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“THE UNDERSTANDING OF DEPRESSION IN THE LIGHT OF C. G. JUNG’S WORK”

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To my father.

“Sin otra luz y guía sino la que en el corazón ardía”

(San Juan de la Cruz)

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to reconstruct Carl Gustav Jung's psychological understanding of depression, in other words, to give an account of the meaning of depressive phenomena for the development of human consciousness. Through this, we aspire to make a triple contribution:

- 1) Although there are some post-Jungian studies that address the subject of depression (E. Harding, 1981; V. W. Odajnyk, 1983; W. Steinberg, 1989, among others) there is still a lack of research aiming to clarify and to critically reconstruct in detail the Jungian understanding of depression through a carefully study of his work, and with special attention to its sources.
- 2) As we will try to show, this reconstruction contributes to the human sciences, particularly health sciences, and especially regarding the possibility of conceiving a potentially transforming and meaningful dimension of depressive phenomena along the development of human consciousness, without neglecting its pathological and adaptive dimension. This becomes particularly valuable in the context of the increasing over-medicalization and 'diagnostic inflation' of depression that many scholars of the health sciences have evidenced in the last years (A. Horwitz and J. Wakefield, 2007; A. Frances, 2013; P. Pignarre, 2001).
- 3) Within certain limits we will try to show that the Jungian understanding of depression as a potentially transforming experience recovers psychologically a leitmotiv that traverses, through a variety of symbols and forms, a big part of Western history. This thread of meaning reveals itself particularly in the symbolism regarding Saturn in the Greco-Roman tradition, in the notion of 'the dark night of the soul' in Christian mysticism, and in the alchemical *nigredo*.

To fulfill our purpose, we divide our work in five chapters. In the first chapter entitled "Methodology" we settle down the methodological criteria that sustain our study and which may be synthesized as the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach. Since the Jungian work doesn't have

any specific essays addressing the subject of depression, in this chapter we point out the several contexts that will nourish our subsequent work of symbolic amplification. We also dedicate a brief paragraph to the importance of ‘understanding’ (Spanish: *comprender*, German: *verstehen*) as a key approaching attitude in human sciences, which we will also privilege along our study (as its main title specifies).

In the second chapter entitled “Symbols of Melancholy in Western Spiritual Traditions”, we make a brief reference to melancholy as an historical antecedent of depression from Western antiquity to Renaissance. We clarify the different meanings that it possessed, that is: as an illness, as a temperament or a passing mood -as such, not necessarily pathological-, and as a spiritual gift regarding the destiny of the exceptional individual. We develop this last aspect and introduce the main symbols that came to be associated with this transforming dimension of melancholy along Western spiritual traditions. We particularly emphasize on the figure of Cronus-Saturn in the Greco-Roman tradition, the ‘dark night of the soul’ in Christian mysticism (with special attention to St. John of the Cross) and the nigredo in alchemy.

In the third chapter entitled “Towards a Definition of Depression in the Light of C. G. Jung’s work” we briefly address the modern concept of depression according the DSM V’s diagnostic criteria (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). We later introduce the increasing controversy regarding the ‘diagnostic inflation’ and the over-medicalization of depressive phenomena in the contemporary world. Following, we attempt to reconstruct a possible definition of depression in the light of a critical approach of the Jungian theoretical work. In this context, we establish the main differences between the causal-reductive Freudian point of view and the synthetic-constructive Jungian point of view.

In the fourth chapter entitled “Depression as a Threshold Experience in the Development of Consciousness”, we address the Jungian understanding of depression as a meaningful psychological experience in the light of the consciousness’s development which, far from being linear, alternates between regressive and progressive moments. We here recognize four meanings of depression as a potentially transforming regressive experience: depression as a childish conscious attitude (incest longing through an identification between consciousness and unconscious), depression as phenomena resulting from the assimilation of the unconscious (separation between consciousness and unconscious), depression as a compensation to one-sided conscious attitudes (‘loss of the soul’), depression as a state of incubation serving towards a future transformation of consciousness (integration between consciousness and unconscious). We amplify the meaning of these four

threshold moments (and the psychic experiences that accompany them) in the light of the symbolism of Western spiritual traditions that we already introduced before: Cronos-Saturn in the Greco-Roman tradition, the ‘dark night of the soul’ according to Saint John of the Cross and the nigredo in alchemy. Thereby, this chapter addresses our main objective of reconstructing the Jungian understanding of depressive phenomena, but in alignment with the previous chapters.

Finally, in the fifth chapter we undertake the conclusions, making a synthesis of the results and suggesting some new guidelines for further research, particularly regarding some practical implications regarding the treatment of depression, a subject that we only limit ourselves to mention, but do not develop.

In general terms, we hope this research may achieve a deeper understanding of depression from the Jungian point of view. We also aim to demonstrate that it does not only recover a normal dimension of depression (as an adaptive response to an experience of loss, without disregarding its eventually pathological meaning), but also a transforming dimension regarding a symbolic experience of death and rebirth that can take place along the development of human consciousness. As such, it may be considered as a constitutive experience of the human being that is called to transform himself through life. In either case, it is necessary to warn that the constructive Jungian point of view of depression that does not deny the causal point of view. On the contrary, it completes and amplifies it.

The choice of Carl Gustav Jung’s theory as a framework for our research finds its reason in the fact that, surprisingly, both in academic and in medical areas it still lacks the recognition that it deserves given the value of his work, as Bernardo Nante (2010) points out.¹

It’s far away from our intentions to romantically praise depression and the suffering that comes along with it. We are also far from denying a symptomatic dimension of depressive phenomena in its biological, psychological and social aspects. However, we believe that it is necessary to recognize and to ‘remember’ some facets of depression mentioned in spiritual traditions, but apparently forgotten in contemporary times.

If certain depressive phenomena may be understood as a threshold along a path of conscious development, it’s not about how to eliminate this experience, but to discover the resources that may help to go through this dark and tough reality, searching for the seeds of a future inner growth. As an old alchemist said: “*Habentibus symbolum facilis est transitus*”.

¹ It’s worth quoting Nante’s words regarding the significance and value of the Jungian work: “*precisely, its merit consists in attempting to understand the human being, not according to what ‘he is being’, but according to that which he ‘could become’, starting with what ‘he is being’ (...)*”. [Bernardo Nante, *El Libro Rojo de Jung. Claves para la comprensión de una obra inexplicable* (Buenos Aires: El Hilo de Ariadna, 2010), 51. Translation mine.].

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Warnings and abbreviation's list

Throughout this research, we will be quoting Jung's texts according to the *Collected Works* (CW), Princeton University Press. Below, you will find a list of its volumes. Immediately after, we also point out those texts which, although not being part of the *Collected Works*, even so belong to Jungian work. We also provide an abbreviation's list for the quotations.

A. COLLECTED WORKS (CW)

Volume 1 – *Psychiatric Studies*. CW 1

Volume 2 – *Experimental Researches*. CW 2

Volume 3 – *Psychogenesis of Mental Disease*. CW 3

Volume 4 – *Freud & Psychoanalysis*. CW 4

Volume 5 – *Symbols of Transformation*. CW 5

Volume 6 – *Psychological Types*. CW 6

Volume 7 – *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. CW 7

Volume 8 – *Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche*. CW 8

- Volume 9 (Part 1) – *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. CW 9/1
Volume 9 (Part 2) – *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. CW 9/2
Volume 10 – *Civilization in Transition*. CW 10
Volume 11 – *Psychology and Religion: West and East*. CW 11
Volume 12 – *Psychology and Alchemy*. CW 12
Volume 13 – *Alchemical Studies*. CW 13
Volume 14 – *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. CW 14
Volume 15 – *Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*. CW 15
Volume 16 – *Practice of Psychotherapy*. CW 16
Volume 17 – *Development of Personality*. CW 17
Volume 18 – *The Symbolic Life*. CW 18
Volume 19 – *General Bibliography*. CW 19
Volume 20 – *General Index*. CW 20

B. SEMINARS

- *The Zofingia Lectures*
- *Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminars Given in 1928-1930*
- *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminars Given in 1934-1939*
- *Children's Dreams*
- *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*
- *Visions*

C. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- *Memories. Dreams. Reflections.*

D. LETTERS

- *Letters I (1906-1945)*
- *Letters II (1946-1955)*
- *Letters III (1956-1961)*

- *The Jung-White Letters*
- *The Jung & Neumann Correspondence*
- *The Freud-Jung Letters*

E. THE RED BOOK

F. INTERVIEWS

- *C. G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*

Abbreviations:

CW	Jung, Carl Gustav. <i>Collected Works</i> . Princeton University Press.
The Red Book	Jung, Carl Gustav. <i>The Red Book. Liber Novus</i> . Edited by Sonu Shamdasani (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).
Memories	Jung, Carl Gustav. <i>Memories, Dreams, Reflections</i> . (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).
Briefe	Jung, Carl Gustav. <i>Briefe I-III</i> . (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2012).
Letters	Jung, Carl Gustav. <i>Letters I-II</i> . Edited by Gerhard Adler in collaboration with Aniela Jaffe. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012)

Regarding St. John of the Cross' works, which we also quote frequently, we will be following the *Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, Ed. Allison Peers. (London: Burns & Oates, 1953).

For a more fluid reading, we will quote according the following abbreviations:

1A- 2A- 3A: Book 1-2-3 of *Ascent to Mount Carmel*. The first number after indicates the chapter, the second number indicates the paragraph.

1N- 2N: Book 1-2 of *The Dark Night* (chapter and paragraph *ibid.*)

C: *Canticle*.

1. METHODOLOGY

C. G. Jung never wrote a separate book or essay about depression, nor developed a systematic theory about it. Nevertheless, he left many ideas on the subject scattered throughout his writings, that allow us to glimpse an implicit and constant presence of the topic throughout his entire work. It is true that these references may sometimes seem anecdotic, fragmentary and unevolved. Even so, through a carefully reading and study of his work it is possible to recognize a unique understanding of depressive phenomena and its possible meaning for the psychic and spiritual development of the human being.

As almost every other topic along the Jungian work, it calls for a critical study capable of recognizing the growth of a thinking in *status nascens*. Naturally, every innovative and creative thought might express itself chaotically at its beginning, but this ‘chaos’ does not discourage its richness, on the contrary, it can speak for it. Regarding this aspect of his work, Jung acknowledged: “*I can formulate my thoughts only as they break out of me. It is like a geyser. Those who come after me will have to put them in order*”.²

Although some post-Jungian scholars address the subject depression (E. Harding³, W. Steinberg⁴ y R. F. Hobson⁵ among others), we still lack critical research focusing on the specific meanings that depression acquires throughout C. G. Jung’s work, with special consideration of its sources.

² Jung quoted by Aniela Jaffé. *The Myth of Meaning in the Work of C. G. Jung* (Zürich: Daimon Verlag, 1984), 8.

³ Esther Harding, “The Value and Meaning of Depression” in *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought* 12, no. 2 (1981): 113–35.

⁴ Warren Steinberg, “Depression: Some Clinical and Theoretical Observations” in *Quadrant* 17 (1984): 7–22.

⁵ Along their respective works, W. Steinberg (1989) and Robert F. Hobson (1955) acknowledge the value of the Jungian work for the distinction between depression as a necessary phase of psychic transformation, and depression as a psychopathological state. However, their research mainly focuses on psychopathological depression. Cf. Warren Steinberg, “Depression: A Discussion of Jung’s Ideas” in *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 34, no. 4 (October 1989): 339–52. Also cf. Robert F. Hobson, “Archetypal Themes in Depression” in *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 1, no. 1 (January 1955): 33–47.

Concerning this, we believe that Walter Odajnyk's study⁶ constitutes a pioneer work which is necessary to continue and develop.

Since C. G. Jung does not always undertake a critical revision of his concepts, our attempt of reconstructing and systemizing Jung's understanding of depression may seem a bold initiative, or even a reckless task. That's why it becomes necessary to explain the methodological criteria that will guide us along the chapters to come.

1.1 The Phenomenological-hermeneutical Approach

Our research will evolve according to the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach. By this, we are following the reconstruction of the Jungian method, as it has been undertaken by the Argentine scholar Bernardo Nante⁷, who insists on the necessity of understanding the Jungian work on its own terms. From a phenomenological point of view, we will explore and recognize the different formulations, affirmations and references that C. G. Jung makes on depression (and other associated terms and experiences) along his work, distinguishing and eventually articulating its many meanings. We will privilege the texts of the *Collected Works* coming after 1913, which is when Jung separated himself from Freudian Theory and begun to develop his own psychological theory after publishing *Symbols of Transformation*. Concerning those texts which are not included in the *Collected Works*, we will especially refer to the *Red Book*⁸, which has been recently published and is intimately related to our topic of research. To a lesser extent and only whenever it becomes crucial to our research, we will also refer to the seminars, to the epistolary exchange and to his autobiography, which are also not included in the *Collected Works*.

At the same time, our method will follow a hermeneutical approach since for the most part, whenever referring to depressive phenomena, C. G. Jung favors the symbolic language, instead of using the psychiatric language of his time. Thus, for example, in some of his letters he uses symbolic expressions such as “*nach unten genötigt sein*”⁹ (being needed in the lower parts), “*das (uns)*

⁶ Walter Odajnyk, “Jung's Contribution to the Understanding of the Meaning of Depression” in *Quadrant* 16 (1983): 45–61.

⁷ Cf. Bernardo Nante, “Notas Para Una Reformulación de La Epistemología Junguiana. Primera Parte” in *Revista de Psicología UCA* 2, no. 3 (2006).

⁸ We will follow the English edition: Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Book. Liber Novus*. Edited by Sonu Shamdasani (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

⁹ Jung's letter to an unknown recipient, dating 09/03/1959 in Carl Gustav Jung, *Briefe III. 1956-1961*. (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2012), 237.

*eigentümliche Loch*¹⁰ (each one's own well), or “*das Mysterium des Nachmittags*” (noonday's mystery)¹¹. On the other hand, along his theoretical work we also find symbols appertaining many spiritual traditions, such as the alchemical nigredo, Saturn and the dark night of the soul. Furthermore, on the *Red Book* (which begins with Jung's profound depressive experience) we come along the symbolic image of the desert, not to mention other images. Certainly, this attitude of prioritizing the symbolic language over psychiatric terminology may already anticipate a peculiar understanding of depressive phenomena and its potential relationship to the mystery of psychic transformation. By this, we are calling up the noted words by Gilbert Durand when he defines the symbol as “a mystery's epiphany”.¹² Correspondingly, in *Psychological Types*, Jung explains that symbols (in contrast to signs) are the best possible expression “of a relatively unknown thing, which (...) cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented”.¹³ As Mircea Eliade points out, the symbolic thinking is not an exclusive domain of the child, the poet or the mentally ill. On the contrary, it is connatural to every human being and reveals certain aspects of psychic reality that an exclusively rationalistic approach fails to perceive: “*Le immagini, i simboli, i miti, non sono creazioni irresponsabili della psiche; essi rispondono a una necessità ed adempiono una funzione importante: mettere a nudo le modalità più segrete dell'essere. Ne consegue che il loro studio ci permette di conoscere meglio l'uomo, l'«uomo tout court» (...)*”.¹⁴ In agreement with Eliade, Jung conceives the symbols of the spiritual traditions as psychic truths and, thus, as manifestations of the most intimate contents of the psyche. As such, they constitute a priceless path for a deeper understanding of the human being.

Thereby, it is necessary to make an approach that recognizes them as such, open to hear the richness of meaning that they whisper. To do this, the symbolic amplification becomes a hermeneutical bridge of maximal importance. In the light of these considerations, and to reconstruct Jung's understanding of depression, it becomes necessary to make:

¹⁰ Jung's letter to Erich Neumann, dating 05/01/1952 in Carl Gustav Jung, *Briefe II. 1946-1955* (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag), 2012, 242.

¹¹ Jung's letter to Erich Neumann, dating 28/02/1952 in Carl Gustav Jung, *Briefe II. 1946-1955* (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2012), 250.

¹² Cfr. Gilbert Durand, *L'Imagination Symbolique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

¹³ Jung, CW 6, § 815. (Cf. also Jung, CW 11, § 307). For a deeper understanding of Jung's concept of the symbol, cf. Jolande Jacobi, *Komplex, Archetypus, Symbol in der Psychologie C. G. Jungs* (Düsseldorf: Walter Verlag, 1957).

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Immagini e Simboli* (Milano: Jaca Book SpA, 1981), 16.

a) An inner contextualization of each of the meanings relating depressive phenomena along Jung's theoretical work.

Throughout a critical approach of Jung's work, it is possible to recognize many different meanings of depressive phenomena. On our point of view, these different meanings are not to be considered separately, but as different moments taking place throughout the evolution of consciousness. The apparent fragmentation that Jung's references to depressive phenomena may present, get enlightened by the work of Erich Neumann, Jung's largely known follower and collaborator. On our point of view, Neumann's work constitutes one of the best contributions to Jungian thought. On his work titled *Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewußtseins (The Origins and History of Consciousness)*, C. G. Jung stated that it reunited and gave order to the *disiecta membra* of his whole work.

b) A contextualization of the symbols that came to be associated with melancholia along Western spiritual traditions.

As we previously highlighted, whenever referring to the experience of depression Jung mostly uses symbols of Western spiritual and philosophical traditions that in Antiquity came to be associated with melancholy. Especially relevant among them are Cronus-Saturn in Greco-Roman tradition, the 'dark night of the soul' in Christian mysticism and the nigredo in Alchemy. To reconstruct the Jungian understanding of depression, it will be necessary to deepen on the original meaning of these symbols, according to their respective tradition. On the second chapter, we attempt a brief approach to each of these symbols throughout their respective contexts, and we later return to them on the fourth chapter establishing a dialog with the Jungian work.

c) A delimitation of Jung's concept of depression in dialog with Freudian theory and modern psychiatry

The 'Weltanschauung' that characterizes Jungian theory is radically different to the Weltanschauung of Freudian theory and modern psychiatry. Since Jung's work has a language of its own, we believe that it deserves to be studied by itself and in its own terms. Nevertheless, it will be also necessary to avoid any isolations by establishing a dialog with Freudian theory whenever it becomes necessary to clarify Jung's understanding of depression. This becomes especially necessary

for distinguishing between the Freudian causal-reductive approach to psychic phenomena, and the Jungian synthetic-constructive approach. At the same time, we can't avoid making a brief reference to the significance given to diagnosis by modern psychiatry, in contrast to Jung's theory.

1.2 On the Significance of 'Understanding'

The phenomenological-hermeneutical method that we will be following aspires to highlight the importance of 'understanding' as a key modality for approaching any psychic phenomena. As a matter of fact, we believe that this is the research attitude to which the Jungian work calls for. As Bernardo Nante points out, this becomes especially evident in the *Red Book*, a highly complex work where Jung himself often refers to the concept of understanding (from the German word: 'Verstehen'), opposing it to the act of explaining ('Erklären').¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is necessary to also avert that the significance of understanding for Jung does not only make itself evident in the *Red Book*, but traverses his entire theoretical work. In fact, Jung opposes the action of understanding to the act of psychiatric diagnosis as a mere way of labeling people: "*Our understanding is in no way advanced when we know for certain the medical designation of the subject's state of mind. The recognition that Schumann suffered from dementia praecox and K. F. Meyer from periodic melancholia contributes nothing whatever to an understanding of their psyches. People are only too ready to stop at the diagnosis, thinking that any further understanding can be dispensed with*".¹⁶

The distinction between explaining and understanding goes back to the work of the German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey (1833-1911), who by the end of XIX century insisted on the necessity of distinguishing between the methodology of the natural sciences and the methodology of the human sciences. Whereas the natural sciences generate new knowledge through explanations following the cause-effect principle, the human sciences call for understanding, which exceeds every explanation and relates to a more holistic, synthetic and integral apprehension. Whereas in natural sciences what matters is the cause, in the human sciences what matters is the meaning. The meaning is an irreducible element that cannot be dissected, and can only be deepened. However, very often the explaining

¹⁵ Bernardo Nante, *El Libro Rojo de Jung. Claves para la comprensión de una obra inexplicable* (Buenos Aires: El Hilo de Ariadna, 2010), 94-96.

¹⁶ Jung, CW 18/I, § 795.

method of natural sciences is applied when approaching human phenomena, although it shouldn't. William James gives a clear example of this when referring to 'medical materialism' and its *'too simpleminded system of thought'* that attempts to explain mystic phenomena on the basis of a physical pathology: *"Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate. (...) All such mental overtensions, it says, are, when you come to the bottom of the matter, mere affairs of diathesis (...), due to the perverted action of various glands which physiology will yet discover. And medical materialism then thinks that the spiritual authority of all such personages is successfully undermined"*.¹⁷

This tendency of applying the explaining method of natural sciences when approaching human phenomena persists until today. One can observe it clearly when it comes to the treatment of psychic phenomena, a danger that Jung already perceived in his clinical practice. This led him to develop his own constructive method, which diverged from Freud's analytic-reductive view. Through the constructive point of view, Jung retained that it was not only important to discover the repressed infantile experiences, but also to discover the 'understanding forwards'¹⁸, that is, the understanding leading to psychological development: *"This is how we have to consider the human psyche, too. Only on one side is it something that has come to be, and, as such, subject to the causal standpoint. The other side is in the process of becoming, and can only be grasped synthetically or constructively. The causal standpoint merely inquires how this psyche has become what it is, as we see it today. The constructive standpoint asks how, out of this present psyche, a bridge can be built into its own future"*.¹⁹

Jung was far from disesteeming the value of the causal-reductive standpoint, but he warned every now and again of the risk of falling into reductionisms. Thereby, by accepting Jung's invitation to the 'understanding' standpoint and thus by trying to deepen our understanding of depressive phenomena, we are asking ourselves about the significance of that soul's 'bridge into its own future': *"Cause alone does not make development possible. For the psyche the reduction ad causam is the very reverse of development; it binds the libido to the elementary facts. From the standpoint of rationalism this is all that can be desired, but from the standpoint of the psyche it is lifeless and comfortless boredom (...) the psyche cannot always remain on this level but must go on developing, the causes transforming themselves into means to an end, into symbolical expressions for the way*

¹⁷ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans, 1905).

¹⁸ Jung, CW 3, § 391.

¹⁹ Jung, CW 3, § 399.

that lies ahead. The exclusive importance of the cause, i.e., thus disappears and emerges again in the symbol (...)”.²⁰

Certainly, every attempt towards a deeper understanding will require an equally important attempt of understanding oneself, to which the reader of this work is invited, as well as who is writing. In either case, it is necessary to remember that on the contrary to any explanation (which has a definite beginning and an equally definite ending) the understanding of the symbols, as of every human phenomena, constitutes a permanent task and, as such, it doesn't finish. However, every step forward becomes essential, because it has to do with the 'essence'. In words of Jung: *“The ultimate core of meaning may be circumscribed, but not described. Even so, the bare circumscription denotes an essential step forward in our knowledge (...)*”.²¹

1.3 Depression as Complex Phenomena: the Jungian Approach to Psychic Reality

Throughout our research, we will study depression as a psychic reality. However, our methodological reductionism should not be interpreted as an ontological reductionism. Thus, we agree with David Rosen when he states that depression should be understood as a complex reality involving four factors: biological, psychological, social and existential/spiritual.²² For Jung, the psyche does not constitute an isolated agent. On the contrary, it's part of an integral and tripartite anthropology, where the human being is conceived as body, psyche and spirit. According to the Jungian Weltanschauung (and in agreement with the traditional anthropologies) the psyche constitutes an immediate reality. As such, it fulfills a mediating function: *“All that I experience is psychic. Even physical pain is a psychic image which I experience; my sense-impressions- for all that they force upon me a world of impenetrable objects occupying space- are psychic images, and these alone constitute my immediate experience, for they alone are the immediate objects of my consciousness (...). We are in truth so wrapped about by psychic images that we cannot penetrate at all to the essence of things external to ourselves. All our knowledge consists of the stuff of the psyche which, because it alone is immediate, is superlatively real”*.²³

²⁰ Jung, CW 8, § 46.

²¹ Jung, CW 9/I, § 265.

²² David Rosen, “Depression and Suicide” in *Open Questions in Analytical Psychology: Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Congress for Analytical Psychology Zurich 1995* (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 1997), 612–19.

²³ Jung, OC8, § 680.

At the same time, for Jung psychic reality is not only immediate, but fundamentally creative: *“I am indeed convinced that creative imagination is the only primordial phenomenon accessible to us, the real Ground of the psyche, the only immediate reality. Therefore, I speak of ‘esse in anima’, the only form of being that we can experience directly. We can distinguish no form of being that is not psychic in the first place”*.²⁴

As an immediate and creative reality, the psyche does not only get affected by the body and the spirit (understood as a hypothetic dimension of meaning and sense), but it does also have an impact on the body and can become an obstacle or a channel for the manifestation of the spirit. That’s why every psychological approach of depression calls for a permanent dialog with the disciplines of the body, and the disciplines of the spirit.

²⁴ Letter from Jung to Dr. Kurt Plachte, dating 10/01/1929, in Jung, *Briefe I*, 86.

2. SYMBOLISM OF MELANCHOLY IN WESTERN SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

Already having established the methodological criteria for our research, in this chapter we will make an introduction to some of the symbols that came to be associated with melancholy along Western spiritual traditions. As we have already highlighted, we believe they constitute an important hermeneutical key for clarifying Jung's understanding of depression. However, before diving into the symbolic perspective, it is necessary to make a brief historical reference to the concept of melancholy across Western history.

The use of the word 'depression' referring to affective experiences of recurrent sadness or apathy, psychomotor inhibition and moral pain is relatively recent. As Stanley Jackson points out, in 1725 Richard Blackmore (an English poet and physician) was one of the first to use the term 'depression' (Latin *depressio/ deprimere*: to 'press down') to designate a psychological disposition which was as old as humanity itself, but until then (at least since Hippocratic times) had been known by the name of melancholy.

