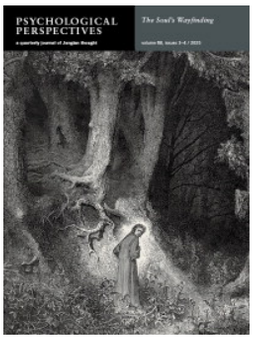

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Jungian Gothic: The Dark Romantic in Jung's Early Life and Psychology

Faith "Fey" Harkey

An otherworldly mother with two personalities. A cousin with a gift for spiritualist mediumship. Family secrets, peculiar relations, and eerie doublings. In an almost uncanny way, the events and figures of C. G. Jung's early life echo the themes of Gothic literature. This article explores the motifs of the Gothic imagination and the real-life unfolding of these motifs in Jung's life and work. After considering the often-eldritch historical details of the Preiswerk and Jung families, this paper turns to the question of how these elements unfolded in later theories of Jungian psychology. Finally, the text concludes with a consideration of what telos, or purpose, the Gothic itself may have had "in mind" when it settled so powerfully into the world of a young man who would become an explorer and teacher of the subtleties of psyche.

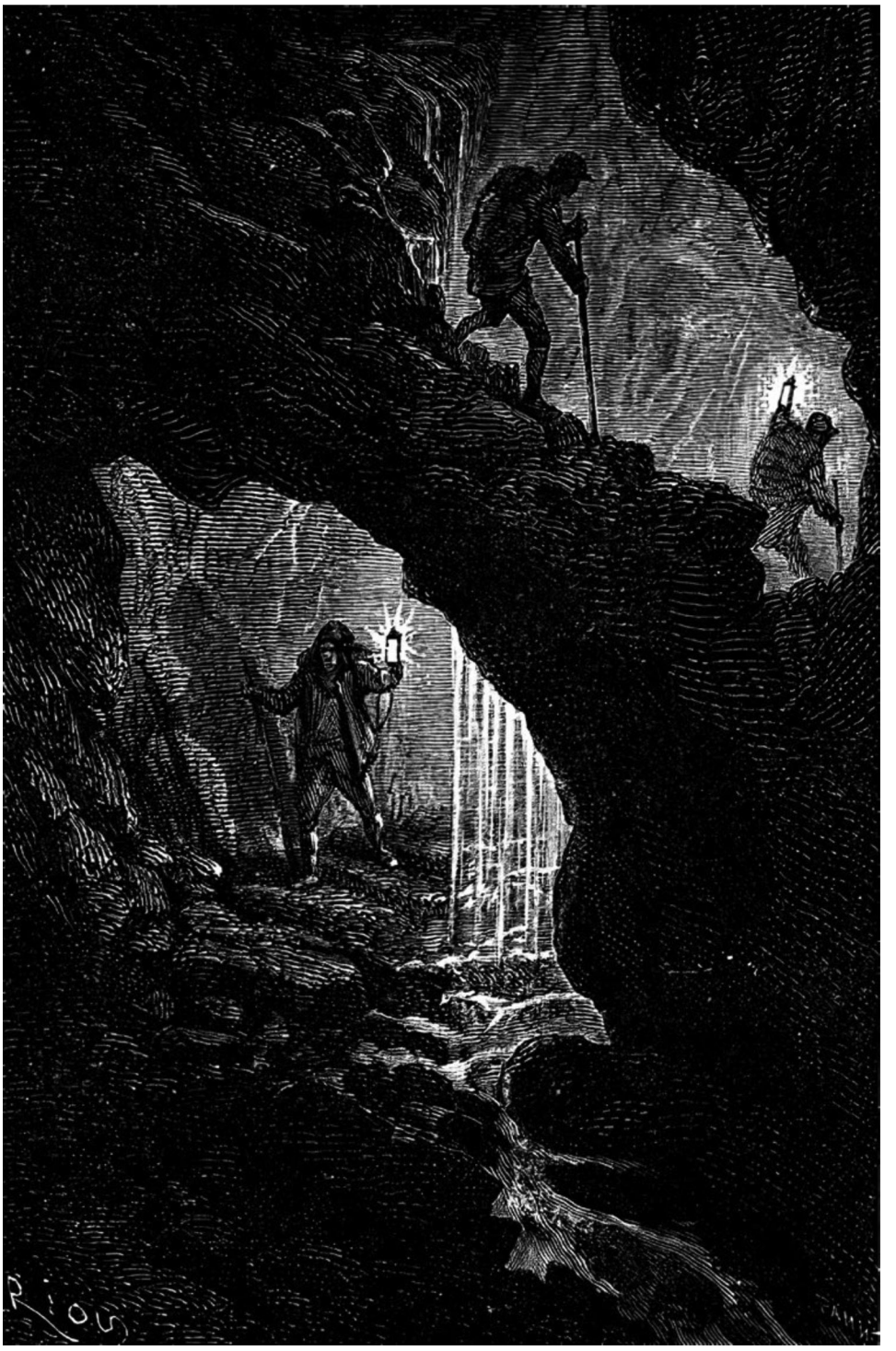
A Gothic Prelude

The story begins with a boy whose mother is mysteriously "other" at night, wild and uncanny. He grows to understand that—not unlike the figures in stories of doppelgängers and split personalities—his mother is actually two persons. And so is he.

In a desperate attempt to make sense of this uneasy doubling, he turns with his young female cousin to spiritualism, encouraging her to welcome the voices of the dead. And the dead do speak. They issue through her. The young woman, now with an inner schism all her own, speaks not as one, but as many.

In time, the boy, becoming a young man, turns his back on his cousin. Mundane life overcomes her, and she dies too young. He, meanwhile, becomes a master at a mental institution. He founds a psychology that whispers, "You are many, and if you do not heed the voices within you, they can destroy you."

This account, as you may have suspected, is drawn from the life of C. G. Jung. It invites us into an exploration of the Gothic in Jung's early life and life's work.



