

EROS AND THE SHATTERING GAZE

Transcending Narcissism

Kenneth A. Kimmel



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INTRODUCTION

I want to be able to fly. I want to hover around you like a winged Cupid in attendance on his Goddess.¹

From *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius. Lucius here pleads with his lover, a witch's apprentice, to steal a magical potion so that he can be transformed into a god. Instead, he is given the form of an ass and must submit himself to an existence as a loathsome beast of burden.

The live in a time and culture predisposed toward life at the surface. Ours is a society that privileges eternal youth and beauty, consumer-driven instant gratification, and narcissistic preoccupation with self-centeredness, not self reflection. Like Narcissus we often look no deeper than the reflection in the mirror, seeing only skin-deep beauty, never daring to know our own—nor the other's, inner depths.

Contemporary thought has attempted to respond to this cultural climate that, in the words of Stephen Frosh, "[fights] against the deepening of relationships [and love], against feeling real." Psychoanalysis, analytical psychology, and philosophy have addressed the contemporary individual's crises of the heart, separation from authenticity, and repudiation of the other. They offer a variety of viewpoints on the problem of narcissism, from its ontological and healthy conformations to its pathological forms, and its grandiose illusions leading to growth or to defense.

Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror stage helps us to understand the essential alienation inherent in narcissism and its search for perfection in an idealized image of another. Lacan describes a moment in infancy when the six-month-old child "recognizes" himself in the mirror and falsely identifies the reflection as an image of the unified wholeness and mastery he does not in fact possess. In that moment, the infant, with his smiling mother's assent, is lured into an illusion of false certainty and omnipotence that splits him off from his fragmented body/self with its accompanying experiences of terror and uncertainty.

Lacan's conception of the mirror sequence describes the way a mental construction of a perfect, alienating identity can originate, separating the infant from his own insufficient self image. The I itself that takes form here is an artificial representation, a self split between its idealized mirror image and the raw truth of human existence.³ It is not difficult to imagine, then, how this narcissistic ideal can be later projected onto objects of desire who mirror this ideal.

Narcissism is not limited to the psychology of individuals. American culture, politics, and its recent national wounding uncannily mirror these narcissistic phenomena. The Patriot Act and the War on Terror can be seen as unconscious fantasies enacted upon the world stage. In this post-September 11 world many individuals err on the side of security and rigid borders, thereby sacrificing freedom, relationality, and dimensionality. Nor is narcissism merely a contemporary phenomenon. Literature and history provide ample illustrations of the historical and cultural contexts underlying the problem of narcissism and the way it is transcended.

The essence of narcissism is the repudiation of the other in its differences. Sometimes this takes the form of appropriating the other under the guise of romantic love, and sometimes it takes the form of casting out the other to protect the vulnerable self. In these pages I attempt to present a *theory of the transcendence of narcissism*, in which the humble capacity to love comes about through the surrender of the self to the shattering truth of the other.

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Western culture's most ancient tale of love, "Psyche and Amor," which forms part of Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, will introduce us to these dynamics. The story features a leading man—*Amor*, the very personification of Love—whose amorous desires are so embedded in narcissism that he never dares to reveal himself to the object of his passion. The couple, Psyche and Amor, remains suspended in a dark fusion removed from life until Psyche has finally had enough; the illusion is pierced and shattered, and loss ensues. Emerging from his state of wounding, Amor comes in a new way to the side of his beloved, the mortal human Psyche, his act signifying the inner "awakening of the sleeping soul through love," as James Hillman puts it.⁴ How many hundreds of modern romantic dramas follow in the train of the Tale of Psyche and Amor, telling the story of the selfish or hardened man who uses everyone, then loses everything, but then finds a woman from whom he learns how to love?

More than a millennium later, the tales of medieval courtly romances portray the fate of lovers whose longing for oneness can be realized not on earth but only in their sacrificial death and reunion in Heaven. These are tragedies portraying an idealized longing for true love that can never be sustained in our flawed human condition.

The blissful fantasy of everlasting union merely conceals the face of narcissism. This romantic ideal privileges the allure of the lovers' paradise over the enduring struggles in human relationships in all their vicissitudes. These are the romantic fantasies of a happily-ever-after ending, illusions ultimately deriving from childhood experiences. Time and again, lovers plunge blindly into brief enthrallments that are doomed to failure, yet hold fast to their unquestioned, cherished beliefs, and to a faith in an idyllic innocence that is

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inevitably shattered. Young lovers blindly enter marriage with the fantasy that romantic love will endure forever. But predictably, when the burning fires of first love's desires have cooled to warm embers, many men devalue the apparently known quantity at home and look to a passionate love affair with a mysterious other, in which to be absorbed. For the narcissist this process signals the avoidance of human relationship in its fullness, rife with difficulties, limitations, and ethical responsibilities, in favor of the grandiose illusion of ecstatic oneness and freedom from all pain.

Ultimately the narcissistic avoidance of the difficulties of life arises in response to a primal experience—the inevitable wounding and loss suffered in the earliest infant-mother relationship. Thus narcissistic dynamics are deeply impacted by the experience of trauma. Psychological wounds too devastating to bear are reflexively partitioned and buried, while simultaneously, reactionary wars of retaliation against one's pain are staged in order to provide safeguards from disavowed shame and profound vulnerabilities. Throughout life grandiose fantasies in all their forms will magically supplant the experience of unbearable vulnerability, literally obliterating it.

These clinical themes are richly amplified by cultural signifiers found in the myths and mysteries of antiquity and from the medieval Tales of Courtly Love through the literature of the mystics and Romantics, to Gothic horror stories and modern romances from contemporary popular culture. These provide the historical and cultural contexts for the contemporary problem of narcissism as well as its transcendence.

As we will see, Levinas's postmodern philosophy describes the way the encounter with the ineffable Face of the Other shocks and deconstructs the sameness and narcissism within eros, freeing the subject to assume an enduring responsibility for the other from which new and transcendent capacities to love may be envisioned.

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My theory of the transcendence of narcissism is based on the work of two men: C. G. Jung and the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Jung's theory of the *complexes* (see the Glossary for italicized terms) illuminates two vital concepts that are threaded throughout this book: the ego's primitive identification with the negative or overly positive aspects of the Mother, and the relationship of the *puer aeternus*, the eternal boy, with his split-off counterpart, the *senex*, the old man. We can see how these complexes come about by observing the characters in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, which contains the immortal "Tale of Psyche and Amor." The path through which they are overcome leads from the romantic, narcissistic, predatory preoccupations of what I call the *mother-bound man* to the wound that shatters the isolation of his standpoint. Through the work of the *transcendent function* this shattering may culminate in the emergence of empathic dimensions of emotion and a humble yet still masculine standpoint.

One of the ways this book contributes to the development of contemporary analytic psychology is through the cross-fertilization of Jungian and contemporary psychoanalytic ideas. For instance, I argue that narcissistic defenses arise not after the development of the complexes, but prior to them. The puer aeternus psychology described by Jung comes into being in reaction to the narcissistic defenses that have appropriated the infant's most archaic, unsignifiable complex—the mother. These narcissistic defenses encapsulate the infant's ego, protecting it from experiences reminiscent of its original loss of maternal containing. Another original area of contribution may be found in my analysis of the Grail Legend, where I view von Eschenbach's *Parzival* through the lens of eros development in its dual guise, as both a narcissistic and wounding process and one that is relational and healing.

