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## Following the Gypsy: When the Other is the Self

We are always in one or another root-metaphor, archetypal fantasy, mythic perspective.  
From the soul's point of view we can never get out of the vale of our psychic reality.

James Hillman

This paper explores the archetypal image of the gypsy as a symbol of the other within us, between us and in the world. According to Jung, in the unconscious the archetypes permeate each other in a state of “complete mutual interpenetration and fusion” (CW 9/1, par. 302). Other mythic figures in this archetypal field include *wanderer* and *exile*, *pilgrim* and *musician*, *trickster* and *magician*, but it is the *gypsy* who has captured my imagination for as long as I can remember.

The *archetypal gypsy* has an external correlate in the Roma people who have been shunned and persecuted throughout the western world for centuries and offer a sobering example of how humanity has often encountered “the other in the world.” Like the Roma themselves the *archetypal gypsy* is situated on the edge, and that is where I see this paper as well – bordering scholarly and imaginal exploration. Beginning with my own experience and an overview of a gypsy dream series, I will speak briefly about the Roma and offer some thoughts on why the gypsy image is evocative today, then conclude with some thoughts about the role of writing in the exploration of significant inner others.

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The word Gypsy derives from the erroneous belief that the Roma originated in Egypt, whereas their true origins have been established as the northern regions of India. Historically both Roma and non-Roma activists and writers have used Gypsy and Roma interchangeably. In speaking of the actual people, I use both Roma and Gypsy; in referring to the archetypal image, I use lower case *gypsy* in italics; and when speaking of dreams I use the term offered in the dream.

## I. When the Other is the Self

About twenty five years ago I had the following dream.

I am sitting in the back of a pickup truck with several other women. We are in England, in the countryside south of London. Suddenly we see a group of women outside on the rolling green hills, brightly clad in colorful long dresses and sitting on a stone bench. More women appear and then I realize that these are Gypsies and we are in their territory. They are all talking and laughing, walking and running, clearly having a good time. The pickup truck stops and we all climb out. I wonder if the Gypsies will be friendly – they may feel we're invading their space. Are we welcome? Am I welcome? The women all speak Romany. I try to begin a conversation with one of them but she doesn't speak English so she calls an older woman who does. Then we have to go back to the truck and continue on our way. I desperately want to stay with the Gypsy women.

During the course of my studies at ISAP Zürich in 2006, it became evident that the symbolic figure of the gypsy that had captivated me since childhood was an archetypal image of my lifelong individuation journey. As I read and wrote, circumambulated and amplified this archetypal image, I realized I was writing a memoir of a lifelong fascination with an inner figure. I could not account for this mysterious affinity but it was clearly woven into my life in a profound way. Countless dreams –

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including at least fifty that I had recorded through the years – along with waking fantasy, synchronicity, and an ongoing process of active imagination all indicated the presence of an inner other just as real as the outer others in my life. It seemed the *archetypal gypsy's* vivid paradoxes were woven into the warp and woof of my life and she had made a permanent dwelling place of my soul.

Jung wrote, “In each of us there is another whom we do not know. He speaks to us in dreams and tells us how differently he sees us from the way we see ourselves” (CW 10, par. 325). As it turned out, after a series of pointed dreams and a lengthy inner struggle, the *archetypal gypsy* led me out of analyst training and onto a different Jungian path. However it was obvious that the gypsy symbol paper I wrote at ISAP was the beginning of a longer writing journey and it took me another decade to write *Gypsy Fugue: An Archetypal Memoir*.

Numinous archetypal images point toward and mirror corresponding inner others: figures and energies unknown to us, or whose presence we have glimpsed on the periphery of consciousness for some time. These images may appear in dream series over time or meet us in the outer world as mysterious fascinations that hold us in thrall. However they appear, their presence compels our attention and imagination; at times we may even feel as though we are possessed by them.<sup>1</sup>

To approach these images with an attitude of “creative resonance” and “receptive devotion” in the words of Helen Luke, to circumambulate and engage with them in a lively *Auseinandersetzung*, is to expand and deepen awareness of what was previously

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<sup>1</sup> Murray Stein writes: “For a moment, one almost becomes another person; in the long run, one actually does. If these powerful archetypal images are strong and impressive enough, the whole fabric of a person’s life can be transformed.” *Transformation: Emergence of the Self*, p. 41.

