CHAPTER EIGHT

Myth, synchronicity, and re-enchantment*

Roderick Main

The disenchantment of the world

Max Weber (1864-1920) described modern culture as characterised by capitalism, rationalisation, disenchantment, subjectivist culture, and democratisation (Scaff, 2000, pp. 103-107). These features of modernity are intimately interlinked in Weber’s thought, and any one of them gives access to the overall problem of modernity as he saw it. In this chapter I shall focus on the feature of disenchantment (Entzauberung, “de-magification”), described by Weber as a condition in which “there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather ... one can in principle, master all things by calculation”, and in which, therefore, “[o]ne need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits” (1919, p. 139). The Weberian scholar Lawrence Scaff neatly elaborates:

The disenchantment thesis holds that modernity represents a loss of the sacred sense of wholeness and reconciliation between self and world provided by myth, magic, tradition, religion, or immanent nature. It ushers in the disruptive sense of disengagement, abstraction, alienation, homelessness, and the “problem of meaning” that begins to gnaw at the vital core of modern experience and social philosophy. (2000, p. 105)

In what follows I shall explore one influential attempt, of a kind foretold and observed by Weber, to re-enchant modernity: the psychological model and related theory of myth of the Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung (1875-1961). Although this attempt occurs primarily at a conceptual level, I shall show that the re-enchanting process also

* This is a revised and updated version of a paper previously published as ‘Ruptured time and the re-enchantment of modernity’ in Casement, 2007, pp. 19-38; reprinted with permission.
informs the language, imagery, and narrative structures through which Jung’s conceptual argument is elaborated.

Scattered throughout Jung’s voluminous work can be found an analysis of modernity broadly matching Weber’s. Though decidedly less articulate than Weber on the subjects of capitalism and democratisation, Jung does write about these as well as, more extensively and with the same general emphases as Weber, about rationalisation, subjectivist culture, and disenchantment. For example, in relation to capitalism, Jung writes about the dangers of unbridled materialism, as well as about the effects of urbanisation, industrialisation, and the specialisation of work (e.g., 1896-9, pars. 11-66; 1945/1948, par. 393; 1912, par. 428; see also Main, 2004, pp. 119-121). In relation to democratisation, he writes about the problems of mass-mindedness, collectivisation, and the delegation of responsibility (e.g., 1957, pars. 488-504; see also Main, 2004, pp. 136-138). In relation to rationalisation, he writes frequently and at length about the perilous one-sidedness of scientific rationalism and overly rational approaches to religion (e.g., 1957, pars. 488-504; 1952b, pars. 821, 904; 1896-9, pars. 243-291; see also Main, 2004, pp. 123-129). With regard to subjectivist culture, Jung was both a contributor to this, with his focus on personal experience and the value of the non-rational, and an insightful critic of it, commenting on the dangers of as much as the need for the subjective turn in modern culture (e.g., 1957; see also Main, 2004, pp. 117-143; Main, 2008). And, most pertinently for the present paper, on the topic of disenchantment and its consequences, he writes about spiritual confusion, loss of tradition, loss of myth, and alienation from nature, and about the sense of uprootedness, disorientation, meaninglessness, and profound uncertainty to which these conditions give rise (e.g., 1933/1934, par. 313; 1938/1940, pars. 140-141; 1963, pp. 142, 165-166, 306; 1945, pars. 1360-1368; 1934, par. 815; 1928/1931, par. 155; see also Main, 2004, p. 120).

**Jung and the re-mythologisation of modernity**

Where Weber described and explained the disenchantment of the modern world, Jung actively sought to remedy it through bringing about a re-enchantment, and one of the principal ways in which he tried to do this was through his theory of myth. His theory interprets myths positively as means by which the unconscious, specifically the collective unconscious, can reveal itself to consciousness. Thus the myth of the hero, discussed at length in Jung’s *Symbols of Transformation* (1911-
12/1952), reveals unconscious structures and processes of the psyche. As Robert Segal summarises:

the myth of the hero symbolizes at once an archetype and, even more, the psychological life cycle. The birth, childhood, and adolescence of the hero symbolize the emergence and development of the ego and ego consciousness, which is consciousness of the difference between oneself and the external world. The adulthood and death of the hero symbolize the return of the ego to the unconscious and its reintegration with the unconscious to form the self. (1998, p. 145)

Attending to myths and mythic motifs, whether in poetry, novels, films, and art, or in dreams and other forms of personal fantasy, enables one to integrate into consciousness the revealed contents of the collective unconscious, including the instinctual energy bound up in these contents, thereby both animating the psyche and furthering the process of self-realisation that Jung terms individuation (ibid., pp. 17-19). In this way the enchanting world of myth bestows meaning and can again be taken seriously by modern individuals.

