

Carrying the fire
individuation toward
the mature masculine
and telos of cultural...



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Carrying the Fire Individuation Toward the Mature Masculine and Telos of Cultural Myth in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*

maggie bortz So everything is necessary. Every least thing. This is the hard lesson. Nothing can be dispensed with. Nothing despised. Because the seams are hid from us, you see. The joinery. The way in which the world is made. (McCarthy, 1999b, 143) It was good that God kept the truths of life from the young as they were starting out or else they'd have no heart to start at all. (McCarthy 1999a, 284)

Although many critics consider Cormac McCarthy to be the greatest living novelist in America, his dark, compelling vision did not reach a mass audience until the film adaptation of his novel *No Country for Old Men* (2005) was released in 2007. The film, directed by Ethan and Joel Coen (2007), won the Academy Award for Best Picture. A film adaptation of his latest novel, *The Road* (2006), which won the Pulitzer Prize, was released in late 2009. McCarthy now has the public's rapt attention. McCarthy's visionary works can be read as dreams of our contemporary culture.

Great works of art, like dreams, perform a compensatory function to the conscious attitudes of a society and may carry teleological implications. Jung viewed great art as an aperture to the collective unconscious, through which the role of the archetypes in shaping the psychological development of individuals and societies might be discerned (1930/1966, CW 15, ¶¶157, 161). McCarthy's later novels, speaking in image and myth, the language of the unconscious, frame the collective psychic dissociation that prevents us, individually and collectively, from growing up.

The final, transcendent image in *No Country for Old Men*, which appears in an old man's dream, and the father-son imagery in *The Road* suggest that a reunion and recalibration of the inner Jung *Journal: Culture & Psyche*, Volume 5, Number 4, pp. 28-42, ISSN 1934-2039, e-ISSN 1934-2047. © 2011 Virginia Allan Detloff Library, C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website at www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo/asp.

DOI: 10. 1525/jung. 2011. 5. 4. 28. Maggie Bortz, Telos in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* 29 father and son, representing a "union of sames" in the split masculine archetype, constitute the requisite path of healing and maturation. This imagery may prefigure the emergence of a new cultural myth. Jungian analyst Joseph Henderson identified specific thresholds of initiation or psychological rites of passage "which make possible the transition from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to early maturity, and from maturity to the experience of individuation" (2005, 11).

Our culture, however, remains dominated by male adolescent energy, seemingly arrested in anachronistic identification with the uninitiated hero, still living out a negative mother complex: a myth of male regeneration through escalating violence inflicted on a feminine earth and on humanity. This entrenched cultural complex manifests in and is reinforced by social constructs of what it means to be male in modern America, including the myth of the self-made man and the ethic of individualism. This complex also bears "a revolutionary unattached shadow that would smash all fetters" (Hillman 2005, 56-57).

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To give a clinical example, some of my clients, on parole from the Oregon Youth Authority, are very likable boys for the most part who, at 14 or 15, have already spent a year behind bars in the state's "baby" prison system. Their yearnings for identity are shaped by a culture of outer action devoid of inner meaning. The lack of connection to an inner life also appears in adult male populations in presenting symptoms like workaholism, anger issues, substance abuse, relationship problems, and sexual obsession. In older men, the dissociative phenomenon is related to the common tragedy of suicidal depression.

Women, of course, are not immune to any of these things. It is axiomatic that masculine cultural dominants affect women's lives and impact their relationships with men. On a deeper level, masculine psychological energy is present and problematic in the female psyche as well. Jung personified the unconscious masculine energy in a woman as an interior male image, the animus. "Her unconsciousness has, so to speak, a masculine imprint" (1951/1968, CW 9ii, ¶129). James Hillman personified "the psychological foundation of the problem of history" in the archetypal magery of the senex (old man) and puer (young man) (2005, 35). Old men and young men are ubiquitous images in McCarthy's work. *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* appear to validate Hillman's theory that a split in the masculine senex-puer archetype underlies the psychic malaise of our time and that work toward a "union of sames" must begin at the senex pole of that archetype. Although the reticent McCarthy seems to write from a Jungian-informed perspective, I was unable to discover any biographical data linking him to an interest in Jungian psychology.

However, he frequently associates with physicists at the interdisciplinary Santa Fe Institute, a think tank located at the former site of the Manhattan Project, a collaboration McCarthy has tersely attributed to his enduring interest “in the way things work” (Voice of America 2008). C. G. Jung collaborated with Nobel Prize-winning physicist Wolfgang Pauli and was struck by the cogent parallels between quantum physics and his psychological theory (Pauli and Jung 1992/2001).