The work of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas provides the second major source for my theory of how narcissism may be transcended. A traumatic encounter with an utterly unknowable, transcendent Other⁵—sometimes initiated by analytical work or psychotherapy—may violently shatter the narcissistic illusions that maintain, among other things, the individual's endless, romantically driven projections and erotic fantasies. There is therefore a painful, even violent, yet redemptive potential to the wounding. Levinas's postmodern philosophy is essential to an understanding of this kind of encounter with the Other by a subject; he too emphasizes its capacity to decenter the ego's "solipsism" the belief that the self is the only reality and the only thing that we can be certain of. Levinas attempts to describe this shift from an ego-centered view of the universe as something that defies understanding or category. All religious experience perhaps stems from such a primordial awareness. His ethical philosophy, informed by the Holocaust in which his entire family was murdered, centers upon the "relation of infinite responsibility to the other person."6 Levinas provides a profound insight into the dangers of how individuals can be so easily subsumed in the vision of a tyrannical utopia which he often refers to as a "totality."

To Levinas, the Other is unknowable, ineffable, ungraspable, tormenting, enigmatic, infinite, irreducible, sacred. Its mere trace can only be glimpsed interpersonally or *intersubjectively*—a term defining a psychological experience created between individuals. The Other does not originate in the psyche. It is infinite, already there, before subject or object exists, and our subjective awareness of it comes through the primacy of its impact upon us. It transcends subjective being, defies our concepts or categories, and cannot be engulfed or appropriated by ego consciousness.⁷

As Levinas would say, the trace of the Other is glimpsed in the irreducible "face of the human other," who is revealed in (her) vulnerability, sacredness, and nakedness.⁸ In Levinas's ethical view, one's responsibility emerges from the trauma he feels for the useless suffering and destitution of the one now standing before him. He is taken hostage to the guilt of surviving when the other is stricken. He is even compelled to wish to substitute

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himself for the other, to put himself in (her) place—but it is too late. This is the torment of which Levinas speaks—the unavoidable responsibility to the other invoked by the shattering Other. It is impossible to evade this summons, which accuses one and even leads him to wonder just how much truth he can bear.

In moving from the ethics of human justice and compassion to personal psychology, one can observe how the traumatic impact of the Other destabilizes and shatters the ego's narcissism, awakening the subject from his slumber. Such a violent blow often appears to the ego in forms that are dark and shadowy, or that threaten to obliterate its fixed orientation and need for certainty, its wish for everything to remain the same. For Levinas, the ego's need to appropriate alterity—the other's difference—and to reduce it to sameness is the origin of all violence: narcissism *is* violence. In those cases where the shattering encounter is successfully navigated, a restructuring of a man's core of being occurs. An inner cohesion develops that enables him as an ethical subject to bear love's separations, uncertainties, longing, as well as its closeness.

Here I propose a significant revisioning of Jung's concept of the enigmatic Self, conceptualizing it as an idea akin to Levinas's unknowable Other, where both, I contend, transcend subjective being and the boundaries of the psyche. I argue that this revised understanding of the Self provides the basis for what I have previously described as a unifying theory of the transcendence of parcissism.

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This book is concerned with *men's* problems with love due to narcissism. While some of these difficulties are common to women as well, I will leave the exploration of the woman's perspective to another. Similarly, I write primarily about heterosexual relationships, but many of these ideas can also be applied to homosexual relationships.

At the same time, though it focuses on narcissism in individual men, the book is not intended to be a textbook on the clinical theory and treatment of narcissism. Rather it is meant to bring to light the prevalence of narcissism in our culture and the possibilities for its transcendence. It does so through stories—stories old and new, epic and personal, fictional and historic. They include vignettes from my over thirty years of clinical experience as well as examples from a variety of cultural and historical sources, beginning with Apuleius and other Greek, Roman, and Biblical material and continuing through medieval romances to contemporary culture. Permission has been given in all case vignettes and each patient's identity has been carefully disguised. Some case vignettes are composites. I have found films to be particularly helpful in illustrating the forms narcissism takes in contemporary love relations.

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The book consists of three parts, preceded by a Prologue that follows this introduction. The Prologue summarizes Apuleius' story for those unfamiliar with it; the retelling of the tale is followed by the description of what I term the *Eros template*—that is, those narcissistic qualities illuminated in the character of Eros, or Amor, in his relationships to his mother, Venus, and to his lover, Psyche. Apuleius' work offers important glimpses into the reversal of narcissistic states in men, and in doing so also provides the metaphorical entry points for the three parts of this book.

Part One is entitled, "Narcissism in the Romantic: The Mother, Her Son, His Lover." These chapters depict how romantic and erotic desire for the instant but transient pleasures found in the lovers' fusion enacts men's earliest longing to return to the fantasy of a lost maternal paradise. The primitive development of these defensive and destructive forms of narcissism maintains and insulates men throughout life against the perceived threat of retraumatization that emotional depths or mutual relationships could initiate. Their desire seeks its ideal object through projections that *colonize* the individuality of the other, as the other is used for the colonizer's own completion. This creates an inflated state of fusion in the couple.

Part Two, "The Predator Beneath the Lover," shows how this fragile wholeness ultimately collapses. The object is discarded and devalued, leading to reactive attempts to restore the lost union through colonization and manipulation of a new object. As an alternative the subject withdraws into narcissistic encapsulation. Narcissism's disavowal of the other's human distinctiveness and mutuality in relationships can be viewed as a tyrannical maintenance of *sameness* that results in the annihilation of otherness. These obstacles to loving are portrayed in Ovid's myth of "Narcissus and Echo," where we see the tragic isolation of the person hopelessly ensnared at the surface of existence. He lives in desperate fear of contact, both with other humans and with his own internal depths. The existence of the other (Echo) is negated through a false sense of superiority. Part Two will enlarge upon these Ovidian themes.

In Part Three, "The Shattering Gaze," we encounter the traumatic *gaze of the Other*, who is unknowable and transcendent. It may shatter the individual's narcissistic omnipotence, whether it comes through unforeseen and unbearable tragedy, loss, or in the naked truth of revelations that seem too devastating or shameful to bear. Following this encounter, a resilient, emotional depth may evolve in a man, signifying the greater psychic cohesion needed to endure love and loss.

The Endnotes that follow the completion of each chapter contain a wealth of additional material too extensive to be included in the body of the book.

It is my hope that this work will appeal across theoretical lines and bridge the differences between diverse schools of thought. Therefore, a number of terms from analytical

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psychology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy, have been defined in the Glossary provided at the end of the book. These terms are italicized in the text. Through the Glossary those readers unfamiliar with ideas from different theoretical traditions and disciplines will gain a deeper understanding of this broad and inclusive area of study.

Notes

- 1 Apuleius, *The Transformations of Lucius otherwise known as The Golden Ass*. Translated by Robert Graves (NY: Noonday Press, 1951), 42.
- 2 Stephen Frosh, "Melancholy Without the Other," in Studies in Gender and Sexuality 7(4) (2006): 368.
- 3 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," in *Ecrits*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 78.
- 4 James Hillman, The Myth of Analysis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 55.
- 5 The term "Other" stemmed from the philosophy of Hegel's dialectic and gained contemporary relevance primarily from the work of Jacques Lacan and Emmanuel Levinas. Lacan doesn't see the Other in an infinite or transcendent way as Levinas does. Rather, he identifies the Other with the world of the Symbolic, which encompasses the cultural, social and linguistic networks into which the person is born, and from which subjectivity comes into being. The two men are similar in a general way, in that both privilege an 'otherness' that is already there at the origins of the subject, and from which the subject emerges. That is, for both, the 'self' is not an entity that is present from the beginnings of development. See Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity* (New York: Verso Press, 1999), 198-216. See also Suzanne Barnard, "Diachrony, *Tuche*, and the Ethical Subject in Levinas and Lacan," in *Psychology for the Other*, edited by Edwin E. Gant & Richard N. Williams (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2002), 160-181.
- 6 Simon Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.
- 7 Jung may have had a similar idea of the Other in mind in his conception of the *Self* as ineffable and different from the ego, in a way that transcends even the psyche and is an infinite mystery disclosing itself only gradually over time. See the Glossary.
- 8 Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), 89, 161.
- 9 My rendering and commentary is but one in a long line of previous and noted endeavors. Why have so many depth psychologists delved into the subject, and tried their hand at bringing new meaning to the myth, almost in the way that serious actors must all take a stab at Shakespeare? Simply put, we are all intrigued by a story that features as its star Psyche, the namesake of the profession to which we have all tethered ourselves. There must be some profound meaning we may yet discover in the relationship between Love and Psyche. For some examples see Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche*; Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*; Robert Johnson, *She*; James Hillman, *Myth of Analysis*; Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma*; Polly Young-Eisendrath, *Women and Desire*.

