



Symbols and the Soul

The soul moves among symbols and unfolds in symbols¹

- W. B. Yeats

In the foreword to the 4th Swiss edition of *Symbols of Transformation* (Collected Works, Volume 4) Jung reflects on the gaps in his original manuscript written in 1911. He is self-critical of the way it was quickly written and lacked the maturity of insight that had come with later years. With hindsight and ‘old age and illness’ as he says, he ‘discovered, bit by bit, the connecting links that I should have known about before’. Besides being self-critical, the connecting links he referred to were the ‘subjective contents of unconscious processes’ as well as the unconscious myths that shaped him.

As he looked back on the ‘landslide’ of thoughts at this earlier time, he recognized what lay behind his urgency. As he says, it was ‘the explosion of all those psychic contents which could find no room, no breathing space in the restricting atmosphere’ of the current psychology and its ‘narrow outlook’ and ‘reductive causalism’. After the book was released, Jung recognized that his ‘task of tasks’ was to know the myths that ordered his life, for as he says ‘how could I, when treating my patients, make due allowance for the personal factor, for my personal equation, which is yet so necessary for a knowledge of the other person, if I was unconscious of it?’ Of interest to me is Jung’s early understanding of the subjective connectivity essential in his psychological work. To be inside rather than outside the work; that is, to subjectively experience himself with the work. And so it became necessary to work out methods which would enable him ‘to explore the manifestations of the unconscious.’²

At the close of the foreword, Jung identifies the necessity for a knowledge of soul:

Knowledge of the subjective contents of consciousness means very little, for it tells us next to nothing about the real, subterranean life of the psyche. In psychology, as in every science a fairly wide knowledge of other subjects is among the requisites for research work. A nodding acquaintance with the theory and pathology of neurosis is totally inadequate, because medical knowledge of this kind is merely information about an illness, but not the knowledge of the soul that is ill. I wanted, so far as lay within my power, to redress that evil with this book.

I was intrigued by what he meant as 'evil' in the last sentence - like Jung taught, I actively reflected and imagined on this. Was 'evil' lost in translation between German and English, or did he mean 'evil' was information masquerading as comprehension, insight and truth? Or was it that the 'professional' atmosphere had become so increasingly rational, detached and compartmentalized? This world devalued mystery; there was no margin for uncertainty, no room for imaginative subjects, nor was any importance placed on reflection, ambiguity or unconscious ways of knowing. By 1911 when Jung wrote the original manuscript, he was already researching the 'subterranean life of the psyche', as he writes in this letter to Freud:

At the moment I am looking into astrology, which seems indispensable for a proper understanding of mythology. There are strange and wondrous things in these lands of darkness. Please don't worry about my wanderings in the infinitudes. I shall return laden with rich booty for our knowledge of the human psyche.

Jung was at a crossroads between his outer worldly life as a doctor and these new ways of knowing that were presenting to him. Jung was 36, a critical time as he says, not only the beginning of the second half of life, but when a mental transformation can occur. He was betwixt and between, at the intersection between his two personalities; for instance, he said that psychological truth does not exclude metaphysical truth, but he also emphasized that 'psychology, as a science, has to hold aloof from all metaphysical assertions.'³ Perhaps betwixt and between science and symbol.

As a pioneer, he explored this frontier between science and symbol in depth. Symbols stirred his imagination; myths, images and visions were a different lens to perceive, understand and imagine the outer world. Immersed in a world where imagination was the dialect, he took on the task of deciphering the psychic hieroglyphs. Through that wider 'knowledge of other subjects' which lay outside the scientific perimeter like astrology, mythology, alchemy, theurgy, philosophy, the I-Ching, he bridged scientific and symbolic ways of conceptualizing the landscape of the psyche to express his archaeology of the soul.

The dilemma Jung encountered still exists, perhaps even more so. Today we have more information available than ever before – IT is a commodity bought and sold that perpetuates the myth of reductionism. Many symbols once so evocative have lost their potential to enchant as they have become prescriptive and definitive. Even psychological processes and symbols like transference or shadow are now recycled on an informational treadmill or boxed in by a factual or conceptual definition. The age-old dilemma seems to be that the symbolic process that allows the soul to interface with the world was then, and still is, the inferior element of the governing world. Hence we are left with tomes of information and conceptualization about the soul, but little understanding, with few educational opportunities to experience both the literal and psychic levels of reality as a unified function of perception. This is the natural world of imagination and symbol.

I often wonder how symbolic perception, the act of seeing through literality, is something that can be sustained in a world where certainty, clarity, rightness are the superior values. How do we sustain a symbolic life in a literal world? It is difficult when we need acknowledgment, approval, education, support and validity from systems that cannot value symbol, be imaginative or espouse systems of thought that idealize soul rather than embody it. Individuation, to me, is a psychological act that supports the authenticity of subjectivity; therefore values the soul and appreciates the language of symbols.

To continue, I would like to address soul, then symbol and perhaps how symbols can connect and reconnect us to soul. I hope this will help us imagine soul without the compulsion to try and define or conceptualize it..... but before we begin perhaps best to acknowledge that soul is often referenced on two levels: the individual level, personal and subjective, while the other is often

flagged as the world soul. Since they are intermeshed, I will just speak of soul, as attempts to delineate the difference will get me lost in a conceptual world where soul does not exist.

