

Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance. *By Seán Fitton.*

Cover Page for Administration:

This thesis in the form of a Sway document is submitted in part-fulfilment of the PhD:

- 1. ***Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance.***
- 2. One volume only
- 3. Student Name: Sean Fitton @00429606
- 4. Doctor of Philosophy
- 5. The University of Salford
- 6. School of Arts, Media and Creative Technology
- 7. Year of Submission: 2024

IMPORTANT NOTE:

This document is a record, for the purposes of submission to Worktribe, of the original thesis which takes the form of a Sway document. The Sway document is available here:

<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/lvvDkUBA07RbCyzS?ref=Link>

The seven essays mentioned below are appended to the end of this document:

Primary Essays:

Tim, *The Minstrel as a Bridge* (12,000 words)Page 60

Thena, *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 1: General* (9,000 words)Page 114

Thena, *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 2: Persona* (6,000 words)Page 157

Thena, *The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment* (3,500 words)Page 184

Secondary Essays:

Tim, *Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation* (7,500 words)Page 202

Seany, *How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide* (8,000 words)Page 240

Seany, *The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel* (12,000 words)Page 272

A few instructions before starting:

This Sway document has been designed to be viewed on a laptop or PC, but should be easy to read on a tablet or smartphone.

It is intended to be read in a linear fashion like a book, by turning the 'pages' using cursor arrows.

However, a linear approach is not necessary to an understanding of the document. The reader is recommended to work through the Introductory Section in order, but the various Persona Contributions of the Main Section may be taken in any order wished. To do this please use the icon which appears in the bottom right corner.

There are several hyperlinks in each section (notable by the fact that they appear underlined) which will take you off the site to various weblog posts, YouTube videos and downloadable essays in .pdf form. I recommend opening these in a new tab, if that is possible.

As this is not a 'normal' thesis, it may be helpful for those of a more traditional mindset to know that the core propositions of *Multiplasticity* and *The Minstrel as Bridge* and the outcomes/findings, which are the philosophical concept of *The Minstrel Self* and the performance persona, *Seany Minstrel* are explored in several of the aforementioned essays. Most notably these are the primary, theoretical essays:

- [The Minstrel as a Bridge](#) [Minstrel as Bridge]
- [The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona \(Part 1: General\)](#) [Multiplasticity, Minstrel Self]
- [The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona \(Part 2: Persona\)](#) [Multiplasticity]
- [The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment.](#) [Minstrel as Bridge, Multiplasticity, Minstrel Self]

They can also be found in the secondary, practical essays:

- [Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation](#) [Multiplasticity]
- [How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide](#) [Minstrel Self, Seany Minstrel]
- [The \(re\)Evolution of The Minstrel](#) [Multiplasticity, Minstrel Self, Seany Minstrel]

And, that's about it. Please feel free to browse and enjoy.

Contents





INTRODUCTORY SECTION:

- **Contents Page**
- **The Abstract**
- **Preface: An Important Note for the Reader** *By Seán Fitton*. A brief note about multiplasticity as Queer identity, explaining to the reader the use of multiple viewpoints, methods and personae in the work and, how the text is made up of writings by the various personae – and why this is important. Introduces the personae (as names only) and Seany Minstrel as the editor of the thesis and introducer of each essay. Explains the hierarchy of essays. (1000 words)

- **Foreword: A Note from the Editor** *By Seany Minstrel.* A lighter and more playful, but more thorough, introduction to each of the personae, their characters and areas of specialization. A note about the ambiguity of writing in persona while still being myself. (600 words)
- **Academic Introduction** *By Thena.* A scholarly introduction outlining what the thesis is about and briefly explaining Minstrelsy, multiplasticity and the use of personae, and the revisioning of Minstrelsy as a practice for self-discovery and spiritual validation (500 words)

MAIN SECTION:

The main body of this Sway document consists of the individual contributions of the various performance personae, in the form of hyperlinks to essays in .pdf form, videos, weblog posts or other appropriate matter. Each contribution is prefaced by a short introduction from either Seany Minstrel or Seán Fitton.

- **Persona Contributions #1: Tim the Excited Mythologer.**
- [The Minstrel as a Bridge](#) (.pdf 12,000 words)
- [Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation](#) (.pdf 7,500 words)
- *Weblog Posts*
- *Videos*
- **Persona Contributions #2: Thena the Academic.**
- [The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 1: General](#) (.pdf 9,000 words)
- [The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 2: Persona](#) (.pdf 6,000 words)
- [The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment](#) (.pdf 3,500 words)
- *Videos*
- **Persona Contributions #3: Guru Tovski.**
- *Essays (Four meditations in .pdf form 1,000 words each)*
- *Other Writings*
- *Videos*
- *Workshop*
- **Persona Contributions #4: Baron Sam.**
- *Poetry (a selection of weblog posts)*
- *Videos*

- **Persona Contributions #5: Seany Minstrel.**
- [How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide](#) (.pdf 8,000 words)
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- *Videos (links to performances and poetry)*

CONCLUDING SECTION:

- **Academic Conclusion** *By Thena*
- **A Final Word** *By Seán Fitton*
- **Appendices**
- Glossary
- Early Writings
- References



1 - Mask by Gill Nicholas

ABSTRACT: by Seán Fitton

Staging Queer Spirituality: *New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance.*

My thesis is based upon the findings from my post-graduate practice-as-research project.

I will propose a re-envisioning of the practice of Minstrelsy, not only as a traditional form of storytelling entertainment with its roots in ancient history and archetypal myths, but as a playful method by which its practitioner(s), through the understanding and communication of those myths, may come to experience an understanding of self-identity as a multiplastic 'Minstrel Self'.

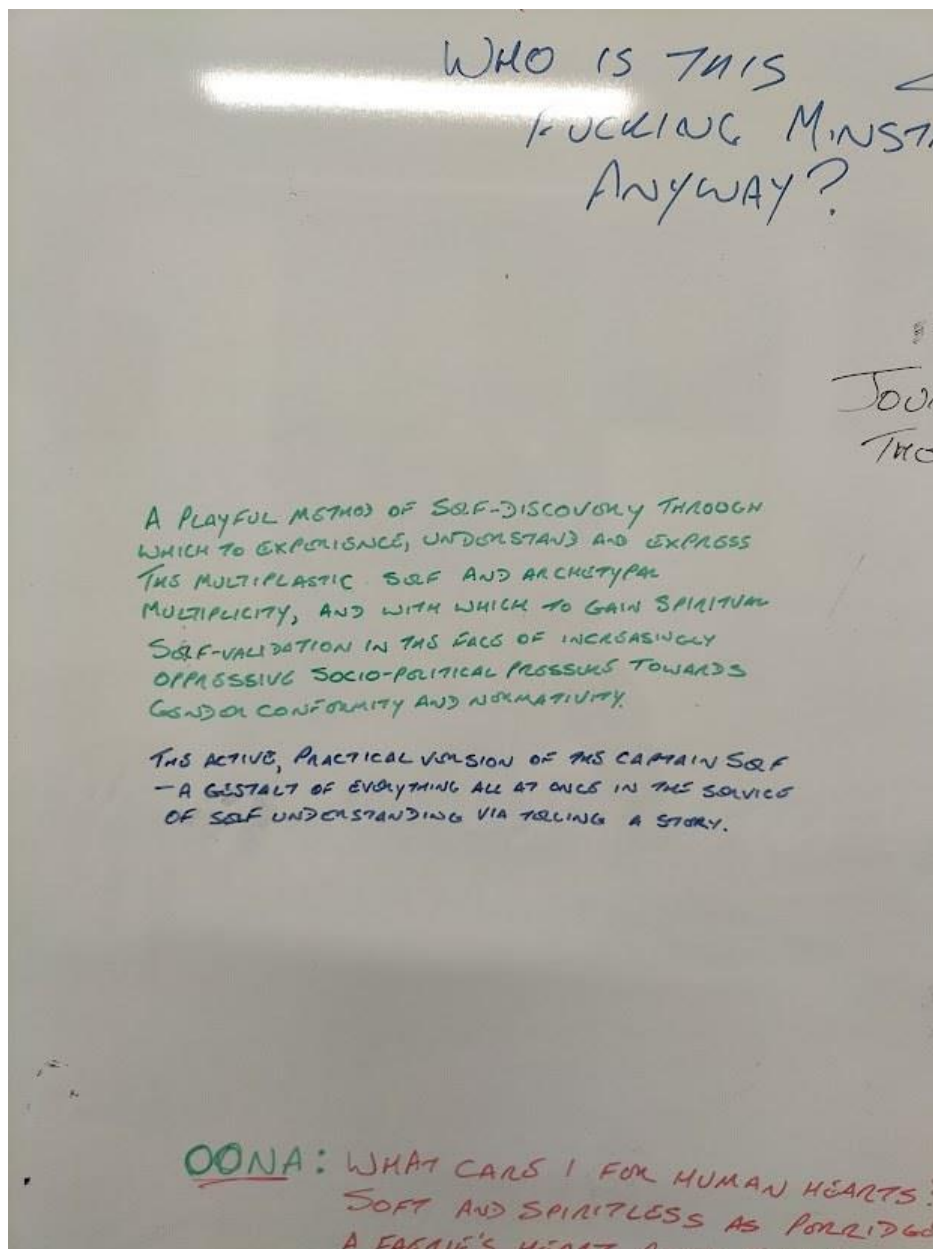
Through the performance of archetypally based personae, including that of the Minstrel themselves, I will suggest an understanding of self-identity that deliberately foregrounds concepts of the natural plurality and fluidity of gender and sexuality in the human being, in direct contrast to the recent rise of anti-LGBTQ+, gender essentialist and 'gender-critical' attitudes expressed through popular media.

Through performative methods that use archetypal forms found in ancient myth and legend, and, specifically, through the playing of the Minstrel figure - a 'queer' storyteller and mythmaker, one that stands both within and apart from their own culture - I aim to define a special form of identity, the Minstrel Self.

The multiplastic 'Minstrel Self' as experienced through the performance of Minstrelsy, I argue, functions as a bridge between the archetypal and the ordinary, between the high and low of society, between times and cultures, and between the norms and differences of societal acceptance in gender, sexuality and (dis)ability.

Moreover, this Minstrel-esque element of the human psyche offers a sense of spiritual validation via its connection to ancient, mythological, ritualistic archetypal forms.

Preface: An Important Note for the Reader By Seán Fitton, MA
BA(Hons) DipRSA





1. The Work

My practice-as research PhD project, *Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance*, is based on experiencing Queer self-identity as multiplastic – that is, consisting of a single, albeit gestalt, ‘substance’ capable of taking many forms – through a direct engagement with archetypal forms as performance personae

2. Academic Methodology

Academically, my work takes a multi-lens approach which compares and resolves several viewpoints and disciplines into a syncretic whole. This has involved approaching an understanding of self-identity from the specific perspectives of spirituality, gender and sexuality, psychology and as a stage performer.

2.1 Spirituality

The spiritual lens examines the ‘purpose’ of spirituality as a road to self-understanding.

2.2 Gender and Sexuality

Gender and sexuality considers identity as performative and posits the possibility of a ‘soul’ of some nature.

2.3 Psychology

The psychological lens uses the four-part Jungian model of the human psyche as a framework for experimentation, and the later philosophy of Archetypal Psychology to resolve any differences between the meanings of ‘archetype’. Hillman’s ‘acorn theory’ is positioned as a possible resolution of identity as fluid.

2.4 The Stage

Performance training and methods, particularly clowning, are examined in dialogue with spiritual practices and an archetypal viewpoint.

2.5 Syncretism

The four viewpoints are blended and the philosophical finding of the Queer, multiplastic Minstrel Self is offered

2.6 Further

This understanding is supported by deep explorations of persona as a form of identity, of the archetypal form of the Wandering Minstrel, and the Minstrel Self as a Queer socio-political perspective.

In turn, this theoretical writing is supported by secondary writings which examine the practical methodologies of archetypal examination, both intellectual (‘Queering’) and physical, and the historical development of Seany Minstrel.

3. Practical Methodology

The practical part of this work has, therefore, involved the emergence of various performance personae - aspects of self and 'viewpoints' from which to examine notions of Queer self-identity - as 'voices' with which to speak in staged, storytelling performances. As is not uncommon with storytelling methods, these personae are drawn on in performance to examine specific areas of investigation (which may be considered their specialisations) in order to present a viewpoint of Queer identity as multiplastic via its connection to the story told and the archetypal figures and patterns within it.

4. Writing

I would contend that writing is also a form of performance created for an audience of readers. Thus, a completed item of written work can be framed as a recording of that performance analogous to, for example, a highly edited television programme or a film as a recording of an actor's performance.

4.1 Persona Writing

It is important, therefore, that this written thesis reflects the performed practice from which it has resulted, by taking the *practice* of personae performance into writing. Consequently, as well as speaking via multiple personae in a staged performance, I will also be 'speaking' through those same personae in this written 'performance'. In other words, examining Queer self-identity from multiple angles by multiple personae, or multiple 'voices' in written form, each with their own styles and specialisations. Each item of writing, as with each linked video or other material, may be taken as both an interlinked section of the whole thesis and a stand-alone essay in its own right.