PROLOGUE

The Transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as The Golden Ass, by Lucius Apuleius¹

n this story a nobleman of high standing, who bears the same name as the author of the Golden Ass—Lucius—sets out on a journey to visit his mother's homeland in Thes-Lasaly, a place famed for its sorcery, black magic, witchcraft, and occult phenomena. It is a lawless land, filled with roving bands of cutthroat thieves and bandits. Lucius, whose name means "the light one," seeks to be enveloped and enchanted by occult forces and the dark side of the ancient mother goddess, the realm of the dark feminine. It is She who secretly brings about transformation and the new life that springs from death, though rarely without great pain. Once arrived, Lucius manages to seduce the slave girl who is the servant in the home where he is staying, hoping he may persuade her to reveal the secrets of her mistress, who is secretly a witch of enormous powers. In effect, this woman serves the goddess of the underworld, who has the power to transform men into beasts. After many pleasurable nights with the slave-girl, however, the arrogant visitor is still craving for more. He is filled with grand ideas of wielding great magical powers that he has no idea how to control. As Apuleius writes, he wants to be like a god, "a winged Cupid standing opposite her, Venus."2 His plan backfires. Instead of finding himself transformed into a love god and taking flight, his grandiosity suffers a compensatory deflation and he is changed into an ass, a lowly beast of burden.

His lover, who stole the witch's magic ointment that transformed Lucius, reassures him that the antidote to his predicament is simple: he need only chew on *roses*; these will transform him back to human form. But the solution is not simple: roses are not in bloom during this part of the year. Lucius remains in animal form throughout the duration of the novel, suffering mightily over several seasons. He regains his human form only through the grace of the Goddess Isis. But that is a later story.

The author Apuleius was an intellectual, a man somewhat removed from an earthy existence, and seemingly more concerned with aesthetics and beauty.³ von Franz writes, "Within the intellectual who cuts himself off from the immediacy of life experience through his intellectual theories, as Apuleius did, there remains a kind of hunch or idea that certain things can only be made conscious through being suffered or lived . . ." A wealthy man, he

himself may never have been forced to endure pain and suffering in his privileged life. As a philosopher and a scholar, he may have lacked the aggressive and resilient nature that a warrior or a laborer tends to develop in order to free himself from a strong maternal influence. She continues,

Apuleius probably had an enormous mother complex which took the form . . . of being threatened by an overwhelming . . . archetypal feminine principle. If a man is too much impressed by the figure of his mother, whether by her fault or by his own disposition, she interferes with his contact with reality, with women, usually inhibiting or eating up his *chthonic* [earthy] sexual personality. He may, being oversensitive, not have a strong enough masculine brutality to escape the mother and fight his way to freedom. Instead he escapes into intellect where generally she cannot follow.⁴

In Apuleius' tale, the hero falls down an Alice in Wonderland–like rabbit hole into the realm of lived experience. The author's literary creation can be interpreted as a text describing the development of a psychological process within his own psyche, depicting qualities vitally needed to free himself from the influence of the mother. Rather than flying off into the intellect, which I tend to believe was both his and his character's typical response to unexpected circumstances, Lucius/Apuleius responded to something unknown to him that was rearing its head, leading him in a new direction, toward manhood.

What greater affront to a snobbish, highbrow, eternal youth such as Lucius, the "light bringer," than to be changed into a reviled beast of burden. To people of the classical world, the ass carried varied meanings. The quality often ascribed to the animal was wanton lust, not too remote from the horny, insatiable behavior exhibited by young Lucius. The word's symbolic roots lead us to a key theme in the tale, that of Saturn. The planet associated with the ass is, in fact, *Saturn*. We know Saturn by his other name, Cronus, the god who eats his young out of fear that they will one day rebel against him and steal his power. His son Zeus outwits him, takes the throne of the gods, and banishes Saturn. Yet in his final stage Saturn becomes the wise and beneficent ruler over the Golden Age of happy men, in which the earth yields its fertile bounty and people live in harmony.

The often humorous tone of Apuleius' novel finds poor ass-headed Lucius bearing the brunt of pranks and abuses. Moreover, it is in Apuleius' very writing style, resembling carnival folk humor, that one discovers the paradoxical pairing of humiliation with comedy, sacrifice with renewal, travesty with transformation. The later carnival forms in the Middle Ages afforded the common folk a sort of cultural rite of passage, through which each person, during the carnival time, could transcend their humble position and toss away all inhibitions and limitations. This embodiment of their foolishness was where transcendence could be found, and it is a place where the fool plays a central role. In these plays and festivals, folklore and fairy tales, both King and Fool were enjoined and mocked, celebrated and sacrificed. The festive, playful, carnival spirit evoked the earthy, the sensuous, and the

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grotesque humor that parodied the ritual sanctity of official church and state. Carnival translates from the Latin roughly as "farewell to flesh," as in the Fat Tuesday Mardi Gras festivities preceding Ash Wednesday. Elements of these motifs are found throughout *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius' ebullient writing style can be closely compared to that master story-teller of medieval folk humor, Rabelais.⁵

Just as the midwinter festivals herald a return of the light, in his story the gaze of Apuleius never strays far from the promise of the dawn bringing with it the rebirth of Lucius from suffering and near-death. The ass-eared fool reigned during the ancient Roman festivals at the midwinter Saturnalia, which were viewed, according to Bakhtin, as a "true and full, though temporary, return of Saturn's golden age upon earth." The Saturnalia traditions continued into the Christian era, and European folklore told of the "Christmas Fool," adorned with an ass-eared cap, who was killed by the "Spirit of the New Year," the infant Zeus.

Apuleius may have intentionally used a similar theme in his novel, where Lucius must carry the mantle of the ass-headed Saturnalian Fool and endure the endless shame of his imperfect, lowly position. "Lucius the Ass" must become Saturn's unwitting scapegoat while undergoing torturous sacrifices for a higher purpose that is only later realized. Within the fool may lie the trace of a king.

Through the struggles of Lucius we learn of shame as a teacher. It is through the bearing and working through of our shame and humiliation that we come to renounce all illusions of perfection, superiority, and certainty that we hold toward the world. We lie exposed, authentic, wounded. We come to accept ourselves in whole, including our foolishness and our flaws. The acceptance of the Fool is a transcendent moment, for it humbles us as well as opens us to a greater story. At the core of his storytelling, Apuleius has laid bare the hidden meaning of Lucius' odyssey. The boy must live in the punishing realm of Saturn the Father so that he can free himself from an over-identification with the maternal, and become a man capable of honoring, not using, the feminine. He must endure treatment as a devalued beast of burden. He is whipped, beaten, left for dead, even forced into lewd acts. He learns humility and he learns to endure pain like a warrior. Saturn's final, benevolent reign over the Golden Age of Men foreshadows something crucial in our story. A man like Lucius who fights to free himself from the mother will find within him a transformed Saturn nature. No longer the envious destroyer of children, he can stand as a bridge to the energies of a deeper masculine nature.