Beyond the shared observer effect and the subject-object bond, quantum physics and Jungian psychology both venture into depths where the distinctions between energy and matter collapse. Following the development of nuclear weapons, Jung and Pauli also shared a deep concern about the future: they feared that in the absence of a greater understanding of man’s potential for evil, humanity would “destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science” (1957/1970, CW 10, ¶1585). Although McCarthy’s canon garners critical acclaim, his work also provokes controversy.

Yale literary critic Harold Bloom admits to a “fierce” passion for *Blood Meridian* (1985), which he considers a masterpiece of American literature. Bloom also confesses that he had a hard time finishing the book because he “flinched from the overwhelming carnage that McCarthy portrays” (2009, 1). Literary critic Morris Philipson has written: “For culture, just as for therapy, symbols are not intuitions by themselves; they are only brute facts that must be interpreted” (1992, 226–227). There are brute facts aplenty in

McCarthy's canon: scalping, massacres, executions, necrophilia, cannibalism, every imaginable kind of human evil, but his artistic vision reflects the ultimate mystery of the unconscious and does not lend itself to facile reduction. Symbolic images, whether interpreted or not, affect us. They represent living psychological dynamics that we experience as feelings, emotions, ideas, and impulses toward action. McCarthy's earlier work is often celebrated for its lyrical style and long, comma-free sentences.

Critic Steven Frye wrote that, "for many of us that artistry, his mastery of beauty in language, is the only compensating factor for the bleak and uncompromising world he forces us to confront" (2005, 16). But in *No Country for Old Men*, the prose is clipped and minimalistic. The unconscious tends to turn up the music as required to equilibrate the conscious attitude. Compensatory dreams may become repetitious or disturbing; symptoms may become more severe.

Perhaps McCarthy's style has changed because we have missed the subtler messages of the collective unconscious, and it is getting more obviously archetypal in its self-regulatory attempts. As if mirroring a quaternity, the pattern of psychic wholeness, *No Country for Old Men* contains four major characters. The landscape, as character, presents the energy of the dark, chthonic feminine. Llewelyn Moss, the hunter who becomes prey, embodies the immature masculine energy of the hero, a puer spirit contaminated by a negative mother complex. Anton Chigurh, the psychopathic killer, personifies evil in its human and god-like dimensions.

The psychological protagonist, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, is a senex figure with positive and negative attributes who struggles against his own nature to assimilate his shadow and to individuate toward the mature masculine. Each represents an autonomous complex at work inside the collective psyche. Complexes are split-off parts of the personality or culture that “ behave like independent Maggie Bortz, Telos in No Country for Old Men and The Road 31 beings” (Jung 1937/1969, CW 8, ¶253). The ultimate meaning of the quaternity in this cultural dream remains ambiguous. Jung thought that the automatic eneration of quaternary images, “ whether consciously or in dreams and fantasies, can indicate the ego’s capacity to assimilate unconscious material. But they may also be essentially apotropaic, an attempt by the psyche to prevent itself from disintegrating” (Sharp 1991, 111). Both possibilities, further evolution and collective psychosis, must be entertained in reading the work. The interpretation of a dream often begins with a careful consideration of the setting. No Country for Old Men unfolds in 1980 in the wild, scrubby borderlands of South Texas and Mexico.

The landscape is a raw, barren land of sprawling desert plain, lava scree, red dirt, and creosote, sparsely inhabited by Mojave rattlesnakes, scorpions, and birds of prey. The image of the border itself suggests an unstable and volatile place between two worlds where the usual rules do not apply, a sort of psychological no-man’s-land where consciousness and unconscious meet. Borders are the domain of the archetypal Trickster, who incites psychic change through creative and destructive interventions that disturb the established psychological order.

The archetypal feminine is always a silent, powerful, brooding presence in McCarthy's work. In his novels, anima or soul is sometimes represented by animals, feral creatures who need human protection, like the pregnant wolf that Billy finds trapped at the beginning of *The Crossing* (1999b). Sometimes, and usually briefly, followed by tragic consequences, the anima is projected onto young women in McCarthy's novels. But the chthonic feminine, as landscape, is always present in his novels, both as a primitive force of nature and as a deeply unconscious psychological dynamic in the characters' psyches.