4.2 Justification

This is not a new concept. In using this methodology I am following in the footsteps, for example, of the 19th century Danish philosopher-theologian-poet, Søren Kierkegaard, a holder of several pseudonyms used to forward specific arguments, and the more recent American polymath, Robert Anton Wilson. Wilson's example is particularly useful because of the accessibility of his writing and the highly developed 'characters' of his various pseudonymous personae. For instance, articles of futurist socio-political philosophy are written by Hagbard Celine and spiritual meditations by Simon Moon, meanwhile Justin Case examines potential hidden meanings in film and music and Mordecai the Foul creates Discordian 'dogmas'. (Wilson, 1980)

5. Personae

This thesis can therefore be seen as both the work of a single author *and* as a collaborative effort - an anthology of voices reflecting the multiplastic nature of Queer self-identity. There are six personae through which I speak, one of which is Seán Fitton, the post-graduate student who has written this preface. The others, whose purposes and development are explained in the text, include Tim the Excited Mythologer, Thena the Academic, Baron Sam and Guru Tovski.

5.1 Seany Minstrel

Prime amongst those personae, though, is Seany Minstrel, who is the performed, multiplastic and gestalt 'Minstrel Self'. Seany Minstrel, while providing writings of his own, will also act as the editor of the document as a whole and, more importantly, a guide to the reader. He is the storyteller who will introduce each writer as they appear and draw the varying strands of the PhD PaR argument into a cohesive narrative thread.

6. Reading the Thesis

6.1 Direction

Without wishing to impose 'rules', I would suggest that the reader examines the **Introductory Section** of this thesis first, and the **Concluding Sections** last.

The **Main Section**, though, diverges from linearity in the following way. Each linked essay, other writing or video, while working in dialogue with all other items in the thesis, is designed to 'stand alone', that is to say that each one is comprehensible in and of itself and does not require previous reading of any other writing. This means that the **Main Section** can be taken in any order the reader chooses without confusion, since each persona viewpoint is an independent element of the overall gestalt. There is, however, a hierarchy.

6.2 Hierarchy

Four essays, comprising about 30,000 words in total, provide the academic and theoretical 'thrust' of the thesis and should be considered **Primary Essays**. These are:

- **Tim**, [The Minstrel as a Bridge](#) (12,000 words)
- **Thena**, [The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 1: General](#) (9,000 words)
- **Thena**, [The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 2: Persona](#) (6,000 words)
- **Thena**, [The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment](#) (3,500 words)

A further three essays, comprising another 27,500 words in total, concentrate on practical methodologies and persona development. These should be thought of as important **Secondary**, 'supporting' or 'enhancing' essays. These are:

- **Tim**, [Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation](#) (7,500 words)
- **Seany**, [How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide](#) (8,000 words)
- **Seany**, [The \(re\)Evolution of The Minstrel](#) (12,000 words)

All the other **Persona Contributions** of the **Main Section** are important in themselves but may be considered to stand as creative and artistic, rather than academic, contributions

7. Final Words

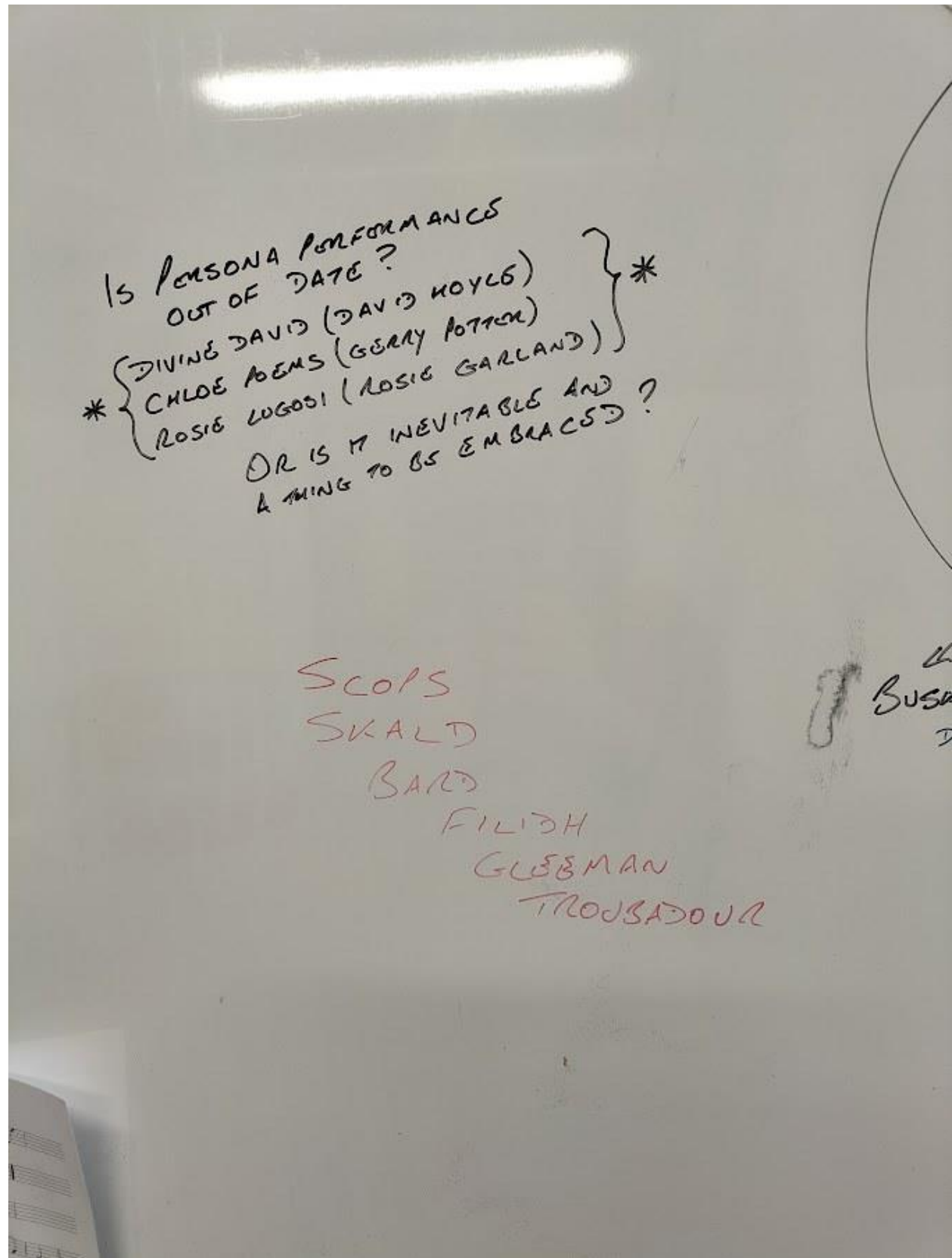
Finally, due to the multidisciplinary nature of this work I have used a number of technical terms, some of which I have had to coin myself. These terms are defined in their relevant texts, but for the sake of the reader's ease I have also included a **Glossary** as the first Appendix in this document. I hope it helps.

Equally, I hope you enjoy reading this thesis. As a creative as well as an academic, it is important to me that my ideas not only inform, examine and challenge, but also do so in an interesting and entertaining way.

Reference:

Wilson, R.A. (1980) *The Illuminati Papers*. Ronin Publishing: California

Foreword: A Note From the Editor





2 - Photo of Seany Minstrel performing by Sara Fitton

By Seany Minstrel

"Je m'en vais chercher un grand peut-être." - Francois Rabelais

"I don't believe there is any virtue in understatement." – Ken Russell

This book, this thesis, this masterpiece of questioning genius, this travesty of camp self-indulgence, that you are reading right now is the result of the collaboration of one person with themself(s). They/we/I speak with six voices through one mouth, each one with its own manner, its own style, its own 'shape', interests and understanding, to bring together a multiplastic, melting-plastic blend of Queer self-identity in fluid artistic, spiritual and intellectual forms.

In these pages you will meet Thena (i.e. me) the Academic, who will lead us in her precise, almost maternally careful, fashion, through the complex maze of conceptualisations which blend to form an understanding of the Minstrel as a performed version of the overall 'Captain Self', and an understanding of why, in today's social and political climate, the Captain Self/Minstrel Self is such an important idea.

You will meet Tim (i.e. me) the Excited Mythologist who will regale us with his knowledge of the Minstrel, as a historical figure from the mediaeval courts and villages of Europe, as an archetypal figure in myth, legend and faery tale, as a figure common to human culture worldwide and to popular culture on our stages and screens, and as a figure whose time has come to shine in the world of Queer self-identity.

You will meet our spiritual leader, Guru Tovski (i.e. me) who will guide us through paths of confusion and mysticism with his words of validating wisdom in the sacred language of the subconscious (and occasionally the Queer sacred language of Polari), until we understand archetypal spirituality with heart and body as well as with our minds.

You will meet Baron Sam (i.e. me) the Shadow/Poet/Filth-Monkey and through their poetry experience yet other, alternative expressions of gender and sexuality, adding to the witch's cauldron of multiplicitous ingredients which make up this Queer potion of multiplastic self-identity.

Finally, and also immediately because we have already met, there will be me, Seany Minstrel the Minstrel Self who is the performed 'Captain Self' – a term borrowed from Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel, *Orlando: A Biography* - the blending gestalt who is everything in one and multiplastic in form, and the controlling editor of this document. I will also be providing my own sections detailing how I came to (re)discover my own existence and how, perhaps, you could too.

However, even though I have come to regard writing as just as much a persona performance as getting up on stage and singing, it must still be acknowledged – inevitably, in the same way that each different performance persona must necessarily be 5'10" inches tall and have pierced ears – that behind each 'voice' is the person of myself Seán Fitton the 'unperformed' post-graduate student who proposed this PaR project and who has been working on his own self-understanding, through its methodology, from before the project even began.

Yet, this acknowledgement itself must lead to a wonderfully multiplastic paradoxical ambiguity in which performance and non-performance become entangled in the act of writing. The voice of Seán Fitton is the voice of all, but the voice of each is not the voice of another. Unless, of course, they slip!

As Slavoj Žižek (Big Think, 2015) once said, "even when we are just ourselves in private life, we always play being ourselves" and so, in that case, who are the 'ourselves' that we play?

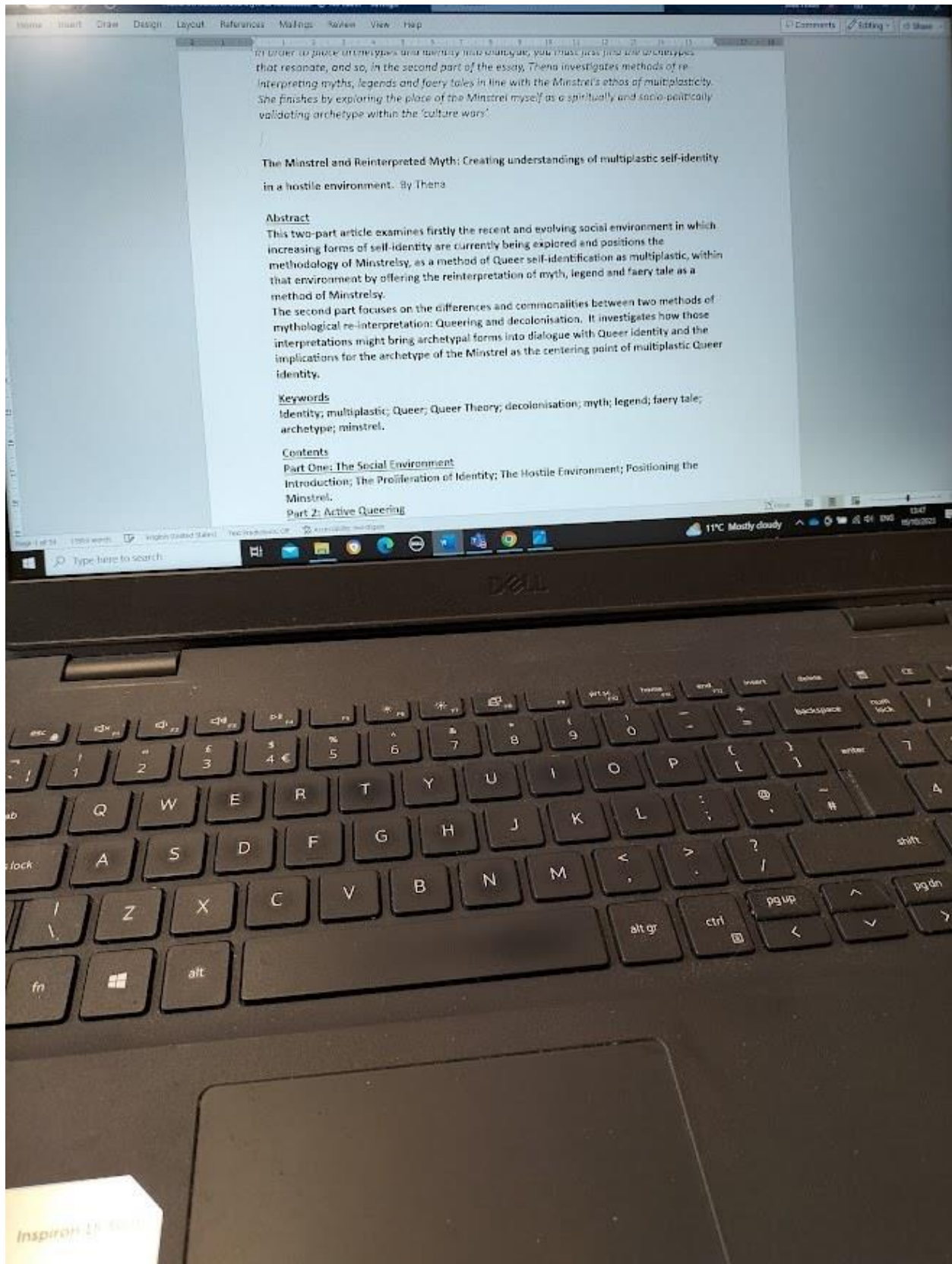
But!

