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Light at Midnight *and the Art of Synchronicity*

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The call for papers for the 2010 joint conference between The Jungian Society for Scholarly Studies and the International Association of Jungian Studies includes a statement that encourages speakers to merge their art with scholarship through self-analysis: “. . . we hope that this conference will be of the arts as well as on the arts; to this end we want to include arts practice as research, with artists of all kinds presenting their work and offering short commentaries as scholarly papers.” This is exactly my purpose in the present essay.

From 1991–2000 I served as a founding faculty member at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG), and I tell my story in a recently published memoir entitled *Light at Midnight: A European Journey*. D. H. Lawrence’s famous caveat—“Never trust the teller, trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it” (8)—has little bearing when the critic *is* the artist. But more importantly, in the spirit of Jung’s “visionary mode,” in which writing fueled partly by the unconscious continues to unfold to succeeding generations of critics (CW 15, 141/90, 153/98), this paper offers the first—and, one hopes, not the last—critical look at a brand new autobiographical text.

Although I did not conceive of my book as a Jungian epic, it is both Jungian in content and epic in structure. As for content, I borrowed the title phrase from *Measure for Measure*, “women are light at midnight” (5.1.288). The character who makes this statement uses “light” pejoratively as an adjective to mean that women out late at night are of easy virtue. I use it as a noun to underscore Jung’s idea that the feminine plays a crucial role in connecting a man with the midnight of his unconscious and to signal that *Light at Midnight* is, in fundamental ways, a book about my relationship with the anima. As for structure, planning the table of contents revealed something unexpected about the general shape of my experiences in Europe. I had been used to thinking of the whole nine years as uniformly challenging and traumatic, yet structural principles soon emerged. Within an overall twelve-chapter outline that engages with the twelve-book structure of the Virgilian epic, I began *in medias res* and employed a three-part organization modeled on Joseph Campbell’s statements about the hero’s journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This is not to imply that weathering AUBG makes me a hero, though readers are welcome to reach that conclusion if they wish. The point is rather that the memoir’s sections relate to the three stages of a journey: descent, encounter, and return. Accordingly, chapters 1 through 4 document my arrival in Bulgaria and my engagement with the setting and its native people, including a relationship in the fourth chapter with a woman whom I renamed Dido. Chapters 5 through 8 recount the deepest part of my descent: namely, various encounters with Americans, which involved love, battle, friendship, and work, respectively, including a descent into hell in chapter 6 because of a battle royal with three shadowy older men whom I call the Infernal Triad (meaning the flesh, the world, and the devil, though sometimes it was hard to tell which was which). And chapters 9 through 12 show my psychological extrication from the underworld via increasing involvement with persons and events in places other than



Bulgaria. It is to some remarkable synchronicities in this third section of the book that I am going to apply the tools of Jungian psychology. My goal in doing so is twofold: to amplify the principles that underlie Jung's synchronicity theory and to emphasize that synchronicity is a kind of art to the extent meditation and inner work may evoke it.

I begin with Jung's notion of the "*unus mundus* (unitary world)" or "one world" (CW 10, 778/409; 14, 760/534), which he takes to be the "background of our empirical world" (CW 14, 769/538) or, more specifically, "the original, non-differentiated unity of the world or Being . . . the primordial unconsciousness" (CW 14, 660/462). But he refers both to this "transcendental *unus mundus*, the potential world outside time" (CW 14, 718/505) and, as Marie-Louise von Franz points out, to the *unus mundus* as the "oneness of the psychic and physical universe" (98). Similarly, Victor Mansfield calls it "the unitary ground underlying both psyche and matter" (196). That is, the unitary world is "some general field" (CW 8, 822/423)—this being Michael Conforti's territory—in which "[e]ach 'simple substance' has connections 'which express all the others.' [Each] is 'a perpetual living mirror of the universe'" (CW 8, 937/499). More pointedly, as Jung says in connection with Leibniz, "man is a microcosm enclosing the whole in himself" (CW 8, 937/499). Thus the *unus mundus* encompasses the physical and the nonphysical. As Susan Rowland states, "*Unus mundus*, as the term suggests, reflects Jung's belief in the fundamental unity of the cosmos, of matter with soul and spirit" (12). Moreover, there seems to be a holographic relationship between the parts, meaning that each part contains a model of the whole. It follows that synchronicity taps into an "absolute knowledge"—a knowledge unobtainable through normal sensory channels or reasoning" (Mansfield 45).¹ The implication of this theory "that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing" (CW 8, 418/215) is that there is also One Mind that unites "the empirical world of appearances" and its "transcendental background" (von Franz 126), a mind different in degrees of consciousness but unitary in nature.² Separateness is an illusion. Thus, as F. David Peat notes, "everything that happens in our universe is in fact caused by everything else" (58).³ Further implications include what Jung calls "a psychically relative space-time continuum" (CW 8, 440/231); and, in the words of J. Gary Sparks, "the fact that intelligent meaning can reside in and arise from matter" (117). As he goes on to say, "For more and more people, the spirit no longer comes down from above. It emerges up from matter and is there for those who are willing to accept the earth's complications and see the spirit in the storms body and matter throw at us" (172).

