Collateral Damage

Plunged Into the Underworld by Hubris and the Quest for Power

By

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Preface

While working on my previous publication that describes an exploration of evil,[1] I was in the midst of fact checking a point regarding the CIA-LSD experiments of the 1950s–60s when unsuspecting citizens were given LSD without their knowledge or consent. Investigating further, I learned that in the 1970s, a swirl of publicity regarding the story of Dr. Frank Olson, one of the researchers who was involved in the government's work, instigated Senate hearings and a great amount of reporting about the case. In addition to Olson's story, the experiences of several more victims of the LSD experiments were documented. This troubled me and led to a deeper exploration of an era in United States history that personified what I think of as patriotism gone awry. This also illustrates how fear can wreak havoc on people's moral compass, leading them to cause their victims to embark on a journey into the unconscious, a metaphorical descent to the Underworld, for which they were neither prepared nor willing. That journey is further exacerbated when perpetrators are so convinced their thinking is indisputable, they exhibit unfettered hubris.

Underworld mythology is found in most cultures reaching back beyond recorded history. The journey is envisioned as a descent to another realm and stories that describe the experiences of various pilgrims have often survived as fragments passed down through generations, lessons to be learned as we navigate the human experience. First, and foremost, this book explores stories of people, in their own words, who through no fault of their own, were sent on

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[1] Robin L. Gordon, *Fieldnotes from a Depth Psychological Exploration of Evil: From Chinggis Khan to Carl Jung* (Routledge, 2019).

a psychological descent to Hades by the hubris and arrogance of others.

Several topics in *Collateral Damage* have been written about individually in myriad academic disciplines. My work concerns linking disciplines by exploring common themes in history, mythology, philosophy, and depth psychology. These themes are universal and can be approached from several perspectives. The framework I am using for considering the survivor stories with greater depth includes discussing how they came to find themselves on their particular journey, looking for patterns in how they navigated their ordeal, and ultimately, reflecting on their path to transformation or in Jungian terms, individuation.

Examining the mythology of the Underworld begins our task of understanding the survivors' journey which includes a description of what occurs when one journeys, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to what some have called Hades/Hell. Underworld myths are found in most, if not all, cultural stories. Moreover, we hear in myths such as the story of the Sumerian queen, Inanna, preparation is crucial for a successful journey to the Underworld and even then, one never ascends unscathed. *Collateral Damage* explores stories of those who have experienced these journeys. Furthermore, as Carl Jung pointed out, there is a connection between consciousness, unconsciousness, and mythology which is also examined and illustrated in the survivor stories.

The circumstances surrounding the survivors' spiral into the psychological Underworld are described and placed in historical context. That discussion of context would not be complete without a brief conversation concerning hubris and how people's fears can precipitate actions that cause undue harm. Thus, a survey of the

phenomenon of hubris and its mythological origins is explored in the initial chapters. Understanding how people found themselves on involuntary descent journeys to the Underworld also requires looking at the perpetrators and their motivations. Although the reader may or may not be familiar with the work of Carl Jung and subsequent depth psychologists, examining how ordinary people can become focused on the quest for power no matter the consequences for others, often at the expense of their own moral compass and as well, demonstrating classic hubris, brings to light how perpetrators send people on involuntary psychological descent journeys to the Underworld.

The devastating effects of hubris are found in several areas of study and this book encourages one to consider all of the potential results of one's actions and to avoid believing one's actions will only affect the *other* with no personal consequences. Imposing harm on another, regardless of motivation, affects one's own psyche, one's soul even. Rationalization or invoking the *ends justify the means* argument is hollow in the end. Employing the excuse, *things are different now than they were back then*, is likewise a trope used to justify the inexcusable. Cruelty is cruelty and we know it, or people would not try to hide it from view or disguise it as something needed for the greater good. Debates on ethics, philosophy, and religion have been taking place for thousands of years and more currently has become, a focus for educating young people. Yet, I might add, education does not necessarily stop someone from perpetrating unscrupulous deeds. It is not enough to shine a light on bad behavior; *one must understand the conditions that support it*—but that may not be enough either. Thus, perpetrators often attack the curriculum of schools and universities, claiming the young are being indoctrinated in some way.

I have chosen to focus on the stories of individual people in order to look beyond a theoretical, academic consideration of experiencing the Underworld. The accounts of their descent journeys are discussed using a Jungian/depth psychological lens. Furthermore, if one only focuses solely on survival and resilience, we may miss a part of the narrative that explores inner transformation. That phenomenon does not mean a survivor must carry out some large, out-facing work as an indicator of inner transformation. Considering one's place in the world and finding, as Victor Frankl describes, *meaning* in one's journey, may have quiet but significant effects, certainly on one's psychological growth and perhaps on the outer world as well.

