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Charles L. Dunlap II, M.A.
Regis University, cdunlap001@regis.edu

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A Phenomenological Exploration: The Black Bile of Depression

CHARLES L. DUNLAP II, M.A.

*Department of Counseling, Division of Counseling and Family Therapy, Rueckert-Hartman
College of Health Professions, Regis University, Thornton, CO*

The phenomenon of depression manifests itself in many different forms, haunting us with its simultaneously inescapable, diffuse and pervasive presence. The rich thickness of depression is often severely drained and confined within the overall field of psychology, in which this phenomenon is regularly expressed as an all-encompassing, diagnostic label, to limitedly describe an almost endless number of symptomatic permutations. We shall attempt to distill something of depression's essence in returning to its ancient, etymological, spiritual and metaphysical roots, in order to begin transcending the traditional clinical notion of depression as simply a disease to be cured and suppressed. The relatively rare and unique theoretical lens and tools offered by phenomenology (as supplemented and informed by personal interviews with people who have personally struggled with depression), allows us to grow into a healthier relationship with this phenomenon - one that can more honorably and constructively serve us in our ongoing development to this largely murky, misunderstood and often misleading force. Perhaps only by exploring and staring into that infamous abyss, may we seek to populate it with stars.

KEYWORDS depression, phenomenology, Jung, existentialism, alchemy, spiritual, metaphysical, psychology, psyche, narrative, mythological

Peeking into the Abyss

Akin to its twin sibling, anxiety, the phenomenon of depression manifests itself in many different forms, haunting us with its simultaneously inescapable, diffuse and pervasive presence. The sheer plethora of connotations and contexts that have surrounded the concept of depression throughout history, only testifies to the phenomenological power, with which this term has infused our experience across space and time. Virtually everyone has met this shady stranger at their door, whether personally and intimately, or as reflected from - and refracted through - close friends and family.

An etymological purview of the term, *depression*, reveals this phenomenon's paradoxically elusive pervasiveness and diverse flexibility, as perhaps one of our oldest and most enigmatic, composite (i.e. catch-all, umbrella) terms. Despite evoking surprisingly similar feelings, images and themes in contemporary society, depression has been continually reinterpreted and re-experienced throughout history. If anything, the rich thickness and thick richness of depression is often severely drained and confined within the overall field of psychology, in which this phenomenon is often employed as an all-encompassing, diagnostic label, to limitedly describe and fail to contain an almost endless number of symptomatic permutations.

Clinically depleted of its transformational power and drained of its multifaceted mystery, depression nonetheless remains arguably one of the most common scourges to ever afflict and seed the Earth. Most therapists and sufferers have sought - whether consciously or not - to internalize a multidimensional phenomenon that's seemingly unbound by the three-dimensional world of time and space through which we move.

As Horsley (2018) warns us in relation to our culture's often demonizing and internalizing views towards trauma (or, in this case, the highly related phenomenon of depression), the *totem*

has become the taboo; an archetypal traumatic agency, reinforced and given life by our own limitedly conditioned perceptions. Much like an ouroboros, or spiraling snake that eats its own tail, we must paradoxically learn how to ride the spirals upwards, through learning from and surviving the descent. Indeed, the phenomenon of depression conditions everything it touches, despite of (and perhaps fueled by) our ever-evolving efforts to capture and keep it contained.

Although comprehensive coverage of the extensive and myriad ways in which depression has manifested and been captured throughout time, since literally the dawn of recorded history, would not be practical or desirable for our purposes here, we shall attempt to distill something of depression's essence (and thus, enter the spiral) in returning to its ancient, spiritual, metaphysical and perhaps most importantly, its pre-historical roots. Particularly when filtered through some of the thick phenomenological perspectives and experiences offered in our field, we can begin to finally transcend the clinical notion of depression as nothing more than a disease or malady to be cured and suppressed. The relatively rare and unique theoretical lens offered by phenomenology, particularly when mobilized by the grounded, embodied and transformative motions of alchemy, allows us to begin growing into a healthier relationship with this phenomenon - one that can more honorably and constructively serve us in our ongoing relationship with this still largely murky, misunderstood and often misleading force.

What if there was actually much more than meets the eye when it comes to depression? What if much of our most valuable and insightful knowledge of this phenomenon has been lost amidst the sands of time, buried under increasingly cold, sterile and detached intellectual perspectives that have already succumbed to depression's hypnotic spell? What if, as a result, we have stopped learning how to grow into and through depression? What if there was actually great value hidden within depression's sometimes suffocating folds - timeless treasures awaiting those with the strength and will of vision to inexorably plunge through its darkened abyss?

