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## **The Serpent's Prayer: The Psychology of an Image**

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Why hast thou enticed thyself  
Into the old serpent's Paradise?  
Why hast thou stolen  
Into thyself, thyself?<sup>1</sup>  
Nietzsche

### **The Image**

In the margins of a notebook in which he recorded dreams and composed poems, a young analysand doodled a serpent. The creature's slender body was bent such that its posture mimicked that of a person kneeling in prayer. Its head was lowered, it had two arms, and its hands were clasped together in a manner which further accentuated the idea of prayer. Other features of the drawing, however, belied the humility and reverence which we are accustomed to associating with this gesture of supplication. In contrast to the usual practice of praying with the eyes closed, a practice which reflects the surrendering of one's personal point of view to the point of view of God, the serpent's eye was open and piercingly aware. Likewise, though the hands were raised before the face and clasped together prayerfully, the middle finger of the left hand was turned upward in a profane gesture. In addition, the serpent had a little beard, cut in a "beatnik" fashion. Far from suggesting receptiveness to a higher power, the open eye, the raised finger, and the beard expressed a rebellious pride. The overall effect of the crude cartoon was parodic. Though the serpent had adopted the posture of the supplicant, it did so mockingly.

The analysand had no particular associations to his drawing. While it seemed to give shape to

certain vague feelings which he had previously been unable to express, it remained mysterious to him. Why, out of all God's creatures, had he doodled a serpent? And why did it kneel in prayer with its finger raised in the familiar "up yours" gesture? The manner in which he had drawn the serpent--in profile facing to the left, its body curved like a question mark--seemed to invite these questions.

While conventional psychoanalytic methodology would attempt to understand this drawing through recourse to the psychology of the analysand, in the pages that follow we shall take a quite different approach. Following Jung, who maintained that the meaning of imaginal figures should *not* be derived exclusively from the personal psychology of their creator (since the creator's psychology may be imagined in more radical perspective if viewed as the product of the figure which it claims to have created)<sup>2</sup>, our approach will focus on the *serpent's* psychology, not the analysand's. This *imaginal* approach, which recognizes imaginal figures as subjects in their own right, affords awareness of a figure's revelatory value. Freed from their reduction via the personalistic perspective to what is known about the patient, the autonomy and otherness of the figures stands clear. Suddenly, introspection gives way to an I-Thou relationship and psychology rubs a shoulder with religion.

Before we turn our attention specifically to the figure of the Praying Serpent, we shall embark on a winding, serpentine journey. First we shall explore something of the influence which our education has had upon our relationship to the serpent. Then we shall examine the manner in which the serpent inhabits the mythic imagination. From there we shall move on to Jung's writings to discover his view of serpent and snake images. Though we will return to the Praying Serpent only after many turns and detours, its spirit will be with us every inch of the way, determining the choices we make regarding the amplifications we will explore and styling our reflections upon these.

## **The Voices of our Education**

When D.H. Lawrence encountered a snake drinking at his water trough the "voice of [his] education said to [him]/ [It] must be killed."<sup>3</sup> In a poem dedicated to the snake, Lawrence tells us that the voice suggested to him that striking the creature with a stick was the manly thing to do and that to hesitate was either cowardly or perverse. But Lawrence liked the snake and felt honoured that it had sought out his hospitality "from out the dark door of the secret earth."<sup>4</sup> For some minutes he struggled with himself--should he kill the snake or no--and then, possibly to ease the discomfort of indecision, he picked up a log, struck at the creature, missing it. Startled, the snake darted quickly back down its hole and out of sight leaving Lawrence to regret the meanness of his action.

I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.  
 And thought of the albatross,  
 And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
 Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,  
 Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords  
 Of life.  
 And I have something to expiate:  
 A pettiness.<sup>5</sup>

Doubtless, the ambivalent feelings to which Lawrence was subject in his encounter with the snake are familiar to most of us. When we meet a snake in the woods or zoo, feelings of fascination and revulsion are likely to intermingle. The sensuous, undulating pattern of the creature's limbless body, its swift, sinuous movements, its forked, threatening tongue, its tendency to coil around its victims,

and its capacity to shed its skin polarize human affections. Some people have a decided love for snakes and may even keep them as pets. Like the ladies of antiquity, especially Egyptian, who wore live snakes as necklaces to cool their skin, these snake-lovers enjoy holding their reptilian friends and allowing them to slither across their shoulders and around their necks. Caring for these pets--or should we rather call them gods?--requires sacrifice. Some species must be fed live rodents such as mice, others hamburger or insects. The enclosures in which they reside become household shrines, their owners, priests. Other people become phobic in the presence of a snake. The mere sighting of one, whether in the wild, captivity, or on film may elicit immediate panic. Significantly, snake-phobias are among the most common of the phobias, despite the fact that today we rarely encounter snakes and, indeed, are in constant contact with objects which would seem to be much better candidates for our fear (automobiles, guns, knives, one another).<sup>6</sup> Rapoport, drawing on the empirical work of Mineka with monkey's and snakes, suggests that certain animals, including human ones, learn to fear snakes with very little actual experience of them because innate, "out of date" patterns of behaviour, patterns which have been built up through thousands of years experience, are released.<sup>7</sup>

As Lawrence discovered in his encounter with the snake which drank inoffensively at his water trough, it is impossible to approach the creature innocently. Our responses, whether for or against, are overdetermined. Throughout history serpents, snakes, vipers, adders and asps have been revered and reviled. When we meet them, whether in nature, dream, myth or art, we are immediately bitten by some aspect of their symbolism. Though we may not know their reputation consciously it precedes them nonetheless. No sooner do we meet them than the voices of an education not personally our own speak to us from archetypal sources.

## The Serpents of Myth

Though a full length exposition of the symbolism of the serpent would fill large volumes, we can here touch on some of its salient features.<sup>8</sup> Philo of Alexandria, impressed with the serpent's ability to rejuvenate itself through the shedding of its skin, as well as with its ability to kill and cure (an ability which he saw as indicative of the positive and negative cosmic powers that rule the world), deemed it the "most spiritual of animals." Along with other reptiles it has been used to refer to life in its earliest, most primordial aspects. Gnostics of the Nassene sect (*nass*=snake) regarded the snake as an elemental life force and imagined it to inhabit all objects and beings. Likewise, in Greek mythology, Eros, the god of love and child of Chaos, whose cosmogonic power caused "all things to mingle" including the elements which combined to form the other gods, was, in his original, primordial form, a chthonic snake. In Hindu mythology, the cosmic serpent, Sesa, supports the earth on his head and, as Cosmic Ocean, envelopes the universe. The Egyptians, likewise, regarded the snake as a being so elemental that they incorporated serpents into almost all of their symbols, but in particular, into symbols of the sun. While the serpent figures prominently in creation myths where it seems to be a metaphor of generativity and life, it also appears in myths of destruction. In Germanic mythology, for instance, a great serpent eats away at the root of the Tree of Life. And in the Norse, *Voluspa*, it is said that the world destroying deluge will begin when the serpent, Midgard awakens. In the Book of Revelation John tells of the war in heaven in which "the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9), the serpent, that is, which caused Mankind's eviction from Paradise, will be defeated by Michael and his army of angels.

