DOUBLING BACK

Psychoanalytical Literary Theory and the Perverse Return to Jungian Space

1. Returning to Jung

In Deleuze and Parnet’s *Dialogues* there is this marvellous quote from D.H. Lawrence about the purpose of literature: “To leave, to leave, to escape... to cross the horizon, enter into another life...” It is a phrase that succinctly summarizes Deleuze’s own philosophical project, a philosophy of movement and becoming, of lines of flight and deterritorialization. It is a way of philosophizing that Deleuze fiercely opposed to psychoanalysis, with its unhealthy obsession about the *dirty little secret* – another favourite quote of Deleuze, again borrowed from Lawrence – and its constant desire to return home, to daddy-mommy, to a truth that speaks out in the all too familiar signifiers of castration. For Deleuze and Parnet the unconscious is not structured like a language, but rather like a landscape: “The analysis of the unconscious should be a geography rather than a history” (*Dialogues*, 102), Deleuze and Parnet claim. By returning to the work of Carl Gustav Jung, I want to argue that he already developed such a ‘geographical’ view on the unconscious. As Christian Kerslake points out in his *Deleuze and the Unconscious* (2007), Deleuze’s view on the unconscious was profoundly influenced by Jung. This makes a return to Jungian analysis also a way to reconcile these two apparently antagonistic fashions in current cultural and literary theory: psychoanalysis and ‘Deleuzianism’.

Unlike Lacan and Deleuze, Jung has the considerable advantage that almost everyone has forgotten about him. Northrop Frye’s archetypal criticism is passé and continental theory, except perhaps for Deleuze, still obediently follows Freud’s ban against his former ally in the early days of psychoanalysis. For cultural studies, the Jungian territories are unclaimed land and free to explore. Jung’s sporadic digressions on astrology or alchemy also prevent one from taking him too seriously. But the most advantageous aspect of Jung’s theory is his approach of the unconscious as an almost inexhaustible reservoir of actors and landscapes, a dramaturgy of affects and sensations that far exceeds the Freudian family drama with its limited set of familiar, always human characters. This versatility — even if, as we will see, it is somewhat eclipsed by Jung’s later theory of the unconscious archetypes — makes Jungian analysis a perfect tool to deal with the rich imaginary worlds we explore when we read. Moreover, Jung’s notion of active imagination, which I will discuss later, forces the literary critic to abandon the fallacy of being an outsider to the text. Jung’s geographical view on the working of the unconscious makes clear that the reader is already part of the literary space he or she explores and becomes an actor in the reading process, which transforms both reader and text.

2. Getting Lost in the Tropics

The historical geography of the psychoanalytical movement is initially a tale of two cities: Vienna and Zurich. In 1900, the same year that Freud published his *Traumdeutung*, a young and ambitious doctor, Carl Gustav Jung, entered the Burghölzi, the psychiatric clinic of the University of Zurich. It was led by the famous psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, who had installed an almost monastic regime, asking of his medical staff total devotion. Despite the research on dementia praecox and word associations he could conduct there and for which he was widely acclaimed, Jung was soon looking for a way out of the narrow-minded mediocrity and the boring routine of his psychiatric work at the Burghölzi. In his correspondence with Sigmund Freud, to whom he wrote for the first time in 1905, Jung eventually found his much desired escape route.

A lot of attention has been paid to the father-son relation that marked their friendship from the very beginning — not in the least by Jung and Freud themselves. And it is true that Jung, after his disappointing experiences with both his own father and Bleuer, felt attracted to the stern, intelligent professor Freud. But the classic Oedipal history that can be traced in their letters has almost completely obscured the fact that their relationship was from the beginning also clearly determined