In the following pages, we shall seek to reclaim some of the value and mystery surrounding this complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In relating depression back to its ancient alchemical roots, perhaps we can begin to understand depression as that precious *black bile*; a darkened philosopher's stone whose depths we have yet to properly navigate and plumb. Perhaps such efforts may eventually allow us to slither our way up the spiral and stare into that abyss, of which Nietzsche (1997) has warned. Akin to Yalom's (2008) titular encouragement for us to stare into the sun in order to overcome our fear of death, perhaps only by exploring and bravely staring into that proverbial Abyss, might we seek to populate it with stars.

Enter the Downward Spiral

Perhaps nothing more ubiquitously captures the paradoxical, pervasive elusiveness of depression than the downward spiral. Throughout a trifecta of anonymous phenomenological interviews conducted (Participants A-C, personal communications, 2016), this archetypal image and concept manifested in several complementary forms. One interviewee (Participant A, personal communication, March 15, 2016), described depression as feeling like one has been caught in the slow, spiraling, inexorable pull of a whirlpool. This spiral is not a watery one, but exists in a less tangible, gaseous state - one that feels like it leaves a coat of grime all over one's skin, perhaps like getting out of saltwater for the first time (although the grime carries more of an unpleasant, sulphuric quality with it).

Nothing causes this downward spiral, but there are layers to it. Layers of memories and experiences that alchemically mix to eventually manifest as feelings of hopelessness and despair;

reciprocal, cyclical waves, slowly building upon one another. It almost feels as if one is in a sick and agonizing state of slow-motion (like the hollow, anxious feeling one gets when a rollercoaster begins to drop), watching one's self helplessly from above, but unable to do anything about it. As time slows down in this gaseous downward spiral, the interviewee warns, one must catch him or herself at the top of the whirlpool, for the further it pulls you down, the more difficult it becomes to reach and pull one's self out towards that diminishing light at the top. To realize this phenomenon too late, is to drown in the spiral.

Another interviewee (Participant B, personal communication, March 23, 2016), described depression like an inundating fog that is suffocating within its all-encompassing whiteness, framed by black edges of darkness, which recede into more blank space. This fog is both chilling and warm (like dry ice), with a mossy or mildewy feeling like stagnant water in a basement; a dead stagnant pool of nothingness that smells of decay. This disgusting abyss smells like rancid mildew - a place where flies might lay their eggs. One doesn't feel grounded within this formless void; more like floating in a void or vacuum of time, in which none can stand or hold onto anything.

Within this suffocating fog, one feels saccharine, blank and empty, longing and desperate for solace from the never-ending, persistent, vacuous void. The sufferer tries to give to others what they cannot supply for themselves (e.g., happiness, comfort, optimism, etc.), but is inundated and surrounded by this suffocating fog; lost and searching, but for what one is not sure. This fog of depression is an ungraspable, yet influentially pervasive state, comparable to when one is blinded by the sun and the negative images remain, burned into your corneas.

Despite the different structures and images informing these interviews (albeit interconnected through fairly consistent themes and aesthetic similarities, particularly in regards to the slow temporal, detached and diffusely pervasive, spatial qualities of depression), one important theme began to emerge and revolve around the hidden, redemptive power of depression. For the whirlpool sufferer, the downward spiral is characterized by a stagnant lack of drive - an abusive state that ironically carries an element of comfort within it, as if one is wrapped in something that dulls. On the surface, this metaphorical/phenomenological aesthetic could be seen as a natural extension of those common behavioral spirals of the depressed and traumatized individual - the subject either returning to the familiar scene-of-the-crime, only to frustratingly resume their often romanticized and misconstrued abuse (rather than learning how to move on from it), or similarly falling back into the familiar ouroboros spirals that chain and wind around their depression.

When viewed with understanding rather than judgment, however, such properly-harnessed spiraling may also signal the individual safely approaching and re-enacting the trauma from different angles, in a necessary quest towards healthy integration. While the depressed may feel tied up or drowning within the currents of these darkened spirals, one particular interviewee (Participant C, personal communication, March 19, 2016), felt a strange sense of fascination and pull towards what he described as the *event horizon*; a subtle craving of the darkness that compels one to see the bottom of the spiral, rather than reach towards the light.

The Black Bile of Depression

According to Cowan (2002), the term *depression*, actually derives from the ancient Greek term, *melankholia*. In ancient Greece, this term etymologically derives from the root words, *melas/melan* (i.e. "black"), combined with *kholē* (a term literally denoting "bile") - an excess of which was believed to cause depression. Medieval physiology thus traditionally attributed this black *kholē* (or *black hole*) of depression to an excess of this "black bile" - a secretion of the spleen and

one of the body's four "humours/humors" along with "blood, phlegm and yellow bile." Within this framework of understanding, the preponderance of any one humor would concomitantly lead to one of four natural temperaments, including "sanguine, phlegmatic, bilious, and *melancholic*" (p. 122).