The serpent, of course, is sacred to numerous gods, especially chthonian mother-goddesses. Eliade

identifies Eve (and Cirlot, Lilith) with an ancient Phoenician goddess whose form was that of a snake. One thinks as well of Athena, Artemis, Hecate, Persephone, and of Medusa and the Erinyes with their loathsome, snake-hair. When the cult of the decidedly male deity Apollo usurped the matriarchal cult at Delphi, an act of usurpation mythologized as Apollo's killing of the feminine serpent, Python, the plundered feminine serpent symbolism became assimilated to him. Likewise, in the *Iliad*, when an eagle appeared carrying a maimed snake in its talons, the seer Calcas interpreted this to mean that the more patriarchal organization of the Aryans would defeat the more matriarchal order of Asia. Again, in a similar manner, Zeus' taking on the form of a serpent in order to escape the murderous aggression of his father, Cronus, may be understood as his attempt to hide behind the mother's skirts of the Matriarchate.

Judeo-Christianity comes down hard on the serpent from the very beginning. Like the critical stare of Apollonius in Keats' poem, *Lamia*, a stare which turned the young poet's female muse back into a forlorn snake, the monocular vision of monotheism concentrates polytheism's diverse articulation of the life force into the hiss of the Evil One. Where before the serpent had been a favourite theriomorphic form of gods and goddesses, it became with the "fall" of Adam and Eve the infernal enemy of the so-called "one true God." Though the Eden story has been read literally in terms of sinful disobedience, psychologically in terms of the nascent stirrings of consciousness, and erotically in terms of the symbolism of sexual awakening, the casting of a creature so redolent of paganism as the snake into the role of tempter suggests that Original Sin may have had to do with an *a priori* "breaking" of the first of the Ten Commandments, a commandment which was revealed only much later by God through Moses: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). Read from a polytheistic perspective, the story of Eden provides an account of how the serpent, a creature with as

many legs as it had religious affiliations, was separated from both and forced to slither upon its belly as the monopede foil of monotheistic religion. The amputation of the serpent's legs, the amputation, that is to say, of its pagan standpoints, was not the result of a sharply discriminative consciousness such as is conveyed by the adage "divide and conquer." Rather, the war cry of monotheism was blur, obfuscate, and confuse. Lump the foe together in the same rough-edged bin. Fail to distinguish. Reduce the multitude of divine forms to a common denominator. As Jesus put it: "if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt 6:22).<sup>9</sup> What Jesus neglected to mention, however, is that this light body casts the serpent as its shadow.

In Book X of *Paradise Lost*, Milton provides a vivid example of the monotheistic imagination's tendency to concentrate the "other gods" into a generic, serpentine form. After Satan has spoken to the fallen angels in Pandemonium, angels which Milton echoing Old Testament usage<sup>10</sup> had earlier referred to as "gods,"<sup>11</sup> he and they are transformed into hissing serpents so that each might be "punisht in the shape he sinned,/according to his doom."<sup>12</sup>

...dreadful was the din  
 Of hissing through the Hall, thick swarming now  
 With complicated monsters, head and tail,  
 Scorpion and Asp, and *Amphisbaena* dire,  
*Cerastes* horn'd, *Hydrus*, and *Ellops* drear,  
 And *Dipsas* (not so thick swarm'd once the Soil  
 Bedropt with blood of *Gorgon*, or the Isle  
*Ophiusa*) but still greatest hee the midst,  
 Now Dragon grown, larger than whom the Sun  
 Ingender'd in the *Pythian* Vale on slime,  
 Huge *Python*, and his Power no less he seem'd  
 Above the rest still to retain....<sup>13</sup>

The Christian mystic, Jakob Boehme imagines a similar transformation. When "the divine light

went out of the Devils," he writes in his treatise, *A Description of the Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, "they lost their beauteous forme and Image, and became like Serpents, Dragons, Worms and evil Beasts: as may be seen by *Adam's Serpent*."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Vondel's poem *Lucifer*, the Devil, pierced by the sword of Michael in the war in heaven turns into a monster combining the features of a serpent with those of other beasts.<sup>15</sup>

Ironically, Milton's vision of God's punishment of Satan and the fallen angels itself has pagan undertones. In order to "aggravate/Thir penance," God causes a grove of trees, "laden with fair Fruit, like that/Which grew in Paradise, the bait of *Eve/ Us'd by the Tempter*" to appear in their midst.<sup>16</sup> Like the titan, Tantalus, craning his neck in vain that he might reach the fruit which dangles out of reach above him, and the famished souls which reside below a branch of the Tree of Knowledge which has been placed above them in Dante's *Purgatory*, Milton's serpents reach out to eat the forbidden fruit only to have their mouths filled up with ashes. Little wonder that the Praying Serpent should give 'the finger' to the Lord.

### **The Serpent in Jung's Thought**

Although a more complete survey of the symbolism of the serpent would have to include a discussion of the high esteem in which it is held in traditional cultures such as those of India (especially as the Kundalini) and Mexico (Quetzalcoatl), its identification in early Greek thought with the personal genius, and its importance as a phallic symbol (to mention only a few more of the worms in the can), let us now consider the general psychological meanings which Jung ascribed to it.



In Jung's view, "the snake, as a chthonic and at the same time spiritual being, symbolizes the unconscious."<sup>17</sup> In particular, it seems to refer to "the latter's sudden and unexpected manifestations, its painful and dangerous intervention in our affairs, and its frightening effects."<sup>18</sup> Crucial to an understanding of the significance of the serpent or snake as a libido-symbol is a consideration of the biological characteristics of the actual creature. Jung stresses the fact that the snake is a "cold-blooded vertebrate" and that with it the "psychic rapport that can be established with practically all warm-blooded animals comes to an end."<sup>19</sup> Like the Gnostics who identified the serpent with the human medulla and spinal cord, Jung regards the snake as the psychic representative of the profoundly unconscious reflex functions which are governed by these organs.<sup>20</sup>

...the snake would correspond to what is totally unconscious and incapable of becoming conscious, but which, as the collective unconscious and as instinct, seems to possess a peculiar wisdom of its own and a knowledge that is often felt to be supernatural. This is the treasure which the snake (or dragon) guards, and also the reason why the snake signifies evil and darkness on the one hand and wisdom on the other. Its unrelatedness, coldness, and dangerousness express the instinctuality that with ruthless cruelty rides roughshod over all moral and any other human wishes and considerations and is therefore just as terrifying and fascinating in its effects as the sudden glance of a poisonous snake.<sup>21</sup>

Canadian author, Margaret Atwood, gives the snake a characterization similar to that of Jung. In a poem entitled, "Bad Mouth," she too emphasizes the terrifying darkness, extreme unrelatedness, and unfathomable necessity of the snake.