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by a very spatial desire to move and to break free. For Jung, Freud incarnated the cosmopolitan city of Vienna, which seemed to him the very antipode of his own conservative Zurich. As an outsider, an unwelcome foreigner, Freud created a line of flight with his unaccustomed theories, allowing Jung to escape from the claustrophobic space of the academic psychiatric society. For Freud, on the other hand, Jung was going to make sure that psychoanalysis would not remain a mere "Jewish cause": coupled with the unbridled ambition of a young and energetic protestant psychiatrist, Freud was assured that his theory would finally go beyond the narrow confines of artistic and intellectual Vienna and conquer the world. Their correspondence in fact often reads like the reports of two warlords, thinking up ingenious strategies and boasting about their subsequent territorial victories. But the more the psychoanalytical movement expanded, the more Jung began to feel restricted once again. From an admired nomadic Hannibal, invading territories without ever settling down, it now must have seemed to Jung that Freud was turning into just another despot, obsessed with building and maintaining his own empire, with Jung as his undisputed, but also subordinate, heir-apparent.

Once again, Jung was looking for an escape route, a route that he finally found in the study of mythology. Enthusiastically, he wrote to Freud in 1910: "I often feel I am wandering alone through a strange country, seeing wonderful things that no one has seen before and no one needs to see." (The Freud/Jung Letters, 183) At first, Freud seemed to interpret the new research project of his disciple as just another campaign of conquest: "I shall be very happy when you plant the flag of libido and repression in that field and return as a victorious conqueror to our medical motherland..." (The Freud/Jung Letters, 213) Jung did not pay much attention to the ambiguity of Freud’s answer, urging him both to continue his journey and to return home and use the riches of this newfound land to pay tribute to psychoanalysis. But very soon, this implicit ambiguity of Freud became an explicit warning: "Just don’t stay too long in the tropical colonies, it’s really about ruling at home!" (The Freud/Jung Letters, 224) By that time, however, Jung had no intention of ever coming back. On the contrary, he was using his research in mythology to turn the tables on Freud. Decades before Lévi-Strauss would claim a similar thing, Jung wrote to Freud that it had become clear to him that the Oedipal incest fantasies were only a modern-day variation of an ancient myth, which has cleverly adapted itself to the Victorian views on family and sexuality: "The tremendous role of the mother in mythology

6. "[Jung’s] association with us is therefore all the more valuable. I was almost going to say that it was only by his emergence on the scene that psychoanalysis was removed from the danger of becoming a Jewish national affair." Freud in a letter to Karl Abraham on 3 May 1908, Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham 1907-1925, ed. Ernst Falzeder, trans. Caroline Schwarzacher (London: H. Karnac, 2002) 38.

7. For Freud’s lasting fascination for the heroic figure of Hannibal, see Dennis B. Klein, Jewish Origins of the Psychoanalytical Movement (London and Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981) 70-72.
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has a significance far outweighing the biological incest problem.” (The Freud/Jung Letters, 267) Freudian psychoanalysis could not explain this myth, only re-enact it. Unable to see the vital importance of movement in Jung’s letters, his continuing search for new spaces to think from, Freud could only interpret Jung’s criticism as a death wish against him, as the insolent behaviour of a rebellious son (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 180-181).3 He responded to it by passing out, twice, in the presence of Jung, as a silent reproach: *Et tu, Brute?* The second time it happened, during a meeting in Munich, Jung carried him and laid him on a sofa: “As I was carrying him, he half came to, and I shall never forget the look he cast at me. In his weakness, he looked at me as if I were his father.” (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 180) From a Freudian perspective, Jung’s remark could indeed be interpreted as the ultimate vengeance: just as he claimed the study of mythology to be the father of psychoanalysis, rather than its latest offspring, he now wanted to become the father of his spiritual father, Sigmund Freud.