Édouard Riou, illustration from Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, 1864. Engraving.

Jung, the Romantic, and the Gothic

If the Romantic movement begins with the soul of nature and with the grandeur, depth, and breadth of the individual (Abate & Jewell, 2005; Douglas, 1997), the Gothic—which we might think of as the "lower" (Williams, 1995, p. 176) or "dark romantic" (Clay, 2016)—begins with a gasp and a shiver, the sublime sense that something is not-quite-right (Sturgis, 2020), and the suspicion that we are surrounded by hidden forces that cannot be fully trusted.

Although the beginnings of the Romantic era and the rise of Gothic literature belong to the late 18th century (Abate & Jewell, 2005; Merriam-Webster, 1995), predating Jung's birth by nearly a hundred years (Ellenberger, 1970), Jung's life and work were surely informed by both. Not only did "the strains of Positivism and Romanticism [war] in Jung's education" (Douglas, 1997, p. 20), Jung also had a marked appreciation for Romantic writers such as Goethe and Schelling (Douglas, 1997, p. 23). In moments, he saw himself as an expression of Goethe's most Gothic duo, writing, "The dichotomy of Faust-Mephistopheles came together within myself" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 235).

Additionally, the psychology that arose prior to, and strongly influenced, Jung—sometimes called "Romantic psychiatry" (Douglas, 1997, p. 25) or "Romantic medicine" (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 210)—was shot through with the hallmarks of the Gothic: trance states, hysterical women, dipsychism (a divided or double-souled state), and strange demonstrations of power by scientists who might be considered, by some, to be quite mad (Ellenberger, 1970).

The era preceding Jung's, then, bore the remains of the Romantic to his doorstep, much of it expressed in Gothic form. But more than the societal residue of the Gothic permeating Jung's times, the figures of his family, and particularly his maternal family, were powerfully Gothic in character. In order to understand how this is the case, we must first consider the genre of the Gothic—its essence and its motifs.