As Harper (2001) relates, the related French term, *melancolie*, eventually morphed into the English term, "melancholy," as we know it today. Throughout the 13th century and up until at least the late 14th century, such a state of melancholy was considered a condition characterized by sullenness, gloom, irritability and many of the other qualities traditionally attributed to depression. In the late Middle Ages, depression became the English term we know today from the Latin *de-primere*, which means "to press" (i.e. *primere*) "down" (i.e. *de*). From the 15th century onward, depression came to be suitably attributed to feelings of "dejection, or a depression of spirits," before finally being employed (after being incorporated into many, less related contexts that we will not discuss here) as a clinical term in psychology around 1905. Indeed, one interviewee (Participant C, personal communication, March 23, 2016) describes the phenomenon of depression as a heavy weight resting on one's chest (thus, connecting depression to the Middle English, *nightmare/incubi* of bad dreams and night-terrors), slowly squeezing the breath and life out of the sufferer.

Perhaps most significantly throughout this historical evolution, was the conflicting sociocultural tendencies to view such depression or melancholy as a spiritual or mental condition, despite the physiological concreteness (i.e. that black bile) of its ancient and medieval roots. Often referred to as "monk's disease" in the Middle Ages, depression was thought to evoke a state of "acedia" or "spiritual torpor" which, according to medieval physiology, occurs when the wet soul "suffers an aridity of spirit, a wasteland of the psyche" (Hollis, p. 74). In plainer terms, this state of acedia (a state of ennui shared by most of my aforementioned interviewees) seemed to represent an arising phenomenon among these medieval monks (later reduced to the behavioral vice of "sloth"), many of whom could be viewed as imprisoned within their astringent lifestyles, drab environs, difficult vows and enforced pieties (i.e. that iconic notion of the ascetic monk or old man, disembodied and sequestered away from the world in his own private cave).

Where does such black bile come from, and why was it seen by the ancients as such an important factor in one's temperament, despite contemporary history's increasing tendency towards viewing depression as a primarily internalized, mental or spiritual conundrum? While many might dismiss such black bile as an artifact of a more primitive civilization, less refined and learned in their ancient ways, there nonetheless remain many interesting connections to these ancient musings - connections that promise to flesh out the phenomenon of depression in meaningfully powerful ways that our current medical and scientific establishments either refuse or have yet to grasp, trapped in their own, largely formless and spiraling tunnels of perception.

Saturnine Reflections of the Dame Melancholy

As Kierkegaard (1992) states: Besides my other numerous circles of acquaintances, I have one more intimate confidant - my melancholy. In the midst of my joy, in the midst of my work, she waves to me, calls me to one side, even though physically I stay put. My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known, what wonder, then, that I love her in return. (p. 44)

In Moore's (1994) revealing exploration of the connections between melancholy and depression, he reveals how "melancholy was identified with the Roman god, Saturn," and that "to be depressed was to be in Saturn," (i.e. to be saturnine in contemporary English prose), or to be known

as “a child of Saturn.” This Roman god was known as the old man and “patron of the past,” whom “resided over the ‘good old days,’” otherwise known as those “golden years.” In Saturn’s “preference for days gone by, for memory and the sense that time is passing,” this god’s sad musings ultimately “favor the soul’s desire to be both in time and eternity” - Saturn’s “gift of age and experience” to the soul’s incarnated movement through space and time (pp. 138-139).

As Brady (2003) writes, historical views of melancholy highlight the qualities of *reflection* as one of this complex emotion’s most distinctive aspects. Melancholy employs vehicles of memory and recollection as its primary means for transporting the rider into other realms of thought, spirit and feeling. When traveling through Saturn’s powerful, archetypal god-image, the melancholic vessel of depression gains a special velocity - one streaked through with constructive, informative and tangible insights picked up on its integrative, otherworldly journeys.

As Moore (1994) continues, to be one with Saturn becomes so much more than simply succumbing to grief and sadness at the passing of time. Uniting with Saturn, we give up the care-free innocence (and its concomitant ignorance) of youth, for a richer orientation towards life - one that values and incorporates the patient wisdom of experience. In acknowledging - rather than fleeing from - the specter of death that hangs over us, we learn to make the most out of our fleeting time on Earth; to realize the value of our suffering in a way that only time and knowledge can grow (pp. 139-140). Or in the words of Rolheiser (2015), it’s those very, so-called negative aspects of melancholy that “help keep us in touch with those parts of our soul, to which we are normally not attentive. Listening to our complex and deep souls and trying to hear what they say...the soul tells us those things we normally refuse to hear...in order to come to deeper health and wholeness” (para. 2-3).