For Jung, of course, it is the archetype that bridges the physical and the nonphysical, which is why his treatise, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (1952), was originally published in a volume with the work of physicist Wolfgang Pauli. It is not just that the archetype is a nonphysical organizing principle that guides the creation of images in physical manifestation. Pauli knows that mind impinges on matter, just as Jung understands that the archetype has a physical aspect, which he calls psychoid, "[a]n adjective referring to the boundaries of the psyche, one of which interfaces with the body and the physical world and the other with the realm of 'spirit'" (Stein 234). But it is important to note that the psychoid realm is both physical and nonphysical but also neither—some third thing. Peat is helpful here:

. . . the psychoid as a spectrum which contains mind and matter at its ends . . . with a whole range of hidden possibilities in between and even beyond. Synchronicity, for Jung, therefore had its origin in a movement of this spectrum, which then manifests itself in its two extremes, as the simultaneous manifestation of a pattern of the material and mental realms. (188)

The result is complementarity:

Microphysics is feeling its way into the unknown side of matter [I take this to mean the quantum but also the mind], just as complex psychology is pushing forward into the unknown side of psyche [I take this to mean the collective unconscious but also matter]. . . . The common background of microphysics and depth-psychology is as much physical as psychic and therefore neither, but rather a third thing, a neutral nature which can at most be grasped in hints since in essence it is transpersonal. (CW 14, 768/538)

As Jung states more helpfully in *On the Nature of the Psyche*, “the relative or partial identity of psyche and physical continuum is of the greatest importance theoretically, because it brings with it a tremendous simplification by bridging over the seeming incommensurability between the physical world and the psychic” (CW 8, 440/231). M-L von Franz calls this a “coniunctio of matter and psyche” (116); Conforti refers to “the indivisibility of psyche and matter” (51); and Jung himself considers the archetypes transgressive, meaning that “they are not limited to the psychic realm” (Stein 201). What emerges, then, is a stark distinction that sets him quite apart from his early mentor: Freud is to classical physics, causality, the personal unconscious, and the physical world as Jung is to quantum physics, acausality, the collective unconscious, the unitary world, and the One Mind.

The purpose of the preceding paragraphs has been to sum up the thinking that, I believe, undergirds Jung’s actual theory of synchronicity, to which I now turn. The synchronicity treatise speaks of “synchronism” as “the simultaneous occurrence of two events” (CW 8, 849/441). Some are causal and inhabit the realm of classical physics or relate at least to chance, such as streaks in random events. Those that are acausal or quantum are called synchronicities and arise from the archetypes’ psychoid nature: “phenomena of simultaneity or synchronicity seem to be bound up with the archetypes,” Jung succinctly states (CW 8, 841/437); but they also seem to manifest in connection with instinct and emotion. He offers various definitions of synchronicity, and I have selected one of the best for this talk: “Synchronicity therefore consists of two factors: a) An unconscious image comes into consciousness either directly (i.e., literally) or indirectly (symbolized or suggested) in the form of a dream, idea, or premonition. b) An objective situation coincides with this content” (CW 8, 858/447). The parts of this coniunctio commingle with affectivity and comment on each other in meaningful ways, often relating as well to complexes but arising without any known cause. As Conforti states, “The complex creates a type of antenna so that we can tune into and align with a specific frequency of an archetype”; this, he argues, accounts for “an issue that suddenly manifest[s] in virtually every facet of our lives” (24). But synchronicity, as Sparks observes, is also like dreaming while awake: “the dream process occurs in the outer world” (52). Two possibilities thus arise: synchronicity manifests, and synchronicity compensates.

