Metis and Her Unborn Children: Notes on an Epistemology of the Gut

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"Zeus listed after Metis the Titaness, who turned into many shapes to escape him until she was caught and got with child. An oracle of Mother Earth declared that this would be a girl child and, if Metis conceived again, she would bear a son who was fated to depose Zeus just as Zeus had deposed his father Cronus and as Cronus had deposed Uranus. Therefore, having coaxed Metis to a couch with honeyed words Zeus suddenly opened his mouth and swallowed her, and that was the end of Metis, though he claimed afterward that she gave him counsel from inside his belly."

Z eus, the victorious usurping son, triumphant patriarch, and overarching sky god at the dawn of Western civilization, swallows Metis, a Titaness. Yet another rapacious episode for Zeus, complete with the usual bizarre aftermath. What is it with this
guy? Europa, Mnemosyne, Leda, Semle, etc.—the list of seductions, coercions, and rapes is interminable, and the outcome is never good. These episodes in the history of the King of the Olympian Gods have been understood in a number of ways, most commonly as portrayals of historical conquests, in which the Greek God overcomes the patron Goddess of a people who have been conquered by the Greeks. 1 But Metis, first of Zeus's illicit conquests, is not the patroness of a vanquished state. She has a meaning of her own.

What exactly has Zeus swallowed? Metis is metis, a Greek word that is interpreted in a number of ways, ranging from the mundane to the more curious. Metis may be translated as counsel, 1 advice, or wisdom, 1 and in that guise seems unintimidating. But metis also means cunning intelligence. 2 Cunning, as in artful or sly, intelligence is not wisdom in its usual form. For one thing it is deceptive: "metis is both the strategy of deception...and the mental ability to devise (such a strategy)." 3 It was Metis the Titan who devised the cunning strategy that Zeus used to force his father Cronus to disgorge Zeus's siblings, Cronus's children, whom he had swallowed when they were babies. Metis concocted the emetic herself. Through her intervention vomit was transformed into a pantheon of Gods. "The Greek concept of metis, or transformative intelligence, is itself portrayed as the goddess, Metis." 4 Cunning, deceptive, transformative wisdom is portrayed here in a female form.

But Metis is no Sophia, embodying and dispensing helpful feminine insight. She is something rather trickier, as the story makes clear, a shapeshifter; her transformations are literal. Metis is a Titaness, a survivor in Olympian times from the conquered first generation of Mother Earth's children. She is a sister of Hecate and of Zeus's mother Rhea. She is associated with the planet Mercury 5 the mercurial planet of Hermes, also a prime Trickster who shows up in the conclusion of the story of Athena's birth. But before moving on to that conclusion, what do we make of this image of Metis in the belly of Zeus, still, he says, offering counsel.

Some sort of wisdom is settled in the body of the archetypal Father, a female type of wisdom associated with the belly. Is it that alternately malign and idealized epistemological tool, women's intuition? Is it the sometimes revered and sometimes dismissed counsel of "gut feeling"? It's that and more. Emotion, intuition, somatic sensation, fantasy, metaphorical association, visualization, and imagination are all sources of perception and knowledge which are tricky, shapeshifting, and hard to

catch, tending to be expressed in indirect ways and to confound rational confirmation. Women as individuals—and the Feminine as an archetypal principle—are perceived as having a special connection to these shadow forms of knowledge and a special access to the body's wisdom. The shadow of the feminine is ever associated in Western culture with the shadow of the rational and orderly. In cultural symbolism the mysterious female acts as the embodiment of a secret, elusive wisdom which is somehow less important but more profound than the wisdom available to the rational and orderly male.

The Greek concept of metis, or transformative intelligence is itself portrayed as the goddess, Metis.

In the Greek mythos only one child of Metis manages to be born, a daughter who mirrors male epistemology rather than opposing it. Her birth makes this clear: "As he [Zeus] was walking he was seized by a raging headache, so that his head seemed about to burst. He howled...and the whole firmament echoed. Hermes ran up and 'divined the cause of his discomfort. He persuaded Hephaestus to make a breast in Zeus's skull from which Athena sprang fully armed.' " 6 The Trickster who possesses special insight is now no longer Metis but Hermes, and now Metis's child Athena, one aspect of feminine knowledge, must go into the world fully armed. Given her mother's fate, doubtless a wise strategy, Athena is seen by many mythographers as representing a masculinized wisdom in technically feminine form: "many people feel that she is male...a combination of rationality, political sagacity, and practical skills representing culture in the culture versus nature dichotomy. She is the result of a patriarchal confiscation of metis, transformative wisdom; she is what is left of her mother Metis after being processed in the body of Zeus.

The myth of Metis provides us with a vivid narrative picture of the relationship between the dominant world view and alternative, "other" epistemologies (those ways of knowing associated with people who are "the other" in patriarchal culture). As Zeus swallowed Metis and gave birth to Athena—a new, armored, Father-oriented Goddess of Craft—so abstract conceptualization has, in the dominant discourse, swallowed embodied experience and given birth to
technology. The post-enlightenment patriarch is a thinker rather than a thunderer, but cunning, shapeshifting wisdom still sits in his gut. Numerous efforts have been made to get the old boy to cough up this elusive, unacknowledged knowledge. Some, Jung included, have tried to use the imagery of ancient systems like alchemy or gnosticism to free themselves from the constrictions of the dominant epistemology. But Metis is still swallowed and Athena has the run of consciousness.

Athena has been a seductive figure in my own life. Her heroic competence commands respect in a patriarchal world. I like a girl who knows how to get things done. Identifying with Athena’s power and, especially, her crisply defined boundaries (all that nice bronze) is so much more reassuring than messing about with her shape-changing, elusive, artful mother. My ambivalence is personal but also reflects a collective ambivalence: we want to recover a type of wisdom, some capacity for transformation that has been lost, but recovering it might be really messy. All that has been lost is not light, some of what will be recovered is dark. And will we still be able to get everything done? Without those crisp boundaries how will we know how to assess what we know? How will it?