Without a doubt, melancholy could be considered the psychological phenomena that captured the most attention across Western thought over the past two millennia. As it is well-known, melancholy has not only been an object of study in medicine, but also in religion, art and philosophy. We will make some mandatory references to the history of melancholy, but it is beyond our scope to get very much into its detail. In any case, there already exist many treatises on the subject that the reader will be able to consult.²⁵ For now, it will be sufficient to say that, for over the past 2000 years and more, melancholy has not only been considered an illness. It also constituted a temperament and a passing mood, which were not necessarily pathological. Furthermore, it even got to be understood as a divine gift related to the destiny of the exceptional individual. According to ancient Hippocratic

²⁵ We mention a few of them: Stanley Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). See also: Alina Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God: A Study in the Genealogy, Hermeneutics, and Therapeutics of Depression* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011). Jean Clair, "Sole nero. Genio e follia in Occidente. Note e progetti per un'esposizione" in *Arcipelago Malinconia. Scenari e parole dell'interiorità*. Ed. por Biancamaria Frabotta (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2001), 169–76.

medicine and psychology (which goes on until the Renaissance), the black bile (ancient greek: μέλας “black” and χολή “bile”) constituted one of the four fundamental humors. As such, it was an integral component of every human being (along with blood, phlegm and yellow bile) and only its imbalance led to illness.²⁶

At the same time, the Hippocratic classification established a relationship between microcosmos and macrocosmos, since the four temperaments corresponded themselves with the four elements, the four cardinal points, the four seasons, the subdivisions of the day and the life phases. In words of Ioan P. Couliano: “*The series of yellow bile comprises fire, the wind Eurus, summer, high noon, and maturity; that of blood air, the Zephyr, spring, morning, youth; that of black bile the earth, the wind Boreas, autumn, evening, and the age of sixty*”.²⁷

The predominance of one of the humors determined the temperament: choleric or bilious, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic. The melancholic temperament was considered the most unfortunate of the four types. However, the unflattering description of the melancholic type was soon relativized by some authors that averted in melancholy a condition that frequently came along with the geniality of the exceptional individual. Without a doubt, the widely known Problem XXX by Pseudo-Aristotle (which some specialists attribute to Theophrastus²⁸) is the testimony that best reflects this re-signification of melancholy, in which converge the medical Hippocratic notion of melancholy and the platonic notion of divine madness: “*Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly melancholics, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?*”²⁹

The idea of melancholy intended as a spiritual gift related to the destiny of the exceptional individual gravitates, under many symbolic forms, across the entire Western history, and starts to slowly vanish in modern times. In his essay entitled “*Malinconia senza Dei*”, James Hillman argues that, when changing its name to ‘depression’, melancholy lost its original meaning of a cosmic force, thus becoming a synonym of illness.³⁰ However, the symbols that speak for this antique dimension of melancholy as a gift are beyond time, and constitute a treasure for our topic of research. Actually, Jung refers to them more than once.

²⁶ Hipócrates, *Tratados hipocráticos* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), Vol. I, 284.

²⁷ Ioan P. Couliano, “Melancholy and Saturn” in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 46.

²⁸ Walter Müri, “Melancholie und schwarze Galle” in *Museum Helveticum* 10, no. 1 (1953), 21–38.

²⁹ Aristotle quoted by Klibansky, Saxl & Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1964), 18.

³⁰ Cf. James Hillman, “Malinconia Senza Dei” in *Arcipelago Malinconia. Scenari e parole dell’interiorità* Ed. by Biancamaria Frabotta (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2001), 3-16.

In this sense, we believe it is necessary to establish a dialog between the Jungian theoretical work and the symbols of melancholy along Western spiritual traditions. We will particularly refer to Cronus-Saturn in Greco-Roman tradition, the ‘dark night of the soul’ in Christian mysticism and the nigredo in alchemy. Most certainly, among these contexts alchemy constitutes the ultimate key source to the entire Jungian work³¹. However, we cannot avoid researching the symbolism of Saturn and the dark night of the soul, since all these traditions do not flow in parallel. On the contrary, they often relate to each other, conforming a vivid unity of symbolic meaning. To justify the choice of these symbolic contexts, we will make a brief introduction to each one of them.

2.1 Saturn in the Greco-Roman tradition:

It’s hard to establish the exact point of Western history, at which the symbolic association between the ‘gift’ of melancholy and Saturn begun to take place. As it usually happens with the symbolic images and myths, one can clearly recognize when they flourish, but its real origin often vanishes in the mists of time. In their largely known work on *Saturn and melancholy*, Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl declare that this connection would have been first established in the IX century by some Arabic authors (Abu-Masar, Alcabitius), whose astrological notion of Saturn as a planet converges with the Roman god Saturn and the mythical Greek Cronus: “*Even in the sources from which the Arabic astrological notion of Saturn had arisen, the characteristics of the primeval Latin god of crops Saturn had been merged with those of Kronos, the son of Uranus, whom Zeus had dethroned and castrated, as well as with Chronos the god of time, who in turn had been equated with the two former even in antiquity; to say nothing of ancient oriental influences, whose significances we can only roughly estimate*”.³²

On the other hand, in his book entitled *Stanzas* Giorgio Agamben argues that the ambivalence of melancholy was already known since the Christian Middle Ages.³³ However, Ioan P. Couliano stated clearly: “*Indeed, the ambiguity of Saturn was no more foreign to the Middle Ages than to antiquity, but Ficino should probably be credited with having superimposed the two faces of*

³¹ For an introduction on the significance of alchemy for the Jungian theory, cf. Bernardo Nante y Francisco García Bazán, “Introducción a la edición española” en Carl Gustav Jung, *Psicología y alquimia* OC 12 (Madrid: Trotta, 2005).

³² Klibansky, Saxl & Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1964), 133.

³³ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

“Saturnism” upon the two faces –the bestial one and the face of genius- belonging to melancholy”.³⁴ On the undoubted ambivalence that reunites the destinies of Saturn and melancholy, Klibansky et. Al., assert: “It was not only the combination of cold and dryness that linked black bile with the apparently similar nature of the star; nor was it only the tendency to depression, loneliness and visions, which the melancholic shared with the planet of tears, of solitary life and of soothsayers; above all, there was an analogy of action. Like melancholy, Saturn, that demon of the opposites, endowed the soul both with slowness and stupidity and with the power of intelligence and contemplation”.³⁵

As Couliano points out, this symbolic convergence reaches its maximum flourishing in the Florentine Renaissance. The words of Marsilio Ficino reflect it clearly: “The nature of the melancholic humor follows the quality of earth, which never dispersed like the other elements, but concentrated more strictly in itself... such is also the nature of Mercury and Saturn, in virtue of which the spirits, gathering themselves at the center, bring back the apex of the soul from what is foreign to it to what is proper to it, fix it in contemplation, and allow it to penetrate to the center of things”.³⁶

As Alina Feld specifies, in Ficino’s portrait of melancholy (*De vita*) takes place a unique hermeneutical event, because of the convergence of two big symbolic traditions: the Western medical and philosophical tradition (including the Hippocratic theory of the four humors, the platonic notion of divine madness and the pseudo-Aristotelian theory relating melancholy and exceptionality) and the mythological-astrological tradition (Greco-Roman myth of Cronus/ Saturn and astrological symbolism of the planet Saturn).³⁷

Cronus/ Saturn presents a highly complex and ambivalent symbolism, since the many characterizations along the different sources and myths vary dramatically³⁸: castrator of his own father, devourer of his own children, God of the exile, but also of agriculture and the Golden Age, god of divine contemplation and of hidden knowledge, god of the melancholic, but also of the genius.³⁹ As Klibansky et. al. point out, although all the Greek gods manifest ambivalences, in none of them this aspect becomes so sharply emphasized as in Saturn: “His nature is a dual one not only

³⁴ Couliano, *Eros and magic in the Renaissance*, 49.

³⁵ Klibansky et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 158-59.

³⁶ Ficino quoted by Agamben, *Stanzas*, 12-13. For the links between melancholy and Saturn in Ficino, see also: “Melancholy and Saturn”, in Couliano, *Eros and magic in the Renaissance*.

³⁷ See “Children of Saturn” in Alina Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God*, 43-61.

³⁸ As every symbolic study shows, the many aspects of a symbol, although coming from different contexts, may be understood as the many facets of one totality which, ultimately, constitutes a mystery.

³⁹ On the symbolism of Saturn see “Sobre Saturno” in Natale Conti, *Mitología* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1988), 116-26.

*with regard to his effect on the outer world, but with regard to his own –as it were, personal- destiny, and this dualism is so sharply marked that Kronos might fairly be described as god of opposites”.*⁴⁰

From a different perspective, Augusto Vitale also supports the idea of an own personal destiny that would make itself evident along the many ‘graces’ and ‘disgraces’ in Saturn’s drama. We agree with Vitale’s statement regarding the possibility of understanding Saturn in relationship to an individuation process: *“The entire story of Chronus seems guided by the leitmotif of his dogged search for and defense of his own individuality. This dramatic aspect is that which distinguishes Cronus from the other Gods. (...) The risks Cronus runs are basically those of death: in the first stage, a death in the form of non-birth, of being prevented from being born; in the second stage, a death as loss of himself”.*⁴¹

Similarly, Ficino also pays attention to the factor of individuality shared by the symbolism of Saturn and melancholy. On this, Feld asserts: *“Ficino notes that the domain signified by Saturn is that of the exceptional individual: Saturn cannot signify the common quality and lot of the human race, but only that of an individual set apart from others, divine or brutish, blessed or bowed down with extreme misery. (...) Since Saturn signifies the individual and also melancholy, individuality and melancholy become codependent”.*⁴²

Since Jungian theory defines the psychic cure in relationship to the individuation process and the realization of one’s own singularity, in the sense of becoming one’s own potentialities, we believe that it could be meaningful to study Jung’s understanding of depression in the light of Saturn’s symbolism.⁴³ This becomes fruitful in two ways: the symbolism of Saturn may shed light on Jung’s understanding of depression and, at the same time, Jung’s understanding of depression may help to understand Saturn’s symbolism from a psychological point of view. This way, through a symbolic amplification, the mythical elements and the psychological elements mutually clarify. Although showing some slight differences, we can find an antecedent of this approach in the already mentioned

⁴⁰ Klibansky et. al, *Saturn and Melancholy*, 134.

⁴¹ Augusto Vitale, “The Archetype of Saturn or the Transformation of the Father” in *Fathers and Mothers*, ed. Patricia Berry (Dallas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1973), 48.

⁴² Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God*, 55.

⁴³ The references to Saturn in the Jungian work are multiple, especially regarding the alchemical nigredo. For example, in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* Jung mentions the alchemist Michael Maier and his pilgrimage through the Ostia Nili, a journey that begins in Saturn and ends in Saturn: *“Saturn has here changed from a star of ill men into a “domus barbae” (House of the Beard), where the ‘wisest of all’, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, imparts wisdom”.* Jung, CW 14 /I, § 303. As Ficino, Jung had recognized himself as a Saturn’s child, an anecdotic but still curious fact. In a letter dating 1955, he states: *“The ruler of my birth, old Saturnus, slowed down my maturation process to such an extent that I became aware of my own ideas only at the beginning of the second half of my life, i.e., exactly with 36 years”.* (Letter from Jung to Upton Sinclair dating 25/02/1955 in Jung, *Letters II*, 232).

study by Augusto Vitale.⁴⁴ Alluding to the hermeneutical possibilities of Saturn's symbolic universe, A. Feld also states: "*The observations on Saturnine nature allow for highly complex and contradictory hermeneutical possibilities*".⁴⁵

As it is well known, in the Greco-Roman tradition the figures of Cronus and Saturn often overlap. Taking this into account, we will refer to Greek mythology, as well as to Roman mythology. Eventually, we will also refer to other contexts since Saturn's symbolism also manifests in other traditions (hermeticism, astrology, alchemy and folklore).

2.2 The Dark Night of the Soul in Christian Mysticism

Across history, the Christian tradition has acknowledged different types of spiritual dryness that might come along the path of spiritual transformation: the spiritual tepidity of serving two masters (Mt 6: 24), the terrifying 'noonday demon' of acedia –subtly described by Evagrius Ponticus⁴⁶-, the illness –and eventually also subterfuge-, which Santa Teresa of Avila described as melancholy⁴⁷, distinguishing it from spiritual dryness, just to mention a few examples.⁴⁸

In either case, St. John of the Cross is undoubtedly the one author where the treatment and study of spiritual dryness along the mystic pathway arrives to its maximum degree of subtlety. In fact, according to St. John of the Cross the psychological and spiritual dryness –expressed under the symbol of the night- turns out to be a mystical stage on the pathway towards the union of the soul with the divine. The phenomenological similarity, not to say coincidence, between the psychic experiences that St. John of the Cross illustrates under the symbol of the 'dark night of the soul', and the clinical picture that psychiatry describes under the title of depression is largely known and –to some extent-indisputable.⁴⁹ As Javier Álvarez points out: "*Through a confrontation between the*

⁴⁴ While Vitale (1977) focuses on Saturn's myth as a symbol of the father, our proposal includes a wider perspective attending Saturn as a symbol of the threshold. Certainly, this includes the father-child dynamics, but also goes beyond it.

⁴⁵ Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God*, 54.

⁴⁶ Evagrius Póntico, *Trattato pratico sulla vita monastica* (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1992). Evagrius Ponticus considered acedia as a sin, a moral connotation which was still absent in Greek melancholy. However, Agamben (1993) states that the ambivalent connotations of acedia and melancholy mutually influenced each other, and thus criticizes Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl for not having included the patristic literature on the 'noonday's demon' in their analysis of Durer's Melancholy.

⁴⁷ Cf. Mónica Balltandre Pla, "Encuentros entre Dios y la melancolía: los consejos de Teresa de Ávila sobre cómo se han de tratar las melancólicas de sus 'Fundaciones'" in *Revista de Historia de La Psicología* 28, no. 2/3 (2007), 197–203.

⁴⁸ Despite the different names, it is necessary to avert that in some authors these psychological and spiritual phenomena sometimes get distinguished, while in others they overlap.

⁴⁹ On the links between the depressive state from the point of view of psychiatry, and the experience of the dark night of the soul, cf. Javier Álvarez, *Mística y Depresión: San Juan de La Cruz* (Madrid: Trotta, 1997). By the way, the suffering

*passive night of the spirit according to Saint John of the Cross and the endogenous depression according to psychiatric manuals, one can tell that it is clearly the same phenomenological process, and this is something that cannot be overlooked at all by any psychiatrist handling any descriptions relating endogenous or melancholic depression”.*⁵⁰

Analogously, Daniel Hell affirms: “*Saint John of the Cross conceived the dark night as a purification that could lead to an illumination. Yet by judging by its appearance the dark night meets mostly the criteria that according the WHO should meet any depressive episode. From a symptomatic point of view, it is also hard to distinguish from acedia (...)*”.⁵¹

However, it should be noticed that this phenomenological affinity (which today comes to be interpreted in the most different ways) was already recognized by St. John of the Cross himself, who insisted on the need of distinguishing the dark night experience from melancholy intended as a disease, and even from the sin associated to acedia.⁵² On his prologue to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the mystic clearly states: “*It is a hard and miserable thing for souls when they cannot comprehend their own state, nor meet with anyone who can. For when God leads any one along the highest road of obscure contemplation and dryness, such an one will think himself lost; and in this darkness and trouble, distress and temptation, some will be sure to tell him, like the comforters of Job, that his sufferings are the effects of melancholy, or of disordered health, or of natural temperament, or, it may be, of some secret sin for which God has abandoned him. Yea, they will decide at once that he is, or that he has been, exceedingly wicked, seeing that he is thus afflicted*”.⁵³

Yet at the same time, he warns of the opposite danger: “*For there are persons who will think, or their confessors for them, that God is leading them along the road of the dark night of spiritual purgation, and yet, perhaps, all is nothing but imperfection of sense or spirit; and others also who*

of such anguish and desolation experiences on the mystic pathway is not exclusive to St. John of the Cross, but goes through the lives and doctrines of numberless Christian mystics, that came before and after the Spanish mystic. Just to give a few examples, Jean van Leeuwen also makes a detailed description of the sufferings that the soul experiences on its way to God, and John Tauler analyzes the torments that come along the mystic path.

⁵⁰ Translation mine. Javier Álvarez, *Mística y depresión*, 16.

⁵¹ Translation mine. Regina Bäumer and Michael Platting ed., *Noche Oscura y depresión, crisis espirituales y psicológicas: naturaleza y diferencias* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2011), 17.

⁵² One important antecedent of these distinctions is to be found in Santa Teresa de Avila, who already distinguished between melancholy as an illness (which required medical intervention), and melancholy as a moral weakness (that is, as a subterfuge for the exemption of the work duties). However, Santa Teresa also spoke of the spiritual dryness which was an inherent stage of every mystic path, since it was through the soul’s wounds that God spoke to the mystic. Even Santa Teresa suffered from this inner dryness which, by the way, was phenomenologically alike to certain melancholic experiences. Regarding this, it’s worth mentioning St. Paul’s distinction between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow: “*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death*”. (2Co 7, 10)

⁵³ Saint John of the Cross, “Prologue” in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, § 4.

*think they do not pray when they pray much, and, on the other hand; there are those who think they pray much when they do not in reality pray scarcely at all”.*⁵⁴

The Spanish mystic’s remarks allow to glimpse the extreme affinity between the dark night experience and melancholy, but also a subtle distinction. We believe that these subtle remarks not always hold together among some modern interpretations of the dark night phenomena. Thereby, some modern medical studies tend to develop a pathologizing approach, reducing the dark night experience to a morbid depression (sometimes recognizing the value of Saint John of the Cross’s work, while other times even denying it). On the opposite shore, some traditionalist studies that try to rescue the spiritual significance of the dark night, on occasions tend to overlook its psychological meaning. In other words, whereas according to some approaches the phenomenological affinity ends up in a confusion, according to others, the distinction attempt ends up in a radical separation. Within such a state of the art, our research aspires to develop an intermediate position, in the line of our phenomenological-hermeneutical approach. Whenever referring to the ‘dark night of the soul’ as a symbolic resource for our research, we start with the assumption that the dark night gives an account of a suffering experience which is as real (i.e. symptomatic) as symbolic. Symptomatic, because it speaks for an actual torment that meets the same symptoms as any other depression, and even worse (as St. John of the Cross states). Symbolic, because the main character understands it as a threshold experience towards a state of inner plenitude, which happens to make a subtle but undisputable distinction with any other morbid state that would only lead to a deterioration of personality. On this, Mireille Mardon synthetizes in a clarifying way the differences between morbid melancholy and the dark night experience: *“As a matter of fact, on the contrary to the melancholic crisis, it seems as if the night of the spirit produces a real psychological change, with the subject emerging from it transformed, as the caterpillar turning into a butterfly”.*⁵⁵

In the light of these asseverations, one should also consider the words of St. John of the Cross when affirming that only the one person who has experienced this, will also be able to communicate something of it, or at least to try it: *“Before we enter on an explanation of these, it is right we should understand that they are the words of the soul already in the state of perfection, which is the union of love with God, when it has gone through the straits, tribulations and severities, by means of the spiritual training, of the strait way of everlasting life, by which ordinarily the soul attains to this high and divine union with God”.*⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibidem, § 6.

⁵⁵ Translation mine. Mireille Mardon, cited on Javier Álvarez, *Mística y depresión*, 254.

⁵⁶ SJC, “Prologue” to *Dark Night*, § 2.

However, this experience is to such point ineffable that it can only be ‘darkly’ communicated through the language of symbol. As St. John of the Cross points out: *“For so great are the trials, and so profound the darkness, spiritual as well as corporal, through which souls must pass, (...) that no human learning can explain them, nor experience describe them. He only who has passed through them can know them, but even he cannot explain them”*.⁵⁷ According to this, we agree with Jean Baruzi when affirming that St. John of the Cross’s night is not to be understood only as a sign, but as an authentic symbol: *“On Ascent to Mount Carmel and The Dark Night we find the symbol of the night in a pure state. And since the poem “The dark night” leads us to the most elevate mystical phases, we can be sure that within the work by Saint John of the Cross the night symbol is clearly an utter symbol (...). Thanks to a mystical imagination’s prodigy, the night is at the same time the most intimate translation of the experience and the experience itself (...). Therefore, it’s unmeasurable and deserves to be called a symbol, technically speaking”*.⁵⁸

We highlight Baruzi’s assertive observation on the symbol of the night as the experience itself, as well as its intimate translation: an experience of torment, but also projected towards a higher meaning. The symbol of the night according to St. John of the Cross is a pure subtlety. It thus becomes a landscape of the soul, since it manifests a variety of meanings: it’s a night as the starting point of the soul (purgation of the appetites), it’s a night as the path through which the soul passes and it’s also a night as an arrival point, i.e., God, who is a night for the soul in this life: *“The journey of the soul to the divine union is called night for three reasons. The first is derived from the point from which the soul sets out, the privation of the desire of all pleasure in all things of this world, by detachment therefrom. This is as night for every desire and sense of man. The second, from the road by which it travels; that is faith, for faith is obscure, like night, to the understanding. The third, from the goal to which it ends, God, incomprehensible and infinite, who in this life is as night to the soul”*.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the night according to St. John of the Cross is also a ‘first night’ (purgative), a ‘midnight’ (illuminative, faith night) and a ‘third night or *antelucano*’ (unitive, contemplation): *“(...) the three nights are but one divided into three parts. The first, which is that of sense, may be likened to the commencement of night (...). The second, of faith, may be compared to mid-night, which is*

⁵⁷ SJC, “Prologue” to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, § 1.

⁵⁸ Translation mine. Jean Baruzi, *San Juan de la Cruz y el problema de la experiencia mística* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1991), 328-329. Baruzi also expresses: *“The symbol demands us to express not the image for the idea, but the idea for the image”*. Ibidem, 331.

⁵⁹ SJC, I A, 2, 1.

utter darkness. The third resembles the close of night, which is God, when the dawn of day is at hand”.⁶⁰

Yet it is still the one and only night, from which are part the night of the senses (“It now remains for me to give certain counsels whereby the soul may know how to enter this night of sense and may be able so to do. To this end it must be known that the soul habitually enters this night of sense in two ways: the one is active; the other passive”⁶¹), and the night of the spirit, both manifesting an active and a passive dimension.

The night of the senses is intended to be a path for the purgation of appetites, which refer to the most external and inferior part of the soul: “The soul must of necessity –if we would attain the divine union of God- pass through the dark night of mortification of the desires, and self-denial in all things. The reason is this; all love we bestow on creatures is in the eyes of God mere darkness (...)”.⁶² At this point the night comes to be associated with nudity, not of the things themselves, but of their desire in the sense of an attachment: “I call this detachment the night of the soul, for I am not speaking here of the absence of things (...) but of that detachment which consists in suppressing desire (...) even though possession may be still retained”.⁶³ On the other hand, the night of the senses on its passive dimension becomes a purgative contemplation: “It went forth, from itself and from all things, in a dark night, by which is meant here purgative contemplation (...) which leads the soul to deny itself and all besides”.⁶⁴

On the other hand, the active night of the spirit refers to the purgation made by the night on the superior and spiritual part of the human being: “The soul, which God is leading onwards, enters not into the union of love at once when it has passed through the aridities and trials of the first purgation and night of sense; yea, rather it must spend some time, perhaps years, after quitting the state of beginners, in exercising itself in the state of proficient”.⁶⁵ The night of the spirit is much darker, since it reaches not only the senses, but also the understanding, memory and will: “For the darkness of the spiritual part is by far the greater (...). For, however dark a night may be, something can always be seen, but in true darkness nothing can be seen; and thus in the night of sense there still remains some light, for the understanding and reason remain, and are not blinded. But this spiritual

⁶⁰ SJC, I A, 2, 5.

⁶¹ SJC, I A, 13, 1.

⁶² SJC, I A, 4, 1.

⁶³ SJC, I A, 3, 4.

⁶⁴ SJC, I N, 1.

⁶⁵ SJC, II N, 1, 1.

night, which is faith, deprives the soul of everything, both as to understanding and as to sense".⁶⁶ At this point the active night of the spirit is equivalent to the night of faith: *"So that which is to be inferred from this that faith, because it is a dark night, gives light to the soul, which is in darkness (...)"*.⁶⁷ Faith is understood as a void of intellectual activity, as night for the understanding: *"(...) and this second part (of night), which is of faith, belongs to the higher part of man, which is the rational part, and in consequence, more interior and more obscure, since it deprives it of the light of reason, or, to speak more clearly, blinds it; and thus is compared to midnight, which is the depth of night and the darkest part thereof"*.⁶⁸

At its passive stage, the night of spirit becomes again contemplation and supposes a big progress on the spiritual journey, yet also the largest suffering and torment: *"Therefore it is most fitting and necessary, if the soul is to pass to these great things, that this dark night of contemplation should first of all annihilate and undo it in its meannesses, bringing it into darkness, aridity, affliction and emptiness (...)"*.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it is on this passive dimension of the night of the spirit where the soul gets prepared for its ultimate union with the divine: *"The other (night) is that night or spiritual purgation wherein the soul is purified and detached in the spirit, and which subdues and disposes it for the union with God in love"*.⁷⁰

Although Saint John of the Cross distinguishes between the night of sense and the night of spirit, one should remember that he does so for didactic motives, since in practice he believed there to be an intimate correlation between both: *"For it comes to pass, and so it is, that with such yearnings of desire the sensual nature is moved and attracted toward sensual things, so that, if the spiritual part be not enkindled with other and greater yearnings for that which is spiritual, it will be unable to throw off the yoke of nature or to enter this night of sense (...)"*.⁷¹

However, there are at least two elements which all the nights share. On the one hand, their meaning of suffering, torment and tempest for the soul: *"(...) for two reasons this Divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but is likewise affliction and torment"*.⁷² On the other hand, their meaning of threshold or passage, an aspect which we would like to specifically highlight. We believe that the key for the entire mystic process according to St. John of the Cross is to be looked

⁶⁶ SJC, II A, 1, 3.