Soul

Therefore, we start with the impossibility of defining soul. As Tom Moore pointed out: 'It is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway: the soul prefers to imagine.'⁴ James Hillman had earlier shared the same thinking:

This exploration of the word shows that we are not dealing with something that can be defined; and therefore 'soul' is really not a concept, but a symbol. Symbols, as we know, are not completely under our control, so that we are not able to use the word in an unambiguous way, even though we take it to refer to that unknown human factor which makes meaning possible, which turns events into experiences, and which is communicated in love. *The soul is a deliberately ambiguous concept resisting all definition in the same manner as do all ultimate symbols which provide the root metaphors for the systems of human thought.*⁵

The soul does not construct its reality out of literal sense impressions, yet it is no less 'real'. Understanding soul is complex as it resists literalization or conceptualization, the modes of conscious knowing that we are most familiar with. Soul cannot be factually measured nor intellectually known, even through poetic or metaphorical language. We can be inspired, responsive and moved, but unless their images open the portal to a subjective and imaginal way of knowing, we are not in soul's domain. Soul stirs, not because the image is poetic and philosophically perceptive, but because an inner and resonant image has been evoked, which touches our truth in a way not known before. Myth and poetry, like symbols, are agents of a soulful process but do not guarantee a soulful experience without your subjective participation.

James Hillman said the soul's first freedom was 'the freedom to imagine'. He was outspoken about how we act even sin as he says against imagination whenever we ask an image for its meaning, requiring images to be translated into concepts.⁶ When we begin to see images and symbols as concepts and ideas, rather than seeing by means of them, the symbol becomes disconnected from soul.

Soul highlights a way of knowing and perceiving reality that is distinctively separate from physical and conceptual realities. Having such a unique identity, it has its own rules of engagement, antithetical to factual or conceptual ways of knowing. Observation, being impartial and interpreting images and symbols in keywords or typology misrepresents the soul's viewpoint.

The soul invites another knowing: our subjective images and responses are the soul's data. The soul composes its own diary, so often contrary to outer authority, rules and codes of conduct. And since psychology intrinsically depends on the soul's diary, the soulful practice of psychology is marginal to the objective way of knowing. Perhaps why, as James Hillman suggests: 'Psychotherapists suffer from not being able to communicate about their area of reality in a scientific manner'.⁷ But can they? To restore the focus of soul in psychology or any other soul-centred disciplines, like astrology, suggests the honouring of not knowing, uncertainty, mystery, ambiguity, doubt, paradox.... all states inferior to accepted standards.

For Jung, *The Red Book at night*; *The Collected Works at day*, demonstrate the bridge he built between the images and symbols of the unconscious and his way in the world. When this interface occurs, the world is ensouled. Hillman does this by always turning things around – the subject becomes the object – reminding us that soul knowing is not knowing. All, I feel, would agree it is mystery.

Yet, the word soul is so evocative, so much so that our economic rational world has tagged soul as a saleable commodity – buildings and music have soul – put soul in a book title or a lecture description and it catches our attention. Psychologists, literally students of the soul, can find the term confusing, as Guggenbühl-Craig suggests:

Now ‘soul’ is a difficult term to use. Some psychologists avoid it, trying to create a psychology without soul. Others replace the religious-sounding ‘soul’ with the more neutral ‘psyche’. I am all for employing the word ‘soul’, yet, when used too often, it sounds pompous or sentimental. There is no way out: if you don’t use the word ‘soul’ you avoid the basic issue of psychology; use it too often and it becomes embarrassing.⁸

From an ancient perspective, soul was the life energy that entered the body at birth and left at death. It was the essence of life, the breath, carried on the wind or borne lightly on the wings of a butterfly. The word ‘soul’ first enters western literature in the Homeric epic *The Iliad* around the 8th century BCE. By the Classical period, three centuries later, soul had undergone a significant semantic amplification cultivated through the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. Through subsequent periods soul remained a perpetual focal point of inquiry for all philosophers. The doctrines of subsequent practices like theosophy, anthroposophy and psychology continually redeveloped their understanding of soul.

Soul has accounted for the amorphous, yet eternal, aspect of self freed from the body at death. It is not material, but can be deeply felt; therefore its nature is of two worlds. Evocative, soul conjures up a collection of ideas, images, beliefs and feelings; but one thing seems common, which is that soul appears unworldly and eternal. It is an invisible quality that breathes life into the life, a smouldering ember that can become a passionate flame. Soul cannot be manufactured or commoditized, but is present in an ephemeral thought, a profound experience, in reflective and timeless moments or in feeling the anguish of being human. Words such as alive, appetite, breath, character, chi, consciousness, essence, force, ghost, heart, inner life, mind, morality, spirit, virtue, vocation, warmth and wisdom suggest its presence.⁹

In Greek, the closest word to the English soul is *psyche*; in Latin, *anima*. ‘Psyche’ characterizes a mix of indefinable ideas such as soul, mind and spirit derived from the Greek *psychein*, to breathe or blow, continuing the tradition of linking soul and breath.¹⁰ *Psyche*, as an animating spirit or soul, entered the English language by the mid-17th century. By the early 20th century it was associated with the amalgam of thoughts, emotions and behaviours¹¹ or *psychology*, which suggests the study of the human soul. A *psychologist* implies a student of the soul; hence, in the spirit of the word, those of us who study the soul are in essence psychologists. It is not in the nature of the soul to award degrees of proficiency for its study. Its awards are private and personal, often unspoken yet deeply comforting and sustaining. Those rewarded by their education of soul experience recognize their multivalent life, shepherded by their inner dialogue with the divine.