Our story tells us why Zeus is afraid to regurgitate Metis. Her unborn children, those destined, if Metis is free, to follow Athena out into the world, will usurp the patriarch, will unseat the son of light, whether he is ruling the sky or ruling the discourse. Like all good patriarchs he is enthusiastic about usurpation. Having usurped others he knows it is unpleasant for the usurpee. What then will free Metis from the body of the Father? Is surgery required? Major surgery? Minor surgery? Fatal surgery? And, if she is freed, who, metaphorically speaking, might her potential offspring be? Will they usurp consciousness? To address these questions I must move from the collective to the individual and begin exploring the ways that the gut wisdom of Metis survives and gives counsel within people who are acculturated to a Western world view.

SWALLOWED WISDOM AS IT SURVIVES IN THE UNCONSCIOUS

The wisdom of Metis springs from a mix of subjective and intersubjective experiences which appear chaotic and threatening to the patriarchal mindset, whether that mindset is held by a man or a woman. The experience of inexplicable revulsions and allurements, gripping moods, body states that may have little or no basis in external events, compulsive behaviors, seemingly random thought or image streams, intense unprovoked responses to people—any or all such experiences may express Metis's cunning advice, spoken from the belly, emerging from the body and the unconscious in shapeshifting, that is to say symbolic, forms.

"Could it be that the body is the unconscious and that in repressing and, more important, disregarding the spontaneous life of the nervous system we are enthroning the rational, the orderly, the manageable?" "It could be just that. My unconscious commented on this disregard for the body 17 years ago when, on the night before I received my doctorate, I had the following dream:

"I'm in a green cemetery, given as Irish hill moss, furnished with streaky white New Orleans style mausoleums, chill but peaceful. In my tweed jacket, carrying my briefcase, I am very professional. I walk up to the aged, benign, and respected fellow whose dark sits in the middle of that perfect lawn. "Dr. Bleuler," I say, "may I see my old body?"

"You may look and take piece with you."

The perfectly clean, long-limbed skeleton lies in a stone box. I take the right hand, put it in my blazer pocket, turn to go.

"We'll see you again," Bleuler says.

The dream is both mysterious and blatant. As I am initiated into my new professional identity, I have my new blazed and briefed case form. I need that good right hand, the practical one that got me this far, but the rest of my very underfed female body can rest for eternity in its sarcophagus. Dr. Bleuler, a pioneer in my field, the original definer of psychosis, is an understandable, if unexpected, gatekeeper for this rite of passage. Graveyards, skeletons, the groves of the dead are age-old settings and props for shamanic death and rebirth, the initiation of the healer-to-be. So far, so clear. But what does he mean, "We'll see you again." Definitely not what I wanted to hear at age 27.

My attachment, at that time, to a masculinized Hero stance dictated a hyper-rational approach to experience, a somewhat grandiose approach but at the same time alienated. This stance was congruent with the culture's ego ideal and with mainstream feminism's emphasis, at that time (the late 1970s), on giving women access to male privileges, privileges like graduate education and nifty briefcases. In order, as Whitehouse says,
to enthroned the orderly and pursue my profession in a manageable way, I left most of my body behind. But it was not lost. The unconscious makes that clear. And I would have to return. That was also clear.

What can I possibly mean, I left my body behind? Obviously it came with me, in corporeal fact. I mean that, whenever possible, I disregarded the body's spontaneous responses and perceptions. In short I ignored its wisdom, the gut counsel of Metis. At the same time I relied on its wisdom, which came to me in the form of intuition, a vital but completely unacknowledged (by me anyway) resource in my work. Consciousness I was just working with that useful right hand, leaving my rite of passage, so clearly laid out in the dream, suspended in a mid-liminal stage. In the unconscious it was as if Inanna, after going through four of the seven gates into the underworld, decided to go back to the upperworld and start a private practice. Leaving below unfinished business of an unavoidable nature.

What is gut wisdom and what is belly rumbling?

Five years or so after this dream I was standing by my front door, holding another nifty briefcase, flooded by exhaustion and a sense of meaninglessness. Alienation, disenchantment, and—meaningfully in the context of the dream—some progressively unignorable medical problems had built up in my life to the point of overwhelm. I had been trying to address these disturbing experiences by making plans of various kinds, still relying on the problem-solving right hand to make life manageable and orderly. In a moment, standing there at the front door, I realized that the methods which had produced my alienation would never diminish it.

As I had so clearly found out, rational, abstract methods, closely attuned to culture's masculinized ideal, can only illuminate those aspects of reality, those aspects of the Self, with which they are congruent. The dominant world view, springing from and supported by masculinized ways of knowing, demeans and disempowers body, nature, and woman as interrelated aspects of chaotic matter. I had gone right along with that view and I had reaped certain practical benefits in the world of work as a result. Regardless of my conscious dedication to that world view, despite cultural repression and personal resistance, an archetypal experience of dismemberment, insight, and rebirth was still accessible in the unconscious, and the entrance to that experience was through my feelings of desperation. Metis was still attempting to give me counsel from the belly; messages—in the form of body states, strong feelings, and dreams—were coming to me from the unconscious.

According to Jung, the unconscious pursues a compensatory purpose, endeavoring to balance and regenerate consciousness by communicating denied, repressed aspects of the Self to the dominant, culture-identified ego (I use ego here in the way that Jung used it—to indicate those aspects of the Self which are consciously acknowledged by the individual). Thus the unconscious functions as a storehouse of forgotten resources. When it became clear that my consciously developed methods and view were both inadequate and ineffective in addressing my experience, it was possible to access the aspects of my Self which had been left behind, the undeveloped resources of the unconscious, the remainder of the body in the sarcophagus. The remaining gates of Inanna's initiation into the underworld stood ready; I could continue if I chose.