This is only the foreword to a PhD thesis, and even a PhD thesis in Contemporary Performance should have at least *some* academic elements. In which case I hereby hand over the reins to Thena for a suitably scholarly introduction.

Reference:

Big Think (7 June 2015) *Slavoj Žižek on Synthetic Sex and 'Being Yourself'* [YouTube video] Available at: <https://youtu.be/7xYO-VMZUGo> (accessed 16/9/21)

Academic Introduction by Thena





Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance.

This thesis is based upon the findings from Seán's post-graduate practice-as-research project in which he developed autoethnographic and psycho-physical methodologies with which to explore connections between a multiplicitous sense of self-identity and the archetypal figures of myth, legend and faery tale ('faery' being a preferred spelling to distinguish traditional tales, which have 'evolved' and developed over long periods of retelling, from stories of a similar genre with specific authors, such as Angela Carter or Neil Gaiman) through the adaptation of those archetypes as performance personae. Over time, these findings have led to the discovery and adoption of the concept of the multiplastic 'Captain Self', and the Minstrel (via the practice of Minstrelsy) as the performance persona of that Captain Self.

Seán, therefore, uses this thesis to propose a re-envisioning of the practice of Minstrelsy. In the terminology of this thesis, the art of Minstrelsy may be visualised as a traditional form of storytelling entertainment, albeit with other forms of entertainment included, with its roots in ancient history and archetypal myths. There will be a study included, presented by Tim, of the Minstrel as both a real-world character (historically and geographically/culturally) and an archetypal form (mythological and in popular culture) as a section of this thesis.

The re-envisioning, then, re-contextualises Minstrelsy not just as a storytelling art form but also as a practical, playful and accessible method by which its practitioner(s), through the understanding and communication of a variety of myths, legends and/or faery tales may come to experience an understanding of self-identity.

Through performative methods that use archetypal forms found in ancient myth and legend, and, specifically, through the playing of the Minstrel figure - a 'queer' storyteller and mythmaker, one that

stands both within and apart from their own culture - Seán aims to define a special form of identity, the Minstrel Self.

This practical method includes the performance of archetypally based personae, which has come to include the Minstrel themselves as the archetypal form of multiplasticity via their embodiment of the archetypal figures involved in the stories they relate. Using this archetypal multiplasticity as a framework Seán suggests an understanding of self-identity that steps beyond the limited popular idea of the existence or otherwise of the 'true self' and deliberately foregrounds concepts of the natural plurality and fluidity of gender and sexuality in the human being.

This multiplastic 'Minstrel Self' as experienced through the performance of Minstrelsy, he argues, functions as a bridge between the archetypal and the ordinary, between the high and low of society, between times and cultures, and between the norms and differences of societal acceptance in gender, sexuality and (dis)ability. This attitude of multiplasticity stands as a playful celebration of Queerness as an archetypal human state, in direct contrast to the recent rise of anti-LGBTQ+, gender essentialist and 'gender-critical' attitudes expressed through popular media.

Moreover, for those whose spirituality is inclined towards the archetypal patterns found in myth, legend and faery tale, recognising the Minstrel within the human psyche helps to engender a sense of spiritual validation via its connection to ancient, mythological, ritualistic archetypal forms.

Persona Contributions #1: Tim the Excited Mythologer



***Seany Minstrel:** Tim is our mythologer, faery tale nerd and amateur historian who looks into the world of archetypes through myths, legends and popular media. He's the one who finds examples of the figures that we know exist but aren't sure where.*

Primary Essays

- **The Minstrel as a Bridge** ([.pdf 12,000 words](#))

- **Seany Minstrel:** *As well as being a super-complex performance persona, I am a Minstrel in the broadest sense of that word. Here our historian and mythology geek, Tim, takes a good, deep look at Minstrels from the past, from stories and in our present and future. Most importantly, he explains the core proposition of **Minstrel as Bridge**. That is to say, how the figure of the Minstrel can be a bridge between past and future, the worlds of archetypes and the mundane, and between genders and sexualities, as well as a bridge to self-understanding through understanding his (my!) multiplasticity.*

Secondary Essays

- **Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation** ([.pdf 7,500 words](#))
- **Seany Minstrel:** *In order to place archetypes and identity into dialogue, you must first find the archetypes that resonate, and so in this essay, our mythologer, Tim investigates methods of re-interpreting myths, legends and faery tales in line with the Minstrel's ethos of multiplasticity. He finishes by considering the place of the Minstrel myself as a spiritually and socio-politically validating archetype.*

Weblog Posts

- *A selection of Tim's early researches into archetypal figures :*
- [The Bit Where Tim Waffles On About Trickster Figures](#)
- [Tim Tells How Loki Gets Thor to Dress in Drag.](#)
- [Tim Tells Us About Lilith.](#)
- [The Dark Fool of Ireland: A Discussion](#)
- [Tim and the Minstrels](#)

Videos

- *A playlist of contributions from Tim concerning the Goddess Athena, the 'demon' Lilith and an Olympian musical competition.*
- [Tim's YouTube Playlist](#)

Persona Contributions #2: Thena the Academic





Seany Minstrel: *Thena is our academic, the brains of the team, if you will. It is her job to take our creative ramblings and turn them into cogent, coherent arguments suitable for an educated audience, and to find the academic back-up to demonstrate that we're not just self-indulgent attention seekers*

Primary Essays

- **The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)** ([.pdf 9,000 words](#))
- **Seany Minstrel:** *The Minstrel doesn't just come from one place. If he's multiplastic and a bridge between archetypes and humanity, then he's got to come from everywhere, all at once. I'm a syncretism! In this essay our academic, Thena, makes an examination of the multiple theories that form the foundations for the existence of the Minstrel and the syncretism of those theories*

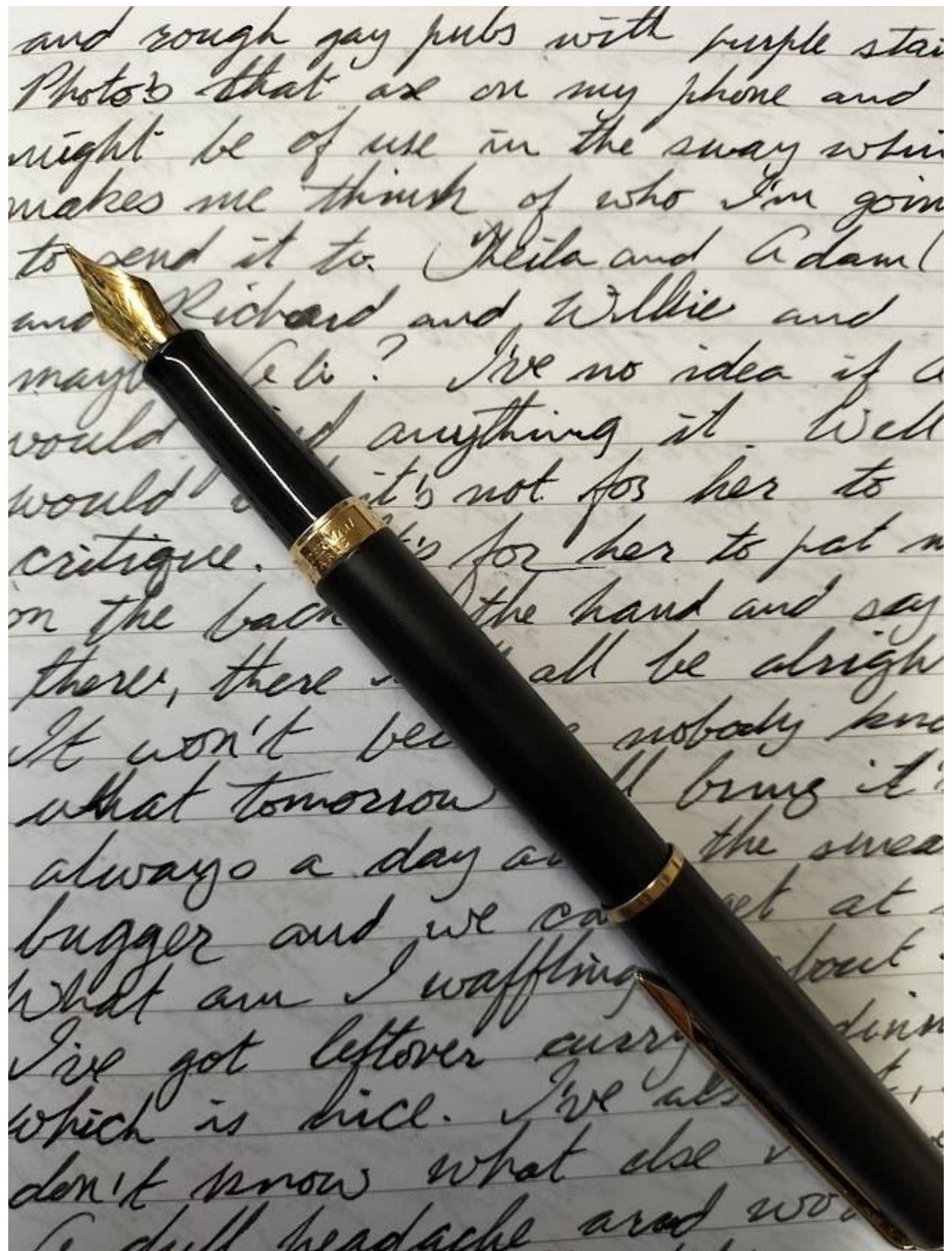
which underlies Minstrelsy as a practice. This is just part one, though. Part two looks more deeply at what persona can be, but for now she starts by working from the general to the specific. Seems like a good idea to me!

- **The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 2: Persona)** ([.pdf 6,000 words](#))
- **Seany Minstrel:** *I am a performance persona, but what on earth does that mean? What is it to be a persona, or an identity, or a self - and are they really all that different? In this second essay on the theoretical background of Minstrelsy and Queer archetypal performance persona, our academic, Thena, takes a deep dive into what 'persona' actually means. And, potentially more importantly, what it could mean for a multiplastic performing Minstrel and anyone else who wishes to take the Minstrel path to self-understanding*
- **The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment.** ([.pdf 3,500 words](#))
- **Seany Minstrel:** *Forms of self-identity, especially gender identity, have increased dramatically in recent years but, unfortunately, so has a backlash against the validity of those forms to the extent that the term 'culture war' has become a popular description. In this short essay our academic colleague, Thena, makes an examination of the current social situation regarding identity issues around gender and sexuality and then considers the position of Minstrelsy as a way of dealing with those issues, through its understanding of archetypes. In order to place archetypes and identity into dialogue, you must first find the archetypes that resonate, and so, a following essay by Tim is referenced in the text which investigates methods of re-interpreting myths, legends and faery tales in line with the Minstrel's ethos of multiplasticity. Thena finishes by exploring the place of the Minstrel myself as a spiritually and socio-politically validating archetype within the 'culture wars'.*

Videos

- A short playlist of videos featuring Thena, including Seán's first experiments in embodying Thena as a solid figure.
- [Thena's YouTube Playlist](#)

Persona Contributions #3: Guru Tovski



and rough gay pubs with purple stair
Photos that are on my phone and
might be of use in the sway which
makes me think of who I'm going
to send it to. Sheila and Adam
and Richard and Willie and
maybe Leo? I've no idea if I
would send anything it. Well
wouldn't it be not for her to
critique. It's for her to pat me
on the back of the hand and say
there, there. It'll all be alright
It won't be because nobody knows
what tomorrow will bring it.
always a day and the sweet
bigger and we can get at
What am I waffling about.
I've got leftover curry and drink
which is nice. I've also
don't know what else
A dull headache and wood



Seany Minstrel: *Guru Tovski is a creature of mysticism and spirituality rather than intellect. His is the world of archetype, non-linearity and associative logic - the world of focussed imagination which crosses into the magickal. He is the exponent and teacher of Archetypal Movement Exploration and openness to Encouraged Serendipity, which lead to understandings beyond the rational and into the heart and spirit, but which can then be explored by the more rationally-inclined personae.*

The same can be said of the Guru's writings which are free-flowing meditations, attempting to enter the world of the mythopoeic, surreal and irrational by means of words rather than active imagination, in order to uncover revelations understandable tacitly and explorable rationally.

His words don't always make sense on the level of conscious thought (and they're not always in English), and the reader is asked not to analyse them but to read them in the spirit in which they were written - to

absorb the profound, laugh at the ridiculous and say "Errrrr, what?" at the nonsensical. As that great sage, Willy Wonka once said, "A little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men"

What follows is a selection of links to short essays, weblog posts, aphorisms and video experiments in Archetypal Movement Explanation. I hope you enjoy them. In the words of the Guru himself, "If one makes one's whole life theatre, when do you rehearse?"

No, I didn't understand that either. It must be profound.