Although this book focuses on extremely difficult circumstances, it is ultimately about hope. The stories show that there are many paths for dealing with trauma, none better than the other, but personal and diverse. In order to privilege individual voices, the stories originate from diaries, memoirs, oral history, and United States Senate hearings. Some of the memoirs were written or recorded after the events being described and it is likely certain details may have been slightly altered with time; however, their stories are valid recordings and observations of survivors' lived experiences. The issue of memory and oral history will be discussed further. Regarding methodology, including direct quotes from the diaries and memoirs gives the readers the opportunity to draw their own conclusions and interpretations that might differ from my own. However, in grounded theory/phenomenology, the method used for my analysis, conclusions must be grounded in the evidence. They can be explained to illuminate the path taken by the author; however, the reader must always be able to say, yes—I see how that reasoning is consistent with the data.

For those who have not returned from the Underworld, this book acknowledges their pain and suffering. This is not to suggest they lacked something but to recognize surviving the Underworld is not guaranteed. For the survivors, it will be seen that although they carried wounds, something in their psyche demanded their perseverance. Their stories reveal resilience as well as something more profound and by looking at their personal journey through the darkness it is clear they found a way through their suffering and ultimately, despite being forever changed, thrived. In Jungian terms, they experienced a type of transformation on their individuation journey. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the tale of an archetypal individuation journey with numerous mythological connections, Gandalf perceives a change in Bilbo who has survived his ordeal when he observes, '"My dear Bilbo! Something is the matter with you! You are not the hobbit that you were."[2] Change is inevitable and when it is accompanied by transformation, the path to finding meaning in one's journey is clear.

[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Ballantine, 1955, 1965), 313.

Introduction to Part I: To Experience the Underworld

In order to fully understand the psychic consequences for people who are sent on an involuntary descent journey to the Underworld, it is important to examine the destination of that journey. Chapter 1 considers the destination or nature of the Underworld. The structure of the Underworld varies by culture and/or religious tradition, yet common themes across numerous mythologies describe the Underworld as the domain of the dead and is often populated by spirits and/or demons who set all manner of tasks or tests for those who enter their realm. In some cases, where the culture places the dead in the heavens, the Underworld is a place of punishment for sin where there is judgment for one's actions, often referred to as Hell or Hades in Western writings. Regarding employing mythology as a context for the stories explored in this book, Carl Jung's work describes the deep levels of the psyche and how they appear in cultural stories. Although the actions of the perpetrators and the response of the survivors to be described is at a conscious level, they are informed by unconscious contents that are at the deepest level of the psyche. Myth is a record of how those contents are acted out in the world. Our human story has been told, even before it was written down, reaching back in time as a record of our psychic development.

Underworld mythology is extensive but for the purpose of grounding the reader in a sampling of cultural descriptions we look briefly at stories such as that of Hades, the Greek god of the dead. Other examples include the Aztec notion of the Underworld where one is led by a dog through nine levels of Hell, and the Egyptian *Pyra-*

mid Texts circa 2400–2300 BCE. Greater depth for the discussion of the afterlife is provided by looking at the Mayan treatise, the *Popol Vuh*. The *Popol Vuh* is said to pre-date the *Vedas* and provides a history of the Mayan people including their creation myth. We focus on one portion of the book that concerns the Underworld, or as it is called in the *Popol Vuh*, Xibalba. The description of Xibalba will feature more prominently in Chapter 2 that focuses on the descent journey.

Chapter 2 explores what takes place when one descends into Hades, both voluntarily and involuntarily. Descent journeys are described across cultures and time and have been associated with shamanism, myth, and ritual. They are also explored in Jungian work as a metaphor for moving downward into the unconscious. The voluntary descent journey revolves around a conscious choice to participate in a ritual, an initiation ceremony, or to explore hidden depths of the unconscious. An involuntary descent journey emerges from the myriad life experiences that cause people to find themselves in a psychic underworld as a result of life-threatening illness, family tragedy, or other circumstances beyond our control that happen due to the vagaries of human existence, triggered from our human mistakes, or caused by another.

Carl Jung wrote extensively about the Underworld as a means for understanding the unconscious. James Hillman writes in his work on looking at the Underworld and its relationship to dreams stating, "It is in the light of psyche that we must read all underworld descriptions. Being in the underworld means psychic being, being psychological, where soul comes first . . . Underworld images are ontological statements about the soul, how it exists in and for itself

beyond life."[1] This initial section that focuses on the mythology of the Underworld as well as its psychological connections is a helpful vehicle for understanding the stories to be explored in Part 3.

