

## READING JUNG FOR MAGIC

“Active imagination” for/as “close reading”

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Jung’s imaginative and symbolic writing is neither a literary device nor an embellishment, but is his psychology’s most complete expression, according to Susan Rowland. Closely examining what Jung wrote about his foremost therapeutic method, which he called “active imagination”, she intuitively grasps its family resemblance to a method of literary criticism called “close reading”. In this essay, Rowland carefully traces the nature of each method, approximating their analogous contours, and bridging the gap between them where fruitful exchanges might begin to occur for their mutual enrichment. By holding the two methods face to face, Rowland creates magic. She inspires the literary scholar to gain familiarity with Jung’s writing and thus enhance his or her skill as a critic and the Jungian analyst to contemplate the dual nature of his or her work and narrative competence. She does so with her own imaginative and symbolic writing.

### A note: why I read Jung

One advantage of being trained as a literary scholar is the habit of reading in the mode of a quest: reading as asking what writing *is* or could be. Of course, any form of academic training involves exploring different models of writing and the history of literary representation. We all read with presuppositions of what a particular kind of writing should contain or offer. On the other hand, an education in literary studies encourages a questioning, an opening up to scrutiny of habits and conventions in the way we write. For example, fiction is not wholly separable from factual prose if both use many of the same techniques. Imaginative writing and scientific accounts are not as distinctly different as parts of our culture assume.

When reading Jung for the first time, I found myself experiencing some of the pleasures frequently associated with creative writing, such as evocative symbols, mythical tropes, speculation, and humour. In particular such “literary” devices appeared not to be ornamental nor did they detract from the “psychology”. Rather imaginative, dramatic, and symbolic writing proved fundamental to the psychology’s expression. Jung, I concluded, was intrinsically literary. I

began to recognize that not only was his writing especially suitable to literary analysis, but also it *belonged* to literary categories. Above all, I saw that Jung's writing was responsive to reading as quest because it was writing *as* quest. Jung's work belonged to post-Romantic literature, when writing stopped being valued for its strict adherence to past models. Romantic works do not obey rules. Rather, Romantic writing is in search of the rules and theories by which it might be comprehended.

Here is writing that fulfils Romanticism's radical agenda. It proffers a psychic revolution that undoes the dominant conventions that have calcified psyche and society. Jung's writing frees the reader's psyche from too narrow notions of rational truth. It does so by seeking knowledge as a quest for its rules rather than an enactment of them.

To me, Jung's writing is also a quest for meaning – a quest that embraces fictional, poetic, mythic, rhetorical, logical, and empirical strategies. Part of its quest nature is to address and unravel distinctions between science and art. Reading Jung is to engage the *whole* psyche since much of the so-called literary qualities invoke the "other", those parts of ourselves that modernity has sited/cited beyond the ego along our developmental path. For Jung's writing is historically acute. Not only does it map the hardened ego of post-Enlightenment definitions of reason, but also it seeks to overcome that very ego's too rigid boundaries. Jung's writing is literature that incorporates the reader's psyche, remaking the structures of the soul within modernity. It is for these reasons that my reading of Jung has never been concerned with issues of translation. While the study of "original" manuscripts is a fine and legitimate act of scholarship, it is nevertheless built on an ideal of knowledge as something that is ultimately fixed, pure, and knowable. If the essays that make up *The Collected Works*, Volume 12, were originally written in German, then some consider that a study of the translation and the related search for Jung's original manuscript will produce a *truer* text than the English version. Although such scholarly research is undeniably valuable as a contribution to a larger picture consisting of different kinds of knowing, its epistemological basis in translation is partial. Such a pursuit of a creation myth of truth from the first manuscript presupposes that writing is meaningful only insofar as it can be related to the embodied presence of an author. "Original" writing is supposedly sealed hermetically and possessed of full and rational meaning, *and that is all that can be construed as knowledge*.

I suggest that if we read Jung as a challenge to the divisions between literature and science, the search for an original version or Jung's pure and knowable intentions (as author) is unnecessary. It misreads the radical possibilities of his writing. I do not want to read Jung for what the rationalized ego of the once living man might have meant, for this goal in all its fantasy of completeness is not realizable given the complexity of authorship and revisions, let alone the mixture of conscious and unconscious functions within the writer. My proposal is to read Jung for what the non-ego qualities

of the writing might offer us *now*. What multiple possibilities might be discovered by the living psyche of the twenty-first-century reader in the enigmatic qualities of Jung's texts?

In short, I want to read Jung as a quest to fertilize and sow the contemporary imagination. His words are seeds that blossom in readers today and in the unimaginable future. In such a spirit the following essay is my attempt to explore and develop the fecundity of Jung as a writer.

## Introduction

In this essay, I want to pivot the topic of C. G. Jung and "reading" into a bold argument about the evolution of academic disciplines (and later about evolution itself). Relatively recent forms of academic study, such as psychology, were constructed by dividing a heritage along lines of "respectable" proto-scientific ideas versus esoteric practices better forgotten and darkened. After all, how we read Jung and why concerns not just reading *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, but also how such work might affect reading texts of all kinds. The act of reading might be defined as interpreting words and other signifying material such as dream images. This definition opens up large spheres of knowledge: hermeneutics; the study of imaginative literature; and, in pre-Enlightenment eras, reading arts such as alchemy and magic.