⁶⁷ SJC, II A, 3, 6.

⁶⁸ SJC, II A, 2, 2.

⁶⁹ SJC, II N, 9, 2.

⁷⁰ SJC, I N, 8, 1.

⁷¹ SJC, I A, 14, 2.

⁷² SJC, II N, 5, 2.

after in the transits or passages that lead from one state of being to another, rather than in those states that constitute the goal of development. As a matter of fact, the Spanish mystic focuses on describing precisely the several crisis that prepare the passage from one stage to the other. For example, the night of the sense prepares for the night of the spirit (where the actual purgation is to take place), and the night of the spirit is to be understood as the gate of the path towards the union with God: *“The strait gate is this night of sense, and the soul detaches itself from sense and strips itself thereof that it may enter by this gate, and establishes itself in faith, which is a stranger to all sense, so that afterwards it may journey by the narrow way, which is the other night—that of the spirit—(...) which is the means whereby the soul is united to God”*.⁷³

The night as an experience of the passage becomes possible because, according to St. John of the Cross, the night as dark as it is, doesn't stand against light but remains its necessary condition of being, i.e., the womb where it generates itself: *“And it is at times as though a door were opened before it into a great brightness, through which the soul sees a light, after the manner of a lightning flash, which, on a dark night, reveals things suddenly, and causes them to be clearly and distinctly seen (...)”*.⁷⁴ In the second Book of “The Dark Night of the Soul” the Spanish mystic also writes: *“(...) although this happy night brings darkness to the spirit, it does so only to give it light in everything; and that, although it humbles it and makes it miserable, it does so only to exalt it and to raise it up; and, although it impoverishes it and empties it of all natural affection and attachment, it does so only that it may enable it to stretch forward, divinely, and thus to have fruition and experience of all things, both above and below, yet to preserve its unrestricted liberty of spirit in them all”*.⁷⁵

As it can be noted, the phenomenology of the night according to St. John of the Cross becomes even subtler as it evolves, since the night transforms itself along with the mystic. This is one of the reasons that motivates us to choose this text as one of the symbolic contexts for our study of depression along the Jungian work.

Throughout his theoretical work, C. G. Jung refers several times to Christian mysticism⁷⁶ (particularly Meister Eckhart, Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of the Cross, among others) as a

⁷³ SJC, I N, 11, 4.

⁷⁴ SJC, II A, 24, 5.

⁷⁵ SJC, II N, 9, 1.

⁷⁶ Comparing to alchemy, the subject of Christian mysticism in Jungian work remains less explored. For a dialogical approach between Saint John of the Cross's work and Jungian psychology, cf. Guenter Benker, „Die dunkle Nacht der Ganzwerdung, C. G. Jung und der Mystiker Johannes vom Kreuz“, *Anal Psychol* 1999; 30, 245-272. Despite their different contexts (one being religious, the other one psychological), C. G. Jung and Saint John of the Cross attend to processes that are somehow related, that is: the accomplishment of a wider personality, the development of the human being towards himself, which includes the spiritual experience, and at the same time making it possible. In Benker words, who worked on the possibility of establishing a dialog between Jung and the Spanish mystic: *“Throughout different*

significant source containing symbolic parallelisms regarding his concept of the individuation process. Although Jung doesn't dedicate any specific writings to St. John of the Cross, he explicitly mentions him more than once. Alluding to the individuation process, Jung states: *"There are spiritual monuments of quite another kind, and they are positive illustrations of our process. (...) In a very different language, St. John of the Cross has made the same problem more readily accessible to the Westerner in his account of the 'dark night of the soul'. That we find it needful to draw analogies from psychopathology and from both Eastern and Western mysticism is only to be expected: the individuation process is, psychically, a border-line phenomenon which needs special conditions in order to become conscious. Perhaps it is the first step along a path of development to be trodden by the men of the future (...)"*.⁷⁷

In another opportunity, C. G. Jung refers more precisely to the 'dark night of the soul' when talking of the melancholic phenomena that may occur throughout an individuation process, and thus establishing a parallelism with the alchemical nigredo: *"It is not immediately apparent why this dark state deserves special praise, since the nigredo is universally held to be of a sombre and melancholy humor reminiscent of death and the grave. But the fact that medieval alchemy had connections with the mysticism of the age, or rather was itself a form of mysticism, allows us to adduce as a parallel to the nigredo the writings of St. John of the Cross concerning the 'dark night'. This author conceives the 'spiritual night' of the soul as a supremely positive state, in which the invisible –and therefore dark- radiance of God comes to pierce and purify the soul"*.⁷⁸

On the relationship between light and darkness along the evolution of consciousness, Jung also states: *"We add to ourselves a bright and a dark, and more light means more night. The urge of consciousness towards wider horizons, however, cannot be stopped; they must needs extend the scope of the personality; if they are not to shatter it"*.⁷⁹ To these words he then adds an explicit reference to St. John of the Cross: *"Cf. what St. John of the Cross says about the 'dark night of the soul'. His interpretation is as helpful as it is psychological"*.⁸⁰

In addition to these references, we will suggest other Jungian allusions which, although in an indirect way, invariably conduct to the symbol of 'the dark night of the soul'. To begin with, the

methods and concepts which one cannot blur, both try to describe what happens when the human being opens himself radically to the Self and the Divine and thus, being ready to transcend the limits of his strait and always unilateral consciousness, allows to be conducted by his unconscious and God in order to experience totality." (Ibid.)

⁷⁷ Jung, CW 8, § 431.

⁷⁸ Jung, CW 16, § 479.

⁷⁹ Jung, OC 9/1, § 563.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Jungian and, by the way also polemic, analysis of Job's biblical drama (paradigmatic book of the righteous sufferer) constitutes a fundamental source of St. John of the Cross's 'dark night'.⁸¹

On the other hand, the symbol of the night appears very often throughout the Jungian work. In relationship to this, it's worth mentioning the symbol of the night journey that usually comes along the myth of the hero, which Jung also relates to the development of consciousness. This aspect is particularly developed in *Symbols of transformation*, where Jung points out to the human figure of the hero or the demon as one of the key symbols of libido. "*Here the symbolism leaves the objective, material realm of astral and meteorological images and takes on human form, changing into a figure who passes from joy to sorrow, from sorrow to joy, and like the sun, now stands high at the zenith and now is plunged into darkest night, only to rise again in new splendor*".⁸²

It should be noted that the elaboration of this book, which marked a before and after Jung's career, temporally coincides with the making of the *Red Book*, where Jung not only theorizes on the night, but narrates his own intimate experiences of the 'night'. Thus, in the *Red Book* we are told that the God image renews itself in the night, and that it is also in the night when Jung encounters his soul: "*I had spoken to my soul during 25 nights in the desert and I had given all my love and submission*".⁸³ Nevertheless, this night not only constitutes a time frame, but becomes a symbol of the tortuous inner path: "*I can no longer say that this or that goal should be reached, or that this or that reason should apply because it is good; instead I grope through mist and night*".⁸⁴ Thereby, on this night path it becomes necessary to cross over one's own darkness with the only guide of one's own inner voice and consciousness: "*Silence and peace come over you if you begin to comprehend the darkness. Only he who does not comprehend the darkness fears the night. Through comprehending the dark, the nocturnal, the abyssal in you, you become utterly simple*".⁸⁵

Last, but not least, on his autobiography Jung tells his well-known dream of going through the darkness holding nothing but a tiny light, that can only remind us of St. John of the Cross's poem of the Dark Night ("*sin otra luz y guía, sino la que en mi corazón ardía...*"): "*It was night in some unknown place, and I was making slow and painful headway against a mighty wind. Dense fog was flying along everywhere. I had my hands cupped around a tiny light which threatened to go out at any moment. Everything depended on my keeping this little light alive. Suddenly I had the feeling that*

⁸¹ To describe the passive night of the spirit St. John of the Cross quotes mostly from the *Book of Job*, the *Psalms* and the *Lamentations*.

⁸² Jung, CW 5, § 251.

⁸³ Jung, "Descent into Hell into the Future", *The Red Book*, 238.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, "Nox secunda", 295.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, "The Anchorite", 270.

*something was coming up behind me. I looked back, and saw a gigantic black figure following me. But at the same moment I was conscious, in spite of my terror, that I must keep my little light going through night and wind, regardless of all dangers”.*⁸⁶

This dream terrified, and at the same time stimulated Jung. Like St. John of the Cross, Jung turns himself to that night or darkness that does not oppose to light, but truly holds it. The path of the one who seriously searches its own totality leads towards it. On a letter to Erich Neumann, who was then traversing a depressive episode, Jung writes: *“Everyone has an ‘abasement’ given in its own personality. Whoever seeks seriously for his own totality, will unsuspectedly fall in his own well, and from this darkness will go out for him the light; though the light cannot be illuminated. If someone feels like being in the light, I would not tell him anything about the darkness, otherwise he would search with his light and find something dark which he is not. The light cannot see its own darkness. But when it decreases, and when the human being also follows his twilight, as he previously followed his light, then he will get into his night”.*⁸⁷ Jung speaks of a light that can only be discovered in the deepest darkness, and Jung advised Neumann to hold on to his heart.

These are some of the explicit Jungian references to the symbol of the ‘dark night of the soul’ and we also pointed out some other ‘implicit echoes’, which we believe allow us to choose the symbol of the ‘dark night’ as a potential context for amplifying the several meanings of depressive phenomena throughout Jungian work. Jung doesn’t develop in detail the ultimate reach of this symbolic convergence between the evolution of consciousness and the overwhelming experiences that take place in St. John of the Cross’ “The Dark Night of the Soul”. However, we believe this parallelism deserves to be deepened and more carefully studied, since it could lead to a major clarifying of Jungian understanding of depression and, why not, of the psychological and spiritual process that St. John of the Cross experienced and described.

⁸⁶ Cf. “Student Years” in Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

⁸⁷ Translation mine from the German edition, Jung’s letter to Erich Neumann dating 05/01/1952 in Jung, *Briefe II*, 242. Following we quote the original text: *„Jedem ist diejenige Erniedrigung, die ihm bekommt, in seinem Charakter mitgegeben. Sucht er seine Ganzheit ernstlich, so wird er unvermutet in das ihm eigentümliche Loch treten, und aus dieser Dunkelheit wird ihm das Licht aufgehen; das Licht aber kann nicht erleuchtet werden. Wenn einer sich im Lichte fühlt, so würde ich ihn nie zur Dunkelheit überreden, denn er würde sonst mit seinem Lichte etwas Schwarzes suchen und finden, das er gar nicht ist. Das Licht kann die ihm eigentümliche Dunkelheit nicht sehen. Nimmt er aber ab, und folgt der Mensch auch seiner Dämmerung, wie er seinem Lichte folgte, so wird er in seine Nacht gelangen“.*

2.3 Nigredo in Alchemy

Visita interiora terrae rectificando invenies occultum lapidem

Azoth de Basilio Valentín

The nigredo or melanosis (blackening) is usually defined as the initial stage of the alchemical work⁸⁸, followed by the albedo, citrinitas and rubedo.⁸⁹ Thus, the alchemist Ripley states: *“Know that your beginning should be made towards sunset, and from there you should turn towards midnight, when the lights cease altogether to shine, and you should remain ninety nights in the dark fire of purgatory without light. Then turn your course towards the east, and you will pass through many different colors”*.⁹⁰ Lyndy Abraham defines the nigredo as *“the initial, black stage of the opus alchymicum in which the body of the impure metal, the matter for the Stone, or the old outmoded state of being is killed, putrified and dissolved into the original substance of creation, the prima materia, in order that it may be renovated and reborn in a new form”*.⁹¹

Far from being considered negatively, the nigredo constitutes a fundamental stage along the alchemical process, since it reveals itself as inherent to every transformation process in a double sense: the dark dimensions of matter can and should be transformed; but, at the same time, they also have a transforming potentiality. Regarding this, E. Edinger cites a passage from an old alchemical text entitled “The Golden Treatise of Hermes”: *“O happy gate of blackness, cries the sage, which art the passage to this so glorious change. Study, therefore, whosoever appliest thyself to this Art, only to know this secret, for to know this is to know all, but to be ignorant of this is to be ignorant of all. For putrefaction precedes the generation of every new form into existence”*.⁹²

⁸⁸ For a classification of the main scholar interpretations of alchemy in contemporary literature, cf.: Bernardo Nante, “Introducción a la alquimia” in *Revista El Hilo de Ariadna* N°5 (Buenos Aires: Malba Fundación Costantini, 2008). Throughout our research, we will approach alchemy from a phenomenological and psychological point of view, as it was also done by C. G. Jung. Among the multiple existent definitions of alchemy, we recall Bernardo Nante’s definition: *“Alchemy is the art of transmuting matter with the scope of redeeming cosmos and the human being from its corruptibility”*. [Translation mine: *“La alquimia es el arte de la transmutación de la materia que tiene el propósito de redimir al cosmos y al hombre de su corruptibilidad”*]. (Nante, “Introducción a la alquimia”, 21).

⁸⁹ Although throughout our research we will specifically address the nigredo stage, it’s important to keep in mind that nigredo is to be understood in relation to the whole alchemical process, i.e., in relation to the other stages. As Jung says: *“The albedo is, so to speak, the daybreak, but not till the rubedo is it sunrise”*. (Jung, CW 12, §334). On this aspect, B. Nante also points out: *“It’s necessary to clarify that each of the stages implies the others and, thus, to a certain point the alchemical process must not be conceived as a succession of steps, but as a deepening of a unique state that comprises multiple states”*. (Translation mine. Nante, “Introducción a la alquimia”, 28).

⁹⁰ Jung quoting George Ripley, OC 9/2, § 231.

⁹¹ Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 135.

⁹² Edward Edinger, *Anatomy of the psyche: Alchemical symbolism in psychotherapy* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1994), 149.

Certainly, in alchemy the nigredo is always referred to as a key to the entire opus. However, the deep meaning of nigredo still holds some subtlety that, on our point of view, not always is properly evidenced. To this end, we would like to highlight some appreciations regarding the meaning of nigredo as a ‘stage’, as well as its feature of being ‘initial’.

On the one hand, when in alchemy comes to be talked of nigredo as a stage, it should be kept in mind that it does not only refer to the stage of the opus in a chronological sense, but also to:

- a) **The alchemist’ psychic states** that take place at this stage, that is: melancholic states, sentiments of despair, guilt, sadness, suffering, torment. On this, Jung points out: *“The nigredo not only brought decay, suffering, death, and the torments of hell visibly before the eyes of the alchemist, it also cast the shadow of its melancholy over his own solitary soul”*.⁹³ Lyndy Abraham analogously comments: *“The beginning of the opus is a time of bloodshed and lamentation. Fabricius commented on the opening emblem of Trismosin’s Splendor Solis: “Its season of spring is a season of sacrifice, its river a life stream of blood”. During this black time of suffering, despair and melancholia may cast their shadow over the alchemist”*.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the author of the *Aurora Consurgens* supplicates: *“cleanse the horrible darkness of our mind”*⁹⁵, and Michael Maier states: *“There is in our chemistry a certain noble substance, in the beginning whereof is wretchedness with vinegar, but in its ending joy with gladness. Therefore, I have supposed that the same will happen to me, namely that I shall suffer difficulty, grief and weariness at first, and in the end shall come to glimpse pleasanter and easier things”*.⁹⁶

- b) **The conditions of the matter to be worked upon:** Issac Newton wrote on his “Index chemicus”: *“Materia prima is that which has been stripped of every form by putrefaction so that a new form can be introduced, that is, the black matter in the regimen of Saturn”*.⁹⁷ Throughout the psychological approach that Jung makes on alchemy, this dark quality of matter corresponds to the unconscious: *“The dawn state corresponds to the unconscious; in*

⁹³ Jung, CW 14, § 493.

⁹⁴ Abraham, *A dictionary of alchemical imagery*, 135.

⁹⁵ The author of the *Aurora Consurgens* quoted by Jung, CW 12, § 383.

⁹⁶ Michael Maier quoted by Jung, OC CW, § 387.

⁹⁷ Isaac Newton quoted by Abraham, *A dictionary of alchemical imagery*, 153.

*alchemical terms, it is the chaos, the massa confuse or nigredo (...). The alchemical work starts with the descent into darkness (nigredo), i.e., the unconscious”.*⁹⁸

c) **The types of operations to be carried out:** Mortificatio, putrefactio, calcinatio, iteratio, etc.

Therefore, one can say that in alchemy the color of each stage combines and articulates categories that our modern consciousness and contemporary epistemology tend to separate. As J. Hillman points out: *“The alchemical mode of science maintained the law of similitudes between all participants in any activity: the work, the way of working and the worker. All must conform; whereas we can have a science in which the subjectivity of the experimenter may be radically separated from the experimental design and from the materials of the experiment”.*⁹⁹ This aspect had been well-known to Jung who, when mentioning the motive of torment in alchemy¹⁰⁰, states that it sometimes shows up in relationship to the alchemist (as tormenter, as well as tormented), other times in relationship to the prime mater to be transformed, and even to the lapis, i.e., the arcane substance.

On the other hand, regarding the meaning of ‘initial’, it should be averted that in several alchemical passages nigredo is not only associated to the beginning of the alchemical work, but also to intermediate stages, and even to its end. According to Hillman, there are several interpretations of the nigredo phenomena: *“The optimistic and more Christianized readings of alchemical texts give to the nigredo mainly an early place in the work, emphasizing progress away from it to better conditions when blackness will be overcome (...). This is only a possible reading. The texts make very clear that the nigredo is not identical with the materia prima (...). The nigredo is not the beginning, but an accomplished stage. Black is an achievement. It is a condition of something having been worked upon (...).”*¹⁰¹

Again Jung already recognized that nigredo more than once was understood as the result of an earlier operation: *“It must be emphasized that in alchemy the dark initial state of nigredo is often regarded as the product of a previous operation, and that it therefore does not represent the absolute beginning”.*¹⁰² Whereas in *Psychology and alchemy* he points out: *“The nigredo or blackness is the*

⁹⁸ Jung, CW 9/I, § 230.

⁹⁹ James Hillman, “The Seduction of Black” in *Spring* 61 (1997), 5.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Jung, CW 13, §§ 439-447.

¹⁰¹ James Hillman, “The Seduction of Black”, 7.

¹⁰² Jung, CW 16, § 376. On a footnote (n. 26) he adds: *“Where the nigredo is identified with the putrefaction it does not come at the beginning, as for example in fig. 6 of our series pictures from the Rosarium philosophorum (Art. Aurif., II, p. 254). In Mylius, Philosophia reformata, the nigredo appears not only in the fifth grade of the work, which is celebrated*

*initial state, either present from the beginning as a quality of the prima materia, the chaos or massa confusa, or else produced by the separation (solutio, separatio, divisio, putrefactio) of the elements. If the separated condition is assumed at the start, as sometimes happens, then a union of opposites is performed in the likeness of a union of male and female (called the coniugium, matrimonium, coniunctio, coitus) followed by the death of the product of the union (mortificatio, calcinatio, putrefactio) and a corresponding nigredo”.*¹⁰³

At the same time, there are several references regarding nigredo at the end of the process, although in a transformed state: *“Mercurius stands at the beginning and end of the work: he is the prima materia, the caput corvi, the nigredo; as dragon he devours himself and as dragon he dies, to rise again in the lapis.*¹⁰⁴ That’s also why the alchemical opus often is defined as circular=circular. In the Koré Kosmou Isis teaches: *“Kamefis, the ancestor of us all, honored me with the perfect black”.*¹⁰⁵ In this context the ‘perfect black’ constitutes the gift of alchemy.

The fact that nigredo is not only to be considered as the beginning of the work (i.e., chronologically) but also as an intermediate stage and even as a final stage (although transformed, under the form of a dark light or a luminous night), allows us to think of alchemical darkening as presenting many shades or, in other words, many different types of ‘black’.¹⁰⁶ Whereas in St. John of the Cross there’s not one night, but several nights (that in the end are one and the same), in alchemy we come along an analogous phenomenon, since there’s not only one, but many types of nigredo, which in the end are one and the same. In any case, the darkness should not be understood as opposite to the light of consciousness, but containing a light of its own.¹⁰⁷

Taking these considerations into account, we believe that the meaning of nigredo as an “initial stage” deserves to be understood in relationship to the profound meaning of the word “initium”, which is implicit in every initiatic tradition, alchemy being one of them. The etymology of the word “initial”

in the darkness of Purgatory; but further on, we read in contradiction to this: ‘And this denigration is the beginning of the work, an indication of the putrefaction’.

¹⁰³ Jung, CW 12, § 334.

¹⁰⁴ Jung, CW 12, § 404.

¹⁰⁵ Nante and Bazan, “Introducción a la edición española” in OC 12, XV.

¹⁰⁶ On his article “The seduction of black”, J. Hillman criticizes the conception of black as a non-color and calls for the need of distinguishing different types of black. On this argument, cf. also: Tom Cheetham, “Black Light. Hades, Lucifer and the Secret of the Secret. A Contribution to the Differentiation of Darkness” in *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 68 (2001): 59–104.

¹⁰⁷ From the perspective of Islamic mysticism, Henry Corbin argues: *“(…) there is one Darkness which is only Darkness; it can intercept light, conceal it, and hold it captive. When the light escapes from it... this darkness is left to itself, falls back upon itself; it does not become light. But there is another Darkness, called by our mystics the Night of light, luminous Blackness, black light”.* [Henry Corbin quoted by Tom Cheetham, “Black light”, 90] For the symbol of the black sun (sol niger) from a Jungian perspective, cf. Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun. The Alchemy and Art of Darkness* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

refers to in-ire, in the sense of entering, of coming in, (latin: *initū(m)*, deriv. de *inītus*, *inīre* ‘to enter, to come in’). Thus, the profound meaning of every beginning is not that much related to a simply chronological and linear dimension, but to an ontological dimension, that is, to the beginning of being: where one really begins to be. In agreement to this, M. L. von Franz states: *“Every dark thing one falls into can be called an initiation. To be initiated into a thing means to go into it. The first step is generally falling into the dark place, and usually appears in a dubious or negative form –falling into something, or being possessed by something. The Shamans say that being a medicine man begin by falling into the power of the demons; the one who pulls out of the dark place becomes the medicine man, and the one who stays in it is the sick person. You can take every psychological illness as an initiation. Even the worst things you fall into are an effort of initiation, for you are in something which belongs to you, and now you must get out of it”*.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, nigredo reveals itself as the initial stage of the work in the sense of a key, **the** key to the work, because without it nothing can begin nor develop. In effect, it should be taken into an account that in antiquity alchemy was known as the ‘black science’ or as the ‘black art’, and the root of his word ‘khem’ alludes to black earth. In other words, alchemy (al-kemia) means ‘the black’, the ‘black earth’, intending the black earth of the Nile, which invades the arid surface, and at the same time fertilizes and transforms it. Plutarchus refers to Egypt as one of the blackest lands, which is called Kemia, comparing it to the black of the eye, as well as to a heart.¹⁰⁹

As Bernardo Nante points out, alchemy constitutes the ultimate symbolic key to the understanding of C. G. Jung’s work. In agreement to this, we believe that the many shades of meaning regarding nigredo in alchemy are crucial for our research on the meaning of depressive phenomena according to Jung. As a matter of fact, this amplification has been already undertaken by Jung. However, we will try to put some order on it (whenever possible) and to deepen it, whenever required. Regarding the alchemical work as a symbolic parallel of the individuation process, Jung said that it could be described as: *“a projection of the individuation process which takes place even without the participation of consciousness, however when consciousness does participate in the process, all the emotions associated with a religious revelation are experienced”*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Marie Louise von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1972), 64.

¹⁰⁹ Isis and Osiris 364D. Cf. García Bazán and Nante, “Introducción a la edición española” in Jung OC 12.

¹¹⁰ Jung, OC 13, § 277.

2.4 Saturn, the Dark Night and Nigredo as Symbols of the Threshold

Beyond each tradition's peculiarities, it's worth mentioning that these symbols do not only share an intimate association with melancholic phenomena, but also the profound meaning of the threshold. In other words, they all share the meaning of a transit or passage along a creative transformation process. For example, among the many traditions referring to him, Saturn is particularly associated with transformation moments. According to the Greek myth, the culminate points of Cronus' life are those referring to his non-birth, his birth, his dethronement, his exile and/or his destiny in the afterlife. As it can be seen, they are all inflexion and transit moments from one state of being to another. In addition, according to Roman mythology Saturn is received by Janus¹¹¹, the twofaced god and one of the oldest roman gods: god of gates, passages and transitions, from one state to another, from one vision to another, from one ending to another. But also St. John of the Cross' dark night comes identified with doors and strait paths. This also emphasizes its meaning of transit and passage: "*calling this strait road with full propriety 'dark night,' as will be explained hereafter in the lines of the said stanza*".¹¹² Also in alchemy, as we already pointed out, nigredo holds the profound meaning of the beginnings and, thus, signifying the transitions from one state of the opus to the other. As the old alchemist Morienus asserts: "*Exceeding narrow is the gateway to peace, and none may enter save through affliction of the soul*".¹¹³

It's also worth noting that these traditional symbols often do overlap, for one can glimpse organic links that speak for a vivid symbolical unity. For example, the Argentine author Arturo Marasso wrote about the alchemical parallels of St. John of the Cross' poem.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, one may also think of the frequent alchemical allusions to Saturn, to the point that even Mercurius gets to be identified with Saturn more than once.¹¹⁵ In "The Spirit Mercurius" Jung specifically mentions the links between Mercurius and Saturn: "*But the most important of all for an interpretation of Mercurius is his relation to Saturn. Mercurius senex is identical with Saturn, and to the earlier alchemists especially, it is not quicksilver, but the lead associated with Saturn, which usually represents the prima materia. In the Arabic text of the Turba quicksilver is identical with the 'water*

¹¹¹ Macrobio tells that Janus received Saturn in Latium. Saturn taught him the art of cultivation, and Janus rewarded him by associating him to the reign. (Macrobio, *Saturnalia* 1, 7, 21).