How are these unconscious (swallowed) resources accessed? What, in fact, could I do to return to Bleuler's cemetery? The return of the repressed is perceived through other ways of knowing, ways which illuminate what "the other" knows. Spontaneous images and narratives encountered in dreams, trance states (however induced), and states of reverie (such as daydreams) are clues which may lead to an experience of the repressed wisdom of Metis. Communications from the unconscious are woven throughout the warp of everyday, work-a-day life. The products of the imagination are continuous and available to all. The real difficulty lies in noticing and validating the daily communications of the unconscious, in differentiating between the expressions of recovered wisdom and the discharge of unconscious conflict. What is gut wisdom and what is belly rumbling?

The typical ego fears being subject to "demonic intruders" from the underworld, from the unconscious. The ego fears usurpation by the Tricksterish activities of the disregarded parts of the Self that are holding swallowed wisdom; consequently, it has a bad attitude toward them. I like most people in my position, with my attitudes and approach to life, I had a hard time paying more than cursory attention to communication from
the unconscious. I had an even harder time taking those communications seriously when they challenged my habitual, productive, culturally supported ways of knowing and modes of action. The wisdom speaking to me came from within my body and tended to meet considerable resistance.

Because of this resistance, access to swallowed wisdom requires both a practice and a container: a practice that will express the unique quality of the repressed wisdom, that will give it a voice, and a container that will preserve a place for it in the face of the ego's fear, scorn, resistance, and just plain ignorance. Our culture requires that we create a particularly firm, immutable, consciously maintained and constructed place for the emergence of swallowed wisdom. This is necessary because the "pragmatic" world view, with its emphasis on productivity and with its many demanding social roles, is so overwhelmingly dominant for Western people. Additionally, the potentially explosive power of the unconscious, in both its personal and transpersonal aspects, has no reliable container within our collective Western culture. Such a container is only constructed and maintained by the individual, who is constantly subjected to social pressure to break or abandon it.

The concept of the container, as I use it here, springs from the practice of depth psychotherapy. Various names are used in that practice—container, _temenos_, holding function, frame—to denote a bounded, some would say sacred, space within the therapeutic relationship, a space which is needed to facilitate the symbolic dialogue. In essence, the nature of the external relationship between therapist and client eventually becomes internalized for the client as a model for relationships between ego and unconscious. The container holds the rich chaos of conscious and unconscious experience, allows a multitude of fragmentary images to be sorted out and deeply felt, to interrelate and be held in consciousness. The container provides a framework for the recognition of revolutionary insights which the socially conditioned ego might otherwise avoid. The need to actively build and nurture such a container, whether in therapy or out, is particularly pressing for an individual who has been conditioned to distrust inner perceptions in favor of social expectations.

I fell back on a practice I had abandoned in college, a practice which, for me anyway, was a gift from and gateway to the repressed wisdom of Metis—art. As he predicted in my dream, Bleuler surely did see me again.

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In my late thirties I began to rob the graves he supervised in order to reassemble my abandoned body. A right hand can make a career but only the whole body can make art. The process of making art caused me, inevitably, to focus on and take seriously the indirect communications of the parts of my self that I had left behind. The time set aside to make stuff, the studio itself, a few key teachers, and the finished pieces provided a container. The most striking result of my return to the practice of art was that my medical problems went away. I believe that the art-maker in me (my swallowed transformative wisdom), deprived of media (left in a stone box), went to work on my body, tinkering with the very cells, giving me what is euphemistically, and in this case accurately, called "female trouble." When given a shot at a better venue she tidied up and went out to work.

Jung believed that art can provide access to profound realities which are excluded from conscious life and world view. "In works of art of this nature... it cannot be doubted that the vision is a genuine primordial experience.... It is not something derived or secondary, it is not symptomatic of something else, it is a true symbol—that is an expression for something real but unknown." Forms of expression that allow shapeshifting, cunning, usurping counsel to be heard give voice to Metis, who is real but unknown. The more that voice is listened to, the more consciousness itself is altered. The more that voice is listened to, the more possible it is to distinguish restorative communications from harmful mutterings. Over time, in effect, Metis is recovered from the body of Zeus and given conscious manifestation in narrative, imagery, sensation, intuition, and feeling.

However, the process of listening to Metis's voice presents some serious issues in the general area of trustworthiness. In attempting to grasp and assess a nonrational, nonlinear, and frequently nonverbal form of wisdom, a form with, moreover, a tricksterish bent, how do we differentiate whim from inspiration, intuition from projection, insight from wishful thinking, the trustworthy from the pathological? I believe that these questions are built into the project of recovering swallowed wisdom—those are inherent in the nature of the unconscious. But my interest in them springs from my personal experience.

I have spent a great deal of my teaching life in programs and institutions that endeavor, in one way or another, to balance the biases of the Western world view, to balance the dominant epistemology with
"other ways of knowing, in the metaphorical terms of this paper, to recover swallowed wisdom, in some part. This might be pursued through curriculum content, through innovations in institutional structure, or both. In all cases these utopian endeavors have been distorted by the inability to distinguish subjective truth from subjective prejudice and consequently have been plagued by interpersonal chaos. I will attempt to address three interrelated aspects of my concerns about the trustworthiness of swallowed wisdom: 1) assessing the dependability of methods for listening to and understanding swallowed wisdom, 2) disentangling swallowed wisdom from swallowed pathology, and 3) addressing projection and exploitation in the recovery of swallowed wisdom.

DEPENDABILITY OF METHODS—DISTINGUISHING GUT WISDOM FROM BELLY RUMBING

There are many methods of accessing body wisdom, and there are many claims to an epistemology of the gut. Assessing these methods and claims often, in our culture, has been synonymous with debunking or belittling them. Because the epistemology of the gut enters deeply into the realm of personal, subjective truth, assessment is often experienced as attack and self-appraisal can be experienced as self-doubt. Nevertheless a willingness to sort through one’s own methods and delineate the bases of one’s claims strikes me as the single most important marker of dependability. Like gut wisdom itself, this is a marker which is personal, a reflection of the attitude of one who uses certain methods rather than an abstract attribute of the methods themselves. Let me try to clarify this through example, by sorting out, delineating, and providing rationales for the methods used in this paper.