My core proposition is that Jung proposed a method of working with unconscious images – "active imagination", he called it – that was simultaneously an act of liberation and repression. Comparing active imagination with its historical parallel from the discipline of vernacular literary studies, "close reading" makes visible its structure of reduction and expansion. As offered by Jung, active imagination represses its nature as an art, while proposing an expansion of reading sorely needed by literary studies. In turn, an examination of close reading and its antecedents reveals a structurally similar *and opposite* repression, that of the creative psyche, while expanding the role of reading as an art of *making*. In this way, Jung's psychology and literary studies may re-form each other to show both active imagination and close reading as acts of magic for the twenty-first century.

We begin by recognizing that positing an unconscious subverts conventional assumptions about reading. Words and images are not unproblematically paired with "meaning" if a part of the psyche resists conscious control. Therefore, Jung devised active imagination to "read" images generated primarily by the unconscious as symbols. Suggestively, active imagination arises contemporaneously with another development of reading from another recently founded academic discipline. Because literature was traditionally a staple of universities, albeit in Latin and Greek, the newness of literary studies or "English" as a degree in higher education has often been overlooked. However, literary studies, a degree subject invented in the late

1890s, differs radically from the classics in constructing *vernacular* literature as a basis for knowledge. My essay argues that Jung's method of subjecting unconsciously generated symbols to the process of active imagination has a deep historical relationship with literary studies and its originating research method, known today as *close reading*.

By examining the roots of close reading and active imagination in hermeneutics, Renaissance philosophy, and magic, I explore how Jung re-oriented the reading of symbols in the service of cultural transformation. Furthermore, I show that this cross-disciplinary comparison allows active imagination to be reimagined as a *skill to be practised*. In effect, I am suggesting that active imagination be regarded as magic, for it becomes an imaginative reweaving into the body of the earth.

### Wild and (un)disciplined

For centuries, literary scholarship meant the examination of classical texts and their languages. By the close of the nineteenth century, emancipatory pressures generated the need to open the universities to new categories of students, such as women and lower-class men. They were admitted with accompanying anxiety about their fitness for such robust study as the classics. Therefore, as a compromise, a new degree of literary studies was invented using the students' own language and literary history.<sup>1</sup>

Both the psychology of the unconscious, known here as *depth psychology*, and literary studies began in a previously neglected wilderness, which they set about "disciplining" as quickly as possible. Depth psychology began to listen to feminine voices in hysteria; literary studies to consider the "feminine" domesticities of native fiction. "Wild writing", is a term taken from the poet Gary Snyder, who argues that language is rooted in the human body and, therefore, "wild" in essence.<sup>2</sup> It becomes "cultivated" by practice, education, and artfulness, and thereby transitions into culture. Human language is here a medial realm by which boundaries of nature and culture are negotiated. Art, in particular the intensities of poetry, may open up its roots in the nature of our biological being shared with other creatures, who themselves have languages we can only dimly appreciate.

Jung becomes important here in the context of his drive for *cultural* as well as *individual* healing. His concern for the psyche in an age of accelerating technological change can be traced back to the literary and philosophical anxieties of late eighteenth-century Romanticism. Here, it is useful to look at Ross Woodman's magnificent study of Romanticism and Jungian psychology, *Sanity, Madness, Transformation: The Psyche in Romanticism*.<sup>3</sup> This work compares literature a century prior to its vernacular "disciplining" to Jung's very similar treatment of the "wild" in writing. Woodman starts revealingly with Jung and Northrop Frye, a literary scholar rooted in the process of making the new discipline.

Influenced by Jung, Frye was equally fearful of breakdown in the collective psyche. Both Frye and Jung, therefore, adopted the term “archetype” to offer a new understanding of symbols as healing containers of psychic energy. However, there is a crucial difference between Jung and Frye. Although both agreed that the decline of Western Christendom had dangerously weakened social health, the literary critic found alternative sources of the sacred in Romantic poetry, notably that of William Blake. Frye, also like Jung, identified the mythopoetic imagination with the experience of the numinous. Unlike Jung, Frye believed that existing symbols are still communicable to the world. Frye’s archetypes are entities, within great literature, that contain “presence”, an intensity of meaning that endows the receiver of the symbol with authentic being. Frye identified the presence of the mythopoetic in Romantic literature with the Logos of Christ. He found his new gospel in existing literature.

I want to consider further Woodman’s distinction between Jung and Frye on the symbol and its social function. What is more symptomatic of a fractured psyche than the failure of the great codes in religion and the arts? If they are no longer read in a way that knits the collective together, then society is indeed fragmented.

From Jung’s point of view, Frye’s notion of the archetype as “the communicable symbol” ignores the historical fact that the symbol is no longer communicable. The unified and integrated symbolic life embodied in the Catholic Church, he argues, has been squandered by, among other things, the Protestantism that replaced it . . . “Only an unparalleled impoverishment of symbolism”, he then goes on to explain in *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, “could enable us to rediscover the gods as psychic factors, that is, as archetypes of the unconscious.”<sup>4</sup>

Woodman makes a vital point that Jung’s notion of archetype inheres in humanity through the body’s connection to the psyche, whereas, for Frye, it can still be found in the reading of great vernacular literature. “Herein lies the difference between Frye’s notion of the archetype and Jung’s: whereas Frye locates the archetype in ‘the metaphysics of presence,’ Jung locates it in the unconscious operations of the human body.”<sup>5</sup>

In this analysis, Frye invokes literature as a source of the mythopoetic numinous to counter the abyss of unsignifying that is the unconscious. Woodman regards Jung as more realistically offering the human body as repository of archetypal energies of patterning against the abyss. Although I find Woodman’s reading of Frye and Jung entirely persuasive, I want to offer two counterarguments as more optimistic responses to Jung’s appreciation of the unconscious void.