[1] James, Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld* (Harper & Row 1979), 47.

Chapter 1

The Nature of the Underworld – the Destination

The ancient Sumerian story of Inanna's journey to the Underworld (3rd millennium BCE) introduces us to her sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld whose name (kigal), refers to "the great subterranean realm."[2] Inanna's journey is one she chose in her effort to gain power over the Upper world as well as the Underworld. Unfortunately, part of her story involved sending her consort, Dumuzi, to the Underworld in her place. Jordan identifies Dumuzi as the first, "dying-and-rising god to be historically recorded by name."[3] One might wonder at Inanna's daring albeit it initially appears to have been for questionable motives.[4] We can imagine that Ereshkigal would challenge any traveler who had the audacity to enter her kingdom. As for the soul who finds herself dropped unprepared into Ereshkigal's realm, sympathy for her plight by that goddess would be surprising and unlikely. Yet, in similar tales such as those of the fearsome Russian crone, Baba Yaga, it is said she responded well to Vasalisa's display of confidence. Vasalisa had sought out Baba Yaga's hut in the forest in order to obtain light for her stepmother who had given her that

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2 J. Bruce Long, "Underworld," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 15, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan, 1987), 128.

3 Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods: Over 2,500 Deities of the World* (Facts on File, 1993), 70.

4 D. Wolkstein and S. N. Kramer, eds., *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (Harper and Row, 1983); Kim Echlin, *Inanna from the Myths of Ancient Sumer* (Groundwood Books / Douglas & McIntyre, 2003).

perilous task, hoping it would lead to her doom. Vasalisa's confidence emerged with the help of a little doll her mother had given to her before her death, an image for intuition, an inner whispering about choosing the right path of action. Thus, if involuntary travelers have this inner capacity for drawing on shrewdness and boldness, they may be able to survive a descent to the Underworld and possibly experience a psychological transformation. However, if one is unprepared and as well, if that inner soul connection is missing or weak, surviving Baba Yaga's or Ereshkigal's wrath may not be successful and will surely wreak havoc with one's psyche. In order to fully understand the psychic consequences for people who are sent on an involuntary descent journey, it is important to examine the destination of that journey, the Underworld.

An Ancient Realm: Rulers, Goddesses, Gods

It is not clear when Heaven and Hell became separated in the human psyche, but the idea of the Underworld or place of the dead reaches back beyond antiquity. The realm of the Underworld carries deep symbolic meaning across cultures and/or religious traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Egyptian to name a few. A common theme is that the Underworld is the domain of the dead. In several instances, where a culture places the dead in the heavens, the Underworld is a place of punishment for iniquity.[5] This is Hell or purgatory where one's sins are judged and moving toward Heaven is a complex process, if it happens at all.[6] For example, Roman legend describes the Underworld realm they called the Elysian Fields.

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[5] Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan, 1987).

[6] Anna-Leena Siikala, "Descent into the Underworld," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 4, trans. Susan Sinisalo (Macmillan, 1987), 300–304.

> Elysian Fields that lies somewhere to the west of the world, where, according to Homer, certain heroes . . . go without actually dying. . . is quite unlike the gloomy Land of the Dead visited by Odysseus, where most people were sent after death. The Romans—including Virgil—saw Elysium as an underworld place for blessed shades.[7]

Synthesizing the mythology of the Underworld is an encyclopedic task; however, a brief but general overview is useful as it illustrates that the Underworld experiences of the people's stories described in this book are not unique to contemporary living although caused by modern-day narcissism and hubris.

The Greek god Hades, also the name of his realm, ruled over the dead in the Underworld. Fearing to speak Hades' name aloud, one often called him Pluto (Roman) which translates to "the Unseen One"[8] or the "Invisible One"[9] referring to his helmet that bestowed him with invisibility. Another name for Pluto was the "Rich One"[10] indicating the great wealth to be found in the earth, namely a treasure trove of minerals as well as the realm of the dead. The tradition of calling a god by a pseudonym in order to avoid instigating annihilation was also found in the Jewish tradition of invoking the name *Yahweh*, represented by the tetragrammaton, YHVH or "I am."[11] Hades' mythical assistant was the three-headed dog, Cerberus, whose task was to prevent anyone from leaving the

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7 Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 120.

8 Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. John Buchanan-Brown, (Penguin, 1969/1994), 490.

9 Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 167.

10 Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 490.