The Motifs of the Gothic

Not to be confused with the Gothic aesthetic of the Middle Ages, Gothic literature consists of those stories that demonstrate "a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror" (Kuiper, 1995, p. 480). These are tales that make us uneasy, which have "something 'horrid'" (Ledwon, 1993, p. 261) at their heart. It is a literature we identify by the effect it has on us. But the Gothic is also typified by certain characteristic motifs, some of which recur with particular frequency in Jung's life. Here I will address the motifs themselves. In later sections, I will consider ways in which the literary Gothic and its motifs made themselves felt in Jung's world and work.

First, secrets are essential in Gothic literature. From secrecy comes conflict and shocking revelations—the juicy heart of Gothic novels. Consider, for example, the centrality of Rochester's secret in the Gothic *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1981): not only is he still married to his first wife, but his original bride remains hidden in the house! Gothic secrecy can come in many forms but frequently appears as family secrets (Williams, 1995) or secret identity (Sturgis, 2020).

Present in virtually all Gothic stories is the blurring of the line between the natural and the supernatural (Sturgis, 2020). Ghosts may be "real or imaginary" (Williams, 1995, p. 45)—we may never be quite sure. In fact, this very ambivalence functions as a classic Gothic element (Williams, 1995) that, in tandem with questions of secrecy, leaves us uncertain as to what or whom we can trust (Sturgis, 2020).

The Gothic demonstrates an almost universal preoccupation with the past (Sturgis 2020), often to a pathological degree. Family histories intertwine with the motif of secrecy so that questions as to who married or parented whom may have great import. Again, thinking back to *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1981), we see that Rochester's past continues to haunt him up to and even after the fire, which ultimately kills his hidden wife.

One of the greatest sources of disquiet in the Gothic is its sense of "sexual peril … [or] transgression" (Sturgis, 2020). Many forms of incest are common (Williams, 1995), as are damsels in distress, generally. Again, recall *Jane Eyre* and the mysterious voice that calls out to her: "My daughter, flee temptation!" (Brontë, 1981, p. 304). Jane is a classic Gothic heroine, dangerously susceptible to both Rochester's and her own transgressive longings.

The "central enigma of the family" (Ledwon, 1993, p. 261) is a motif often integrated with the supernatural and the lingering past such that we might see the spirits of dead family members, "obscured family ties" (Ledwon, 1993, p. 262), and inheritances galore—financial, karmic, biological, and so on (e.g., Williams, 1995).

Finally, and of special interest for our discussion, is the Gothic motif of "doubling." Here, one finds everything from duplicity (Williams, 1995) to doppelgängers and split personalities (Ledwon, 1993). In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha serves as Jane's shadowy double, "representing all that the heroine must reject" (Williams, 1995, p. 169). A related sense of being haunted by what is rejected is also prevalent in the Gothic.

The Central Enigma: Emilie and Carl

Emilie Preiswerk, born in 1848, was the youngest of an appropriately Gothic 13 siblings (Bair, 2003). Visions and ghostly encounters were sufficiently frequent in the family that Emilie kept a diary of her "oracular" and "parapsychological" experiences (Bair, 2003, pp. 17, 601). Her father communed weekly "with the spirit of his first wife" (Charet, 1993, p. 67) while, during conventional work hours, Emilie and her sisters were recruited to shoo off spirits while he sat writing at his desk (Bair, 2003, p. 16; Charet, 1993, p. 67). Emilie's father, it seems, was bothered by "spirits passing behind his back and disturbing him" (Charet, 1993, p. 68).

In 1869, Emilie married Paul Jung. After two stillbirths and the neonatal death of a baby boy, she gave birth to Carl Gustav (Bair, 2003, p. 18), who would become the eminent psychologist C. G. Jung. Carl grew to be an unusual and sometimes uncanny boy. He was secretive, had visions, and was for some time kept out of school due to fainting spells (Jung, 1961/1989; Jung, 1935/1976).