....  
 And you, *Constrictor constrictor*,  
 sinuous ribbon of true darkness,  
 one long muscle with eyes and an anus,  
 looping like thick tar out of the trees  
 to squeeze the voice from anything edible  
 reducing it to scales and belly

....

Between us there is no fellow feeling,  
as witness: a snake cannot scream.

Observe the alien  
Chainmail skin, straight out  
of science fiction, pure  
shiver, pure saturn.

Those who can explain them  
can explain anything

Some say they're a snarled puzzle  
only gasoline and a match can untangle.  
Even their mating is barely sexual,  
a romance between two lengths  
of cyanide-coloured string.  
Despite their live births and squirming nests  
it's hard to believe in snakes loving.

Alone among the animals  
the snake does not sing.  
The reason for them is the same  
as the reason for stars, and not human.<sup>22</sup>

Jung's statement--"the unconscious insinuates itself in the form of a snake if the conscious mind is afraid of the compensating tendency of the unconscious..."<sup>23</sup>--must be read in light of the snake's zoological uniqueness. To dream of a snake is entirely different than to dream of a wild boar, a ferocious lion, or a rabid dog. Though all these creatures may point to compensatory unconscious contents which the conscious mind fears, each challenges the standpoint of consciousness in its own particular way. While the boar charges out from the underbrush at the edges of awareness, the Cobra raises its head above the savanna ready to spit its blinding poison. While the lion prepares to pounce upon its prey, the rattler rustles its tail, ready to strike anything that draws too near. And again, while the rabid dog froths, chokes and bites the air, a yellow-green garter snake worships the sun on a warm rock in the garden. It is one thing for the one-sidedness of the conscious mind to find itself

compensated by a mammalian member of the animal kingdom such as a boar, a lion or a dog, and quite another to find itself in compensatory relationship with a snake. The snake, after all, is a saurian, a member of the reptile kingdom, cold-blooded and unrelated. Its appearance in a dream suggests a psychic situation in which the gulf between the conscious and unconscious is particularly wide. Whether this gulf is seen as the result of excessive repression (Freud) or as the consequence of the ego-personality having taken on the wings of an eagle and flown too far in another direction (Jung), its serpentine form suggests that some aspect of the personality can actualize itself only in a snake-like manner, which is to say, unconsciously, compulsively, cold-bloodedly, reflexively.<sup>24</sup> When the psyche is this polarized, it is impossible to predict just what will happen next. As Jung put it, when the "saurian turns up, one may expect something quite unusual to happen."<sup>25</sup>

In psychotherapeutic practice one frequently meets up with the snake, particularly with patients who are compelled to "act-out." Consider, for example, the patient who is unable to bear the agony of indecision and represses one side of a conflict. Suddenly, everything is reported to be solved. The rightness of the decision seems to be validated by the relief it brings to the pain of indecision. Certainty seems to be established. The patient says she will now leave her husband or whatever in order to be more herself. But the relief which the patient reports is only the calm before the storm. Earlier, when she had been of two minds, her conflict had been a decidedly human one. She could empathize with both of her feelings, despite the contradiction between them. Her ambivalence was a warm-blooded, even hot blooded, psychic rapport with both sides. With repression, however, comes a loss of rapport with the repressed pole of the conflict and a corresponding cooling of its blood. Pushed out of awareness, the repressed value devolves into a less related creature. When the repression is particularly severe it devolves into a snake.<sup>26</sup> The process, here, is reminiscent once

again of Keats' description of how the marvellous serpent, Lamia was stripped of her beautiful pagan raiment and turned into a loathsome snake by the harsh gaze of monotheism. Unable to live the "polytheism" of her conflicts, the patient affects the decisiveness of an Apollonius and stares down the rejected values until they slither away like snakes. But these rejected values do not slither away into complete oblivion like Keats' Lamia-- "dead to all the higher forms of poetry." On the contrary, they continue to inhabit a shadowy corner of the patient's peace of mind even as the beguiling snake inhabited a shadowy corner of the Garden of Eden. Of course, given that her new found certainty is at bottom merely a forced, pseudo-certainty, it is only a matter of time before an *enantiodromia*, a swing to the repressed pole of the conflict, takes place. At her next session the patient is agitated and conflicted, in a "fallen" state once more. She reports that despite the peace of mind she had previously claimed for herself, a dark force compelled her to enact the alternative she had previously ruled out. If, at this point, she again represses one side of the conflict, the whole process will repeat itself. Like a snake biting its own tail, she will then find herself in a vicious circle. If, however, she is able to hold the tension of the opposites it is possible that a new attitude may emerge which can resolve them into a larger personality. Before this occurs, however, the likelihood is that she will continue to oscillate back and forth for some time. Viewed positively, the flip/flops which follow in the wake of repressed ambivalence are *felix culpas* or "fortunate falls," which return the patient to the transforming cross of the conflict which must be suffered if the New Jerusalem of a truly new attitude is to be achieved.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps, this balancing (as opposed to repressing) of opposites, each of which could "run roughshod over all moral and all other human wishes and considerations" like a snake if arbitrarily repressed, is one meaning to the pair of balanced serpents which flank and entwine the caduceus of primal physician, Aesculapius. In a similar vein, perhaps those gnostics and

alchemists who nailed the mercurial serpent to the cross did so out of a recognition that we must suffer the very values that our tradition would have us split off as evil and repress if the higher personality, which Christ personifies, is to be raised up in our being.<sup>28</sup>

When serpents *threaten* us in our dreams, we have strayed from the serpentine path of our individuation. As Blake put it in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," it is not until we leave the "paths of ease" and walk upon the "perilous paths" of our own uniqueness that "the sneaking serpent walks in mild humility."<sup>29</sup> The way of our own uniqueness, the "perilous path," is not a straight line. Straight lines and short cuts take us away from ourselves. Indeed, it is by trying to be too straight--which is to say, too rational, too decisive, too uniform, too collectively correct--that we become neurotically divided against ourselves. Our own way is an individual way, a road less travelled. It leads, writes Jung, "in directions that seem absolutely wrong. One doesn't realize when one swings to the left that left exhausts itself and swings to the right again."<sup>30</sup> When asked by a young woman what route led most directly to her destiny Jung answered, with the speed of a striking serpent, "the detour!" Blake would have given a similar reply: "Improvement makes strait roads; but crooked roads without improvement are the roads of Genius."<sup>31</sup>