11 Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 153.

realm by devouring them.[12] Legend states that only two people were able to successfully leave Hades, Orpheus and Herakles (Hercules/Roman). Orpheus had attempted to rescue Eurydice; Herakles was said to have descended to the Underworld in order to obtain the Cerberus as one of his twelve tasks or Twelve Labors for Eurystheus,[13] to atone for killing his children.

Herakles is also given credit for assisting Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, to escape death/Hades. Admetus was a King of Thessaly who won the hand of Alcestis by meeting her father's requirement of traveling to her in a chariot led by lions and boars. Eventually, Admetus became ill and the Fates declared that in order for him to be healed, someone would need to die in his place. Upon finding that no one was willing to take his place, Alcestis agreed to die for her husband in his stead. Once Alcestis agreed to the condition, despite Admetus' despair, she became close to death until Herakles appeared, fought with Death, and won her life.[14]

Egyptian mythology regarding the Underworld is rich in description and likely traces back to an oral tradition. The *Pyramid Texts* (c. 2375 BCE) were found in the tombs of Pharaohs and described the preparation of the body after death. Leeming adds, "the texts include protective spells, incantations, and myths meant to ensure the safe passage of the king in the afterlife."[15] The *Coffin Texts* (c. 2200 BCE) came later and were found in the tombs of the upper class. Osiris ruled over the Egyptian Underworld with the assistance of Anubis, usually portrayed as a black dog, and whose

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[12] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 69–70.

[13] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 177.

[14] Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology: The Age of Fable, The Age of Chivalry, Legends of Charlemagne* (The Modern Library, 1993/1998), 168–169.

[15] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 331.

focus was on the embalming process. Jordan writes, "The *Book of the Dead* has him standing by the scales in which the heart is weighed in the Hall of Two Truths."[16] Osiris wears a unique crown Jordan describes as, "consisting of the conical white crown of Lower Egypt framed by tall plumes and rams' horns. Often his skin is colored green."[17] Osiris also carries a shepherd's crook and a flail for threshing grain. Finally, Walker identifies a symbol for the Underworld according to Egyptian hieroglyphics that was a circle divided into five parts looking like a circle encircling a star and signified "the Tuat [also called Duat]: the underground realm of the dead."[18] Thus, at least for royalty or the upper classes, the Underworld was a place of rest.

African mythology is complex and vast, well beyond the scope of this book. Furthermore, colonization and aggressive missionary work likely distorted ancient belief systems. However, examining Underworld stories that precede colonial influences includes that of the Nigerian goddess, Ala, who ruled both the Upper world and the Underworld. Monaghan describes her as, "[the] creator of the living and queen of the dead."[19] It was told Ala watched over the child in a mother's womb, after its birth, and throughout adult life. The dead returned to Ala's womb from where they first emerged, perhaps a kind of pre-existence of the soul, called "the pocket of Ala."[20] She also provided her people with guidance in the form of

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[16] Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods: Over 2,500 Deities of the World* (Facts on File, 1993), 19.

[17] Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, 195.

[18] Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (HarperCollins, 1988), 77.

[19] Patricia Monaghan, *The Book of Goddesses & Heroines* (Llewellyn Publications, 1993), 13.

[20] John N. Wickersham, ed. *Myths and Legends of the World* 1 (Macmillan Reference, 2000), 30.

laws that focused on morality. Depictions of Ala show her wearing a crescent moon as a crown and holding a baby.

Asian mythology concerning the Underworld encompasses a plethora of stories from diverse cultures. Central Asian mythology included a belief about a giant who linked the upper world with the Underworld. Leeming states, "the world was held up by a giant whose feet were in Hell. Hell was a place populated by spirits who sent evil to the world."[21] One Siberian Underworld legend described a Great Mother goddess who ruled the upper world while a king oversaw the Underworld where he judged the dead. An alternative version states, "On the other hand, it must be noted that the period of death below the earth was for many Siberians a period of gestation leading to rebirth."[22] Another description of Islamic Hell refers to "Jahannam"[23] that was made up of numerous levels as well as seven gates. The severity of one's sins dictated one's punishments.

Hindu mythology is massive in scope and like others already discussed, reaches back in time to the oral tradition, well beyond the more familiar *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Aranyaka* texts. In the *Rig Veda*, Yama, the god of the dead, is portrayed ruling over other realms besides the Underworld.[24] His twin, the goddess Yami, was also linked with death whereas Yama judged the dead.[25] Yama's Underworld realm was also referenced in Buddhism, sometimes merged with the story of Gautama Buddha's temptation by the

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[21] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 67.

[22] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 68.

[23] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 175.