Although synchronicity is acausal, Jung does speak of a condition that acts as a kind of seedbed for the phenomenon: specifically, a lowering of consciousness, as in meditation. For example, he writes, “When . . . the vision arose in Swedenborg’s mind of a fire in Stockholm, there was a real fire raging there at the same time, without there being any demonstrable or even thinkable connection between the two” (CW 8, 912/481). Jung speculates, “We must assume that there was a lowering of the threshold of consciousness which gave him ‘absolute knowledge’” (CW 8, 912/481). Elsewhere, he speaks of “an abaissement du niveau mental, that is, the overpowering of the ego by unconscious contents and the consequent identification with a preconscious wholeness . . .” (CW 8, 430/225). As Stein observes more clearly:

Often synchronicity occurs . . . when a person is psychically in an *abaissement du niveau mental* (a lower level of conscious awareness, a sort of dimming of sense) and the level of consciousness has dropped into what is today called an alpha state. This means also that the unconscious is more energized than consciousness, and complexes and archetypes are aroused into a more activated state and can push over the threshold into consciousness. It is possible that this psychic material corresponds to objective data outside the psyche. (211)

Jung puts the point even more simply: “. . . synchronistic phenomena can be evoked by putting the subject into an unconscious state (trance)” (CW 8, 440/232). His essay “The Psychology of Eastern Meditation” mentions how “the Indian” speaks of *dhyaana*, “the sinking and deepening of contemplation” (CW 11, 936/570, 938/571), that is, a “sinking into meditation” (CW 11, 911/560; Jung’s emphasis); how “[m]editation . . . is therefore something like a descent into the fountainhead of the psyche, into the unconscious itself” (CW 11, 935/570); and later how “[t]he West is always seeking to uplift, but the East seeks a sinking or deepening” (CW 11, 936/570). As Sparks observes, when we go within to perform the work of self-examination, “Events in the outer, physical world itself come to us in moments of resonance, guidance and response” (14). Surely, inner and outer come into even greater synchronicity when one meditates. That may partly account for why Jung states, in connection with “The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation,” that “[t]he meditation our text has in mind seems to be a sort of Royal Road to the unconscious” (CW 11, 827/507). The ultimate goal, of course, is *samādhi*, “the state of supernatural calm” (CW 11, 917/562); however, in order to make progress in achieving altered states, one must work through “the *kleshas*, the disorderly and chaotic instinctual forces which yoga proposes to yoke” (CW 11, 938/571). While meditation and yoga both lower consciousness and thus facilitate inner work, the road to enlightenment leads through the personal unconscious and especially the shadow.

During my years in Bulgaria, I eventually made the kind of psychic progress that Jung describes. I consciously recognized the unity of psyche and matter, began to explore the potential of the One Mind, achieved some degree of deepening or lowering of consciousness through meditative practice, and made progress on shadow issues. As a result, I created a seedbed for a great profusion of synchronicities. In short, I started meditating, using Hemi-Sync tapes from The Monroe Institute, which harness the binaural beat to promote and reinforce hemispheric synchronization and altered states of consciousness, including the previously mentioned alpha state. Course participants at TMI frequently find that they must work through their shadow issues in the personal unconscious (the *kleshas*, as above) before they can access the collective unconscious and the spirit world. Hemi-Sync facilitates this purging process. TMI’s Focus 10 state, also called “mind awake/body asleep,” is essentially what Jung means when he states that “[m]editation without concentration would be a waking but empty condition, on the verge of falling asleep” (CW 11, 827/507). Even for those who do not meditate, Focus 10 can be a regular occurrence. Those who hear themselves snoring are mentally awake but physically asleep.