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experienced as “other” within (1995, pp. 23, 25). Attending to these lesser known inner figures enlarges our sense of who we are and brings us back to the symbolic life, releasing new energy in our bodies and souls.

“A symbol does not define or explain,” Jung said. “It points beyond itself to a meaning that is darkly divined yet still beyond our grasp, and cannot be adequately expressed in the familiar words of our language” (CW 8, par. 644). Archetypal or transformative images are potent symbols of the highest order whose meaning can be “darkly divined” at best and whose power lies in their capacity to evoke an endless flow of associations and creative possibility, to alert us to the presence of synchronicity in our lives, and to mirror emerging energies within our bodysouls. The numinosity of these images generally reflects something in the collective situation as well and I will come back that later.

## II. The Nocturnal Other

Here I would like to offer an overview of a gypsy dream series throughout the past thirty years. The dream motifs and variations can be summarized as follows: I want to be with the Gypsies. I realize I could join a *kumpania* of Gypsies. I am visiting Roma in Romania and they want me to stay with them. I feel I belong with them and these are my people. My passport states “Gypsy-traveler” as my ethnicity. Gypsies prevent me from crossing the bridge back to my home in Zürich. Gypsies are being persecuted by ruthless soldiers. There are Gypsy caravans in the park across from my home and Gypsies on the beach below. I am making music with Gypsy musicians and dancing outdoors with the Roma. My closet is filled with Gypsy clothes. Gypsies are stealing

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clothes from my closet. I am reading the International Romany Newspaper. I am writing a book about Gypsies.

Sometimes the dreams were filled with emotion that lingered on through the day, while others unfolded like ongoing stories or films I had stepped into. Some consisted of just an image or a few words. The dream of yearning to join the Gypsy women in the English countryside preceded many dreams of increasing proximity, rapport, and identification with Gypsies. From wondering if I will be welcome to being embraced by Romanian Gypsies; from learning to sing the Gypsy musical scale to being instructed to join a caravan; and from wanting to learn the Romany language to conversing freely with Gypsies everywhere: the arc of the dreams moves toward recognition and intimacy, empathy and connection.

Jung said that if we look closely at a series of dreams over time we can often observe a developmental process underway. He wrote:

These apparently separate acts of compensation arrange themselves into a kind of plan. They seem to hang together and in the deepest sense to be subordinated to a common goal.... I have called this unconscious process spontaneously expressing itself in the symbolism of a long dream-series the individuation process (CW 8 par. 550).

Two dreams seem particularly significant in this regard. In the first one (2006) I am walking down a country path in Spain when suddenly on the right side of the path I see a life-size mirror resting solidly on the earth. As I step up to the mirror I see my own reflection and I am a Gypsy. Upon waking I realize that the colours in the dream – red and black, yellow, white, and gold – are the colours of alchemical process (CW 14, par. 281).

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The second dream (2012) came during a time when I had been contemplating whether to continue writing or keep this material contained within my own soul. The dream seemed to settle something in my psyche.

There is a young Gypsy woman whose diary has been held under lock and key. She is calm and quiet but it seems she's a survivor of some kind of concentration camp and torture, and I am deeply moved by her story. I see the open diary. It is a "book of secrets." I recognize a few words but it seems to be written in a mixture of different languages and includes hieroglyphics and colours. There are other people present and it's clear to everyone that this is a precious document and we are grateful to have it. The young woman watches us quietly and I ask if this is her diary. She says yes. I begin to weep and she does too. She seems peaceful and content that her book of secrets is in good hands and will be read by people who treasure her story. We walk down a forest path, embrace tightly, and I thank her again and again for sharing her story. Then we part ways and I wake up.

I came back to this dream often, and continued writing the book. Through the years I have worked with many of these dream figures in active imagination through writing, movement, music, and art, endeavoring to bring their essence into the lived reality of my waking life.

### III. The Roma as Other in the world

Despised and rejected throughout the world, the Roma carry western culture's projection of the external other. At the same time they have been romanticized in the cultural imagination for their music, dance, and nomadic lifestyles. Although they constitute the largest ethnic minority group in Europe (numbering around twelve million) there is no place where they are safe from persecution and no country that recognizes

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them as fully equal members of its society. Wherever they go the Roma are regarded as outsiders and one social researcher has described them as “Europe’s ‘Untouchable’ Class” (MacLaughlin, 1999, p. 39). They have endured a long list of abuses documented in Amnesty International’s Annual Report on Human Rights, and remain one of the most consistently and dramatically “othered” people in the world despite the fact that historically they have never posed a threat nor laid claim to land or property.