From antiquity to modernity, soul remained a fluid and indeterminable idea, best amplified and imagined like a symbol itself. In early epics, qualities like courage and passion were assigned to the soul. Playwrights from the 5th century BCE referred to the soul’s desire, pleasures, emotions and virtues, aligning the soul with morality. Plato reshaped the ideas he inherited on soul, endowing it with wits and aligning it with an intelligible life form. His discourses characterize mental and psychological aspects belonging to the soul, not the body – soulful ideas that continue to echo through our modern discourses.

And so the philosophical enquiry throughout antiquity about whether the soul is separate from the body, whether it leaves, returns, even reincarnates, continued. During creative transitions, such as the Renaissance, the question of soul was philosophically renewed, finding an expression through other mediums including painting and prose. It is also through our movements and renaissance

periods that the soul stirs. The Romantic period also brought the soulful dimension of purity, beauty and suffering to life through the imagery and words of poets like John Keats.

Soul-making

In a letter, John Keats reminded his brother of Psyche's late incarnation: 'the goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour – and perhaps never thought of in the old religion: I am more orthodox than to let a heathen Goddess be so neglected.'¹² As a Romantic poet, Keats could not neglect Psyche, not just because she was the embodiment of beauty, but because her suffering through her trials of life was 'soul-making'.

Keats's interest in Psyche's anguish inspired him to reflect on the world as the 'vale of soul-making'.¹³ A few days before he copied his *Ode to Psyche* in his journal, he wrote to his brother:

I say 'Soul-making'... Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul. A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!¹⁴

His words resonated through me when I read them for the first time. Keats accentuates the poles of beauty and suffering as layers of the soul, but he also locates the incarnate and worldly experience as being where soul is crafted. Keats's 'World of Pains' was the 'vale of soul-making', the place where a meaningful interface between the suffering and trials of the body in the world and the beauty of the soul could be felt. Keats is struck by Psyche's trials which were 'soul-making', an active process of working with soul. The ancients knew the act of ensouling, but now Keats gives us a new phrase for it: 'soul-making'.

The majority of my clients came for an astrological consultation to contextualize and understand their suffering; therefore I found Keats's image of our worldly trials as the 'vale of soul-making' not only inspiring but enormously helpful. I applied this image to the horoscope, which for me is an imaginative map of this vale. Keats helped me see that active participation and work with the symbols of the horoscope is in itself soul-making, like working on a dream. I recognized in myself, as well as many of my students and clients, how the images evoked by the horoscope offer ways to participate with our trials and pains, not from an analytic or causal perspective, but from a soulful one. The horoscope infuses the mundane world with meaning and connection through the medium of its symbols and images.

Reflecting on Soul

Inspired by Keats, James Hillman began his manuscript *Re-Visioning Psychology* with: 'This book is about *soul-making*'.¹⁵ In his efforts to realign soul with psychology, Hillman introduced an archetypal psychology that addressed life as *psychological* in its authentic sense: that is, the study of the soul and its connection to life. Similarly, astrological intelligence can be aligned with the process of soul-making, as it orders and makes meaning of our worldly trials through the study of the starry heavens.

Hillman's early reflections identified four aspects of the soul. For me his delineation of the soul as the unknown component which engenders meaning, turns events into experiences, is communicated in love and has a religious concern, is a wonderfully succinct beginning to reflect on soul and the horoscope. In *Re-Visioning Psychology* Hillman added 'three necessary modifications.' He suggested that soul is the deepening of events into experiences, its religious concern derives from its special *relation with death* and that soul is the imaginative possibilities in our nature.¹⁶

Twenty-one years after the publication of *Re-Visioning Psychology*, Hillman published *The Soul's Code*, a more contemporary contemplation on the essence of soul reaching back to Plato's Myth of Er to draw inspiration for amplifying the soul's companions of calling, fate, daimon and necessity. Hillman used the 'acorn theory', which suggests that 'each person bears a uniqueness that asks it be

lived and that is already present before it can be lived'.¹⁷ Astrologers were already familiar with this thought, as it is central to the system of astrology, as well as the idea underpinning Dane Rudhyar's conceptualization of a transpersonal astrology. The horoscope is a time-honoured tradition that has continuously embraced Hillman's 'acorn theory'. As the spokesperson for realigning soul with psychology, Hillman leaves a legacy of how contemporary symbolists might consider soul.

Hillman suggests that soul is not a concept but a symbol that resists definition in the same way as all symbols.¹⁸ The soul is less an object of knowledge than it is a way of knowing the object, a way of knowing knowledge itself.¹⁹ Symbols convey meaning beyond the limit of any definition that we could give them. In the same way, soul defies a limited view or fixed definition and perhaps is better described in the ancient way as fluid, porous, flighty and permeable.²⁰ Soul is a perspective, a way of seeing or thinking, a symbol rather than a fixed point of view or belief.

