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The Collective Unconscious and the Leontocephalus: A Rejoinder to Noll

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In his paper, "Jung the Leontocephalus,"¹ Richard Noll examines several of Jung's key inner experiences, experiences which, according to Noll, confirmed in Jung his conviction of the existence of a collective unconscious. By comparing these experiences with recent scholarly accounts of the Mithraic mysteries to which Jung felt his experiences to correspond, Noll demonstrates how overdetermined Jung's imagery was by the once definitive, but now out-dated, scholarly accounts of his day. This, for Noll, plus the fact that Jung may well have erred in his assertion that the vision of the "Solar Phallus Man" could not possibly have been influenced by scholarly accounts of the text of an ancient magical papyrus of remarkably similar content, suggests that the collective unconscious may exist "only on the shelves of Jung's personal library."

In what follows, we will take issue with Noll on a number of points.

1) As Noll points out, Jung acknowledged to the audience of his 1925 seminar that the material he was putting before them from his active imaginations was strongly influenced by his reading of scholarly works on mythology, the details of his imaginings being a "condensation" of it. If he erred in his assumption that the "Solar Phallus Man" could not possibly have been influenced by material he had once known consciously, Jung was not making that error with regard to himself in this seminar. Jung knew that the high correlation between the specific details of his fantasy images and the details, such as they were then known, of Mithraic mysteries pointed, not to the collective

unconscious, but to his own erudition. It was not the parallelism of the imagery that was of archetypal significance, but his living experience of its numinous power. It was the fact that he experienced an initiation and felt himself to be transformed that was important, not his having been transfigured into the Lion-headed deity, Leontocephalus. Archetypes, as Jung repeatedly stressed, are not "inherited *ideas* but ...inherited possibilities [to form] ideas" (CW 9i:136) and, as such, they "have at first no specific content[,...their specific content only appear[ing] in the course of the individual's life, when personal experience is taken up in precisely these forms"(CW 11:845). The knowledge of Mythraic initiation that Jung had gained from his mythological studies provided the "specific content" of his experience, not the formal possibility of the experience itself. Presumably the specific content could have been different had he been as preoccupied with other mysteries or had he read, as Noll has, the most recent scholarship on Mithraism, without thereby altering that his experience was an archetypal experience of initiation. Jung was immersed in mythology and Mithraism in the same way that Einstein was immersed in mathematical equations and Kekule in the mystery of the carbon molecule. Just as their dreams and fantasies played a creative role in conceptualizing solutions to their respective dilemmas, so Jung's active imagination was decisive, not as an occult contribution to the archaeology of actual Mithraism, but to our understanding of the transformative power of the initiatory archetype.

2) It is a fallacy to suppose, as Noll seems to, that out-dated scholarship--even if patently erroneous from a historical point of view, is any less archetypal than contemporary research--no matter how correct. Freud, in Lamarckian fashion, may have seen archaic vestiges in modern dreams as being derived from the literal events in the primordial family; Jung's notion of the archetype, however, is not so literal. The archetypal order is ahistorical, "above" time, in *illo tempore* as Wolfgang

Giegerich has reminded us.² Even if we had a definitive picture of the Mithraic mysteries this picture would only reflect the grappling of the initiates of that time with the archetype to which their mysteries were transparent. The scholarship of Jung's day and today, likewise, enact the same archetype. In fact, the work of Cumont which Jung followed, standing in a similar relation to the facts of actual Mithraism as alchemy stands to modern chemistry, may have been just as deeply in touch with the archetypes that structured those mysteries despite the fact that they got the mysteries wrong. Facts are not the bottom line, *fantasies are*. And it is in this sense that Jung can claim to have experienced the Mithraic transformation. As Plutarch put it, "...the highest of our initiations here below is only the dream of that true vision and initiation; and the discourses [scl., delivered in the mysteries] have been carefully devised to awaken the memory of the sublime things above, or else no purpose."

3) After demonstrating that the vision of the schizophrenic patient which Jung often cited as independent evidence of the collective unconscious could have been derived from scholarly writings available at the time, Noll inflates the significance of this finding by quoting Sonu Shamadansi's view that this patient "carries on his shoulders the weight and burden of proof of the Collective Unconscious." While Noll certainly makes a contribution in establishing the possibility that the patient may have had previous conscious knowledge of the material in his vision, and while this patient's back may be broken by the cumulative weight of Noll's and Shamadansi's findings, Jung did have other evidence of a collective unconscious. One thinks most immediately of the evidential value he felt children's dreams provided. In "Approaching the Unconscious," Jung presents the archetypal dreams of a young girl whose pending death he was able to predict on the basis of eschatological images contained in her dreams (CW 18: 525-539).