But Jung did not want to kill the father-king to seize his throne: he simply wanted to leave behind Freud’s paternal prohibitions that prevented him to explore new ideas. This perhaps explains why Jung did not retaliate against Freud when the latter simply disinherited and banished his Swiss disciple from his glorious empire: by now, there were enough other loyal partisans to defend the Freudian cause, and a bridgehead in Zurich was no longer necessary. At the beginning of 1913, the curtain falls on their friendship, as Jung acknowledged in a short letter: “I accede to your wish that we abandon our personal relations, for I never thrust my friendship on anyone. You yourself are the best judge of what this moment means to you. ”The rest is silence.” (The Freud/Jung Letters, 297)

3. Creating the Temenos

Jung’s doubling back after the rift with Freud, proved to be, initially at least, a devastating retreat. On the verge of World War I, Jung himself was on the verge of a psychotic breakdown – he even had to give up his position as a lecturer at the medical faculty of the University of Zurich, because he felt unable to teach coherently. In this period, Jung had an overwhelming hallucination: a flood inundated Western Europe, but the mountains rose around Switzerland to protect the country, while the waters of the flood turned into blood. Jung was convinced, from his experience of many years with psychotic patients, that such a vision was the omen of a looming psychosis (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 199-200). It was at this point that he discovered that talking alone could not cure the intensities, the affects and the forces that threatened to overwhelm him. They had to be expressed spatially, rather than verbally. In order to control his inner distress, Jung started to collect little stones and just like a little boy would do, he began building a miniature village. This way, he was creating for himself what Winnicott would later call a “potential space”, a “play area” in which ”the child gathers objects or phenomena from

8. See also The Freud/Jung Letters, 292.
external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from inner or personal reality.” From a Freudian perspective, such an imaginary space should be regarded as a mere metaphor, a rebus that has to be solved by reconstructing the hidden semantic code of repressed desire that has generated this virtual landscape. But by playing, Jung realized that the creation of this imaginary space was not a secondary reaction that covered up a preceding inconvenient truth. There was nothing behind this “play area.” It was a spatially defined manifestation of unconscious processes, which next allowed these unconscious forces and intensities to emerge as actors, phantasmatic images within this imaginary space: “[T]he building game was only a beginning. It released a stream of fantasies which I later carefully wrote down.” (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 198)

By Jung's creation of a potential space, an assemblage was formed that coupled impersonal unconscious processes to equally impersonal cultural images: these images became the necessary interface that eventually made it possible for Jung to come to terms with the demons that were haunting him: "Had I left those images hidden in the emotions, I might have been torn to pieces by them.” (Ibid., 201) The series of fantasies that his infantile building game provoked, began with a dream in which Jung, assisted by a dark-skinned primitive, killed the mythic hero Siegfried. (Ibid., 204-205) When Jung awoke, it felt as if he had shot himself: because of his tall figure and his strong-headed behaviour, Jung was often compared to Siegfried, a comparison that greatly flattered him. (Wehr, 180) After this dream, Jung fantasized that he entered the land of the dead, where he met an old man, accompanied by a beautiful, blind girl. They were given Biblical names: Elijah and Salome, the prophet and the femme fatale. Next, these images began to evolve (for instance, Elijah turned into Philemon, a Gnostic pagan) and were supplemented with a series of other figures, each confronting Jung with unknown parts of his psyche. (Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 205-ff.)

Eventually Jung began to paint these images and to write down what these imaginary characters told him. In this way Jung was able to turn the “psychic material which is the stuff of psychosis” into a “matrix of mythopoetic imagination” (Ibid., 213), a transformation that only became possible after he started building his miniature village, after he — quite literally — made space. Later on, Jung would compare such an act to the creation by the ancient Greeks of a "temenos", a demarcated, sacred place in which the powerful presence of the gods — or in Jung’s terminology, "the unconscious" — could be experienced. The temenos established a space for gods who would not be able to appear without (or outside) the borders of this temenos. One could even say that they can only exist because of the creation of such a temenos, as their existence is only an appearance, a simulacrum, an image without an original. Their manifestation on the holy ground of the temenos is their only reality. So for the pre-Platonic Greeks the quest for an essence hidden behind

The different appearances of these gods was meaningless, as it was for Nietzsche, a philosopher who greatly influenced Jung. The powerful images of Jung’s fantasies and dreams should, in a similar vein, be regarded as such simulacra — in Jung’s particular case derived from Germanic mythology (Siegfried), colonial racism (the dark-skinned primitive), gender stereotypes (Salome) and Biblical and Gnostic theology (Elijah, Philemon and again Salome). It would be quite pointless to interpret Elijah or Philemon, both old men who figured as spiritual mentors, as fantasy-substitutes for the wise professor Freud, because the image Jung had of Freud was itself only another variant in a series of related images, and none of these different images could be said to be the original that was represented by all the others.