Essays

- A Meditation on Music ([.pdf 1,000 words](#))
- A Meditation on Stories ([.pdf 1,000 words](#))
- A Meditation on Minstrelsy ([.pdf 1,000 words](#))
- A Meditation on the Colour Green ([.pdf 750 words](#))

Other Writings

- Aphorisms in Polari ([.pdf file](#))
- Aphorisms ([.pdf file](#))

Videos

- A playlist of four videos, three of which demonstrate traditional physical methods used to access spiritual experience (Yoga, Chi Kung and Tai Chi) and one Archetypal Movement Exploration investigating the archetype of the Holy Fool via the Payakyamu, the sacred clown of the Hopi people
- [Tovski's YouTube Playlist](#)

Workshop

- **Seany Minstrel:** *Guru Tovski, Seán Fitton (purely as writer) and I wrote a workshop together about finding self-identity via archetypal connection and Minstrelsy. Sounds cool? We thought so. So far it exists only in theory, but we're excited to try it at some point. It's in two halves, with Tovski taking the first, more theoretical half, and me turning up after lunch for the practical Minstrelly stuff. For the mythologers among you, it's based around the character, Blodeuedd from the Welsh tale, Math ap Mathonwy.*
- Minstrelsy Workshop ([.pdf 1,500 words](#))

Persona Contributions #4: Baron Sam





Seany Minstrel: *Baron Sam is our poet, shadow, filth monkey and spirit of chaos. Their province is sexuality and deviance from the social 'norm'. Consequently, they rarely speak except in the form of poetry (disrespectful limericks are a speciality), rather camp songs and suggestive remarks.*

Poetry

- A selection of Sam's poems on the weblog:
- [An Introduction](#)
- [The Queers Dance While the Academics Talk](#)
- [The Ballad Cycle of Sally and Johnny](#)

- [The Beheading Limerick](#)
- [Baron Sam's Rap](#)
- [Sam's Response to Thomas the Rhymer](#)

Videos

- A playlist of Sam's rare solo video appearances
- [Baron Sam's YouTube Playlist](#)

Persona Contributions #5: Seany Minstrel





Finally! It's my section. I tend to be more of a practical performer than a writer - I belong on a stage, darling! - but I can be persuaded to write, too. Here's a small collection of works that I have either written or performed in, sometimes in spirit rather than actuality. But you'll be able to read about that in the second essay. Enjoy!

Secondary Essays

- **How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide.** ([.pdf 8,000 words](#))
- **Seany Minstrel:** *It's my turn now! I'm not just a pretty face, I'm a finding! I am the result of quite a lot of work and practical techniques. What you're about to read below takes you through those techniques to explain how they work and how they inter-relate and influence each other. Maybe you could try a few of them yourself.*
- **The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel** ([.pdf 12,000 words](#))
- **Seán Fitton:** *The following is a chronological, autoethnographic study of the development of **the finding** of this thesis - the performance persona, Seany Minstrel and the concept of the Minstrel Self. This is expressed as a (re)discovery through the practical creation and presentation of various public performances, adapting Plato's idea of learning as anamnesis to conceptualise self-realisation as form of remembering. The essay is written by Seany Minstrel*

Videos

- **Performances:** A playlist of video recordings of a variety of shows (both live and made for video) mentioned in the essay, The (re)Evolution of the Minstrel
- [YouTube playlist - Performances of whole shows.](#)
- **Poetry:** A YouTube playlist of the video series, [Poems from the Minstrel's Kitchen](#). Poems specifically concerning identity include: #2 Mushrooms; #5 Polari; #7 Three; #10 My Voices; #17 The Transgender Agenda; #20 The Amazon at the Back.

Academic Conclusion: by Thena



Conclusion

by Thena

As is appropriate in relation to the concept of Queer self-identity as multiplastic, the philosophy and methodology proposed here, to realise such self-identity, has been comprised of a complex of multiple, entangled and inter-related elements.

Our purpose, as performance personae and written 'voices' was to break down the structure of that philosophy and methodology into those separate elements which could be examined and understood individually, and then to re-entangle them into a rebuilt and more comprehensible form. Alongside that dis-entanglement, we were also developed to allow our originator, Seán Fitton to effectively 'dismantle' himself in order to investigate his own self-understanding as Queer-self-identified performer and finally, although he did not know it at the beginning of this project, to 'rebuild' himself as/through the official outcomes of the thesis - the multiplastic performance persona, Seany Minstrel and the philosophical notion of the Minstrel Self. All this was achieved partly through the written word as presented in this thesis, and also partly through the variety of performances which are referenced in the text.

Thus, each of the four original performance personae – Tim the Excited Mythologer, Baron Sam, Guru Tovski, and myself, Thena the Academic – could be said to have had a 'job', or a specialisation which it was our purpose to clarify (where appropriate) and present.

My own task was to act as the academic voice with which to analyse a wide variety of theoretical positions, and provide suggestions towards an understanding of multiplastic self-identity as a syncretic version of Woolf's 'captain self', as examined in the first of my essays, *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 1: General*. This led to an early finding, the conceptualisation of the Minstrel Self as a gestalt persona and the performed version of the Captain Self, which I explored, along with the concept of persona in general, in the second essay *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 2: Persona)*. I also made the proposal that an archetypal understanding and a knowledge of the Minstrel Self as multiplastic self-identity could be of importance in the modern world, which I considered in my third essay, *The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment*.

Tim's 'job' was to find the points with which modern identity could connect to archetypal forms and how the art of a modern performer could be placed in dialogue with the idea of an old-fashioned wandering minstrel - how the Minstrel as both an archetype and a real-world figure is universal and to explore the core principle of how Minstrelsy serves as a bridge connecting the past with the modern, and archetypal with the day-to-day, and crosses the barriers of gender, sexuality and identity. He has done these in some depth in his essays, *The Minstrel as a Bridge*, and *Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation*, which places the multiplastic Minstrel Self squarely at the heart of modern Queer identity.

Guru Tovski, perhaps unexpectedly, has proven to be a most effective artistic researcher in our little band. Tovski's use of sub/unconscious and psycho-spiritual-somatic methods that are normally unavailable to the intellectual researcher has led to great insights in the practice of Minstrelsy. Most important has been the welcoming of emergent concepts - examples being the name, Endymion, the discovery of the concept of the Captain Self, and the nature of Thomas the Rhymer as a potentially 'fey' creature - via the practice of encouraged serendipity, which have helped to build the personae, the

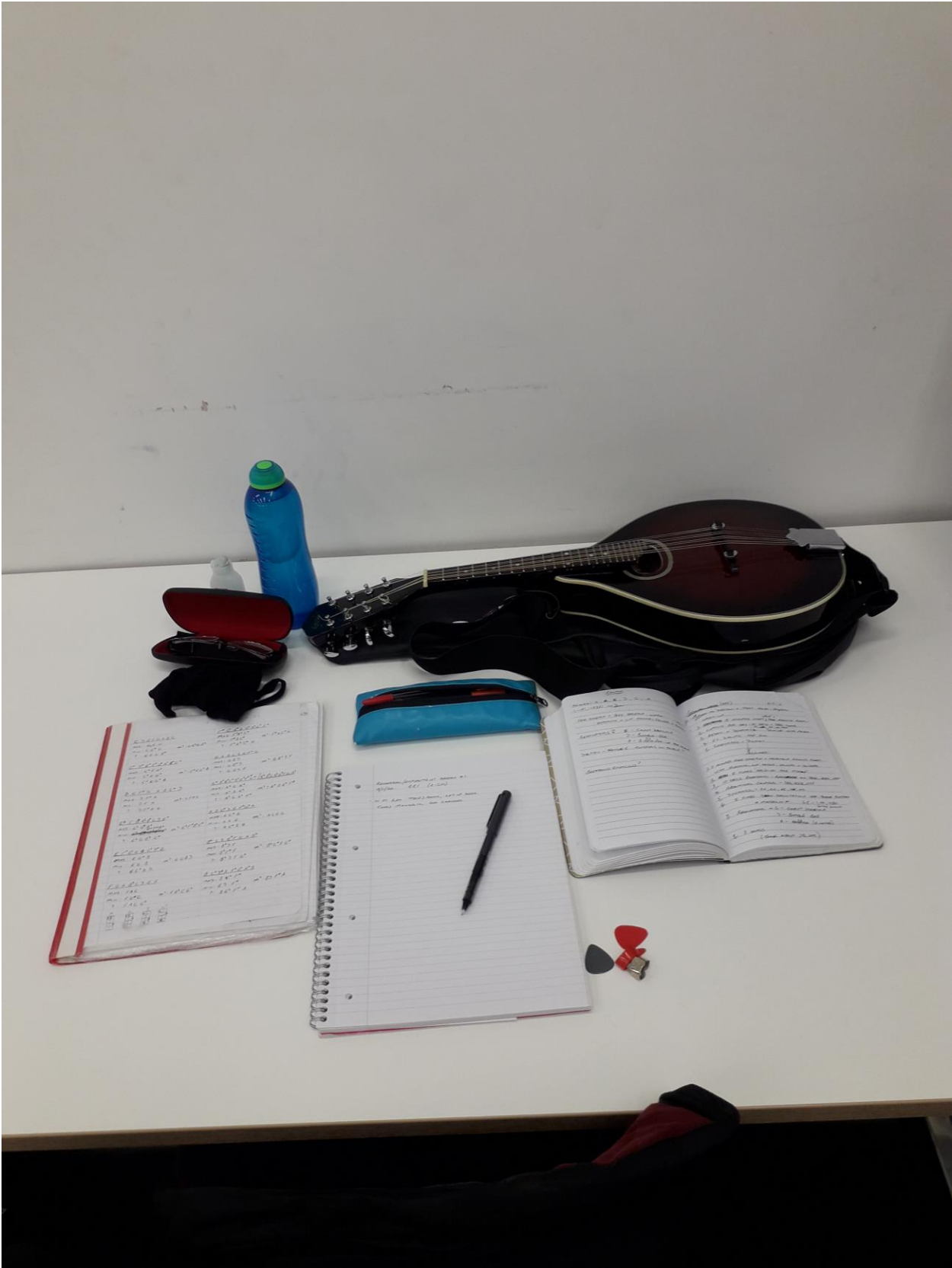
conceptualisations and the performances themselves. While Tovski may not always be comprehensible on an intellectual level, his tacit understanding of the spiritual, and use of methods to explore that, has pushed the project in fascinating, productive and sometimes unexpected directions.

It is also extremely important in the arts, and in self-exploration, not to take oneself too seriously. Baron Sam has seen to that. Sam is, indeed, our dark side and something that would normally be hidden, but to hide an aspect of oneself would be to leave self-exploration incomplete. Therefore Sam has acted as the 'joker' in our 'pack', the element of chaos which could upset the whole process but which, at the same time, can reveal insights and ideas that had become lost in the act of serious investigation. The possibility of Thomas the Rhymer's relationship with the Queen of Elfland (and, by extension, the land of Faery) being based on BDSM is an example of those insights. Sam's best work has primarily been in live performance, and the reader is advised to see those which have been recorded and referenced in Seany Minstrel's section of the thesis.

Appropriately, the final performance persona and contributor is also the principle finding of the entire PhD project - Seany, the Minstrel himself. In a similar manner to Jung's concept of individuation, Seany Minstrel is a gestalt of all of us personae. But he is also so much more. In the same way that Virginia Woolf's oft' quoted Captain Self is "compact of all the selves we have it in us to be", the Minstrel Self could be said to be "compact of all the selves we have it in us to perform". Seany examines this idea both practically and autoethnographically through his (and Seán's) own history in two essays - *How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide*, and *The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel*.

The final word, however, should go to the originator of this project and the Captain Self, Seán Fitton who will take over in the next, effectively final, section of this thesis.

A Final Word: by Seán Fitton





Final Word

by Seán Fitton

I am very much of the opinion that research should not necessarily have to provide answers. Sometimes it should help us - encourage us, in fact - to formulate better questions. That is, at the end of this thesis and its attendant performance, something that I hope I have done.

However, as I'm sure the reader suspects, there has been more to this work than just a theoretical artistic research project. It has been very much a search for self-understanding and identity that has become an integral part of an ongoing, ever-evolving and lifelong process.

Working autoethnographically has led, to some extent, to a certain insularity. Not only am I the lab-coated researcher, I'm the white mouse in the maze, too, and perhaps even also the maze itself, and the bit of cheese at the end.

I have turned my gaze outwards, to the greater world, to other performers and styles of performance, to involvement in the academic community and in various Queer communities, and found that the Venn diagram of those three contains a huge overlap. In this I have been skillfully aided by my supervisors, Dr R Talbot and Dr I Wilkie, who have somehow, remarkably, managed to stop me from wandering off-track completely, and saved me from falling down several metaphorical rabbit holes.

Yet, I still have to accept and admit the slight possibility that the Captain Self and the Minstrel Self, multiplasticity, and Minstrelsy as a Bridge (as well as a creative research practice) are concepts that apply only to myself.

But I don't think so.

I would, quite strongly, contend that there are plenty of people out there like me. People whose sense of spirituality has led them to the search for the 'true self', but whose complex, fluid relationships with their gender and sexuality, and their seeming inability to fit in with 'normal' society, has, over many years, lead them to question whether such a thing as a 'true self' really exists. And, if it does, do they even have one at all?

Or perhaps several? Or even something fluid, changing.