Commenting in a seminar on the vision of a patient who had envisioned herself walking upon the back of a large serpent, Jung suggests that "the inevitable path is a thing that is living in itself, autonomously living."<sup>32</sup> He then compares this living path to the Chinese concept of *Tao*, reminding his audience that *Tao* was symbolized as a dragon and that the dragon and the snake are mythological equivalents. In another seminar, Jung relates the living path to Christ:

...the serpentine way of the individual is the straightest way he can possibly go. That is symbolized by the serpentine way of the sun through the Zodiac, and the Zodiacal

serpent is Christ, who said: "I am the way [John 14:6]. He is the serpent, so in the early Christian church he is the sun, and the signs of the Zodiac, the apostles, are the twelve months of the year."<sup>33</sup>

Though Jung refers to the living path as the "inevitable path," it is just as inevitable that we shall stray from it from time to time. When this happens, when, that is to say, "we fail to follow the path of the libido,"<sup>34</sup> the libido loses its "mild humility," takes on a threatening quality, and turns against us. It is just as if each turn of fate which we attempt to by-pass in favour of what seems like more direct routes slithers ahead of us and snarls our path with a compensatory experience.

Perhaps, Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus was a compensatory experience of this type. Hoping to arrest any he could find in Damascus "belonging to The Way" (Acts 9:2), and "breathing threats and murder against the disciples" (Acts 9:1), Paul made a direct line for the city. His trip, however, was not without incident. As he approached Damascus he was blinded by a heavenly light. A voice in the light identified itself as Jesus, and after asking Paul why he persecuted His followers, said to him, "it is hard for thee to goad against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). By "goad[ing] against the prinks" Christ meant moving counter to the direction one's life compels one to go. The road to Damascus, i.e., the collective road of anti-Christian sentiment, was not Paul's true path. Indeed, his true path, ironically enough, was now to take a turn in a Christian direction. After three days had passed the Lord directed a man named Ananias to go to a house on a street called "Straight" where the blind Paul was staying and restore sight to Paul's eyes through the laying on of hands (Acts 9:11,12). Though at first Ananias, fearing Paul, was reluctant to obey, he faithfully followed this serpentine turn in his own life's path, found Paul, and touched his eyes. As he did so "something like scales" (Acts 9:18)--could they have been the scales of a snake?--fell from the blind man's eyes. With this his sight was restored and his conversion essentially complete.

As we have already suggested in connection to the patient who repressed her ambivalence, our inevitable lapses from our inevitable path have a fortunate aspect: they help us to become more conscious. Jung repeatedly stresses in his writings that it is not enough that we simply live in accordance with nature. In addition to living naturally, we must also live consciously. Human existence is complicated by the fact that the reflective awareness that distinguishes our minds from nature can, as a result of its capacity for abstraction, lead us to live *against* nature. Hence the need that it be harmonized once more with nature. As Jung puts it,

...why should a philosopher only be able to reach *Tao*, as the ultimate effect of his philosophical efforts, if it were so easy that any lizard or rat or dog or any primitive man could have it? You see this is just the difference between life in nature in *participation mystique* where you are completely unconscious, and life in nature where you are conscious. The one state is a sinful state and the other is a redeemed state, according to a [Gnostic] saying of Jesus..."If thou knowest what thou art doing, thou art blessed; if thou dost not know thou art cursed."<sup>35</sup>

If, as Jung maintains, the apparently "wrong" road may prove fortuitous and bend around eventually to become the "right" road even as the "right" road may take a "wrong" turn, it is because, as he says elsewhere, "there can be no consciousness without the perception of differences."<sup>36</sup> It is by getting off the track and then searching for it again that we have the opportunity of finding it *consciously*. Errors, mistakes, and wrong turns provide the context from which one's own way can be divined. Perhaps, this is why the alchemists referred to their work as an *opus contra naturam*, a work *against* nature which ultimately fulfils nature. It may also account for Jesus's claim that there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine pious souls (Luke 15:7)--the sinner, being aware of difference, has a more conscious form of piety. And, in a similar vein, perhaps those gnostics who identified Christ with the knowing serpent and followed the serpentine path that ambles back and forth between right and wrong, truth and falsity, good and evil brought joy

to heaven for precisely the same reason.

Although the serpentine path of this discourse has made use of Christian allusions, it would be mistaken to conclude on this account that "the soul," as Tertullian claimed, "is naturally Christian." The religious affiliations of the serpent, as we have already noted, are numerous and diverse. Every archetypal category of existence, every altar of life, every reach of the soul has at least one snake in residence. Though the path of one's individuation may take a Christian turn as it did for Paul, other turns in other directions are also possible. Indeed, now that Paul's crooked path has been straightened into a Christian thoroughfare<sup>37</sup>, it is increasingly likely that we will be blinded by the theophanies of those gods we have failed to recognize along our way--or, if not blinded by them, bitten by their snakes.

Whenever a metaphor has outlived its usefulness, a theory has lost its explanatory power, or the attitude of consciousness has become too one-sided, poisonous anomalies are likely to appear. This is especially the case when we persist in them unchanged. As Blake put it, "The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind."<sup>38</sup> Though Blake refers here to the negative aspect of mental stagnation, the reptiles which this stagnation breeds may also be curative.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it is by poisoning us with their snakes that the gods we have neglected attempt to heal us of the oversight which caused us to neglect them in the first place. The operative principle here is *similia similibus curantur*--like cures like. The god which has caused the illness is the god with the power to cure it. Only by living those aspects of life which are sacred to the deity we have neglected is the serpent's bite cured.

The environment is one example of this reptile infested mental water. The triumph of monotheism over polytheism has dealt a devastating blow to nature. As the local deities which inhabited the



brooks, meadows, fields and mountains were driven out by the missionaries and their abstract notion of God, Nature came to be viewed as spiritually inert. The brooks became drainage ditches, the meadows toxic waste sites, the fields condo developments, and the mountains ski resorts. Today, Eliot's vision of our culture as a "wasteland" heaped with "broken images" is literally true. The broken images are in the local river coated with the effluent of a factory. The earth itself has become the dumping ground of our civilization's other-worldly theology, even as God shat upon the Basel Cathedral in Jung's adolescent fantasy.<sup>40</sup> Transcendent monotheistic religions such as Christianity, having staked an exclusive claim on the serpentine pattern, now gasp and choke in the bad air of their own Damascus. The neglected gods hiss like reptiles, their shrines polluted by our stagnant minds. The compensatory swing back to paganism takes on a compulsive necessity. Like the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's rime, we must learn to bless these water snakes once more if we are to be freed from the fiends which pursue us for having shot the Albatross with the crossbow of monotheism.<sup>41</sup>