As a standing testament to the sway such ideas held during the Renaissance, Albrecht Durer’s iconic painting, “Melencolia” (as described by Read, 2019, para. 2), is itself a central and “rich repository of the pictorial symbolism of alchemy” (a repository that can also be construed as the unique alchemical journey, with which melancholia presents us), and has often been viewed by art historians as depicting melancholy to be “an attribute of students or seekers after knowledge” (para. 9). The Neoplatonist philosopher and astrological physician, Ficino (1482), established the concept of inspired melancholic genius as a commonplace feature of Renaissance philosophy and art, noting how astral influences could be combined with moderately heated black bile, in order to induce a condition of “genial” melancholy, involving solitary episodes of Platonic “divine frenzy,” in which the melancholic becomes alienated (perhaps a sovereign, if Earth-based *alien-nation*) from himself as a human being, inspired by divine forces, and thereby capable of extraordinary accomplishments in many areas of human endeavor (pp. 2001-2006).

Such alienation can easily be interpreted as purely pathological on the surface, akin to Horsley’s (2018) sense of self-imposed alienation or distancing as a means of escape from trauma; a movement symbolized by our phallic, intellectual, dissociative rockets, penetrating deep outer space at the expense of a fully-embodied inner space, thus rendering us one of his titular *Prisoners of Infinity*. For Horsley, however, such an escape often represents a helpful defensive maneuver for the traumatized experiencer - a necessarily circuitous route that integrates the trauma from different, safer angles throughout its journey (i.e. that aforementioned spiral), so that one may return home even more whole than when they left. On a more Earth-bound plane, one can also consider this act of distancing (and concomitant uniting with the divine), as potentially crucial steps towards a more constructive departure away from the often deleterious, automated conditioning that regrettably programs our myopic human condition.

Akin to such multidimensional, both modern and Renaissance-based perspectives on melancholy, biblical sources similarly allow for a godlier or penitential sense of sorrow - a distancing from our everyday comforts and routines, which can help compel us towards salvation (2 Cor. 7:10). For within the space provided by Saturn's literally cold and distant nature as both a planet in our solar system and as the "god of wisdom and philosophical reflection," our "reflection deepens, [our] thoughts embrace a larger sense of time, and the events of a long lifetime get distilled into a sense of one's essential nature" (Moore, 1994, p. 140).

Furthermore, within this more positive and well-balanced view of depression, "aging brings out the flavors of personality," and "melancholy thoughts carve out an interior space where wisdom can take up residence" (pp. 140-141). To employ more alchemical terminology, the formerly light, airy and disconnected ideas of our youth coalesce into more coherent narratives that give our lives a greater substance and density, from which those now coagulated elements can imbue life with fresh imaginations and more meaningful interpretations (i.e. Jung's, 1980, global psychological interpretation of the *solve et coagula*, alchemical/psychological process).

In this context, Moore (1994) breathes characterized life into the very feelings of being trapped or imprisoned, which mark many impressions of depression, in noting that this is all part of Saturn's paradoxical style - a wise utilizing of *opposing tensions* that represents one of the ways in which Saturn mobilizes the soul by making it feel constrained, thereby stimulating us into a higher state of action. The wet nature of our emotionally-reactive youth solidifies within the hearth of Saturn's cold fire (like that aforementioned feeling of foggy dry ice) to bake a stronger, more interconnected sense of identity, yielding the wise and experienced fruits of our temporally-hardened labors in life.

Indeed, those too involved in emotionally "wet" experience of life, "might benefit from an [incarnating] excursion to the far-off regions of Saturn's cold and dry," black earth (p. 142). From such a fire is birthed the Renaissance's "Dame Melancholy" - that "mother of the Muses," or mythological "matrix [interestingly, both *mother* and *matrix* derived from the Latin root, *mater*], from which all creative endeavors are born" (Cowan, 2002, p. 126). For James (1902), the melancholic is a *twice-born soul* whom travels through the initiatory rite that depression thus represents, achieving a form of heightened intellectual, psychological and spiritual maturity - one that moves us away from a horizontal ego-world of problems, and into the more vertical or ascending world of the soul (p. 20).