The set of mythical or historical names that are given to these images — like in Jung’s case Elijah, Siegfried, Salome or Freud — should therefore, as Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), “not be conceived of in terms of representation; it refers instead to the class of “effects”: effects that are not a mere dependence on causes, but the occupation of a domain, and the operation of a system of signs. This can be clearly seen in physics, where proper names designate such effects within fields of potentials: the Joule effect, the Seebeck effect, the Kelvin effect. History is like physics: a Joan of Arc effect, a Heliogabalus effect—all the names of history, and not the name of the father.” The confrontation with these images activates what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a becoming, a process of transformation that has nothing to do with actually wanting to be this or that image, nor with imitating it or sacralising it into a sort of symbol. This becoming-Freud, this becoming-Elijah of Jung was the expression of a process of connecting with the right knowledge to get out, to escape from a situation, to trace a line of flight. To put it somewhat simplistically: while a psychotic would think that he was Elijah (like the classic madman who thinks he is Napoleon), and while a neurotic would try, by hysterical imitation, to hide from himself and the others that he could only be a failed prophet, Jung opted for a kind of perverse strategy, as if he would say: “I know very well that I am not a real prophet, but I want to find out where this becoming-prophet could lead me to.” In this process, an improper and indeed perverse use is made of cultural elements that were never intended to be used in that particular, idiosyncratic way. A Viennese professor and a Biblical figure are *deterritorialized* from their context and transformed by unconscious forces and affects into virtual images that drag the mind along, towards new ways of thinking and new ways of feeling. This is a specific operation that Jung calls “active imagination”: starting to fantasize about images that appear in the mind, and follow the associations and daydreams that emerge in the confrontation with these images.

By stimulating this “active imagination”, it becomes possible to discover and eventually break the unconscious spell of these powerful cultural images. In a continual process of self-experimentation and self-transformation one can actualize other variants within the potential field of these images. Such virtual images should not be seen, in a Lacanian sense, as lures of the imaginary, with every image as another self-alienating mirror in which one narcissistically discovers a more impressive double. For these images are never fixed—they are no more than snap-shots of a process in which the virtual image toward which one escapes is itself caught up in the process of becoming and therefore also continuously changes. If we radically follow this line of thought, the success of such an experiment can never be measured from an external point of view—only immanently, from inside the temenos can this process be evaluated. But at this point Jung proved to be more of a Platonist than of a Nietzschean. Although he continued to argue that what matters for the psyche is not whether something is true, but whether it works, Jung would in fact soon return to the Platonic universe with its belief in a transcendental truth behind the veil of appearances. In 1919, when he had finally overcome his deep personal crisis, Jung began for the first time to refer to these haunting images as archetypes, and turned his own intimate experience into a comprehensive theory of the psyche. (Deleuze and the Unconscious, 87) Eventually, he would claim that these archetypal images were in fact all incomplete actualisations of universal archetypes, which were themselves unknowable. The most crucial ones were the persona or ego, the shadow, the animus/ anima and the Self.