Myths, therefore, are of the utmost importance from a psychological point of view. However, as Segal notes, Jung’s theory of myth – better, as we shall see, his early theory of myth – falls short of a re-enchantment of the world. For in this process of psychic revelation the external world acts only as a screen onto which the collective unconscious contents are projected. The inner psychological meaning of myths is appreciated precisely because these outer projections are withdrawn, that is, to the extent that one realises the myths refer not to the outer physical world but to the inner psychic world. As Segal summarises the implication of Jung’s theory of myth:

Myths for moderns do not function to connect the inner world with the outer world, which remains impersonal and mechanical. Instead, modern myths function to connect – better, to reconnect – moderns to the inner world. Modern myths still provide meaning, but that meaning now lies entirely within humans rather than also within the world. (Ibid., p. 19)
Segal suggests that for Jung the world serves only as a middle-man, which could be happily dispensed with if the contents of the collective unconscious could be revealed and encountered more directly, as arguably they can through the analysis of dreams or by the process of waking fantasy that Jung called “active imagination”. Such an approach to myth might restore inner meaning but not the “sacred sense of wholeness and reconciliation between self and world”. Jung’s strategy for a fuller sense of re-enchantment and re-mythologisation of the world depends on a feature of his psychological model that he did not develop in detail until late in his life: his theory of synchronicity.

**Synchronicity**

Briefly, synchronicity describes and theorises coincidences in which, for example, a person’s dream or thought is matched by something that happens in the outer world, without it being possible that either event could have caused the other. Such coincidences can be experienced as especially meaningful and prompt one to wonder whether something more than mere chance may be involved. Jung defined synchronicity in a variety of ways. Most succinctly, he defined it as “meaningful coincidence” (1952b, par. 827), as “acausal parallelism” (1963, p. 342), or as “an acausal connecting principle” (1952b). More fully, he defined it as “the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state” (ibid., par. 850).

I would like to look in detail at an episode of synchronicity which Jung says “is meant only as a paradigm of the innumerable cases of meaningful coincidence that have been observed not only by me but by many others, and recorded in large collections” (1951, par. 983). Famous though this incident is, I believe its full significance for Jung’s theory of synchronicity and his attempt to re-mythologise and re-enchant the modern world has been insufficiently appreciated. The account is from Jung’s lecture “On Synchronicity” delivered at an Eranos conference in Ascona in 1951. Writes Jung:

My example concerns a young woman patient who, in spite of efforts made on both sides, proved to be psychologically inaccessible. The difficulty lay in the fact that she always knew better about everything. Her excellent education had provided her with a weapon ideally suited to this purpose, namely a highly
polished Cartesian rationalism with an impeccably “geometrical” idea of reality. After several fruitless attempts to sweeten her rationalism with a somewhat more human understanding, I had to confine myself to the hope that something unexpected and irrational would turn up, something that would burst the intellectual retort into which she had sealed herself. Well, I was sitting opposite her one day, with my back to the window, listening to her flow of rhetoric. She had had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab – a costly piece of jewellery. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against the window-pane in the obvious effort to get into the dark room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chafer (Cetonia aurata), whose gold-green colour most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, “Here is your scarab”. This experience punctured the desired hole in her rationalism and broke the ice of her intellectual resistance. The treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results. (Ibid., par. 982)

Jung related a shorter version of the same incident the following year in his essay “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle” (1952b, pars. 843, 845). The only major addition this later account provides is an amplification of the symbolic meaning of the scarab beetle:

There … seems to be an archetypal foundation to [this] case…. Any essential change of attitude signifies a psychic renewal which is usually accompanied by symbols of rebirth in the patient’s dreams and fantasies. The scarab is a classic example of a rebirth symbol. The ancient Egyptian Book of What Is in the Netherworld describes how the dead sun-god changes himself at the tenth station into Khepri, the scarab, and then, at the twelfth station, mounts the barge which carries the rejuvenated sun-god into the morning sky. (Ibid., par. 845)
Jung states that his purpose in recounting this episode is “simply to give some indication of how meaningful coincidences usually present themselves in practical life” (1952b, par. 845). The incident shows, for Jung, that psychic and physical events can parallel one another acausally but meaningfully, and that the imagery that provides the focus of the coincidence can be archetypal, i.e., it can express a part of the mind that “is identical in all individuals” – what Jung refers to as the “collective unconscious” (ibid., par. 840). However, there is a lot more going on in his presentation of this episode than Jung declares. In particular, the episode plays a crucial role, in several ways, in his attempt to re-enchant the modern world. I will look first at some general implications of the principle of synchronicity that the incident illustrates, then at the actual content of the incident, and finally at the narrative through which it is presented.

*Synchronicity and re-sacralisation*

In an interview with Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), Jung connected synchronicity to numinous and religious experience:

> Religious experience is *numinous*, as Rudolf Otto calls it, and for me, as a psychologist, this experience differs from all others in the way it transcends the ordinary categories of space, time, and causality. Recently I have put a great deal of study into synchronicity (briefly, the “rupture of time”), and I have established that it closely resembles numinous experiences where space, time, and causality are abolished. (McGuire and Hull, 1978, p. 230)

In this statement, religious experience is characterised as numinous, and what is distinctive about numinous experiences is said to be that they transcend the ordinary categories of space, time, and causality. Synchronicity, as the technical term that Jung developed to articulate this transcendence of space, time, and causality, thus implicitly describes what for Jung is the kernel of numinous or religious experience. His view of the social and cultural significance of this emerges from an assertion he made later in the same interview: “The modern world”, he states, “is desacralized, that is why it is in a crisis. Modern man must rediscover a deeper source of his own spiritual life” (ibid.). Jung’s concept of synchronicity can therefore be seen as part of his strategy
for rediscovering a deeper source of spirituality in order to re-sacralise the modern world and thereby address the crisis of modernity.

*Myth beyond projection*

This is confirmed by the scholar of Gnosticism, Gilles Quispel (1916-2006), who was present at the 1951 Eranos lecture where Jung first formally presented his theory of synchronicity, including the example of the scarab beetle. Quispel reports that, after the lecture,

> even Jung himself seemed quite relieved and unusually good humoured. All his life he had rummaged in the collective unconscious, but now he had forced a breakthrough from the soul to the cosmos. He beamed when he told me: “*Es geht um die Erfahrung der Fülle des Seins*”; it is the experience of the fullness, the pleroma, of Being that matters. And he said to me on another occasion that now the concept of projection should be revised completely. (Quispel, in Segal et al., 1995, p. 19)

In his earlier theory of myth, Jung, like Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), considered myths to be the projection of the contents of the unconscious psyche onto the world. He differed from Freud in believing that these projected contents stemmed from a collective rather than personal stratum of the psyche. But for both thinkers the world onto which the unconscious contents were projected was in itself impersonal and mechanical, the world revealed and investigated by the hard sciences. Indeed, the psychological concept of projection had in its way contributed to the disenchantment of the world, for the concept implies that the meanings we perceive in the world are not there in reality but are being foisted onto the world by the human mind. However, when his theory of myth is supplemented by his theory of synchronicity, Jung can argue that the outer world may not after all be totally alienated from human purposes but, at least on occasion, can be intimately involved with them. Thus, the real scarab beetle in his example behaved in a way that seemed mysteriously connected with the patient’s inner psychic world. As Jung later remarked to a correspondent: “at the moment my patient was telling me her dream a real ‘scarab’ tried to get into the room, *as if it had understood that it must play its mythological role as a symbol of rebirth*” (1976, p. 541, emphasis added). Jung goes further: “Even inanimate objects”, he
writes, “behave occasionally in the same way – meteorological phenomena, for instance” (ibid.).