These peculiarities were relatively slight, however, compared to Jung's most Gothic inheritance, a double set of doublings that began with Emilie. As a child, Jung came to understand that his mother was not one woman, but two (Jung, 1961/1989). Jung writes, "By day she was a loving mother, but at night she seemed uncanny" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 50). Furthermore, "this other [mother] emerged only now and then, but each time it was unexpected and frightening" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 49). For a child living in a home where one experienced "vague fears" and could "hear things walking about in the house" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 9), to have a mother who was both inconsistent and eerie would have been especially scary. Who would she "be" when he needed her? No doubt his anxieties multiplied when his mother was hospitalized due to reasons not made fully clear to Carl (Jung, 1961/1989). Emilie was not only a model of the Gothic divided personality, but also—depending on the mysterious cause of her hospitalization—a potential madwoman. It is surely no wonder that Carl suffered, as Charet (1993) suggests, "insecurities" (p. 71) and somatic troubles like eczema (Jung,

1961/1989, p. 8). Emilie's division into two personalities was not the end of it. Her doubling doubled itself in her son; young Carl began to "[sense] a splitting of [himself], and feared it" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 19). Around age 12, "it occurred to [Carl] that [he] was actually two different persons" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 33), which he came to think of as "Personality No. 1" and "Personality No. 2" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 45). Mark Saban (2020), who has done extensive work on Jung's two personalities, writes that Personality No. 1's traits included "the contemporary," "the present day," "the ordinary," and "the predictable" (p. 32)—not in the least eldritch, except for the fact of its existence as one of a pair. Personality No. 2, meanwhile, shared some territory with Emilie's night-side personality. It was associated with "night," "secrets," "the unreliable," "the frightening," and "the uncanny" (p. 32). It was, in Jung's words, "the Other" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 45). Although, in time, Jung arguably came to a certain peace with the existence of his personalities (Jung, 1961/1989), the tension between them was vital to his future development. When it came time for him to choose a medical specialty, he chose psychiatry as the one that allowed him to feel he had "united [his] double nature" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 109), a decision that would set him on a path of exploration of that most secret part of the psyche: the unconscious.

Blurrings and Transgressions: Carl and Helene

Before medical school and before his specialization in psychiatry, Jung entered into a most Gothic partnership with his cousin and childhood playmate Helene Preiswerk (Goodheart, 1984). Typical of many Gothic stories that demonstrate an uneasy "narrative ambiguity" (Ledwon, 1993, p. 265), there are multiple accounts of this tale (Ellenberger, 1991; Shamdasani, 2015). On this basis, we cannot be quite sure when the following events began or how long they lasted (Shamdasani, 2015).

Things started, it seems, with something like a séance. There was table turning (Ellenberger, 1991). A glass was upturned, fingers resting on top as it slid across a page marked with letters—apparently a homemade Ouija board (Shamdasani, 2015). Carl Jung was there, age 23, or perhaps younger (Ellenberger, 1991). Also present was Jung's mother, who "encouraged" such "experiments" (Ellenberger, 1991, p. 44). Two young women, Helene's sister and a friend, attended the gathering (Ellenberger, 1991, p. 44). The fifth person at the table was Helene herself, who had the appropriately spooky nickname "Helly" (Bair, 2003, p. 47). "It was then discovered that [Helly] was an excellent medium" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 22).

Over the course of the séances, Helly "preferred the darkness" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 25) and was superbly Gothic in description: "There [was] something soulful and elegiac about her" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 39), and "she was deathly pale … her pulse was slow and weak" (Shamdasani, 2015, p. 292). The contents of the séances included visits from deceased relations (Shamdasani, 2015) and a guiding spirit called "Ivenes" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 32), all of whom spoke through Helly, who, in this way, also became a sort of split personality. Jung observed that she lived a "real 'double life' with two personalities existing side by side or in succession, each continually striving for mastery" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 25).

Additional doublings also occurred. Helly's spirits came in two types: "*serio-religious* and *gay-hilarious*" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 73). When she read aloud, she was prone to misreadings, effectively doubling the original text with a second, affected one (Jung, 1902/1977). Even Helly's sisters, doubling her mediumistic experiences, began to have visions during this time, one of which featured two kinds of figures—one black and one white—one of which attempted to choke the other (Jung, 1902/1977).

At nearly every turn, the secret and the hidden, the night-side world, fought for ascendancy.