Ironically, what is so deeply personal, so interior to my being, so private and so soulful, cannot be said to be mine, as soul is not ruled by my personality nor managed by my will. While there are many traditions and ways to view the soul in relationship to body and even spirit, it is never aligned with self-image or ego. As the early Greeks suggested, soul is ethereal and relatively autonomous. Hence, for any psychological consultant, some of the deepest and most profound work with clients and students remains private and sacred. Psychological expertise belongs to the soul, not the personality.

On Psyche's Wings

Psyche is the root for many of our modern words which refer to this human fusion of thoughts, spirituality and desires. For instance, *psychosomatic* aligns body and soul, addressing the interface between the two; *psychopathology* refers to the suffering of the soul while *psychosis* proposes the idiosyncrasies of the soul. In a technological world that no longer has ways of thinking about soul, Psyche's words become diagnostic and clinical, ailments to be fixed or medicated, rather than essential aspects of our nature.

Carl Jung experienced the split between the established scientific and scholarly avenues with his own imaginative and instinctive experience of soul/psyche. Jung's conversations with his soul, precognitive visions, automatic writing, inner voices and creative imagination gave form to many of his original psychological ideas.²¹ But in a world that valued literality and scientific proof, these sources could not be easily footnoted, nor acknowledged.



Astrologers too experience the pressure to be literal, predictive and certain; however, the horoscope invokes the symbolic and non-rational world where images, feelings, voices and sensations are the medium for clarity and insight. Practitioners are susceptible to falling into the gap between the factual and the imaginative, as astrological techniques are guides to a symbolic way of knowing. Without awareness, astrological techniques are championed as the reason for the successful judgement, rather than the key that unlocks the portal of imagination. This was why meditation on

the soul became a valuable companion to my astrological practice, as it assisted me to understand another world not bound by physical, literal or rational parameters.

Acknowledging soul as a symbol that operates autonomously, outside the boundary of coherent thought and beyond scientific statutes, frees our capacity to see through the material to a soulful world where life has meaning and purpose. I feel that ensouling our everyday life is the essence of astrological work. To return to Hillman:

By *soul* I mean, first of all, a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint towards things rather than a thing itself. This perspective is reflective; it mediates events and makes differences between ourselves and everything that happens.²²

Soul is reflective, subjective and inward, offering meaning to worldly experiences so I can participate with them, not just experience them as random, fated and/or disconnected. For me, soul is the capacity to symbolize an event or experience so that it might be felt, embodied and remembered, reminding me of the authenticity of all feeling, the eternity of all attachments and the sacredness of all life. Soul animates the mundane world through creativity and connection, encouraging participation in and with the world.

I think of soul as an attitude. Foremost it respects life in all its manifestations, inner and outer. By nature it is paradoxical; it is eternal yet it is known only in the present. Soul is both incarnate and ephemeral. It is awakened through the beauty and suffering of the outer world, yet is invisible in itself. It deepens the quality of life; it stimulates and enchants. It is sacred. Soul is mystery. Yet, ironically, openness to its ambiguity and symbols leads us to a resonant knowing. I bring this attitude to mind when preparing a horoscope, remembering that soul is found in the mystery and not in clarity.

Symbolic Language

In 1814, almost a century before Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, a treatise on dreams by G.H. von Schubert entitled *The Symbolism of Dreams* was published. The author described dreams as a 'picture language', a hieroglyphic fusion of symbols expressed through concepts, feelings and pictures. These symbols were universal and timeless with a poetic and ironic quality; for instance, an image of birth might actually be pointing to death, while the image of excrement might suggest gold.²³

Being illogical, mysterious and contradictory, dream symbols are naturally paradoxical. The language of dreams is amoral and non-judgemental which permits repressed, unknown and neglected aspects of the personality to be pictured and considered during sleep without censorship or condemnation.

Unconscious aspects of events, unremembered feeling and repressed perceptions are revealed in dreams through symbols and images, not logical or factual thoughts. Symbols are not only the 'picture language' of sleep and dream, but also of waking life. They express what cannot be characterized through the agency of thoughts or rational explanations, nor can they be defined, conceptualized or fully understood. Symbols are agents for what is nameless and ambassadors for what is unidentified. Therefore, the intellect can benefit from symbolic thinking, as symbols transmit what cannot be conveyed through a scientific, philosophical or conceptual framework. A symbol is uncommitted in that it does not stand for something specific, but directs us beyond itself to a meaning or revelation. As Coleridge has been quoted: 'symbols give form to forgotten truths about my inner nature'.²⁴

Symbolic language and images are used by all religions to honour and become familiar with what lies beyond the range of human comprehension, the realm of the divine. Symbolism enriches our myths, stories, poems, novels, films and dreams. A symbolic language functions as a moderator for

meaning. Early psychoanalysis could be characterised as a symbolic language and every symbol could be said to be relevant psychoanalytically. In other words, symbols are the soul's poetic language. Paul Tillich suggests symbols open the gates of the soul:

Every symbol opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate...But in order to do this, something else must be opened up – namely, levels of the soul, levels of our interior reality. And they must correspond with the levels in exterior reality which is opened by a symbol...So every symbol has two-edges. It opens up reality and it opens up the soul.²⁵