What justifies the use of one’s dreams in a scholarly work? Marie-Louise von Franz describes the process she uses in her method of myth interpretation in this way: "Psychological interpretation is our way of telling stories ... We know quite well that this [constitutes] our myth ... Therefore we should never present our interpretation with the undertone of 'this is it' ... The criterion is: Is it satisfactory and does it click with me and other people? — And do my own dreams agree?" (italics added). Am I using my dreams to explicate my interpretation of the story of Metis simply because a prominent Jungian like von Franz says this is legitimate? Well, it’s always nice to be validated, but I also have reasons which are specific to this project. I have conceptualized the swallowed wisdom of Metis as persisting in the body and in the unconscious (two entities which, if they are not synonymous, at least overlap a great deal). Consequently that wisdom may well inform this paper through communication from the unconscious and from the body.

Dreams are among the more accessible of such communications and they are relatively suitable to a written format. It has happened to me before that a dream has given me valuable commentary on writing in progress, and I am hardly alone in that experience (note the famous story of Kekule and the benzene ring). Of course, all such communications are not Metis. Swallowed wisdom survives in the unconscious as a potential, a forgotten resource. It is not equivalent to the unconscious.

Like cultural outsiders, Metis resists being controlled by the dominant authority.

Using one’s own dreams is a subset of using personal experience, or to be more specific, consciously and openly using personal experience in the study of human consciousness. William James recently used his own inner life as a basis for his understanding of psychology, as did Jung. Many contemporary theorists, especially but not solely feminist theorists, have posited that all researchers and scholars are working through and from their subjective experience, that their idiosyncratic slant on their subject is present and influential even if heavily embedded in an "objective" approach. From that point of view the important issue is not whether you use your own experience but whether you are aware of and honest about the way in which your subjective, personal experience and particular biases affect your approach to your subject.

Having concluded that the subjective wisdom of my dreams might be pertinent to understanding the swallowed wisdom of Metis and that, in part, the trustworthiness of my approach depends on my awareness of my own idiosyncratic stance toward the epistemology of the gut, how should I
go about discovering and clarifying that slant? One of my peculiar concerns about exploring the wisdom of Metis is conveyed in the following dream.

I have been cast in a play with an old, perhaps mystic theme: I am in the wings of the stage waiting to go on and I seem to be in charge of a sword, which is wrapped in beautiful handmade flax paper. However I cannot keep track of it. I tell the director of the play, a brusque and competent woman about ten years my senior, that she has cast me as the Lady of the Lake then obviously I have been miscast, because I have lost the sword. She says I had better find it and I run around looking, in the theater and parking lot. I am thinking, while I am running around, that this sword may be the real one (Excalibur) even though I thought before that it was fake, and I can't figure out how the real one could end up in an amateur production.

As with all dreams there are several levels of meaning here; for instance, I have explored a different level of this dream's meaning in *Persephone Returns*. Some of the more personal levels will not be discussed in this paper, although the reader is, of course, free to speculate. The aspect of the dream which seems relevant to this paper is my attitude toward the sword and toward being cast as the Lady of the Lake. One of the classic ways to regard a sword in a dream (or any cutting instrument with a "keen edge") is as a metaphor for the process of thinking and analysis. The *sharp* mind analyzes things, dissecting them (to cut up or take apart is the root meaning of the word analyze), is piercing or pointed in its insights, cuts to the quick, etc. As I proceed with this paper, which could be seen as an amateur production with an old, mythic theme, I keep losing track of my thinking function, my ability to analyze, to penetrate to the heart of the issue. (Any readers with lingering Freudian interests may have a phallic, castration anxiety field day here.) I seem to be wondering if my interpretive analysis is fake or legitimate.

Archetypal amplification of the symbol of the sword begins, obviously, with Excalibur, Arthur's enchanted sword given to him by the Lady of the Lake. The Lady is insistent, when she hands over the sword, that Arthur remember that it is hers, not his, and must be returned to her. In the famous final (or perhaps not so final) episode of Arthur's story he makes sure that Excalibur is returned to the Lake. Who is the Lady and what is the particular meaning attached to this sword Excalibur? The Lady of the Lake and her magic sword are two of the many old Celtic images that persist in the Arthurian story cycle, survivors from an ancient otherworld that still shows through the romanticized layers of chivalric tradition that have accrued to Arthur's myth.

The Celtic otherworld was the land of the spirit, the land of the dead, the land of enchantment, and the land of women. "This world transcends the limitations of human time... It also transcends all spatial limitation. It may be situated under the ground or under the sea; it may be in distant islands or it may be coexistent with the world of reality... It may be reached through a cave, through the waters of a lake, through a magic mist—or simply through the granting of insight." [italics added] So there are certain "thin places," in geography and in consciousness, where the visible and invisible worlds connect. The Lady of the Lake provides a connection to and power from the Celtic otherworld. Her sword is a boon from the underwater retreat of the ancient "Tuatha de Danaan," the people of the Goddess Danu, who are the source of insight in the insular Celtic tradition. All of these images resonate with my concept of the unconscious as a refuge/storehouse of forgotten (swallowed) wisdom.