Anima figures fare pretty poorly in McCarthy's work. Billy must kill the beloved wolf in *The Crossing* to save her from a slow, agonizing death in a dog pit, where she has become the main act in a blood sport that entertains older men. In *The Road*, anima as landscape has been killed off entirely: the chthonic feminine is a fading memory, a charred and ruined relic. In *No Country for Old Men*, anima appears as landscape in foreboding form: High bloodweeds along the road. Wiregrass and sacahuista. Beyond in the stone arroyos the tracks of dragons.

The raw rock mountains shadowed in the late sun and to the east the shimmering abscissa of the desert plains under a sky where raincurtains hung dark as soot all along the quadrant. That god lives in silence who has scoured the following land with salt and ash. (McCarthy 2005, 45) The dark feminine landscape in *No Country for Old Men* mirrors the alchemical process of calcinatio and its products: salt, a metaphor for bitterness or wisdom, and soot and ash, the residue of fire. " The calcinatio is performed on the

primitive shadow side, which harbors hungry, instinctual desirousness and is contaminated with the unconscious.

The fire for the process comes from the frustration of these instinctual desires” (Edinger 1994, 21-22). 32 jung journal: culture & psyche 5: 4 / fall 2011 The characters in *No Country for Old Men* are ambivalent about the landscape. Uncle Ellis tells the sheriff: This country was hard on people. But they never seem to hold it to account. In a way that seems peculiar. That they didnt . . . How come people dont feel like this country has got a lot to answer for? They dont. You can say that the country is just the country, it dont actively do nothing, but that dont mean much . . This country will kill you in a heartbeat and still people love it. (McCarthy 2005, 271) On one hand, the landscape represents a terrible archetypal mother, the surrealistic backdrop of a burgeoning drug war, which is itself the continuation of many barbaric historical slaughters. In other respects, the characters identify positively with the landscape. She still nurtures according to her increasingly limited abilities. Moss can still find antelope in her deep interior space and a river saves him from certain death early in the book.

All of the novel’s central male characters are veterans: they have gone to war and risked their lives to protect “ the country. ” The power of the landscape, however, is muted in *No Country for Old Men* as opposed to McCarthy’s earlier Western novels. Even the moon, the symbol of feminine consciousness, is disfigured. It is as though man’s relentless dominance, his continual conquests, savagery, and ever forward “ progress” have effectively depotentiated the chthonic feminine, and she has regressed more deeply into the unconscious.

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Behind the mask of our technological society lurks a negative mother complex, a dissociation from and opposition to the feminine principle. Complexes are not ours to eliminate. On the contrary, they commonly persist beyond the life of the individual and perpetuate themselves across generations. According to Jung, “ A complex can be really overcome only if it is lived out to the full . . . If we are to develop further we have to draw to us and drink down to the very dregs what . . . we have held at a distance” (1954/1968, CW 9i, ¶184).

Unconsciously living out this collective negative mother complex is a dangerous and precarious proposition: it means consuming the natural world and each other in the process. The second major character, Llewelyn Moss, a welder and Viet Nam veteran, is hunting antelope in the desert when he stumbles across the surreal, slaughterhouse scene of a failed drug deal. Moss finds a case of money, a load of heroin, and one dying Hispanic man pleading for water. He takes the money, but his conscience nags him and he comes back to the scene that night with a jug of water for the dying man.

His belated act of compassion commences the novel’s ostensible journey: Moss runs with the money, pursued by Anton Chigurh, a rival hoard of drug dealers, and Sheriff Bell. Classical Jungian theory links both the puer and the hero to the Great Mother: the puer via regressive attachment, the hero via opposition. James Hillman argued, however, that whereas the hero is always bound up in a battle with the mother, the puer spirit is defined in relationship to the father and is not heroic in the classical sense. Maggie Bortz, *Telos in No Country for Old Men and The Road* 33

Puer consciousness is a masculine psychological energy representing, in alchemical terms, “ a new spirit born of an old spirit” (2005, 117). Hillman contended that whereas the emergent masculine ego might pattern itself in association with either archetype, an alchemical “ union of sames” in the puer-senex archetype represents the requisite path of individuation toward the mature masculine. Moss initially seems to reflect qualities of the archetypal puer-like opportunist. Like other mythological puer figures, such as Icarus or Bellerophon, 1 he does not recognize his limitations and is more vulnerable than he realizes.