In therapeutic terms, such an initiatory, alchemically transformative and phenomenological (in so much as the journey is felt and lived through) rite of passage becomes a "natural, homeopathic remedy for the murderous superficiality and pathological speed that characterizes our society, and that prevents psychological maturation." An antidote to the type of cultural mania produced by our modern world, in which "speed is of the essence...ruled by the child archetype," whom insecurely convinces us of the need for instant gratification, and shuts us off from the deeper mysteries of the world, in the process (Moore, 1994, p. 121).

On a wider cultural level, such unexamined trauma is manifested as secretive, patriarchal grabs for power in our increasingly-privatized efforts to colonize space for material and sociopolitical consolidation, while draining away billions of tax-payer dollars per year and invaluable resources in the process (Greer, 2001). The power struggles of an equally insecure, stunted child, squinting in the maddening, dazzling darkness of the unintegrated unknown and misconstrued.

As Cowan (2002) rightfully notes, many of the more embodied, transcendent and redeeming qualities of such a saturnine melancholia, have all been "subsumed and undifferentiated in the [clinical], diagnostic category of 'depression'" which, in conflicting with our modern, westernized

“ideals of health and progress,” places “the dark visage of Dame Melancholy in the modern psyche as a symptom of sickness, instead of perceived as the womanly face of wisdom and care” (p. 123). That phallic, dissociated/disembodied rocket indeed stands in stark contrast to the masculine/feminine, animus/anima-balanced *merkaba* (Melchizidek, 1990), or ancient Hebrew sense of a natural, organic vessel (spelled in other cultures as *merkabah* or *merkavah*), which seeks to travel through space and time in order to transcend its limitations (the travel of which is equally and ultimately incumbent upon one’s own, inner-spatial limitations).

Within the deep journey of the saturnine melancholic, “the quick fix is no substitute for the slow wound” - those “slow-turning cycles [i.e. the spiral] necessary for maturation, security, solidity, and lasting change” (Cowan, p. 123). As that oft-cited mystical poet, Rumi (2012), famously stated, it is precisely through the wound, that the light enters. If we take into account that the term, “passion,” comes from the Latin root meaning “to suffer,” than the compelling, gripping and *igniting* saturnalia of depression ferments and “fuels itself on the black bile of melancholy” (p. 128), rising from Saturn’s (also known as the reaping god of harvest) “black earth like chaff at harvest time” (Moore, 1994, p. 142).

As Moore concludes, such a frenzied state of pathos not only produces the more path-etic and shallow, clinical version of depression (i.e. *pathos* as social scientific perspective, externally or *ethically*-imposed), but also prevents us from finding “a way into the mystery of this emptiness of the heart” (p. 151), the organ of the heart, according to ancient Egyptian scholar, Budge (1899) was considered for the ancient Egyptians to be the true seat and source of wisdom, which surpassed even the brain. Such knowledge has come full-circle through its own history-penetrating spirals - in being supported by the very contemporary discoveries of organizations like the HeartMath Institute (2018), which has discovered more nerve pathways connecting the heart to the brain than vice versa, along with the discovery of new neurotransmitters and proteins embedded in the heart, unparalleled electromagnetic sensitivities and communications, and other similar discoveries too numerous to summarize here.

As an ultimate, *solve et coagula* synthesis of the aforementioned considerations, such melancholy transcends good or evil (itself, a strictly third-dimensional and often judgmental or *heart-less* clinical dichotomy), when harnessed as a vehicle for traversing inner space. The relevant motions and lack thereof - whether returning to a fresh and more full sense of *home*, or getting lost adrift the terrible splendor of our stars - are ultimately dependent on the navigator, and whatever alchemical and phenomenological forces can be gathered into his or her being. Perhaps such forces can be more efficiently embodied and poignantly channeled through the heart, inasmuch as our brain-based culture has failed us in this regard, with its impotent, fear-based and intellectually disembodied penetrations into space, and shallow clinical interpretations of complex, multifaceted phenomena. For through the initiatory trajectory of that saturnine melancholy which informs this enigmatic phenomenon, “we might also discover that depression has its own angel, a guiding spirit whose job it is to carry the soul away to its remote places, where it finds unique insight and enjoys a special vision” (Moore, 1994, p. 154).

The Orphan & the Angel

For Romanyshyn (2002), we as depressed people, “In spite of love, success, achievement, are restless, beckoned beyond ourselves, called to another place...feeling in the deepest chambers of our hearts that we are still so far from *home*” (p. 36). In resonance with Moore and Cowan’s

redemptive and transcendent views of depression, Romanyshyn views melancholy as both a foretaste and “aftertaste of an Angelic existence....A way in which we are being opened to the Angel, so that we might begin that work of radical criticism or *reflection*, which asks us to reach deeply into the core of our lives, to open our *hearts*, in order to recover what we have lost, and to remember what we have forgotten” (p. 40).