Graves associates the Lady of the Lake with the Celtic Goddess Ceridwen, who lived on an island in a lake and whose cauldron could regenerate the dying and inspire the living. In my dream I am uncertain that I can enact this part. I may not be fit to provide the regenerating insight that connects everyday reality to the otherworld/underworld of the unconscious. This interpretation of the dream reveals my considerable uneasiness about the project I have undertaken in this paper. What does it mean that I cannot keep track of the sword? I like being sharp-minded and it has served me well in life, but this particular sword is not the sort I am accustomed to, not one that I can be sure is genuine. After the Lady of the Lake has given Excalibur to Arthur, he and Merlin have a conversation in which Merlin asks Arthur if he prefers the sword or its sheath. Arthur prefers the sword and Merlin tells him that the sword's sheath is far more important and powerful than the sword and that Arthur must take pains not to lose the sheath. In my dream the sheath of the sword is handmade flax paper, a medium I often use in my art, which is my own personal connection to the otherworld of insight and inspiration.

I think the dream plays out the anxiety and distrust I feel about taking the swallowed wisdom of my unconscious seriously. I consciously identify with Arthur's stance, valuing the sword more than the sheath,
that is, valuing analysis more than inspiration, thought more than art, perhaps even valuing male principles over female. As I sit with the dream it seems to me that it is not so much the possible content of swallowed wisdom about which I feel skittish, but rather the processes required to gain access to it—the particular type of otherworldly sword and sheath required. The dream brings me around in a circle to the beginning of this section on dependability of methods: one of the personal conflicts which may affect my discussion of methods for listening to and understanding swallowed wisdom is my tendency to distrust those methods, to be uneasy about “other” ways of knowing even while playing a part which is meant to give access to them (like the part I have in the dream play or the part I play as author of this article). The more aware the reader and I are of this conflict within me, the writer, the less likely it is to skew our mutual understanding of the material under discussion. The dream has brought this out.

Allowing conflicting ways of knowing to coexist in consciousness requires a type of oscillation between the pragmatic rational demands of the ego’s concerns and the liminal, medial states of “altered consciousness” that are required to attend to swallowed wisdom. Despite the fact that I find it troublesome to tolerate, this oscillation can produce a fruitful tension of opposites. The human psyche frequently holds seemingly oppositional feelings like mine. Within our culture’s dualistic paradigm, these are difficult to tolerate with full awareness. Lack of awareness of such internal conflicts opens the door to unmediated influence from the unacknowledged conflict. Jung’s theory provides a method for grappling with this challenge; that is the method of cultivating the awareness and containment of opposites through a dialectical relationship between ego and unconscious. The foundation of such a relationship lies in the ego’s willingness and ability to attend to communications from the unconscious.

I suggest that the dependability of one’s insight into and understanding of swallowed wisdom hinges on a willingness to go through this oscillation between ways of knowing, to tolerate the internal opposites without denying one pole or the other, to be open to the compensation of personal blind spots by entering into ongoing dialogue with the unconscious. Von Franz states that she depends on an experience of “clicking,” which I believe is a somatic, (gut) experience, on the reflections of other people, and on her dreams to compensate for her poten-

tial blind spots. So, am I saying that anyone who seeks to listen to swallowed wisdom should keep close track of their dreams? In a word, yes.

Von Franz cites some checks and balances other than the compensation available from dreams. She asks: (1) “does it click with me” (2) “and does it click with” other people? My own understanding of the “click” is that it refers to what is sometimes called the “Ah ha!” experience.

Why use inexact, informal words like “click” or “Ah ha”? Shouldn’t we concern ourselves instead with how logical, convincing, or cogent an interpretation or insight is? Cogency and logic are, of course, legitimate concerns, and I expect that dialogue with others, von Franz’s second point which we will discuss, can address them. These concerns have to do with intellectual integrity while the “click” or “Ah ha!” experience has to do with thought and feeling, mind and somatic coming together in an experience of understanding that is more than cognitive. It is what I would call a full body insight. It has impact. For me the useful, productive click incorporates movement, by which I mean that the full body insight produces further understanding, induces a potent shift in one’s relationship to oneself and/or to the material being explored. It moves, it leads into something. Such an insight is not the end of understanding (not an experience of “that’s that”) but the expansive beginning of exploration.

When I reread Arthur’s first encounter with the Lady of the Lake, in which she gives him his sword, I felt intrigued, moved on the gut level. This feeling-level response is, for me, key to the process of archetypal amplification. The archetypal level of a symbol carries a strong emotional charge, for it partakes of the archetypal’s numinous aura. A strong, gut-level, felt response is, I believe, a more reliable guide than a cognitive interpretation because the transpersonal aspect of the unconscious, the mythic level, cannot be expressed in purely intellectual terms. When exploring the archetypal aspect of a dream image it is not necessary or even desirable to prove that a given association is the “correct” one. It is
necessary that the association feel meaningful and that it lead somehow. In this case it led me to explore the Celtic underpinnings of the image of the Lady of the Lake, an exploration that yielded more images and a fuller story than the Lady is accorded in the myth of Arthur.

These stories have come to inform and inspire the creative part of my life. Certainly if I had decided to go looking for a myth to which I could relate, I might have happened upon the same material, but my experience of its meaningfulness would have been quite different, more theoretical. My dream world connection to the mythic images helps me feel their numinous charge rather than simply be interested in them; it helps me experience my life's vital connection to levels beyond the everyday. The numinous charge is the archetypal potential for transformation, and Metis the embodiment of that potential.

Each individual must learn what this "clicking" experience feels like in his or her particular body. Each person must undertake the project of knowing themselves well enough, over time, to determine which subjective experiences of recognition (clicking) prove to be useful and productive sources of knowledge. Each person must do the personal research which will help her or him identify those subjective experiences that are so idiosyncratic or unresolved that, though they may further personal development, they do not illuminate anything for others. I realize that this sounds less than precise. It is difficult to find language that does justice to the epistemology of the gut. One must scrutinize the subjective insight, the surfacing of swallowed wisdom without flattening or destroying it.