[24] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 185.

[25] Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, 292.

demon Mara called the "Evil One."[26] In Tibetan Buddhism, Yama is described as, "a terrifying deity who judges the dead, holding the mirror of *karma* in his left hand and the sword of justice and wisdom in his right."[27] Hackin et.al. explain, "Buddhism provided the main background of this underworld, and brought with it the ancient Indo-Iranian god of the dead, Yama."[28] Likewise, the Chinese Yama-Kings ruled over ten regions of the Underworld that focused on different sins. Receiving judgement for one's actions is a common factor among the differing stories of the Underworld.

The ancient Canaan Underworld was ruled by Mot. The story is told that Baal, another Canaan god linked to fertility, disrespected Mot who later tricked him into dining in his Underworld realm. After ingesting a mud of some kind that caused death, Baal became trapped in the Underworld. When famine struck in the upper world, the ruling god El, attempted to replace Baal but was unsuccessful. Thus, Baal's wife, Anat, struck Mot with her sword and ultimately burned the pieces of the god, ground the remains, and planted them which resulted in Baal's resurrection. Eventually, Mot was also resurrected and the two gods battled until they were separated from each other. Thus, in a similar pattern as other myths, Baal oversaw the growth of crops in the spring and summer whereas Mot ruled over the quiet time of fall and winter as well as death. According to Wickersham, Mot specifically represents the life cycle of growing wheat including, "splitting, winnowing, burning, grinding, and planting."[29] Christian and Hebrew tradi-

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[26] Robin L. Gordon, *Fieldnotes from a Depth Psychological Exploration of Evil: From Chinggis Khan to Carl Jung* (Routledge, 2019), 27.

[27] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 406.

[28] Hackin, et.al., *Asiatic Mythology*, 363.

[29] John N. Wickersham, ed., *Myths and Legends of the World* 1. Macmillan Reference, 2000, 85.

tions altered Baal into a negative god in the process of subjugating the local beliefs, another tactic used by conquerors throughout world history.

Japanese mythology records the Shintô tradition regarding the afterlife identifying "Yomi-tsu-kuni (the land of darkness, or Ne-no-kuni (the land of roots),"[30] where the waters of the earth flow into a deep chasm. One tale involved Izanagi who was said to descend to the realm of the dead in search of his wife, Izanami. Another Japanese Buddhist sect, the Jodô-Shû, viewed Hell, *Jigoku*, or the Underworld as consisting of sixteen regions, eight being hot and eight being cold. These regions were further divided into several sections; however, the fiery realm of "Emma-Ô (Yama-raja),"[31] was paramount. It was said he ruled over the Underworld with the help of eighteen generals and 80,000 soldiers.

Emma-Ô kept a book that listed the sins of the dead. He is depicted with two heads sitting in flat bowls ranged on either side of him. The female head, Miru-me, could discern "secret faults"[32] whereas the male head, Kagu-hana, could smell "the scent of all misdeeds."[33] A mirror was placed such that it reflected the dead's conduct throughout their life after which Emma-Ô gave judgement. Depending upon the severity of the misdeeds, demons dispensed suffering to the dead according to the level of their sins. Yet, all was not lost. It was said, "there is no eternal suffering: damnation is but for a fixed period; one can even be delivered

[30] J. Hackin, Clement Huart, Raymonde Linossier, H. de Wilman-Grabowska, Charles-Henri Marchal, and Henri Maspero, *Asiatic Mythology: A Detailed Description and Explanation of the Mythologies of All the Great Nations of Asia* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1932), 387.

[31] Hackin, et.al., *Asiatic Mythology*, 416.

[32] Hackin, et.al., *Asiatic Mythology*, 416.

[33] Hackin, et.al., *Asiatic Mythology*, 416.

before the prescribed term by the power of prayers and offering from the priests."[34] Eventually, Emma-Ô would retrieve the soul to be reborn or delivered to Paradise.

Tales of Polynesian deities likely traveled from South-East Asia over 2000 years ago.[35] The myths tell of each living thing carrying differing amounts of mana or "sacred and supernatural power"[36] that could be good, evil, or some combination of the two. This was linked to the rules or "tapus"[37] that if broken, could be punished by death. Additionally, Knappert identifies the Hawaiian version of Hades as "Lua-o-Milu, 'Milu's Cave,'"[38] a realm of the dead ruled by the god, Milu. Similar to the stories of Persephone and Baal, if one visited Milu's realm, eating anything would result in preventing a return to the upper world. Yet another Polynesian goddess was known as Hine-Nui-Te-Po which translates as "Great lady of the night."[39] Knappert describes this Maori goddess as, "black with green eyes which a man could see staring at him in the night when his time of death was approaching."[40] Jordan continues stating, "She is depicted in human form but with eyes of jade, hair of seaweed and teeth like those of a predatory fish."[41] Additional traditions placing the Underworld in the depths of the sea include

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[34] Hackin, et.al., *Asiatic Mythology*, 417.