This saturnine Angel “touches the [archetypal] Orphan in us,” awakening us amidst the cold and dark feeling of separation we must carry, in feeling so “removed from Creation.” Moreover, it’s precisely this feeling of orphan-hood (that cold, *opposing tension*, distance of Saturn), which serves as a “necessary precondition for hearing the lament of the world, for witnessing its dying...and, if we are lucky, assisting in its healing” (p. 40). Our second home, Rilke’s “interpreted world” (a world of limitedly rational/clinical/analytical interpretation in our modern times, which leaves out the irrationality of the heart or “feeling function”), lies “between the sleepy dumbness of the Animal and the self-contained narcissism of the Angel.” A “draughty” area where “the winds of some deep sorrow whistle through the cracks in the walls of meaning we build to deal with suffering” (p. 46).

Within this dichotomizing prison, “it is the figure of the Orphan, with its mood and melancholy, who beckons us home, into the spiritual depths of our existence, and toward the Angel” (p. 36), for the Orphan and the Angel are really somehow one, “yoked together by the same mood of melancholy,” this saturnine longing or calling stirs the Orphan in us, in a way that allows us reach for and touch the Angelic, for it’s this very melancholia of the soul that acts as a “dim reminder, the aftertaste, as it were, of our Angelic existence” (p. 38). While the human realm foolishly reduces the Angel to a “guardian, a friend, a companion, a messenger,” for Romanyshyn, this Angel - much like the Roman god, Saturn - can be utterly terrible in its beauty, inasmuch as it must arrive to us as an “earthquake of the soul, a tear in the fabric of space and time, a [horrific] miracle,” that often takes the form of a breakdown (p. 38), including those of the major depressive episode variety (i.e. the dreaded “MDE” label, in clinical terms). “When the Angel comes, it comes unbidden,” yoking together both visible and invisible forces to “create a tension that must always remain unstable.” The beating of such a powerful force or entity’s terribly majestic wings, always eludes our grasp and comprehension as a function of the Angel’s transcendently paradoxical efforts, simultaneously validating “our highest but dimmest aspirations,” while also reminding us of “the distance between what we are” and what we might become. In this sense, the Angel “is a moment of breakdown which, if we tend to its vocation, might [actually] herald a *breakthrough*” (p. 39).

After all, it’s precisely this sense of breakdown or dissolution, which is often required to abandon the sort of limited rationality and life-stunting logic that keeps us tied to the types of aforementioned, clinical forces and myopic programming discussed herein. Such status quo forces keep us locked and wallowing in those very types of unhealthy repetitions, dead intellectual abstractions and standardized cognitive interpretations, that have failed in capturing the potentially transcendent power of depression throughout history.

How terrible is this dark Angel’s averted gaze, Romanyshyn (2002) muses, which must awaken the lost Orphan within us, in guiding us to the enlarged vistas of our warped and stolen horizons? One cannot even hope to meet this *awe-full* gaze without abandoning the near-sighted authority of humanity’s inherently limited and skewed sense of perception, reasoning and intelligence. Perhaps we can only locate our self’s highest yearnings in such a gaze through what Romanyshyn identifies as “the feeling function” (p. 39); that passageway through the fires of the heart, which the saturnine power of depression often paradoxically lights or *ignites* for us.

Within this phenomenon of depression, the torn tensions of the between is where the depressed make their ever-sinking homes; privileged Orphans awakened to the blessings of melancholia as the “beginning of a spiritual transformation, which allows us to know that, as Orphans between the Animal and the Angel, we have the special work of continuing the world’s realization” (pp. 46-47). In therapeutic terms, the way of the saturnine, melancholic Orphan casts animus shadows, which constitute what Jungian psychology (1980) describes as necessary for the process of individuation; that *solve et coagula* quest towards a genuine authenticity of being. For in this “space between Angel and Animal lies our glory as the Orphan. Here in the between, we become the spokespeople for the continuing miracle of creation. A small flame that lights the way toward’s creation’s continuing evolution...The arc that connects matter with spirit, the pivot around which the Animal and Angel dance, beings with two faces, who remember the early morning of the world” (Romanyshyn, 2002, pp. 48-49), when all was one.

The Swamplands of Depression

Many of the themes, images and impressions, which arose from the phenomenological interviews herein, tended to revolve around the paradoxically pervasive, yet diffuse qualities of depression; an enigmatic force simultaneously so all-encompassing in its overall affect, while its deviously-debilitating effects still remained difficult to grasp. No one could seem to give depression a common face that rang true - even those evocative images of a ferocious beast or blood-thirsty monster somehow seemed inadequate in capturing this ancient phenomenon’s deeply-rooted horrors and all-encompassing mysteries.