During his first encounter with the drug dealers, Moss injures his feet by walking barefoot in the river gravel and then traversing the country in wet boots. A gunshot wound suffered during his first encounter with Chigurh further lames him for the abbreviated duration of his life. The classic puer injury to the foot suggests a fatal weakness where this immature consciousness meets the world. Once Moss takes the money, however, his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors clearly pattern boy or uninitiated hero psychological energy.

His heroic quest is about cash—his spirit is literalized in currency. Moss is skillful with weapons, which are described in elaborate detail. Literary critic Jay Ellis astutely observed the technological fetishism with which McCarthy describes Moss’ preoccupation with weapons and tools: To pre-adolescent (and increasingly, adolescent and older) male readers still uncertain about their vulnerability and power in the world . . . the minutiae surrounding objects that afford their user power in the world become all-important . . .

Anything that can be added on to an already desirable object that will afford greater lethality, great speed, greater vision, or more information, fills in for what young men fear they lack. (2009, 138) Ellis noted that these powerful weapons and tools ultimately do little for Moss: he misses his opening shot at an antelope and is ultimately gunned down by drug dealers at a cheap hotel. Sheriff Bell, in contrast, is dubious of sophisticated weaponry. “ Tools that comes into our hands comes into theirs too . . . Some of the old time sheriffs wouldnt even carry a firearm” (McCarthy 2005, 62–63).

Moss’ interactions with women betray an oblique hostility and adolescent insecurity. He uses sarcasm to dismiss and deflect his young wife. Moss mentions “ mother” specifically twice in the book, both times in relation to death, and appears to dialogue with her elsewhere. Shortly before he is murdered, Moss picks up a teenage girl who is hitchhiking. The mother complex speaking through Moss tells the girl: “ Most people’ll run from their own mother to get to hug death by the neck. They can’t wait to see him” (McCarthy 2005, 234).

Moss’ unconsciousness of his own limitations, of any transpersonal ideals, and of the insurmountable evil he both confronts and secretly carries within him, costs him his own life; the collateral damage includes the deaths of his wife and the young hitchhiker. 34 jung journal: culture & psyche 5: 4 / fall 2011 At this point in the senescence of our culture, McCarthy seems to say, the hero is as good as dead. Although Moss’ heroic tale entices the reader into the novel, as critic Jay Ellis (2009) has noted, this part of the story collapses midway through with Moss’ death when Sheriff Bell’s process emerges to dominate.

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This apparent literary dismissal of the heroic neurosis may reflect its psychological status as a secondary pathology, as a symptom of failed initiation that masks a religious problem: the missing God “who offered a focus for spiritual things” (Hillman 2005, 121). The third major character, Anton Chigurh, psychopath and assassin, represents the most potent force in the collective psyche at this time. He is a complex, quasiarchetypal shadow figure, a paradoxical psychic presence who acts as the dynamist or catalyst in the larger psychological process of the novel.

When the reader meets Chigurh, he is a prisoner in a small, rural county jail. While the arresting deputy chats on the phone, Chigurh, in one fluid move, gets his manacled hands in front of his body and around the jailor’s neck. After the grisly murder, Chigurh nonchalantly uses the bathroom, binds his injured wrists with tape and paper towels, and sits at the desk “studying the dead man gaping up from the floor” (McCarthy 2005, 6). There is no emotion in the scene beyond the horror it evokes in the reader. The motif of the murdered jailor has appeared elsewhere in McCarthy’s work.

Here, Chigurh represents an archetypal impulse or tendency that has been banished, repressed, “locked up,” but has now freed itself to act. Chigurh, unlike Moss, is not motivated by money. When he eventually recovers the satchel of stolen cash, he returns it. Killing people is Chigurh’s job. The world is his abattoir. He is the quintessential bounty hunter, a contemporary iteration of the scalp hunters in *Blood Meridian*. He prefers to dispatch his victims (and to open doors) with a cattlegun. Other people become objects or livestock to him, and in this way, he prefigures the cannibals in *The Road*.

Anton Chigurh seems to embody shadow qualities properly belonging to the personal unconscious of the other characters, as though the archetypal split between the contaminated puer and ineffectual senex created a psychological void that he is obligated, through some inscrutable psychological rule, to fill. In some respects, he is like a photographic negative of Moss. He even mirrors Moss' limp, sustaining a leg injury while inflicting one. When Chigurh is injured in a car crash late in the book, he buys a boy's shirt to make a sling for his broken arm, mirroring Moss' earlier purchase of a boy's coat on the Mexican border.