[35] John N. Wickersham, ed., *Myths and Legends of the World* 3. Macmillan Reference, 2000, 134–137.

[36] Wickersham, *Myths and Legends of the World* 3, 134.

[37] Wickersham, *Myths and Legends of the World* 3, 134.

[38] Jan Knappert, *Pacific Mythology: An Encyclopedia of Myth and Legend*. Diamond Books, 1992.

[39] Jan Knappert, *Pacific Mythology*, 116.

[40] Jan Knappert, *Pacific Mythology*, 116.

[41] Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, 105.

those of New Guinea as well as further afield, the Navajo watery realm and Celtic western isle.[42]

The Norse/Germanic Underworld was linked to Yggdrasill, the "cosmic tree . . . {that] ensures the vertical coherence of the world."[43] The tree, an ash, joined the heavens to the earth; its three roots included the realms of men, giants, and the Underworld or Hel. This connection of earth and sky, or the "world tree, the axis mundi,"[44] is rich with tales of dragons, gods, and magic.[45] Another Scandinavian version of the nature of Hel/Underworld bears added description. The goddess, a Norse Queen of the Underworld also known as Hel, ruled that realm of the dead. Hel's father was the trickster god, Loki; her mother was the giantess, Angrboda. Legend described the goddess as, "From her waist up Hel appeared to be [a] normal woman. But from the waist down she was all rotting flesh."[46] Common in mythology, descriptions vary with time, and Hel was portrayed as having a body that appeared both blue and white or sometimes black and white. She was also associated with mountains or volcanoes such as a womb that contained fire and a place for renewal.[47] Another association for Hel was with Brunnhilde or "Burning Hel,"[48] the leader of the

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[42] Wickersham, *Myths and Legends of the World* 1, 19–21.

[43] Claude Lecouteux, *Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic Folklore, Mythology, and Magic*, trans. Jon E. Graham, ed. Michael Moynihan (Inner Traditions, 2016), 323.

[44] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 407.

[45] Arthur Cotterell, *The Mythology Library Norse Mythology: The Myths and Legends of the Nordic Gods*, (Annes Publishing, 1997).

[46] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 175. See also Michael Jordan. *Encyclopedia of Gods: Over 2,500 Deities of the World*, (Facts on File, 1993).

[47] Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (HarperCollins, 1983).

[48] Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia*, 381.

Valkyries. This is consistent with those mythical warrior women who were described as, "sinister spirits of slaughter, dark angels of death who soared over the battlefields like birds of prey, meting out fate in the name of Odin."[49] The Valkyries gathered the heroic dead to take them to Odin's realm in the heavens. The Valkyries legend later morphed them into more benign beings who became, "Odin's shield-maidens, virgins with golden hair and snowy arms who served the chosen heroes everlasting mead and meat in the great hall of Valhalla."[50] Another attribute of the Valkyries concerns as was said, "When they ride forth on their errand, their armour sheds a strange flickering light, which flashes up over the northern skies, making what men call the 'Aurora Borealis' or 'Northern Lights.'"[51]

Celtic gods and goddesses vary by geographical location; however, Arawn (Celtic Welsh) led a phantom hunt with hounds who chased a white stag.[52] Likewise, Donn (Celtic Irish) ruled from his upper domain located on an island while he assisted the dead as they descended to the Underworld.[53]

The Aztec notion of Hell, or Mictlan, tells of one being led by a dog through nine levels of the Underworld. Passing through all the levels resulted in annihilation, another instance of a state of pre-existence such as in the myth of Ala.[54] The journey through the levels required one to be successful in various tasks before reaching the final destination overseen by Mictlantecuhtli and his

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[49] Cotterell, *Norse Mythology*, 46.

[50] Cotterell, *Norse Mythology*, 46.

[51] Bullfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology*, 304–305

[52] Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, 23.

[53] Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, 23.

[54] Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 491.

consort, Mictecacíhuatl.[55] Jordan adds, "In the primeval waters of the cosmos, they generated the monstrous goddess Cipactli, from whom the earth was formed."[56] It is interesting that in this creation myth the underworld and upper world are the products of a pair of deities as opposed to a monotheistic origin story.