Having subjected one's insight to internal scrutiny, one must then expose it to scrutiny and commentary from others. This can be an extremely touchy business. Clearly, the tension between that which is articulated and that which we experience but cannot yet express is very great. The temptation to escape that tension through a premature definition of inchoate internal experience is encouraged by the cultural norm of cut and dried descriptions. This solution, which mutilates tender, evolving, profound but inchoate experiences, can breed a counter-reaction; that is, a refusal to continue to attempt articulation or discourse in any situation which includes different points of view. This second solution leaves one in communication only with those who are willing or able to merge with one's experience. When one's own personal experience becomes the sole authority, checks on self-deception are hard to come by. Feedback from others, dialogue with as wide a range of interested parties as one can manage, is an indispensable process, necessary to noticing and balancing the skew which inevitably accompanies the emergence of swallowed wisdom.

All of the approaches to assessing trustworthiness I've discussed depend on a particular attitude. That attitude is itself paradoxical, requiring a bold faith in the importance of one's subjective, inner experience and at the same time a willingness to reflect scrupulously on one's blind spots. Once again, von Franz comments on this when she states that she must know limits of her own consciousness in the process of constructing an interpretive story and that she expects others to go beyond those limits, superseding her understanding. This stance is vital. The insights available in one's own consciousness are crucial but, inevitably, limited. If these limits are not acknowledged consciously and grappled with overtly they will exert covert influence. The importance of this dynamic is increased by the fact that dreams and other non-cognitive sources of wisdom reside in the unconscious. As a result, real pathology (as opposed to projected pathology) may become entangled with swallowed wisdom. Each individual must undertake the task of disentanglement.

**Disentangling Pathology from Swallowed Wisdom**

As I have said, my favored method of accessing and expressing swallowed wisdom is art-making. The artist's work, if it is inspired by the "real but unknown" (this is visionary art in Jung's terminology) serves as a compensating dream, balancing the conscious attitude with images of unacknowledged aspects of reality, aspects for which ego consciousness does not have ready words. In the Western world art has a long association with otherness in general and craziness in particular. This may have something to do with why the guardian of my particular storehouse, the boneyard in the first dream in this article, is Bleuler, the historical definer of psychotic process. As Gablik states in *The Reenchantment of Art*, "Many people believe that entering the visionary mode is romantic or regressive and fear it will fix them in archaic states that are unsuitable to contemporary life." This is a reasonable fear, illustrated in the following dream.
I get off a bus outside a large walled estate, similar to the ones which you see below Carmel. I used to work here but it is now deserted and neglected, though not derelict. I am expecting it to be empty, but from a walking point of view, I don't know my reason for returning. I go into the living room, which is bare and dark with high ceilings and big windows that look out to the overgrown garden. A large orange tomato comes in and I recognize him as my basis pet. I greet him and follow him outside where he slips through a hole in the garage door. I go in after him and find that all of the pets are still here—a dog, three cats and a bird. They seem well cared for. I am puzzled over this and walk back out to the driveway. At this point my old bus comes out of the house. He is Bruce Nauman, the artist, and he starts to try to convince me to come back to work for him. He is living here as a hermit. I refuse the invitation—let's face it, Bruce is damned odd. But in the midst of the conversation I get the feeling that there may be nowhere else to go. The rest of the world may no longer exist.

The rest of the world may no longer exist. That, for me, is the promise and threat of the part of me that makes art, of communion with swallowed wisdom. The promise is of deep merger with the transpersonal, the threat is the destruction of everyday life. The process enucleates me, as in the dream, in a fascinating, not quite wild, not quite domesticated world that could entrap me. I don't think I seriously believe that art will make me psychotic, but it's also not entirely out of the question. Of course, this fear has to do with the legend of the artist in the West—the mystagogue who risks insanity to connect with and express insights that are unavailable to ordinary citizens; in fact, the mystagogue's role is to recover swallowed wisdom. That legend has to do, in part, with the repression of the epistemology of the gut. If the dominant epistemology is rational and sane then counter epistemologies (like those used by artists) are the shadow of rational and sane—i.e., crazy. But the notion of the artist teetering on the edge of sanity also has to do with the way in which swallowed wisdom is entangled with pathology. As Jung said, "A deep darkness surrounds the sources of visionary material." 62 The artist, among others, follows the vision and encounters the darkness.

Consequently certain dangers arise. Many groups and individuals who are involved in the recovery of swallowed wisdom show signs of serious, destructive pathology. I say this based on my own experience and on observation of others' experience. Some situations in utopian communities get so out of hand that we find the destructive effects reported in the newspaper.

The seeker after swallowed wisdom will encounter both personal and collective shadow material which is dangerous. The individual's personal shadow material is activated, and in some cases inflated, by the archetypal power of Metis's gut counsel. All of the repressed personal experiences, feelings, and memories with which the ego has failed to come to terms are brought closer to the threshold of consciousness. Those aspects of the Self which frighten, disgust, or threaten the ego are encountered at the entrance, like the three-headed dog at the entrance to the Underworld. This is both a problem and an opportunity.

Personal and transpersonal aspects of the unconscious are woven together (it might be more viscerally correct to say muddied together) and do not become differentiated until they are exposed to the processes of awareness. Repressed pathogens intersect with unrealized swallowed wisdom in ways that can be profoundly confusing and sometimes dangerous. The personal unconscious consists of repressed memories, feelings, preferences, and capacities. This repressed material springs from the individual experiences of life with which, for a variety of reasons, the ego will not or cannot form a conscious relationship. Repressed conflicts and traumas in the personal unconscious can be the source of pathology.

The transpersonal level of the unconscious plugs into the archetypal power of collective human potential and is a storehouse of undeveloped resources for the individual. This is Metis's home in the Western world. Grappling with a personal conflict will sometimes put an individual in touch with the transpersonal, because of the way in which these aspects of the unconscious entwine. When the personal shadow is brought to the threshold of consciousness, the ego can use this as a chance to form a relationship to these repressed aspects of the Self and find a modus vivendi with the shadow. Alternatively, the ego may be overwhelmed and unmediated shadow material may begin to influence behavior.

