

The Mask

THESEUS - The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth from earth to
heaven.
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. [M.N.D – V, I, 28]

1 Many of the personae and characters, heroes and heroines, plots and incidents we encounter in stories and narrative, whether films, plays, novels, nursery rhymes sagas or soap operas are drawn from classical myths, early theatre and folklore. This talk hopes to show that the forms of characters and the plots themselves are much older than that. And that they have a much wider and deeper significance that can justifiably be called 'universal' – applicable to us all. It is particularly relevant for us to apply various forms of analysis to the significance of these plots and personae and their meaning and power particularly as regarding the continuous internal narrative we hear between our ears.

2 'What we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. *They are without known origin*; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world - even where cross fertilization through migration must be ruled out.' [my italics] (C.G.Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, p.69.)

3 The use of the word *Mask* in the title and body of this thesis serves two functions. One is to make reference to the work of Joseph Campbell, the extent and the depth of whose four volume work *The Masks of God* I have borrowed from extensively. The second is use this term *Mask* is to avoid a long-standing confusion around the word *persona*, and an allied looseness in the application of the term 'personality'. Similarly there are problems with *ethos* and *karacter*. We need then a term that we can more clearly limit the meaning of to allow for two distinct aspects.

The Latin use of *persona* was literally as a mask for the theatre, and echoed the Greek *prosopon* - a mask or face. So in that sense the word refers to the 'character' or facade that is adopted, put on, or a part to be played. Eric Partridge traces this meaning in *Origins* in the legal sense as a 'status in the eyes of the law' and is opposed to *res* - property. This ancient use of *persona* in its legal and civic sense, enshrined in its status, is the exact use I want to attach to the word *mask*, and to carry with it all the political associations of status and related property. This

stereotypical meaning that is meant by Aristotle's *harmottos* or 'fittingness' to its social category and as actable in a play - capable of dramatic mimicry.

4 *harmottos* categories from the *Poetics* as the hierarchical and polar distinctions of young/old, male/female, free/slave, the given - but not good/bad, controlled/uncontrolled; these later rest upon *proairesis* – conscious choosing. This aspect of the self I shall refer to as sentiency.



5 As Eugene Halliday points out clearly in his talk *The Absolute* [eugenehalliday.com/audio], unfortunately, the word *persona* which is often used in this theatrical context, also has the modern associations of 'personality' which is, to a large extent, the opposite of this original meaning; probably tracing it in Latin to *per* - through, *sonus* - sounding, and going on to use the word to mean the essential being or the 'person'. This is, in the modern sense, the one who is behind the facade, and who is sounding through the wood and canvas, or in this context the socially constructed, contrived and presented characterisation in opposition to what might be called the more 'real', the individual, conscious centre of human 'personality', or sentiency.

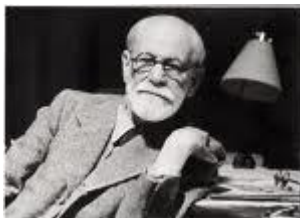
The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives both interpretations, from 'an individual human being, man woman or child' to 'a character sustained or assumed in a drama or the like' and then goes on, extending its application even to a corporate body as an 'artificial person' as regards its rights and duties in society .

6 There are similar problems too involved in the term 'character'. Similar in that they stem from a confusion as to whether it is the essential consciousness of a being that is referred to, or whether it is the actual and external 'marks in the world' (Partridge, p.188), by which we discern such an essence, to which we refer. Character is usually seen as the closest English term for the Greek *êthos*; Partridge links this meaning with *ethos* - custom (as in ethnic - of racial character or custom). According to H.G.Liddell and R.Scott's invaluable Greek Lexicon, *êthos* originally meant a figure stamped onto a wax tablet, or the stamping device itself and hence means the recognizable and readable sign of something (H.G.Liddell and R.Scott, p.426), but already by the time of Plutarch writing the life of Alexander it had the application as the centre from which the choices which motivate action seem to come from. This un-seeable essence being referred to I am reading as the conscious centre of the being - sentiency - as opposed to any of its properties or forms in the world.

7 So to avoid these problems of the term 'personality' and the associations of 'persona' and 'character' we can fruitfully use the term *mask* to refer to this, and only this, assumed, visible, social role. There are also useful associations with 'making', 'make up', both theatrical and otherwise, and 'machination' and 'disguise' that accrue to this word, and help to fix its dramatic and familiar context. It also reflects my hope of showing that the value and force of the *mask* is in direct descent from, and completely congruent with, the ritual and theatrical use of masks.