The *Popol Vuh* recounts the Mayan treatise on the nature of the Underworld and as mentioned earlier, is said to pre-date the *Vedas*. It provides a history of the Mayan people including their creation story. The *Popol Vuh* relates how two brothers, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, traveled down to Xibalba. This account will be covered in depth in the next chapter as it is rich in imagery and demonstrates several aspects of the archetype of an Underworld journey.

The Underworld mythologies just described include motifs such as a final resting place for the soul, a return to the womb preceding rebirth, and an association with the seasonal cycle for growing crops. Other descriptions tell of demons, fierce gods and goddesses, and a place for judgement. There are many similarities that indicate a connection to the unconscious that was a great part of the work of C.G. Jung and those who followed in depth psychological writings which will be discussed next.

Jungians on the Underworld —Connection of the Ego to the Unconscious

Jungian analysis often includes a womb-like journey when exploring elements of one's psyche. It will help to briefly outline Jungian theory that encompasses earlier work by Sigmund Freud although

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[55] Leeming, *Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, 262.

[56] Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods: Over 2,500 Deities of the World* (Facts on File, 1993), 164.

Jung developed different theories in his thinking. Jung explains our psyche as being made up of the conscious, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. Marie-Louise von Franz employs a diagram of circular patterns that branch out from a central circle, thus illustrating the levels of psyche. Her diagram adds a few levels that show how groups or nations can also affect the individual's psyche. The innermost circle represents a collective structure for all we experience representing the *unus mundus* or as she states,

> The sum of those universal psychic archetypal structures that we have in common with all of humanity, as, for example, the psychic notion of mana, of heroes, of cosmic divine persons, of mother earth, of the helpful animal, or the figure of the trickster, which we find in all mythologies and all religious systems.[57]

Moving outward, the next level represents the collective unconscious, the realm of our psychic development which Jung describes as "ancestral heritage."[58] Jung suggests that the contents of the collective unconscious are not only shared by humanity but may even include all animals which was unusual thinking by Westerners for the day. He continues describing the collective unconscious stating, "[it] appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations are its real exponents. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious."[59] Jung posits that it is at the level of the collective unconscious where we find the

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[57] Marie-Louise von Franz, *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche* (Shambhala, 1997), 44.

[58] Carl G. Jung, *The Portable Jung*, Joseph Campbell, ed. R.F.C. Hull, trans. Penguin Books, 1971, 38.

[59] Jung, *The Portable Jung*, 39.

origins of myth and fairy tales which is supported by his assertion, "The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual."[60] Citing myths as early explanations for the natural world or human behavior explains these stories at one level. However, Jung takes this a step further arguing that myth is triggered by how one felt when confronted by experiences such as natural disasters or the many ways humans interact with each other. Thus, we see the emergence of patterns that cross cultures with the existence of archetypes such as mother, father, king, and so on. This might explain the frequency of the Underworld connections to the archetypes which are in essence, a record of the human story.

Continuing to the next level outward, von Franz identifies a type of national or what she calls the "regional unconscious"[61] that represents patterns of thoughts and beliefs shared by a nation, not necessarily a core belief of humanity in general. Examples include what might be called national characteristics such as what is often referred to as the East versus the West when describing attitudes or conceptual frameworks. The next level outward encompasses unconscious beliefs held by groups of people that von Franz explains are comprised of, "customary reactions and complexes common to whole groups, clans, tribes, and so on."[62] Those kinds of beliefs are clearly reflected in the way people perceive how they are different from others.

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[60] Jung, *The Portable Jung*, 45.

[61] Marie-Louise von Franz, *Projection and Re-Collection in Jungian Psychology: Reflections of the Soul* (Open Court, 1980), 80.

[62] Marie-Louise von Franz, *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche* (Shambhala, 1997), 44.

The level of the personal unconscious is represented in the next level outward and is illustrated with myriad branches that signify the complexity of the individual psyche. Von Franz writes this level is, "the psychic stratum discovered by Freud that contains forgotten and repressed memories, desires, and instinctive impulses."[63] This level will be illustrated repeatedly in later chapters describing stories that demonstrate how unconscious complexes can cause profound destruction.

Finally, the outermost layer of the psyche concerns the individual ego consciousness which when interacting with unconscious complexes can have the power to trigger the Underworld experiences that are the focus of this book. We will see, for example, how repressed feelings can be projected onto others where a person is acting on beliefs whose origin is in the unknown depths of the unconscious. Thus, people may believe their actions are rational, not realizing they are acting on unrealized fears. Jungians often use the mythology of the Underworld as a metaphor for delving into the unconscious, especially useful in the dreamwork psychotherapists use while working with patients in analysis.