Tillich reminds us that symbols enchant both the inner and outer worlds. A symbol can evoke what exists beyond rational knowledge and sensual perception, as they bridge the two worlds of earth and heaven, night and day, unconscious and conscious and literality and imagination. Our literal world becomes with endowed with meaning through imagination and as Jules Cashford, said:

imagination must speak in the language of symbolism, for imagination speaks from the soul and of the soul and, like the messengers of God, it brings two worlds together as one. Perhaps that is why symbolism has been called the language of the angels²⁶

Symbols have manifold associations and numerous possible meanings: a snake might symbolize a phallus to a Freudian, a deeper layer of unconscious material for a Jungian, fear to someone who has no experience of snakes, transformation to an astrologer or a matriarchal icon to an archaeologist. In religion and myth, the serpent is a potent figure whether in the Garden of Eden, in a dream in the temple of Asclepius, in Medusa's hair or on Athena's aegis. A plethora of dictionaries devoted to symbols attest to the various ways that symbols are portrayed and interpreted, but they are left in the conceptual and causal realm. Few texts amplify how symbols speak.

The word symbol has evolved in meaning from the early Greek *symbolon* which combines the prefix *sym*, meaning together and *bol* to throw. Hence the idea of a symbol was 'to throw things together' referring to what is brought or cast together. This also suggested contrasting or comparing. Symbols were seen as tokens or permits, outward signs which were pointing to something else. Symbols bring things together to reveal what cannot be seen literally or known cognitively.

Symbols, Dead and Alive

Carl Jung stressed that symbols are living things and remain alive as long as they are pregnant with meaning. Living symbols are those that we participate with, reflect upon and are mindful of. It is as if symbols are the energetic characterisations of unconscious contents which facilitate connection to unknown parts of the self. Through the connection to a symbolic life we begin to understand deeper and concealed aspects of who we are.

But Jung also warned about symbols becoming dead. When a symbol is no longer meaningful and revelatory in nature its meaning is no longer evocative or consequential. He states:

The symbol is alive only so long as it is pregnant with meaning. But once its meaning has been born out of it, once that expression is found which formulates the thing sought, expected, or divined even better than the hitherto accepted symbol, then the symbol is *dead*, i.e. it possesses only a historical significance.²⁷

Yet we continue to speak of a symbol as a symbol even when its meaning and energy have gone. Many Christian symbols such as the cross, the Christ birth and the gifts of the wise men are lifeless, as their vibrant symbolism has been killed off through dogma and commerce. Interpretation also contributes to the death of a symbol. When institutions and conventions consciously ascribe a permanent meaning to a symbol it becomes a sign, merely a pointer to their traditional beliefs and doctrines. The interpretive reading of the symbol, even though in an esoteric or psychological

framework, creates a principle of knowledge that can inhibit the energetic power of the symbol to inspire meaning and revelation. It is as if the symbol is dead inside but still lives on.

Jung's view was we should distinguish between a symbol and a sign. When an expression represents something known, this is a sign, not a symbol.²⁸ This is an important distinction in psychological practice. A symbol is an indefinite expression with many meanings, pointing to something not easily defined; therefore, not fully known. But a sign always has a fixed meaning because it is a conventional abbreviation for, or a commonly accepted indication of something known.

Being involved with the symbol

We lose touch with the symbolic life when we get entangled in everyday life tasks and ascribe meaning to things. As Yeats said, 'One is furthest from symbols when one is busy doing this or that'.²⁹ But symbols are all around, perhaps in a chance meeting, a synchronistic event or a song on the car radio; they are always there to reconnect us to the imaginative life. Perhaps a fall, time out, a reverie, getting distracted, even an illness will reconnect us to a deeper place where soul stirs. As Jung states:

The symbol has a very complex meaning because it defies reason; it always presupposes a lot of meanings that can't be comprehended in a single logical concept. The symbol has a future. The past does not suffice to interpret it, because germs of the future are included in every actual situation.³⁰

We participate with symbols every time we reflect on our dream or engage with our horoscope. Dreams and horoscopes invite us to inhabit their symbolic world that values the sacred and the mysterious. Symbols are not fixed in time, but free to move between the past and future. Besides being fluid, they are also limitless and timeless.

Symbols evoke what cannot be characterized through thoughts or rational explanations. While they are often indefinable, symbols are the agents for what is nameless, ambassadors for what is unidentified. Therefore, the intellect can find great significance in symbols, as they add value to what cannot be conveyed through a philosophical or conceptual framework. A symbol is uncommitted in that it does not stand for something specific, but directs us beyond itself to a meaning or revelation, giving form to feelings and inner truths.

Foremost to allowing the symbol to speak is the imagination, the essential faculty that unhinges the doors of perception. Imagination is a type of disciplined consciousness that is not empirically determined, nor focused on the literal world. It inspires perception beyond the ego and permits an experience of something deeper and meaningful. Secondly we must recognize that the symbolic process is participatory. Psychological techniques can lead us to the archetypal territory, but it is our imagination that makes contact with the symbol, facilitating our intuition and feeling responses to be midwives to the process of revelation. Listening and engaging are crucial aspects of the participatory process, as is the appreciation of the illogical nature of the psyche. Working with symbols we learn to value their inconsistencies and contradictions. To be involved is to also 'stick to the image'³¹, not reduce it to a concept, nor add more detail that reiterates the theme, but to continue to hear and respect the metaphoric essence to deepen our participation with it. As we deepen our involvement with the symbol, analogies arise which open up meaning. Carl Jung was fond of saying *image is psyche*; the more we stay with the image the more we participate with psyche.