¹¹² SJC, I N, Prologue, 2.

¹¹³ Morienus quoted by Jung, CW 12, § 386.

¹¹⁴ Arturo Marasso, "Paralelismo Alquímico En La Poesía de San Juan de La Cruz" in *Fervor, Silencio, Tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Fata Morgana, 1994), 111–21.

¹¹⁵ Jung, CW 13, § 274.

of the moon and of Saturn'. In the 'Dicta Belini' Saturn says: 'My spirit is the water that loosens the rigid limbs of my brothers'. This refers to the 'eternal water' which is just what Mercurius is".¹¹⁶

In the light of these considerations, we believe that establishing a dialog between Jungian psychological theory and these traditional symbols linked to melancholy may be helpful in two ways. On the one hand, Jungian theory may contribute to a deeper understanding of the several symbols that came to be linked with depressive phenomena along Western spiritual traditions. This might help reestablishing the connection between consciousness and its spiritual and symbolical past. Regarding the importance of this link for the human soul, Neumann stated: *"The rediscovery of the human and cultural strata from which these symbols derive is in the original sense of the word 'bildend' – 'informing'. Consciousness thus acquires images (Bilder) and education (Bildung), widens its horizon, and charges itself with contents which constellate a new psychic potential. New problems appear, but also new solutions".¹¹⁷*

On the other hand, the deepening of these symbolic sources also contributes to a deeper understanding of Jungian work, especially regarding the phenomenology of the several facets of depressive experience, which we are to study in the upcoming pages.

¹¹⁶ Jung goes on affirming: *"In Khunrath Mercurius is the 'salt of Saturn', or Saturn is simply Mercurius. Saturn 'draws the eternal water'. (...) Saturn is the father and origin of Mercurius, therefore the latter is called 'Saturn's child'. Quicksilver comes 'from the heart of Saturn or is Saturn', and a 'bright water' is extracted from the plant Saturnia, 'the most perfect water and flower in the world'". (Ibid.)*

¹¹⁷ Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 13.

3. TOWARDS A PRELIMINARY DEFINITION OF DEPRESSION IN THE LIGHT OF C. G. JUNG'S WORK

“Now as a Caterpillar, when it has come to the end of a blade of grass, in taking the next step, draws itself toward it just so this self in taking the next step strikes down the body, dispels its ignorance, and draws itself together (for making a transition)”.

Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad 4.4,3.

Having already introduced those symbols that will serve as a context for our posterior symbolic amplification, in this chapter we will focus on tracking down and recognizing some of the key references that Jung makes to the topic of depression throughout his *Collected Works*. Although Jung doesn't dedicate any specific writings to depression, we believe that it is possible to reconstruct his possible understanding of it by articulating the several *disiectia membri*, i.e., all the commentaries and allusions which, although fragmentary and dispersed, seem to insinuate a horizon of meaning. Towards the end of the chapter, we propose a definition of depression in the light of C. G. Jung's work, which will serve us as an 'Ariadne's thread' throughout the upcoming chapters of our research. However, it will be firstly necessary to make a brief reference to the meaning of depression in modern psychiatry.

3.1 The Meaning of Depression since Modern Times

The *Red Book* was born as an answer to a deep depressive experience to which Jung didn't find any answers in Freudian psychoanalysis, nor in psychiatry, nor in religion. Through its pages, we find an interesting and subtle distinction between three types of madness (Wahnsinn): the sick madness (of the ones who are taken by 'the spirit of the depths'), the –also sick- madness of the ones who only live on the surface (taken by the 'spirit of this time'), and the divine madness.¹¹⁸ In the fifth

¹¹⁸ The topic of the divine madness goes back to platonic philosophy. Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244a: “The greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods”.

chapter of Liber Primus, entitled “Descent into Hell in the Future”, Jung writes: “If you do not know what divine madness is, suspend judgement and wait for the fruits. But know that there is a divine madness which is nothing other than the overpowering of the spirit of this time through the spirit of the depths. Speak then of sick madness when the spirit of the depths can no longer stay down and forces a man to speak in tongues instead of in human speech. But also speak of madness when the spirit of this time does not leave the man and forces him to see only the surface, to deny the spirit of the depths and to take himself for the spirit of the times. The spirit of this time is ungodly, the spirit of the depths is ungodly, balance is godly”.¹¹⁹

Whereas in sick madness one may observe an identification with the spirit of depths, in the other type of madness –which is also kind of sick- there takes place an identification with the spirit of the times, i.e., an identification with the values and principles of the ruling culture. As Nante points out, the first one is the product of an invasion of unconscious contents (psychotic), meanwhile the latter is more neurotic, as an identification’s result with the surface.¹²⁰ However, both kinds of madness should be still distinguished from ‘divine madness’, which is the only madness that accomplishes a balance between the spirit of depths and the spirit of this time and which, far from being negative, leads to the maximum fullness of life: “The divine madness –a higher form of irrationality of the life streaming through us- (...)”.¹²¹ In Chapter XVI of Liber Secundus entitled “Nox tertia”, the soul reveals to Jung this specific dimension of madness: “Let the light of your madness shine, and it will suddenly dawn on you. Madness is no to be despised and not be feared, but instead you should give it life”.¹²² Nevertheless, the spirit of this time only recognizes one type of madness –the sick kind- and identifies the divine madness with it. Throughout the ideas that take place in chapter XV of Liber Secundus (“Nox secunda”), the reader can glimpse Jung’s strong critique to the psychiatry of these times, since it does not longer distinguish between sick phenomena and the mystic experience, not to say recognizing its own ‘madness’ (the madness of this time).

All these thoughts taking place in the *Red Book* are dear to our research theme, since they may be also linked to the slow metamorphosis that underwent the conception of melancholy through modern times and with the development of modern psychiatry. Although it took long for the term

¹¹⁹ Jung, *The Red Book*, 238. The English edition sometimes translates ‘Wahnsinn’ as ‘delusion’. We prefer to translate it as madness (as the Spanish edition does), since we believe it would be more accurate.

¹²⁰ Cf. “Las formas de la locura y la voz de la profecía” in Nante, *El Libro Rojo de Jung. Claves*, 110

¹²¹ Jung, *The Red Book*, Liber Secundus, Chapter XV, 295.

¹²² *Ibid.*, Liber Secundus, Chapter XVI, 338.

‘depression’ to settle, in the end –in XIX century- it substituted the term ‘melancholy’.¹²³ In contrast to antiquity, where melancholy was not only conceived as a pathology, but also as a temperament or a passing mood, and even as a stage along a process of spiritual transformation –it could be said, as ‘divine madness’-, in the modern medical paradigm depression comes almost exclusively understood as a pathology –or in the Red Book’s words, as ‘sick madness’.

The word ‘depression’ comes from the latin *deprimere*, which means to ‘press down’. Modern psychiatry defines it as a mood disorder, diagnosing it according to the criteria established in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) by the American Psychiatry Association, which we further quote:

Major Depressive Disorder (DSM V)¹²⁴:

A) Five (or more) of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2-week period and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.

Note: Do not include symptoms that are clearly attributable to another medical condition.

1. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad, empty, hopeless) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). (Note: In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood.)

2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation.)

¹²³ According to Javier Alvarez (1997) this terminological change is to be understood as an answer to the increasingly misuse of the term ‘melancholy’ which came to denote the most varied inner moods –nostalgia, sadness, affliction, yearning, sorrow-, as well as the artistic creations derived from those psychic moods. However, we believe it necessary to note that, with the passing of time throughout XX century, the term ‘depression’ has not suffered a different destiny, since it has also passed from being a strictly medical term to being part of everyday language, referring to many different experiences which are phenomenologically similar, although presenting absolute different causes and meanings. Maybe this common destiny of an abusive use of the terms may constitute a good motive for trying to understand depression as a more complex reality of human being –to a certain point, also vital-, where the psychopathological aspect is only one aspect belonging to a multiplicity of aspects, which are also to be considered.

¹²⁴ We are quoting from DSM’s fifth edition: American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-V. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013).

3. Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. (Note: In children, consider failure to make expected weight gain.)
 4. Insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day.
 5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
 6. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
 7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilt about being sick).
 8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day (either by subjective account or as observed by others).
 9. Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.
- B) *The symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.*
- C) *The episode is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or to another medical condition. Note: Criteria A-C represent a major depressive episode. Note: Responses to a significant loss (e.g., bereavement, financial ruin, losses from a natural disaster, a serious medical illness or disability) may include the feelings of intense sadness, rumination about the loss, insomnia, poor appetite, and weight loss noted in Criterion A, which may resemble a depressive episode. Although such symptoms may be understandable or considered appropriate to the loss, the presence of a major depressive episode in addition to the normal response to a significant loss should also be carefully considered. This decision inevitably requires the exercise of clinical judgment based on the individual's history and the cultural norms for the expression of distress in the context of loss.*
- D) *The occurrence of the major depressive episode is not better explained by schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia, schizophreniform disorder, delusional disorder, or other specified and unspecified schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders.*
- E) *There has never been a manic episode or a hypomanic episode. Note: This exclusion does not apply if all of the manic-like or hypomanic-like episodes are substance induced or are attributable to the physiological effects of another medical condition.*

Although DSM was born to uniform diagnostic criteria of mental disorders in clinical practice, today the diagnosis of depression as a mood disorder still shows some controversies, since DSM's classificatory system is based on a reductionist biological model, following vague and indeterminate symptomatic criteria lacking a proper individual and social contextualization.¹²⁵ It should not be forgotten that there do not yet exist any biological nor chemical marks allowing an unequivocal diagnosis of depression. As a matter of fact, until today depression continues to be a complex phenomenon, and its ultimate causes remain still unknown.¹²⁶

In this sense, several authors are already warning of the danger that current diagnostic criteria may represent regarding the possibility of distinguishing a normal depression (as an adaptive response) and pathological depression.¹²⁷ Even the former chair of the DSM-IV taskforce, Allen Frances, is highly critical of the newly released DSM-V, stating that it contributes to an increasing medicalization of everyday life, benefiting only pharmaceutical companies¹²⁸, and generating a diagnostic hyperinflation not only of depression, but also of other psychiatric diagnosis (for example, attention deficit disorder, Asperger disorders, among others). In Frances' words: "*There has been no real epidemic of mental illness, just a much looser definition of sickness, making it harder for people to be considered well. The people remain the same; the diagnostic labels have changed and are too elastic. Problems that used to be an expected and tolerated part of life are now being diagnosed and treated as mental disorder*".¹²⁹ These words specifically apply to the diagnosis of depression, since

¹²⁵ For example, the removal of the bereavement exclusion in the diagnosis of the major depressive disorder was perhaps one of the most controversial changes taking place in DSM-V.

¹²⁶ Certainly, the quantity of modern theories trying to explain depressive phenomena is numberless. Such is the complexity of this phenomenon. It is beyond our scopes to make an approach of every existing theory of depression. However, we will make a brief classification of the main approaches to it, recognizing at least three big groups among them: A) Neurobiological and genetic theories. Bio-psychiatry works with a psychopharmacological therapy. It's worth mentioning that the effectiveness of antidepressants has only been proven in the cases of patients with moderate to severe depressions. Whereas the effectiveness of antidepressants in mild depressions is not yet proven and, on the contrary, they have revealed themselves to be insufficient. B) There are a number of psychological theories trying to explain depression from its own perspective (psychoanalytic theories, cognitivism, behaviorism). Beyond their theoretic differences, they all have in common the fact of conceiving depression as a symptom resulting from an individual intrapsychic factor (may it be a learned behavior, a cognitive disorder, or an unconscious experience). C) Sociological theories: all those theoretic models and researches which particularly focus on the role of social and environmental factors in depression (for example, socio-economical pressure, vital stressful events, the levels of social integration and support, alienation, social adaptation, among others). In either case, it should be noted that all these theories have in common the causal approach.

¹²⁷ Cf.: Horwitz, Allan V., and Jerome C. Wakefield. *The Loss of Sadness. How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sorrow into Depressive Disorder* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹²⁸ Analogously, Philippe Pignarre links the vague diagnostic criteria of depression in DSM with the increasing business of depression taking place in the pharmaceutical industry. Cf. Philippe Pignarre, *L'industria Della Depressione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010).

¹²⁹ Allen Frances, *Saving Normal: An Insider's Revolt against out-of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, and the Medicalization of Ordinary Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 82.

today the same criteria set defines both the mildest and the most severe depressions. Although the DSM's definition of depression works well at the severe end, at the other end it causes an increasing pathologization of everyday life, interpreting normal unhappiness as a mental disorder. Analogously, Wakefield and Demazeux assert: "*Major depression is one category of disorder in DSM-5 and ICD-10, yet it is virtually universally agreed that the conditions that fall under that category constitute several different disorders caused by quite different etiologies*".¹³⁰ The negative consequences of a lack of distinction between normal and pathological depression amplify when depression comes to be defined as a condition to be cured with antidepressants. We agree with Frances when he states that psychiatric medications may be necessary and helpful for severe mental disease that provoke impairment. However, these do not help in everyday problems, on the contrary: medication abuse causes more damage, than benefits. Furthermore, James Hillman warned that modern diagnostic criteria of depression may also constitute a manic defense against depression in a manic society: "(...) *qualsiasi cosa diciamo sulla malinconia lo facciamo a partire da una posizione che diametralmente le si oppone, la teme, la odia e può solo considerarla come una depressione costrittiva*".¹³¹

We agree with David Goldberg¹³² when he argues that nowadays it would be highly crucial for clinical workers to recognize and to study the extreme heterogeneity of depression, in contrast to the apparent homogeneity of depression as represented in DSM. Naturally, it goes beyond our scope to solve such thing. However, we believe that the Jungian perspective should not be ignored if we were to face this challenge of the future that is already showing its urgency in the present.

As we will try to demonstrate, the Jungian perspective does not only refer to the heterogeneity of depressive experience, but also to its potentiality. Taking this into account, it does not only revalue a normal dimension of depression (as an adaptive response), but it does also recover a potential transforming dimension regarding the evolution of consciousness. In other words, without denying the pathological dimension, Jung also calls for understanding depression as a phenomenon that may also take place along the process of psychic transformation. In this sense, we believe it's possible to think that in Jungian understanding of depression there is also working the distinction regarding sick madness and divine madness as it compares in the *Red Book*, and to which we previously referred. Divine madness, however, is not to be understood as a privilege of a few, but as an innate potentiality

¹³⁰ Jerome C. Wakefield and Steeves Demazeux, "Introduction: Depression, One and Many" in *Sadness or Depression? International perspectives on the Depression Epidemic and its Meaning* Ed. Jerome C. Wakefield and Steeves Demazeux (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016), 1-15.

¹³¹ James Hillman, "Malinconia Senza Dei", 4.

¹³² David Goldberg, "The Current Status of the Diagnosis of Depression" in Ed. Wakefield and Demazeux, *Sadness or Depression? International perspectives on the Depression Epidemic and its Meaning*

of every human being, in other words, as a human vocation: “*Wer Bestimmung hat, hört die Stimme des Innern, er ist bestimmt*”¹³³, which we here translate as “*Anyone with a vocation hears the voice of the inner man: he is called*”.

But before we dive into the meaning of depression throughout C. G. Jung’s work, it will be necessary to make a brief reference to Jung’s point of view towards psychological diagnosis.

3.2 Jung on Psychological Diagnosis

Very early on his career C. G. Jung criticized those psychiatric practices which exclusively relied on symptoms and statistics for their diagnosis, and thus ignoring the factor of individuality, life history and meaning. In his autobiography, when referring to his years of apprenticeship at Burghölzli, Jung says: “*Psychiatry teachers were not interested in what the patient had to say, but rather in how to make a diagnosis or how to describe symptoms and to compile statistics. From the clinical point of view which then prevailed the human personality of the patient, his individuality, did not matter at all*”.¹³⁴

Jung’s early concern at the beginnings of his professional career would get even stronger with the passing of time, especially when developing his psychological theory. Eventually, it would lead to a therapeutic approach centered on each patient’s singularity, as well as on the wholeness of personality, limiting the initial psychological diagnosis to exclude any organic causes: “*The content of a neurosis can never be established by a single examination, nor even by several. It manifests itself only in the course of treatment. Hence the paradox that the true psychological diagnosis becomes apparent only at the end. Just a sure diagnosis is desirable and a thing to be aimed at in medicine, so, conversely, it will profit the psychotherapist to know as little as possible about specific diagnoses. It is enough if he is reasonably sure of the differential diagnosis between organic and psychic, and if he knows what a genuine melancholy is and what it can mean*”.¹³⁵

Thus, it shouldn’t be a surprise if Jungian work lacks explaining definitions and classifications on depression. Its attention is not focused on the symptoms to be eliminated, but in the person as a

¹³³ Jung, GW 17, §301.

¹³⁴ Jung, *Memories. Dreams. Reflections*, 114.

¹³⁵ Jung, CW 16, §197.

human reality which is to be accompanied through a transformation process that is not exempt of suffering. As Nante points out, throughout Jungian work the therapeutic intention “*transcends the limits of psychiatric psychopathology limited to semiology and nosology, and aims to the comprehension of the human being, of its painful situation in the world, hurt from finitude and contingency, which is a source for his uprooting and evils. Certainly (this therapeutic intention) is not therapeutic but ‘cura animarum’, which can only be stimulated through the same self-healing processes that the psyche offers and which demands an awareness transcending every therapy*”.¹³⁶

In *Memories, dreams, reflections* Jung states that the crucial thing is not the diagnosis, but “*the story. For it alone shows the human background and the human suffering (....)*”.¹³⁷ In any case it is worth noting that with ‘story’ is not only to be understood the personal story of every individual’s childhood, but also the symbolic story that wants to be told in every human being and to which Hermann Hesse refers in an inspired way in his prologue to *Demian*: “*(...) the story of a human being –not an invented, potential, ideal, or otherwise nonexistent person, but a real, unique, living one. (...) each person is not only himself, he is also the unique, very special point, important and noteworthy in every instance, where the phenomena of the world meet, once only and never again in the same way. And so every person’s story is important, eternal, divine; and so every person, to the extent that he lives and fulfills nature’s will, is wondrous and deserving of full attention. In each of us spirit has become form, in each of us the created being suffers, in each of us redeemer is crucified*”.¹³⁸

According to Jung, the psychological symptoms make also part of this ‘human story’ and may even contain a precious seed of meaning for the inner development of the human being. In his writing on Paracelsus, Jung explicitly recognizes himself on the Swiss alchemist’s cosmovision, for whom disease was “*a natural growth, a spiritual, living thing, a seed. (...) a proper and necessary constituent of life that lived together with man, and not a hated ‘alien body’ as it is for us*”.¹³⁹

On our point of view, one may also glimpse this horizon of meaning in Jung’s occasional references to depressive phenomena, which we will explore in the next pages to come.

¹³⁶ Translation mine. Bernardo Nante, “Aportes de La Teoría Junguiana a Una Antropología Filosófica” Tesis Doctoral, Facultad de Filosofía, Universidad del Salvador (Buenos aires: 1999), 15.

¹³⁷ Jung, *Memories. Dreams. Reflections*. 124.

¹³⁸ Herrman Hesse, “Prologue”, *Demian* (United States: Dover Publications, 2000)

¹³⁹ Jung, CW 15, § 14.

3.3 Depression in C. G. Jung's Work: from the Reductive to the Constructive approach

In general terms, as P. F. Pieri has pointed out, throughout the Jungian work it's possible to recognize two opposing –though not mutually exclusive– interpretations of depression: the reductive approach (depression as a symptom) and the constructive approach (depression as a symbol). In the reductive approach of depression Jung follows the Freudian interpretation, i.e., intending depression as a symptom (*“alterazione del tono dell'umore nella forma di una tristezza profonda che induce la riduzione della stima di sé e talora il bisogno di autopunizione”*¹⁴⁰) relating it to loss or separation experiences from the mother figure in early childhood. As Freud points out in his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia”, the one who suffers melancholia/ depression attacks himself instead of attacking the lost object, with whom he has become identical. Through the reductive interpretation, Jung explains depression by its cause. Although he does not reject the importance of this approach at all, he doesn't focus that much on it.¹⁴¹

On the contrary, the most important and enriching meaning of depression in C. W. Jung's work takes place in his constructive approach, regarding its potential final meaning for psychic development. Whereas the reductive approach ends when arriving to the cause of depressive phenomena (for example, the ‘fixation to the mother’ according to the Freudian point of view, or the neurotransmitter imbalances according to neurobiological approach)¹⁴², the synthetic (constructive) perspective that Jung proposes conceives the causes as a means to an end of ulterior development. In his essay entitled “On psychic energy”, Jung points out: *“Since the psyche possesses the final point of view, it is psychologically inadmissible to adopt the purely causal attitude to psychic phenomena, not to mention the all too familiar monotony of its one-sided interpretations”*.¹⁴³ Taking this into account, that which for the reductive approach may be a symptom to eliminate, for the constructive approach may be a symbol pregnant of meaning. As such, it may contain the possibility for a future

¹⁴⁰ Cf. “Depressione” in Paolo Francesco Pieri, *Dizionario junghiano* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998).

¹⁴¹ The reductive-causal approach is especially relevant when it comes to the treatment of psychopathological depression. Cf. Robert F. Hobson, “Archetypal Themes in Depression” in *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 1, no. 1 (January 1955): 33–47. Cf. also Warren Steinberg, “Depression: A Discussion of Jung's Ideas” in *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* 34, no. 4 (October 1989): 339–52.

¹⁴² Our research does not deny the value of the causal approach, but we believe it necessary to revalue the Jungian constructive approach. On the other hand, when it comes to causes, we retain it crucial to understand depression as a complex phenomenon, i.e., as a reality concerning multiple dimensions of being (biological, environmental, psychological, social, spiritual). As such, it does not allow to be understood by a unique cause.

¹⁴³ Jung, CW 8, § 45.

psychological transformation¹⁴⁴ and development: “Cause alone does not make development possible. For the psyche the reduction ad causam is the very reverse of development (...)”.¹⁴⁵

By attempting to understand it from a synthetic-constructive perspective, depression acquires a very different color that transcends its symptomatic value: far from signifying only a blocking of development, it might also constitute a necessary stage in every individuation process, manifesting a meaning and a purpose.

The constructive perspective articulates itself with the transformation model of psychic energy, which according to Jung alternates between moments of progression and moments of regression. In this context Jung defines depression as an entering into the silence and void that precede new creations.¹⁴⁶ P. F. Pieri reassumes the Jungian definition of depression as follows: “*immagine della stasi energetica che si viene a dare nella quota rappresentativa del processo di individuazione perché l’Io possa confrontarsi con quel che in essa si custodisce e attraverso di essa si esprime*”.¹⁴⁷ In the light of these considerations, depression may be understood as a regression or, at least, as one of its possible ways of manifestation. In *Symbols of Transformation* Jung states that regression “*is a relapse into the past caused by a depression in the present*”.¹⁴⁸

For a better understanding of the constructive meaning of depression as a regression phenomenon it will be necessary to refer to the model of psychic energy according to Jung.

3.4 Depression in the Light of Jung’s Theory of Psychic Energy

In his essay ‘On psychic energy’ Jung refers to progression and regression of libido as one of the most important energetic phenomena of psychic life. He defines progression as “*the daily advance of the process of psychological adaptation*”, yet he immediately avers that this adaptation is not something that is achieved once and for all: “*The progression of libido might therefore be said to consist in a continual satisfaction of the demands of environmental conditions. This is possible only by means of an attitude, which as such is necessarily directed and therefore characterized by a certain one-sidedness. Thus, it may easily happen that an attitude can no longer satisfy the demands of*

¹⁴⁴ It shouldn’t be forgotten that for Jung this transformation of psychic energy transcends the sexual sphere: “*Sexual dynamics is only one particular instance in the total field of the psyche. This is not to deny its existence, but merely to put it in its proper place*”. Jung, CW 8, § 54.

¹⁴⁵ Jung, CW 8, § 46.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Jung, CW 16, § 373.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. ‘Depressione’ in Pieri, *Dizionario Jungiano*, 203.

¹⁴⁸ Jung, CW 5, § 625.

adaptation because changes have occurred in the environmental conditions which require a different attitude".¹⁴⁹

In this sense, the external adaptations sooner or later lead to the necessity of an adaptation to the inner world, which only can take place through regression: "*Regression, on the other hand, as an adaptation to the conditions of the inner world, springs from the vital need to satisfy the demands of individuation. Man is not a machine in the sense that he can consistently maintain the same output of work. He can meet the demands of outer necessity in an ideal way only if he is also adapted to his own inner world, that is, if he is in harmony with himself. Conversely, he can only adapt to his inner world and achieve harmony with himself when he is adapted to the environmental conditions. As experience shows, the one or the other function can be neglected only for a time*".¹⁵⁰

Progression makes part of the psychic dynamics, as well as does regression. As such, they constitute structural energetic movements of the human being, and can only be neglected temporally. As a parallel to these dynamics Jung refers to the diastole and systole movements by Goethe. Whereas diastole alludes to psychic energy extending throughout the universe, the systole is its contraction into the individual: "*To remain in either of these attitudes means death, hence the one type is insufficient and needs complementing by the opposite function*".¹⁵¹ However, regression brings suffering to consciousness, since it gets stripped of its energy, which introverts into the unconscious, giving eventually place to depressive phenomena: "*The unconscious has simply gained an unassailable ascendancy; it wields an attractive force that can invalidate all conscious contents –in other words, it can withdraw libido from the conscious world and thereby produce a 'depression', an abaissement du niveau mental (Janet)*".¹⁵² In relation to this, Esther Harding states that beyond the causes of depression, the mechanism standing behind it is always the same: the loss of psychic energy. Harding links this mechanism to the symbolic image of wilderness¹⁵³, since by disappearing the vital energy into the unconscious, life remains dry, sterile, arid, miserable and desolated. Hence it feels like being in the desert, where nothing grows and no life flourishes.