Australian Roma poet, Jimmy Story, expresses the anguished experience of the disenfranchised Roma other in the following lines from his poem, “New Rom.”

Who are we,  
Roma without Romanes  
who must read  
our own history  
in another tongue,  
follow the butterfly  
of our own being  
across maps of imagination  
trying to recreate  
the lost structure  
of our soul?

Unlike other ethnic minorities in Europe and North America who often feel strong familial and cultural ties to their place of origin, the Roma have neither a homeland to which they feel bound nor a longstanding literary tradition that tells of their culture or thousand year history after leaving India and scattering throughout many countries of the world. Until the previous century, it was primarily poetry and music that carried their stories and the writer Fernanda Eberstadt who lived with Roma in the south of France describes Gypsies as living in a state of “permanent provisionality.”

Jung himself, it appears, never wrote about the Roma except in a footnote to his discussion of the magician archetype (CW 6, par. 316). In recent years Jungian scholar Alexandra Fidyk claims, “As an ‘othered’ group [the Roma] represent the intrapsychic conflicts of group/nation members and are unconsciously used to act out a shared collective problem” (2008, p. 18). And so the Roma become the scapegoat for what the collective does not acknowledge within itself as a whole. The collective strives to maintain its sense of cohesion and unity, and philosopher Richard Kearney observes, “the price to be paid for the construction of the happy tribe is often the ostracizing of some outsider: the immolation of the ‘other’ on the altar of the ‘alien’” (2002, p. 26). This all too accurately describes what has happened to the Roma through the centuries, culminating in the *Porraimos* or “Devouring,” the Roma Holocaust, in which approximately the same proportion of their entire population perished as the number of Jews who were murdered under Hitler. A Romany proverb about this time says, “They led us in through the gates; they led us out through the chimney” (Yeger, 2014).

To speak of the Roma is to address a vast topic and I can only point toward the pathos and drama, suffering and dark beauty of Roma history and culture; and to the resilience and defiance, adaptability and vitality that have sustained them throughout their thousand-year migration and diaspora. Sadly, we know that their situation has not improved in recent years; Aidan McGarry, a British scholar of international politics recently published a book ominously titled *Romaphobia: The Last Acceptable Form of Racism*.



#### IV. The *archetypal gypsy* today

Throughout the western world Gypsies have been idealized and denigrated in equal measure, reflecting a deep-seated ambivalence toward this mythical other. This is evident in Hollywood movies, music, literature, the world of fashion, and elsewhere. The common fantasy of footloose and carefree Gypsy life includes smoldering dark-eyed bearded men playing violins and exotic women in flamboyant dresses dancing around campfires in front of colourful horse-drawn caravans; the children are charming little ragamuffins with mischievous smiles and deft fingers. Simultaneously Gypsies are often portrayed as irresponsible vagrants who survive by their wits, take what they want, and train their children to beg and steal in the marketplace. Nomadism, lawlessness, exoticism, erotic appeal, musicality, craftiness, fortune telling, even black magic – all of these appear in the collective projection of Gypsy life. Why are these stereotypes so prevalent and so potent?

Might it be that the stereotypes reverberate as muted echoes of archetypal energies we all carry within? Jung compared the archetype to “an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself” (CW 10, par. 395). Once we lose touch with the water of life – our connection to the symbolic realm – what remains is only the watercourse, empty and dry. The archetype loses its dynamism, and the life-giving archetypal image devolves into a lifeless stereotype. Even so, if we can see through the stereotype to its archetypal origin, we may catch glimmers of the longing for freedom, beauty, and *duende* in our daily lives.

Perhaps the *archetypal gypsy* offers the possibility of expanding beyond the linear logic and cramped rationality that dominate our daily lives toward a more passionate and instinctual way of being in the world, one attuned to the senses and the body, as well as the mind and spirit. One that might transcend the split between Apollonian perfection and Dionysian ecstasy, that values intuition and feeling as much as thinking and objective facts; playfulness and beauty as much as intellectual accomplishment. I would suggest that the collective responds to the idealized fantasy of Gypsy life with fascination and longing because it touches a bone-deep hunger for soulfulness, spontaneity, and embodied joy; and for other ways to live that would nurture the social body and feed the communal life of the *anima mundi*.