Jung himself, already a double, was doubled again. On one hand, he was Helly's cousin. On the other, he was a budding mad scientist who, Shamdasani (2015) speculates, may have "[conducted] hypnotic experiments" on Helene (p. 297). Other double-trouble brewed between them too. Jung and Helly, cousins and past playmates, began to develop a second relationship bearing an "intimate, erotic" tension (Goodheart, 1984, pp. 3, 14). Goodheart suggests that Jung drew Helly deeper into this life of darkness and séances, while Helly, who had developed a crush on her older cousin, struggled to hold his attention and his heart. "Jung unknowingly led Helly into a seemingly innocent but actually lethal and totally isolating … enchantment with the unfolding living drama of her images, sub-personalities and ecstasies" (Goodheart, 1984, pp. 13–14). In this way, Helly developed a secret identity, the imperiled "damsel in distress."

The séances also included what Jung (1902/1977) termed "romances," in which Helly "disclosed a whole system of reincarnations" (p. 36) and "innumerable stories in which she believed implicitly" (p. 38). This preoccupation with the Romantic past included an incarnation in which she was Carl's mother (p. 37)—leaving us with still more double relationships and familial enigmas, not to mention an incestuous weaving of cousins, mother, and son.

Helly's romances generally "had a pretty gruesome character: murder by poison and dagger, seduction and banishment, forgery of wills, and so forth" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 39). And if all that sounds literarily Gothic to us, apparently Jung did not miss the connection either. In one essay, he comments on "the Romantic Movement in literature," in which "people adored wallowing in Ossianic emotions [and] went crazy over novels set in old castles and ruined cloisters" (Jung, 1905/1977, p. 294). Jung is plainly referring to what we now call Gothic novels. Tellingly, Jung referred to this body of literature using the same term he used to describe Helly's narratives: "The Romances" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 36).

One might reasonably wonder how we have so much information concerning a series of séances conducted in private and in the presence of such a small group. In fact, Jung maintained a record at the time (Shamdasani, 2015) and later wrote his medical school dissertation on the subject of Helly's spiritism. Titled "On the Psychology of So-Called Occult Phenomena," this text is written from a remove, as if Jung were a distanced observer and Helly an unrelated woman with the pseudonym "S. W." (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 17). Of course, this alias constitutes another secret identity, doubling Helene yet again.

In describing S. W.'s (and Carl's own!) family in the dissertation, the dissertation paints a thoroughly Gothic portrait of them. In this family with "a predilection for the paranormal" (Hayman, 2001, p. 9) were members who had "visions," "bizarre ideas," "waking hallucinations," "second sight, premonitions," and even one who experienced "a trance lasting for three days" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 17). That relative's trance, incidentally, terminated only when "the crown of her head was burnt with a red-hot iron" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 17). It is hard to imagine a "Romance" more Gothic than the one presented by Jung's own family.

A Most Gothic Psychology

Having established Jung's Gothic credentials, it is time to draw back the veil on the ways in which the Gothic elements in his early life contributed to the development of his psychological theories.

Secrets and secrecy permeate Jung's psychology. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1961/1989) is a book in which the word "secret" appears no less than 27 times in the first three chapters (Saban, 2013). In it, Jung (1961/1989) writes, "It is the patient's secret, the rock against which he is shattered. If I know his secret story, I have a key to the treatment" (p. 117). "Nothing," Jung (1955/1967) posits, "makes people more lonely … than the possession of an anxiously hidden … secret" (p. 192). Patients improve because analysis allows for the "confession" of such secrets (p. 192). Jung—a secret keeper as a boy, and affected by secrets such as the cause of his mother's hospitalization—would ultimately heal others through the revealing and resolving of secrets.

Much of Jung's mature psychology can be conceived as a blending of the natural and supernatural. He explores "parapsychic phenomena" in "The Psychological Foundations of the Belief in Spirits" (Jung, 1969, pp. 301–318) and the subtleties of the death journey in "The Soul and Death" (Jung, 1969, pp. 404–415). Speaking about his encounters with the unconscious, he once said, "I again and again think of the verse … 'Thy dead shall live'" (Jaffé, 2023, p. 152), thus conjuring images of spirits rising from the grave of psyche. Even his mature theory of synchronicity (Jung, 1969, p. 417) might be understood as the influence of "supernatural" forces acting on mundane life.