In Hollis’ (1996) *swamplands* of depression, he seeks to find “new life” in that “dismal place,” in which depression takes residence, much as the aforementioned scholars and interviewees struggled to find their own sense of redemption within the throes of depression. For Hollis, depression serves the vital function of inducing a “regression of energy” (i.e. that ennui state of “acedia” mentioned above), that calls our attention back to a split of energy from the soul that we have somehow lost, urging us to “go back down and find it, bring it to the surface, integrate it, live it.” In our efforts to reintegrate this split, “we are therapeutically obliged to find what has been left behind and bring it back to the surface,” through the sort of “active imagination” that would “render such material conscious” (p. 73), much as we have tried to do throughout this phenomenological analysis. “The psyche uses depression to get our attention, to show that something is profoundly wrong,” and once we learn how to follow this phenomenon through “our private labyrinth, then depression can even seem as a friend of sorts.” After all, Hollis continues, “if we had not hurt so, the psyche would have already been dead...The hurt the suffering, is a sign that something vital is still there, awaiting our invitation to come back into the world.” In every such swampland is a task, through which we must harness “great courage to value depression, to respect it, not to try and medicate it away or distract ourselves from its misery,” for down in that “underworld,” just like “Orpheus, who goes down there to confront, perhaps to charm, the lower powers, so we too are obliged to go down into the depression and find our soul’s greatest treasure” (p. 73).

What treasure does the soul yield when challenged and strained through the throes of depression? What “task” of existential intentionality and authenticity (or Jungian individuation) can we cultivate from the more ancient, phenomenological and alchemically-based lessons of depression? How can we listen to the calls of our Dame Melancholy, in order to alchemize redemptive narratives from her tears? How do we unite the Orphan with the Angel? How do we grow our

gardens of redemption within the cold and dry soil of Saturn's black soil? Perhaps our greatest view towards salvation lies in the smallest of roots - that aforementioned, *black bile* of depression.

Black Sun: Alchemizing Gold from Sludge

Perhaps Moore (1996) offers us a valuable clue, in identifying Saturn as "sol niger," (i.e. *the black sun*). In the shadows cast by Saturn (Hollis' *swampland* of the soul), a valuable "process of distillation" can occur over time; "something essential emerges from this saturnine reduction - the gold in the sludge." In this darkness, "there is to be found a precious brilliance, our essential nature, distilled by depression as perhaps the greatest gift of melancholy" (p. 145).

Looking back to ancient times, we find interesting clues that both supplement and expand the deepening resonance of this black bile of depression as a potential philosopher's stone; an alchemical force with the power to transmute and recover our lost energies, and thereby transcend the elusive pervasiveness of this similarly ancient phenomenon of depression. As Peter Moon explains (1997), one of the oldest names for Egypt is "Kam, Kamt or Qemt," words which mean "black or dusky." According to Moon, some scholars believe this name was applied because the color of the mud on the Nile is very dark, and the actual reason Egypt was referred to as "black" was for the *occultum* or *white gold* (also spiraling back into contemporary existence as the now widely-available, ormus white gold), being mined in the cliffs of Abydos. This mountainous area in southern Egypt is renowned for the black alkaloid it contains in its soil (p. 253). When there was a flood, the black soil would wash down into the Nile. According to "quintessential" Egyptian scholar, Budge (1899), the early Christians called this land *Kheme*, and passed it on in this form to the Greeks, Romans, Syrians and Arabs. The latter added the article *Al* and the land became known as *Al-Khemia* - the precursor of *alchemy* (p. 20).

Budge informs us that the Egyptians were famous for their metallurgy, and were known to produce transmuted metals. They used quicksilver and other processes in order to produce gold and silver, by separating these metals from their native ore - a process that resulted in a black powder substance, which was supposed to possess marvelous powers, as well as contain the individual properties of the various metals. "In a mystical manner, this black powder was identified with the *body*, which the god Osiris was known to possess in the underworld, and to both were attributed magical qualities, and both were thought to be the sources of power and life" (p. 20).

In summary, *Khemia*, or the preparation of this black ore or powder was considered an alchemical production of what was considered an "elixir or active principle in the transmutation of metals," from which the very term *black magic* derives (Moon, 1997, p. 254). Although the science of this alchemy is too extensive to describe here, the salient point is that this alchemical process would employ principles of superconductivity to revert gold back to its powdery white, natural form - a substance that some ancient cultures were believed to excrete directly from their third-eye, pineal glands (the pineal gland also constituting an essential energy source for the aforementioned *merkaba*). In the mystery school of Horus, "the initiate was primed so that the constituents of his own system acted as the superconductor" - a process which, with the aid of ingested gold powder, would produce that natural white gold, that was considered a "symbolic or residual effect of the fact that fusion between the right and left hemispheres of the brain had occurred, thereby merging, much like the merkaba vessel, the "finite with the infinite" (p. 255).