Jung would probably understand the environmental disaster with which the planet is now threatened in terms of themes familiar to him from hero myths. Hero figures, in Jung's view, reflect the psychic tendencies which underpin the expansion and development of the conscious mind in general, and of the ego-complex in particular. In mythology the hero's fate is frequently entwined with that of the serpent or snake. On the one hand, these serpents symbolize the unconscious in its maternal aspect--she from whom the "forward striving libido of the son demands separation"<sup>42</sup> in order to differentiate a conscious form of life, as well as she to whom he clings with "childish longing."<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the serpent, as devouring mother, may attack the emancipated hero, especially when his battle to differentiate consciousness has been so successful that consciousness is

developing too one-sidedly. Of course, the emancipated hero, the dragon-slayer, mistaking the serpent for an enemy of consciousness (i.e., fearing the new images and ideas that come out of the unconscious), may fight her off again and again, thereby "dish[ing] the compensation from the unconscious."<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, however, he may bravely descend into her (active incest) or, as is more often the case, simply be overpowered and swallowed up. Ironically, this calamity of being devoured may ultimately prove providential. Indeed, if the polarization between the hero and the mother-serpent is not so great as to force her to secrete a lethal venom, and if the devoured hero is able to accept the compensatory input of the neglected instincts, he may be relocated once again on the serpentine path through a subsequent rebirth.

In illustration of the havoc that a "too successful life"<sup>45</sup> can spell for one's relationship to the unconscious, Jung cites the case of the hero, Gilgamesh.

[Gilgamesh] was so successful that the gods, the representatives of the unconscious, saw themselves compelled to deliberate how they could best bring about his downfall. Their efforts were unavailing at first, but when the hero had won the herb of immortality and was almost at his goal, a serpent stole the elixir of life from him while he slept.<sup>46</sup>

Today, emancipated by an enormously "successful" heroic phase of development and progress, we no longer live inside nature, in *participation mystique* with it, like a tribe in a rain forest, or an infant in its mother's womb. The paradisiacally "sinful" state of unconscious identity, the childish longings that once bound us to the mother, have long been overcome. But, as Jung said of Gilgamesh, our success has been so excessive that it has become an offense to the gods. Our collective consciousness has become so one-sided that the world itself has become a poisonous lamia. As acid rain, thinning ozone, global warming and pollution the serpent coils around us. And though we view

these snakes as "hostile demon[s],...rob[bing] [us] of energy,...in actual fact [they] are...[our] own unconscious whose alien tendencies are beginning to check the forward striving of the conscious mind."<sup>47</sup> It is not so much that we must *attack* these problems. To continue on with the attacking attitude would only widen the gulf between the conscious and unconscious minds, a gulf of which the toxicity of the modern environment is a symptom. Rather than *attack* these problems we must allow ourselves to be *swallowed up* by them. The poison in the world is the medicine for our sickly attitude. Like cures like. The problems which our contemporary world-view is unable to solve will, like a corrosive or solvent, dissolve that world-view, thereby allowing new perspectives--the perspectives of other gods--to emerge from the unconscious. Like the wounded physician, our capacity to heal this planet resides in our capacity to become sick with its problems. Flights into health are no longer the answer. The snake has bitten fast and we must now, like the devoured hero, go on that long, dark journey through its belly toward rebirth. If we will agree to go the way of the serpent, if, that is to say, we will allow ourselves to be sickened into rapport with the spirits of life we have neglected, the genetic damage to which our bodies are now increasingly subject may give way to a mutation of consciousness. This mutation of consciousness, this genetic drift toward a new attitude, whether it be conceived as the function of natural selection or divine election (i.e., our adaptation to the neglected gods), must commit the human spirit to life in *all* aspects of its divinity.

### **The Praying Serpent Again**

Though we return only now, after many a winding detour, to the Praying Serpent with which this journey began, let us remind ourselves that this serpent has been with us all along compelling this

inquiry from the back of our minds. Had we begun with another image, even another serpent-image, we would doubtless have noticed different things along the way. This, of course, is how the imagination operates. As "the awful shadow of some unseen Power/Float[ing] though unseen amongst us,"<sup>48</sup> an image is the author of its own elucidation. And so it has been in this paper. What started as a spontaneous doodle in an analysand's notebook continued to define itself as we allowed it to imagine on. Features which had originally been sketched in only the faintest outline became more sharply drawn with every sentence. References to polytheism, the perilous path, and the psychology of ambivalence lent further definition to the figure's beard, finger, and irreverent attitude. Even the particular style of the writing discloses something of the colour of the serpent's scales. As Jung put it, "Image and meaning are identical; ...as the first takes shape the latter becomes clearer."<sup>49</sup>

Edward Casey, writing on the imagination, has said that an image is not what we see but how we see.<sup>50</sup> This has certainly been the case with regard to the Praying Serpent. Though we have not yet looked specifically *at* the features of this image, we have, nonetheless, been seeing by means of them. The Praying Serpent is far more than something that we look at, a series of lines doodled in a notebook or a conglomeration of signs pointing to a definite meaning. In a deeper sense, it is a living figure of fantasy, an imaginal being with its own unique viewpoint. Not only does this serpent read Milton, Blake, Keats and Jung; it can also take up the pen on behalf of its own point of view, transforming, thereby, our knowledge into *gnosis*. Had Lawrence been the pupil of his snake, rather than of "the voice of [his] accursed human education," he might not have "missed [his] chance with one of the lords of life" and the "pettiness" which he incurred would not be ours to "expiate."

While keeping firmly in mind Casey's dictum that an image is not what we see but how we see, let us now look at the specific features of the Praying Serpent, careful that we not kill it with

objectifying stares.

### Three Analogies

Like the *ouroboris*, the serpent that devours its own tail, the figure in whose perspective we have been imagining, devours its own prayer. As we noted at the outset, though the creature's hands are clasped together in supplication, the middle finger of its left hand has broken rank with its brethren and rises from their midst in the familiar, "up-yours" gesture, much as a snake that has been charmed from its basket. The serpent's eye, likewise, is not closed submissively before the presence of the Lord, but, like an evil eye, it has its own infernal perspective. The beard, as well, is not the beard of piety, as were the beards of old which men braided like the beards of their gods, swore oaths upon, and shaved off as a sign of mourning, punishment, servility and shame.<sup>51</sup> On the contrary, it is a devilish, counter-cultural, "beatnik" Goatee. Perhaps this autophagic activity, this ouroboric devouring action, reflects the mutual incorporation or ingestion of psychic values that might otherwise have polarized in diametrical opposition. Difficult as it may be to digest, opposites such as good and evil are relative. When the one bites into the other each flinches with the recognition that its teeth are in its own tail.