In our times, the *archetypal gypsy* is also a potent symbol for a powerful current of shifting populations, displacement, and homelessness, and for the spiritual rootlessness and restless searching that characterize a technological global society in which many feel cut off from the traditional structures of meaning that provided stability for earlier generations. The old certainties no longer hold, and we may well feel ourselves living, like the Roma, in a condition of “permanent provisionality.”

Between us as within us the *archetypal gypsy* points toward renegade psychic energies that cannot be neatly corralled or contained; disruptive “borderline” energies that break conventional boundaries and spill through the cracks of our carefully moderated social personas and behaviour; subversive energies that topple the ego’s best intentions and rumble in the shadow of our relationships to self and other – primal, raw, unedited. The *trickster* is one of the *gypsy*’s archetypal cousins after all.

## V. “Other-Love is Writing’s First Name”

I would like to conclude with some reflections on the role of writing in encountering the other within and amplifying the archetypal images and numinous symbols in our lives. “Other-love is writing’s first name,” says Hélène Cixous, French feminist theorist and writer. “Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me - the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me” (1986, pp. 85, 86, 99).

Autobiography – auto/bio/graphy – is literally “self-life-writing.” Throughout years of teaching classes in autobiographical writing I observed that while students registered for the class in order to write about their lives, most were actually motivated by a deeper urge to discover who and what that self is. The processes of memory, reflection, and self-expression proved deeply meaningful, often precipitating significant dreams even for those who had not previously remembered them, and bringing to light recurring themes, images, and symbols that had accompanied them through decades, sometimes throughout their entire lives. What transpired was the discovery or deeper awareness of the inner realm and the presence of the unconscious.

Jung noted that what he found most important to include in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* were those instances “when the imperishable world irrupted into this transitory one”: the dreams and visions that he regarded as encounters with “the ‘other’ reality” (1965, pp. 4, 5). Christine Downing expanded on this in her 1977 essay, “Re-Visioning Autobiography: The Bequest of Freud and Jung,” stating:

The discovery of the unconscious leads to a new sense of the form and content of autobiography. The usual chronologically ordered arrangement of outward events misses the point. There is a center to us beyond our direct knowledge and control...which we know only through its manifestations, especially dreams.... The recognition that our dreams create us as much as we create them suggests autobiography as a dream series. (p. 232).

I began to offer an Archetypal Autobiography and Memoir class based on a dream. (In the dream we are given a paper grid to write our stories in. There is a large insect in the center of mine in a beautiful iridescent royal blue colour. I begin to write around it in wavy, concentric circles and gradually fill the page with writing. When I drew this image I saw a mandala.) We began with an introduction to Jung's understanding of the psyche, the archetypes, and individuation. I asked students to record their dreams, write about their most vivid memories, fantasies, emotions and synchronicities, and practice active imagination in the form of written dialogues with significant dream figures. Most often they came upon a symbolic image that held great meaning for them. Some did a substantial amount of writing during the course while for others what was most important was the discovery of an inner world teeming with previously unknown figures and energies, what von Franz referred to as "our inner family of souls" (1994, p. 160). My hope was always that the symbolic life had become a reality for them and they had discovered a sense of eros with their own imaginations.

"Writing is a gesture of love," says Hélène Cixous (1991, p. 42). "**Other-love is writing's first name.**" Whether the other we encounter in our writing is within us, between us, or in the larger world; whether we write journals or memoir, poetry or fiction; and whether it's a theory, a moment in time, or an inner figure we are writing

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about – what is called for is an attitude of attention and radical receptivity, empathy and eros – qualities that are the essence of love.

In closing I would like to circle back to my title – “Following the Gypsy” – and suggest that to *follow the gypsy* is to follow the soul, and like the *archetypal gypsy*, the soul doesn’t have a set itinerary but meanders where it will. Psyche is nomadic, wandering between the realms and returning from the underworld with the treasure box that contains the knowledge of life and death. To *follow the gypsy* is to be on a journey that never ends, one that allows time to saunter, to turn around and circle back for a second look, to savour the moment with curious eyes. As we *follow the gypsy*, “Latcho Drom” – Safe Journey – to us all!

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