4) Noll writes that "cryptomnesia...has always been the "shadow" of the collective unconscious, and this was a fact that haunted Jung." While Jung's writings on cryptomnesia, especially his later ones, do seem to be written defensively, in anticipation of a potential source of criticism, I think that we must also consider that a sincere interest in cryptomnesia on Jung's part played an important part in the development of the archetype concept. Again, as I discussed above, inasmuch as the definition of the archetype stresses form, not content, the concept of a collective unconscious does not depend on a one to one correspondence between individually generated-fantasy material and archaeological data. Contrary to Noll, I would argue that it was precisely Jung's acknowledgement of the role of cryptomnesia that prevented him from literally identifying himself with the Lion-headed God of the Mithraic mysteries who he became in active imagination. Jung's interest was in the experience, its form and transformative significance, not in its Mithraic content per se.

5) It is unfortunate that Jung cited the spectacular example of the Solar Phallus Man so frequently, for in doing so he may have unwittingly seemed to set a precedent of evidence which was too stringent and too literal to reflect the finer points of archetypal theory. To my mind, Jung's amplification of the young man's dreams and visions in "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy" provides stronger evidence of the archetypes of the collective unconscious because Jung is here more subtly focused on form, rather than content. The young man's dreams and visions do not literally correspond to alchemy in the manner in which Jung's fantasies corresponded to his Mithraic studies. The juxtaposition of the two merely throws the common pattern playing through both into relief. In reading this work we realize that although alchemy provides a particularly rich source of amplifications, other amplificatory material could also have been used.

Surely "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy" as well as other works such as "The Visions Seminars," "A Study in the Process of Individuation" etc., lighten the burden which Noll and Shamadansi would have Solar Phallus Man bear.

6) Noll describes his paper as partaking of a new current in Jungian scholarship, a current that moves from "idealization to humanization or from hagiography to critical history." While such an effort can only be welcomed as long overdue, I believe Noll oversteps his mandate when applying his very interesting findings to Jung's *theories*. Just as the poet as poet cannot be reduced to the banalities of the man as a man, so too for a psychological theorist. The validity of a theory is not a function of its author's history, but of its applicability to the phenomena that it seeks to explain. This applicability, especially with regard to a hypothesis such as the collective unconscious, can never be evaluated by personalistic historical analysis, Jung's statement that all psychological theories, his own included, have the character of a subjective confession notwithstanding. On this last point, let us recall that Jung defined his psychology as a subjective confession long before his confessional memoirs were conceived. Just as he argued that it was not Goethe who created Faust, but Faust who created Goethe, so we may argue that Jung was created by the ideas and theories which we attribute to him and that if this is not appreciated both the man and the work will be misperceived.

7) Noll makes much of the fact that Jung "followed the standard position of his day and interpreted Mithra as a "solar deity," while recent scholarship "suggests and even greater role for Mithras: that of *kosmokrater*, ruler of the entire cosmos....(p. 28). While Noll is doubtless correct in his analysis of the influence of Jung's reading on his fantasies, I think that Jung's Mithras was also something

more than a solar deity. As an archetypal image, the figure of Jung's imaginings pointed beyond itself to a conceptual *kosmokrater*, the concept of the collective unconscious. This concept, not the Mithra Leontocephalus, was Jung's God-term. This, I believe, is an important point. The concept of the collective unconscious, inasmuch as it is also a God-term or God-image, contains, as it were, the evidence of its own validity. We don't need Solar Phallus Men and Magical Papyrus. We don't need to rule out cryptomnesia and furnish proof. The concept of the collective unconscious is itself an archetypal fantasy. All peoples in all times and place have imagined gods. As Jung pointed out this is just as true in our own day of "isms."

As for myself, I like to link all this to narcissism, for I believe that narcissism, or as Jung called it, the self, has a predisposing essence and suprapersonal reach which mankind has always represented to himself as God(s). Put less reductively, narcissism mythologizes itself in terms of God(s) because it is, to quote Shelley, "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own." Of course, in ascribing this meaning to narcissism I am merely introducing yet another psychologistic God-term.

One grounds upon which the concept of the collective unconscious may nevertheless be criticized is that it is an abstract God or "God of Gods" and, as such, an impossibly higher order concept, illegitimately ontologized to be the realm of the others. On this point, and in conclusion, let us recall Nietzsche's account of how the gods laughed themselves to death when they heard the monotheistic pretensions of one of their number:

For the old gods, after all, things came to an end long ago; and verily, they had a good gay godlike end. They did not end in a "twilight, though this lie is told. Instead: one day they *laughed* themselves to death. That happened when the most godless word issued from one of the gods themselves--the world: "There is one god. Thou shalt have no other god before me!" An old grimbeard of a god, a jealous one, thus forgot himself. And then all the gods laughed and rocked on their chairs and cried, "Is not just this godlike that there are gods but no God?"³

Notes

¹ Richard Noll, "Jung the Leontocephalus," *Spring 53: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* (Putnam, CT: Spring Journal, 1992), pp. 12-60.

2. Wolfgang Giegerich, "Ontogeny + Phylogeny: A fundamental Critique of Erich Neumann's Analytical Psychology," *Spring 1975: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1975).

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 182.