Symbols are the language of the soul. Through the auspices of images and symbols, the connection to our essential nature is rekindled. Symbols stimulate contemplation about living a heartfelt life and inspire revelations about our inner world and spiritual character. It is as if a symbol can open a new dimension that allows a deeper, unseen meaning to emerge. When this meaning is also seen externally, two worlds are bridged: the incarnate and the heavenly. To imagine and work with

symbols affirms and animates the life. Symbols, like a dream, call us to participate in a conversation with our soul whatever we might imagine that to be.

With no context or ways of thinking about soul, symbols become rationalized remaining fixed in literality, facts rather than images, interpretations rather than revelations. Engaged with soul, countless impressions are summoned up that are difficult, at times impossible, to articulate; yet this is the nature of soul.

How does a symbol become ensouled? How does it speak to us in mysterious ways? I petitioned Hermes for help

Hermes Helps with Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics was always a philosophical study that mystified me, but since its ‘folk etymology’ was connected to Hermes, the multifarious god of the in-between, I felt his underlying presence might offer me something of value. Hermes was not just the god of words, but the god who found imagination in the word; hence a god of symbol. Words were symbols, but his sleight of hand could also trick us into thinking we were on the right track when we really were not. As a god who was granted access to both worldly and underworldly hemispheres and the god known as the shepherd of dreams, somewhere in this study, I sensed Hermes would offer guidance.

The word *hermeneutics* derives from the Greek to suggest interpretation or explanation. This way of thinking developed in ancient Greece as a means to interpret oracles, myths, dreams, omens, even epic poetry. How important it was, given Hermes was also the god of liars, that the interpretation could be determined to be truth or lie. At Delphi, Pythia, the oracular voice of the divine, delivered her messages in riddles. Since divine messages were ambiguous, irrational and lacked clarity, an interpretative method to decode it in lay language was often necessary. One of the first ways of thinking about this process was allegorical; that was to express it differently, mainly in a nonliteral way, which attempted to extract a deeper or hidden meaning. What was being signified by the message?

However, allegory as a means of perception remains objective. While meaningful and insightful, it does not necessarily activate self-reflection or musing. Astrological symbols are allegorical; for instance, your Saturn in the 7th house might be interpreted as an older partner or a projection of authority onto others. At this stage the symbol is interpretative. And even though it may be factual or accurate, it does not invite us to consider an inner dimension, nor reflect on a deeper soulful image.

Remaining at Delphi for a moment we are also reminded of another layer of interpretation embedded in the sayings or Delphic maxims which were inscribed on the columns of Apollo’s temple. The most commonly known is *Know Thyself*, followed by two others: *Nothing in Excess* and *Surety Brings Ruin*. Something more is being asked of the petitioner by the god: to reflect on self, to be honourable and uncertain. I mention these aphorisms as these speak to the ethical and moral layers of interpretation, which open up a new dimension that the symbol evokes.

Christians used the hermeneutic method to meaningfully amplify the moral lessons in the Bible. By the 3rd Century, a four-fold model of interpretation was being used and it is this model that best helped me to reflect on illuminating the symbolic process. I say *process* because in our time we often suggest that the act of interpretation ends with providing a solution or an answer. This focus on the four stages in the interpretative process was of interest to me, as I had spent my adult life ‘interpreting’ horoscopes. Throughout the process of sitting with clients, something else beyond my own comprehension often occurred when I was focused on a symbol.³² It was this mystery, beyond

the interpretation and separate from the technique, that brought life force into the interactive space between myself and the other.

The four stages of the hermeneutic process that have helped me imagine what happens when we engage with symbol are:

1. The Literal
2. The Allegorical
3. The Tropological or Moral
4. The Anagogic or Mystical

This symbolic process is similar to what James Hillman referred to as ‘seeing through’, or Henri Corbin suggested was ‘penetrating into the invisible’, or what Jung said were ‘transformers’.³³ The symbol is the agent that pierces the literal realm ‘into the world of mystery, into the esoteric dimension.’³⁴ (“a symbol guarantees the correspondences between two universes belonging to different ontological levels; it is the means, and the only one, of penetrating into the invisible, into the world of mystery, into the esoteric dimension”.)

Let’s imagine we are amplifying an image from a dream, a Tarot card or an astrological symbol – the first stage of encountering the symbol is *literal*; for instance, you dreamt of your childhood home; you drew the Moon card or you have Mercury retrograde. All these are literal in that they are unembroidered facts. We can also see constructs like time, or emotions like anger, as also being literal.

With *allegory* we assign a meaning to the symbol which is often derived from the conventions of the discipline, whether psychoanalytic, Tarot symbolism or astrological. For instance, the childhood home is a symbol of your revisiting the innocent past; the Moon card suggests not everything appears as it is and Mercury retrograde is the time to rethink your strategy. While the interpretations can be much more elaborate or sophisticated, or accompanied by the wise use of metaphor, not all students, nor even some practitioners of symbolic processes venture beyond this stage, remaining more objective and impartial, personally removed from the impact or affect of the interactive process.