Woodman’s acute sense of both Jung’s psychology and Romantic literature as being built upon the absolute void (the absence of signifying in the

unconscious) is powerfully explored through the cultural theory of deconstruction and the work of Jacques Derrida in particular:

Not until my immersion in deconstruction during my final teaching years did I fully confront the depth of the “secret unrest” that ... gnaws at the roots of Romantic being, or recognize in Jung’s psychological views of the archetype the way in which Frye’s essentially Christian view aesthetically insulated him from the global psychosis that threatened to invade it.<sup>6</sup>

This entirely persuasive portrait of the radically deconstructive nature of Jung’s unconscious provides a starting point, I argue, for two countering notions of how this terrifying void has an-other kind of being altogether: first, the role of the unconscious in magic, and second, the imbrication of the human body with nonhuman nature through evolutionary complexity science. Both of these arguments provide major recuperative frameworks for reading symbols *with* the body and nature. Symbols can be viewed as a communicating link between the human body and nature.

### Active imagination and amplification vs. New Criticism and close reading

Both active imagination and what I have been calling “close reading” are responses, in different disciplinary locations, to the perceived loss of the communicable symbol in culture. It is time to look at just what these different epistemologies, as ways of making and justifying knowledge, entail.

Of course, Jung does not present active imagination as a theory of reading, but as a way of encouraging the spontaneous growth of images from the unconscious and of using them as a mode of healing. Here, he envisages a number of modes of active imagining in ways that envelop the body as home of the ensouled psyche:

I therefore took up a dream-image or an association of the patient’s, and, with this as a point of departure, set him the task of elaborating or developing the theme by giving free rein to his fantasy. This, according to individual taste and talent, could be done in any number of ways, dramatic, dialectic, visual, acoustic, or in the form of dancing, painting, drawing, or modeling.<sup>7</sup>

When a patient is depressed or overwhelmed by a feeling of dread, he or she is prompted to allow the sheer power trapped in the unconscious to produce an image or to meditate upon a potent dream symbol. By relaxing conscious control, the overwhelming “other” develops the images of its own accord. Either with the analyst or alone, patients can then work on finding a

rapprochement with this “active”, previously alien, part of themselves. Ultimately, the “active” in active imagination encompasses ego as well as the unconscious. In this sense, active imagination is a way to improve and enhance individuation, that healing development of an ever-deeper connection between ego and unconscious archetypal energies. “But active imagination, as the term denotes, means that the images have a life of their own and that the symbolic events develop according to their own logic – that is, of course, if your conscious reason does not interfere.”<sup>8</sup>

None of this looks like reading in its everyday sense, except for the insistence on beginning by treating the other as *other*. Active imagination is a kind of reading when it insists upon symbolic images being treated as *the text of another*. During the process of integrating these symbols into ego consciousness (individuation), it may cease to be seen as a kind of reading. In fact, though, active imagination remains allied to reading if its resemblance to depth psychology’s nonidentical twin, literary studies, is pursued.

Contemporary to Jung in the early twentieth century and out of the developing field of literary studies there arose another response to the loss of the communicable symbol, a literary theory known as New Criticism (c.1900–60). The New Critics pioneered the method known as *close reading* (sometimes called *practical criticism*), a practice still indigenous to literary studies today and, therefore, greatly influencing the teaching of literature in schools and colleges throughout the anglophone world. I suggest that recognizing the resemblance of close reading to active imagination will augment both depth psychology and literary studies.

“New Criticism” is a theoretical label applied to American and British scholars with a range of attitudes to vernacular literary study including, in Britain, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and the poet, T. S. Eliot; and, in the United States, J. C. Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and W. K. Wimsatt.<sup>9</sup> What linked those theorists was the belief that a work of literature forms an organic and semantic whole that transcends its origins either in an author or a historical context. To the New Critics, a literary text needs nothing outside of itself. It is autonomous as to its meaning. New Critics are, by default, liberal humanists because they argue that a literary work can speak to an attentive reader in any historical setting by reason of its *communicative* ability to a common human essence. What holds potential conflicts of meaning in a work together is the power of symbols operating as verbal icons.

While faith in the symbol to *transcend* conflicts of meaning in the text is seductively close to Jung’s notion of a psychic symbol possessing a transcendent function, the New Critics unhelpfully disowned psychology altogether. They dismissed the psyche of the author *and reader* in interpreting a work of literary merit. It is not their approach to the reader that brings them to depth psychology, but to the *act of reading* that so resembles active imagination. In effect, the New Critics endorsed active imagination technically, yet not ontologically (philosophically). For in order to restrain a literary

work from spilling its meaning or its historical and cultural considerations into the reader's conscious mind, (all anathema to New Critics), "close reading" was developed as a way of *othering* the text. Close reading is a *perverse* counterintuitive practice. It involves focusing on words and phrases, their sounds and shapes on the page, to thus invoke their almost infinite possibilities to spark interpretations. For close reading, everyone's interpretation of a particular text is unique.

Here, I want to offer a perverse argument. For despite these literary theorists' disavowal of psychology and, in particular, the psychology of the unconscious, I suggest that, nevertheless, a secret kinship exists between New Criticism and Jungian depth psychology. The incestuous closeness between close reading and active imagination inheres in their disciplinary "cousinship" and, as I will show later, in common ancestry. For now I want to focus on a possible link between close reading and active imagination, beyond and despite the New Critics' insistence on ignoring the reading psyche. In particular, I argue for a link between close reading as a literary technique (once New Criticism's theoretical orthodoxies have been left behind) and active imagination plus amplification as a psychological method. The New Critics invented close reading, but the practice survived their dominance of the academy.