In "Concerning Rebirth" Jung describes some psychological experiences that may accompany such a regressive state: "*It is a slackening of the tensivity of consciousness, which might be compared to a low barometric reading, presaging bad weather. The tonus has given way, and this is felt*

¹⁴⁹ Jung, CW 8, § 61.

¹⁵⁰ Jung, CW 8, § 75.

¹⁵¹ Jung, CW 8, § 70, footnote 49.

¹⁵² Jung, CW 7, § 344.

¹⁵³ Harding, Esther. "The Value and Meaning of Depression." *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought* 12, no. 2 (1981).

*subjectively as listlessness, moroseness, and depression. One no longer has any wish or courage to face the tasks of the day. One feels like lead, because no part of one's body seems willing to move, and this is due to the fact that one no longer has any disposable energy. This well-known phenomenon corresponds to the primitive's loss of soul. The listlessness and paralysis of will can go so far that the whole personality falls apart, so to speak, and consciousness loses its unity; (...). The abaissement always has a restrictive influence on the personality as a whole. It reduces one's self-confidence and the spirit of enterprise, and, as a result of increasing egocentricity, narrows the mental horizon".*¹⁵⁴

To understand the ultimate meaning regarding the lack of psychic energy, it's worth remembering that the Jungian concept of libido transcends its Freudian original sense, i.e., as mere sexual energy. As it is well-known, this disagreement has been one of the motives that set Jung and Freud apart. In *Symbols of Transformation* Jung states that psychic energy lacks a specific quality, except when manifesting. Hence psychic energy may be understood as intrinsically creative, orientating and vital. Nante's precisions on Jung's concept of psychic energy are extremely helpful, as he links it to the concept of dynamis in its double meaning: as a potentiality and as a force. These aspects, when united, manifest themselves as transformation, which is a maximal expression of life. At the same time, referring to libido Pieri states: "*Il concetto (...) è assimilato alla nozione di energia psichica in generale. In quanto tale, la libido è ritenuta capace di assumere forme diverse (di cui è una forma la libido sessuale studiata da Freud), e ciò sia a livello di istinto sia a livello di realizzazione culturale*".¹⁵⁵ In "Psychic energy" Jung refers to some of the possible manifestations of libido: "*Psychic energy appears, when actual, in the specific, dynamic phenomena of the psyche, such as instinct, wishing, willing, affect, attention, capacity for work, etc., which make up the psychic forces. When potential, energy shows itself in specific achievement, possibilities, aptitudes, attitudes, etc., which are its various states*".¹⁵⁶

Consequently, whenever a psychic regression takes place the consciousness may experiment this lack of psychic energy as all those symptoms that commonly are associated with depressive phenomena: lack of will, reluctance, fatigue, lack of initiative, lack of creativity and vital force, incapability to concentrate, anhedonia, just to mention a few. However, Jung's description of psychic regression (and depression as one of its many manifestations) as a constituting movement of psychic dynamics manifests an observation with an ultimate reach which is not to be ignored. If this is so, some regressive states may agree with certain diagnostic criteria that commonly qualify as

¹⁵⁴ Jung, OC 9/1, §§ 213-214.

¹⁵⁵ 'Libido' en Pieri, *Dizionario Junghiano*, 404.

¹⁵⁶ Jung, CW 8, § 26.

pathological depression, although constituting an unavoidable stage throughout a process of inner development. Taking this into account, some depressive phenomena may also be understood as a passage experience from one progression to another. Regarding this, in “Psychic energy” Jung insists on the fact that psychic regression not necessarily constitutes a pathological state, although it may sometimes seem as one: “(...) *regression is not necessarily a retrograde step in the sense of a backwards development or degeneration, but rather represents a necessary phase of development. The individual is, however, not consciously aware that he is developing; he feels himself to be in a compulsive situation that resembles an early infantile state or even an embryonic condition within the womb. It is only if he remains stuck in this condition that we can speak of involution or degeneration*”.¹⁵⁷

Keeping this in mind, the significance of regression for psychic renewal gets better understood by considering that Jung’s concept of the unconscious goes way beyond rejected remnants of everyday life, by holding precious germs of new life.¹⁵⁸ M. M. Pessina observes that it is on this depressive horizon of regression where Jung enables human consciousness to go beyond the dichotomy between the unilateralism of reason and the tragic identification with the unconscious, which would mean its ruin: “*Questo atteggiamento-altro è per quella coscienza che si sia addentrata nella capacità di 'abitare' la depressione, assumendone, nel suo lasciarsi permeare, il segreto e il senso*”.¹⁵⁹

In a letter addressed to Dr. John W. Perry, Jung concludes that regression is part of every rebirth process: “(...) *the regression that occurs in the rebirth or integration process is in itself a normal phenomenon inasmuch as you observe it also with people that don’t suffer from any kind of psychopathic ailment*”.¹⁶⁰

Taking this into account, it’s possible to conclude that for Jung regression (and the depressive phenomena that may accompany it) belongs to the vital movement of the psyche and may take place as an adaptive response to an exterior change, as a psychopathological state (when the consciousness remains stuck to it), yet also as a stage taking place along psychic development.

In order to establish the bases for the ulterior development of our research, we here propose the following general definition of depression in the light of C. G. Jung’s work, which we believe to be founded on the arguments we already exposed until now. Throughout the upcoming pages, we will

¹⁵⁷ Jung, CW 8, § 69.

¹⁵⁸ Jung, CW 8, § 63.

¹⁵⁹ Maria Maddalena Pessina, *Simbolo, affetto e oltre... Riflessioni attorno ad alcune categorie e tematiche junghiane*, (Vivarium, Milano, 2004), 27.

¹⁶⁰ Letter to Dr. John W. Perry dating February 1954 in Jung, *Letters II*, 148.

intend depression as: **a psychological phenomenon caused by a lack of psychic energy, which the consciousness may experiment along certain moments of its development. This lack of psychic energy can manifest itself as an absence of vitality, distraction, sadness or emotional apathy, reluctance, inhibition of will, and other symptoms that commonly come to be associated with the depressive episode, as they are described on DSM. This lack of psychic energy at the consciousness' disposal is caused by its regressive movement into the unconscious, and may be part of an adaptive response to a loss experience, or may constitute a preparation towards an ulterior psychic transformation. It can become a pathological condition if consciousness remains stuck in this stage.**

Thereby, depression in the light of C. G. Jung is not only understood as a disease (though he doesn't deny this dimension), but fundamentally as a human passage experience that is part of the psychic dynamics in permanent transformation. As such, it may be considered as psychologically inherent to the human being and the danger resides in the fact of not attending to it as such. In *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung says: *"Whenever some great work is to be accomplished (be it a task of life adaptation or some creative effort), before which a man recoils, doubtful of his strength, his libido streams back to the fountainhead –and that is the dangerous moment when the issue hangs between annihilation and new life. For if the libido gets stuck in the wonderland of this inner world, then for the upper world man is nothing but a shadow, he is already moribund or at least seriously ill. But if the libido manages to tear itself loose and force its way up again, something like a miracle happens: the journey to the underworld was a plunge into the fountain of youth, and the libido, apparently dead, wakes renewed fruitfulness"*.¹⁶¹

These considerations recall the meaning of the initiatic illness, as it has been referred to in shamanism by the preeminent scholar of history of religions Mircea Eliade: *"To obtain the gift of shamanizing presupposes precisely the solution of the psychic crisis brought on by the first symptoms of election or call"*.¹⁶² However, the initiation phenomenon is not exclusive to shamanism. Several studies from XX century have shown that, beyond its many variants, initiation is a phenomenon that manifests in every pre-modern society, especially relating to threshold or passage moments in life: vital, social, religious, vocational. In its deeper meaning, initiation may be understood as a symbolic process destined to guide the members of a certain community throughout an experience of symbolic death and rebirth. With every initiation, the initiated becomes part of a wider, total and harmonic

¹⁶¹ Jung, CW 5, § 449.

¹⁶² Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth. Rites and Symbol of Initiation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958).

reality, which expands his sense of plenitude. From a philosophical point of view, initiation equals an ontological mutation. Furthermore, Eliade states that such initiatic practices express a peculiar conception of human existence: “*All these rituals and symbolism of passage, we must add, express a particular conception of human existence: when brought to birth, man is not yet completed; he must be born a second time, spiritually; he becomes complete man by passing from an imperfect, embryonic state to a perfect, adult state. In a word, it may be said that human existence attains completion through a series of ‘passage rites’, in short, by successive initiations*”.¹⁶³

Although it is not always specified, it’s important to note that death and descent symbolism – which commonly are associated with the initiation’s phenomenology- also appears in the phenomenology of depression. This may be particularly observed in the experience of the mystic night, with an equal initiatic value. Analogously, regression as described by Jung manifests an equal meaning towards a wider totalization: in order to establish a link with the self, the conscious ego must open himself to a wider totality, and this cannot exclude suffering and affliction.

Throughout Western history, and at least until Renaissance, we find several antecedents which refer to a potentially constructive dimension of melancholy, in other words, to melancholic phenomena as a passage experience towards the experience of a wider reality. As Agamben refers regarding sorrow in Christianity: “*next to tristitia mortifera (deadly sorrow) [or diabolica, or tristitia saecula (weariness of the world)], the fathers placed a tristitia salutifera (saving sorrow) [or utilis (useful), or secundum deum (according to God)] that was operator of salvation and the ‘golden goad of the soul’, and, as such, ‘it should be counted not a vice but a virtue’*”.¹⁶⁴ In John Climacus’ *Ladder of Paradise* the seventh step is constituted by the grief that creates joy. Analogously St. Augustine defines *tristitia* as *gemina*¹⁶⁵ and Alcuin also affirmed: “*There are two kinds of sadness: one that brings salvation, one that brings plagues*”.¹⁶⁶

On the other hand, in an alchemical text *acedia* (which is usually understood as a sin in the context of Christianity) shows a positive connotation. As Dorn specifies in *Clavis totius philosophiae*, *acedia* equals the alchemical oven, because of its slowness, which is nevertheless a necessary operation of the alchemical process.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, 1959)

¹⁶⁴ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Saint Augustine, *Liber de conflictu vitiorum et virtutum*, in *Patrologia latina*, 40 quoted by Agamben, *Stanzas*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Alcuin, *Liber de virtutis*, c.33, quoted by Agamben, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ “*Nunc furnum habemus completum, quem acediam solemus appellare, tum quia tardus est in operando, propter lentum ignem...*” (in *Theatrum chemicum*, Argentorati 1622, v.1) Quoted by Agamben, *Stanzas*, 10.

Melancholic affliction as a passage experience also manifests itself in those symbols of Western spiritual traditions, which we have already introduced in the precedent chapter. As a matter of fact, *acedia* has been also called the ‘noonday demon’. As it is well known, the noonday beholds the meaning of a threshold, i.e., a transition. The same could be said of Saturn, which from one point of view is the last of the planets, and from the other point of view becomes the first. Analogously, the night follows the day, but it also precedes it. On the other hand, the *nigredo* is the putrefaction stage that reveals itself as an unavoidable condition for every renewal. On our point of view, the Jungian understanding of depression psychologically recovers such symbolic ideas from Antiquity. As such, it reveals itself as a passage experience through the several phases of consciousness’ development. It’s not a case that one of the psychological phenomena that interested Jung the most has been the midlife depression, where ‘the sun reaches its maximal height and starts to descend’.

The consciousness’ development can be understood as a path going through several successive thresholds, which manifest as a crisis, but also as moments of potential growth and renewal. However, the contemporary human being –as Nante points out- lacks thresholds, and whenever the threshold is absent, there appears at its place the limit-experience that can only provoke the most extreme anguish, a nonsense experience and all those symptoms that DSM commonly enumerates under the category of major depressive episode.¹⁶⁸

In *Psychological Types* Jung states: “*Whether a thing is a symbol or not depends chiefly upon the attitude of the observing consciousness*”.¹⁶⁹ In the light of these words, it becomes necessary to study the several meanings of depression in relationship to the consciousness’ development process. This will allow us to deepen on the significance of depression in C. G. Jung’s work.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Bernardo Nante, “Alla ricerca della soglia perduta” in *Beyond Masters. Spaces without Thresholds* Eranos Yearbook 71. Ed. Fabio Merlini y Riccardo Bernardini (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 2014). In the same volume, cf. also Claudio Bonvecchio, “La sfida della soglia”.

¹⁶⁹ Jung, CW 6, § 818.

4. DEPRESSION AS A PASSAGE EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In the precedent chapter, we analyzed the potentially constructive meaning of depression in the light of C. G. Jung's work. From this point of view, depression reveals itself as one of the possible manifestations of psychic regression preceding every ulterior progression. As such, it might be understood as a constitutive human experience inherent to psychic dynamics.¹⁷⁰ Taking this into account, it could be said that the experience of depression particularly relates to certain moments of 'threshold' in psychic life, i.e., to specific moments along which the consciousness is called to do a great leap forward in its development, a transformation. These passage moments of psychic life may or not coincide with moments of change and transition in the external life. In any case, it should be kept in mind that according to Jung the psychological development, far from being linear, reveals a spiral dynamic with permanent regressions and progressions, analogously to the alchemical expression *solve et coagula*. This consciousness' development is understood as an individuation process, that is, as the process of becoming an 'individual', not in an individualist sense, but as being 'non-divided', as its etymology refers (lat. Individuus, indivisible; individuum, atom). It's an aspiration towards a personality not divided in opposites and, therefore, better integrated, total, and free. Nevertheless, this path is not exempt from suffering and, eventually, from certain depressive phenomena (sentiments of solitude, guilt, anguish, sorrow, etc.).

The hard and difficult path takes towards a permanent confrontation with the unconscious, of which it is possible to say, agreeing with Odajnyk¹⁷¹, that it presents analogous traits as those that are usually linked with depressive phenomena: dark since unknown, heavy since it permanently resists to being integrated, toxic as Saturn's lead, but also potentially creative as it holds the germs of future development possibilities.

The aim of this chapter is to recognize, clarify and articulate the several meanings of depression as a potentially transforming regression in the light of the consciousness' development. As we will try to show, in Jung's theoretical work it's possible to specify at least four meanings of

¹⁷⁰ The constructive understanding of depression does not exclude its symptomatic meaning. However, it amplifies and completes the causal-reductive approach, which usually takes place in modern psychology.

¹⁷¹ Odajnyk argues that in its natural state the unconscious could be understood as 'being depressed': "*The usual symptoms associated with depression –the feelings of inadequacy, inertia, heaviness, sadness, blackness, lack of interest in life and the pull towards death –are apt descriptions of the lower depths of the psyche*". Odajnyk, "Jung's contribution to the understanding of the meaning of depression", 45.

depression as a potentially constructive regression: depression as consciousness' infantilism (identification between consciousness and unconscious), depression as an effect of the assimilation of the unconscious (separation between conscious and unconscious), depression as a 'call of the soul' (unconscious compensation) and depression as an incubation process towards a future transformation of consciousness (integration of conscious and unconscious). These meanings of depressive phenomena articulate with different phases of the consciousness' development, where regression constitutes a necessary passage towards an ulterior psychic progression.

It's worth to note that these different facets of the depressive experience, which we will here specify, are scattered throughout Jung's theoretical work, but they are not explicitly articulated. However, the fragmentary character of Jung's references to depression, amplify in several aspects through Erich Neumann's work, of which we may say that it has been one of the greatest contributions to Jungian psychology. Especially important to our research is his book *The Origins and History of Consciousness (Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewußtseins)*, of which C. G. Jung himself said that it undoubtedly began just where he would have started to gather up the *disiecta membra* of his own writings.¹⁷² This work by Neumann constitutes a key piece for our study, since it presents a unique and well documented history of human consciousness' creative development, presenting the myth and the symbols as its phenomenology. Regarding this, Neumann explicitly referred to the infinite sufferings that take part of this development: "*Whenever one phase of the ego is substituted with another, there arises anguish, which is symbolically related to the symbolism of death. The ego of a certain phase is really threatened to death. Then it will become decisive if he stops at the regression or if he goes into a transition towards a phase of a superior ego*".¹⁷³

Our hermeneutical work will complete itself with a permanent dialog with the symbols of melancholy (and other related phenomena) in Western spiritual traditions, particularly emphasizing on the symbolism of Saturn in Greco-Roman tradition, the 'dark night of the soul' in Christian mysticism and the alchemical nigredo. As we will try to demonstrate, the several meanings of depression in Jung's work correspond to and get symbolically enlightened with the several moments of Cronus-Saturn's development, with the several nights of the mystic path according to St. John of the Cross, and the different meanings of nigredo in the alchemical process. More than once, Jung said that the encounter with certain traditional texts had taken him out of his 'isolation', allowing him to

¹⁷² Carl Gustav Jung, "Foreword" (1949) in Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, XIII.

¹⁷³ Translation mine from the German edition: "*Überall, wo eine Ich-Phase durch eine andere abgelöst wird, entsteht Angst, welche symbolisch verbunden ist mit der Symbolik des Todes. Dem durch seine Phase charakterisierten Ich droht ja auch wirklich ein Tod. Entscheidend ist nur, ob es zu einer Regression ein eine frühere oder zu einem Übergang in eine höhere Ich-Phase kommt*". (Erich Neumann, *Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewußtseins*, 278).

undertake a theoretical elaboration of certain phenomena that he had been observing on his patients and on himself.

Throughout this chapter, we aim to show that, although the phenomenological traits of depression (i.e., the symptoms) may keep constant and without variation, they may still acquire different meanings according to the development of consciousness, and they may thus call to different attitudes on behalf of the conscious ego. However, we need to avert that the work of analysis requires for us to present in a separate and successive way certain processes which often take place simultaneously. Taking this into account, it's good to warn that the different stages that we will be presenting are not to be understood chronologically, for each one of them in a certain way involves the others. On the phases of the alchemical work, as well as of individuation, Jung pointed out: *“The time-sequence of phases in the opus is very uncertain. We see the same uncertainty in the individuation process, so that a typical sequence of stages can only be constructed in very general terms. The deeper reason for this ‘disorder’ is probably the ‘timeless’ quality of the unconscious, where conscious succession becomes simultaneity (...)”*.¹⁷⁴

On the other hand, although we will not develop it, we need to clarify that these phases with their corresponding depressive moments may be read ontogenetically as well as phylogenetically, as Neumann already noted. Thereby, the phases of the collective consciousness' development in humanity present a clear analogy with the phases of individual consciousness' development, which at the same time could be linked with each vital stage of life. In any case, it should be kept in mind that according to Jung the consciousness' development clearly exceeds the external adaptation, for this will be always remain incomplete if not including an internal adaptation intended as a 'creation of oneself': *“To live oneself means, to be one's own task. Never say that it is a pleasure to live oneself. It will be no joy but a long suffering, since you must become your own creator”*.¹⁷⁵

4. 1 Depression as Consciousness' Infantilism: Identification of Consciousness and Unconscious

In *Symbols of Transformation* Jung refers to depression as a regressive tendency linking it to the incest longing, i.e., as an infantilism of the consciousness which is still identified with the unconscious. As Jung points out:

¹⁷⁴ Jung, CW 16, § 468, footnote 8.

¹⁷⁵ Jung, *The Red Book*, 249-250.

*“(...) in the morning of life, the son tears himself loose from the mother, from the domestic hearth, to rise through battle to this destined heights. Always he imagines his worst enemy in front of him, yet he carries the enemy within himself—a deadly longing for the abyss, a longing to drown in his own source, to be sucked down to the realm of the Mothers. His life is a constant struggle against extinction, a violent yet fleeting deliverance from ever-lurking night. This death is no external enemy, it is his own inner longing for the stillness and profound peace of all-knowing non-existence, for all-seeing sleep in the ocean of coming-to-be and passing away. (...) If he is to live, he must fight and sacrifice his longing for the past in order to rise to his own heights”.*¹⁷⁶

Psychic regression, firstly, reveals itself as an attachment to everything which has a maternal meaning for the conscious ego. In a conference taking place in 1936, Jung said that the first consequence of a regression was usually the reappearance of childish attitudes.¹⁷⁷ However, that which used to be useful for the child, may be fatal for the developing consciousness. In other words, the childish attachment might signify a paralysis for the development of the adult.

In psychic regression as infantile attachment, the conscious ego does not have any psychic energy at his disposal, since the latter remains in hands of the unconscious, symbolized by the mother. This expresses itself in every kind of unconscious attachments. In “The stages of life” (1930) Jung extracts the common factor of the sufferings found in the period of youth: *“If we try to extract the common and essential factors from the almost inexhaustible variety of individual problems found in the period of youth, we meet in all cases with one particular feature: a more or less patent clinging to the childhood level of consciousness, a resistance to the fateful forces in and around us which would involve us in the world. Something in us wishes to remain a child, to be unconscious or, at most, conscious only of the ego; to reject everything strange, or else subject it to our will; to do nothing, or else indulge our own craving for pleasure or power. In all this there is something of the inertia of matter; it is a persistence in the previous state whose range of consciousness is smaller, narrower, and more egoistic than that of the dualistic phase. For here the individual is faced with the necessity of recognizing and accepting what is different and strange as a part of his own life, as a kind of “also-I.”*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Jung, CW 5, § 553.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Jung, CW 18/2, § 1312.

¹⁷⁸ Jung, CW 8, § 764.

This peculiar moment of consciousness' development may be particularly associated with the period of adolescence. However, it continues to present itself in every period of life, since consciousness does not overcome its childish attachments once and for all. Infantilism is not a feature that can get definitively suppressed, on the contrary, it takes part of consciousness' development that lasts for the whole life. Regarding this, Marie-Louise von Franz quotes one of his adult patient's dream that was undergoing a depression: *"There was a ship on the shore of my childhood's house. I examined it thoroughly and saw that it was in perfect conditions. I knew that I had already crossed many times the sea on it. I asked myself: Why do I not start the journey? I said to myself that I still didn't know the ship enough"*.¹⁷⁹ In the light of this dream, depression constituted a call to go beyond childish attachments and to 'cross the sea', which symbolically refers to getting into the adventure of the unknown, by making one's own path.

Most certainly, every creation process of oneself implies a permanent call to the overcoming of infantilism: *"So long as the child is in that state of unconscious identity with the mother, he is still one with the animal psyche and is just as unconscious as it. The development of consciousness inevitably leads not only to separation from the mother, but to separation from the parents and the whole family circle and thus to a relative degree of detachment from the unconscious and the world of the instinct. Yet the longing for this lost world continues and, when difficult adaptations are demanded, is forever tempting one to make evasions and retreats, to regress to the infantile past"*.¹⁸⁰ Infantilism becomes especially manifest in the attachments which, as the traditions of all times insist, constitute the first aspect to overcome in every process of inner growth. However, it's necessary to clarify that the profound meaning of this process is not the repression of these attachments, but the reorientation of the psychic energy to other contexts of being. As Jung argues in *Symbols of Transformation*, the libido which is caught in family rapports should be reoriented into wider circles.

In the *Red Book* there is a special reference to the necessity of overcoming the consciousness' infantilism, which often manifests, for example, in the necessity of being understood by everyone else: *"You want to be understood? That's all we needed! Understand yourself, and you will be sufficiently understood. You will have quite enough work in hand with that. Mothers' little dears want to be understood. Understand yourself, that is the best protection against sensitivity and satisfies your childish longing to be understood"*.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Translation mine. M. L. V. Franz, *Archetypische Dimensionen der Seele* (Daimon Verlag: Einsiedeln, 2005), 281.

¹⁸⁰ Jung, CW 5, § 351.

¹⁸¹ Jung, *The Red Book*, "Scrutinies", 334.

On the other hand, in “The way of the Cross” there’s an explicit call to abandon one’s own childish attachment: *“Someone must begin to stop being childish. Your craving satisfies itself in you. (...) If you devour other things and other people, your greed remains eternally dissatisfied, for it craves for more, the most costly –it craves you. And thus you compel your desire to take your own way. You may ask others provided that you need help and advice. But you should make demands on no one, neither desiring nor expecting anything from anyone except from yourself”*.¹⁸²

Infantilism manifests itself especially in the fascination that the unconscious produces as a way of dissolution of consciousness, where apparently also difficulties dissolve. On this, Neumann states that this identification with the unconscious leads to a loss of psychic energy, which could also provoke a depression: *“The fascination of an unconscious content lies in its power to attract the conscious libido, the first symptom of which is a riveting of attention upon that content. If the attraction grows stronger, the libido is sucked away from consciousness, and this may express in a lowering of consciousness, fatigue, depression, etc.”*¹⁸³

This meaning of depression as an unconscious remaining attached to the mother’s womb expresses itself symbolically in Cronus-Saturn’s story, whose myth precisely begins in the mother’s womb (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 133-87).¹⁸⁴ The fact of being his father the one trying to prevent the children’s birth and the mother Gaia promoting their liberation by giving the sickle to Saturn, allows us to think of a certain ambivalence of the unconscious by resisting, but at the same time promoting its conscious realization. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Saturn is the only one of the children to accept the challenge of getting born. This may be also interpreted as an ambivalent drive in the depressive phenomena regarding development, by resisting to it, but at the same time promoting it. In either case, it reveals itself as a passage symbol. The author Augusto Vitale states that in adolescent depression one might see an ambivalent link with the mother. On the one hand, she is seen as a refuge against the principium individuationis, which threatens to bring a loss of the infinite possibilities that the ‘mother’s womb’ represents. On the other hand, the attachment to the maternal source represents itself a petrification of the development process. As a matter of fact, this is the depressive suffering that usually characterizes the so-called puer aeternus, although it also may constitute a necessary stage to go through in every process of inner development. In Vitale’s words: *“The youth has just been born and still carries with him the fascinating memory of the infinite, immortal depth of the mother. He has no form, but unlimited possibilities. He fears every form like*

¹⁸² Jung, *The Red Book*, Liber Secundus, “The Way of the Cross”, 310.