The Golden Ass and the pearl within it, the story of "Amor and Psyche," elucidate the problems I have undertaken to explore. Within the poison is contained the cure. The boy who is engulfed by his mother will discover his own point on which to take a stand only when the Saturnian mantle of manhood is thrust upon him. Living as the lonely ass brings humility, submission, pain, and recognition of the suffering of others. When Lucius ingests the antidote of the rose garland during a procession in honor of the Goddess Isis, his suf-

fering is finally at an end. Lucius regains human form, a changed man, ready to serve life, not steal from it greedily.

In taking within himself the rose antidote, Lucius assimilates the ageless symbol for the heart, devotion, and the truest of all loves. Foreshadowed in the restorative treatment is his initiation into the mysteries of Isis that were popular in that day. Those ancient and secret rites reenacted the sacred union that joined a man in service to the divine. As we shall see, the spiritual renewal of young Lucius brings with it a deep sense of meaning, service, and humanity. His metal has been tempered in the fires of life through suffering the most humiliating, shameful, and torturous experiences imaginable.

The boy who goes searching in the land of his mother for mystical wisdom is transformed into an ass. He is taken off of his high horse, his seeming intellectual superiority, and forced to learn as a beast of burden. The influence of Saturn is felt throughout much of the novel and holds great psychological significance for the work on narcissism. Saturn, in his terrible aspect, crushes mama's boys that deny him. He is the lead weight tied to the eternal boy's lightness of being. He forces limitation upon the youth's unbounded freedom. He forces reality onto the dreamer. He brings balance. Lucius' embedded narcissism is uprooted and he is sacrificed upon the altar of Saturn so that he may one day become a man who can rightly serve the other—in her transcendence and her nakedness.

At one important juncture of the story, the author recounts how Lucius the Ass has been stolen by a gang of thieves, who brutalize him. But in the bandits' den he befriends a beautiful young bride, Charite,⁷ who has been kidnapped and held for ransom. He makes a vow to himself to aid in her escape from the foul murderers, no matter what the cost, but the pair must wait for an opportune time before they can attempt to flee. There, to pass the time around the campfire, an old charwoman recites the immortal tale of the Princess Psyche who must also undergo great trials to win back the love of her life, her *Amor*, the divine son of Venus.

The Tale of Eros and Psyche

The tale that the old charwoman imparts to Lucius and Charite is an ageless one, featuring themes with which we are all too familiar: a possessive and seductive mother, her godlike son who can't take no for an answer, and his lover, the original woman who loves too much. At center stage is Venus, goddess of love and beauty, jealous of any mortal daring to upstage her or to steal her precious boy's affection. Her son is Eros (Amor), wayward god of love, a grown-up Cupid and the proverbial eternal youth. And finally we have the mortal Princess Psyche, whose first sin was being born with grace and beauty so great that people throughout the land began to worship her as if she were the newborn Venus, thus neglecting the temples of the goddess herself. Given Venus' propensity for jealous vengeance, this was not a good

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idea. But the greatest affront to Venus is the fact that Psyche offers Eros a real human relationship.

Psyche's sisters are married off to respectable, albeit geriatric rulers of nearby kingdoms, men who would rather go off to war than become intimate with their wives. But no man could feel himself worthy of Psyche, nor did any dare come within a furlong of this "new Venus." Idealized, she sits alone in her ivory tower, untouched by life: the perfect woman in every narcissist's fantasy.

Psyche's father clearly cannot help his daughter into life. He sees how his daughter arouses awe in his subjects and fears the gods will punish this rebuke of Venus. After consulting the oracle of Apollo and receiving a terrible decree, he sends his youngest daughter to her apparent death. She is to march at the head of a funeral procession, dressed in bridal robes. Then, at the summit of a mountain, she is to be sacrificed to her "bridegroom," described by the oracle as a monstrous and fiery-winged serpent. Like the virgin left chained upon the altar to feed the dragon, Psyche bravely accepts her fate and awaits her murder. Yet the fierce dragon is none other than the divine youth whose arrows of love can enflame men's hearts to unimaginable and destructive excess.

Enraged, Venus has ordered her son down to earth to avenge her and to destroy the upstart girl. But instead Eros becomes enflamed with desire for Psyche, the New Venus. This conflation of mother and lover reveals the incest fantasy that traps Eros in over-identification with the maternal. Having taken one look at his innocent, luscious prey, the God of Love could no sooner kill Psyche than swear an oath to eternal celibacy. He arranges to have his newest plaything secretly whisked away to an enchanted palace within a secret valley, far from the prying eyes of his mother. Nightly, *Amor* returns to Psyche's bedchamber for sexual bliss. In her imprisonment, Psyche is forced to yield to her unknown lover and is forbidden to ever gaze upon his face, for he departs before the morning light. She lies trapped within a gilded cage, simply an object of a man's desire.

The true intent of Eros' acts against both Venus and Psyche is hidden from both women, and may at this juncture in the story point to his hidden rage and hatred at his own entrapment within the feminine. He schemes to simultaneously deliver a lethal blow that will get both of them!

Initially, Psyche is the perpetual victim, passive, helpless, and clueless. In her first terrifying night, as Apuleius informs us, "her fear of the *unknown* surpassed by far the fear of any peril that ever she had conceived." She must submit to this dark and powerful spirit. Yet, in time, she grows to love him, despite his anonymity. But when Eros allows Psyche's jealous sisters to visit her luxurious prison, they poison the innocent girl's mind in hopes of horning in on the obvious windfall that has befallen their sister. Only when they enflame her thoughts with fear that her anonymous husband is in fact a terrible monster with the head of a thousand serpent coils is the passive Psyche stirred to action, finally willing to risk all just to see her lover's face. That night, she lifts an oil lamp from a hiding place

beneath her bed and casts its light upon the face of her sleeping husband, intending to cut off the deadly serpent's head with a razor. Only then does she realize that she has taken up with a god. She is so startled that her hand starts to shake and a drop of the lamp's hot oil falls upon his shoulder, deeply burning him. When she pricks her finger on one of his love arrows, in the flickering light of a dawning consciousness, she *falls in love with Love*. Startled awake, Eros bolts from her arms and flies away, despite her mournful protests. His little love nest has been exposed and now he must escape.

He returns to his mother's palace, wounded and seeking sympathy, knowing he could never bear to stand up for himself against the ire of Venus once she comes to learn of his disobedience.

What follows in the very moments after love is awakened is a suffering and loss that is nearly unbearable. The flame that brings consciousness is so rarely painless. It is only when Psyche, in the dark, sheds light upon her unconscious condition, ultimately wounding Eros and driving him away, that she can begin the task of consciously loving him. Psyche's act of burning Eros with the lamp's oil signifies the lovers' sacrifice of the fiery passion that has seized them in a mutually blinding possession. In renouncing the safety of the lover's Garden of Eden, Psyche must face the uncertainties of existence alone, for the first time in her life. To survive, the now-pregnant Psyche must surrender herself to the vengeful Venus and her abusive handmaidens. She must undertake four impossible tasks at the hands of her enraged mother-in-law, while Eros goes home, like a whipped pup, to his mother's house to nurse his wound. Now all Psyche's thoughts turn toward restoring her union with Eros.