Besides the analogy to the *ouroboris*, we may also draw an analogy to the pair of serpents--the one cowed the other wild--which flank the Caduceus of Aesculapius. Though the Praying Serpent is by itself and not paired or contrasted with another serpent, it combines within itself the qualities of these two Aesculapian vipers. On the one hand, it is as submissive, respectful, and tame as the cowed serpent, and, on the other, it is as rebellious, unruly, and obstreperous as the wild one. Could

this blend of opposites somehow be medicinal? Is the Praying Serpent, like the serpents of Aesculapius, also a medicine-serpent?

Before taking up these questions let us stain the image with yet another analogy. The Praying Serpent may also be compared with the chinese yin/yang symbol. Though east is east and west is west, the two images overlap in their treatment of the opposites of which they are composed. Just as the dark yin and light yang aspects of the unitary yin/yang symbol each contain a dot of the other within them, the piously clasped hands of the Praying Serpent contain a dot, or rather a finger, of usurping blasphemy. This reading of the image is reversible. The blasphemous features of the Praying Serpent may also be imagined to contain within themselves aspects of piety. Though the serpent's finger gestures profanely, its hands are pressed together in prayer.

Of course, it may be objected that we are dealing with very different pairs of opposites in the case of the Praying Serpent than we are in the case of the yin/yang symbol. While the Praying Serpent is composed of good and evil, yin is the feminine principle and yang the masculine. Before discarding the analogy, however, let us remind ourselves that the categories of good and evil have been conflated in our tradition with the categories of masculine and feminine. Indeed, if we recall the serpent's strong affiliation with chthonian mother-goddesses, and the connection scholars make between Lilith/Eve and a Phoenician Mother-goddess with the form of a snake, we can see within the moral conflict between the good and evil a more gendered dichotomy. From the point of view of our culture's patriarchal God, good and evil are rooted in the masculine and feminine principles respectively. Like the masculine principle, good is associated with reason, unity, oneness and order. Evil, on the other hand, along with the feminine principle, is associated with irrationality, chaos, multiplicity, disorder, inferiority and weakness.

## **Between Good and Evil**

The irreverent attitude of the Praying Serpent suggests that an *enantiodromia*, a transvaluating conversion of values into their opposites, has begun. Just as Yang gives way to Yin once it has achieved its fullest ebb, so good gives way to evil and evil to good. Doubtless, this view of good and evil is highly objectionable to those who believe that good and evil are as readily distinguishable as black is from white. Religious fundamentalists, in particular, find the notion that good and evil are not polar opposites but ends on a spectrum of grey values to be reminiscent of the seductive sophistries of that primeval serpent who tempted our first parents to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But whether we consider the serpent's seduction of Adam and Eve to constitute a tragic fall or a fortunate one, the fact remains that all subsequent generations have been banished from the garden to a world of complex moral considerations. In our fallen state, playing good is not enough. Our innocence really has been lost and there is no use in trying to retrieve it by placing our heads in a heap of white sand. Rather than repudiate the serpent for tempting our first parents, perhaps we should call upon like to cure like by eating more of the fruit that the serpent offered.

The Praying Serpent is a medicine serpent, its power to heal residing in the mercurial duplicity with which it is able to approach life's moral quandaries. Though good and evil are relative, there being, as Jung said, "no good that cannot produce evil and no evil that cannot produce good,"<sup>52</sup> we tend to revere and revile them as if they were absolutes. But good and evil, at least as we encounter

them in life, are not as easily differentiated as our pseudo-innocence would lead us to believe. Indeed, as Jung put it, "we quite forget that we can be as deplorably overcome by a virtue as by a vice."<sup>53</sup> Though patients come to therapy to overcome their supposed vices, as often as not their actual problem is that they have made a vice out of their virtues. Ironically, it is the need to be better and better, the urge to improve, and the emulation of perfectionistic ideals that underpins much of the malaise of the soul today. But these vain attempts to be all those marvellous things that we are not, only adds to the sense of rejection which made us flee from ourselves in the first place. Healing requires that what has been rejected be revalued. The patient must be encouraged to run toward his snakes, not away from them. This not only holds for painful feelings and annoying symptoms, but for one's shadowy qualities and inferiorities as well. Though "integration of the shadow" is the familiar term, Nietzsche's notion that we must "rebaptize our evil qualities as our best qualities"<sup>54</sup> conveys the essence of the process much more aptly.

The Praying Serpent heals us of our misplaced piety with the medicine of heresy. As we learn to pray along with it in mock reverence we gradually free ourselves from the neurosis which had served as our religion. Although at first we may lack the courage to explore the blasphemous aspects of our personalities, aspects which "the voices of our accursed human education" had always taught us to repent, gradually we will become emboldened by the recognition that blasphemy is itself a form of repentance. The word `repent' comes from the Greek word *metanoia* which means a radical changing of one's ways. To repent is to shift one's basic attitude, to thoroughly change one's mind and direction. The word is especially used in relation to sin, for which it is prescribed as the remedy. The word `sin,' however, also has a deeper meaning. If we return it to its Greek root, `hamartia,' we get the meaning `missing the mark' as when an arrow misses its target. Putting



`*metanoia*' and `*hamartia*' together suggests that the attitude of consciousness must change such that it no longer misses the mark. The serpent is the symbol *par excellence* of this shifting, changing movement. Although our religious tradition equates the serpent with sin, the serpent also presents a pattern of repentance. Watch a snake as it slithers through the grass. It sins to the left only to repent to the right. And then, when this repentance itself begins to sin through excess, it repents to the left again. Notice that the two movements are not enemies. On the contrary, they work together in a complementary/compensatory relationship even as the muscles of a serpent or snake work together as it winds its way along. The trouble starts when we run for the shovel and attempt to vanquish sin. Attempts to do away with sin fix the mind into an attitude of rigid, unrepentant, moral righteousness. We see the speck in the serpent's eye and not the spot in our own and are blinded, as a result, from the realization that our virtues have become vices, that our values are at odds with life, and that the god which we serve is a false god. No wonder the Praying Serpent lifts its finger blasphemously. How better to repent a sinful piety?

### **Usurpation and Surrender**

"Non Servium," said Satan to God, "I will not serve." The Praying Serpent seems to make this same defiant assertion. A subversive spirit, it mocks the higher power before which it pretends to kneel. Though it would appear to have surrendered before the power and righteousness of whatever is currently filling the role of God, this surrender is merely feigned. Its actual intent would seem to be an act of usurpation. Like a wolf in lamb's clothing, the Praying Serpent dons the mantle of piety in order to penetrate the fold. Of course, this disguise, if that is what it in fact is, is of little use. Our

religious tradition has long taught us to recognize the Evil One as a serpent even if in pious dress. We are not surprised by the creature's irreverent behaviour. Indeed, we expect the Deceiver to malign our faith in God. In doing so he is simply playing his assigned role in the divine plan.