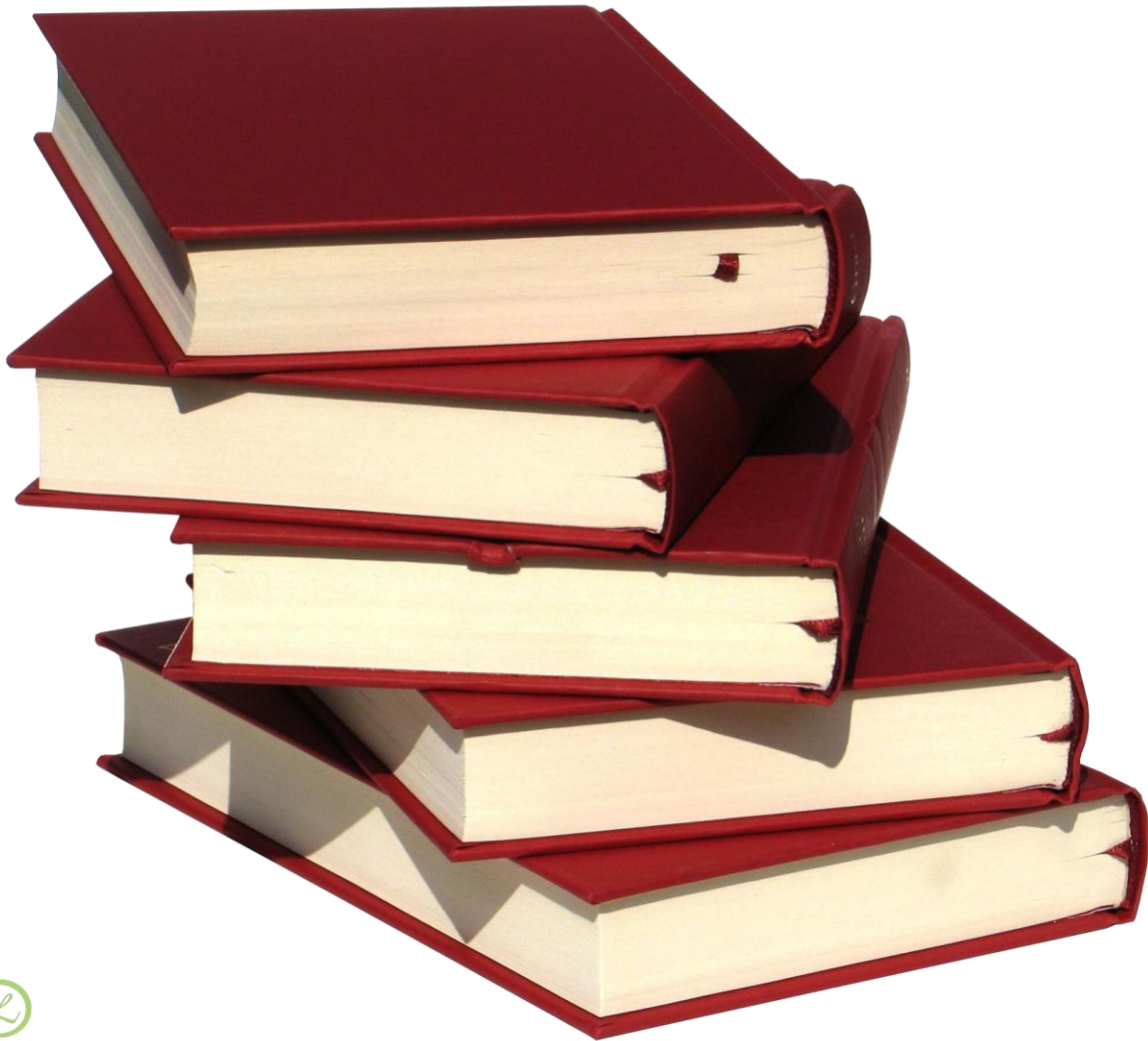
Multiplastic.

I believe that I have found an answer. Not necessarily *the* answer, but certainly *an* answer.

I believe that I have both discovered and demonstrated that a valid, spiritual sense of self-identity as a multiplastic Queer-identified person can be discovered, through a connection to archetypal forms experienced through performance personae.

I also believe that I have at least *suggested* a feasible way to do that, one that can be offered out, taught and tested. One that can be interrogated, expanded upon, and improved upon by other researchers and, I hope, one that will encourage us to formulate some better questions.

Appendices



Glossary

GLOSSARY

Glossary of Technical Terms used in the Text

Anima/Animus: The contrasexual *Self* (qv. *Archetype (Jungian), Daimon, Soul*). An aspect of the psyche in *Jungian Psychology* which is considered to be of opposing gender to the individual in question. Thus a man would have an *Anima* and a woman an *Animus*.

Archetype: A complex term with multiple meanings. For the sake of simplicity, these may be divided into three categories: *Jungian*, *Mythological* and *Phenomenal*. However, the boundaries between these categories are not hard. They merge and overlap and should therefore be considered with an attitude of “both-and” rather than “either-or”.

- **Archetype (Jungian):** The division of the human psyche into 4 sections: *Self*, *Shadow*, *Anima/Animus* and *Persona*, the integration of which is known as *Individuation* and is the ultimate aim of Jungian Psychology.
- **Archetype (Mythological):** The universal figures and patterns which appear in Mythological stories worldwide. Such would include Tricksters, Witches and Heroes, and motifs such as a shape-changing chase or a death and resurrection. Jung was also known to use this definition as well as his own, often indiscriminately.
- **Archetype (Phenomenal):** In Archetypal Psychology (and in my own argument) an archetype is not considered to exist purely as a psychic conceptualisation (Jungian) or a poetic metaphor (Jungian/Mythological) but also to have real-world manifestations. James Hillman explains:
- “*Archetypes are the primary forms that govern the psyche. But they cannot be contained only by the psyche, since they manifest as well in physical, social, linguistic, aesthetic and spiritual modes*” (2013:13)

Archetypal Movement Exploration: A partly *somatic*, or psycho-physical, method of archetypal engagement using visualization and bodily movement to temporarily identify with, and therefore form a somatic understanding of, a chosen archetypal figure.

Archetypal Patterns: (qv: Archetype (Mythological))

Archetypal Psychology: A post-Jungian school of psychology founded in the 1970s by James Hillman (1926-2011). Archetypal Psychology is seen by its practitioners as more than a school of psychology. It is a philosophy which attempts to reach from “recognizing myths in life to the recognition of life as myth” (2013:74) and it presents:

- “[...] *the polytheistic structure of a postmodern consciousness. It is a style of thinking, a fashion of mind, a revisionist engagement on many fronts: therapy, education, literary criticism, medicine, philosophy and the material world.*” (2013:60).

Autoethnography: Academic analysis through the lived experience of the author, prioritising

- “*the author’s insights, experiences, and reflections [auto-] to identify, and sometimes challenge, cultural expectations, beliefs, and practices [-ethno-] [and utilizing] the structure and assemblage of symbols into coherent fragments (words, sentences) in a particular language*” [-graphy]” (Adams & Hermann, 2023)

Captain Self: A conceptualisation of the personal identity as multiplicitous, taken from *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) by Virginia Woolf.

- “*This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all.*” (p221)

Collective Unconscious: The myth-creating level of mind which, according to *Jungian Psychology*, is the realm of *archetypes*. This is considered a universal aspect of the human psyche and evidenced by the shared cross-cultural appearance of archetypal figures and patterns in *Myth (Legend and Faery Tale)* such as Tricksters, Witches and Minstrels, and motifs including world creation, apocalypse and battles between gods and older beings.

Contrasexual Self: (*qv. Anima*)

Daimon: Originally an ancient Greek word for a guiding spirit, *Daimon* is positioned by Hillman as the pre-existent 'you' which necessitates one's existence and creates "the particularity you feel to be you" (1996:6) and which I reposition in combination with *Anima/Animus* as the basis for a concept of *Soul*.

Decolonisation: The removal of a colonizing force or culture from a land or culture. This can be extended to historical and literary subjects and, in the case of this thesis, mythological material.

Encouraged Serendipity: Practices, such as *freewriting* and *Archetypal Movement Exploration*, and attitude of mind which encourage and welcome accidental and emergent discoveries, and might then lead to further exploration.

Fae: The Faery Folk of *Faery Tales*. The magical people who dress in green and yellow, and kidnap human minstrels. As an adjective, *Fae* can mean destined or doomed in some way, and is conflated with *Fey*, meaning strange or unworldly and implying gender or sexual variance.

Faery Tale: The spelling used to distinguish between traditional stories which can be said to have 'evolved' within a culture, and similar stories, *Fairy Tales*, written by a specific author.

Freewriting: A method of subconscious engagement through writing for an extended period without stopping or self-censoring. *Freewriting* about an archetype often brings insights into one's psychological relationship with that archetype

Individuation: (*qv. Archetype (Jungian)*)

Jungian Psychology: A school of analytical psychology founded around 1912 by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), which originated the terms, *Archetype* and *Collective Unconscious*.

Minstrel Self: The performance *Persona* of the *Captain Self*. The gesalt archetype of Queer multiplasticity.

Myth (Legend and Faery Tale): The traditional stories of a culture. To save space in the text, the term, *Myth*, is used as a collective noun for myths, legends and *Faery Tales*, since definitions of all three are widely variable and vague, and overlap considerably.

Mythopoeic: Literally, 'myth-making'. A term used in Jungian and Archetypal Psychology to designate the level of mind and openness that allows us to connect imaginatively with *Myth*.

Multiplastic: A term coined for the thesis which is intended to convey the idea of being of a single essence (*qv. Diamon*) which is capable of taking many shapes

Persona (performance): An aspect of oneself which one projects when performing on a stage of some kind.

Persona (psychology): The part of the psyche (*Archetype*) in *Jungian Psychology* which is seen as a metaphorical mask through which one interacts with others.

Queer Theory: A multi-valent form of academic analysis which is intended to destabilise normative assumptions, particularly in matters of gender and sexuality.

Self: a complex term which, for the purpose of simplicity can be reduced to how one views oneself. A term used as one of the four *archetypes* in *Jungian Psychology*.

Shadow: The dark or hidden *Self*, which comprises the parts of the psyche an individual may not wish to acknowledge. One of the four *archetypes* of *Jungian Psychology*.

Second Order Observation: Self-observation as that which is observed, or seeing oneself indirectly as being seen. The choices made in the creation of a social media profile, for example, in order to present an image that one sees as oneself.

Somatic: Literally 'of the body'. Tacit knowledge (such as how to play a musical instrument) acquired physically and experientially rather than intellectually. *Archetypal Movement Exploration* can be considered a somatic exercise.

Soul: An enormously complex and vague term under normal circumstances. Here Soul is posited as a blending of Jung's *Anima/Animus* with Hillman's *Daimon* to suggest something similar to a pre-existent 'controlling program' which admits (or not) one's self-identities.

Early Writings



Seán Fitton: Presented here is a selection of links to various documents which, while not part of the actual thesis, have formed a great deal of the research 'soil' from which the thesis has grown. Many of these pieces should be considered historical, inasmuch as they show work in development before any clear conclusions had been reached, or they consider vague ideas which had not yet coalesced into more solid shapes.

Early Essays

- Practice Essay: Body, Somatic, Embodied ([.pdf 2,500 words](#))
- The Endymion Project Contextualised ([.pdf 4,000 words](#))
- Transitioning to Video ([.pdf 6,000 words](#))
- Development of the Show, *Thomas the Rhymer* ([.pdf 5,000 words](#))

The Liam Byrne Award

- Proposal Letter ([.pdf 500 words](#))
- Acceptance Letter ([.pdf 500 words](#))
- Update Letter ([.pdf 400 words](#))