In her first task, Psyche must sort a heap of seeds into distinct piles. The girl is helpless, but she receives assistance from a colony of ants that do the work throughout the long night.¹¹ In her second task, Psyche must ford a stream to bring back strands of golden fleece from Apollo's sun rams. In the height of the noonday sun, these great beasts are fierce and foul tempered, ever ready to slice her to pieces with their horns if she dare confront them directly. Just as she attempts to cross the stream, a reed softly sings to Psyche, imploring her to wait for the right time to proceed, to wait for the sun to begin to set before attempting to cross. Sure enough, as the daylight begins to dim the beasts lie down to sleep on the hillside. Psyche crosses the stream and picks strands of the golden fleece from the sticker bushes along the banks of the river.¹²

In her third task Psyche must fill a crystal vessel with waters that flow from falls high upon a jagged peak. These waters are the source of the dreaded River Styx. This, too, is beyond her capacities, so she is aided by Zeus' eagle, who flies to the source and fills the container.¹³ In her fourth and final task Psyche descends to the underworld to retrieve a box of beauty ointment for Venus from the goddess of the Underworld, Persephone. Psyche is warned ahead of time to "resist pity" for various characters along the way that ask for her help, for to do so would entrap her for eternity in the land of shades.¹⁴ She succeeds in ac-

Prologue 15

quiring the beauty ointment but decides to keep it for herself, believing the ointment will make her irresistible to Eros and compel her long-lost husband to return to her. Through her willful act she has disobeyed Venus' final command, and when she opens the box on reaching the surface, she falls into a deathlike sleep.¹⁵ Eros, observing it all, will not sit idly by any longer. He breaks from his mother's chambers, flies down to the place where Psyche lies, and awakens her. It is love that awakens the sleeping soul.¹⁶

Through her developing strength and resilience, and her ultimate faith in love, Psyche fulfills all of Venus' tasks. Her courage inspires Eros to leave his mother's house to find and free his lover from her deathlike sleep. In that loving act, *Amor* finally acts like a man, freed from lunar orbit around mother's earth, no longer under her domination. The two lovers ascend to the halls of Olympus and into the welcoming arms of the gods. Psyche drinks the ambrosia of immortality and later gives birth to their daughter, *Voluptas*. Yet this flight away from the human condition gives the story a characteristically incomplete ending. It mirrors so many other great romances where young lovers must perish and leave this world because their idyllic love can exist only in the great beyond, never with feet planted firmly upon the ground. As we return to the text of *The Golden Ass* we find this theme repeated.

Back in the robbers' den, Lucius and Lady Charite are rescued at long last by her brave husband, *Tleptolemus*. The couple's joy, however, is short-lived. Like the tragic troubadour's tales of fatal love (*Liebestod*), the lovers' souls find eternal union only in the afterworld. One is murdered by an envious competitor, while the other, in grief, takes her own life, unable to bear an existence without her beloved. Meanwhile, Lucius is sold from one cruel or neglectful owner to the next. He is subjected to the worst indecencies that humanity has to offer. Our author has plunged his protagonist into the realm of the *shadow*.

A traveling band of eunuch priests become Lucius' new owners, hawking their Syrian Goddess Cybele to the crowds they entertain. These debauched priests stage frenzied dances replete with acts of sadomasochism and bloody self-mortification—all for show—meanwhile lining their robes with the silver they glean from the audience. These were half-men, androgynous, squealing "girls," as their master called them, far from the celibate priests you might expect. They lusted greedily over the poor men they could lure into their clutches. They identified so mightily with the goddess that every remnant of their masculine being had been devoured by her. The author affords us here an extreme picture of a man trapped in the mother complex.

Apuleius describes how Lucius is led from one auction to the next. In his final trial, a convicted murderess, "though condemned to be eaten by wild beasts," is ordered first to become his "bride" through an act of bestiality, all before a jeering public. ¹⁷ Such a disgraceful prospect finally jars Lucius to action: he races six miles to a secluded beach and falls asleep. Startled awake by the glorious full moon rising from the sea, he purifies himself seven times in the water and offers heartfelt prayers for help and mercy to the "Blessed Queen of Heaven" in all her innumerable forms and names. As he falls back to sleep, a tran-

scendent vision of beauty arises from the sea—the Goddess *Isis*—universal mother, mistress of all the elements, the unifying manifestation of all known gods and goddesses.

In the dream Isis promises to deliver Lucius on the following day, during the annual Spring procession, when her priests lead the people down to the seaside to bless the ships for safe travel in the new season. She instructs Lucius to eat the rose garland that she will command her High Priest to carry. In return for his transformation from ass to man, she asks—no, expects—that he will devote himself to her service for the rest of his days. All this comes to pass. Sloughing off the ass's hide, Lucius undergoes initiation into the sacred mysteries of death and rebirth, emerging as a priest of Isis and Osiris. The boy Lucius has freed himself from enslavement in the realm of the mothers and become a man, one capable of service, sacrifice, and passionate devotion.

The Eros Template

Eros is an unrepentant, narcissistic lover who retreats from all emotional attachments. He takes the first steps toward maturity and love only after suffering and enduring a life-changing wound that opens him. We find him brought to life by countless writers and artists in many guises and circumstances throughout the long, meandering history of the Western world. Eros, son of Venus, husband of Psyche, is the prototype of the many versions of the puer aeternus we will meet in this book. We recognize him through the actions of men who leave behind the scattered wreckage of lost relationships. This type of man harms many women in their search to find the diamond in the dung heap of love and relationship. He's the one who leaves a goodbye note, is caught with the best friend, or turns cold and distant when the "L" word is spoken. It is ironic that these men who give so little are loved so much. This is due, perhaps, to their aura of specialness, or to their accomplishments, attractiveness, sensitivity, charisma, charm, and creativity, or even to that pitiful little-boy-lost quality that can evoke a mothering response in the most independent of partners.¹⁸

Apuleius' "Tale of Amor and Psyche" is the classical story that best charts the course of these men's romantic, narcissistic, and even predatory love. It is embodied in the character of Eros as well as in that of Lucius, the hero of *The Golden Ass*. These stories follow Eros and Lucius through their wounding and suffering, and toward the possibility of mature love, humility, and devotion. Regarding this from the standpoint of the male (as opposed to that of women), one can extract from Eros a *template* that outlines the key qualities of one pattern in narcissism—that of "mother's perfect little god," who habitually seeks instant pleasure in paradise but never in mutual relationships.

Prologue 17

Here are some of the common themes of narcissism in the *Eros Template* extracted from "The Tale of Amor and Psyche." They are generally found embedded in our notions of romance and love, and are met throughout Western history.

Mother's special boy. He is the divine son of his mother. He is so special, and he knows no bounds. He can't take no for an answer. His desires and impulses must be gratified instantly. He is incestuously bonded to his mother, but as long as he does her bidding she protects him from the slings and arrows of the cruel world that may try to knock him down a few pegs for being so full of himself.

His beauty is only skin deep. He is a physically beautiful man but he lacks the capacity for internal reflection. His life centers around surface things: fulfillment of physical desires, attainment of beautiful possessions, and expectations of perfection. The great control and power that he must exert over his outer environment and relationships is a form of compensation for an emotionally unstable and chaotic internal identity that he cannot hold in check.

Predator. His desires are fueled by an internal lack, and when he becomes satiated he searches ceaselessly for a new object of desire and pleasure. He is a predatory hunter. He seeks the adrenaline rush of sexual conquest and power over the helpless victim. Like Psyche awaiting her sacrifice atop the mountain, she is merely his thing to be used to meet his needs.

He seeks fusion in relationships. He maintains his control over the love object by keeping her in the dark about who he really is. She has no identity separate from his, and as long as she is fused with him she is not an object to be related to but is compelled instead to be an object of his desire alone. He unconsciously seeks to relive the fantasy of incest with his own mother in his own little Garden of Eden, by finding her substitute, the newer version of Venus—young Psyche.