And since these masks are socially represented then they are political, with both a small 'p' and a capital 'P', as they concern the classification of behaviour into roles between individuals ('p') or within a society and its awarded status ('P'). That is they stem from the hierarchical management and manipulation of instinctive drives that are already present within the human psyche, and presenting themselves, seeking outlets, and stimulation in that society. The *katholos* – 'universality' of the hierarchies that we see in politics – the ascribing of leadership, heroism, criminality etc. to behaviours, rests, according to Aristotle on the *proairesis* – conscious choice that can be expressed. *proairesis* for him came as in the form of rulership, forged from conscious and deliberate choices.

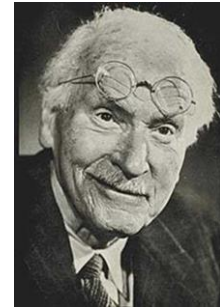
8 So if all we can see in this world is the form, what can we say of the 'essence' that which is looking to re-present itself in the forms available? Has it a hidden form or shape of which it is un-conscious until it acts in the world.



The phrase 'They are without known origin' (paragraph 2) is a key one here in that Jung considers it possible for unconscious ideas or forms to reside in a 'collective unconscious', that is an unconscious accessible to us as individuals only in certain circumstances. Freud's 'archaic remnants' theory is similar to Jung's but of a much more prescribed origin. Freud's basic idea, covering the universality of certain forms in diverse individuals, is that they are ideas which are widespread because they are laid down by the primal scene of family life. They are universal only because the family is universal, and they are grounded in the anatomy of the human being, in the appetites and various requirements of its physiology and the conflicts these create within its environment.

9 The original concept of the 'Archetype' was first presented by the clinical psychiatrist Carl Jung. Jung was one of the centuries most successful writers and

clinicians in the field of psychiatry, a co-worker with Freud in the early years of psychoanalysis, they went separate ways in 1913. Freud retained the term 'Psychoanalysis', whereas Jung chose to work under the term 'Analytical Psychology'. Jung generated the idea of archetypes as forms to account for the frequency of images and situations which he constantly came across in his analysis of patients, and which echoed the images and situations he knew from the literature, mythologies and fairytales of the world.



Joseph Campbell describes and uses Jung profoundly. He shows how this view of the meaning of the mythological (which is for him the creative aspect of thought) for its importance to the structure and coding of the mind, was a view that was forming throughout the century leading towards the ideas produced by Freud and Jung. The Grimm brothers had gathered the fairytales of their collection with the hope of re-forming from them an Indo-European mythology in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The deciphering of the Rosetta stone in 1821 had unearthed, in the hieroglyphs subsequently translated, literature and myths proving to be of far greater antiquity than anything previously known (by some 2000 years in some cases). Yet in these stories, scholars found many of the same structures and forms as were in the familiar Greek and Biblical canons, classified at the time as either great literature and absolute truth respectively.

10 Campbell points to examples of the resurgence in art and literature of the serious treatment of mythological or symbolic forms in representing the psyche, as in Goethe, Wagner, Melville and Ibsen. In the way he stresses the precedence of 'Art' before 'Science' in these cases, Campbell underlines the very Jungian attitude of a synchronistic radiating *zeitgeist* at work, anticipating and predicting the formulations and conclusions of the scholars and scientists:

‘ One thinks of Goethe, in every line of whose Faust there is evident a thoroughly seasoned comprehension of the force of the traditional symbolism of the psyche, in relation not only to individual biography but also to the psychological dynamics of civilization. One thinks of Wagner, whose masterworks were conceived in a realization of the import of the symbolic forms so far in advance of the allegorical readings suggested by the Orientalists and ethnologists of his time that even with the dates before one (Wagner 1813-1883; Max Muller 1823-1900; Sir James George Frazer 1854-1941) it is difficult to think of the artist's work as having

preceded the comparatively fumbling efforts of the men of science to interpret symbols.’
(Campbell *Primitive Mythology*, p.17.)

11 The unique value of Campbell's approach to this study is in his bringing, to the area of the unconscious and of archetypal forms, tenets from another discipline that is very informative although not obviously related. It is an area that moves us towards a description of the type of instinctive mechanisms that might be 'perceived by the senses', 'manifest in fantasies' and 'reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world'. He draws into the field the work of animal behaviourists, particularly Tinbergen and Konrad Lorenz. He then takes the scientific significance of their findings:

‘Chicks with their eggshells still adhering to their tails dart for cover when a hawk flies overhead, but not when the bird is a gull or a duck or a pigeon. Furthermore, if the wooden model of a hawk is drawn over their coop on a wire, they will react as though it were alive- unless it be drawn backward, when there is no response.’