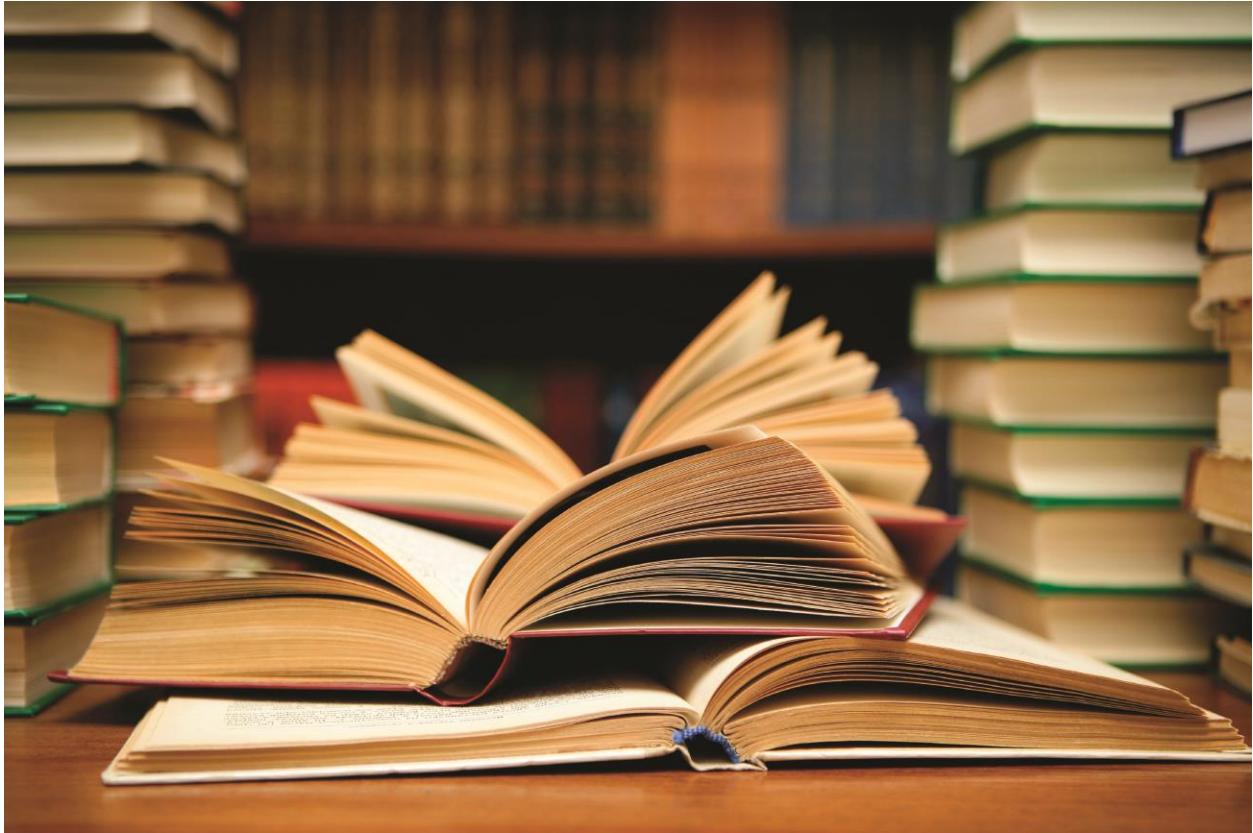
Presentations

- Internal Evaluation 2022 Slides ([.pptx](#))
- Internal Evaluation 2022 Text ([.pdf 1,000 words](#))
- Huddersfield PGR Conference 2023 Proposal ([.pdf 500 words](#))
- **Salford Post-Graduate Annual Research Conference 2022 (as follows):**
- SPARC 2022 Presentation Abstract ([.pdf 150 words](#))
- SPARC 2022 Presentation Slides ([.pptx](#))
- SPARC 2022 Presentation Text ([.pdf 650 words](#))
- SPARC 2022 Three Minute Thesis Abstract ([.pdf 150 words](#))
- SPARC 2022 Three Minute Thesis Image ([.pptx](#))
- SPARC 2022 Three Minute Thesis Text ([.pdf 400 words](#))

Training

- In-House Training ([.pdf 500 words](#))
- External and Independent Training ([.pdf 500 words](#))

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Seany Minstrel: As well as being a super-complex performance persona, I am a Minstrel in the broadest sense of that word. Here our historian and mythology geek, Tim, takes a good, deep look at Minstrels from the past, from stories and in our present and future. He even shows us how the figure of the Minstrel can be a bridge to self-understanding through understanding his (my!) multiplasticity.

The Minstrel as a Bridge

by Tim the Excited Mythologer

Abstract:

This essay focuses on the archetypal figure of the Minstrel through history, mythology and popular culture, and examines how this figure might function as a bridge between archetypal forms and modern queer identity through his embodiment of other forms via song and story.

Keywords:

Archetype; queer; minstrel; bard; troubadour; fluidity; multiplicity; multiplasticity; persona; bridging

Contents:

Introduction; The Minstrel as Archetype; Minstrels in History; Minstrels in Myth, Legend and Faery Tale; Minstrels in Popular Culture; Bridging; The Minstrel as Performance Persona; Concluding

1. Introduction

1.1 Archetype

Thena has written about archetypal¹ figures, like Fools, Witches and Heroes, and how ‘placing them in dialogue’ with modern concepts of identity helps us understand multiplastic identity from a spiritual point of view². In this essay, I make a thorough examination of one particular archetype, The Minstrel. It’s not always easy to define exactly what a Minstrel is because attitudes change over time, as will be evident in the text, but for the sake of brevity I’m going to use ‘Minstrel’ to refer to anyone who practices Minstrelsy, that is to say, music, poetry and storytelling for the purposes of both entertainment and the sharing of information. This is similar to Jon Davison’s consideration that the clown doesn’t exist, but only the activity of clowning:

Dominant discourse on clowning holds that clowns are personal, assuming we can understand humans as individuals. Research into clowning emerging from marginalised identities, however, sees clowns as defined by cultural contexts and identities which depend on ethnicity, gender, social class, disability, etc (Davison, 2024).

To add my persona-I voice, I show, step-by-step, how The Minstrel can be seen as a metaphorical ‘bridge’ on which archetypal forms and personal identities can meet, over the ‘river’ that separates myth,

¹ See Glossary for a definition of *Archetype*

² *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*.

legend and faery tale from real life, because the Minstrel (and Minstrelsy as what a Minstrel does) is multiplastic in his storytelling methods and his embodiment of other archetypes. Firstly, I describe how the Minstrel is a 'subset' of the Fool archetype, a 'bridge between' Clown and Trickster, multiplastic and partaking of both. This might benefit from a diagram, but I'll try explaining it in words!

1.2 History

After that I search through history to find examples of Minstrels in the western cultures of our past. I use a wide definition of 'Minstrel' at first, justified by his multiplasticity, but I narrow it down as we go. Starting in prehistory I consider shamans, and the musicians and poets of Ancient Greece and mediaeval Europe, examining their relationship with society at large, and eventually focus on what we think of nowadays as a Travelling or Wandering Minstrel, the characters appearing in popular culture with bright clothes, musical talent and witty repartee, and were known in various times and places as *bards*, *troubadours*, or *gleemen*.

1.3 Myths

Following comes my favourite part where I write about archetypal Minstrels of myths, legends and faery tales, and then in the stories,

films, and other entertainment media of popular culture. He pops up a surprising amount if you know where to look.

1.4 Bridging

Next, I discuss 'bridging', not just as what a Minstrel does but also what a Minstrel *is* in the context of being an archetypal form who crosses not just boundaries of time/culture or ancient/modern, but also the boundaries of genders and sexualities, Queering identity into multiplasticity. I include some examples of real Minstrels who exist, or existed until recently, in various world cultures as examples of how 'bridging' can work in real life.

1.5 Performance Persona

Finally I explore the Minstrel as a performance persona. I show how *being* the Minstrel oneself, by relating 'Queered' or 'decolonised' stories of ancient myth, legend and faery tale, can lead to greater understanding of self-identity, connected to archetype and as a Queer, multiplastic concept.

2. The Minstrel as Archetype

Thena gives us a thorough examination of what an archetype is³, so a summing up will be enough here. We can see archetypal forms, either

³ *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*. Section: 4. Psychology

in the shape of particular figures or sets of events, as universal elements of a story which transcend culture. They are, “The primary, and irreducible, language of [...] a metaphorical discourse of myths. These can therefore be understood as the most fundamental patterns of human existence” (Hillman 2013:14). I should mention that I’ve used masculine pronouns to talk about the Minstrel, because the vast majority of Minstrels in myths, legends, faery tales and popular culture are men – ‘he/him’ and so on – and I’m going to mostly carry on doing so, simply because it’s easier and more comprehensible than any alternatives I’ve found. However, and we’ll see how this works as we go through the article, the gender identity of the archetypal Minstrel is rather more complicated than it first appears. So I’m going to ask you, dear reader, to bear with me and keep in mind that the convenient ‘he’ may often also contain at the same time the Queer and multiplastic ‘she’, ‘they’, ‘it’, and possibly some other pronouns that have yet to be invented.

2.1 Universality

The first question we need to ask ourselves, then, is if we *can* see the Minstrel and Minstrelsy as a universal and fundamental pattern of human existence? I believe we can, because we already do. The job of a Minstrel is entertainment. As John Southworth (1989) describes it:

The romantic image of a male figure in colourful costume, standing beneath the battlements of a towering castle as he strums on his lute is deeply entrenched in the popular imagination. He sings ballads, makes

jokes and [...] is fiercely loyal to his liege-lord whom he will follow, if necessary, to the ends of the earth (p1).

Such a figure (one who sings, tells stories and jokes, plays music) and such entertainments seem to have a completely cross-cultural appeal. The creation and consumption of entertainment is, as far I am able to tell, a truly universal human attribute applicable to every human culture presently and throughout history. The methods and styles of that entertainment may vary in their finer details, but they come in a remarkably consistent array of forms including storytelling, music, drama and dance.

2.2 Clowns and Tricksters

Equally universal are the Clowns and Tricksters who appear in myths, legends and faery tales, light and dark aspects of the Sacred Fool archetype - and the Fool can be thought of as the most important of all the archetypes because, as Jung considered, "The highest truth is one and the same with the absurd" (Jung, 2009:161). The Clown is a figure "without any ego holding them together or uniting them. In this way, he presents us with an image of the self - in Jung's terms, that primordial, unconscious wholeness that includes all aspects of life" (Ulanov, 1987:189). The Trickster, the Clown's shadow, is all about his ego: "tricksters are teachers of authority who nonetheless teach not through pious, elevated language but through lewdness and humour" (Doty, 1995:30). A vital aspect of clowning is the need for

an audience to fulfil the clown's primary function of creating laughter, because "Clowns love their audience and will go to any length to keep that audience laughing" (Wright, 2006,183). A similar thing applies to the Minstrel who, though still a Minstrel when practising his instrument or learning songs and stories, can only fulfil the purpose of traditional Minstrelsy by entertaining an audience with those stories and songs. Equally, the Trickster needs an audience of at least one. The Clown teaches his lessons through his own weakness and silliness while the Trickster plays tricks, often ones that backfire, on people in order to push his stories forward. The Minstrel bridges the two because, although he may use all sorts of tricks and manipulation to boost his own position, like the Clown he still needs to be "loved by his audiences, or if he is disliked, he continues to bring people close to him to watch his show, to stand around fascinated even when they feel repelled" (Ulanov, 1987:7).

2.3 Queerness

Importantly, both of these aspects can be seen as Queer, or examples of sexual and gender variance. Ulanov tells us that the archetypal Clown "makes available concrete ways in which a release from stereotyped sexual identities can lead in turn to the largest of sexual freedoms" (ibid:23). Meanwhile, the Trickster archetype "is polyvalence and multiplicity" (Doty, 1995:29) and "one who bridges oppositions between day and night, female and male, and public and

private” (ibid:30). So, we can see here that the Minstrel, as an archetypal form, blends and bridges the Clown and the Trickster, and this can be seen as symbolised by his wearing of the *motley*.

Admittedly, the imagery owes a lot more to traditional lore than historical reality, as Southworth says:

The traditional motley of the medieval fool (more French than English in use) makes its first appearance in the patch-work jacket (*centunculus*) worn by the mimes, and in the eared hoods of the *derisores* and *scurrae* of imperial Rome (1989:12).

However, this image still exists in the popular imaginings of courtly fools and entertainers of the mediaeval period. I will examine the use of clothing colours properly later, but for now it might be useful to note how the traditional bi-coloured motley, often split down the middle so that one leg and one side of the torso contrast with the other, can be seen as a symbol of the Minstrel’s dual nature – both Clown and Trickster in one.

2.4 Multiplasticity

A further point is that the Minstrel, traditionally and historically, is a multiplastic creature – like the Trickster, he is “polyvalence and multiplicity”. Not only must he be able to sing and play a musical instrument, he must also be able to remember a wide variety of songs, stories and poems and adapt them to his audience.

Though each performer would have had his or her special skills, the instrumentalists among them would as readily have lent a hand or leg

with an acrobatic turn, or filled a part in a sketch, as acrobats and actors doubled in wind or brass (ibid:14).

Equally, he must have 'people-skills' in not only dealing with an audience but in his ability to find work as an entertainer.

Historically, at least as far as the English Court is concerned, Minstrels were not purely specialists in entertainment, and did not become so until the time of Henry VIII. They were certainly expected to be multi-talented entertainers, but when not doing that they usually worked as minor court officials and servants and were, therefore, multiplastic in their multi-role abilities, like a 'triple-threat' musical theatre performer who works during the day on a doctor's reception, a building site, or a telephone sales line:

Histrionic ability is but one more of a bundle of skills that minstrels might possess in varying combination. (Indeed, the gradual emergence of specialized actors in the Tudor period will be seen to correspond exactly with the decline of the minstrels. Take away any one of the minstrel's skills and you diminish what makes him uniquely a minstrel) (ibid:16).

3. Minstrels in History

As with the theories which abound about the origin of theatre⁴ and many other forms of entertainment right up to today's pop-music megastars,

⁴ For example, ritual identification with a mythological character eventually evolving into what we now consider 'acting'.

the Minstrelsy of ancient history could, arguably, be traced right back to prehistoric shamanisms:

It may be a long way from the shamans of the ancient past to the pop idols of today, but between them there stretches an unbroken line of descent. The 'magic' of showbusiness is *real* magic (Taylor, 1985:13).

Just like the shaman⁵ would travel into the magical and mysterious 'Otherworld' (Celtic), 'Underworld' (Greek) or 'Dreaming' (Australian Aboriginal) and bring back stories, songs, answers to questions and healing advice from the spirits, so the historical Minstrel would 'travel' into his own 'mysterious otherworld' of memory, lore and divine inspiration - his repertoire and skills as an entertainer - and bring back songs, music and stories with which to entertain, inform and (perhaps even) spiritually heal his audience:

In a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre and poetry, is explanation and explication of life itself [...] what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of sociocultural life, is drawn forth (Turner, 1982:13).