He is split between his mother and his lover. His loyalty is split between the need for mothering and the desire for the mature love of a woman, a division that interferes with his maturation and prolongs his stay in eternal youth. Alternatively, he is tossed between his longing for the untouched virgin and his desire for pleasures that only the goddess of love may bestow.

Idealization and devaluation of the object of love. He is always in search of the ideal, perfect woman. Because she is only human, the woman merely plays a role in his perfect fantasies and he has no idea who she really is. The moment she begins deviating from his expectations his feelings turn cold or destructive. Her imperfections arouse all sorts of uncertainties and insecurities within him, and to avoid those unstable feelings he must devalue her. Using her to maintain his stability and his illusions of perfection, he can also blame her when she lets him down. He sets things up so that he never has to look within to his own

weaknesses. He rids himself of his own bad feelings by dumping them into the devalued woman.

The narcissistic wound leads to negation of the other. Owing to an unstable identity, he is full of exaggerated sensitivity and therefore is easily slighted and wounded, which leads to negation and devaluation of his ideal love object. Because the internal feelings prove too unbearable to look at, he instead chooses to retaliate against any perceived betrayal that causes him pain. He will easily abandon and evacuate the woman from his mind if it will allow him to avoid suffering.

Continual return to mother to avoid the difficulties of life. He will seek the old familiar retreat to his mother's rooms to heal the narcissistic wounds inflicted by what he sees as a cold, cruel world, a world that demands to meet him as a real person. He is split between the need for security, sympathy, and maternal comfort, and the instinctive hunger for sexual gratification.

Feigned innocence serves to mask his own destructive, hateful impulses. By splitting off his awareness he turns a blind eye to the terrible mother and her group of vengeful handmaidens who fall mercilessly upon Psyche when she surrenders herself to Venus. By involving himself so exclusively in bemoaning his own mistreatment, Eros feigns innocence. His guilt lies in his complicity. A man such as this can bat his eyelashes innocently while he compartmentalizes his hatred and aggression, though it will often seep out indirectly, passively.

The mother-bound man destroys all links to human relationships. Mother-Venus and her handmaidens threaten Psyche with death if she fails to fulfill any of the impossible tasks set before her. They hope to destroy any links to love, dependency, and vulnerability. As in the previous paragraph, Eros feigns innocence as the dirty work is done for him, thus insulating himself from real life and real relationships and the pain that might ensue. These destructive handmaidens exist within the mother-bound man as protecting and persecuting objects, encapsulating him in a shell and protecting him from the risk of an intimacy that might cause him pain. He stays safe within mother's orbit, unwilling to break free of her power. On a conscious level he is only cognizant of his role as the "offended party" and will not own responsibility for the violence he inflicts on others when defending himself against perceived threats to his self preservation.

The wounding that pierces the narcissistic shell. In the end, Eros has suffered through his wounding and his separation from his wife Psyche. The bearing of shame plays a vital role in deflating one's omnipotence (although this step is not as clearly elucidated with Eros as it is with Apuleius' main character, Lucius). Eros develops within himself the courage and resilience to defy his mother's wrath and to return to Psyche. The wound that Eros ultimately bears exposes the false self that he has perpetuated in order to maintain his illusion of control over life. He chooses the life-giver, ¹⁹ as Neville Symington calls it, with all its uncertainties.

Prologue 19

Repairing the capacity to love. A psyche must develop a resilience and cohesiveness in order to bear the vicissitudes of life, and from this, love in its transcendence may emerge. In the story, Eros comes to see this in Psyche, as he realizes the depth of her sacrifice and devotion, all for the sake of love. Her courage has touched something within him that inspires him to break out of his prison and seek connection and love in a human way. He discovers the capacity for care and the meaning of sacrifice. He repairs his marriage, but only after the couple suffer through separation, pain, and loss. Through a process of great suffering in which the capacities for *transcendence* emerge, Psyche, recognized as a man's inner *psyche-soul-anima*, transcends the maternal complex in which she has been mired. Love frees the soul.

Notes

- 1 Apuleius, *The Transformations of Lucius otherwise known as The Golden Ass*, translated by Robert Graves (NY: Noonday Press, 1951).
- 2 Marie-Louise von Franz, The Golden Ass of Apuleius (Boston: Shambhala, 1970), 56.
- 3 I owe a great debt to Marie-Louise von Franz, whose commentary on *The Golden Ass* lays the foundation for this body of work.
- 4 von Franz, Golden Ass of Apuleius, 21–22.
- 5 Apuleius, *The Golden Ass.* See Graves, "Introduction," x.
- 6 M. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 7–8.
- 7 Charite's name—charity—can be traced back to the Greek word for the "love of God," or *agape*.
- 8 Erich Neumann, Amor and Psyche (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 11.
- 9 At the deepest level within the psyche, symbolized by her emancipation from the darkness of the bedchamber, we may view Psyche as the image of a man's inner feeling, his feminine nature—the *anima*—coming out of the dark and into relation with him.
- 10 This is the only variety of love that mama's little prince could offer within his enchanted paradise—one of instant fusion, the rapture of momentary pleasures soon to fade and die, and freedom from all struggles. Psyche, with one abrupt stroke, has put an end to the illusions spun by the web of erotic love. Psyche, as *psyche*, must wound and be severed from her unconscious, immature, idyllic, romantic, and self-centered relation to love, so that she might love on a deeper level. When new possibilities emerge from the psyche, consciousness increases and love can be freed from its contamination with the maternal, just as Eros must separate from his mother. In the myth of Psyche and Eros we find the first lines of poetry or prose ever written that laud the struggles of the human psyche to free love and desire from the drives of mother nature, and to move toward a state of conscious loving, caring, and relating.
- 11 This is a lesson in differentiation of chaotic, instinctive energies.
- 12 She learns to trust her intuition to find the right time, and resists the destructive impulse to "ram ahead" without reflection.
- 13 This speaks to the inability of the ego, by itself, to contain the waters of life and death. In times of difficulty the energies of the Self may emerge and come to our aid when the ego shows the resilience to endure the struggle.

- 14 This can allude to regression in psychotherapy and analysis, where we must work at not getting stuck in the unconscious.
- 15 Here Psyche, as the emerging conscious psyche, is attempting to differentiate from the unconscious that is signified by the realm of the gods and goddesses.
- 16 In *The Myth of Analysis*, James Hillman recounts the lover's tale as an inner text, describing "processes that go on between eros and psyche." By awakening Psyche from her deathlike sleep, Eros has finally broken free of the mother. Love profoundly affects the psyche. "Only Love" (Eros)—mature Love (freed from the binds to mother), "can awaken an unconscious Psyche" (my emphasis). James Hillman, The Myth of Analysis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972, 55, 57). Surely these tasks undergone by Psyche must teach us something about how the psyche develops so we may learn to love more deeply.
- 17 Apuleius, The Golden Ass, 260.
- 18 We may pause to reflect upon why some women may seek the eternal youth, the "soft male," in order to avoid the threat of the strong patriarchal influence from their own past.
- 19 Neville Symington, *On Narcissism: A New Theory* (London: Karnac Books, 1993), 80. The "lifegiver" is the choice opted for by the patient, rather than the default to the "narcissistic option." The lifegiver may be signified by an internal or external object, such as the good-enough breast, or good-enough therapist, that the patient seeks. It may be compared to one's opening to the Other, in Levinas's terms. It is the choice for life and relationship rather than the deathlike, perpetual sameness of narcissistic encapsulation.