Descending perhaps from the "central enigma" of Jung's family and the extraordinary tendency toward doubling in his early life is Jung's most Gothic psychological concept: that of the personal complex. By way of definition, the complex seems a bit mundane; it is an "image of a certain psychic situation … strongly accentuated emotionally" (Jung, 1969, p. 96). But when we peer deeper, complexes have a Gothic essence. They have "autonomy … like an animated foreign body in the sphere of consciousness" (Jung, 1969, p. 96). Personal complexes act as "splinter psyches" (Jung, 1969, p. 97) and "live their own life apart from our intentions" (Jung, 1935/1976, p. 73). When constellated (Jung, 1969, p. 94), they emerge and "settle over us, almost ghost-like" (Harkey, 2022, p. 156), a psychic double that haunts us from within. When in the grip of a complex, our own identity becomes suspect. Can we even trust ourselves?

Speaking to the connection between Jung's early life and the "complex doctrine," Cope (2006, p. 8) considers the séances to be a "deeply personal" matter for Jung, offering him a way of "understanding … how a 'No. 2' personality could be formed" (p. 110; see also Jung, 1961/1989, p. 107). And, in fact, Jung's own terminology of personalities No. 1 and No. 2 is echoed in his dissertation, where he mentions a spirit's "identity of I and II" (Jung, 1902/1977, p. 75). His own inner split—not to mention his mother's double personality—could not have been far from his mind. Further, in describing such spirits in his dissertation, he uses the term "complex" in a way that is consistent with his later thought (Cope, 2006; Jung, 1902/1977). In his later work, too, he connects spiritism and the complex, noting that "in the voices heard by the insane [complexes] take on a personal ego-character like that of the spirits who manifest themselves through automatic writing and similar techniques" (Jung, 1969, p. 121).

The complex seems to arise, then, as a revenant of Jung's séances with Helly, from his need to understand the splits in himself and his mother. Arguably, Jung succeeded. He would ultimately make clear that the psyche is naturally plural; that the complex is not a pathology; and that neither his nor Emilie's multiplicity constituted an illness. "On the contrary, it is played out in every individual" (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 45). In this way,

both Helly and Emilie made essential contributions to Jung's analytical psychology. The Gothic would forever take its place in his work, growing out of the central enigma that was Jung's maternal family. The double, no longer a doppelgänger to be feared, transmuted into the *complex*, "the living [unit] of the unconscious psyche" (Jung, 1969, p. 101) and a steadfast companion in healing (Harkey, 2022). Passing into the territory of shadow, one discovers a sublime and shimmering light.

Gothic Telos

One of the essential qualities of Jungian thought is that it takes a teleological stance (Jung, 1928/1966), viewing intrapsychic processes as expressing an "immanent psychological striving for a goal" (Jung, 1969, p. 241). A complex, for instance, may arise out of an attempt to reconcile an intolerable "moral conflict" (Jung, 1969, p. 98), and its uncomfortable constellation may ultimately result in a therapeutic awareness of a neglected part of the psyche. In this light, it seems reasonable to look more closely at the telos of the Gothic as it played out in Jung's life.

In her thought-provoking book, *The Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Williams (1995) considers that there is a doubling within the Gothic itself, creating a male Gothic and a female Gothic. Each of these has its own characteristics, but an essential difference is that the male Gothic tends toward abject *horror* and what Williams calls the "gross-out" (p. 104), while the subtler female Gothic inclines toward "*terror* or the sublime" (p. 76). With the female Gothic, we see "an imagined"—or perhaps imaginal—"threat and the process by which that threat is dispelled" (p. 104). This plot structure resonates with Jungian psychology, which addresses inner specters that project outward (Jacobi, 1959, p. 16), thereby quelling "the unexampled tragedy and hopeless misery that [can] follow in their train" (Jung, 1969, p. 100). Because of this essential link with the female Gothic, as well as the presence of Helly and Emilie, two Gothic women in Jung's life, this discussion of Gothic telos pertains primarily to the female Gothic.