Chigurh certainly needs no help from anyone. Women who spend too much time around Chigurh, like those who become involved with Moss, wind up dead. An aura of the negative hero seems to radiate around him. At the same time, Chigurh seems to carry some qualities of the negative senex that seem related to Sheriff Bell. As a senex figure, Bell represents, among other things, Maggie Bortz, Telos in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* 35 justice, law, and the process whereby these concepts are enforced in human affairs through the sometimes arbitrary power of an established order.

Within an individual psyche, these ordering and moral functions are often associated with the senex archetype, and, inevitably, a murky shadow accompanies them. "A morality based on senexconsciousness will always be dubious. No matter what strict code of ethical purity it asserts, in the execution of its lofty principles there will be a balancing loathsome horror not far away" (Hillman 2005, 260). (The first line of the book suggests as much: "I sent one boy to the gaschamber at Huntsville" [McCarthy 2005, 3].

Like a dark reflection of the senex compulsion for law, order, and
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measurement, Chigurh is a man of exacting principles: “ principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that” (153). As Moss’ wife begs for her life, Chigurh shakes his head. “ You’re asking that I make myself vulnerable and that I can never do. I have only one way to live and it doesn’t allow for special cases” (259). Anton Chigurh serves as a vehicle of unconscious projection for the reader. His sadistic acts and complete emotional detachment inspire terror. This character, so indefinably foreign, or marginally human, does not seem like one of us, but he is an irrefutable psychological truth that belongs to our culture. He represents something we should know about ourselves that remains unconscious, like a not yet understood dream. While Chigurh’s vulnerability to physical injury suggests a human shadow figure, his disappearing acts, miraculous escapes, and his association with fate lend him a supernatural aura that suggests the archetypal shadow. By the end of the novel, Bell comes to believe that Satan “ explains a lot of things that otherwise don’t have no explanation” (McCarthy 2005, 218).

Chigurh himself confesses that he has found “ it useful to model himself after God” (257). For our culture at this time, we might say Chigurh is God, the dark God grown more human, closer to consciousness. Chigurh resembles the God-image Jung discovered in the Book of Job. Jung found that Yahweh, egged on by Satan, possessed, in part, “ an animal nature” (1952/1969, CW 11, ¶600) and, in this way, was “ less than human” (¶599). Like Yahweh, Chigurh is guilty of “ murder, bodily injury with premeditation, and denial of a fair trial” (¶581).

For Jung, Yahweh's cruelty to Job is " further exacerbated by the fact that Yahweh displays no compunction, remorse, or compassion, but only ruthlessness and brutality" (§581); we find the same divine heartlessness, fed by the unconscious, in Chigurh. Chigurh shares another trait with Yahweh: " Nowhere does he come up against an insuperable obstacle that would force him to hesitate and hence make him reflect on himself " (§579). In Jung's view, the Christ symbol represents only an intermediate stage in a process of divine development in which God effectively dissociated from his own dark side.

Identification with the exclusively " good," loving aspects of the divinity " is bound 36 jung journal: culture & psyche 5: 4 / fall 2011 to lead to a dangerous accumulation of evil" (1952/1969, CW 11, §653). Anton Chigurh symbolizes that magnetic, irrational pull to incarnate God's darkness, " the ultimate source of evil, its absolute home" (Stein 1995, 144). Chigurh slays the cultural hero and provokes Bell's psychological development: he is the dynamic agent, the terrorist, and instigator of Bell's emergent connection to the unconscious. The realization of the self as an autonomous psychic factor is often stimulated by the irruption of contents over which the ego has no control" (Sharp 1991, 120). The irruption of contents like this can destroy the ego. In his Trickster role, Chigurh is not unlike Satan in the Book of Job or the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Evil serves a psychological function. " The stirring up of conflict is a Luciferian virtue in the true sense of the word. Conflict engenders fire, the fire of affects and emotions, and like every other fire it has two aspects, that of combustion and that of creating light" (Jung 1954/1968, CW 9i, §179).

The conscious attitude determines whether the conflict is ultimately illuminating or destructive: we either evolve from our mistakes or we unconsciously dig deeper into our accustomed defenses. Sheriff Bell, a country lawman approaching sixty, is the novel's psychological protagonist. As a senex figure, Bell seems to represent, at least in part, the conservative function of the archetype, "the fastness of our habits" (Hillman 2005, 48), "the principle of long-lasting survival through order" (284). Psychological movement, once incited by Chigurh, depends entirely on Bell's interior process.