3.1 Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece is known to have had professional solo musician-poets, known as *Kitharodes* or *Kitharists* because they would generally accompany themselves on a type of lyre called a *Kithara* (Κιθάρα).

⁵ Or his cultural equivalent. 'Shaman' is technically a word which refers to the priesthood of the Tungusk people of Siberia.

Kitharodes were considered carriers of divine inspiration and wisdom, and their performances would usually include singing hymns, reciting poetry and telling stories. The most famous Kitharodes still known today include Arion, Terpander and Sappho.

3.2 Arion, Terpander, Sappho

Arion is a semi-legendary figure who is said to have come from the island of Lesbos and to have invented a form of verse called the *Dithyramb* which was used in chants in honour of Dionysos. Even less knowledge survives about Terpander, in fact we know almost nothing about him except his name and his reputation for virtuosity on the Kithara. However, we do have proof of the existence, and even some fragmentary remains of the actual poetry, of our third Kitharode and, incidentally, third native of Lesbos, Sappho. Sappho lived sometime around 600 BCE and is most famously known to the modern world for her love poetry in praise of women, and the derived terms *Sapphic* and *Lesbian* have been used to mean much the same thing since the 19th century. Interestingly for us, and despite my explanation of using ‘he/him’ pronouns for the Minstrels I’m describing, the ‘polyvalence and multiplicity’ of Minstrelsy is immediately highlighted by the first verifiable human Minstrel being both a woman and (although theoretically bisexual because she may have had a daughter) also a lover of women.

3.3 Vaudeville

Jumping forward in time briefly, there is a difficulty we need to acknowledge with the word 'minstrel' in its modern usage. In the late 19th and early 20th century, American Vaudeville adopted the word 'minstrel' for song and dance troupes consisting of white men parodying black men by means of stylised blackface make-up and wigs, and stereotypical styles of speech and movement. This 'broad-brush' kind of entertainment, insulting and dehumanising to black people as it was, was remarkably popular amongst the majority white population of the USA and the UK for many decades and even spawned later television shows, such as the Black and White Minstrel Show which ran on the BBC from 1958 to 1978. Some 45 years later, aspects of this racist 'satire' still exist. Recent news reports (as of April 2023) have told of an English pub from which the landlord had a collection of Golliwogs (dolls closely resembling the Vaudevillian blackface minstrels) removed by the police because of complaints of the offence they were causing. The scandal was exacerbated even further when the landlady's decision to replace them was apparently supported as an act of free speech and personal conscience by the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, herself a member of a racial minority (Walker, 2023).

3.4 Romanticism

It's unfortunate that the term 'minstrel' has been besmirched in this way, but I also feel that that image is rapidly dying away from the

popular imagination due to the sterling work of anti-racist campaigners over the last fifty years and, I would argue, that in most people the word 'minstrel' inspires in them a much more archetypal and traditional, as well as appropriate, image. That is: an image of an itinerant musician, male without being hyper-masculine, wearing motley or colourful clothing, playing a lyre or a lute to accompany his voice, and travelling from place to place carrying news and songs with which to earn his supper. Admittedly, this is a romanticised image, and one which:

is contradicted by the obloquy heaped upon it by a large part of their contemporaries and by the harshness of the lives that many of them led, [but] it may also reflect something real about the way they liked to see and portray themselves in their songs and stories; as sharing a vision of freedom perhaps, of untrammelled celebration of the joys of life - of life itself (Southworth, 1989:1-2).

An itinerant musician, without any regular patronage or other reliable means of support would soon become very hungry:

I have come to recognize and define it as 'the myth of the wandering minstrels' [...] but I would ask my readers to be on their guard from the start against the idea that minstrels were necessarily, even commonly, of this 'wandering' kind [...] Even the popular entertainers [...] journeying in bands and family groups from one local fair to another, may well have arrived at something approximating to a yearly itinerary - as fairground people do today (ibid:2-3).

3.5 Roots

The fact that the majority of Minstrelsy was, at least in Britain until the Tudor period, performed in the service of a court may have

roots reaching back to pre-Roman Celtic culture. Known as *Bards* and *Filidh* (modern Welsh: *Bardd*, modern Irish: *Filí*, both meaning 'poet') they were more than entertainers. Celtic Bards often held highly exalted positions in their social strata, being not just musicians and poets, but also keepers of genealogy, literature and lore, as did their equivalents in contemporary cultures:

The harper-poet of the oral tradition was also a story-teller and historian; the stories and songs that he sang were the people's remembrance of their past. As Tacitus wrote of the Franks, 'their ancient songs are their only history' (Germania, 2) (ibid:89).

This was still the case in Ireland until some time around the 12th century, when Anglo-Saxon literature began to supplant the Celtic.

3.6 Griots

There's a parallel with west African *Griots*. 'Griot' is almost certainly a French-derived word, used as an umbrella term for several almost identical cultural phenomena spreading across the northern parts of west Africa, known in Mande (Mali, Guinea and surrounding areas) as *Jali*, in Yoruba (Nigeria) as *Arokin*, and in Fula (Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Niger) as *Gawlo*, amongst many other names. Griots are entertainers and storytellers who, in common with their pre-Roman Celtic and European counterparts, but in strong contrast to their later mediaeval European equivalents, have high positions in their cultural hierarchies. As well as being singers and musicians, they

are also the keepers of lore, tradition, genealogy and wisdom. Their career is generally hereditary, their training extensive and their presence at important ceremonies vital. As communications technology advances, the role of the Griot is evolving in its wake:

Some of today's high-profile musicians from West Africa, like Mory Kanté from Guinea, Mansour Seck and singer Youssou N'Dour both from Senegal come from traditional griot castes. But as times change and a break with tradition occurs, artists like Salif Keita, who is not from the lineage, have adopted a cultural role that traditionally wouldn't have been theirs to fill (Okoh, 2018).

3.7 The Court

Returning to mediaeval Europe, it was common practice for courts to employ entertainers who often, as Southworth described, took other roles when not actually performing:

“To be a minstrel in the twelfth century was to be a minor court servant [...] and as mastery of an instrument was a basic requirement for every rank of courtier [...] music the normal accompaniment to almost every kind of medieval entertainment” (1998:36).

Most of these would remain with their courts or travel a circuit from one court to another along with their masters. Just as the Irish and (early) Welsh courts had their Filí and their Bardds, the Anglo-Saxons had *Scops* (pronounced ‘shops’), the Norse had *Skalds* and, slater, the French-speaking courts employed *Troubadours* who sang the newly fashionable songs of chivalry and courtly love.

3.8 Itinerants

But what about our elusive, archetypal ‘wandering minstrels’? Is it possible that they didn’t exist at all? According to Southworth and some other sources, they did, but they lived a harsh, almost criminal life about which we know little:

We must face the fact that the mass of minstrels are mentioned (if at all) merely to give colour to a narrative or throw a gleam of light on the foibles of the rich and powerful. They exist [...] in the margins of history, and creep into its pages on the coattails of those who employed them (1989:8).

However, such people were not unknown, “These street musicians are not to be thought of as a separate species from the minstrels already mentioned” (ibid:14). By the time of the Troubadours they were named *Jongleurs* or *Gleemen*, and more likely travelled in bands on a circuit like modern fairground workers today. Similarly to those same fairground workers, they were often considered of extremely low status, or even worse:

It is not just that the status of the minstrel was low; for very many of his contemporaries, he was altogether beyond the pale of social acceptance. In this respect, he was worse off than a serf; if the serf occupied the lowest place in the medieval hierarchy, the minstrel had no place at all. Not only was he excluded – or more correctly, perhaps, had excluded himself – from the normal web of ties and responsibilities that constituted medieval society, but even his membership of the universal church, the fellowship of baptized Christians, was at one time in serious dispute (ibid:4-5).

As mentioned above, the Church, the mainstay of law, morality and societal cohesion in mediaeval Europe (and in contrast with their

attitudes towards Troubadours, who were sometimes employed to perform praise songs) often took a low view of Minstrelsy, ostensibly because of their nature as outsiders to 'normal', proscribed behaviour patterns. "The chroniclers, of course, are invariably clerics, and their occasional references to fools and *mimi* - associated, as they nearly always are, with wastrels and whores - reflect an inevitable distaste" (ibid:37). One might even suggest that the church fathers found them offensively 'queer':

While many admired the minstrels, many others treated them as outcasts. The Church generally refused to administer communion to them. The Church's hostility toward them conspired with their itinerant lifestyle to place them in a subculture comprised of dancers, jugglers, prostitutes, card players, thieves, homeless persons, persons with physical and mental impairments, practitioners of magic, and the transgendered and homoerotically inclined (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:239).

3.9 Storytellers

We can surmise that these Minstrels were, effectively, the buskers and jobbing musicians of their day in that they travelled from place to place entertaining for payment - probably on the basis of an annual circuit and preferably at the court of a noble family - with a repertoire of songs, and tales often in the form of poetry backed by music. An example might be *The Ballad of Fair Ellen*, the archetypal story of an evil and jealous stepmother who kills her stepdaughter, has the young woman baked in a pie and fed to her own father, and is justly and gruesomely punished. This specific tale is associated with

the ruined Anglo-Norman manor-house and keep, Radcliffe Tower in Radcliffe, Manchester, but local historians have stated that it has no basis in historical fact and is likely a surviving Minstrels' tale, part of a standard repertoire.

3.10 Sots

Pre-Renaissance France and the Netherlands had performers called *Sots* “often vagabonds who performed plays and other feats in exchange for food and lodging” (ibid:310). They revered their own goddess-like/Madonna-like figure, known as *Mère Folle*, *Mère Sotte* or *Folle Bobance* (often embodied by a man wearing a nun's habit with asses' ears) and her consort the *Seigneur de Joye*. They performed *sotties* “burlesque performance meant to celebrate sex, food, games and other pastimes, and to ridicule church and state” (ibid):

The *sotties*, through their characters, reveal a complex Medieval French categorisation of homoerotic activities and relationships. The *sot* himself signifies the receptive partner, while the *galant*, represents the active partner. The *fol*, or ‘fool’ signifies a bisexual male. While all three characters display gender variant traits, the *sot* is considered the most effeminate, while the *galant* is considered the most masculine (ibid).

3.11 Colour

The distinctive traditional dress of these Minstrels, the *motley*, was often considered a sign of their outsider status and adopted in imitation - albeit outside of England in which the Minstrel had no

specific costume and more often wore whatever his patrons had gifted him with. At feasts and carnivals, the entertainers would wear:

the most colourful and striking costumes from their wardrobe. Some are dressed as monks and nuns; there is a wild man and a devil. The animal masks [...] are well in evidence. Two or three performers are naked, and some are showing a bare behind (Southworth, 1989:19).

However, colour was often used more symbolically in certain European traditions. For example, the *mignons* (sexually and gender-ambivalent young men) of pre-modern France would often wear the signalling costume of bi-coloured tights, one leg yellow and one leg green and this style is considered to be derived from:

three sources, namely, the costumes of historical troubadours, fools and legendary fairies [...] troubadours [...] had traditionally worn costumes of yellow and green complimented by red cloaks [...] the costume of the fool was traditionally of variegated yellow and green [...] fairies typically dress in yellow, green and red (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:164).

The association of green with the Fae recalls traditional prohibitions on wearing green for particular people, such as babies and wedding guests, and by association recalls the faeries' mythical habit of stealing human babies and replacing them with 'changelings'. These changelings might then be recognised as such because they reflect the non-human nature of their real parents by growing up in non-normative ways, such as developing autism or being gender-variant. This further brings to mind the use of the word *fey* to mean a sense of something being fated and unworldly, or simply strange, and applied thence to

men to imply homosexuality or some sort of gender variance. At the same time, the use of green and yellow associates Minstrels with Faeries (as well as with Fools) and could symbolise a belief that Minstrelsy was considered a *fey* art - ‘polyvalence and multiplicity’ - a queer, mysterious and multiplastic art not entirely of this world. As we’ll see in the next section, Minstrelsy, magical ability and Faery lore often do overlap and blend at their edges.

4. Minstrels in Myth, Legend and Faery Tale

Unlike the later, real-world Minstrels described above, the minstrels of myth, legend and faery tale are individuals whose positions haven’t waned over the centuries. They are still thought of as beings with great, and magical, abilities. The most famous of these, I would propose, is the ancient Greek poet and musician, Orpheus.

4.1 Orpheus

Orpheus is the son of the muse Calliope (‘beautiful voice’) and either King Oeagrus of Thrace or the god Apollo (himself the god of music) who “not only enchanted wild beasts, but made the trees and rocks move from their places to follow the sound of his music” (Graves, 1955:111). The most well-known stories of Orpheus concern his disastrous attempt to rescue his wife Eurydice from the land of Hades, and his consequent downturn and death at the hands of *Maenads* - wild,

ecstatic female worshippers of Dionysos. His head is torn off, thrown into the river Hebrus where it floats out to sea, and eventually washes up on the shores of Lesbos, where it is buried, still singing all the way. The arrival at Lesbos connects Orpheus mythopoeically with Arion, Terpander and Sappho. Orpheus is generally thought of as a musician rather than a Minstrel in the strictest sense, although his position as “the most famous poet and musician who ever lived” (ibid) and the rise of Orphism “a religious movement that developed probably in or around the sixth century BC [...] in Athens and Magna Graecia” (Christopoulos, 1991:215) would make him a strong contender for the spiritual ancestor of Minstrels everywhere. It is the complicated circumstances of his death which connect him more closely to our ‘queer’, green-and-yellow-wearing, archetypal Gleeman-Minstrel. There are several varying accounts, but the most popular, according to the notoriously homophobic Robert Graves, is that in his despair at the loss of Eurydice, Orpheus foreswore women and turned to the love of boys and young men. Disapproving of this ‘insult’, Dionysos unleashed his Maenads, who tore Orpheus to pieces (ibid:112). Even a brief study of the fluid sexuality and gendered behaviour of Dionysos will call this account into question. Here, however, is not the place to do that and, in fact, I have considered the re-examination of myths through the methods of ‘de-colonisation’ and ‘queering’ in a different

essay⁶. What's important to note right now is that Minstrels, those individuals the Church considered "ribalds" and "erotic rebels", were also considered to be "the spiritual descendants of Orpheus" (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:235).