¹⁸³ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 342.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. “The castration of Uranus” in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Londres: Penguin Books, 2011), 37-39.

death. Such an attitude is peculiar to puer aeternus, since the “changeling” wants to remain such and not take only one form. (...)”¹⁸⁵

On our point of view, this understanding of depression as a childish identification experience of consciousness, can also be illuminated by St. John of the Cross’ references on the phenomenon of acedia, which the saint interprets as one of the many imperfections that may act as a way of avoiding the mystic path, having to be overcome by entering into the night. In a passage of the *Dark Night’s* first book, St. John of the Cross refers to the ones who suffer from acedia as those which, as children: “If once they failed to find in prayer the satisfaction which their taste required (and after all it is well that God should take it from them to prove them), they would prefer not to return to it: sometimes they leave it, at other times they continue it unwillingly. And thus because of this sloth they abandon the way of perfection (which is the way of the negation of their will and pleasure for God’s sake) for the pleasure and sweetness of their own will, which they aim at satisfying in this way rather than the will of God”¹⁸⁶.

According to St. John of the Cross, the ones who suffer from acedia are those who are driven by their own attachments and thus suffer from tedium towards any action implying inner work: “These persons likewise find it irksome when they are commanded to do that wherein they take no pleasure. Because they aim at spiritual sweetness and consolation, they are too weak to have the fortitude and bear the trials of perfection. They resemble those who are softly nurtured and who run fretfully away from everything that is hard, and take offense at the Cross, wherein consist the delights of the spirit. The more spiritual a thing is, the more irksome they find it, for, as they seek to go about spiritual matters with complete freedom and according to the inclination of their will, it causes them great sorrow and repugnance to enter upon the narrow way, which, says Christ, is the way of life”¹⁸⁷.

Acedia (sloth) has a long tradition in Western history¹⁸⁸ and deserves our special attention, since it is another psychological experience that manifests close links to the modern phenomenon of depression.¹⁸⁹ The specific development of the concept of acedia took place during the Patristic Period through Evagrius Ponticus’ work, a deep knower of human psychology and eremite of the

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Vitale, “The archetype of Saturn or the transformation of the father”, 58.

¹⁸⁶ SJC, 1N, 7,2.

¹⁸⁷ SJC, 1 N 7, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The sin of sloth: acedia in medieval thought and literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

¹⁸⁹ For a historical reconstruction of the links between acedia and depressive phenomena, cf.: Rubén Peretó Rivas, “Acedia y Depresión. Aportes Para Una Reconstrucción Histórica” in *Ea Journal* 3, no. 1 (August 2011).

Egyptian desert. However, by going back in time to Classical Antiquity, one can also discover some peculiar terminological subtleties.

The origin of the word ‘acedia’ goes back to the Greek word ‘kedos’ which is linked to the action of caring, and to the solicitude.¹⁹⁰ For example, in *Laws* Plato warns against the attitude of ‘akedia’, that is: a lack of caring, negligence, and indifference towards the neighbor. From the etymological point of view, thus, acedia would allude to a state of unconcern and disregard.

However, as the author Peretó Rivas rightly points out, in several works of Greek classical literature one can also avert the use of the word acedia in relationship to a very specific lack of care, that is: the lack of care towards sepulture and/ or the absence of mourning. Thus, for example, the theme is present in Homer as the abandonment of the corpse without burying it (*Iliad*, 24, 554; *Odyssey*, 20, 130).¹⁹¹

It’s important to notice that this caring for the sepulture does not only refer to the concrete action of burying the dead body, nor to a superficial mourning. Ultimately, the lack of caring for the sepulture and mourning constitutes a lack of caring for oneself. In words of Peretó Rivas: “*The incapacity for mourning implies a superficiality in the treatment of one’s own life. There’s no fervor, there are no tears, there is no sadness. There only remains, then, a lack of caring or negligence for one’s own life*”.¹⁹²

Later, from Evagrius Ponticus’ work on, acedia comes defined as one of the demons that afflict the life of the monk in the desert to deviate him of his spiritual path towards the divine.¹⁹³ This demon tempted the monk to abandon his work and to go home. Far from being one more demon, acedia represented a very peculiar demon, for it haunted at noonday. It was also considered the worst of the demons, since after him there came all the others. Furthermore, this demon brought the hardest trials to the soul. Some of the main manifestations of acedia according to Ponticus’ profound psychological penetration were: sensation of time passing extremely slow (as if a day lasted 50 hours), lack of concentration and permanent distraction, tedium, necessity of change (physical wandering, as well as a wandering of the mind), sloth and working aversion, excessive critique and jealousy towards

¹⁹⁰ The Greek word ‘akedia’ used to be translated into latin as ‘incuria’.

¹⁹¹ Whereas the contrary human action: to kedeos, the caring for the dead, as well as the grief for the deceased person, compare in *Iliad*, 1, 145; *Odyssey*, 4, 108; in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 699, where the term *Kédea* alludes to the funerary rites. Cf.: Peretó Rivas, Rubén. “Acedia y Depresión Como Cuidado Por La Sepultura En El Mundo Clásico y Sus Ecos Contemporáneos” in *Acta Médico- Histórica Adriática* Vol. 12 (Rijeka, 2014), 231-246.

¹⁹² Peretó Rivas, “Acedia y depresión. Aportes para una reconstrucción histórica”, 5. Translation mine.

¹⁹³ Evagrius Ponticus intends acedia as one of the eight logismoi (evil thoughts). Gregory The Great would later revise this classification to form the more commonly known Seven Deadly Sins.

the neighbor.¹⁹⁴ Through an extremely subtle description, Ponticus especially emphasized the idea of a physical as well as an inner wandering (through phantasy)¹⁹⁵ that made the monk permanently desire to be in other places, avoiding his tasks with aversion and thinking that being in any other place would be better than there where he was. Sloth got accentuated by the memories of his family and his past life, and tempted the monk to abandon the cell and his spiritual path. However, the one who could overcome the temptation, would experience a state of great tranquility and joyfulness.

When introducing Ponticus' teachings to the Latin world, John Cassian assimilated acedia to tedium (taedium). Later St. Gregory The Great would conceive it as one of the sorrow's many daughters, on the contrary to Ponticus who still distinguished between acedia and sorrow. On the other hand, St. Thomas Aquinas described acedia as "*an oppressive sorrow, which, to wit, so weighs upon man's mind, that he wants to do nothing; thus acid things are also cold. Hence sloth implies a certain weariness of work (...)*".¹⁹⁶

Undoubtedly, the history of acedia is quite complex and manifests many variations according to each author. However, on our point of view it's possible to recognize a constant pattern throughout history, which would be the relationship between acedia and the aversion to work.¹⁹⁷ Although from a moral point of view acedia has been often linked to sloth and somnolence, it's good to notice that it's not any type of sloth, but a very peculiar one: not just a reluctance, but a sort of evil that radically interposes between the human being and his pursuit of the ultimate scopes of life. It may express itself as sadness, affective indifference, carelessness of oneself or the others, tedium, boredom or weariness, but it's meaning is always the same: to prevent the making of one's own way by causing distraction and inner wandering without a north. Taking this into account, the antique meaning of acedia as a carelessness towards sepulture and mourning may reveal a deeper dimension of this psychological phenomenon, since symbolically speaking mourning and sepulture might be one of the hardest works for the soul in this life, that is: the coping with loss. Thus, the worst negligence of every human being may be the carelessness towards himself, which leaves the soul small and childish. Whereas Hildegard von Bingen establishes a link between the fall of Adam and melancholy¹⁹⁸,

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Ponticus' subtle description on acedia in Pontico, *Trattato pratico della vita monastica*, 70-71.

¹⁹⁵ On the link between acedia and the creation of a 'meta-reality' cf. Rubén Peretó Rivas, "La acedia y Evagrio Póntico. Entre ángeles y demonios" en *Studia Patristica* LXVII (2013): 239-45.

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-III, 35, 1. Cf. Fernando Martín Blassi, "La acedia en Tomás de Aquino y sus consecuencias en el plano de la religión" in *Cauriensia*, Vol. VIII (2013), 299-315.

¹⁹⁷ This aversion to work might be understood as a lack of working, but also as an excess of it. Cf. Rubén Peretó Rivas, "Acedia y Trabajo. El Justo Equilibrio" in *Cauriensia* VI (2011): 333-44.

¹⁹⁸ The German mystic Hildegard von Bingen establishes a link between the fall from paradise and the melancholic humor: "*una volta Adamo ebbe trasgredito il comandamento, lo slancio dell'innocenza si oscurò in lui, e i suoi occhi che avevano*

Evagrius Ponticus intends acedia as the biggest obstacle for returning into the original unity. In Peretó Rivas' words: "*The negligence or acedia is double: it is at the origins of the dramatic fall and, also, making it difficult to return to the original unit. Therefore, it is not just a simple sloth or reluctance, but an evil that goes against the most important and fundamental activity of human being, which is achieving its ultimate scope. Just as he doesn't worry about giving the right sepulture to the death and processing grief, neither does he worry about accomplishing the duty that he has to himself*".¹⁹⁹

Although acedia has been often considered as an exclusively monastic phenomenon, from Middle Ages on, several authors conceived it also as a secular phenomenon. For example, Caesarius of Heisterbach affirms: "*the devil does not only tempt spiritual people with somnolence, but also the laics*".²⁰⁰ Here it becomes evident that not only the monks may suffer from acedia, but also laics. Furthermore, in *Un prince de la bohème* Balzac explicitly refers to acedia when referring to the state of many young people of his time, who didn't find the energy for dedicating themselves to anything in particular, and so were filled with boredom in the afternoons –and not only Sundays-, hit by the noonday demon.²⁰¹

We believe that the concept of acedia as a lack of inner work may be also related to the meaning of depression as incest longing according to Jung. However, it's necessary to notice that the infantilism of consciousness according to Jung exceeds the stages of life and presents itself as a certain ego attitude that may manifest at any moment of inner development, and thus ultimately constitutes a way of 'not confronting' one's own soul. For instance, in the chapter "Experiences in the Desert" of the *Red Book*, we also find some references to the type of consciousness which remains childish towards the soul. In a dialog with the conscious ego, the soul says: "*You speak to me as if you were a child complaining to its mother. I am not your mother. (...) Should everything fall into your lap ripe and finished?*".²⁰²

From this point of view, it's not only a child the one who follows external models, but also the one who cannot affront a mature work through time with his own soul and with the exterior world, thus remaining unconscious and childish, and not being able to take roots. This is the case of the one who identifies himself with the figure of the eternal boy –or, in Jung's terms, the so-called 'puer

fino a quel momento contemplato il regno dei cieli, si spensero e la sua bile fu trasformata in amarezza, la sua malinconia in nefandezza". (Hildegard von Bingen, *Curae et Causae*).

¹⁹⁹ Peretó Rivas, "Las mutaciones de la acedia. De la Patrística a la Edad Media", 159. Translation mine.

²⁰⁰ Cesario de Heisterbach quoted by Peretó Rivas, "Acedia y depresión. Aportes para una reconstrucción histórica", 12. Translation mine.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Jung, *The Red Book*, Liber Primus, "Experiences in the Desert", 236.

aeternus'²⁰³, intending by it that kind of consciousness which believes itself free, though remaining attached to the unconscious symbolized by the mother, consequently behaving in a childish way. It's the kind of consciousness which doesn't commit, or commits only partially, not tolerating frustration and finding it hard to integrate the world of its high spiritual inspirations with the real world.

These considerations also amplify through one of the meanings of nigredo in alchemy, i.e., as the initial and chaotic state of prime matter: *“Right at the beginning you meet the dragon, the chthonic spirit, the devil or, as the alchemist called it, the blackness, the nigredo, and this encounter produces suffering (...) in psychological terms, the soul finds itself in the throes of melancholy (...)”*.²⁰⁴



Figure 1: Chaos as prima materia (M. de Marolles, *Tableaux du temple des muses* -1635-, British Museum, London)

As an initially latent state, nigredo reveals itself as the chaos confusum at the early beginning of the work.²⁰⁵ As Jung points out: *“The chaos is a massa confusa that gives birth to the stone. (...) According to Hortulanus, the stone arises from a massa confuse containing in itself all the elements. Just as the world came forth from a chaos confusum, so does the stone. (...) The initial state is the hidden state, but by the art and the grace of God it can be transmuted into the second, manifest state. That is why the prima materia sometimes coincides with the idea of the initial stage of the process, the nigredo. It is then the black earth in which the gold or the lapis is sown like the grain of wheat. It is the black, magically fecund earth that Adam took with him from Paradise, also called antimony and described as a “black blacker than black” (nigrum nigrius nigro)”*.²⁰⁶

The initially chaotic matter is frequently symbolized as a dragon or a serpent biting its tail. It may symbolize a sterility state in which nothing grows: *“Arisleus tells of his adventure with the Rex marinus, in whose kingdom nothing prospers and nothing is begotten. Moreover there are no philosophers there. Only like mates with like, consequently there is no procreation”*.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ As M. L. Von Franz observes, in the *Metamorphoses* Ovid applies the words *puer aeternus* (meaning eternal youth) to the child-god Iacchus in the Eleusinian mysteries. Cf. Marie Louise von Franz, *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000) On the puer aeternus, Jung stated: *“This type is granted only a fleeting existence, because he is never anything but an anticipation of something desired and hoped for. This is so literally true that a certain type of “mother’s son” actually exhibits all the characteristics of the flower-like, youthful god, and even dies an early death. The reason is that he only lives on and through the mother and can strike no roots in the world, so that he finds himself in a state of permanent incest”*. (Jung, CW 5, § 118-119).

²⁰⁴ *Carl Gustav Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, ed. W. Mcguire and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 228.

²⁰⁵ On the nigredo as the prime matter's chaotic state, cf. Jung, CW14, §§183-184; §253.

²⁰⁶ Jung, CW 12, § 433.

²⁰⁷ Jung, CW12, § 435-436.

In “The Philosophical Tree” Jung also states that the serpent as a symbol of *materia confusa* must be understood as “*the attitude of the son who unconsciously hangs of his mother*”.²⁰⁸ It’s important to note that the psychological state linked to this stage relates again to carelessness, distraction and a permanent temptation to abandon the work. On this, Jung quotes Hoghelande: “*Let him take care to recognize and guard against the deceptions of the devil, who often insinuates himself into the chemical operations, that he may hold up the laborants with vain and useless things to the neglect of the works of nature*”.²⁰⁹ And then he also quotes Olympiodorus (siglo VI): “*And all the while the demon Ophiuchos instils negligence, impeding our intentions; everywhere he creeps about, within and without, causing oversights, fear, and unpreparedness, and at other times he seeks by harassments and injuries to make us abandon the work*”.²¹⁰

At this stage, consciousness is called to an attitude that gets symbolically expressed in the action of cutting and separating in a variety of forms. In Cronus’ myth it appears as the act of ‘cutting the sky’. St. John of the Cross speaks of the necessity of entering into the dark night of the sense, which is an active purgation of the attachments and is equally expressed as an act of separation, of ‘going out of the house’. On the other hand, Evagrius Ponticus says that for overcoming *acedia* it’s necessary to remain in the cell, but this is also understood as an act of ‘cutting’ since it implies an act of vigilance. At the same time, the alchemist is called to do a *separatio* out of the *chaos confusum*, which manifests in the symbolic act of dismembering the serpent, implying the division of matter. Through this, the alchemist differentiates the undifferentiated matter, since only that which is differentiated can later be integrated.

In every case, the idea of an inner work regarding a separation from the unconscious gets emphasized. This aspect of the inner development has been well recognized by Jung as a way of overcoming oneself’ childish aspects and all those attachments that obstacle the path towards inner knowledge. On this, it’s worth remembering the story of Abba Anthony in the *Apothegma Patrum*: “*When the holy Abba Anthony was living in the desert, he fell into acedia and was darkened by many impassioned thoughts. He said to God, ‘I want to be saved, but these thoughts will not leave me alone. What shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?’ A little later, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw someone like himself, sitting and working, then rising from work and praying, and again sitting and plaiting a rope, then again rising for prayer. It was an angel of the Lord, sent to correct him and*

²⁰⁸ Jung, CW 13, § 449.

²⁰⁹ *Theatrum Chemicum* (1692) quoted by Jung, CW 13, § 429.

²¹⁰ Olympiodorus quoted by Jung, CW 13, § 430.

*comfort him. And he heard the angel saying, 'Do this and you will be saved.' And when he heard this, he was filled with great joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved".*²¹¹

The conscious attitude that combines work and devotion is analogously expressed in the largely known alchemical expression: "*Ora, Lege, Lege, Lege, Relege, Labora et Invenies*". (*Pray, read, read, reread, work and you will discover [it]*). But this action of making conscious the unconscious is not easy at all, since it implies an experience of loss, with its corresponding afflictions. In the following pages, we will study depression as an effect of making conscious the unconscious.

²¹¹ *Los dichos de los Padres del Desierto* ed. Martín de Elizalde (Buenos Aires: Paulinas, 1986), 15. Translation mine.

„Wie grausam nun der Verlust auch immer sei,
er vermag nichts gegen den Besitz:
er vervollständigt ihn,
wenn ihr so wollt, er bestätigt ihn:
er ist im Grunde nichts anderes als ein zweiter Erwerb
- diesmal ganz innerlich - und ebenso intensiv“.

R. M. Rilke

4. 2 Depression as an Effect of a Conscious Realization: Separation between Conscious and Unconscious

In *Two essays on Analytical Psychology*, in the chapter entitled “Phenomena Resulting from the Assimilation of the Unconscious”, Jung speaks of depression as one of the possible results of a conscious realization (being mania one of the other possible effects, although for Jung mania constitutes the reverse of depression): “*Since human nature is not compounded wholly of light, but also abounds in shadows, the insight gained in practical analysis is often somewhat painful, (...). Hence there are people who take their newly won insight very much to heart, far too much in fact, (...). They allow themselves to get unduly depressed and are then inclined to doubt everything, finding nothing right anywhere*”.²¹²

In “The Symbolic Life” Jung again speaks of depression as an effect of a conscious realization, by indicating that every inner work towards individuation may initially increase the psychic tensions. This may lead some persons to a temporary maniac exaltation, while in other cases there may take place a depressive experience: “*In general, working with the unconscious brings an increase of tension at first, because it activates the opposites in the psyche by making them conscious. This entirely depends, though on the situation from which one starts. The carefree optimist falls into a depression because he has now become conscious of the situation he is in. On the other hand, the pressure on the inward brooding person is released. The initial situation decides whether a release or increase of pressure will result. (...) In general, every act of conscious realization means a tension of opposites*”.²¹³

In order to develop, consciousness needs to detach itself from the unconscious, which symbolically speaking may be represented by the mother. As long as the maternal womb continues

²¹² Jung, CW 7, § 225.

²¹³ Jung, CW 18/2, § 1812.

to provide for everything, it does not allow consciousness to get born. The undifferentiated unit of consciousness and unconsciousness presents itself chaotically, as a *materia confussa* preceding the separation between oneself and the other, between the inner and the outer world. The path towards the consciousness' birth leads through the separation from the unconscious. Psychologically speaking this act implies a liberation from one's own attachments and a withdrawing of projections. This separation necessarily brings affliction to consciousness, since it is experienced as a loss of the original unity. Consequently, it may bring sentiments of solitude, guilt, sorrow and yearning for the lost paradise.

Erich Neumann briefly analyzes the depressive experience which may be related to the consciousness' birth and to every act of conscious realization. He refers that the suffering and experience of loss which are linked to the creation of consciousness are to such point strong that at the beginning it is far away of being experienced as a creative act, and thus, as a gain: "*Through the heroic act of world creation and division of opposites, the ego steps forth from the magic circle of the uroboros and finds itself in a state of loneliness and discord. With the emergence of the fully fledged ego, the paradisaical situation is abolished; the infantile condition, in which life was regulated by something ampler and more embracing, is at an end, and with it the natural dependence on that ample embrace. (...) Ego consciousness not only brings a sense of loneliness; it also introduces suffering, toil, trouble, evil, sickness, and death into man's life as soon these are perceived by an ego*".²¹⁴

The human is a self-conscious being and, although he does not always live up to his self-consciousness, this is what distinguishes him from the rest of the animals. However, this capacity for self-consciousness is grounded on the successive experiences of loss and separation, which gets symbolically expressed by the infinite variants of the mythological motive of the 'lost paradise'. This experience with all its afflictions reveals itself as a necessary passage in every self-creation act.²¹⁵ It could be described as a double movement: every experience of loss and separation calls for an act of conscious realization and, at the same time, every act of conscious realization causes an experience of separation and loss. As Neumann has demonstrated, the consciousness' birth can only take place as a differentiation of everything which is 'not an ego', i.e., through a liberation from the unconscious. Only then the individuation may begin.

²¹⁴ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 114-115.

²¹⁵ Cf. Ruth Strauss, "The Archetype of Separation" in *The Archetype. 2nd International Congress for Analytical Psychology, Zurich 1962: Proceedings*, 1964, 104-12.

This act of separation is symbolically identical with sacrifice and dismemberment. However, this dismemberment is the condition for every act of creation. In Neumann's words: "*Mutilation (...) is the condition of all creation. (...) Without the slaying of the old parents, their dismemberment and neutralization, there can be no beginning*".²¹⁶ It's an experience which may be imposed by life through an experience of external loss (for example, by the death of a loved one, or the anticipation of one's own death), though it may also be deepened through a free process of inner research (by working on the liberation of one's own attachments, an example of which may be found in the purgative stage of the Christian mystic path, but other similar examples may be also found in the spiritual traditions of all times).

In any case, every loss and separation brings the necessity of grief, which has its own time of maturation. As Neumann points out: "*If the ego succeeds in wresting (a content) from the unconscious and making it a conscious content, it is –mythologically speaking– overcome. As, however, this content still goes on using up libido, the ego must continue to work at it until it is fully incorporated and assimilated. Ego consciousness cannot therefore avoid further dealings with the 'conquered' content and is likely to suffer*".²¹⁷

Several symbols of the spiritual traditions, which are often associated with depressive phenomena, manifest an equally significant separation moment, although at the same time constituting a necessary stage of the symbolic development. As Hesiod narrates, Cronus' birth is made possible by Uranus' castration. This way, Cronos grounds his reign over the loss of his parents, i.e., after the unavoidable separation of sky and earth.

This separating function appears also in the astrological symbolism of Saturn, where it is closely linked to displeasure and to every task intended as an existential test. As Chevalier and Gheerbrant point out:

²¹⁶ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 121.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.

“Al fondo della funzione biologica e psicologica di cui Saturno è simbolo, scopriamo infatti dei fenomeni di distacco: la serie delle prove di separazione che si susseguono nel corso della storia dell’essere umano, dalla rottura del cordone ombelicale del neonato fino all’estrema rinuncia del



Figure 2: Cronus armed with sickle (Aubin-Louis Millin, *Galerie mythologique*, 1811.)

vecchio, passando attraverso i diversi abbandoni, rinunce e sacrifici che la vita impone. Nel corso di questo processo, Saturno ha il compito anche di liberarci dalla prigione interiore costituita dalla nostra animalità e dai nostri legami terreni, sciogliendoci dalle catene della vita istintiva e delle sue passioni. In questo senso, esso costituisce una potenza di freno a vantaggio dello spirito ed è la grande leva della vita intellettuale, morale e spirituale”.²¹⁸

As Chevalier and Gheerbrant clearly state, Saturn’s symbolism speaks of a painful passage linked to loss and separation, though it’s profound meaning is to be found in the possibility of transformation that it supposes for consciousness. It should be noticed that in the Greek Cronos’ myth, there comes emphasized the creative aspect of the cutting action and the loss of original unity. As the mythical tradition tells, from Uranus’ blood (or, depending on some versions, from its semen) which splattered onto the earth, came the Giants, the Erinyes and the Meliae. Also, according to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, from Uranus’ genitals thrown into the sea Aphrodite was born, the goddess of spiritual love, which Plato opposes in the *Symposium* to Pandemos Aphrodite, the love in its earthly aspect. On the other hand, the creativity linked to the action of ‘cutting’ also reflects on the Indo-European etymology of Cronus, as Michael Janda recently proposed²¹⁹: ‘the cutter’, from the root **(s)ker-* ‘to cut’ (Greek κείρω (*keirō*), cf. English *shear*), motivated by Cronus’s characteristic act of ‘cutting the sky’. The Indo-Iranian reflex of the root is *kar*, which generally means ‘to make, create’ (whence karma). Janda also argues that the original meaning ‘to cut’ in a creative cosmogonic sense is still preserved in some verses of the *Rigveda* relating to Indra’s heroic ‘cutting’, which like that of Cronus resulted in creation:

RV 10.104.10 ārdāyad vṛtram akṛṇod ulokaṃ he hit Vrtra fatally, cutting [$>$ creating] a free path.

RV 6.47.4 varṣmāṇaṃ divo akṛṇod he cut [$>$ created] the loftiness of the sky.

²¹⁸ Jean Chevalier e Alain Gheerbrant, *Dizionario dei simboli Vol. II* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1987), 326.

²¹⁹ Michael Janda, *Die Musik nach dem Chaos: der Schöpfungsmythos der europäischen Vorzeit* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachen und Literaturen der Universität Innsbruck, 2010), 54-56.