**Myth and history**

As well as providing a resource for Jung to re-enchant or re-mythologise modernity, this revised theory enables him to reconsider the relationship between myth and history – modernity’s view of the past. Specifically, synchronicity provides a new perspective on one of the issues that had undermined the religious view of the world – historical criticism of the Bible. Jung had lectured on this topic to his student fraternity, the Zofingia Society, in 1899, arguing against a rationalistic, historicising interpretation of Christ (1896-9, pars. 237-291). Now he can approach such problems from a new angle. With his theory of synchronicity, the mythic character of a story does not for Jung necessarily imply a lack of historical truth, since the archetypal motifs informing the myth, and giving it the vitality to persist as a gripping story, can express themselves as much outwardly as inwardly. In his book *Answer to Job* (1952a), published in the same year as his major essay on synchronicity, Jung applies this principle to stories about Christ:

> The fact that the life of Christ is largely myth does absolutely nothing to disprove its factual truth – quite the contrary. I would even go so far as to say that the mythical character of a life is just what expresses its universal human validity. It is perfectly possible, psychologically, for the unconscious or an archetype to take complete possession of a man and to determine his fate down to the smallest detail. At the same time objective, non-psychic parallel phenomena can occur which also represent the archetype. It not only seems so, it simply is so, that the archetype fulfils itself not only psychically in the individual, but objectively outside the individual. My own conjecture is that Christ was such a personality. (Ibid., par. 648)

**A living myth**

When we turn to the content of Jung’s paradigmatic synchronicity, we find that the narrative through which the incident is presented and, even more, the mythic image at its core are doing much more than just illustrating his theory. They are also
conveying symbolically a whole cluster of personal and cultural meanings that actively contribute to Jung’s argument and its emotional charge.

*The scarab incident as a synchronicity for Jung*

Not mentioned by Jung but surely important is that there are at least two senses in which the incident involving the scarab beetle was a synchronicity not only for the patient but also for Jung. First, if we recall Jung’s description of synchronicity as “the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state” (1952b, par. 850), we can find this definition fulfilled by Jung’s psychic state of “hope that something unexpected and irrational would turn up” (1951, para. 982) and the physical event of “something unexpected and irrational” actually occurring with the “very strange” (ibid.) appearance of the scarab “at this particular moment” (1952b, para. 843). Second, the image of the scarab beetle already had considerable significance for Jung, and in view of this the occurrence in his consulting room of the patient’s synchronicity with the scarab beetle will have formed part of a synchronicity with Jung’s own vivid interest in the symbol. The sources of the possible significance of the symbol of the scarab for Jung are worth exploring in detail.

*Jung’s 1913 vision of an Egyptian scarab*

Most importantly, Jung himself had had a vision of an Egyptian scarab during the period of intense psychic turmoil in his life referred to in his memoirs as his “confrontation with the unconscious” (Bishop, 2000, pp. 17, 24-25). The relevant part of this vision is that Jung, finding himself in an underground cavern, sees a corpse float by in some running water: “a youth with blond hair and a wound in the head. He was followed by a gigantic black scarab and then by a red, newborn sun, rising up out of the depths of the water” (1963, p. 203; see also 2009, p. 237). Drawing on his knowledge of mythology, Jung “realised … that it was a hero and solar myth, a drama of death and renewal, the rebirth symbolized by the Egyptian scarab” (1963, p. 204). In the light of the events occurring in his own life at the time of the vision – his break with Freud and the beginnings of his own model of analytical psychology – the ideas of death and renewal are singularly appropriate.

*The scarab as symbol of living a myth*
In another visionary episode, made available with the publication of Jung’s *Red Book* (2009), Jung imagines himself in a desert landscape where he sees a scarab beetle and is prompted to the following musings:

Over there a small dark beetle is crawling along, pushing a ball in front of it – a scarab. You dear little animal, are you still toiling away in order to live your beautiful myth? How seriously and undiscouraged it works! If only you had a notion that you are performing an old myth, you would probably renounce your fantasies as we men have also given up playing at mythology....

Dear beetle, where have you gone? I can no longer see you – Oh, you’re already over there with your mythical ball. These little animals stick to things, quite unlike us – no doubt, no change of mind, no hesitation. Is this so because they live their myth? (Ibid., p. 271; see also images on folio iii [verso] and p. 22)

Here the scarab beetle provides the focus for Jung to reflect on the value of living a myth: myths can be beautiful and can foster seriousness, courage, and tenacity. But myths are of the past (the scarab lives “an old myth”). As soon as we become conscious of myth as myth, the magic departs, we “renounce [our] fantasies”, give up “playing at mythology”, and enter a state of uncertainty and indecisiveness. It is apt that the scarab, which here symbolises a condition of continuing enchantment in which it is still possible to live within myth, should later in Jung’s paradigmatic synchronicity play precisely the role of re-enchanter of the world – the patient’s world, Jung’s world, and, as we shall see later, the modern world generally.