Perhaps, however, the Praying Serpent is more than a deceiver. Perhaps, it has a valid point of view. What if our God, or our image of Him, really is false? It is not enough to simply brand the serpent evil. We must hear it out and entertain the value of what it has to say. Good and evil look very different from the point of view of those that have been repressed as evil--the subjugated, the disenfranchised, and the despised. From their perspective, the Praying Serpent, though the enemy of the God of privilege, is not the enemy of the true God. Though it refuses to serve the tyrant which would vanquish it, that does not mean that it does not propose another vision of the divine. Its crude gestures do not simply profane the ideals that had previously been held to be sacred; in addition, they sacralize other values which had previously been viewed as profane. Far from being anti-spiritual, the Praying Serpent is a re-visionist of religion. The theology which it inspires, though not fixed as to its content, falls into the genre of what has been called liberation theology. The subjugated, the disenfranchised, and the repressed do not look to God to liberate them from the serpent (though many a well-intentioned missionary has tried to monger this kind of salvation). On the contrary, they look to the serpent to liberate them from God, or, rather, from an image of God from which they have been excluded.

"Who achieves liberation in the fewest number of incarnations," asks a Hindu riddle, "the man who loves God or the man who hates God?" The answer, ironically enough, is "the man who hates God, because he thinks about Him more." The Praying Serpent hates God in precisely the sense which this riddle describes. Though it kneels in prayer before the Lord Most High, it lifts the finger

of the poor, the black, the homosexual, the feminine and the marginalized to the wealthy, straight, white, misogynist, male values which have overdetermined our image of "Him." It is these monopolizing images, these images which affirm one understanding of God while casting out all others, that are the real blasphemies.

The Praying Serpent is not the enemy of God. On the contrary, it *is* God, or rather, an image of God through which God expresses His/Her enmity with our conventional God-image. The irreverence of the image, in other words, is God's own irreverence towards another image of "Him."

Ironically, orthodox, dogmatically approved images may be just as offensive to God as the so-called false gods. Indeed, God may even find it necessary to redress a tepid orthodoxy by donning pagan garb. God's quarrel is not really with other gods, despite the Commandment that we worship no other gods before Him. In fact, as the irreverent energy of the life force, God may spontaneously take on any number of pagan forms in order to display facets of "Himself" which had previously been neglected.<sup>55</sup> The problem, as Blake divined, is with "poetic tales" which have been fixed, usually by a priest, into "forms of worship."<sup>56</sup> God is the metaphor or metaphors and will not be literalized. The moment that we think we have Him nailed down He will liken himself to something quite at odds with what we had limited Him to. (The masculine pronoun "He" being a case in point.) Just as a snake renews itself by sloughing off its old skin, God renews "Himself" by blaspheming any notions which would circumscribe "Him" too narrowly. Again, this does not mean that the Praying Serpent's vision of God is the correct vision. Other serpents may turn up at any time and pull at its beard too. Whenever life is not being lived because it has been profaned by notions of the sacred which are too limiting, God, as Lord of Life, will play the heretic. "Formation, transformation, Eternal Mind's recreation," writes Goethe. No sooner have we formed an image and

danced around it than we find that we must melt it down as false and mint a new one. The soul is in a ceaseless process of reformation.

It is not easy to accept the heresy which is God. It is as difficult as entertaining the idea that a blatantly profane and stereotypically "evil" doodle such as the Praying Serpent may be an expression of "Him." Likewise, it is difficult to accept the heresy of ourselves. Even if our drawings give no offense, our dreams seem such a scandal. It is hard to believe that they may be the expression of "a diviner nature through our own." The "voices of our accursed human education" mark the path so clearly that our personal inclinations seem anomalous. If, however, as Clement of Alexandria said, to know oneself is to know God, we should, perhaps, make room for the subjective and anomalous, even when it is at odds with what we have been taught to believe. After all, the map is not the territory. And as pilgrims we walk a perilous path. The way is never clear. Sometimes we have only an up-turned finger to guide us.

Jung tells the story of a Catholic monk, Abbe Oegger, who agonized over the question of whether God, in his mercy, had forgiven Judas.<sup>57</sup> Oegger was a particularly pious monk and prayed fervently for an answer to this question. Finally, after much soul-searching he felt God's answer. Yes, indeed, Judas was forgiven. Having received this answer, Oegger felt freed by God to betray his usual understanding of God and to follow the inclinations of his own individual nature and join another denomination. Perhaps, the Praying Serpent makes Oegggers of us all. As we entertain this image and adopt its point of view, the boundaries which we had drawn between the sacred and profane, Good and Evil, God and devil break down. The pew in which we sit becomes more and more uncomfortable. Things we had never considered sacred reveal their sacredness. We surrender before the very things we at once moralized against. Life, in all its aspects, irreverently,

obstreperously, and spontaneously, asserts its divine right to be lived.