Meditation, however, was not the only factor contributing to my psychic awakening through a slightly lowered threshold of consciousness. As Gloria Anzaldúa suggests in *Borderlands*:

Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense [what she calls “*la facultad*,” which means psychic ability]. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals of

all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. . .
 . It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly
 cultivate. It is latent in all of us. (33)

Feeling outcast, harassed, marginalized, and foreign, I resonated with Anzaldúa's statement. In other words, meditation, though very important, was not the only thing driving my consciousness to a deeper level. Meditation was just the most important factor. Though synchronicity cannot be *caused*, the right conditions for its emergence can be *fostered*. Synchronicity is a byproduct of a deepened mental state. Experiencing synchronicities, then, is an art rather than a craft because it arises from a general state of mind rather than from a specific intention to implement a set of skills.

Jung's treatise on synchronicity identifies three types, and I will illustrate each one with experiences from *Light at Midnight*. The first type involves the same place and the same time. One day, I was in my office with a Moldovan student named Alexander, who wanted me to write him a letter of recommendation. Although I agreed, I told him that I needed about two weeks to work it into my schedule. I urged him not to do the same thing that my Bulgarian student, Georgi, had done. In the late afternoon at least four years earlier, Georgi had insisted that I drop everything and write him a letter of recommendation for a transfer application to Cornell University, where he hoped to spend his junior and senior years. He simply would not take no for an answer, so I finally capitulated and wrote a hasty letter that would enable him to meet the next day's postmark deadline. Needless to say, he did not make it to Cornell or anywhere else but remained at AUBG to finish his bachelor's degree. He then spent two years at Ohio State University, earning a master's degree in computer science and found employment in the United States. As far as I knew, he was long gone; but within five minutes of my mention of the incident to Alexander, Georgi stuck his head in and said hello. The incident is an example of how a complex was paired with an outer event: a deeply rooted aggravation was amplified by the fact that many things at AUBG were like a fire drill, as in "Drop everything and do this now!" There was no earthly reason why Georgi should have stopped by within mere minutes of my mentioning him out loud; but now in retrospect the synchronicity helps me realize that I needed to release my anger about his earlier persistence. In short, the outer situation addressed my inner state.

The second type of synchronicity that Jung identifies involves separation in time. Here is a first example. One frigid Thursday morning in February 1999, I awoke with a terrible song by Tanya Tucker in my head:

Delta Dawn, what's that flower you have on
 Could it be a faded rose from days gone by[?]
 And did I hear you say he was a-meeting you here today
 To take you to his mansion in the sky[?]

I had grown used to having song lyrics and other messages in my head upon waking, but I was almost indignant that such a lousy song, one that I had not heard or even thought of in over a decade, would suddenly bubble up to consciousness. The next morning, just before catching the university's shuttle to Sofia for my day off, I opened an e-mail from an unfamiliar address. In the message, my best friend's father informed me of his suicide. The song in my head was distant in time from both the suicide and the e-mail reporting it. The incident is also a good example of how synchronicity arises from the One Mind as a form of psychic functioning: perhaps



the unconscious part of myself already knew about my friend's death and was attempting to prepare me for the dire news. Here I diverge from Victor Mansfield who writes, "Contrary to all previous writing on the subject [of synchronicity], I argue against considering parapsychology as a form of synchronicity" (7). As Jung says, the unconscious includes "all the future things that are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness" (CW 8, 382/185). The inner state thus prepared me for news of the outer circumstance.

Here is a second example of a synchronicity involving separation in time. In the summer of 1996, I was trying to figure out which boat to buy—a 31-foot British sloop or a 31-foot American cutter. At bedtime, I asked, "Which boat should I buy?" The next morning, I had a dream that was reminiscent of *The Color Purple*, which I had watched on video the previous evening. In the dream, an enormous black woman said forcefully and repeatedly, "The answer is in your own back yard." That summer I did not purchase a boat, but in 1997 I found and purchased a 35-foot cutter that had spent its entire life in my own back yard, meaning on Lake Michigan, about four hours north of my home port, Holland, MI. In this case, the inner signal helped me judge the appropriateness of the outer purchase. The vessel had been shipped out to Annapolis because it had not sold in the Midwest, and I made an offer even before viewing it. Interestingly, on my two nights in Annapolis, Armand Assante's version of *The Odyssey* was on television, and I named my boat *Telemachos*, after the character with whom I most identified, which brings me to the third type of synchronicity that Jung mentions.