Even as new theories emerged to leave their mark upon the junior discipline of literary studies, the perverse "closeness" of the New Critics' reading has survived, although severed from New Critical doctrine and modified by all subsequent literary theories such as Freudian psychoanalysis, feminism, Marxism, structuralism, cultural materialism, Queer Theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, and so on. Because close reading gives *the words on the page themselves* the authorizing power for interpretation, it remains a valued research method, supporting various epistemological diversities. Close reading frames words (and their grammatical constructs) into images that must be regarded as autonomous in constructing meaning. Considerations of the author's "intention" or the reader's "preference" are illegitimate. Like active imagination, close reading construes the words (of literature and whole literary works) as images with their own signifying strategies, independent of their "location" in culture and history or in any one psyche. As a result, close reading endows the words of literature with the highest creative potency, so expanding almost infinitely their potentials for interpretation. After New Criticism, later theories retained this original source of creative energy in literary interpretation, only changing the parameters of close reading to give permission to follow the signifying of the text beyond its boundaries. For the later theories, the literature-as-potent-image-through-close reading was enabled to *add* meaning to cultural topics of power, identity, politics, history, sexuality, and so on.

In effect, close reading as practised today unwittingly has added Jung's method of cultural *amplification* of the symbol to its active imagination-like



generation of its *own*, or *othering* significance. I suggest that close reading has survived, at least in part, because of its underground kinship to active imagination: their *secret history in the psyche*. In turn, depth psychology may benefit from knowledge of the way literary scholars explore the hidden dark impulses that determine patterns of thought and action.

For while the methodology of close reading represses a *conscious* role for the reading psyche, it actually draws upon the structural precepts of active imagination and the symbol as understood by Jung. In close reading, the literary work must be allowed to manifest *its own* imaginative powers. In contemporary literary studies, the term “symbol” has fallen out of favour, but the notion that literature is language that possesses multiple, hidden, or repressed directions for making meaning is inescapable. Like active imagination, students of literature are directed to put aside their conscious concerns and allow the text to speak through them, not just to them.

Close reading (called *literary studies*) discourages personal associations to the text, while cultural and historical connotations are encouraged. What follows with close reading is the student’s own written interpretation. This is a new synthesis, different for each person, and should be guided by the symbolic power of the text, not the ego of the reader. When active imagination (called *psychology*) adds “amplification” to the initial active imagination, allowing the words on the page, the *symbols*, to manifest their own power and energy, what follows is a new synthesis of psyche through the activity of images imbued with unconscious energy. As Jung ultimately emphasized, the ego is renewed by accepting the actions of images and interacting with them. *Amplification* is a form of interrelating with images that draws on historical and cultural paradigms to *ground* the ego as it becomes newly embodied in the collective by the grace of images.

I have been describing the basic technique of close reading as it evolved from the New Critics. Early on, other literary critics recognized that New Criticism itself derived from Romanticism, but it deliberately cast off those Romantic theories of mind, theories that, in turn, re-emerged in depth psychology. In 1952, the literary scholar R. S. Crane critically examined New Criticism, in general, and the work of Cleanth Brooks, in particular.<sup>10</sup> His essay focused on Brooks’s debt to and divergence from the Romantic poet S. T. Coleridge. The latter was the author of *Biographia Literaria*,<sup>11</sup> a work of Romantic aesthetic theory that anticipated depth psychology.

Crane found New Criticism wanting for its unwarranted diminishing of the category of imaginative writing into fictional literature only. To the Romantics, as to Coleridge, poetry implied a larger activity than simply the making of poems. Poetry is a *quality* of writing that emerges from the creative imagination, whether directed to scientific, philosophical, or literary ends. In fact, to me, Coleridge’s view of the imagination is very close to that of Jung’s, in seeing it as a creative power adding to the conscious will and ego’s directed thinking.<sup>12</sup> Coleridge argues: “The reason is that ‘poetry’

comes into being, no matter what the medium, whenever the images, thoughts, and emotions of the mind are brought into unity by the sympathetic power of the secondary imagination."<sup>13</sup>

For Coleridge, primary imagination is the creative energy of God: it makes the world; the "secondary imagination" corresponds to what Jung later calls the unconscious, for it is the creative force in humans that is not always accessible to the rational faculties. Crane points out that, for Coleridge, and by extension the Romantics, three kinds of knowing are needed for literary study: logic, grammar, and psychology.<sup>14</sup> These three are equal potentates in examining a literary work. Grammar thus invades psychology by way of rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, for Cleanth Brooks, and by extension the New Critics, only grammar is needed for literary criticism. Unable to locate an originating cause in the human psyche, they are reduced to positing the origins of imaginative literature in the properties of language.<sup>16</sup>

Here, New Criticism and Jungian psychology divide the heritage of literary and philosophical Romanticism. New Criticism founded close reading, but denied it an epistemology in the psyche conceived of as intrinsically imaginative. It did so because of its urge to separate "literature" from other kinds of writing. Arguably, this collective insistence can be traced to the founding anxiety of the "new" discipline of vernacular literary study. For how could scrutinizing imaginative works in their own language be justified as *knowledge*, epistemologically, if literature were not in some way a special category? Literature *has* to be elevated from the trivial, the journalistic, the contingent immanence of the everyday, into something sublime and transcendent of dependence upon time, place, or person.