Siegfried could now be interpreted as a specific appearance of the persona, the narcissistic image one wants to present of oneself to the world, while the dark-skinned savage who helped Jung to shoot Siegfried was the shadow, the “dark side”, containing everything the persona does not want to be, and Salome was the anima, standing for all the female affects and irrational opinions in the psyche of a man. Elijah-Philemon acted as a psychopompos, a guide of the soul that leads one to the most important archetype of all, the Self, a majestic unity in which all the oppositions are harmoniously gathered. So, however strange the images that are haunting the ego, they are at the same time merely variants of one of those transcendental universal archetypes, and wherever this experiment is taking the ego, it is at the same time always only on the road to this much aspired, harmonious Self. At this point, Jung’s outlook almost uncannily echoes Freud’s exasperating warning to him: it is all right to experiment with yourself in the faraway tropical colonies of archetypal imagination, but only as long as you return safely home, to the Self that lay waiting there for you all along. It is this Platonic doubling in Jung’s theorization of his own experiences that poses the most problems for embarrassed post-Jungians who try to adapt his thinking to the current poststructuralist paradigms, with varying

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success. But once deterritorialized from the Platonic universe it got embedded in, Jung’s archetypal theory could present an interesting new way of reading cultural artefacts, like books.

4. Reading as Active Imagination

From a Jungian perspective we could say that any text establishes a kind of temenos, an imaginary field of virtualities that surrounds it. Some of these virtualities are subsequentially actualized by the active imagination of the reader, as he or she follows the lines of flight that trace themselves into this virtual landscape, transforming both the reader and the text under scrutiny. This is in fact what Jung did with the Bible, when he re-invented the prophet Elijah, or later, when he read esoteric alchemic texts against the grain as explorations of the psyche, rather than as the predecessors of chemistry.

This way perhaps a fatal dilemma in literary theory and cultural criticism in general can be avoided. On the one hand, we want to do justice to the singularity of the given text, which quickly leads us to a tautological defeat: it is what it is. On the other hand, we often consider the text to be not really what it is, and interpret it as a symptom of a hidden truth that can be found outside of it.

A lot of classic psychoanalytical criticism tends to the latter, looking for the personal history of the author or the phantasmatic structures of his or her psyche that are supposed to explain the text, but in doing this, they also make the text itself appear strangely redundant. Jung’s active imagination is more akin to the later work of Roland Barthes and the psychoanalytic criticism of Pierre Bayard, who both deliberately blur the distinction between literature and psychoanalysis and between the unconscious of the text and the unconscious of the reader in the reading process. The images that appear in the psyche of the reader, can only be replaced by other actualizations, which do not claim to interpret, only to transform: the work is what it becomes, and this becoming never transcends the text it emerges from. Invited by an intriguing character, plot twist, or setting, a text catches the reader’s attention and he or she enters the temenos that opens up. The reader can elaborate on an element of the text, linking it to other books, cultural artefacts, personal memories, fantasies and reflections in order to forge unexpected


16. See Psychology and Alchemy, passim.

couplings in a becoming that is started up in the alchemistic process of reading. Although this kind of reading focuses more on the reception of a text than on its production, this subjective approach does not necessarily reduce a literary analysis to a merely personal, idiosyncratic response by the reader.

For Jung, archetypal images are collective structures: they traverse a specific cultural field and provide the powerful expression of certain problems, desires, fears. The confrontation with those powerful images forces the reader precisely to abandon his own persona and to elaborate on problems, desires and fears that go beyond the limits his own private life. A psychoanalytical literary criticism inspired by Jung can thus only present itself as a work-in-progress, without the hope of ever determining the final signification of a specific archetypal image. As such, active imagination resembles the alternative way of reading Deleuze suggests in Negotiations (1990): "There are, you see, two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies [...]. And you annotate and interpret and question, and write a book about the book, and so on and on. Or there's the other way: you see the book as a little non-signifying machine, and the only question is "Does it work, and how does it work? How does it work for you?"

This was also the aim of this paper. A becoming-Jung, a perverse return to Jungian space, is therefore neither a nostalgic return to one of the founding fathers of psychoanalysis nor a plea for his rehabilitation. Jung appears, within the temenos of this research, as a virtual image, a doubling of the force that allows one to explore different other virtualities within the system of psychoanalysis itself, using the untimely force of an outdated and marginalized theory — in order to search for a future for psychoanalytic literary criticism in the 21st century and to be able to enter literature as one enters, like D.H. Lawrence puts it, another life.

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