*Freud’s collection of antiquities*

It is worth bearing in mind one of the places where Jung, prior to these visions, almost certainly would have seen actual Egyptian antiquities in the form of scarabs: Freud’s study. As can be confirmed from a visit to the Freud Museum in London, where Freud’s study was reconstructed as closely as possible to how it had been in Vienna, Freud was a great collector of antiquities, and within his collection are several scarab amulets (Rizzuto, 1998, pp. 120-121, 123). Such amulets were used in ancient Egypt as general good luck charms and, more importantly, for magical protection of the soul on its underworld journey through death – associations pertinent
to the themes of synchronicity, re-enchantment, and Jung’s “underworld journey” following his break with Freud. Freud had begun to build up his collection of antiquities in 1896 following the death of his father. Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1998) has revealed its fascinating significance for understanding Freud’s relationship to religion, noting that many of the antiquities Freud collected are of mythological and religious figures represented in the Philippson Bible which Freud’s father had given to his son on his thirty-fifth birthday in the hope that he would become more religiously observant. On page 340 of volume 1 of the Philippson Bible is an image of a colossal scarab (ibid., p. 123). Also in Freud’s study, among other books on Egyptology, is the classic work by Isaac Myer entitled Scarabs (1894) (E. Freud et al. 1978, p. 235). Intriguing, too, are the anecdotes about Freud engaging in imaginal dialogues with figures from his collection of antiquities (Noll, 1992, p. 80).

That Jung would have been interested in these antiquities and, if he saw it, Myer’s book is clear from his own early and enduring interest in archaeology (Squyres, 1999). In one of the chapters he himself wrote for Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung tells how, as he was approaching the age to go to university, his interests drew him in different directions: on the one hand towards science, and on the other hand towards the humanities including “Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and prehistoric archaeology” (1963, p. 91). It is noteworthy that, much later, in his principal essay on synchronicity, which was specifically written to combat the one-sidedness of contemporary science, Jung should give central importance to an experience involving a representative image (the ancient Egyptian scarab) from the other side of his divided interests – an image, moreover, that consciously or unconsciously he might have suspected of being bound up with the problem of religion and enchantment for Freud.

It is interesting, too, that Jung dates his fascination with the problem of synchronicity to “the middle twenties” (1952b, par. 843), for this dating coincides with the explosion of popular interest in Egyptology following the discovery in 1922 of the tomb of Tutankhamen. The royal cartouche of Tutankhamen includes the hieroglyph of the scarab, so that this image appears on many of the treasures recovered from the tomb, as well as being the central image of several exquisite jewels (pectorals and pendants) that would have been widely described, if not reproduced, and may have been the direct or indirect source of Jung’s patient’s dream (see plates II, XII, XVIII, and XX-XXIII in Desroches-Noblecourt, 1972). (There are,
however, no clues in Jung’s published writings as to when exactly the synchronicity with the scarab occurred.) The association of the scarab with the discovery of a fabulous treasure in the desert is pertinent both to the effect of the synchronicity in suddenly opening Jung’s patient to the hidden riches of her unconscious and to Jung’s own excitement, as related by Quispel, at how the concept of synchronicity “forced a breakthrough from the soul to the cosmos”.

**Scarabs and alchemy**

Aside from its possible associations with his confrontation with the unconscious and with Freud, the mythic image of the scarab may have been further charged for Jung, especially in relation to synchronicity and re-enchantment, by his encounters with it in alchemical contexts. These encounters were few – by Jung’s account, “[t]he scarab is seldom mentioned in alchemical literature” (1944, par. 531). But where such references do occur, they are suggestive.