## Notes

1. Cited by C.G. Jung in *CW* Vol 5, para. 459. Jung suggests that the enticing of oneself into the old serpent's paradise may be interpreted, here, as an "Entry into the mother," not in a negative regressive sense, but as the "creative matrix of the future."
2. With reference to the figures of Christ and Mercurius as autonomous images which can be directly experienced, Jung writes: "...we are obliged to reverse the our rationalistic causal sequence, and instead of deriving these figures from our psychic conditions, must derive our psychic conditions from this figures." *CW* 13, para, 299.
3. D.H. Lawrence, "Snake," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, M.H. Abrams et. al., eds (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), p. 2510.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 2511.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Judith L. Rapoport, *The Boy Who Could Not Stop Washing: The Experience and Treatment of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989), p. 195
7. *Ibid.*
8. Most of the material from this section is drawn from Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1974), pp. 410-415 and J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), pp. 285-290.
9. Commenting on this sentence, Hillman writes, "Single (*haplous*) means open, plain, frank, natural, downright, straightforward and simple. But now that the word single only means univocal, monocular singleness, the passage itself will be read in a puritan and fundamentalist manner, demonstrating that inherent tendency within monotheistic consciousness to take its rhetoric with singleness of meaning, i.e., literally." "Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic," in David Miller's *The New Polytheism* (Dallas, Spring Publications, 1981), p. 128.
10. Old Testament passages which identify angels with God, thereby anticipating Milton's occasional identification of the angels with gods are as follows: Gen. 48:15,16; Gen. 32:24-30; Gen. 31:11-13; Gen. 16:7-11; Gen. 18:1-19:1; Ex. 3:2-6; Judges 13:21-22; Judges 2:1-5; Hosea 12:4; Job 1:6; Ps. 82:6; Ps. 82:1; Ps. 8:5; Eze. 28:2.
11. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Merrit Y. Hughes, editor (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1962). References identifying angels with gods are as follows: Bk, I, 116; BK II, 352; Bk III, 341; BK V, 60, 117; BK IX,164; Bk X, 90.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 249, lines 516-517.
13. *Ibid.*, lines 521-532.
14. *Ibid*, cited by editor in textual commentary, p. 249.
15. *Ibid.*, cited by editor in textual commentary, p. 50.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 250, lines 549-551.
17. C.G. Jung, *CW* 9i, para. 651.
18. C.G. Jung, *CW* 5, para. 580.
19. C.G. Jung, *CW* 9ii, para. 369.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, para. 370.
22. Margaret Atwood, *Interluner* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 11-12.
23. C.G. Jung, *CW* 5, para. 587.
24. Although, a snake, as Jung writes, "may have seven thousand meanings" all these meanings will be a function of the snake's specifically serpentine qualities. C.G. Jung, *Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminar given in 1928-1930*, William McGuire, editor (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 251.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 644.
26. In a seminar on dream analysis, Jung gives a similar example of how a painful feeling devolves into a snake when repressed. A simple-minded Swiss infantry officer limped into Jung's office complaining of pains in his feet. Since other medical investigations had found no physical causes for the complaint, Jung enquired if he had any dreams. In reply to Jung's query the man provided the following dream: "I was walking in the open somewhere and stepped on a snake that bit me on the heel, and I felt poisoned. I woke up frightened." In his associations the soldier stressed the dangerousness of snakes and the painfulness of snake bites. "Oh, you mean a woman?" Jung asked. Soon the story came out of the soldier being jilted by his fiance who went off with another man. Jung asked the soldier if he had been sad. At first the man shrugged off the suggestion. Jung persisted, however, saying that even strong men become emotionally distressed. Soon the soldier broke down and wept. The tears were his cure. The pains in his feet vanished as he allowed himself to experience the painful feelings he had repressed and began to mourn the value of this lost relationship. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

27. I allude here to Jung's descriptions of the "transcendent function" through which the psyche conjoins the opposites between which it is torn into a third position which is transcendent to them. *CW* 8, para. 189.
28. Of course, in the gospels, Jesus, presaging to his crucifixion, identified himself with the serpent: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). Doubtless, this was the scriptural basis of the later gnostic and alchemical ideas.
29. William Blake, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, Northrop Frye, ed. (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 122.
30. C.G. Jung, *Dream Analysis*, p. 307.
31. William Blake, *Op., Cit.*, p. 127.
32. C.G. Jung, *The Visions Seminars, Book 2* (Zurich: Spring Publication, 1976), p. 431.
33. C.G. Jung, *Dream Analysis*, pp. 307-308.
34. C.G. Jung, *The Visions Seminars: Book Two*, p.433.
35. C.G. Jung, *The Vision's Seminars: Book Two*, p. 432.
36. C.G. Jung, *CW* 14, para. 603.
37. "And the crooked shall become straight," cried out John the Baptist (Luke 3:5), quoting the prophet Isaiah (40:4).
38. William Blake, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, p. 131.
39. Jung views neurosis in the same manner: "A neurosis is truly removed only when it has removed the false attitude of the ego. We do not cure it--it cures us. A man is ill, but the illness is nature's attempt to heal him, and what the neurotic flings away as absolutely worthless contains the true gold we should never have found elsewhere." *CW* 10, para., 361.
40. C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 39.
41. T. S. Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in *The Selected Poetry of Coleridge*, Harold Bloom, editor (New York: New American Library, 1972), p. 50.
42. C.G. Jung, *CW* 5, para., 456.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, para., 587. Jung, sees Nietzsche's "vision' of the shepherd and the snake" as illustrative of



this "dish[ing] of the compensation from the unconscious." In the vision a young shepherd is choking on a serpent which crawled into his mouth while he slept. Zarathustra, Nietzsche's Superman-hero, instructs the boy to bite the serpent's head off. The boy is able to do so and he immediately becomes a "transfigured being with light all about him" and laughs with a wild, hysterical laughter (para., 585). In Jung's view, the shepherd boy's success at biting off the snake's head, an action based less on heroic courage than upon his fear of the unconscious, only increases the rift between the conscious and unconscious in Nietzsche's psyche. The transfigured shepherd, laughing hysterically, is, in Jung's view, an inflated and excessively one-sided psychic dominant. In his seminars on Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Jung interprets Nietzsche's idiosyncratic use of the familiar serpent-eagle symbolism in a similar manner. Where the snake (matter) and the eagle (spirit) are usually imagined as antagonistic opposites, in Nietzsche's imagination the snake is the clings around the neck of the eagle in what Nietzsche describes as a friendly manner. Again, Jung sees this symbolism as indicative of an identification on the one hand, and a corresponding dissociation on the other. Although it constitutes an attempt at the reconciliation of opposites such as is reflected by the Mexican plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl, it fails, in Jung's view, because "the serpent is too much on the side of the eagle" (p.233). The sky is not the serpent's natural element and it is quite likely that the snake will tighten its coils around the eagle's neck at some point in a most unfriendly manner. In this way, it would attempt to compensate the overly spiritual attitude. It is, however, a very precarious situation. Indeed, there is the danger that both might crash. *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar given in 1934-39, Vol. 1*, James L. Jarrett, editor (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), p. 226-243).

45. C.G. Jung, *CW* 5, para. 457.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, para. 458.

48. P.B. Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," in M.H. Abrams (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 3rd edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 1739.

49. C.G. Jung *CW* 8, para. 402.

50. "The image is not *what* is present to awareness--this is the content proper--but *how* this content is presented." Edward S. Casey, "Toward a Phenomenology of Imagination," *J. Brit. Society Phenomenology*, 5 (1974):10.

51. Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, p. 39.

52. C.G. Jung, *CW* 12, para. 36.

53. C.G. Jung, *C.G. Jung: Psychological Reflections, A New Anthology of His Writings 1905-1961* Jolande Jacobi & R.F.C. Hull, editors (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 236.

54. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R.J. Hollingdale, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), maxim 116, p. 79.

55. Readers interested in exploring further the pagan and polytheistic aspects of Christianity are referred to the writings of David L. Miller, especially his books, *The New Polytheism* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1981) and *Christs: Meditations on Archetypal Images in Christian Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981). In *The New Polytheism* Miller writes: "Christology has had so many Gods empowering its logics that it is difficult to think of them all: some should be named Athena, Dionysus, Orpheus, Hermes, Persephone, Poseidon, Hades, and Heaphaestus" (p. 88).

56. William Blake, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, p. 127.

57. C.G. Jung, *CW 5*, para. 41-46.