Some synchronicities involve the same time but a different place. I had been suffering for years under an administration that I considered oppressive. The president's last name was Watkins; the provost abbreviated his first name with the letter J, and his middle name was Barry. I always left AUBG as soon as I could after the end of the spring semester and returned to the United States for several months of rest and research in Ann Arbor. But in 1997, I bought *Telemachos* and spent much of my time living on board at one of the marinas in Holland. Across the dock from my vessel was a sloop whose brand name was printed on the mainsail cover: the boat was a Watkins 25. At the end of the other dock lay a rusty tug boat named the *Barry Jay*. Having travelled seven time zones to get away from the administration, I considered the achievement of my lifelong goal of boat ownership to be compromised by a reminder of my nemeses. At the time, the coincidence made me angry. Now I recognize, as Mansfield notes, that "the meaning in synchronicity is an expression of the process of individuation" (6). Sparks is remarkably astute on this point, and I want to quote him at length.

. . . that there is something else besides our actions going on in the world and that this something else has intelligence and intent which heals. (14)

The release from hurt is one of the litmus tests of a correct interpretation or understanding of a synchronicity. The recognition of the inner meaning of an outer event has an effect on our emotions that a reductive interpretation could never give. (54)

[Synchronicities] are not experiences that are "pushed" by the past, but are moments that are trying to pull us into the future. They have an intent that is purposeful, meaningful; in them there is a message concerning our next step in life. Apparently, the purpose of a synchronicity is to educate us into a deeper layer of our own genuine self. (50)

Peat agrees in stating, “Often these coincidences occur at critical points in a person’s life and can be interpreted as containing the seeds of future growth. Synchronicities could, therefore, be said to involve the meaningful unfoldment of potential” (81). Also, “A synchronicity is an origin, the creative moment from which the whole pattern of order in a person’s life can be perceived as it spreads out into the future” (148). At the time, the meaning of the boat-name, waking-dream synchronicity was lost on me; but since then I have been able to understand that it compensated for my conscious assumption that out of sight was out of mind; I needed to get out of AUBG, but more importantly, I needed to release the complex that was binding me to a dysfunctional institution. That is, synchronicities “always pivot around some critical meaning closely associated with the person’s individuation at that moment. A period of intense emotionality often precedes them” (Mansfield 44). As several writers maintain, synchronicity reflects the Self’s will for the individual. The Self is “an intelligence superior to our ego, to our personal will, that works through unconscious compensation to guide our development”; “the archetype of the self as a purposive intelligence or meaning, as expressing itself in an unfolding ‘vision’ of what we are meant to be . . .” (Mansfield 17–18). Synchronicities “are revelations of the self in both the inner and outer world, revelations of meaning seeking to transform the individual” (Mansfield 44). They are “often associated with periods of transformation . . . as if this internal restructuring produces external resonances”; that is why they proliferate when new patterns are reaching consciousness and disappear when the personality has been realigned (Peat 27).

If these statements are applied to my experience, a specific conclusion emerges in connection with Campbell’s stages of the hero’s journey. By the time I bought *Telemachos* in 1997, I was entering my European journey’s return stage, which involved the assimilation of unconscious content related to my difficult encounter overseas. Especially because of meditation, I was open to the changes that were afoot in my psyche. The synchronicities reported above and many others that I experienced arose naturally from and in turn reinforced the inner shift that marked my extrication from Bulgaria. Although the meaning of my many coincidences has taken time to process, I was at least a semi-gracious participant in the art of synchronicity. What was somewhat opaque then is now clear: my boat name synchronicity implied the will of the Self by commenting on my present in order that I might move toward the more individuated person I am here to become.

NOTES

¹ For “the absolute knowledge of the unconscious,” see *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* in *CW* 8, 923/489.

² Jung sounds here very much like nuclear physicist Thomas Campbell whose “theory of everything” describes reality as a series of fractals in which consciousness becomes increasingly differentiated. However, I am using “One Mind” in a different sense than Jung does in “Psychological Commentary on *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*,” where the term refers to the personal and collective unconscious (*CW* 11, 793/496, 820/505).

³ The point relates to David Bohm’s distinction between the implicate order and the explicate order. The explicate order is the realm of Newton and Descartes; the implicate order is the realm of quantum physics. It is on the level of implicate order that universal causality may be the case. See *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* 225. Peat explains implicate versus explicate on 167ff.

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