Paradoxically, the path of psychic evolution begins with the senex in a process of disintegration. The novel takes its title from the first line of W. B. Yeats' most celebrated poem, "Sailing to Byzantium," which contrasts the material world with the transcendent world of art from the viewpoint of an aged man. It urges a belated attention to one's soul. To the extent that art is an aperture to the collective unconscious, the journey to Byzantium implies an intrapsychic movement from the ego toward the Self.

Critic John Vanderheide has observed that the renunciation of the physical world expressed in "Sailing to Byzantium" and *No Country for Old Men* is forced on the narrator by old age and approaching death, conditions he is powerless to change (2005). Consume my heart away; sick with desire And fastened to a dying animal It knows not what it is; and gather me Into the artifice of eternity (Yeats 1926/1952, 490, stanza III, ll. 21-24) This felt sense of mortality, hopelessness, and limitation is often the cue that ignites the process of individuation.

The collective unconscious calls aged men; whether they will respond and how is another matter entirely, but this painful territory is no country for young men. Maggie Bortz, Telos in No Country for Old Men and The Road 37

As senex figure, Bell is the ostensible boundary keeper of the cultural psyche, but he is flooded with content that he cannot repress. Bafflement pervades his monologues. He longs for times past when the world made more sense to him, but Bell's nostalgia is more than a regressive symptom, it implies " a separation of halves, a missing conjunction" (Hillman 2005, 182).

Bell carries notable qualities of the positive senex. His most authentic self is related to others. He sees himself as a shepherd to the people assigned to his care. " I've thought about why it was that I wanted to be a lawman. There was always some part of me that wanted people to listen to what I had to say. But there was a part of me too that just wanted to pull everybody in the boat" (McCarthy 2005, 296). His psyche is anchored in an imago of the positive feminine in the form of his anima figure, his wife of thirtyone years, Loretta.

The escalating violence, his inability to contain it, and the imperatives of his own interior process force Bell to examine the psychological orientation that has guided his life. Bell confronts his own provisional life, an adulthood founded on a lie. As a young soldier in France during World War II, he fought bravely, but in the face of overwhelming odds and certain death, fled the battlefield and his dead companions. He was awarded a Bronze Star for his service, an honor he tried to refuse. His election as county sheriff followed from this heroic misidentification.

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Bell confesses this history to his Uncle Ellis, an elderly lawman disabled in the line of duty, late in the book. “ I didn’t know you could steal your own life,” he says (McCarthy 2005, 278). Bell concludes that his history resurfaces because “ sometimes people would rather have a bad answer about things than no answer at all” (282). Bell endures the part of the alchemical process associated with the death and decay of the old substance, the old way of being in the world. He experiences his growing edge of consciousness as a defeat.

Bell makes a final break with the inauthentic hero and our culture’s idea of what it means to be a man: he quits in the middle of the hunt. His decision to retire reflects an understanding of his own limitations and is guided by a deeper psychic injunction. I always knew that you had to be willin to die to even do this job. That was always true. . . . If you aint they’ll know it in a heartbeat. I think it is more like what you are willin to become. And I think that a man would have to put his soul at hazard. And I wont do that. I think now that maybe I never would. (McCarthy 2005, 4)

Bell begins to acquiesce to and participate in his interior process, going back through his memories, paying attention to his dreams, engaging in active imagination. He ponders the memory of an image he encountered on the battlefield in France, “ a stone water trough” carved “ to last ten thousand years” (307). A trough contains water, a symbol of the unconscious, perhaps the personal unconscious, but perhaps the collective one. The trough symbolizes a way of understanding content arising from the unconscious and resonates as a religious symbol. For Jung, 38 jung journal: culture & psyche

5: 4 / fall 2011 an had the need for a felt connection to something larger
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than his ego deeply embedded into the fabric of his being, but man lost his sense of larger meaning and purpose somewhere amid the horrors and upheavals of the twentieth century. Jung believed that the modern collective failure to channel this instinct, to carve another indestructible stone trough, was both symptom and root cause of our collective dissociation. Bell rejects the notion of carving a trough himself; it must be a collective enterprise, and no new myth has yet emerged to replace the dying God-image of our culture.

Bell's only child, a daughter, died as an infant thirty years before the story begins. Childlessness is associated with the negative senex. "When the senex has lost its child . . . A dying complex infects all psychic life" (Hillman 2005, 263). Late in the book, Bell confides to the reader that for many years he has dialogued with this dead infant daughter (McCarthy 2005, 285). In Jungian theory, that imaginary child would be considered a psychic reality. The novel's ultimate meaning resides in two dreams about his dead father.