One reference to the scarab occurs in the first few pages of the Taoist alchemical text *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, to which Jung contributed a psychological commentary. In a section of the text titled “The primal spirit and the conscious spirit”, the author discusses how by a meditative process called “circulation of the light” one can return to “the light that is the Creative” and produce one’s immortal body. The text then has recourse to the following simile:

> The scarabaeus rolls his ball and in the ball there develops life as the result of the undivided effort of his spiritual concentration. If now an embryo can grow in manure, and shed its shells, why should not the dwelling place of our heavenly heart also be able to create a body if we concentrate the spirit upon it? (Wilhelm and Jung, 1931, pp. 26-28)

Although Jung’s commentary does not pick up on this image, he will certainly have read it, and that alone may have created in his mind an association between the mythic image of the scarab and synchronicity. For his timely receipt of this text from Richard Wilhelm was specifically registered by Jung as a synchronicity (1963, pp. 223; 2009, pp. 163, 320). Furthermore, the association of the scarab with the ability to create living bodies by spiritual concentration once more connects the mythic image with the theme of re-enchantment.
Another reference to scarabs occurs in *Psychology and Alchemy*, in a subsection on “The one-horned scarabaeus” (1944, pars. 530-531). There Jung argues that, like other real and imagined one-horned creatures (“unicorns”), the one-horned scarab is a symbol of the alchemical figure of Mercurius, who in turn is a symbol of the self. Among the properties attributed to this scarab in the alchemical literature, Jung notes its being “only-begotten”, “a creature born of itself”, “*increateum* [uncreated]”, “bisexual, capable of self-fertilization and self-parturition”, and its undergoing beheading and dismemberment (ibid., par. 530). These references show Jung’s awareness that in Egyptian mythology the scarab is not only a symbol of rebirth but also just as much a symbol of creation. The latter meaning stems from two sources. On the one hand, the word for beetle in ancient Egyptian (at least its Heliopolitan form) was pronounced like the word Khoprer, “the Becoming One”, “He Who Comes into Existence”, one of the deities of creation (Clark, 1959, p. 40). On the other hand, the scarab beetle “has the habit of pushing its eggs out of the sand enclosed in a ball of its own dung. The beetle therefore became the symbol of God as he came into existence and of the rising sun, the daily recapitulation of creation” (ibid.). This association of the scarab with creativity and autogenesis is again interesting in relation to synchronicity. For, as acausal events, synchronicities precisely do not have antecedent causes but emerge spontaneously; they are, for Jung, “creative acts” (1952b, par. 967). The concept of the autonomous psyche – that is, the ability of the psyche to generate contents that do not stem from interaction with other people or the environment – is of the greatest importance in Jung’s psychological thinking and is one of the features that distinguish his model from those of other depth psychologists. One could even argue that his theory of synchronicity is in part an attempt to provide an underpinning framework for this notion (Main, 2004, p. 133). It therefore adds to the charge of the synchronistic experience related by Jung that its central image of the scarab symbolises such autonomous emergence.

In addition to these references, there is a surprising “non-reference” to the scarab in Jung’s writings. It concerns the work of the seventeenth-century polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602-82). On page 415 of volume 2, part 1, of his work *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* [*Oedipus the Egyptian*] (1652-54), Kircher presents the symbol or hieroglyph of the scarab as the key to the alchemical art and elaborates on various facets of its meaning, including its role in the spiritualisation of matter (Bonnefoy, 1991, pp. 709-710). Jung refers to Kircher’s works several times (see *General Index*
to Jung’s *Collected Works*), and even three times cites *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*. It may be that he simply overlooked this alchemical reference to the scarab or felt he had no specific reason to note it. But in view of the significance of Oedipus and indeed Egypt for Freud, and the connection we have found between the scarab and Freud, it is tempting to see here a complex of associations that may have further contributed, however unconsciously, to the charge Jung experienced in the synchronicity with the scarab.

**Overcoming Cartesian rationalism**

In addition to these possible personal and scholarly resonances for Jung, the synchronicity with the scarab beetle also enacts, with Jung’s patient, what the theory of synchronicity is intended to achieve for culture. It is not just the patient’s “animus” (1952b, para. 845) or “highly polished Cartesian rationalism” with its “impeccably ‘geometrical’ idea of reality” (1951, para. 982) that needs to be broken down but, as Paul Bishop notes, “Cartesian philosophy, with its ‘geometrical method’, and rationalism in general” (2000, p. 17). The patient’s problem stands for the problem of the culture as a whole, and Jung’s success with the patient is the success he hopes his essay will have with culture. On 24 January 1955, Jung wrote to Michael Fordham about what he hoped would be “the impact of synchronicity upon the fanatical one-sidedness of scientific philosophy” (1976, p. 216), and on the same day he reported to R. F. C. Hull: “The latest comment about ‘Synchronicity’ is that it cannot be accepted because it shakes the security of our scientific foundations, as if this were not exactly the goal I am aiming at” (ibid., p. 217). Weber famously described the rationalised forms of modernity as an “iron cage” (1904, p. 123). Jung’s language in describing the synchronicity with the scarab evokes something similar. His patient is “inaccessible” (1951, para. 982), “rigid” (1952b, para. 845), “sealed” in an “intellectual retort”, in the “ice of her intellectual resistance” (1951, para. 982), in the “armour of her animus possession” (1952b, para. 945). Jung hopes for and then witnesses an event that will enable her to escape from – “burst” (ibid.), “puncture”, “break” (1951, para. 982) – this imprisoning condition.