However, when the creative meaning of separation does not become recognized, at its place may appear nostalgia. An example of this can be found in Tibullus, when he yearns for the Golden Age of Saturnus, before earth separated itself giving place to the sea: *“How well they lived while King Saturn ruled, before the world was open to long treks, back before a ship of pine had scorned the slate-dark waves and offered to the winds its billowing sails”*.²²⁰



Figure 3: The mutilation of Uranus by Saturn, Giorgio Vasari and Cristofano Gherardi (16th century, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence).

The separation also constitutes an important operation in the alchemical process and, by the way, it also comes to be associated with Saturn: *“Per il pensiero ermetico, agli occhi dei “chimici volgari” Saturno è il piombo. Ma per i Filosofi ermetici è il color nero, quello della materia disciolta e putrefatta; o anche il rame comune, il primo dei metalli; o il vetriolo azoico di Raimondo Lullo, che separa i metalli. Tutte queste immagini indicano una funzione di separazione, una fine e insieme un inizio, un arresto nel ciclo, e l’inizio di un nuovo ciclo, poiché l’accento è posto principalmente su una frattura o su un ostacolo nell’evoluzione”*.²²¹

Although the nigredo usually gets linked with the initial state of the chaotic *materia confussa*, sometimes it also constitutes the result of a separation from this initial chaos. As such, it represents a phase which is so difficult and critical, as it is also important for the posterior union of the elements. The key aspect of separation reflects itself in Edward Philips’ words, when he defines alchemy as *“the art of dissolving metals, to separate the pure of the impure”*.²²² Regarding separation as a phase towards the generation of the philosophical stone, Jung quotes Espagnet: *“The gen of the stone takes place on the model of the creation of the world. It’s necessary that it have its own chaos and its own prima materia, in which elements are to float about in confusion until they are separated by the igneous spirit. The waters are gathered into one [place] and the dry-land [Arida] appear”*.²²³

Separation is assimilated to the dissolution that precedes coagulation and conjunction. Throughout the art of separating the gross from the subtle, matter becomes more and more pure. However, this operation is not exempt from suffering. In words of Abraham: *“Separation is the same as dissolution, division and divorce and occurs at the initial stage of the opus alchymicum known as the nigredo. The coagulation, coniunctio, fixation or union of the opposing elements cannot take*

²²⁰ Albius Tibullus, *The Complete Poems of Tibullus* (California: University of California Press, 2012), § 35.

²²¹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dizionario dei simboli Vol. II.*, 325-326.

²²² Edward Philips quoted by Abraham, *A dictionary of alchemical imagery*, 180.

²²³ Espagnet quoted by Jung, *CW 12*, § 475.

place unless they have first been separated. Although the separation appears to be a time of death, sorrow and suffering, it is nevertheless the necessary prelude to perfect conjunction and fixation”.²²⁴

Lyndy Abraham adds that through the separation process the alchemist does not only learn to separate the gross from the subtle, but also reality from mere illusion. Throughout separation the alchemist gains a deeper understanding of himself and of the cosmos, thus emerging from the original chaos.

The separatio as a separation from the original chaos is well represented in the second image



Figure 4: Lambspring Emblem 2

of Lambspring’s book, where a warrior encounters a dragon, whose head he must cut off (fourth figure). In his essay “Transformation symbolism in the mass” (1914) Jung speaks of the symbol of killing with the sword as a recurrent theme in alchemical literature, thus calling attention on its significance of sacrifice and its separating function: “For the alchemical sword brings about the *solutio* or *separatio* of the elements, thereby restoring the original condition of chaos, so that a new and more perfect body can be produced by a new *impressio formae*, or by a ‘new imagination’. The sword is therefore that which ‘kills and

vivifies’ (...).”²²⁵

Nigredo as a separation’s result is also recognized by Jung, when affirming: “The painful conflict that begins with the *nigredo* or *tenebrositas* is described by the alchemist as the separation or division *elementorum*, the solution, calcination, incineration, or as dismemberment of the body, excruciating animal sacrifices, amputation of the mother’s hand or the lion’s paws, atomization of the bridegroom in the body of the bride, and so on. While this extreme form of *disiunctio* is going on, there is a transformation of that *Arcanum* (...)”.²²⁶ Jung adds that the alchemist tries to get round this paradox and to make one out of two, though the success is extremely doubtful. Separation inevitably implies a mortification, an alteration of the substance’s external form. This becomes especially evident in a brain of the Zoroaster’s Cave, where it says: “Nature begins all her Actions from Separation. Mortification is the first step to Separation, and the only way to that End: for, as long as Bodies remain in their old Origin, separation without putrefaction and mortification, cannot reach them”.²²⁷

²²⁴ Abraham, *A dictionary of alchemical imagery*, 180.

²²⁵ Jung, CW 11, § 357.

²²⁶ Jung, CW 16, § 398.

²²⁷ Quoted by Abraham, *A dictionary of alchemical imagery*, 130.

On the other hand, the author Titus Burckhardt links this nigredo experience with the movement of consciousness moving away from the senses into the innermost: *“At the beginning of the spiritual realization there is death, as dying of the world. Consciousness must be turned away from the senses and converted to the innermost. But the interior light has not yet risen; and therefore this withdrawal from the exterior world is experienced as a deep dark night, nox profunda”*.²²⁸

Every conscious realization implies this experience of duality, since it is intended as a separation from the undifferentiated unconscious unity. Nigredo as a separation is psychologically experienced, for example, whenever a withdrawal of projections (positive as negative) takes place. In words of Jung: *“Alchemy describes, not merely in general outline but often in the most astonishing detail, the same psychological phenomenology which can be observed in the analysis of unconscious processes. The individual’s specious unity that emphatically says ‘I want, I think’ breaks down under the impact of the unconscious. So long as the patient can think that somebody else (his father or mother) is responsible for his difficulties, he can save some semblance of unity (putatur unus esse!). But once he realizes that he himself has a shadow, that his enemy is in his own heart, the conflict begins and one becomes two. (...) there is an ‘obfuscation of the light’, i.e., consciousness is deponentiated and the patient is at a loss to know where his personality begins or ends. It is like passing through the valley of the shadow (...)”*.²²⁹

In a similar way, M. L. von Franz speaks of the projections withdrawal as a painful experience that can lead to depressive phenomena, since every projection withdrawal implies a regression of psychic energy into the unconscious. Regarding this, Odajnyk clearly states: *“... even if the correction is made willingly and one really does give up, still a depression follows because the psychic energy that was invested in the projection no longer flow back to us but has been cut off. It then has to be sought in the unconscious, and if that is done properly, another bit of the unconscious is made part of the conscious structure, and the psychic energy formerly streaming out towards the world remains within. (...) It may make one depressed to realize these things, but at least this form of depression is inherently constructive”*.²³⁰

The projection’s withdrawal may be motivated by a free conscious inner work, or may also be forced by the experience of an external loss, for example, the death of a related or a loved one. In both cases, the results are similar, as Jung states: *“When a person dies, the feelings and emotions that bound his relatives to him lose their application to reality and sink into the unconscious, where they*

²²⁸ Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy: science of the cosmos, science of the soul* (London: Stuart, 1967), 186.

²²⁹ Jung, CW16, § 399.

²³⁰ Odajnyk, “Jung’s contribution to the understanding of the meaning of depression”, 49.

*activate a collective content that has a deleterious effect on consciousness. (...) The harmful effect shows itself in the form of loss of libido, depression, and physical debility”.*²³¹

Another way of understanding the creative act through a conscious realization consists in the liberation of one's own attachments. In the chapter “Refinding the soul” of the *Red Book* Jung says that only when one's desire moves away of external things and people, one may arrive to the place of the soul. Consequently, the first step towards the encounter of one's own soul and the self, consists firstly of an ascetical moment, intended as a liberation not of the things themselves, but of their attachment. An example for this kind of depressive phenomena associated to the purgation of attachments is to be found in the writings of St. John of the Cross regarding the active night of the sense, in the first book of *The Ascent to Mount Carmel*. Here the night has again the meaning of a transit or stage along the mystic path, regarding an experience of loss or separation. St. John of the Cross describes this night as a ‘moving away from home’, as a withdrawal of the appetites, which leaves the soul in the dark and suffering. These are moments of mortification, privation, renouncement, negation, which are all actions linked to asceticism²³²: “*We here describe as night the privation of every kind of pleasure which belongs to the desire; for, even as night is naught but the privation of light, and, consequently, of all objects that can be seen by means of light, whereby the visual faculty remains unoccupied and in darkness, even so likewise the mortification of desire may be called night to the soul. For, when the soul is deprived of the pleasure of its desire in all things, it remains, as it were, unoccupied and in darkness*”.²³³

The dark night of sense is one of the first transits that the soul makes towards its union with God. Through it, the will and the understanding become stronger. Without it the soul could not move along the path of unification, since desire “*blinds and darkens the soul; for desire, as such, is blind, since of itself it has no understanding in itself (...)*”.²³⁴ The path that leads into this night goes through the moving away of that which is most easy, tasteful and pleasing, in order to go closer of that which is most difficult, laborious, and tasteless: “*Not that which is restful, but that which is wearisome; not that which is consolation, but rather that which is disconsolateness; not that which is greatest, but that which is least*”.²³⁵

²³¹ Jung, CW 8, § 598.

²³² Cf. González Suárez, Lucero. “Ascética y mística en la Noche Activa Del Sentido. La doctrina de la negación en el primer libro de la Subida Del Monte Carmelo, de San Juan de La Cruz” in *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* IX, no. 19 (2014): 9–32.

²³³ SJC, 1 A, 3. 1.

²³⁴ SJC, 1 A, 8. 3.

²³⁵ SJC, 1 A, 13.6.

Firstly, the soul enters in this night in an active way, which consists in “*that which the soul can do, and does, or itself, in order to enter therein (...)*”.²³⁶ To this active way follows then a passive way, where the soul does nothing, but only God works in it, thus the soul remaining patient.

Neumann links the suffering of the mystic at the purgative stage with the birth and development of consciousness: “*The ascetic whose ego consciousness has triumphantly repulsed the instinctual components that threatened to master him experiences pleasure with his ego, but he ‘suffers’ because the instinct he has denied is also a part of his total structure*”. To this he adds that “*only with the onset of maturity is this suffering partially overcome in the individuation process*”.²³⁷

Whether it is an experience caused by a free inner work, or an experience caused by a form of outer loss, it always confronts the consciousness with the dimension of death and, therefore, with grief work. The relationship between mourning and melancholy has been well studied by Freud in his essay “Mourning and Melancholy”. Although Jung has not written any essays regarding grief, there are several reflections on the topic of death throughout his work, mostly on the idea of the afterlife, which according to Jung is deeply related to the significance of the rebirth. Taking this into account, it could be said that every loss and separation experience constitute the possibility for a symbolical death of the ego consciousness and, if this is duly assumed, the ulterior possibility for a consciousness’ birth. Through grief work the ego consciousness is called to internalize that which was lost, and therefore to recreate the absent in the innermost, for “*what robs Nature of its glamour, and life of its joy, is the habit of looking back for something that used to be outside, instead of looking inside, into the depths of the depressive state*”.²³⁸

4.3 Depression as an Unconscious Compensation (Loss and Calling of the Soul)

In *Symbols of Transformation* Jung writes that depression “*should be regarded as an unconscious compensation whose content must be made conscious if it is to be fully effective. This can only be done by consciously regressing along with the depressive tendency and integrating the memories so activated into the conscious mind –which was what the depression was aiming at in the first place*”.²³⁹

²³⁶ SJC, 1 A, 13.1

²³⁷ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 348.

²³⁸ Jung, CW 5, § 625. When this does not take place, there may appear the pathological grief.

²³⁹ Jung, CW 5, §393.

Through the experience of loss and separation (and the liberation of attachments that it supposes), consciousness develops and becomes stronger. This reflects itself on a stronger will force, and an increase of psychic energy at disposal. However, what at a first place may have been a sign of development and growth, later in time may become a petrification. In other words, the mature consciousness exposes itself to the risk of uprooting from its source of life, which is the unconscious. At this point depression may be understood as a compensation phenomenon, i.e., as an unconscious answer to the consciousness that has become way too unilateral, setting apart other aspects of being that form part of the psychic totality and which, as such, call for their integration in conscious life. Regarding this, Neumann states: *“The firmness of the ego might degenerate into petrification, the independence of ego consciousness can become a blocking off the unconscious, and the self-estimation and self-responsibility of the ego might pervert into self-overestimation and glorification of the ego. This means that the consciousness opposing to the unconscious, which originally had to represent the totality tendency of personality, might lose its link to totality and become ill”*.²⁴⁰

This type of depression is typical of middle life, a moment which Jung symbolically associates with the point in which the sun (of consciousness) arrives to its zenith and starts descending, towards the depths and the knowing of itself: *“(…) the social goal is attained only at the cost of a diminution of personality. Many-far too many— aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber-room among dusty memories; but sometimes, too, they are glowing coals under grey ashes. Statistics show a rise in the frequency of mental depressions in men about forty. In women the neurotic difficulties generally begin somewhat earlier. We see that in this phase of life –between thirty-five and forty- an important change in the human psyche is in preparation”*.²⁴¹

In her article entitled “The value and meaning of the depression”, M. E. Harding describes this depression as an archetypal experience, which resembles an experience of the ‘wilderness’, and which can be understood as an alienation from oneself, from community and from the divine.²⁴² Jung also relates this type of experience to the so-called ‘loss of the soul’ among the primitive people, explaining that this kind of phenomena can be also frequently observed among civilized people. Referring to the modern man, Jung states: *“He too is liable to a sudden loss of initiative for no apparent reason. (...) certain quanta of energy, no longer finding a conscious outlet, stream off into*

²⁴⁰ Neumann, *Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewußtseins*, 306. Translation mine.

²⁴¹ Jung, OC 8, § 772-773.

²⁴² M. E. Harding, “The value and meaning of depression”, 121.

the unconscious, where they activate other, compensating contents, which in turn begin to exert a compulsive influence on the conscious mind".²⁴³

One of the clearest examples of this kind of depressive experience may be found at the beginning of *The Red Book*, where Jung's ego -at the age of 35- expresses his feelings of emptiness and desperation despite having all he had ever wished for (fame, family, richness).²⁴⁴ He then recognizes to have lost his soul, which reveals itself as an independent vital force going beyond academic theories. By making a big sacrifice he accepts to call for her: "*My soul, where are you?*" (*Meine Seele, wo bist Du?*) One could suppose that this calling for the soul was itself an answer to the previous calling of the soul itself for Jung, expressing itself through depression. But in the psyche every loss is apparent and the depressive experience in this context may be understood as a calling of the unconscious for integration: "*Once a thing has fallen into the unconscious it is retained there, regardless of whether the conscious mind suffers or not. The latter can hunger and freeze, while everything in the unconscious becomes verdant and blossoms*".²⁴⁵

In "The psychology of the unconscious" Jung gives the example of an American businessman who was preparing for his retirement, intending to enjoy the fruits of his labor but, instead of being able to 'live', he became depressed with hypochondriac symptoms. As Jung points out, the man had only developed one dimension of his being, neglecting his body during his entire life. The depression came to 'bury' him onto his body, which to that point of his life he had always neglected. If he had heard his depression as a calling of the body, it would have meant his 'salvation'.²⁴⁶

There can be found several symbolic parallels in Western traditions which may shed light on Jung's conception of depressive phenomena as an unconscious compensation. As the Greek myth tells, when Gaia averts Cronus of his future dethronement by one of his sons, Cronus starts to devour them at their birth, as his father Uranus had previously done with him.²⁴⁷ But what is the meaning of this 'devouring'? Augusto Vitale distinguishes between the meaning of being swallowed by the father and the meaning of being swallowed by mother. Meanwhile being swallowed by the mother refers to a childish unconsciousness, being swallowed by the father may be understood as a blocking towards

²⁴³ Jung, CW 16, § 372.

²⁴⁴ Further examples may be found in the beginnings of Goethe's *Faust*, as well as in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*: a critical experience of desperation and inner void, which cannot be 'explained' through logic and reason (since apparently nothing has been lost), but however lead their main characters to live the adventure of their souls. In these contexts, the initial experience of suffering and darkness becomes a passage towards a future inner transformation, which in either case has to be assumed and made conscious.

²⁴⁵ Jung, CW 7, § 345.

²⁴⁶ Jung, CW 7, § 75.

²⁴⁷ Hesiod, *Theogony* 453-67. Cf. "The Dethronement of Cronus" in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 39-44.

transformation: *“The meaning of being swallowed by the father, which is constant of the saturnic psychology, may be explained as the blocking of an urge toward transformation. It is an archetypal expression for a peculiar moment in the process of the ego toward differentiation”*.²⁴⁸

In astrology Saturn also incarnates the principle of fixation, condensation and inertia. It speaks of a force which tends to crystalize and petrify the existent forms. Through a tendency to rigidity, it opposes to change and transformation. That’s why so often Saturn has been considered as the ‘great malefic’, since he also represents every sort of obstacles, paralysis and impotence.²⁴⁹ However, the limits that Saturn imposes to transformation by devouring its own children sooner or later show their inefficiency. There arrives one day in which Rhea gives Cronus a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes, instead of giving to him his son Zeus. Through this symbolic action, one could interpret that Cronus’ unavoidable destiny is to be dethroned, which symbolically equals to dying. Every consciousness implies a consciousness of one’s own death, and at the same time a strong resistance to it. However, the denial of this simple fact cannot go on forever. Sooner or later there comes the ‘rock’, which may be understood as an inhibition of will and of psychic energy. As Vitale points out, it’s not about a lack of will nor a kind of weak and primitive will –as it is usually the case whenever an identification with the unconscious takes place. It’s more like an inhibition of will as an effect of an unconscious compensation: *“Another important aspect of the saturnic depression is the inhibition of will. It is neither a lack nor a primitive weakness of will but a block provoked by an encounter with a contrary and more powerful will”*.²⁵⁰

This inhibition of will reveals itself as a calling for the ‘giving up to the throne’, in order to develop other aspects of the self, which get symbolically represented in the figure of those children which Cronus doesn’t allow to get born. Psychologically, these ‘children’ may be understood as psychological potentialities. There are different versions on Cronus’ destiny. Plato affirms that he got chained by Zeus, while Homer states that he was thrown into Tartarus. However, other versions tell that Cronus did not get defeated by his son Zeus, but delivered his throne to him free and spontaneously. These symbolical variations may reflect different kinds of possible conscious attitudes.

In alchemy, there are other symbolic parallels of the wilderness experience as a calling for the cultivation of the undeveloped aspects of the self, at least for the consciousness which is opened to listen. In *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung quotes one of Philaletha’s texts: *“If thou knowest how to*

²⁴⁸ Vitale, “The archetype of Saturn or the transformation of the father”, 50.

²⁴⁹ Cf. ‘Saturno’ in Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dizionario dei simboli*, 326.

²⁵⁰ Vitale, “The archetype of Saturn or the transformation of the father”, 49.

moisten this dry earth with its own water, thou wilt loosen the pores of the earth"; which he interprets as follows: *"If you contemplate your lack of fantasy, of inspiration and inner aliveness which you feel as sheer stagnation and a barren wilderness, and impregnate with the interest born of alarm at your inner death, then something can take shape in you, for your inner emptiness conceals just a great fullness if only you will allow it to penetrate you. If you can prove receptive to this "call of the wild," the longing for fulfillment will quicken the sterile wilderness of your soul as rain quickens dry earth. (Thus the Soul to the Laborant, staring glumly at his stove and scratching himself behind the ear because he has no more ideas)".*²⁵¹ Here Jung refers again to the consciousness' sterility which has shut itself up to the point of drowning in its own 'greed'.

In *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung states that the alchemical nigredo may also be understood as a calling of the king's son for help: *"As the grain of fire lies concealed in the hyle, so the King's Son lies in the dark depths of the sea as though dead, but yet lives and calls from the deep: 'Whosoever will free me from the waters and lead me to dry land, him will I prosper with everlasting riches'".*²⁵² As Jung states, the conscious ego should hear this calling, since that would not only mean wisdom, but also its salvation. However, whoever should be open to hear this calling will have to descend into the unconscious' darkness, which equals the ritual of a katabasis or the dangerous adventure of the night sea journey, *"whose end and aim is the restoration of life, resurrection, and the triumph over death"*.²⁵³

The call of the depths is also to be found in the *Aurora Consurgens*, whose author writes: *"Be turned to me with all your heart and do not cast me aside because I am black and swarthy, because the sun hath changed my color and the waters have covered my face and the land hath been polluted and defiled in my works; for there was darkness over it, because I stick fast in the mire of the deep and my substance is not disclosed. Wherefore out of the depths have I cried, and from the abyss of the earth with my voice to all you that pass by the way. Attend and see me, if any shall find one like unto me, I will give into his hand the morning star"*.²⁵⁴ In this beautiful text we find again the idea of a calling of that which has been set aside, asking to be assumed.

Analogously, in the chapter entitled "The desert" of the *Red Book*, Jung's ego avers that he was still in his thoughts, after having turned himself away from external things and people. By doing this, he was leaving other dimensions of his being in the shadows: *"I was my thoughts, after I was no*

²⁵¹ Jung, CW 14, § 189-190.

²⁵² Jung, CW 12, § 434.

²⁵³ Jung, CW 12, § 435-436.

²⁵⁴ Jung, CW 14, § 468.

longer events and other men. But I was not my self, confronted with my thoughts. I should also rise up above my thoughts to my own self. My journey goes there, and that is why it leads away from men and events into solitude”.²⁵⁵ However, accepting this call from the desert leads to a deeper desert: “I also had to detach myself from my thoughts through turning my desire away from them. And at once, I noticed that my self became a desert, where only the sun of unquiet desire burned. I was overwhelmed by the endless infertility of this desert”.²⁵⁶

Mutatis mutandis, it’s also worth referring to the night of the spirit according to St. John of the Cross. Following the dark night of the sense, the night of the spirit is even darker and afflictive, since the aridity of the soul still gets worse. In words of Edith Stein: “*The second night is the darker because the first affects the lower, sensory part of the human being and is, consequently, more external. The night of the spirit, on the other hand, involves the higher sensible part and is therefore interior and robs the soul of the light of reason or makes her blind*”.²⁵⁷ However, when accepted this stage becomes a calling for entering the path of faith (which is dark and certain), as an unavoidable bridge towards the union with God. Once purified of the desires and with a stronger will, the soul has to go even beyond its understanding: “*(...) the soul, in order to be effectively guided to this state by faith, must not only be in darkness with respect to that part that concerns the creatures and temporal things, which is the sensual and the lower part (whereof we have already treated), but that likewise it must be blinded and darkened according to the part which has respect to God and to spiritual things, which is the rational and higher part (...)*”.²⁵⁸

This darkness of the understanding through faith completes itself with the negation of the other two potencies, which are the will (through love and charity) and memory (through hope). In the second Book of Ascent to Mount Carmel, St. John of the Cross exhorts the soul to persist in this darkness in order to arrive to transformation, with all the suffering that it implies. The path again leads through that which ‘one is not’, in order to arrive to that which ‘one is not’, since: “*a soul is greatly impeded from reaching this high state of union with God when it clings to any understanding or feeling or imagination or appearance or will or manner of its own, or to any other act or to anything of its own, and cannot detach and strip itself of all these. For, as we say, the goal which it*

²⁵⁵ Jung, *The Red Book*, 236.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Edith Stein, “Spirit and Faith” in *The Science of the Cross: The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, vol. 6 (Washington ICS Publications, 2003)

²⁵⁸ SJC, 2 Ascent, 4.2

*seeks lies beyond all this, yea, beyond even the highest thing that can be known or experienced; and thus a soul must pass beyond everything to unknowing”.*²⁵⁹

An echo of these reflections may also be found in the *Red Book*, when the soul brings to Jung’s ego the ‘countermeaning’ or ‘countersense’ (Widersinn), which is constituted by all those aspects of the self, which oppose to conscious thinking, feeling, imagining, and will. For the ones who can accept the calling of the depths by accepting their ‘countersense’, the experience of affliction and darkness may become a bridge towards a deeper and wider identity. However, this still supposes another descent.

²⁵⁹ SJC, 2 Ascent, 4.4

4. 4 Depression as an Incubation Process (Integration between Consciousness and Unconscious)

In “The Psychology of the Transference” Jung states: “*There are moments in human life when a new page is turned. New interests and tendencies appear which have hitherto received no attention, or there is a sudden change of personality (a so-called mutation of character). During the incubation period of such a change we can often observe a loss of conscious energy: the new development has drawn off the energy it needs from consciousness. This lowering of energy can be seen most clearly before the onset of certain psychoses and also in the silence empty stillness which precedes creative work*”.²⁶⁰

In a corresponding footnote, he also adds that this loss of psychic energy may also get observed as a depression before certain psychological efforts, for example, before an exam, a conference, an important conversation, and so on. Here depression acquires the meaning of a self-incubation, which Jung explains by the Hindu concept of ‘tapas’. In *Psychological Types* Jung refers that the purpose of ‘tapas’ would be the constitution of a creative and redeeming state. In Hinduism ‘tapas’ also has a cosmogonic meaning. For example, the Rig Veda (10:129) speaks of the world creation act through ‘tapas’: “*Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness this All was indiscriminate chaos. All that existed then was void and formless: by the great power of Warmth [tapas] was born that Unit*”.²⁶¹

Today the term ‘tapas’ designates a specific form of meditation, but originally it meant to ‘incubate’ or to ‘meditate’ in the sense of incubating oneself, of giving oneself warmth. It refers to a concentration of the inner energy, so that, as M. L. von Fran says, “*may open that which is still enclosed in the germ*”.²⁶² The action of retracting in oneself and concentrating the psychic energy on one specific point provokes an inner heat that gives place to a creative act. In the English word ‘tapas’ comes translated as ‘brooding’. In a note to his Upanisad’s translation, Max Müller explains that he translated ‘tapas’ as ‘brooding’ because it was the only English word to combine the idea of heat with the idea of reflection and meditation.