What was achieved, I suggest, by this thankfully short-lived denial of psyche in literary studies, was a concentration upon technique. Indeed, it was the *perversity* of the exclusion of the reading psyche from reading that led to the corresponding energy being applied to the words on the page. As a result, it bequeathed to subsequent theories of literary study the notion of developing a counterintuitive skill. Close reading is a skill, an art that has to be learned over time by consciously repressing parts of the ego and repressing conventional ideas about what pleasurable reading is *for*.

Close reading does its (founding) disciplinary job of converting reading literature from an act primarily given to pleasure to a mode of exegesis. It is this achievement of expertise, skilfulness, and art that keeps the practice vibrant in literary studies today. I want to suggest that the development of this disciplined skilfulness has something to offer the idea of active imagination. In order to make my argument for a reciprocal exchange between literary studies and depth psychology, I need to go further back into their mutual lineage in the mythical and esoteric realms of hermeneutics and magic.

## Hermeneutical problems, magical texts

R. S. Crane notes that Coleridge's Romantic theory of mind was indebted to Plato in the notion of imitation. Just as Plato erected a dualist sense of the world through an ultimate reality of transcendent forms to be imperfectly imitated by humans, so Coleridge gave us a secondary imagination by which we might learn to imitate the primary creative imagination of God.<sup>17</sup>

*Hermeneutics*, the art of creating meaning from texts, also contains a Platonic notion in its various citations of recollection. Plato described a process of "anamnesis", or learning about the unknown by recognizing it as or through the already known. This idea becomes a principle in hermeneutics, where meaning is constructed by placing the unknown within an already known context.<sup>18</sup> Another key element in the development of hermeneutics is the notion of the "hermeneutical circle", which, although having roots in Plato, was actually formulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Here textual apprehension moves from focus upon parts to realizing its context in the whole work, and vice versa. By erecting a circle of epistemological acts, such hermeneutical analysis enhances Plato's concept of recollection, placing the unknown in the text in the context of the known.

In his book, *Freud and Philosophy*, Paul Ricoeur significantly redefines hermeneutics by refocusing the practice on the interpretation of texts and by incorporating some depth psychology. It was Ricoeur who famously announced a "hermeneutics of suspicion" congruent with Freud's assertion that a dream *conceals* a wish. By contrast, he also announced a "hermeneutics of trust", closer to Jung's belief in treating an image as meaningful in itself, thus building meaning by amplifying it.<sup>20</sup>

Already in Ricoeur, we see hermeneutics learning from depth psychology. Less recognized is New Criticism's debt to the hermeneutic circle, in close reading's tradition of placing the unknown in the context of the already known or recollected. Close reading in New Criticism depended on the literary text being regarded as an autonomous entity whose meaning could be gleaned by scrutinizing its parts minutely in the context of the entire work. Just as in the elaboration of the hermeneutic circle, close reading moved from parts to whole and from whole to parts, New Criticism's close reading had to stay within that circle for the boundary of the text was, indeed, "sacred" to it. Post-New Criticism's close reading freely expands the hermeneutic circle of interpretation beyond the text, and even into the psyche.

Now I will look at what we might call "the psyche" before psychology and Romanticism – in Renaissance magical lore.

## Renaissance magic and alchemy: twentieth-century transformation and individuation

In *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, Ioan P. Couliano draws on Freudian depth psychology to a greater degree than upon that of Jung in his study of those master magicians of the Renaissance, whose arts of darkness he likens to the hucksters who now bewitch the public with advertising and mass media manipulation.<sup>21</sup> He, therefore, applies Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion". While appreciating Couliano's moral distaste for those who manipulate people by exerting control over psychically potent symbols, I see other possibilities for his research on magic by applying a "hermeneutics of trust". The Renaissance treatment of psyche may reveal a magic potent enough to revise close reading with/and active imagination.

Like hermeneutics, Couliano traces a lineage back to Plato's separation of true reality of ideal forms, dwelling in an imperceptible realm, from their imperfect shadows in the everyday. By the Renaissance, this dualist heritage had become what today we might recognize as a form of sophisticated psychology that viewed humans as possessed of a soul that was in essence *phantasmic*, neither of bodily substance nor destroyed by death. This phantasmic soul shared something of the inaccessibility of Plato's ultimate forms. The soul did not understand the body's language, which was dependent on the physical senses. The soul only comprehended a language made of phantasms – one that the body did not know. Only what was called the "intellect" had the capacity to perceive phantasmic language as well as the sensual. Again, we return to the problems of communicating the symbols because that is what the esoteric phantasmic language consists of.

As Couliano puts it:

Fundamentally all is reduced to a question of communication: body and soul speak two languages, which are not only different, even inconsistent, but also *inaudible* to each other. The inner sense alone is able to hear and comprehend them both, also having the role of translating one into the other. But considering the words of the soul's language are phantasms, everything that reaches it from the body – including distinct utterances – will have to be transposed into a phantasmic sequence. Besides – must it be emphasized? – the soul has absolute primacy over the body. It follows that the *phantasm has absolute primacy over the word*, that it precedes both utterance and understanding of the linguistic message. Whence two separate and distinct grammars, the first no less important than the second: a grammar of the spoken language and a grammar of phantasmic language. Stemming from the soul, itself phantasmic in essence, intellect alone enjoys the privilege of understanding the phantasmic grammar.<sup>22</sup>

Here, we can see why Jung was so attracted to Renaissance symbolic practices such as alchemy. For, in its intellect that stemmed from the soul and was phantasmic in essence is an ego deeply rooted in what Jung much later termed the Self. In seeking out the symbolic texts of alchemy, which predated the historical elevation of logical rationality, Jung sought to heal the modern psychic split by evoking a past with an “other” architecture of psychic being. Notably, in placing so much importance on alchemical texts, Jung implicitly structures active imagination as a kind of reading with the aim of transforming the psyche.