If the Gothic has a teleological capacity, where might its telos be headed? First, it is worth noting that Gothic motifs often highlight "the fragility of our usual systems of making sense in the world" (Williams, 1995, p. 70) and tend to "deny and … confront a troubling reality" (Williams, 1995, p. 46). Manifestations of the Gothic, then, might be construed as attempts to shatter our attachment to failing ideas and establishments. But if the Gothic expression to, and through, Jung had such a shattering effect in mind, what was its target? Perhaps Williams offers us a key. She observes that in the 18th century—an era that would make its developmental mark on Jung as well as the Gothic—the "'other' gendered 'female' became newly visible, powerful, and fascinating" (Williams, 1995, p. 99). By way of the Gothic, "the 'female' in all its guises … might be 'realized'" (Williams, 1995, p. 96).

Jung's psychology has been noted for its alliance with the feminine. Jungian scholar Susan Rowland (2020), for example, observed that "the feminine was a topic of supreme importance" to Jung (p. 133). Further, "one of the chief ways that the unconscious affects our lives, [Jung] believed, is through gender" (p. 133). It seems fair to consider that this distinctive presence of the feminine may have entered into Jung's psychology by way of the feminine Gothic influence and the Gothic females in his life. Perhaps through them, and thus through Jung, the wider zeitgeist may have been aiming to "realize" the female and the feminine more fully.

The teleological task of the female hero in the Gothic, Williams (1995) notes, is to experience "a rebirth" (p. 103). Somewhat ironically, given the frightful tone of Gothic

tales, the female Gothic "demands a happy ending," often a wedding (p. 103). Taken in this light, it may be that Jungian theory attempts to "rebirth" the feminine in Western culture serve as an attempt at marrying the masculine and feminine by way of Jung's emphasis on gender in psyche and in psychology.

Lowering the Veil: Conclusions

The teleology of the Gothic in Jung—culminating in an honoring of the plural psyche and a renewal of the feminine spirit in culture and psychology—echoes the "affirmative" endings common to the female Gothic (Williams, 1995, p. 103). Despite this apparent abundance of light, however, the ever-present shadow of the Gothic and of psyche remains. Jung, like each of us, was fallible. Selfishly, perhaps, with youth and inexperience, he "withdrew from the [séance] sessions" when "nothing new was produced" (Goodheart, 1984, p. 6). He would ultimately marry an intelligent but not-remotely-Gothic girl (Bair, 2003, p. 72) who was close in age to Helene (Goodheart, 1984). The shadowed Helly, meanwhile, would suffer in the limelight that followed the publication of Jung's dissertation. In Basel, where the family resided, the figures described in Jung's paper were "immediately recognized … [arousing] a storm of indignation among the Preiswerk family" (Ellenberger, 1991, p. 51). Helly's demise eventually came in a high Gothic style, dying of "a broken heart" and tuberculosis at the age of 30 (p. 52).

Long after Jung's childhood, Emilie would maintain a Gothic-toned power over her son. During a visit to Carl, an assistant physician at the time, Emilie took an appraising look at all his charts, the data that would ultimately constitute the scientific portion of the complex theory. In what Jung called her "second voice," she asked, "Well, do you think it could be something?" (Jaffé, 2023, p. 21). For Jung, this voice was oracular, and it left him unable to "lift a pen for … three weeks" (p. 21). Ultimately, he returned to his work, and the theory of the complex was born. But not before his mother had, through the speaking of her *other* self, "emphasized the great significance of what was present" (p. 22).

The Gothic, alongside the contributions of both Helly and Emilie, will doubtless remain central enigmas in Jung's work. For now, however, we might best remember the Preiswerk women by honoring the light-and-darkness of the Gothic feminine as expressed in the chiaroscuro of psyche that suffuses the work of C. G. Jung.

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