In the first dream, "he give me some money and I think I lost it" (McCarthy 2005, 309). His father imparted something of great value to him for safekeeping, but he misplaced it, perhaps irretrievably. The second dream is a powerful reiteration of the first and evokes Jung's famous dream of carrying a small light in the fog (Jung 1961/1965, 88). The setting is a cold, snowy night in a remote mountain pass. Bell and his father ride horseback. It was like we was both back in older times and I was on horseback goin through this pass in the mountains.

It was cold and there was snow on the ground and he rode past me and kept on goin. Never said nothing. He just rode on past and he had this blanket wrapped around him and his head down and when he rode past I seen he was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the horn from the light inside of it. About the color of the moon. And in the dream I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. (McCarthy 2005, 309)

Although the dream can be viewed as regressive, in that it invokes Bell's childhood relationship and a longing to live out an old, honorable myth that has become irrelevant in the modern world, it clearly carries teleological implications. Bell goes forward into the dark night, into the unknown, toward death. He and his father ride horses, numinous animals in McCarthy's work that suggest connection to anima or soul. Horses also represent an older and an arguably more connected way of moving through the world. Bell's father carries fire, a symbol for the light of consciousness or spirit, in a horn, a Gnostic symbol of maturity. The horn is a dual symbol: from one point of view it is penetrating in shape and therefore active and masculine in significance; and from the other it is shaped like a receptacle, which is feminine in meaning" (Cirlot 1962/1971, 151). While the image of the horn may suggest a new hieros gamos, a union of masculine and feminine energy, the dead father carries it, not the dream ego Maggie Bortz, Telos in No Country for Old Men and The Road 39 itself. Bell's passivity in the dream seems problematic. On the other hand, it is conceivable that Bell's lack of agency is an auspicious sign. In the absence of ego and into its emptiness an

imaginal stream can flow, providing mythical solutions between the senexpuer contradictions” (Hillman 2005, 66). Bell’s own father aspects are deeply unconscious: he has no living children and, in this respect, has lost his father’s “ inheritance,” a future presence in the chain of life.

Paradoxically, behind Bell’s senex mask we find a son looking for the father within. As in most of McCarthy’s books, the missing psychic presence is the father: there is never a shortage of symbolically fatherless boys in his work.

However, in this novel, the puer appears in the form of Bell as an old man. Bell’s unconscious frames its message in terms of a reunion and recalibration of the father and the son, as though directly addressing the split masculine archetype that appears to block the evolution of our culture. “ This split gives us . . . the search of the son for his father and the longing of the father for his son, which is the search and longing for one’s own meaning” (Hillman 2005, 61). The dream image suggests a path of potential healing, a “ union of sames” in this split archetype, and might represent the nascent emergence of a new myth.

In the end, the dream’s telos remains hauntingly ambiguous. We are only at the beginning of a process. In the face of such pervasive and unbridled evil and unconsciousness, one man’s individuation seems like a very small thing, a very small thing that requires much effort, attention, devotion, and suffering. The last line of the book immediately follows the second dream: “ Then I woke up” (McCarthy 2005, 309). “ Waking up,” increasing consciousness, is the entire point. And thus the novel ends on a slender strand of hope.

We must dream this dream on, in the Jungian tradition, and look toward the next dream for further clarification. McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel, *The Road*, is properly understood as a psychological progression of *No Country for Old Men*. In *The Road*, McCarthy resolves the ambiguity of the quaternity image presented in *No Country for Old Men*. It becomes clear that the imagery portends a collective psychosis and, at the same time, the possibility that some individuals may be ready to assimilate unconscious content. In *The Road*, the chthonic feminine as landscape has been killed off entirely in an unnamed catastrophe marked only by "a long shear of light and then a series of low concussions" (McCarthy 2006, 45). Given McCarthy's long preoccupation with man's proclivity toward evil, the apocalypse was likely manmade: perhaps an all-out nuclear war. There are few survivors. Civilization itself is a fading memory. A nameless father and son wander the scorched landscape, "the cauterized terrain," hoping to scavenge enough canned food to survive while evading roving bands of cannibals (12). The boy's mother has committed suicide in despair. 40 *jung journal: culture & psyche* 5: 4 / fall 2011

McCarthy seems to suggest that the feminine will be eradicated from the picture entirely, the negative mother complex played out to its inevitable conclusion in man's escalating shadow enactments before work on the fundamental problem can begin in what is left of humanity. As Anton Chigurh says, "one's path through the world seldom changes and even more seldom will it change abruptly" (McCarthy 2005, 259). Despite the horrors, a new symbol, the image of a divine child, an elaboration of the dream imagery of *No Country for Old Men*, does emerge out of the ruin and ashes of *The Road*.