However, this act of incubation is accompanied by great efforts and even afflictions which acquire an ascetic meaning. On this, Deussen points out: “*Just as, in a hot country like India, the idea*

²⁶⁰ Jung, CW 16, § 373.

²⁶¹ Translated by Ralph Thomas Hotchkin Griffith.

²⁶² Marie Louise von Franz, *I miti di creazione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989), 128. Translation mine.

of tapas became the symbol of strenuous effort and suffering, so the idea of tapo atapyata gradually acquired the meaning of self-castigation, and became associated with the view... that creation is an act of self-abnegation on the part of the creator”.²⁶³

In *Symbols of Transformation* Jung refers to self-incubation, asceticism and introversion as closely linked notions: *“Self-incubation, self-castigation, and introversion are closely related ideas. Immersion in oneself (introversion) is a penetration into the unconscious and at the same time asceticism. The result, for the philosophy of the Brahmanas, is the creation of the world, and for the mystic the regeneration and spiritual rebirth of the individual, who is born into a new world of the spirit. Indian philosophy also assumes that creativity as such springs from introversion”*.²⁶⁴

In her study on creation myths, M. L. von Franz focuses on the frequent presence of frustration feelings, fear, loneliness, boredom and sorrow, which frequently precede the creative acts among cosmogonic myths: *“We could reassume them as that which the alchemists called as affliction animae, the depression and sorrow which precede every creative act. (...) It is partly an energetic phenomenon. Whenever an important content, a powerful energetic charge, gets closer to the consciousness’ threshold and the ego complex, it attracts libido to itself, because, as well as matter particles act on the other particles, this content acts on the other complexes. Since it attracts to itself the energy of the ego, the latter feels weak, tired, restless, depressed, as long as the unconscious content does not go through the consciousness threshold”*.²⁶⁵



Figure 5: Nigredo of an alchemist on meditation

Taking these considerations into account, it is possible to affirm that the fact of ‘answering to the soul’s calling’ does not imply a definitive overcoming of the depressive experience, but a deepening of it. In *The Red Book*, for example, the soul leads to the desert, to the depths, to darkness, to sum up, to all those aspects of oneself which have not been properly cultivated and developed: that is to say, to the genuinely unknown, which firstly can only provoke affliction, desperation, feelings of solitude and abandonment, reluctance, fear, doubts. Through this, the soul brings to the ego a light ‘which does not belong to this world’, and which the ego experiences as the worst darkness. At this

²⁶³ Deussen quoted by Jung, CW 5, § 589.

²⁶⁴ Jung, CW 5, § 590.

²⁶⁵ M. L. v. Franz, *I miti di creazione*, 132. Translation mine.

point it is not about overcoming childish aspects, nor incarnating the absent which was once present. This time it is about going ‘beyond the mother’, an authentic going through that ‘which one is not’ in order to become one’s own profound identity.

At this stage, there is the possibility of a rebirth through an integration of the inner opposites or, if you prefer, of consciousness and unconscious. Here incubation becomes necessary, self-incubation to be more specific. However, the conjunction of the inner opposites is experienced with great suffering. Every birth is preceded by a time of death, since the integration of the unknown can only take place in the deepest darkness. It’s an unavoidable passage experience towards a renovation. It’s interesting to notice that the symbolism of Saturn, as well as the dark night of the soul and the alchemical nigredo, also reveal a dimension of darkness and affliction intended as a time of incubation preceding the union and rebirth.

Following Antique sources, according to some scholars the name Saturn derives from the Latin word ‘satus’, meaning seed. Regarding Saturn’s significance as the God of agriculture in Roman culture, the author Sabbatucci observes with profound subtlety a fact which is of special interest for our study: on the contrary to the Goddess Ceres who was invoked before harvest, Saturn was the God to be invoked close after the sowing time, which was a moment of no human action. In December, he was celebrated at the Saturnalia, which happened to coincide with the darkest time of the year, the winter solstice. Then the differences between masters and slaves got abolished, and a gift-giving took place. As Sabbatucci points out, Saturn was invoked at the precise moment that preceded the seed’s rebirth, as well as the light’s and the year’s rebirth. However, this moment was ‘darker than dark’: *“Che per il nome di un tale dio sia stata scelta la semina, dipende dalla ricognizione di questo periodo dell’anno mediante il punto di vista agricolo: quando i campi sono seminati e non più coltivati né ancora viventes. In Saturno si può avvertire "un riferimento volutamente simultaneo alla solstiziale morte (condizione della rinascita) del sole e alla parallela morte (condizione della rinascita) del seme posto sotto terra. E insieme al sole e al seme, i Romani facevano morire anche l’anno”*.²⁶⁶

On the lack of human action concerning this period of the year, Sabbatucci notes: *“I dies feriatii dei Saturnalia realizzavano a livello metastorico, e dunque destorificavano, il vuoto d’opera umana che seguiva la seminazione; (...): dopo aver seminato, l’uomo non può più far altro che*

²⁶⁶ Dario Sabbatucci, *La Religione di Roma Antica dal Calendario Festivo all’Ordine Cosmico* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1988), 347

invocare l'intervento divino perché il seme fruttifichi. In questa fase (non la semina, ma quando la terra è stata già seminata) viene evocato Saturno (...)"²⁶⁷

As Sabbatucci points out, Saturn -the God of melancholy- here is associated with a key moment of every creative act: the death that precedes every rebirth, thus revealing itself as an incubation moment, as that moment of apparently no action which follows the cultivation of the earth, and during which nothing seems to happen and even time seems not to flow. However, this incubation moment of latency²⁶⁸ becomes one of the keys to every creation and psychic renewal. In relation to this, it should be also noted that in astrology Saturn also represents the point of maximal descent, and thus signifying the possibility of a new re-ascent. As Vitale points out: "*Saturn is the lowest point of the parabola, the most profound seat where the descent ends and the re-ascent begins. The direction is inverted, the meaning of his being is transformed: descent becomes the possibility for re-ascent, burial becomes contact with the fertile and profound womb of the night, depth becomes possibility for wisdom, putrefaction becomes liberation from death. That which is dead breaks down and dissolves, freeing the precious element which before was bound with an impure one*"²⁶⁹

This intimate creative element which comes linked to Saturn may be psychologically understood as a certain capacity of integrating consciousness with the unconscious. As the Roman God of agriculture and civilization, Saturn may be also linked to the Egyptian God Osiris, of which Erich Neumann interestingly states: "*(...) civilization and agriculture are attributed to him. But why precisely to him? Because he is not merely a fertility god in the sense that he controls natural growth. He is this too, but his creativeness includes that capacity without being limited to it. Every culture-hero has achieved a synthesis between consciousness and the creative unconscious. (...) about this knowledge of the creative point, of the buried treasure which is the water of life, immortality, fertility, and the after-life rolled into one, the aspirations of mankind unwearyingly revolve. (...) The inner object of the ritual is not the natural process, but the control of nature through the corresponding creative element in man*"²⁷⁰

However, the cultivation of the creative element is preceded by a slow time of incubation within the most absolute darkness, for the 'seed' must die to get reborn. In this sense, Saturn's slowness and coldness may be also understood as a time of meditative maturation preceding every profound and lasting work. As Biedermann states: "*Tra le caratteristiche positive che gli sono*

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 345.

²⁶⁸ The Roman region where Saturn settled was called "Latium", since that was the region in which the god had hidden himself. In this sense, Saturn may also symbolize that which is 'latent'.

²⁶⁹ Vitale, "The archetype of Saturn or the transformation of the father", 48-49.

²⁷⁰ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, 212.

attribuite troviamo la meticolosità nel compiere lavori minuziosi, la perseveranza nella ricerca e la capacità di esercitarsi con la dovuta pazienza. Forse queste caratteristiche vanno messe in relazione con la lunga orbita che Saturno percorre nella volta celeste, la quale, vista dalla Terra, sembra presentare anse e nodi”.²⁷¹

Analogously, in alchemy the conjunction of opposites produces the third substance which may cure the afflictions of the separate soul. This union may be symbolized as the chemical weddings,



Figure 6: Mylius. *Philosophia Reformata*

but this integration of opposites between male and female, earth and sky, is neither exempted of suffering nor of inner death. As several alchemical texts refer, *coniunctio* also supposes a *nigredo* and the emblems of the chemical wedding almost always include symbols of torment and death: for example, the sixth emblem of the *Philosophia Reformata* by Mylius (figure 6) shows the united lovers lying together in a glass coffin with Saturn and a skeleton with a scythe at either side.

As Abraham points out: “*The death at the wedding symbolizes the extinction of the earlier differentiated state before union*”.²⁷²

The philosophical Stone cannot be generated unless the opposites unite and, during this integration, they die.²⁷³ As Arthephius writes: “*If therefore these do not die, and be converted into water, they remain alone, or as they were and without fruit; that if they die, and are resolved in our water, they bring forth fruit, and hundredfold*”.²⁷⁴

Referring to the melancholic state that this stage supposes, Abraham quotes the narrator of *The Golden Tract*, who when witnessing the groom’s and the bride’s embrace, gets invaded by feelings of anguish and death: “*The narrator of The Golden Tract witnesses the embrace of bride and groom (argent vive and Sulphur) in the heated alembic and is overcome by fear and anguish at their death: ‘the husband’s heart was melted with excessive ardor of love, and he fell down broken in many pieces. When she who loved him... saw this, she wept for him, and as it were, covered him with overflowing tears until he was quite flooded and concealed from view. But the complaints and tears did not last long, for being weary with exceeding sorrow, she at length destroyed herself. Alas! What*

²⁷¹ Hans Biedermann, *Enciclopedia dei simboli* (Milano: Garzanti, 1991), 467.

²⁷² ‘Chemical wedding’ in Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 37.

²⁷³ For the significance of the *coniunctio* in the treatment of psychopathological depression, cf.: Judith Hubback, “Depressed Patients and the *Coniunctio*” en *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 28, no. 4 (1983): 313–27.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

*fear and anguish fell upon me, when I saw those who had been so straightly committed to my change, lying as it were, melted and before me”.*²⁷⁵

Regarding the integration of opposites preceding every creative act and consciousness renewal, M. L. von Franz states that the coniunctio takes place during the darkest night, when not even the moon shines: *“When you are completely out and consciousness is gone, then something is born or generated; in the deepest depression, in the deepest desolation, the new personality is born. When you are at the end of your tether, that is the moment when the coniunctio, the coincidence of opposites, takes place”.*²⁷⁶

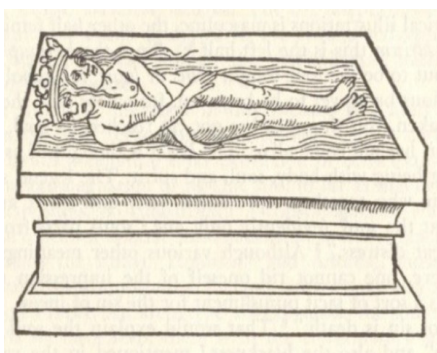


Figure 7: Rosarium Philosophorum (Emblem 6)

Undoubtedly, it is in the Rosarium Philosophorum (1550) where Jung most clearly averts the process of coniunctio oppositorum and the several nigredos that it supposes: *“King and queen are dead (...). The feast of life is followed by the funereal threnody. (...) after the coniunctio oppositorum, deathlike stillness reigns. When the opposites unite, all energy ceases: there is no more flow. The waterfall has plunged to its full depth in that torrent of nuptial joy and longing; now only a stagnant pool remains, without wave or current. So at least appears, looked at from the outside. (...) this death is an interim stage to be followed by a new life. No new life can arise, says the alchemists, without the death of the old. They liken the art to the work of the sower, who buries the grain in the earth: it dies only to waken to new life”.*²⁷⁷

The inscription says that the queen and king (figure 7), representing the spirit and the body, are lying dead and that the soul (which is only one) detaches from them with great affliction. The darkness always presents itself as linked with the tenebrous grave and Hades, as well as with the melancholic states of great affliction: *“The reckoning is presented, and a dark abyss yawns. Death means the total extinction of consciousness and the complete stagnation of psychic life, so far as this is capable of consciousness. So catastrophic a consummation, which has been the object of annual lamentations in so many places (e.g., the laments for Linus, Tammuz, and Adonis) must really correspond to an important archetype (...)”.*²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ ‘Melancholia’ in Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 123-124.

²⁷⁶ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980), 162-163.

²⁷⁷ Jung, CW 16, § 467.

²⁷⁸ Jung, CW 16, § 469.

However, this stage of death and inner putrefaction signifies the conception of the *filius philosophorum*, which Jung psychologically translates as a union of consciousness with the unconscious generating a new personality which includes both components: “*Not that the new personality is a third thing midway between conscious and unconscious, it is both together*”.²⁷⁹

But on the contrary to carnal conception, in the conception of the *filius philosophorum* the soul ascends instead of descending (figure 8): “*Out of the decay the soul mounts up to heaven. Only one soul departs from the two, (...). The One born of the two represents the metamorphosis of both, though it is not yet fully developed and is still a ‘conception’ only*”.²⁸⁰ According to Jung, this stage corresponds psychologically to a state of great inner disorientation and affliction.

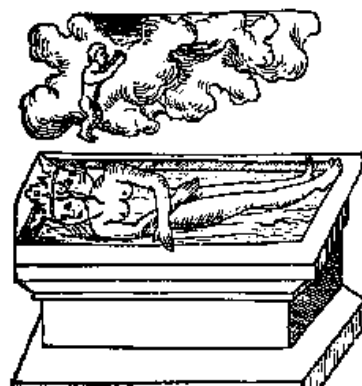


Figure 8: Rosarium Philosophorum (Emblem 7)

He describes it as one of the toughest transitions of every inner process, since consciousness permanently threatens to get immersed into the unconscious. Jung also compares it to the frequent ‘loss of the soul’ attacks among primitives. However, this is also necessary passage experience for consciousness, for during its ascent the soul unites itself with the ‘upper powers’: “*He is the essence of the ‘lower power’ which, like the ‘third filiation’ in the doctrine of Basilides, is ever striving upwards from the depths, not with the intention of staying in heaven, but solely in order to reappear on earth as a healing force, as an agent of immortality and perfection, as a mediator and savior*”.²⁸¹

After the soul’s ascent, which leaves the body in the darkness of death, there takes place an *enantiodromia*, and nigredo is followed by albedo: “*The black or unconscious state that resulted from the union of opposites reaches the nadir and a change sets in. The falling dew signals resuscitation and a new light: the ever deeper descent into the unconscious suddenly becomes illumination from above. For, when the soul vanished at death, it was not lost; in that other world it formed the living counterpole to the state of death in this world. Its reappearance from above is already indicated by the dewy moisture*”.²⁸²

In relationship to this critical passage of the alchemical work, Jung also quotes a letter of the alchemist and theologian John Pordage addressed to his mystic soror Jane Leade: “[*the artist*] does not see that the Tincture of Life is in this putrefaction or dissolution and destruction, that there is

²⁷⁹ Jung, CW 16, § 474.

²⁸⁰ Jung, CW 16, § 475.

²⁸¹ Jung, CW 16, § 481.

²⁸² Jung, CW 16, § 493.

*light in this darkness, life in this death, love in this fury and wrath, and in this poison the highest and most precious Tincture and medicament against all poison and sickness. The old philosophers named this work or labour their descension, their incineration, their pulverization, their death, their putrefaction of the materia of the stone, their corruption, their caput mortuum. You must not despise this blackness, or black color, but persevere in it in patience, in suffering, and in silence, until its forty days of temptation are over, until the days of its tribulations are completed, when the seed of life shall waken to life, shall rise up, sublimate or glorify itself, transform itself into whiteness, purify and sanctify itself, give itself the redness, in other words, transfigure and fix its shape”.*²⁸³

Mutatis mutandis, we cannot avoid mentioning the passive night of the spirit according to St. John of the Cross, for it may be considered another symbolic parallel of the state of union that can only take place within the most profound darkness and suffering of the soul: *“Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn, Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!”* According to St. John of the Cross, the passive night of the spirit is the night par excellence, for it precedes and simultaneously prepares the union between God and the soul. It should be remembered that St. John of the Cross, as well as other Christian mystics, frequently expresses the state of union under the symbol of the spiritual marriage, between God and the soul, between the human and the divine.²⁸⁴

However, this experience of union is often preceded by an experience of the night, with its torments and afflictions. Thus, in the second book of the Dark Night, St. John of the Cross writes: *“the clearer and more manifest are Divine things in themselves the darker and more hidden are they to the soul naturally; just as, the clearer is the light, the more it blinds and darkens the pupil of the owl, and, the more directly we look at the sun, the greater is the darkness which it causes in our visual faculty, overcoming and overwhelming it through its own weakness”.*²⁸⁵ Here St. John of the Cross makes an explicit reference to St. Dionysius’ ray of darkness by stating: *“Now this is precisely what this Divine ray of contemplation does in the soul. Assailing it with its Divine light, it transcends the natural power of the soul, and herein it darkens it and deprives it of all natural affections and*

²⁸³ Jung, CW 16, § 511-512.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Stanza XXII of The Spiritual Canticle: *“That is, the soul is transformed in God, Who is here called the pleasant garden because of the delicious and sweet repose which the soul finds in Him. But the soul does not enter the garden of perfect transformation, the glory and the joy of the spiritual marriage, without passing first through the spiritual betrothal, the mutual faithful love of the betrothed. When the soul has lived for some time as the bride of the Son, in perfect and sweet love, God calls it and leads it into His flourishing garden for the celebration of the spiritual marriage. Then the two natures are so united, what is divine is so communicated to what is human, that, without undergoing any essential change, each seems to be God”.* SCJ, Spiritual Canticle 22, 5.

²⁸⁵ SJC, 2N 5,3.

apprehensions which it apprehended aforetime by means of natural light; and thus it leaves it not only dark, but likewise empty, according to its faculties and desires, both spiritual and natural. And, by thus leaving it empty and in darkness, it purges and illumines it with Divine spiritual light, although the soul thinks not that it has this light, but believes itself to be in darkness”.²⁸⁶ St. John of the Cross also compares the action of the ray of darkness perpetrating upon the soul to the action of the fire upon a log of wood in order to transform it into itself.²⁸⁷

Regarding the meaning of the night as a preparation for the mystic union, Edith Stein also comments: *“Whenever both extremes join, the divine and the human (...) the soul gets absorbed into a deep and profound darkness. (...) What is most painful to the soul is to feel like being abandoned by God, as God himself had thrown her into the darkness... Deathly shadows and screams, and hellish pains are felt by the soul in a vivid manner, thus feeling without God, and like punished (...)”*.²⁸⁸

Thus, the passive night of the spirit also constitutes a passage experience towards union, though presenting great torments and affliction to the soul which feels like being abandoned by God. The comments regarding the transforming union do not take place within the text of the Dark Night, but within the “Spiritual Canticle” and in “The Living Flame of Love”.

Through different contexts and languages, we would like to highlight the idea of the melancholic experience as a phenomenon that may precede every creative act, as well as every experience of inner union between the ego and the self, the human and the divine, light and darkness. The thread connecting these different contexts is always the idea of darkness preceding every kind of renewal. As a matter of fact, there’s one symbol which repeats itself along many traditions: the grain or the seed which dies within the black earth to get reborn. For example, the alchemists compare their art with the sower’s activity of plunging the seed into the earth, where it dies to wake up to a new life. Regarding the philosophical stone, Hortulanus wrote that it: *“is also called graine of corne, which if it die not, remaineth without fruit: but if it doo die (...) when it is joined in coniunction, it bringeth forth much fruit”*.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ SJC, 2 N 8, 4.

²⁸⁷ SJC, 2 N 10, 1.

²⁸⁸ Translation mine. Edith Stein, *La ciencia de la cruz. Estudio sobre San Juan de la Cruz*, (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1989), 147-148.

²⁸⁹ Hortulanus quoted by Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 89.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In a conference that Jung gave under the title “The Inner Voice”, he stated: *“The gigantic catastrophes that threaten us today are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological order, but psychic events. To a quite terrifying degree we are threatened by wars and revolutions which are nothing other than psychic epidemics. At any moment several million human beings may be smitten with a new madness, and then we shall have another world war or devastating revolution. Instead of being at the mercy of wild beasts, earthquakes, landslides, and inundations, modern man is battered by the elemental forces of his own psyche”*.²⁹⁰

Back then in 1932 Jung already anticipated the psychological character of the epidemics to come. In agreement with Jung’s early anticipation, today the World Health Organization considers depression as epidemic, predicting it to be one of the leading causes of ill health and disability worldwide by 2020, along with cardiovascular diseases.

How to understand this depressive epidemic, which arrived at the point of being considered ‘the illness of the century’, or the ‘Evil of Western Civilization’? Across the vast literature dealing with this topic, some authors have considered this epidemic phenomenon of the XX and XXI centuries as real, trying to identify its possible causes (for example, the quick mutations of postindustrial contemporary societies, the ever changing life styles, the socio-economic pressure, the increasing of individualism, alienation, the lack of contact with nature, food-habits, and so on). Whereas other authors consider the epidemic character of depression to be kind of artificial, explaining it on the base of diagnostic criteria that approach depression as a humor disorder whose symptoms are to such point vague and indeterminate, that every person could be diagnosed as depressed, although suffering from a normal sadness.

In the light of our research’s results, we believe that the contemporary depression epidemic may be understood as both real and artificial. We believe it to be real, for the contemporary man lacks of symbols accompanying him along the many threshold moments of his life, and thus allowing him to make out of his significant losses and vital stages of change an opportunity for an ontological

²⁹⁰ Jung, CW 17, § 302.

transformation.²⁹¹ We believe it could be also understood as being artificial, since the actual diagnostic criteria, far away from recognizing the possibility of a meaning's dimension within the vital crisis and its accompanying afflictions, are closer to interpret every suffering as a psychiatric disorder, as if the suffering experience was not part of the human condition. We are not denying a psychopathological dimension of depression, but we believe it necessary to distinguish between different facets of depressive phenomena through a more careful –and, most of all, human- listening.

Depressive phenomena may be one of the most difficult experiences to go through, though it may also constitute one of the most intimate experiences of being human. Although C. G. Jung never wrote a separate essay on depression, throughout his work it's possible to recognize some ideas that might help to re-signify the exclusive pathological meaning that is presented nowadays in the light of certain psychiatric praxis. Throughout this research, we've attempted to show that the Jungian understanding of depression not only recovers a normal dimension of depressive phenomena (i.e., as an adaptive transitory reaction to a loss experience), but also a transforming dimension linked to a stage which may take place along every individuation process. As such, it reveals itself as a passage experience inherent to the development of consciousness where, in order to ascend, it's necessary to descend, in order to live truly, it's necessary to first die symbolically and, in order to find the guiding light, it's necessary to go through the deepest darkness.

In either case, it's important to clarify that Jung's constructive approach of depression (as a potentially transforming regressive experience) does not deny the causal-reductive approach at all. On the contrary, it widens and completes it. This means that one is not to give up to relieving depressive symptoms. Neither one should pursue the depressive suffering, as the French theologian William of Auvergne commented on several religious men of his time trying to fall into melancholy to feel a deeper longing for the divine. Related to this, it's worth remembering Ficino who, while he was trying to rehabilitate melancholy as 'melancholia generosa', he dedicated a part of his Book De Vita to the therapeutic treatment of its symptoms.

Wellness is humanly desirable, though it is also necessary to return the pain its dignity when it spontaneously shows up. As G. Minois said, '*man's greatness also lies in his wounds*'. When

²⁹¹ Regarding this, it may be good to remember that according to Jung the desolate psychic situation of the contemporary man could only be overcome through a free but committed assimilation of the symbols which live within human depth (and where one unconsciously lives). In words of Jung: "(...) *there is a thinking in primordial images, in symbols which are older than historical man, which are inborn in him from the earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche. It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them*". (Jung, CW 8, § 794). As Nante (2010) clearly states, Jung is not founding a new syncretic religion, nor establishing a doctrine. He's neither calling for an external imitation, but to an authentic task of self-discovering, which each one of us is to experience in a unique and unrepeatably way.

acknowledged, these same wounds may become a call for an inner search, a path. However, what the ‘ego’ often interprets as a well-being sometimes is far from corresponding to the wellness of the soul, i.e., the wellness of the total inner being. Nowadays it will never be superfluous to remember the common etymological root of the words ‘safe (in good health)’ and ‘salvation’, from Indo-European ‘solh’ which means ‘whole, completed’. Taking this into account, it’s healthy that which ‘saves’, i.e. that which allows one to go back to one’s own totality, to the ‘total’ being.

However, there arises one important question, as to what would the means and inner dispositions be that would allow making of a depression a potential passage experience. At this point, many gates open to future developments. For the moment, we will just focus on one of them.²⁹² The author Javier Alvarez, who addressed the subject of depression in connection to mysticism, refers to those persons with a strong vocation as to those getting transformed and ‘taught’ by their own melancholic experiences: “*These are persons who are condemned to search. Here the sufferer and the searcher become homonyms*”.²⁹³

Taking this into account, we believe that the value and significance of the vocation for human development could constitute the tip of the iceberg for future research on depression. We do not mean vocation in its strictly professional nor religious meaning. We mean vocation as an inner call to an inner development, as a ‘human vocation’. As Jung once said, this inner voice is “*the voice of a fuller life, of a wider, more comprehensive consciousness*”.²⁹⁴ What does this vocation consist of? Is it an innate disposition, or does one cultivate and discover it? Which are the means that help to its development? These will be questions to be further deepened. Yet an old alchemist said: “*habentibus symbolum, facilis est transitus*”.

²⁹² Although the relationship between symbol and psychic cure has been deeply studied, we would like here to focus on one specific symbol: the symbol of vocation.

²⁹³ Javier Álvarez, *Mística y depresión*, 293. Translation mine.

²⁹⁴ Jung, CW 17, § 318.

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