He then takes this science and enhances it into art:

‘ Even if all the hawks in the world were to vanish, their image would sleep in the soul of the chick - never to be roused, unless by some accident of art; for example, a repetition of the clever experiment of the wooden hawk on a wire[...] unless we knew about the earlier danger of hawks to chicks, we should find the sudden eruption difficult to explain [...] Living gulls and ducks, herons and pigeons leave it cold; but the work of art strikes some very deep chord!(*Primitive Mythology*, p.31.)

Such engraved patterns of behaviour are termed IRM's (Innate Response Mechanisms) by Niko Tinbergen, and Campbell draws many examples from Tinbergen's *The Study of Instinct* (Oxford University Press, 1951) from many and various animal kingdoms. The trigger for these reactions is sometimes called a 'sign stimulus'.

12 Now the entity that recognises the sign stimulus, and indeed responds in whatever way it does, cannot be said to be the individual creature, as it has no individual experience of it at all. The species does, but it doesn't. This is provable in the case of young chicks, as stated in Campbell's quotation, but it is also familiar from the often repeated televised nature films of migrating species. A very familiar one is the scene of turtle hatchlings emerging from eggs buried high up tropical beaches, unerringly turning and scrabbling past a gauntlet of predators for the unknown and

unknowable safety of the ocean. Some 'thing' or 'what' is recognising and organising these processes. This 'thing', or 'what', is acting in a collective manner. That is, it is acting in the individual turtles, across the species but unconscious to the little wriggler itself.

13 And the precision of the image is often confounding. The method of its passage from generation to generation is yet only conjecture. However, as Campbell points out, whatever builds and conveys it (and natural selection seems inadequate for such a sophisticated image), there is the 'ghost' of a hawk woven somewhere into the nervous system of the chick. This ghost, or buried image, it is totally unaware of, until it, or its ancestor as a still functioning 'remnant', sees a specific silhouette and is then apparently impelled beyond its own deliberate or voluntary scheme to break out of whatever it is doing and dart for cover. The 'ghost', or trigger images of whatever kind, is for it so potent, that it then prescribes its behaviour and overrides all other considerations.

Some of the material acts only when the creature reaches a certain maturity; it cannot be triggered in the young, although they are surrounded by the sign stimulus daily. They have to be physiologically ready to respond, for the environmental key to fit the neuronic tumblers. Our own experiences of puberty surely describes how similar key and tumbler responses may possibly be present in humans; it is in this aspect of instinct or 'unconscious' archetypal form that is movingly experienced by individual mortals and how compelling it is.

Some IRM's are like an inherited propensity that latches on to a form and treats it as a sign stimulus from then on. These apparently function as an open or imprintable response mechanism:

But on the other hand, a duckling will attach itself, as if to a parent, to the first creature that meets its eye when it leaves the egg - for example, to a



mother hen or to a dog or even to Konrad Lorenz.

Arche (ἀρχή) is a Greek word with primary senses 'beginning', 'origin' or 'first cause' and 'power', 'sovereignty', 'domination' as extended meanings.^[1] This list is extended to 'ultimate underlying substance' and 'ultimate undemonstrable principle'.^[2] In the language of the archaic period (8th-6th century BC) *arche* (or *archai*) designates the source, origin or root of things that exist. If a thing is to be well established or founded, its arche or starting point must be secure, and the most secure foundations are those provided by the gods-the indestructible, immutable and eternal ordering of things. In ancient Greek Philosophy, Aristotle foregrounded the meaning of *arche* as the element or principle of a thing, which although undemonstrable and intangible in itself, provides the conditions of the possibility of that thing.^[3]

The heritage of Greek mythology already embodied the desire to articulate reality as a whole and this universalizing impulse was fundamental for the first projects of speculative theorizing. It appears that the order of 'being' was first imaginatively visualized before it was abstractly thought.^[8] In the ancient Greek philosophy, **arche** is the element and the first principle of existing things. This is considered as a permanent substance or nature (*physis*) either one or more which is conserved in the generation of rest of it. From this all things first come to be and into this they are resolved in a final state. This source of entity is always preserved. (Aristotle-*Metaph.A*, 983, b6ff). Anaximander was the first philosopher that used *arche* for that which writers from Aristotle onwards called 'the substratum' (Simplicius *Phys.* 150, 22)^[9]. The Greek philosophers ascribed to *arche* divine attributes. It is the divine horizon of substance that encompasses and values all things.