Carl Jung's work that focuses on the psyche is the original foundation for depth psychology.[64] Jung writes that Creation began with the one world, "*unus mundus*,"[65] before separating into earth and heaven. Storr describes the *unus mundus* writing, "This unity is outside the human categories of time and space, beyond our sepa-

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[63] von Franz, *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche*, 43.

[64] C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 9, pt. 1 (Princeton University Press, 1959/1969), 81.

[65] C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton University Press, 1963/1970), 462.

ration of reality into physical and mental."[66] The world of myth mostly describes events after that separation. As noted, physical creation as explained by world cultures includes the heavens, the earth or upper world, and some version of a lower realm. The Underworld is associated with among several things, various archetypes. Jung defines archetypes as, "the deposit of mankind's whole ancestral experience – so rich in emotional imagery – of father, mother, child, husband and wife."[67] Hillman writes, "Let us then imagine archetypes as the deepest patterns of psychic functioning, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world."[68] These archetypes are universal as they arise from human experience, literally or figuratively.

Emerging from the unconscious, archetypes created parameters for morals and acceptable behaviour regardless of culture. Thus, an image such as the womb, is a universal pattern and not surprisingly, found in myriad versions of the afterlife. Aspects of the Underworld such as the chasm, deep hole, and such are akin to the womb. Walker cites the ancient feminine symbolism of a cauldron writing, "The cauldron was the prime female symbol of the pre-Christian world."[69] Walker references Egyptian beliefs stating, "The Egyptian hieroglyph of the great female Deep (womb) that gave birth to the universe and the gods was a design of three cauldrons."[70] Furthermore, she notes how the Oracle of Delphi

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[66] Anthony Storr, *The Essential Jung: Selected and Introduced by Anthony Storr* (Princeton University Press, 1983), 331.

[67] Carl G. Jung, *The Portable Jung*. Joseph Campbell, ed. R.F.C. Hull, trans. (Penguin Books, 1971), 43.

[68] James Hillman, *A Blue Fire* (Harper Perennial, 1989), 23.

[69] Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (HarperCollins, 1988), 124.

[70] Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*, 124.

was considered the "womb of Greece."[71] The mother archetype is deeply embedded in the human psyche.

Several cultural stories reference the womb and Mother Earth as a metaphor for the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth when there is a return to the womb. For example, there is an element of hell that focuses on the womb. Walker explains, "the early 'hell' seems to have been a uterine shrine or sacred cave of rebirth."[72] Walker suggests that the lore surrounding volcanoes may have also had a womb/rebirth function such as the Hawaiian Pele who held souls of the dead in the volcano's "regenerative fire."[73] Burial mounds or barrows have an entrance to their metaphorical womb where the dead are laid to rest anticipating a potential rebirth. Walker adds the nave of a cathedral refers to the "belly."[74] As noted earlier the Nigerian goddess Ala, carried the dead in her womb. This chapter has described the myriad ways the notion of an Underworld appears in different cultures or belief systems. Furthermore, we can see the role played by the human psyche. Next, we explore how a journey to that hidden realm has been recorded in mythology.

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71 Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*, 240.

72 Walker, *Woman's Encyclopedia*, 380.

73 Walker, *Woman's Encyclopedia*, 381.

74 Walker, *Woman's Encyclopedia*, 1092.

Chapter 2

The Descent Journey – What Takes Place When One Crosses into Hades

A lecturer at a depth psychology conference posed a question to the audience members about their thoughts regarding the Underworld. Answers ranged from, "I would love to stay in that dark place," or "I can't wait to make the journey," to "I seem to be in the Underworld most of the time and find it . . ." Hearing these romanticized notions of the domain of Hades caused others in the audience to caution that this journey must never be taken lightly. They were trying to avoid sounding condescending but as survivors of challenging experiences their hope was that sharing their journey might help others be more prepared for this significant step in the individuation process. In the course of one's lifetime, in addition to physical growth from childhood to adulthood, one's psyche continues to develop in a process Jung called individuation. Von Franz defines this growth well stating, "[it is] a process of developing consciousness, which, continually broadening its frame of reference, works toward the conscious realization and active fulfillment of an original fundamental wholeness."[75] That idea of fundamental wholeness seems to be something deep in the psyche that wants to emerge as if as some Jungians argue, we come into this life with a purpose that wants to be made known. I will revisit this thinking in a later chapter. This life-long process is ingrained in the human psyche; however, it is complex and may be

[75] Marie-Louise von Franz, *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche* (Shambhala, 1997), 133.