when children are traumatized, critical pathways of the brain are arrested, leading to intellectual and emotional impairment.

A growing body of evidence suggests that the expressive arts seem to reactivate those portions of the brain and reinstitute growth. Moreover, a study out of Stanford University indicated that the expressive arts are more efficacious than other interventions, be they after-school programs, sports, community projects, or medication. In working with an oncological facility, I learned that expressive arts restore some autonomy to an individual who feels disempowered by a catastrophic illness. Patients who engaged in artistic expression generally have greater tolerance of chemotherapy and other treatment modalities. Expressive arts may prolong life and palliate pain, but they also undoubtedly enhance spiritual well-being in the face of death. (Here again, the director of the program felt obliged to assemble hard data to justify these observed results to colleagues, so wedded were they to the common allopathic oncology treatments whose operative metaphors are grossly called "slash, burn, and poison.")

The point about the expressive and healing arts is not that they represent an exciting frontier for exploration, though they do. Rather, both Eastern healing models and the expressive arts are different ways of imagining. Why would sticking pins in someone ease a chronic condition elsewhere in the body? Why would painting or body movement restore portions of the brain's work? Why would imagining, sand tray, or other creative activities assist in the tolerance of institutionalized forms of treatment?

As suggested before, perhaps life is meaningless, but we are meaning-seeking creatures who are driven to understand it. Failing that, we attempt to form some meaningful relationship to life. We learn from archetypal psychology, from the core of primal religious experiences, from quantum physics, and from the artist's eye that all is energy. Matter

is a dynamic, temporary arrangement of energy. Apparently, a religious symbol or a prayer, a work of art, or an expressive practice can so act on our psyche as to move that energy when it has been blocked, deadened, or split off.

The splitting of matter and spirit, which were last held together by the medieval alchemists, must now be knit together, and thoughtful theologians, imaginative physicists, and pragmatic physicians know that. The split between religion and science has been bigoted on both sides, ignorant, and has blocked the development of new healing modalities. The one-sidedness of organizing metaphors of East and West led one to preeminence in spirituality at the diminishment of the study of nature, and the other to prominence in the manipulation of the tangible world at the cost of soul. A dematerialized spirituality leads to the neglect of legitimate social issues, and the de-souling of nature leads to a bland, banal, and bankrupt superficiality.

But what is real, what is common to both sides of these dichotomies is not ideology but energy. All of them are energy systems. To be more specific, all of them are systematized images of energy. It does not matter whether the image is religious in character, purporting to embody the encounter with a transcendent reality, or material in character, purporting to describe the mystery of nature in incarnational flux. Each image presents itself to consciousness through what the philosopher Hans Vaihinger called a "useful fiction," an image whose purpose is to point beyond itself toward the mystery. As the mystery is by definition that which we cannot know, lest it no longer be the Mystery, our images are tools, not ends in themselves.

Underneath these cultural splits, the archetypal imagination seeks, through affectively charged images, to connect us to the flow of energy that is the heart and hum of the cosmos. With such images we have provisional access to the Mystery. Without them, we would remain locked forever within our bestial beginnings. Surely only fools and literalists would confuse the bridge toward the other shore with the shore itself, or the arrow with the target, or the desire with the object of desire.

Though we begin and end with the limits of our condition, an inexpressible hope, a yearning for connection, a desire for meaning, and a movement of energy toward healing drives us forward. Apparently,

what is real and omnipresent is energy; what allows us to stand in relationship to that mystery is image; and what generates the bridge is an autonomous part of our own nature, the archetypal imagination. We are never more profoundly human than when we express our yearning, nor closer to the divine than when we imagine. This linkage with the infinite has of course been the intent of the great mythologies and religions, the healing creative and expressive arts, and the dreams we dream each night.

This inexplicable linkage was well known to the visionaries, the artists, and the prophets. We too are obliged to wrestle anew with the paradox that, while our condition remains fragile and sometimes terrible, we are nonetheless afforded a means by which to participate in the deepest mysteries of which we are a part and with which we long to connect.

Those who have tracked the history of Western thought from Plato through Newton through Hume and Kant have concluded that we can only know the answer to those questions which our mind is capable of asking. Our sciences are self-limiting imaginal systems, even when they are open-ended. The matters we know conform to matters which we can know, that is, which are within the confines of our capacities to know. Our sciences ask only the questions we are capable of knowing. When, however, we are visited by images which come from another place, from mysterious origin, we are opened to something larger than heretofore possible.

Consciousness is transformed by the encounter with mystery as invested in images heretofore foreign to it. In the world of contemporary deconstructionism, we believe that all knowledge is interpretation and all interpretation is subjective, prejudiced by unconscious determinants such as class, gender, and Zeitgeist, and that no interpretation is final or authoritative. Thus, when the cosmos reveals itself to us, it is by way of the image foreign to consciousness. And it is through this encounter with the numinous that the power of the archetypal imagination makes growth possible.

Many years ago, long before I was a therapist, I played a role in the dream of a friend who was going through a terrible life crisis, not the least of which included the death of his child. In the dream I had placed

a strip of masking tape on the end of his nose. He knew that I had not done this bizarre act as a joke or to make light of his Jobean dilemma. When we talked over the dream and focused on what Jung called the "obscure symbol," I spontaneously said, "Tom, what you are looking for is as near as the end of your nose." He had an immediate reaction—enlightenment—because his course was clear, albeit painful. He knew what he had to do.

Despite what we know to be the infinity of our yearning and the limits of our powers, we have been provided a means of communication with the mysteries. This power is as near as the end of one's nose. As Blake once expressed it:

*I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball:
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.⁸*

CHAPTER 1

Religious Imaginings

Divine Morphologies

*If horses . . . had hands, or were able to draw with their
hands and do the work that man can do, horses would
draw the forms of gods like horses.*

—Xenophanes

*What we wish most to know, most desire, remains unknowable and lies
beyond our grasp.*

Houston poet Edward Hirsch's lines, "Stars are the white tears of nothingness. / Nothingness grieves over the disintegrating gods" stir in us a sense of wistfulness, pathos, longing and loss, even though they are rationally inexplicable.¹ The personification of the stars, the evocation of "white tears," the grieving over lost certainties—all intimate the inexplicable, which is the chief service of symbol and metaphor. Compare the honesty of this feeling state, and the respect for the mystery which these lines portray, with the maudlin, infantilizing, and hybridistic utterances of the televangelists. Hirsch honestly reflects the modern dilemma of living between myths, while the purveyors of one-line theologies uphold the notion of the patriarchal parent. His lines are part *cri de coeur*, part protest, and part expression of radical faith in the immensity which lies both within and outside us. His is the honesty of Robert Frost, who observed,

*They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.*