Significantly, here “intellect” is not the rational ego of post-Enlightenment reason. In Jung’s view, this rational ego is fallible because it has been constructed through cultural discourses of reason that repress too much that is “other”. Jung calls for this ego to remake its relation with the unconscious by converting a strategy of repression into one of relationship, thus transforming the libido (or affective life force) through an active and imaginative engagement with its symbols. This is “individuation”, and a nice illustration of Jung preferring a hermeneutics of trust to that of suspicion (that “distances” the other).

Couliano’s explication of phantasms offers an understanding of the Renaissance alchemist’s sense of working simultaneously in body, psyche, and material substance. In this era, the phantasm is a language that is also a material realm of being in which the soul can be manipulated by the intellect of a skilled practitioner. This “art” as it was called, encompassed what we now call science; for it also operated on, and from, the material world. For the Renaissance practitioner of the art of phantasmic manipulation, it was possible to mutate material substances and even to affect the world at a distance. In one sphere, this was “alchemy” (from the Egyptian *Khemia*, “land of black earth”), but in another, “magic”.

Central to the notion of phantasms and magic is the belief that there is no essential separation between an individual human, the material world, and the spiritual heavens. Phantasms offer the individual a soul that engenders an intellect, which is, after much study, capable of apprehending the soul and the spiritual realm. In this system, soul and intellect (ego-with-self, in Jung’s vocabulary) also belong to a cosmic unity that is structured through and with the stars. Hence, the individual soul is caught up in a dynamic universe of subtle, part material, part spiritual potential entities. As Couliano explains:

[M]agic makes use of the continuity between the individual pneuma and the cosmic one . . .

Reciprocity or the principle of inversion of action, is the guarantee that a process that takes place in the phantasmic mind and spirit of the individual will result in obtaining certain gifts the stars grant us by virtue of the consubstantiality and intimate relationships existing between us and them.<sup>23</sup>

That Jung had a very real sense of this aspect of Renaissance alchemy is shown by his depiction of the “subtle body”, which is, in fact, the dimension of psychic and material phantasms.

The singular expression “astrum” (star) is a Paracelsan term, which in this context means something like “quintessence”. Imagination is therefore a concentrated extract of the life forces, both physical and psychic... But, just because of this intermingling of the physical and the psychic, it always remains an obscure point whether the ultimate transformations in the alchemical process are to be sought more in the material or more in the spiritual realm. Actually, however, the question is wrongly put: there was no “either–or” for that age, but there did exist an intermediate realm between mind and matter, i.e. a psychic realm of subtle bodies whose characteristic it is to manifest themselves in a mental as well as material form.<sup>24</sup>

Fascinatingly, here Jung calls “imagination” what Couliano terms “Renaissance intellect”. Today, depth psychology would recognize Jung’s “imagination” here and Couliano’s “intellect” as that desired result from the ego’s individuation into the numinous unconscious, that is, an individuated ego/self. Not only is this an era in which there is no secure division between the sciences and imaginative arts, but also there is little sense of psychic differentiation between these activities.

Taking his *Collected Works* as a whole, Jung remains ever wary of the shocking departure of endorsing magic. Much of his depiction of alchemy relies upon the post-Cartesian division of self as intrinsically separate from the world. In particular, Jung bases his conceptual scheme on his historically inherited dualism of conscious versus unconscious, with terms like ego, archetype, anima, animus, and shadow belonging on either side of the divide. Yet, at the heart of his project are processes that signify a momentous *undoing* of dualism within the psyche and between the psyche and material world, such as individuation. *Projection*, at least here, is Jung’s retention of epistemological respectability, in suggesting that, for the Renaissance alchemists, the psyche was projected into matter.

It is in Jung’s later work on synchronicity that we find his more authentic alchemical and, I suggest, magical sensibility. In synchronicity, mind and matter reveal themselves as intimately related. Jung describes as synchronous, phenomena in which a psychic event and a material one reveal a meaningful, not causal, connection.<sup>25</sup> For example, I dream of a long-lost relative, whose e-mail then arrives, and I note with surprise that it was typed *while I was dreaming of her*. To Jung, synchronicity is a phenomenon that reveals the possibility of a universe similar to the one invoked by the Renaissance alchemists and magicians, as well as by modern quantum physicists.

Perhaps it was Jung's very proper moral reservations that preserved the difference between his work on synchronicity and Renaissance magic. Synchronicity is a revelation of a property of reality, whereas both alchemy and magic were *arts*, thus deliberate attempts to manipulate actual conditions. Jung aligns his psychology with Renaissance alchemy by the linking hypothesis that its unconscious goal was the personal development of the alchemist, projected onto matter, hence constituting a pre-psychological form of individuation. Provided alchemy shows the possible individuation of an individual psyche, it is safe from the moral dubiousness of magical attempts to intervene in the physical world. Couliano, operating from a hermeneutics of suspicion, is explicit about what he calls Eros and magic as manipulative practices against unknowing populations. Today we possess and are possessed by "magicians" who manipulate, even sculpt, our embodied psyches in the magical symbolic images of the media.

