

Excerpt from *The Cultic Code, The Living Books of Paul Bowles*, IV.3.4. The metanarrative of myth

3.4 Archetypal character constellation

We have seen how precisely the character dyads and triads work in Bowles. The mystic unity of figures is the manifestation of the metanarrative unit, demonstrating that this story level is also an analogous yet autonomous part of the cultic organic hologram. Jung cites the Attis-Kybéle (transliterated as Cybelle) myth as a basic negative fusion mould by which the dividing and subordinating conjunctive dynamic is encoded in Western psyche.¹ I would say, rather, that it is not the myth but its forms of interpretation, passing through cultures, that is telling of the specific psychic paradigm. The myth is more ancient than its colonial adaptation by the Greeks or Ovid. (Jung's reference to the myth through its Roman version immediately raises the question of analytical authenticity, as the story is at least third-hand information at this point. The translation of mythology across cultures seems to distort the original meaning no less than Chinese whispers.) Its furthest historicity is in Phrygian tradition² or the end of the Neolithic Age³, but Kybéle herself is said to be both Gaia herself and at once her daughter Rhea⁴, either way the Mother of the Gods or the Great Goddess. Her archetype is the basis of the entire myth: she is its core, all-containing and generating core. It is due to her central position that the myth is anchored in timelessness. The character triad, in my view, is the projection of her stasis into dynamism, and so it is the meta-historical cultic organism which may be identified in the myth. Perhaps this is a chance to observe the crack between the cultic interpretation of a timeless story and its linear dramatization. This crack is due to the difference between holistic and historical vision. While the first sees events synoptically, configuratively, the second sees them as a process. Process, as we have seen, is merely the projection, the transmitted result of total time. Therefore myths should be seen at once, in a "flash," as a simultaneous presence of different aspects and functions, as the revelation of the components of the temporal, existential, material monad e.g. of the human being. Jung interprets it as the pattern of "fragmentation and dissociation of psyche" and „trials of separation from the mother world"⁵. The configuration of the triad, however, suggests something else. The goddess Kybéle and her young priest Attis are primarily mother and son, and secondarily woman and man. Thirdly, their devotional union brings forth nature in the form of the nymph Sagaris, with whom Attis falls in love. I suggest that these are not objective, exterior human characters but figures of the three interior functions of the universal human being.⁶ Relating the myth to the metanarrative unit, and analogously to

¹ C.G. Jung in: *Jung on Alchemy*, 30-41.

² Frazer 457

³ C.G. Jung in: *Jung on Alchemy*, 30.

⁴ Károly Kerényi, *Greek Mythology (Görög mitológia)*, 59.

⁵ C.G. Jung in: *Jung on Alchemy*, 30.

⁶ The direct human interpretation of such meta-human myths has been a long-time cause of the grave mis-projection that myth is history. Here, where the myth is about the process of creation, the raised Western question becomes the male treason of the female. In a way, the error of the misinterpretation mirrors the psychic and moral schism of a civilization. Similarly and more typically, the figure of Zeus as a notorious womaniser sowing his seed mirrors the mental limitation and moral instability of peoples adopting the ageless myth of virgin conception. Indeed, this notion resolves the apparent contradiction of Kybéle being both the mother and wife of Attis, without incestual violation. At this point human hubris becomes the number one cause of cultural

the existential unit, the result is the following: Kybéle is the central point (monadic nucleus), the beating heart; Attis presents the cycle, the passage of transmission between interiority (goddess of fixed cosmic order) and exteriority (nymph of changing nature), the body of two natures; and Sagaris presents concentric narrative waves as the dream of the mind, the cause of conflict. In the Greek version,⁷ the third figure is the wild, castrated Agdistis, enamoured by Attis, and their mutual devotion causes the self-castration and self-sacrifice of the youth. Despite the apparent character difference, the triad is exactly the same in both cases, as Agdistis presents the elements and elemental force of nature, just as the nymph figure does. He is the source of conflict. The events taking place between the three anthropomorphic functions are, in my view, variations of a **basic event of theogony**, the becoming or emergence, the formal and functional diversification of substance in creation⁸. The aim of the myth is to reverse the direction and reorient to the source: to take the audience back into the original unity of form, into **awakening**. In both versions of the myth, Attis is divided in order to reunite constancy and adventure: he is both child and lover. Attis presents the universal man in whom natural roles are not conflicting but complimentary. Love, devotion, sacrifice, loss should be seen as projected aspects, liminal phases of the single event, integration of individuality into universality. It is their belonging together which creates the figure of juxtaposition, and finally the configuration of identification. Myth shows that the initial identification takes place not between the self and the “other”, but between the different human capacities, configuring into the single transcendent capacity. In other words, the unknown “other” is not outside but within. This final conclusive step cannot be explicitly found in mythic stories, because it is for the audience to make. Its necessity must have been obvious in cultic traditions, but it is certainly not obvious in Western civilization which simply cannot handle radical (i.e. root) mythology. What is strongly suggested in this brief analysis is that the cultic organism may be used as a model of interpreting the basic figures of archetypal myth.”

confusion, where sacral patterns are adopted as mundane. Distinction, therefore, should be made between levels of reality upon which substance is reflected. What Kybelé or Zeus can do, no woman or man can, because humanity is primarily *of* the source, not the source itself, however clearly and perfectly substance may be reflected in an individual. Our individuality seems to be what we have in return for the distance of distinction.

⁷ Károly Kerényi, *Greek Mythology (Görög mitológia)*, 63-64.

⁸ The typical civilisational misinterpretation of this process is marked by the pluralisation and thus division of divinity in the term “gods.”