Thales of Miletus (7th-6th century BC), the father of philosophy, claimed that the first principle of all things is water,^[10] and considered it as a substance that contains in it motion and change. His theory was supported by the observation of moisture throughout the world and coincided with his theory that the earth floated on water. His ideas were influenced by the Near-Eastern mythological *cosmogony* and probably by the Homeric statement that the surrounding Oceanus (ocean) is the source of all springs and rivers.^[11]

Thales' theory was refuted by his successor and esteemed pupil, Anaximander. Anaximander noted that water could not be the arche because it could not give rise to its opposite, fire. Anaximander claimed that none of the elements (earth, fire, air, water) could be arche for the same reason. Instead, he proposed the existence of the apeiron, an indefinite substance from which all things are born and to which all things will return.^[12] *Apeiron* (endless or boundless) is something completely indefinite and Anaximander was probably influenced by the original *chaos* of Hesiod (yawning abyss). He

probably intended it to mean primarily 'indefinite in kind' but assumed it also to be 'of unlimited extent and duration'.^[13] The notion of temporal infinity was familiar to the Greek mind from remote antiquity in the religious conception of immortality and Anaximander's description was in terms appropriate to this conception. This *arche* is called "eternal and ageless". (Hippolitus I,6,I;DK B2)^[14]

Anaximenes, Anaximander's pupil, advanced yet another theory. He returns to the elemental theory, but this time posits air, rather than water, as the arche and ascribes to it divine attributes. He was the first recorded philosopher who provided a theory of change and supported it with observation. Using two contrary processes of rarefaction and condensation (thinning or thickening) he explains how air is part of a series of changes. Rarefied air becomes fire, condensed it becomes first wind, then cloud, water, earth, and stone in order.^{[15][16]} The arche is technically what underlies all of reality/appearances.

Prohairesis

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Prohairesis (variously translated as "moral character", "will", "volition", "choice", "intention", or "moral choice" ^[1]) is a fundamental concept in the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus. It represents the choice involved in giving or withholding assent to impressions. The use of this Greek word was first introduced into philosophy by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.^[2] To Epictetus it is the faculty that distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. The concept of 'Prohairesis' plays a cardinal role in the *Discourses* and in the *Manual*: the terms 'Prohairesis', 'Prohairesis' and 'Aprohairesis' appear some 168 times.^{[3][4]}

[edit] Explanation by Epictetus

According to Epictetus, nothing is properly considered either good, or bad, aside from those things that are within our own power to control, and the only thing fully in our power to control is our own volition (prohairesis) which exercises the faculty of choice that we use to judge our impressions. For example, if a person says something critical, that is not bad; or, if something complimentary is said, that is not good, because such things are externals and not in our power to control. By exerting the power of choice, it is possible to maintain equanimity in the face of either criticism and praise, which is a moral good. On the other hand, when people become troubled by criticism, or elated by praise, that is a moral evil because they have misjudged impressions

by thinking that things not in their power (such as criticism or praise) have value, and by doing that they place a measure of control of their own life in the hands of others.^[5]

The importance of prohairesis for Epictetus is that it exerts a power that allows people to choose how they will react to impressions rationally:

Remember that what is insulting is not the person who abuses or hits you, but the judgment that these things are insulting. So when someone irritates you, realize that it is your own opinion that has irritated you. Try, therefore, in the first place, not to be carried away by the impression; for if you once gain time and respite, you will find it easier to control yourself.^[6]

By exerting their prohairesis (will, volition, or choice), people can choose rationally how to react to impressions. Prohairesis is the faculty that distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. Epictetus defines it as:

1. a rational faculty able to use the impressions and to which all other human faculties are subordinated (e.g.: *Discourses* II.23.6-15; II.23.20-29)
2. a faculty capable of using impressions and understanding their use (e.g.: *Discourses* II.8.4-8)
3. a self-theoretical faculty able to evaluate all other human faculties (e.g.: *Discourses* I.1.1-13; I.17.1-3; I.20.1-6)
4. a faculty impossible to be enslaved (e.g.: *Discourses* II.10.1; I.17.21) and impossible to subordinate (e.g.: *Discourses* II.10.1; I.17.21; IV.1.161)