Such a process was considered no less than a "communication with the principles of Creation" - a uniting of the "nobler or subtle aspects of man conveying energy to the lower aspects." The resulting *occultum* (i.e. the natural white gold), served - again, much like the merkaba vessel

- as a “bridge between the blueprint room [i.e. the etheric plane], and physical matter itself,” thereby suggesting a sort of mastery over the three and fourth dimensional, physical world, in which most Earthlings currently reside (p. 252).

Could this black bile of depression, with its prominence in Ancient Greek thought (much of which has influenced and intertwined with Egyptian culture) possibly be related to the white gold occultum and ancient Hebraic vessel spoken of above? Is it possible that the “black earth” of Saturn shared similar properties of soil and chemicals that could produce the type of superconductivity mastered in Ancient Egypt - an alchemical process symbolized by uniting the *Angel and the Orphan* through the saturnine ways of that *Dame Melancholy*?

Here it should be proposed that viewing the phenomenon of depression as that tangible Greek humor of black bile, offers us many constructive means of viewing depression as the transcendent, trans-mutational force that all of the aforementioned scholars and interviewees sense it to be. Indeed, the therapist - when operating at this level of broad existential awareness - becomes nothing less than a sorcerous alchemist; one’s own merkaba architect, tasked with harnessing and transmuting the hidden, arcane powers of depression. The navigator becomes tasked with pulling one’s self out of that proverbial *swampland*, in order to unite the *Orphan and the Angel* through the Roman god *Saturn*, later viewed as the Renaissance *Dame Melancholy*; in essence, to reunite the soul onto that higher plane of consciousness and life-willing intentionality, which pertains to the true heritage and destiny of the human race.

Suffering under the now less elusive and mysterious throes of depression, we are like Sisyphus, continually pushing that great weight up the hill, only to watch as we roll back down the hill to start the process all over again. As Hollis points out, however, Sisyphus is “yet freer than the gods who oppress him...choosing to push, rather than being doomed to push, [can] Sisyphus wrest that Saturnian power away from the gods and retain his dignity” (p. 80).

It is precisely these diverse, meaning-making movements of the soul, as captured by the phenomenon of depression and the struggles detailed herein, that allow us to escape and transcend depression as a pathetic (i.e. that aforementioned *pathos* or *path-etic*) state of passive victimization. Tellingly enough, the etymological roots of *soul*, which both Horsley (2018) and Jung (1980) equate with *psyche*, are contrary to the contemporary intellectual underpinnings that this term has accrued; a rusted crust, for which the deepened spirituality of the heart is also arguably an essential remedy, inasmuch as it also might constitute an essential a gateway to the psyche.

In our travels away from such culturally-ingrained, brain-based disincarnate, disembodied, dissociative and pathetic victimizing, we are more fully invigorated to plumb those proverbial swamplands, as embodied through a more noble state of tragic heroism - a classically mythological, metaphorical and symbolic journey that, when rendered *incarnate*, can pave the way for higher states of integration, individuation and authenticity. A journeyed incarnation that seeks to adapt, evolve and illuminate whatever form of darkness may find us, through the saturnine shadows of our longings for higher levels of existence. Like the black millipede curling deeper within itself, the often transformative and sacred call of depression paradoxically invites us into the downward spiral, in order to herald our eventual ascension.

The heart-centered therapist who rightfully realizes that one’s client must earn the highest credit for his or her therapeutic growth in order for change to become most fully embodied. The extraterrestrial/extra-dimensional entity, whom is wise and compassionate to forego a dramatic, messianic announcement of its presence, so that humanity can become empowered to get up off of its knees and transcend its sociocultural cage through its own accord and volition. Likewise, the

second-coming call of Saturn, the Dame Melancholy and the reunited Angel, invites and challenges us - with the love and wisdom of an ageless master - to find our own way home in recovery of those lost parts of the soul.

What higher, more all-encompassing calling could there possibly be than for us to learn how to firmly plant our own two, fully-embodied feet in that rich, black earth, while simultaneously never losing sight of the stellar inner light that, when holistically reflected in our newly-populated stars, will always guide us out of the Abyss on our winding, circuitous route home? Such is to harness that alchemical philosopher's stone of depression; that black bile from which we are tasked to produce gold from sludge.

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