Another danger presented by the epistemology of the gut is the activation of the collective, cultural shadow. The collective and historical repression of the wisdom of Metis has been brought about through violence. Oppressive and genocidal methods, such as the Inquisition and the attempted destruction of Native American cultural and spiritual life, have
been used to suppress and denature the power of vision. Demonic imagery has been used in the dominant monotheisms to characterize the repressed wisdom of the body. The trauma of this collective legacy is accessed when swallowed wisdom is accessed and that trauma must be addressed in order to be contained. Practices and practitioners who are shadow phobic, who are overly idealistic and wish to focus exclusively on "the light" without making respectful provision for the shadow, may activate intensely inflated energies which can take over, fragment, and toxify experience.

I have referred several times in this section to a process of "disentangling." What is this process? Disentangling swallowed wisdom from unconscious pathology depends on the stance of the individual, in this case the stance towards the shadow. Willingness to know and claim one's shadow is fundamental. The more clearly the personal shadow is known the more clearly it can be distinguished from swallowed wisdom. If, as Jung believed, the psyche is a "door that opens upon the human world from a world beyond, allowing unknown and mysterious powers to act upon man and carry him on the wings of the night to a more than personal destiny," then that expanded destiny requires an expanded responsibility in regard to knowing oneself and one's shadow.

It is crucial that those who seek to recover swallowed wisdom have an adequate container, a container which provides them with the opportunity to travel back and forth between modes of perception and process, to identify the signs and effects of personal wounds, conflicts and blind spots, to contain the opposites, to tolerate thefulfert tension which allows creation. The development of the container, as an inner structure holding reflective space, depends on nonexploitive relationships which encourage attention to inner experience. Such relationships must have a place for the shadow, allowing a safe but honest reflection of personal problems that inevitably arise. The relationships that nurture the container must actively support a shift in ego stance within the individual. The ego's task in the process of making such a container is not its usual one of analysis, judgment, categorization, and control. Instead, the ego shifts, using a more observing, empathetic, aesthetic, and perhaps feminine stance. Practices and relationships which encourage and support this stance will help to build an adequate container.

In my own problematic experiences I think that more attention to and intention about the container might have curbed some of the more destructive dynamics at work (and still would). However, the groups involved were utopian, and shadow phobic. Little or no conscious provision was made for the inevitable emergence of shadow material. Pragmatic structures and procedures were left loose, reflecting, in theory, a less hierarchical process but in fact allowing more openings for unconscious shadow material.

Recovering Metis from the body of patriarchy requires a willingness to face personal and collective history, complete with its deep shadows, with rigorous honesty and to make provision for it. It requires a grounding in specific bodily experience so that new theory does not take on the abstraction that characterizes dominant theory. To me this means something fairly simple: if your body and feelings are badly affected by something, then that thing is questionable in some way. To pay close attention to visceral experience and articulate it in the terms or media suited to the experience itself brings "other" ways of knowing into consciousness as recovered resources rather than as signs or sources of pathology.

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I am dead and I feel great.

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PROJECTON

The swallowed wisdom of Metis is accessed through epistemological strategies that are associated with cultural outsiders. I am aware of several dynamics which foster this association. The dominant culture projects its shadow material, in this case "other" ways of knowing, onto outsider groups, using those groups symbolically to "carry" the collective shadow of suppressed epistemologies. Also, because outsiders typically take care of those aspects of life which are ignored by the dominant culture (child care, for instance) they are in a unique position to observe and consider the denied underbelly of dominant approaches. In American culture, outsider groups will have some unique insights into the many aspects of human experience which cannot be adequately addressed from the materialist, hyper-rational stance that typifies the prevailing outlook. (see W.E.B. Dubois's discussion of "double consciousness" and Jean Baker Miller's discussion of patriarchy's unsolved problems).
I have already associated two outsider groups, women and artists, with Metis and with metis (cunning, transformative intelligence). Metis herself, as a Titan among Olympians, is a cultural outsider. She shares that status with other mythic tricksters. Campbell, among others, sees the trickster as an embodiment of chaos, the principle of anarchy. In the instance of Metis this is true and not true. Her tricks—the emetic for Cronus, changing shape to escape Zeus—are not random and chaotic. They are specifically aimed at circumventing the oppressive and exploitive plans of overbearing authority. This is another way in which the wisdom of Metis is associated with cultural outsiders—she resists being controlled by the dominant authority.

Certain outsider groups (I am thinking primarily of Native Americans, but I don’t think this type of envy is directed exclusively at them) have retained or recovered cultural practices, rituals, and beliefs that support and guide those within the groups who seek to recover swallowed wisdom. These practices and beliefs form a cultural container for the seeker’s process and for what she finds. The existence, persistence, and maintenance of this type of container tends to excite admiration and scorn, envy, and projection.

This cultural container is well illustrated in an article by Pamela Colorado, a traditional Oneida woman living in Hawaii who holds a doctorate in social work. In this article Dr. Colorado describes a dream in which the appearance of a shark seems to give her a crucial insight into a complex situation. When she awakens she proceeds to assess the trustworthiness of her interpretation of the dream in the following way: “Gathering up my medicine bag I . . . head to Launiopoko Beach to make an offering of thanks. Pulling Indian tobacco from its pouch I call to the Mano (shark spirit). Laying a gift of tobacco in the water I wait. Was it a true dream?”

She is waiting to see if a shark will respond to her offering and thus confirm her sense of her dream. The willingness, indeed the necessity, to ask this question “Is it a true dream?” is vital. It is asked in a rigorous form—nothing less than an appearance of a shark can confirm the truth of the dream. This strikes me as a very high standard of trustworthiness applied with considerable strictness. At the same time it is a standard which is consonant with both the epistemology and ontology of the dreamer. It allows the limits of the dream interpreter’s consciousness to be tested without pathologizing or demeaning her way of knowing.