Next is the **tropological** stage, a turning towards the esoteric or mysterious sense of the symbol. Tropological derives from the Greek *tropos, to turn*; one implication is to turn towards the self. At this stage the symbol engages us in subjective experiences and focuses us on an interior and deeper meaning, not in a factual, but a more amplificatory, reflective and personal way. Objectivity and certainty begin to wane; forms of subjective knowing are stirred and constellated through a slip of the tongue, a spontaneous image, a physical reaction, a memory, song lyrics, feelings being awoken, a spontaneous thought, an emotion bubbling up, recollecting a parallel experience.....when we turn towards these experiences, another way of knowing is aroused. The soul stirs.

When working with a client, this is when the symbol turns to a mutual shared experience, a transference level, the ‘secret, mutual connivance’³⁵ as Jung called it. Without even being conscious the image of the childhood home stirs in the therapist; the subjective experiences of the Moon are awakened in the Tarot reader and deep Mercury stirs in the astrologer as the psychopomp takes us beyond what we consciously know. Both client and other are now involved in a participatory and connective universe; the synchronicity that always exists, can be seen. Boundaries between the observer and observed, psychotherapist and patient, astrologer and client are dissolving though the subjectivity of feeling.

In the section on the Psychology of the Transference in CW 16: The Practice of Psychotherapy, Jung makes an interesting comment about how some psychotherapists find it strange, even ridiculous that ‘they should also have a *feeling-relationship* to the contents of the unconscious’.

Jung makes the assertion that when the symbol turns, ethics are implied. But it is through subjectivity, not an intellectual or objective approach that this occurs. Jung says:

Feeling always binds one to the reality and meaning of symbolic contents, and these in turn impose binding standards of ethical behavior from which aestheticism and intellectualism are only too ready to emancipate themselves.³⁶

The last level is the **anagogic** or mystical dimension; in a sense an inner knowing of divine presence. No longer an intellectual knowing or an objective statement, but an inner recognition that the symbol has rung a bell, created a deeper feeling of connection to the true self, and that this inner knowing now interfaces with the world in a more meaningful way. This inner sense of being involved with a divine knowing evokes an acceptance that the literal world is connected to my presence in it and that this is encompassed by a larger picture or divine sentience. This acknowledgement reenchants the secular world. In this way the symbol brings a sense of wellbeing, even if the symbol is dark or painful. It encourages a sense of hope even when the symbol is despairing because the sense of the divine and our way through the outer world are now interconnected.

The symbol has turned to hope and acceptance; the stage where Jung suggested the symbol “is psychologically true, for it was and is the bridge to all that is best in humanity”³⁷. At this level the symbol evokes the ethical and the honourable, the moral level, which is the key to constellating all that is best in us! It is a wellspring that reconnects us to the world.

Astrological Symbols

As an astrological practitioner how do I know what the symbol means to the client? What I need to know is the astrological traditions and implication of this symbol, my own experiences with the symbol and skills to listen and articulate this in the best way I can. My task is to illuminate the symbol adequately enough so the client resonates with the symbol in themselves. As the client begins to amplify this symbol in the context of their lives, I begin to hear what it means to them. If I define the symbol in the context of their lives the focus narrows onto a literal landscape; whereas when I open up the symbol and invite participation with the symbolic process, I begin to hear how this finds expression in their world. If I only equate an astrological image with a literal manifestation, I perpetuate a causal world which keeps me bound on a mortal grid without the life-sustaining nutrients of the soul.

Astrological symbols are universal and have a myriad of rich associations. Many of the symbols are resonant with archetypal images and myths, and when we engage with these symbols something beyond our logical and sensual perceptions are roused, a world often portrayed as divine or magical. Astrological symbols have been indoctrinated with techniques, methods and dogma for over two millennia; therefore, these symbols have rich layers of conceptual meaning. But when we participate with the authenticity they reveal, the symbol touches the soul.

My experience is that symbols are enriching and evocative when we free ourselves from their prescribed interpretations and engage with the images called to awareness. Dane Rudhyar said ‘The practice of transpersonal astrology is extremely difficult, because one has to see through what is considered the usual meaning of every factor being studied’.³⁸ Being true to the symbol and oneself in the moment, not the dogma or theory, encourages the ability to find meaning beyond the everyday reality of facts, information and logic. This way of seeing is focused through symbol, not a code of belief.

In our astrological learning we may easily be disconnected from the symbol through interpretive information. When astrological students first encounter astrology, the symbols are often highly evocative and revelatory, as they are experienced openly and subjectively. They have not yet been yoked to representing some-thing. Learning the tradition of calculations, rulerships, considerations, associations, meanings and interpretations can dull the life of the astrological symbol. The energy of

the symbol is still there, but it becomes objectified through analytical knowledge when yoked to a causal explanation. Symbolic systems demand participation in their mysteries, not an objective view. Objectification conceives informational systems, which in themselves are helpful, but their language is no longer symbolic. Becoming skilled at the traditions, techniques and systems of any discipline is an essential prerequisite to its practice. Being participatory and present allows the symbol to reveal itself in the sanctity of the moment.