Preferring a hermeneutics of trust, Jung does not explicitly consider the proximity of individuation to magic. However, I argue that active imagination, another process by which a dualistic psyche surmounts its dichotomy, is potentially friendly to a magic that comes by way of literary study's close reading. Indeed, Jung's sense of individuation as "transformation" begins to look like what the Renaissance called magic.

### Close reading and magic: making active imagination an art

Nothing could be further from the intentions of the devisers of "close reading" than the rediscovery of Renaissance magic. Denying psyche's creativity in the reading process, New Critics repressed all the esoteric possibilities of the hermeneutical circle to that of language regarded as a disembodied system. And yet the stripping of psyche from language created the essential psychic perversity embedded in close reading. Subjecting the reader to an impersonal system dissolves psychic identity. Close reading is a defeat of the ego or it is *not close enough*.

At this point, it is time to rethink one of Jung's dualisms: his binary division of literature, and by extension art, into two categories. In "Psychology and Literature",<sup>26</sup> he divides literary works into two psychological categories. One is confusingly called "psychological" and refers to literature in which the unconscious psyche has been fully processed into the work. Psychological literature knows its own world and builds it out of signs: images that denote a stable conscious meaning. Standing opposite is "visionary literature", saturated by the raw symbols of the collective unconscious. Less noticed than this stark division is Jung's acknowledgement that literature may change categories over time. A work of art may be *read* as visionary in one era, psychological in another, and vice versa. This leaking of categorization into *the circumstances of reading* has inspired me to propose a revision

of Jung's psychological and visionary reading into *modes of reading* that could be applied to any work of art, not just literature, of any time.<sup>27</sup>

*Psychological reading*, then, reads art for its conscious intervention into psyche and world. It reads for known signs of the collective consciousness. *Visionary reading* reads for symbols that point to the unknown, not yet known, or unknowable. To read in a visionary manner is to read in the service of the collective unconscious, or soul. Of course, these two types of reading are epistemological strategies that both preserve and defeat a dualistic notion of psyche and world. Psychological reading adheres to faith in consciousness as separable from unconsciousness, if not wholly distinct from it. Visionary reading is a process by which an ego that considers itself as separate from the unconscious is, through reading its symbols, integrated into it.

Furthermore, visionary reading cannot retain a psyche distinct from body or nonhuman nature. For visionary reading describes a practice of working with symbols in art that are simultaneously *known* in the body – and through the body to the nonhuman – and that signify cosmos. Here, I must insist that visionary reading requires the practice of close reading in order to be *visionary*. It is close reading in the visionary mode that deconstructs the ego as a disembodied island of rationality. Uncanny is the similar argument: that active imagination also deconstructs ego as a disembodied island of rationality. Vital to my argument is close reading as an *acquired skill*. As taught in literary studies, close reading requires little in the way of natural aptitude. Anyone with a normal attention span can learn to do close reading, to let the words of the text become alive and guide the reading psyche, rather than vice versa, yet it is a skill that usually takes years of study and practice.

Overarching the notion of learning skills is the great theme of evolution in both natural and cultural terms. In particular, evolution has generated a new ecological complexity science, arguing that creativity and skilfulness are not limited to human beings. What might reading for magic mean if signifying and creative enmeshment mean embracing the whole planet?

### **Magic through complexity science: symbols as nature speaking**

To further consider the connections among psyche, nature, evolution, and magic, I will draw upon two emerging fields of study: *complex adaptive systems* (as they are changing the study of ecology) and *biosemiotics*. The latter term refers to new research in biology that counters centuries of assumptions about “dumb” nature, by proposing that the biosphere communicates on a basic cellular level both within and across species. Nature has systems of signification that are “read” intelligently by plant and animal organisms. This remarkable field of study enhances what used to be called *chaos theory* and is now called *complexity evolution* – the notion that evolution proceeds not by



competition among individual species but by the interaction of incredibly complex environments. So-called complex adaptive systems behave “intelligently” in generating their own complex responses to environments, and their version of creativity even extends to mapping processes between groups in human societies. Biosemiotics may reveal *how* complex adaptive systems in nonhuman locations creatively coevolve, and both offer models for exploring what Jung calls *synchronicity*.

For Jung’s notion of synchronicity implies an ordering in nature that is accessible to the human psyche. A parallel perspective is to be found in literary scholar Wendy Wheeler’s *The Whole Creature*.<sup>28</sup> Looking for a continuity between nature’s fecundity and what is defined as creativity in humans, Wheeler draws on notions of tacit bodily knowledge, such as craft skills, to resituate the body in nature as an organ of knowing indivisible from the psyche. Wheeler argues that art and culture advance through intuited embodied knowledge. It is through the incarnated creative unconscious that the “new” happens. Tacit bodily knowledge implies a complexity greater than can be comprehended at the time. This complexity is not confined to cultural change; complexity is now regarded as key to evolution in nature.

Here is an important development in the theory of evolution after Darwin. Evolved nature is not so much a result of competition among species. Rather, nature changes through ever more complexly interpenetrating environments.

Complex systems evolve via the emergence of strata of increasing complexity. Biological evolution proceeds in this fashion, as, we have now seen, does human culture and human knowledge. Human discovery and invention – human creativity – proceeds via tacit knowledge and our sense that we are in contact with a complex reality of which there is more to be known.<sup>29</sup>

What Wheeler does not say is how far Jung, particularly with reference to synchronicity, anticipates her fruitful gatherings from the field of “biosemiotics”.