PART ONE

NARCISSISM IN THE ROMANTIC THE MOTHER, HER SON, HIS LOVER

She summoned her winged headstrong boy, that wicked boy . . . armed with arrows and torch aflame . . . wantonness and lust are his by birth. . . . I implore you by all the bonds of love that bind you to her that bore you . . . avenge your mother . . . and sternly punish this rebellious beauty. . . . Cause the maid to be consumed with passion for the vilest of men . . .' So spoke She, and with parted lips kissed her son long and fervently.¹

—Venus here calls upon her son, Eros, whom she is sending off to destroy her rival, Psyche.

Introductory Remarks

s the fable of "Amor and Psyche" unfolds we learn of humanity's waning devotion to the love goddess, Venus, mother of Eros. Her altars have been desecrated and abandoned as the exciting news of the arrival of the "New Venus" spreads across the land. The narrator of the tale proclaims, "No, this time the earth, not the sea, has been impregnated by a heavenly emanation and has borne a new Goddess of Love, all the more beautiful because she is still a virgin." Psyche is the symbol of purity—chaste, innocent, a virginal ideal, and completely untouchable by human hands, whereas Venus' sexual conquests and seductions are legendary. She is, sadly, used goods, abject, a devalued whore, thrown upon the garbage heap by a faithless world, traded in for the sparkling and mysterious new bauble in the marketplace.

Apuleius describes how Venus laments her mistreatment at the hands of mortals who have forgotten who she really is: "the first parent of created things, the primal source of all the elements . . . the kindly mother of all the world." For Apuleius and the Greco-Roman

world, Venus is not merely the eternally young and beautiful vamp lying seductively upon her couch casting her spells as Goddess of Love. She reveals her true nature as the primal source of all creation and is therefore linked back to the Great Mother and the ancient fertility goddesses whose rites of initiation flourished in the great agricultural civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, long before the Christian era.

In this context, therefore, Eros, is Venus' eternal *son and lover*, the *puer aeternus*, bound by the bonds of love to serve her as fertility god and never to leave her orbit. The wanton lad has come to know only too well his mother's amorous and incestuous entreaties. Her seductive influence causes him to roam the world, inflaming human passions and lust to indiscriminant excesses with his arrows of love. In one sense Eros, her offspring, manifests the forces of Venus in the world through these arrows. His phallus is hers; he is bound to her, existing merely as a moon revolving closely around her planet.

Venus dispatches Eros on a mission to destroy the mortal Psyche, the "New Venus," who has unwittingly become the target of all Venus' displaced hatred. He is torn between loyalty to his mother and the young beauty's charms, and ultimately he succumbs to his desire to possess this pure and untouched ideal. While awaiting her sacrifice Psyche is spirited away off the mountaintop and brought to the secret palace of Eros.

We can only wonder how cognizant Eros must be of the resemblance Psyche bears to his own mother, or to the implications of the pull toward incest therein. In the days that follow, Eros offers Psyche the only kind of love that his mother's little prince could know—the foolish promise of a short-lived paradise where no struggle is permitted and no conscious relationship can ever really develop, for the lover will never reveal his face in the light of day. Enraptured by her passionate and mysterious husband, Psyche lives at his complete mercy. The two lovers live in a timeless oneness, a dreamlike fusion removed from ordinary life, as lovers often do.⁴ The enchanted paradise in which Psyche is held captive dramatizes every immature romantic love encounter in which the other carries for us our idealized projection of our twin.⁵ The paradise of love encapsulates the twins in a deadening and perpetual sameness as a defense against difference and the unknown, just as Psyche dreads the unknown during her first night in the enchanted palace, alone and terrified.⁶

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To put what we have just heard into theoretical terms: When a man projects his own soul image upon another, narcissism distorts, even contaminates love, particularly romantic love. In fact, to maintain his projection he colonizes the other so that she will continue to meet his expectations. The mother is the first love of our lives, and naturally male feelings of love become mixed up with maternal influences, both positive and negative. Part of a man's feelings for his mother, then, are projected onto the objects of his love.

Anima—the soul of man, the living essence and spirit of life within—transcends all complexes, and can never be located in another person; it emerges instead through the discourse and endless process of engagement with life. When a man's ego becomes entrenched in the mother complex, however, he turns away in fear from the uncertainties of life, an action that prevents the deeper encounter of self with other. For a man to free his love from the kind of narcissism found in romantic yearnings he must struggle to free his anima from the erotically charged projections, infused with elements of the mother complex, that have permeated his early life. In so doing he exposes narcissism's illusions and his own disayowal of love.

The anima's disentanglement from her identification with the mother complex is clearly exemplified in the liberation of Eros and Psyche from the influence of Venus at the climax of the story. The triangle at the heart of the "Tale of Amor and Psyche," comprising mother, son, and lover, embodies three dimensions of the mother problem in a man enveloped and dominated by overwhelming maternal influences, both negative and all too positive. His imagination has been distorted in its perceptions of love and romance—in his ideas of how love is "supposed" to be and how he is to manipulate it to fit his romantic image. He learns to insulate himself from the shattering effects of the alterity of love upon his fixed beliefs. The illusions of love that are depicted in the tale of Psyche and Eros echo many of the same themes portrayed throughout the long history of tragic love and romance in the Western world.

The narcissistic defenses that are mounted against men's emerging capacities to love take a number of forms, which we will meet in the chapters that make up Part One of this book. These defenses are present in the earliest mental life of the infant, for instance, in its archaic fantasies of restoring a traumatically lost (imagined) maternal paradise. In a further example, the helpless infant defends against the dread of the mother's unconscious affects flooding him, his defense taking the form of repression of these unfathomable messages. Later, in the adolescent and adult male, defenses take the form of splits in the psyche between needs for mothering and the desire for seduction and pleasure, and between the craving for carnal passion and the longing for the purity of true love. Lastly, the dissolution of the self into romantic and passionate fusion states is another form of defense, a defensive retreat from life indicating a symbolic return to the mother.

British Object Relations theory understands these defensive phenomena as forms of what it calls "defensive or libidinal narcissism." In this form of narcissistic defense, Ronald Britton writes, one attempts to "preserve the capacity for love by making the love-object seem like the self" (through twinning and fusion). Alternatively, one may aggressively annex the other's unique and separate identity as a means of restoring control to one's threatened sense of self. The Tale of Psyche and Eros abounds with examples of this defense, such as the incestuous claims Venus places upon Eros in order to possess and control him. In turn, Eros internalizes his mother's fear of annihilation (her fear of being abandoned

by humanity) by identifying with her aggressive need for control, as we see in his sexual conquest and possession of his young bride, Psyche.⁹

The boundaryless union within the paradise of Eros and Psyche acts, for a brief time, as Eros' form of retreat and protection from the difficulties of life and the uncertainties of change, until he inevitably loses Psyche. Likewise, the mother-bound man—and the twin he is often drawn to—repeatedly swings between dependency and rejection, often being caught up in roles that reenact his primitive fantasies of fusion with and then loss of the mother.

In Eros' split between his mother and his lover one can see the familiar dilemma of a man who finds himself suspended in the choice between wife and mistress. On the one hand, from one perspective he needs to maintain a stable and secure home-life that only a devoted wife, one who is more like a mother to him, can provide. On the other, he is drawn by the intoxicating allure of the mistress who will stroke and stimulate him. In his need to be aroused and satiated by the one, then soothed and nurtured by the other he has negated the distinctiveness of both women and has instead merely annexed them. This, too, is a form of defensive narcissism: he forces each woman to be as a mother to him, although they play out opposite roles.

Masochistic elements of defensive narcissism can be recognized in the tragic myth of the puer aeternus' fatal entrapment in the realm of mother. As his mother's son he is subject to her desires and bound to orbit her world. His phallus is hers to use. He is hers to consume in pleasures leading to ecstasy and annihilation, known in the French as *jouissance*—the ultimate submission.