We need theory and insight to engage a symbol, but we also need to suspend our rote interpretations to be symbolic. This process allows re-engagement with the life of the symbol and its capacity to see through. Symbols contain potent meanings, but they are not accessed through the intellect. It is the fluidity of imagination and intuition that help symbols to reveal themselves. Once a symbol reveals its meaning it is remembered effortlessly. Students were often astonished at how I remembered a symbol in their chart. It was never through memorizing their horoscope, but because the symbol had revealed itself in conversation or during class participation and continued to live on.

James Hillman - Psychologizing

James Hillman begins his *Re-visioning Psychology* with “This book is about soul-making” and in many ways his book is a treatise to psychological hermeneutics. Hillman outlines that the way to ‘make psyche’, ‘to find connections between life and soul’ is to change literal action into a metaphorical enactment.³⁹ This process of psychological discovery can be seen in a series of steps as he says: first is the interiorizing or deepening – a process of subjectivizing. Next is a process of justification which appeals to the acknowledgement of deeper values, a step necessary to justify the necessity to conceal them. Then there is the process of mythologizing – the narrative fantasy which leads to the insight or the ideas of the soul, the fourth step being the tools or ideas needed to de-literalize or see through.

Our life is psychological, and the purpose of life is to make psyche of it, to find connections between life and soul⁴⁰

¹ W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume I, Early Essays*, edited by Richard J. Finneran and George Burnstein, Simon and Schuster (New York, NY: 2007). 119.

² C. G. Jung, *CW 5: Symbols of Transformation*, translated by R.F.C. Hull, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London: 1956. All quotes are taken from the Foreword to the 4th Swiss Edition, pp. xxiii – xxvi.

³ CW 5: 344

⁴ Tom Moore, (Care of the Soul, xi-xii)2

⁵ James Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, p. 46

⁶ James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology*, Harper & Row, New York, NY: 1975, p. 39.

⁷ (Hillman, Evangelos Christou Introduction to *The Logos of the Soul* Spring Publications, 1976)

⁸ Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig, “Projections: Soul and Money”, from *Soul and Money*, Spring Publications, Dallas, TX: 1982, 83.

⁹ *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 903. The entry for ψυχή or psyche lists many definitions including breath, signs of life, spirit, ghost, heart and appetite. See also James Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, Second Edition, Spring Publications, New York: 2011, 44 for his amplification of soul.

¹⁰ *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 903

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- ¹¹ Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, Harper Collins. New York, NY: 1995, 614.
- ¹² John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, Volume II*, ed. H. Buxton Forman, Gowars & Gray, Glasgow, UK: 1901, 106.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, p.53.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.53-4.
- ¹⁵ James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology*, Harper & Row, New York, NY: 1975, ix.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. x.
- ¹⁷ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, Random House, New York, NY: 1996, 6
- ¹⁸ James Hillman, *Insearch*, Hodder and Stoughton, London: 1967, 37.
- ¹⁹ (Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, 130-131.)
- ²⁰ James Hillman in *Myth of Analysis*, Harper Collins, New York: 1992, suggests: 'the soul is better imagined, as in earliest Greek times, as a relatively autonomous factor consisting of vaporous substance'.
- ²¹ C. G. Jung, *The Red Book, A Reader's Edition*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, NY: 2009. This details Jung's nightly descent into the creative reveries with his own soul.
- ²² James Hillman, *Re-visioning Psychology*, x
- ²³ Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Basic Books (New York, NY: 1970),205
- ²⁴ Tom Chetwynd, *The Dictionary of Symbols*, Granada, London: 1982, 390
- ²⁵ Paul Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language", *Theology of Culture*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1959), 56-7.
- ²⁶ Jules Cashford, *Symbolism as the Language of Imagination*, Kingfisher Art Production (Somerset, UK: 2015), 16.
- ²⁷ CW 6: 816.
- ²⁸ CW 6: 817. Jung said a 'mere sign'.
- ²⁹ W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, The Macmillian Press (London: 1961), 162.
- ³⁰ William McGuire and RFC Hull, *C.G. Jung Speaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ: 1977. 143
- ³¹ James Hillman used this expression in his work – see Thomas Moore (ed.), *The Essential James Hillman, A Blue Fire*, Routledge (London: 1990), 75.
- ³² Two references have been enormously valuable – Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, The Wessex Astrologer, UK: 2003, pp 277-302 and Angela Voss, "From Allegory to Anagoge: the Question of Symbolic Perception in a Literal World", <https://www.skyscript.co.uk/allegory.html> [accessed 6/10/2020]
- ³³ See James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, 140 -145; Henri Corbin "Mysticism and Humour, Spring: 1973, p. 27.; CG Jung, CW 5: 344.
- ³⁴ Henri Corbin "Mysticism and Humour, p. 27

³⁵ CW 8:905

³⁶ CW 16,489

³⁷ CW 5: 343

³⁸ Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Transformation*, Quest Books (Wheaton, IL: 1980), 161. By 'every factor', Rudhyar was implying the birth chart, transits, progressions and the client's life experience.

³⁹ James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, 127.

⁴⁰ James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, ix.