Dominant American culture does not provide this kind of cultural container for those who seek to recover and test the validity of swallowed wisdom. Everyone is pretty much on their own in developing both practice and container. One might or might not be able to find and depend on like-minded seekers. As a result some outsider epistemological strategies are, in a way, envied and this envy (which seems to be close to longing) produces both demonization and idealization of certain groups.

The following dream touches on this process.

I am dead and I feel great. The afterlife is wonderful but I have something which I must communicate to the living. I go to CIIS [California Institute of Integral Studies] to find someone to take the message. No one will admit that they see me. I go from room to room until I find my teaching assistant. She sees me and bursts into tears. After considerable effort I calm her down and give her my message. While we are talking I am assembling a copper scroll with all kinds of talismans and domestic objects attached to it. As I hand it to her it becomes fully material. “This is the only possible record of a conversation between the living and the dead,” I say.

The next time I see my teaching assistant she says she will miss one class because she must sit a vigil for the Day of the Dead. She is a Chicana who is involved in a group that is trying to recover and revive indigenous spiritual practice. In the dream she symbolizes a part of the Self that can accept the split-off wisdom of the “otherworld.” She can see, hear, mourn for, and receive information from those aspects of the Self that cannot get through to everyday consciousness, that have been “killed” in some way. Is there a problem with this? As long as it’s a symbiotic communication between my ego and my unconscious, probably not. If, however, in waking life, I began projecting these split-off parts of myself onto my assistant it would be a serious problem for both of us.

Analogous projections have happened and are happening on a collective level. As a result, the groups who symbolically carry repressed, swallowed wisdom are dehumanized and feel used in yet another way (because they are in fact being used as symbolic vessels for the dominant culture’s dissociated aspects). Less obviously, the projectors are distorted in their own development. Jung pointed out long ago that the wholesale adoption of another culture’s archetypal cosmology and ritual practices tends to allow the adopters to avoid their own culture’s shadow, to cir-
conven the way in which that collective shadow is internalized. Jung considered it crucial for each person to research and recover the epistemological strategies lost to their own culture or cultures, that these would illuminate both the light and shadow aspects of lost wisdom as it survives within a particular person raised in a particular world view.  

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this article I posed certain specific questions: What will free Metis from the body of the Father? Is surgery required? Major surgery? Minor surgery? Fatal surgery? And, if she is freed, who, metaphorically speaking, might her potential offspring be? In a general way we have seen what frees Metis—the mindful practice of other ways of knowing frees what the swallowed “other” knows. At the same time the opposition of dominant received wisdom to swallowed wisdom maintains a conflict. The patriarchal tradition posits crisp, clear-cut distinctions between conflicting feelings, experiences, opinions, approaches, truths. From within this world view it is extremely difficult to tolerate opposites or apparent opposites without one eliminating or overpowering the other. The patriarchal tradition tends to frame an opposing position as a potential or probable usurpation.

Because Western culture is steeped in this dualistic view, it is easy to imagine that father killing is necessary to freedom—as Cronus made away with Uranus, as Zeus made away with Cronus, so must we who wish to free Metis make away with Zeus or his functional equivalent (critical thinking? logic?). I believe that this only seems true from within the patriarchal world view. The figure of Metis herself offers a different possibility. Her shapeshifting counsel invites us to tolerate the confusion of seeming opposites as a fruitful tension. As I have stated in a previous paper, “If the opposites of symbolic and concrete, subjective and objective, masculine and feminine, conscious and unconscious, light and shadow (and so on) are in a dialectical relationship, an equal, ongoing dialogue, then consciousness expands to encompass the complementarity of seemingly contradictory realities: as in quantum theory, neither the particle nor the wave aspect of light need be sacrificed in conceptualization. The resulting model is of consciousness as process, rather than as rigid edifice. As in genuine, open dialogue between disagreeing individuals, rigid and extreme elements are mediated by the dialectical effect of their opposites. All points of view are partial and will be modified in the course of both internal and external dialogue.”

In using dreams in this paper I hope to convey the way in which one can use multiple ways of knowing—cognitive, emotional, somatic, imaginal—to explore the potential inherent in such communications from the unconscious. It is this potential that opens the transformative resources of the psyche, resources of swallowed wisdom repressed into the unconscious and the body. These resources are the nascent children of Metis. The final forms of her children, as they are welcomed into consciousness, will be unique to the individuals who act as midwives.

In conclusion, I will refer back to the thin places of Celtic mythology, the places and frames of mind that allow connection between visible and invisible realities. In the terms of our discussion here, the thin places allow a connection between accepted knowledge and swallowed wisdom. Peter Gomes, the chaplain of Harvard University, borrows the notion of the thin place from Celtic cosmology and writes, “Outcasts may well be the custodians of those thin places; they may in fact be the watchers at the frontier between what is and what is to be.” Gomes specifies these outcasts to be “blacks, women and homosexuals.” I do not find his listing to be complete, but his statement brings me back to the fact that, in the mythic system most closely associated with Western culture, the female trickster is swallowed while the male trickster, Hermes, is free. Hermes provides just the right amount of trickiness required to keep Zeus’s patriarchal system moving. Metis holds the potential for a profound shift in that system, she is “at the frontier between what is and what is to be.”

NOTES

2. Ibid., 56-57.
3. Ibid., 400.
I Am Dancing

CAROL P. CHRIST

The days grow shorter
as the year turns toward solstice.
It is my forty-ninth year
and I am dying.
Was it only months ago
I had years to live?
Looked for a new job?
Concerned about old age?

My body winds down with the year.
I turn inward,
pondering what lies ahead.
Will I smell jasmine blooming
in spring?
Is the heavy scent of narcissus
turning paper white
in the glass by the window
enough?

Am I dying?
I feel so well.
I tire easily.
I don't walk far.

Sitting at this table
where I have shared food and conversation
with friends and lovers for years
I sense an iridescent energy.

No need to sell my home
high on a hill,
looking out to the city,
cable cars clanging below.
No more problems with money.
Relief.

for Judy Ming
1946-1996
with so much love