In some cases, patterns of submission, fusion, and masochism may appear in the field between patient and therapist as well as in the interactions of intimate partners. A therapist's mind may be aggressively colonized by his narcissistic patient, for example, whose needs or demands feel overwhelming, depriving the therapist of his ability to think at moments. The therapist may also feel used and powerless for a time, much like the masochistic object in an intimate relationship.

What has been felt as a profound failure in maternal containment in infancy, producing narcissistic defenses in its train, can sometimes be worked through in the analytic relationship. This is crucial to the emergence of capacities for care and concern thwarted in the early life of the patient. When the analyst's capacity to survive the patient's attacks without retaliation or abandonment is demonstrated to the patient, it can elicit regret or guilt in the patient for having hurt the one he has depended upon. Through the transference relationship the "analyst as mother" is experienced as containing and capable of metabolizing the aggression of the patient's infant part. This is often followed by the patient's capacity for care and concern for the analyst and the possible harm done to their relationship. The narcissistic state is transcended through this achievement of care for the other.

These themes are discussed in the four chapters of Part One. The first chapter, *The Great Round*, highlights the condition of the child's original oneness with mother, followed by the inevitable wounding and disruption of that state with the loss of the maternal body. This profound loss will prompt the individual's eternal longing to return to the state of imagined wholeness and completion. In certain cases, owing to his mother's dominating psychological influence and need—which her son feels compelled to meet—he will become over-identified with the psychology of the *puer aeternus*. In this state he is dissuaded from becoming a separate individual because separateness is viewed as a threat to his mother. This reaction explains his need to insulate himself from life when things become too difficult, and to inhibit the development of capacities for mature love.

Chapter Two, *The Death Coniunctio: Tales of Fatal Love*, describes the compulsion to dissolve in the fantasy of oneness, as in the lovers' fusion of ecstatic pleasure and suffering (which I identify as a form of Freud's *death drive*). This addictive pull to act out the romantic illusion of paradise also takes the form of a compensatory refusal to live in the world or to bear life's difficulties. In one's fantasies, the continual longing to find "the one" with whom to feel complete, followed by catastrophic collapse when the fantasy fails to be realized, is seen as a submission to the inner "death mother." These outcomes reflect a weak and immature ego's lack of internal boundaries and an immersion in the mother complex—whether in its positive or negative aspects.

Chapter Three explores the problem of *The Split Feminine: Mother, Lover, Virgin, Whore*, ¹¹ as a split in a man's psyche between his ideals of pure love and his hunger to fulfill earthy, erotic desires, often referred to as the problem of the virgin and whore. Another typical enactment of this form of splitting will find a man swinging between his need for mothering provided by a stable (maternal) wife, and his desire to be seduced and enthralled in an affair: these are the internal poles of mother and lover. He deprives both women of their unique individualities, uses and colonizes them, and relegates both to different yet static forms of mothering him. The biblical story of Jacob and his two wives, the culture of the Courts of Love, the twelfth-century Cathedral at Chartres, and the cult of the Cathars all signify the cultural, religious, and historic split in the Feminine.

The fourth chapter—*Analyst, President, Surgeon: The Split Feminine in Contemporary Man*—continues to explore the theme of the mother/lover split in the male psyche. Here I examine the likely impact that maternal loss and ambivalence may have had upon the early lives of two renowned public figures—Carl Jung and Bill Clinton—as well as a patient who was once a noted plastic surgeon. Each man has been buoyed by stabilizing women in maternal, caregiving roles on the one hand, and infused with passion for women who carry their projections of anima or seductress on the other. The emotions evoked for these anima women bring inspiration, destabilization, or ruin to the lives of these men.

Notes

- 1 Neumann, Amor and Psyche (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 5.
- 2 Apuleius, *The Transformations of Lucius otherwise known as The Golden Ass.* Translated by Robert Graves NY: Noonday Press, 1951), 96.
- 3 Neumann, Amor and Psyche, 4.
- 4 "Sexuality cannot in itself build depth of character and if sexuality is used as an empathic bridge to another person where deep ties are otherwise lacking, it can be destructive of the development of the love capacities. Romantic love is based on empathic feelings between individuals who see themselves reflected in each other. Such love thrives on withdrawal from the world of problems where faith and analytic thinking are required. The pleasures of romance justify its selfishness and often lead lovers to feel that the outer world is a hostile place. Behind romantic intensity lies a shallowness in the creative love capacities." Paul Rosenfels, Love and Power (New York: Libra Publishers, 1966), 92–93.
- 5 Twin refers in this context to the type of narcissistic couple who individually are insufficient without their "other half." One is the ideal projection of the other's internal image of perfection, and vice versa. They often look and act much alike, and this actually increases over time, because, due to their withdrawal from the world, they depend increasingly upon each other to regulate each other's behavior.
- 6 See Apuleius' quote in the Prologue.
- 7 Ronald Britton, "Narcissism and Narcissistic Disorders." Paper presented at Northwest Psychoanalytic Society, EBOR Conference, Seattle, September 30, 2005.
- 8 In the internal object relations Freud describes the hysteric patient needing to play a part of one of the parents in the "primal scene," where others are invited to look on, and where the patient does not feel excluded. So, in defensive narcissism there is a turning inward within the patient of the image of one of the primal couple that the baby identifies with. That good part is then projected into the analyst or an ideal outer love object. In this sense the libido is object seeking in defensive narcissism, contrary to Freud's earlier belief that narcissism was un-analyzable due to the inability, he believed, for the analyst to be an object of the patient's transference. Robert Oelsner, "Introduction to the work of Ron Britton." Pre-lecture paper presented at the Inter-Institute Guest Lecture Series, Seattle, Washington, March 19, 2008.
- 9 To a lesser extent aspects of "destructive narcissism," defined as the hatred and obliteration of all links to another, are to be found in these three scenarios, as well. However, Part Two explores cases of destructive narcissism more fully. Defensive and destructive forms of narcissism may at times appear to overlap or segue one into the other.
- 10 See Chapter Four.
- 11 This term is borrowed from Peter Mudd's paper, "Jung and the Split Feminine," in the Round Table Review, 6(1) (1998), 1.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GREAT ROUND

For what the center brings
Must obviously be
That which remains to the end
And was there from eternity¹
—Goethe

Jung and others warn us that deleterious consequences befall a man who cannot renounce his over-identification with the internal mother within—a circumstance that will keep him narcissistically removed and unadapted to life. In this chapter I present a number of narratives from myth and legend, as well as vignettes from clinical practice, that depict this immortal drama of the union and separation of mother and son. In the medieval Grail Legend of *Parzival*, the hero's traumatic birth provides an example of the process through which an infant can internalize his mother's negative affects, which will then obstruct the child's growing consciousness and need for separation. Here I also present the case of a former patient whose death exemplifies his retreat from life and whose entrapment within the negative maternal complex led him to suicide in the hope of finding eternal freedom from pain.

The ancient myth of Attis and Cybele provides a related template, one that tells the poignant tale of a divine son, the *puer aeternus*, born to the Great Mother, who castrates her beloved boy for attempting to grow up and leave her. In the last section of the chapter I discuss the dream of a patient struggling for freedom from the mother complex. The dream's heroic patterns of initiation suggest unrealized possibilities for the transcendence of psychological incest and castration at the hands of mother. The missing father looms large throughout each of these narratives.

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Ken Kimmel is a Jungian psychoanalyst in Seattle, Washington, with over thirty years of clinical experience. He received his Diploma in Analytical Psychology in 2008 from the North Pacific Institute for Analytical Psychology where he is currently a clinical and faculty member. His present interests concern the interface of Analytical Psychology with contemporary psychoanalysis, postmodern philosophy, and mystical traditions.



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