This symbol arises from the ground of catastrophic loss. The end of the *via longissima* is the child. But the child begins in the realm of Saturn, in lead or rock, ashes or blackness, and it is there the child is realized. It is warmed to life in a bath of cinders, for only when a problem is finally worn to nothing, wasted and dry can it reveal a wholly unexpected essence. Out of the darkest, coldest, most remote burnt out state of the complex the phoenix rises. *Petra genetrix*: out of the stone a child is born. (Hillman 2005, 64)

In *The Road*, the father and son are “each other’s world entire” (McCarthy 2006, 5), representing a “union of sames” in the masculine archetype and, possibly, the beginning of a new cultural myth. The nameless father in *The Road* struggles to “evoke the forms. Where you’ve nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them” (63). He views his son as a sacred being. As he is dying, the father sees his son “standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in that waste like a tabernacle” (230). Unlike Jesus, this son is not sacrificed back to the father. In the puer is a father drive—not to find him, reconcile with him, be loved and receive a blessing, but rather to transcend the father which act redeems the father’s limitations” (Hillman 2005, 161). The father’s job is to initiate the son before he dies: to provide a sense of meaning that makes existence tolerable. In *The Road*, individual meaning is symbolized in the son’s sacred responsibility to carry the light of consciousness, the only thing of value in a post-apocalyptic world, into the overwhelming darkness that confronts him. This fragile possibility, however, resides in the individual, not within a culture or group.

Critic Kenneth Lincoln saw McCarthy's novels as "lamentational canticles of warning, not directives" (2009, 2). Part of Bell's function is prophetic: he hints at "where we're headed" (McCarthy 2005, 303). "I know as certain as death that there aint nothin short of the second comin of Christ that can slow this train" (159). McCarthy is first and foremost a storyteller. He is not an activist and does not make prescriptive statements, and it is a mistake to read him that way. The blind man in *The Crossing* explains the function of storytellers. "He said that they had no desire to entertain him nor yet even to instruct him.

He said that it was their whole bent only to tell what was true and that otherwise they had no purpose at all" (McCarthy 1999b, 284). I imagine that McCarthy shares the blind man's views and also those of Jung, who in writing about art Maggie Bortz, *Telos* in *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* 41 underscored the fundamental depth psychological tenet that "a dream never says 'you ought' or 'this is the truth.' It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and it is up to us to draw conclusions" (1930/1966, CW 15, ¶161).

Those of us who are conscious enough to draw conclusions from this work must do so now and prepare ourselves as best we can for the dark new world to come. endnote 1. Bellerophon, son of the King of Corinth, was the hero of Greek mythology who killed the Chimera. Bellerophon, inflated by his triumph, felt entitled to join the gods on Mount Olympus and attempted to fly there on the winged horse, Pegasus. His presumption offended Zeus, who orchestrated the hero's dismount. Bellerophon plummeted to earth, crippled

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Washington Square Press. Maggie Bortz earned an M. A. in Counseling Psychology with an emphasis in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, California, and an M. J. in Journalism from the University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Journalism. She is a Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP) working toward licensure as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) at the Center for Family Development in Eugene, Oregon.

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This alchemical hermeneutical study analyzes Cormac McCarthy's novels *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road* as cultural dreams using Jungian and post-Jungian theory. McCarthy's work elucidates the archetypal process of individuation toward the mature masculine in our time. Following McCarthy's imagery and James Hillman's work, I focus on the split in the senex-puer archetype that structures the masculine psyche as the ultimate psychological site of our cultural dissociation.

I also examine the teleological implications in the novel regarding the evolution of the God-image, which reflects man's understanding of the objective psyche, as well as the nature and psychological function of human evil. key words alchemy, archetypal psychology, chthonic feminine, Coen brothers, cultural psychology, dream interpretation, Jungian interpretation of literature, landscape, literature as cultural dreaming, masculine archetypes, Cormac McCarthy, mechanization, *No Country for Old Men*, puer, *The Road*, senex, symbol Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

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