**Hidden heroics in the scarab synchronicity**

Jung commented that his 1913 vision was “a hero and solar myth, a drama of death and renewal, the rebirth symbolized by the Egyptian scarab”. The hero myth
there was indicated by the floating corpse of the “youth with blond hair and a wound in the head”. The significance of this became clearer for Jung after a subsequent dream in which he participated in the killing of the hero Siegfried, which led him to reflect that “the attitude embodied by Siegfried, the hero, no longer suited me.
Therefore it had to be killed” (1963, pp. 204-205). In his amplification of the scarab symbol in his patient’s synchronicity, Jung explains its status only as a symbol of rebirth. However, here too it may be possible to detect the latent presence of, if not a hero myth as such, at least the kind of heroic exploits one finds in fairy tales. Jung’s “young woman patient” sealed in the “intellectual retort” of her rationalistic attitude might be compared to a maiden imprisoned in a tower. The string of doctors who have failed to cure her suggests a series of suitors or champions who have failed to rescue the maiden. Jung’s eventual success thanks to the synchronicity reflects the motif of the improbable suitor who eventually succeeds thanks to supernatural aid. As the scarab entered through the window, so in the stories the rescuer or the rescuer’s supernatural accomplice sometimes reaches or contacts the maiden through a window. As Jung’s patient is at first inaccessible, rigid, sealed up, icy, and resistant, and his efforts to free her are “fruitless”, but later she is sweetened and her natural being bursts forth when Jung “punctured the desired hole”, so the hero typically not only rescues the maiden but also wins her as his consort. Finally, just as Jung closes his anecdote with a vague but optimistic “[t]he treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results”, so the story of a hero rescuing an imprisoned maiden typically ends with them “living happily ever after” (see, e.g., Thompson, 1958, H310, L100, L160, N530, N640, R110, R121.1, T68.1, T381 [alphanumeric references are to the system of classifying folk-motifs in Thompson’s work]). A Jungian interpretation of such an episode in a myth or fairy tale would doubtless revolve around the task of awakening and entering into relationship with the anima or soul. In embedding this motif in his account of the synchronistic event, Jung implies that, with his theory of synchronicity, he is heroically attempting to rescue the anima or soul of Western culture. Such heroics may not contradict his earlier repudiation of the heroic attitude, since what they now involve is not asserting his will but respectfully co-operating with non-rational manifestations of the autonomous psyche.

Conclusion
To summarise and conclude, Jung’s writings on myth can be seen as part of his attempt to re-enchant the modern world. However, the success of his attempt was limited so long as he saw myth solely in terms of the projection of intrapsychic, albeit archetypal, contents. With the theory of synchronicity, developed late in his life, Jung felt able to postulate a parallelism and acausal connectedness between inner and outer events that allowed him to find mythic motifs not only intrapsychically but also, non-projectively, in external situations and events, thus enabling a more far-reaching re-enchantment (see Main, 2011, for further discussion of the extent to which synchronicity may be able to effect re-enchantment). I have suggested, further, that in his choice of example to illustrate synchronicity Jung was drawing on a hypothesised feature of the unconscious psyche, its autonomous mythopoeic power, to present an image so richly charged with personal and cultural associations that it not only illustrated his argument but actively contributed to it and its emotional appeal. This was not simply a rhetorical ploy, in the sense that Jung consciously assembled the charged cluster of associations. It would better fit with his outlook to view the synchronicity with the scarab as an instance of the transpersonal psyche “staging its own manifestations spontaneously” (1945/1948, par. 395), presenting Jung with a compelling incident of whose full symbolic and mythological resonance he may not have been aware even as he intuited that it was absolutely the right example to use.

References