Jung’s unconscious psyche, like Wheeler’s, is also embodied. His “synchronous events” are apprehended through/as tacit knowledge in the body. Effectively, he too embraces the creativity of nature through tacit *significance* into culture. Biosemiosis offers another model for looking at the natural phenomena Jung describes as examples of synchronicity, another way of viewing the links between language and nature. Effectively, Jung embraces the idea of the creativity of nature. Biosemiosis is a parallel way of describing non-human nature as animate, as *communicating* with humans in the reciprocal formation of symbols in culture.

We are back to the issue of the communicability of the symbol, now seeing it as possible on a truly cosmic scale. Symbols, as Jung described

them, are archetypal images rooted in the human body, and through its tacit knowledge, in the nonhuman. Nature is a web of co-evolving complex adaptive systems of which the human embodied psyche is one system, creatively interacting with nonhuman nature. Symbols may arise from biosemiosis when human cultures are rooted in a *reciprocal communication* with the nonhuman. Jung called these occurrences *synchronous*. It is a small step to move from *reciprocal communication* to *reciprocal influence*, or magic.

### Active imagination and close reading as skilful magic: the mythological frame

I propose that close reading is the practice of magic when it involves symbolic images. When not confined to writing in words, we could term such close reading “active imagination”, for encouraging the image to reveal its potential being in the soul spontaneously. Active imagination then overcomes its origin in one of Jung’s dualist paradigms of dividing psyche into ego and other. It does so by welcoming the soul matter into the image as a symbol that actively unites the psyche.

My suggestion in this essay is that we allow a reciprocal *influence* or magic between literary studies’ close reading and depth psychology’s active imagination. The *grounds* for this cross-disciplinary fertilization come from the Complex Adaptive System’s theory of the embodied psyche, the mutual inheritance of these disciplines in Plato, hermeneutics, and Renaissance magic. For example, Jungian Helene Shulman, in *Living at the Edge of Chaos*,<sup>30</sup> considers the collective unconscious as a Complex Adaptive System that offers human co-evolution with the natural environment. Because Jung’s unconscious is rooted in the body, but not limited to it, the psyche in all its unmappable complexity is the meeting place of human and other that teems with fertility and productivity. Moreover, behind all these epistemologies of psychology, philosophy, and magic, I suggest, is the founding role of the two entwined creation myths that have shaped the modern Western psyche.

Borrowing heavily from Ann Baring and Jules Cashford’s *The Myth of the Goddess*,<sup>31</sup> I have inferred that depth psychology, and Jung’s project in particular, is one among many attempts to re-orient modernity through its great myths of consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Dominant in the West, via Christianity, has been a sky father myth based on separation and differentiation from the other that reinforced Platonic dualism and structured consciousness as masculine. Repressed for centuries has been a myth deriving from premonotheistic animism, with the earth seen as a divine mother. Earth mother consciousness lies in the *grounding* of consciousness and spirituality through connection, body, the unconscious, sexuality, and an animistic relation to nature.

In this version, myths operate as grand narratives in making paradigms for knowledge. “Magic” in this context is a practice of the repressed myth of earth mother consciousness. Such a perspective uncovers major trends in late modernity to revive “her”. Depth psychology brings “her” back as the pre-Oedipal (m)other, with Jung’s creative androgynous unconscious as source. Jung also cites/sites her as Eros and synchronicity. Beyond psychology, earth mother consciousness arises in the very theory of evolution (earth generates all life and consciousness) and particularly intensifies with the development of biosemiotics and its theory of nature evolving through creative complexity.

With such epistemological support to a mythic heritage, I propose that both active imagination and close reading might undergo a creative co-evolution, within and between psychology and literary studies, when brought together in the context of a Complex Adaptive System (such as this chapter) and together move toward restructuring our consciousness. Put simply, as the skilful practice of close reading enters the threshold realm of active imagination, it becomes an *art of psychic complexity evolution*. Close reading becomes active imagination through the reciprocity of human and nonhuman nature in embodied symbols. Similarly, active imagination can take on close reading’s habits of disciplined skilfulness.

Thus, active imagination becomes an *art to be learned and practised* in the service of soul as connected to cosmos. Both practices are magic because they constitute active interventions into the creativity of nature, human, and non-human. Because both are skills practised until they become arts, close reading and active imagination, now indistinguishable from each other, are activities of what the Renaissance called the intellect – not the ego, but ego-united-with-soul by training and practice in imaginative creativity. To be precise, then, close reading and active imagination are magic because the division between ego and unconscious has been eroded through the art. Practising this magic remakes who we are, as children of a creative earth.

I began this essay with my long attachment to reading Jung as a quest for knowing, not a map of it. In amplifying, actively imagining, and close reading Jung’s concept of “active imagination”, I have been on a quest for that which is not amenable to disciplinary endeavour through the academic disciplines of psychology and literary studies. Perhaps it is a quest to evoke what Jung indicated when he suggested that analytical psychology was one way of knowing in a long history of symbolic arts, a way also susceptible to change when historical conditions require. In so positioning his work, Jung suggests *how* one might read him – as an invocation to the other – and *why*, that we might continue the pursuit of creativity in (our) nature to find a magic by which to live.

Notes

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- 15 Josephine Evetts-Secker superbly explores psychology's coopting by grammar in *At Home in the Language of the Soul: Exploring Jungian Discourse and Psyche's Grammar of Transformation*, New Orleans, Spring Journal and Books, 2012. In my own book, *Jung as a Writer*, I explore Jung's counterattack on grammatical pressures in psychology, his "trickster" writing. S. Rowland, *Jung as a Writer*, New York and London, Routledge, 2005.
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