4.2 Celts

According to the Greek writer Strabo's *Geographica*, the pre-Roman Celtic societies of western Europe contained a strict 3-layer politico-spiritual hierarchy, of which Bards, who we would now think of as Minstrels, were the lowest. They came beneath the *Ovates* (diviners and natural historians) and the *Druids* (hereditary priests). Nonetheless, a Bard still had great power. Their job was to carry news and compose songs celebrating the achievements of their patrons, but they were not simple messengers or servants. If slighted or underpaid they might compose a satire so cruel it would raise boils on its victim's face (Matthews, 1989:51).

4.2.1 Gwydion

The Mabinogion, a 14th century collection of ancient Welsh myths and legends contains a story called *Math, Son of Mathonwy*, a main character of which is the Bard-Trickster, Gwydion, "the best storyteller ever" (Gantz, 1976:109). Gwydion is a powerful but amoral

⁶ Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation

figure. He instigates a war as a distraction so that his brother, Gilfaethwy can rape King Math's virgin footholder, Goewin, and the two brothers are punished by being turned into several different pairs of animals, swapping sexes, and being forced to mate and produce offspring over a period of years. When this punishment is finished Gwydion offers his own sister Arianrhod as Math's footholder, but she is disgraced by giving birth to two baby boys after a magical test for virginity. Later, Gwydion takes one of the boys to his mother to be acknowledged. In her anger and disgrace, Arianrhod curses the child that he will never have a name or weapons unless she gives them to him and he will never have a wife of the human race. Gwydion wins out by disguising himself and the boy as "bards from Morgannwg" (ibid:109) and tricking Arianrhod into naming her son, Llew Llaw Gyffes and arming him. The third curse is dealt with by Gwydion making LLeu a woman from flowers to be his wife.

4.2.2 Taliesin

The most famous mythological Welsh Bard, possibly a mythopoeic ancestor to the Arthurian Merlin - and one who may have had a historical existence at around the 5th century - was Taliesin, known as 'shining brow'. His lineage is unusually complicated due to being born of a magical shape-shifting event, which effectively makes him his own father but also gives him all the wisdom in the world.

Although his deeds are fragmentary he appears in several sections of

The Mabinogion and has his own book, the *Hanes Taliesin* and several poems attributed to him, and is considered so powerful that, as an infant, he “confounds the bards of Maelgwn Gwynedd by making them play ‘blerm blerm’ on their lips with a finger, so that they sounded idiotic” (Matthews, 1989:67-8). Cassell’s Encyclopedia also describes him as a shapeshifter “including metamorphosis from male to female” (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:317), which is a nod towards his multiplastic nature.

4.3 Odin

In Scandinavian mythology the God of poetry is Bragi, although it has been theorised (Lindow, 2004:21) that he was originally a human bard, and was deified by the chief god, Odin upon his death. A more interesting character for the purposes of this examination is Odin himself who became the greatest ever *skald* by stealing the Mead of Poetry, brewed from honey and the blood of the wisest man in the world, Kvasir. Kvasir was, himself, fashioned from the spittle of the gods. “The blood and honey formed a sublime mead: whoever drank it became a poet or a wise man” (Crossley-Holland, 1981:37). Odin gained possession of the mead, in typical manner, by stealing it from its owner, the giant, Sutting. He did this using his shape-changing powers and seducing Suttung’s daughter, Gunnlod who had been tasked to guard the mead. Then he scarpered back home behind Asgard’s defensive walls:

In his haste to escape Suttung, Odin could not help letting some mead spill outside the wall, but it was so little that the gods were not bothered about it. They said that anyone who wanted it could have it; and that became the poetaster's portion (ibid:43).

Odin is a complex, multiplastic character. As well as the Allfather he is also a trickster, magician, shape-changer, *skald* and a practitioner of *Seiðr* (pronounced 'seethe-er'). *Seiðr* is a form of Nordic shamanism which many scholars consider to have been exclusively women's magic. To practice *Seiðr*, "a man had to be capable of giving up his masculine identity even to the point of dressing and living as a woman for a time" (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:253), and this new identity could also link him to homoeroticism via the word *ergi* - a harsh slur meaning "unmanly", stigmatising the receptive partner in homosexual intercourse. A living (male) practitioner of *Seiðr* takes a different viewpoint:

All these misconceptions come from the word 'Ergi' [...] I believe myself that this term was used as a kind of insult to the men who were practicing majik when the rest of the male population were 'going a Viking' or were engaged in hard, menial farm work or soldiering (Runic John, 2004:23).

Runic John expands that *Seiðr* is not exclusively women's magic and that one's gender or sexual orientation are not relevant to one's ability to practice it. This might be the case, especially for modern practitioners, but I would argue that if we assume a position that gender is performative and that Scandinavian society had strict gender

roles - home and children for women, hard manual work or fighting for men - then a man who does not conform to those roles is indeed *ergi* or, in more modern terms, gender non-conforming or gender variant. Gender roles appear to have been divided into traditional patriarchal patterns in most Scandinavian cultures, but (as an example) female warriors were not unknown, and are reported to have fought alongside men by contemporary writers such as the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus. It seems reasonable that there would also be male individuals who wished to embrace a more 'womanly' life, despite the associated stigma.

4.4 Power

In these, admittedly all European, examples we see the figure of the Minstrel (Bard/Poet/Musician) as an individual with great divine power expressed through words and music. In the Greek and Celtic myths he is born with this power, and fully human Minstrels are seen as his "spiritual descendants", while in the Norse the gift of poetry is a divine attribute literally dropped by the gods and available to whoever can find it. In either case, the power of the Minstrel comes from a divine rather than a human source and so the attitudes towards, and behaviour of, Minstrels place them outside the bounds of normative - i.e. gender-based - social roles. They become fey, "those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be

persons who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined” (Butler, 1990:23).

4.5 Lan Caihe

It is interesting to compare the more familiar Minstrels of western myth, legend and faery tale with other cultures. One instance would be the Chinese Taoist Immortal, Lan Caihe (*Lan Ts'ai Ho*), who began life, according to legend, as a mortal, a homeless wandering minstrel. Lan Caihe would entertain in wine shops and restaurants, notoriously making up eccentric songs full of hidden wisdom on the spot while drunk (adding elements of the Clown/Trickster to their story) and giving away earnings beyond the need for food and drink to the poor (Yetts, 1916), eventually attaining immortality by discarding their worldly goods and either stepping on a cloud or being given a lift to heaven by a stork or a swan that was moved by their music. Lan Caihe was welcomed by the other seven Immortals as an entertaining character and is usually depicted with clappers (a kind of long castanet) or occasionally with a flute, a basket of fruit or flowers and only one shoe. Another interesting aspect of Lan Caihe is their ambiguous gender. There is only one woman (*He Xianggu*) amongst the Taoist's Eight Immortals (*Ba Xian*), which would imply that the other seven are men, but Lan Caihe is impossible to define so simply. Their clothing varies from masculine to feminine depending on the depiction, as does their hair. Their face is usually depicted as young and androgynously

pretty, and it has been suggested that “Lan Caihe was a man who could not understand how to be a man” (Werner, 1922: 293), a description which translates well to the modern concepts of a gender non-conforming, non-binary or trans person.

4.6 Narada

Appearing in the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas*, Hinduism has the Minstrel figure of Narada. A reincarnated *Ghandarva* (a sort of musical angel) and a devotee of Vishnu, he travels to distant worlds with his *khartal* (similar to Lan Caihe’s clappers) and sometimes a *veena* (a lute-family instrument) and imparts wisdom to kings and peasants alike. As usual in Hindu mythologies, the *Mahabharata* credits Narada with all the ‘perfections’ - enormous wisdom, knowledge of all the arts and sciences, and particularly the ability to dispute, discourse and make fair judgement. Compared with the Minstrels mentioned previously all this wonderful perfection would make Narada a dull character. He does, however have a Trickster-y streak. In a *Ramayana* story, Narada claims to be a better Veena player than even Vishnu himself, and so Vishnu takes him to a forest where he introduces him to forest spirits whose bodies had been disfigured by his dreadful playing and off-key singing. In another he lies to a wicked prince who then deposes his own parents and imprisons his niece and nephew (although this does appear to be according to a long-term divine plan). There is also a shape-changing aspect to

Narada which comes about because he brags to Vishnu that he has conquered *Maya* (the illusion of the world as we perceive it, rather than the truth behind it all), and so Vishnu changes him into a woman by asking him to bathe in a pool. As a woman, Narada loses her memory up to that point, and in her new life has several children and grandchildren, all of whom die violently. Eventually, turned back into a man he is found to have acquired great wisdom and learned to see the *Maya* of the unreality of death.

4.7 True Thomas

The final mythological Minstrel examined here had a real-life existence as a historically verifiable human. He's known as Thomas de Ercildoun, Thomas Learmont, or, often, just True Thomas because of his honest nature and his prophetic abilities. He was the Laird of Earlston in the Scottish Borders, between roughly 1220 and 1298. However, his greatest fame is his immortalisation in faery tale literature, *The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer*, which was collected and published as Ballad #37, by Francis James Child, in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* around 1880. The song-poem tells the how True Thomas lies down to rest on the faery mound, Huntley Bank on Eildon Hill, and sees coming towards him a beautiful woman dressed opulently in green, riding a richly bedecked white horse. Thomas assumes she must be the "Queen of Heaven" (the Virgin Mary) and greets her appropriately, but she tells him that she is, in fact, the Queen

of Elfland (Faery) and that she has come for him because he must become her servant for seven years (Froud and Lee, 1995). Thomas, instantly and without question, climbs onto her horse and joins her for the hazardous ride back to Elfland.

4.8 Fae

The kidnapping (willingly or otherwise) of special humans by the Fae is not an unusual occurrence in faery tales. I've mentioned Changelings, and how someone, particularly a boy or a man, who has interest or manners outside their gender normativity might be considered Fae, or at least 'fey', but Changelings are taken as babies. The Fae also seem particularly fond of any adult who is beautiful or can create beauty, and especially Minstrels who can do so through song, story and music:

Faerie musicians have a magical skill, and many songs and airs which today are widely known in the human world have their origins in Faerie. The Londonderry Air is one such tune. Faeries are passionately fond of music and outstanding human musicians are at risk of being lured into the land of Faerie for the sake of their talent (ibid).

The *Tylwyth Teg* of Wales are particularly renowned for this practice and have been known "to kidnap human musicians and keep them in fairyland forever" (Alexander, 2014:44). As I have suggested above, this association with the Fae may bring with it the assumption of the Minstrel as also 'fey' and this leads us to the question of why the Queen of Elfland chose True Thomas to be her servant. Did she want

nothing more than a good poet to entertain her, or did she recognise some kind of kinship in Thomas which would make him suitable for life in Elfland? Equally, it should be asked why Thomas instantly jumped onto the Queen's horse without packing any clothes or food, or even saying goodbye to his family. Did she have some magical power over his actions, or did he immediately recognise some quality of fey/Fae kinship in her? The *Ballad* then tells of their journey through inhospitable magical lands and the differences between the roads to Hell, Heaven and Elfland. Then Thomas is sworn to secrecy:

But Thomas, ye maun hold your tongue,
Whatever you may hear or see,
For gin ae word you should chance to speak,
You will neer get back to your ain country
(*ibid*).

The term 'ain country' is interesting here because the Queen is employing Thomas for his talents as a Minstrel, and so he must, necessarily, speak and sing while residing in Elfland. It's possible to read an implication that when he's back in Scotland after his seven-year sojourn, if Thomas speaks of Elfland then he'll never be able to go back to his *true* home, the land of the Fae. The final verse says how Thomas has now a fine coat and some green velvet shoes after his seven-year disappearance, but makes no further explanation. Later additions to the overall story state that the seven years seemed like only a day or two for Thomas, and that he returned with the gift

of true prophecy. It is also suggested that he stayed in Scotland for a further seven years before disappearing once more, never to be seen by human eyes again and that he is now an advisor in the Faery court (ibid). So, is True Thomas, despite his historical status, as queerly mythical as Orpheus, Gwydion, Taliesin, Odin, Lan Caihe and Narada? I would suggest that he is. His poetic talents and the fact that the Queen of Elfland chooses him as her personal servant imply that he is 'different' from normal men, and that his role across several stories blends from laird, to servant, to poet, to prophet, and finally to full-time Fae makes him as multiplastic as any good Minstrel should be.

5. Minstrels in Popular Culture

In the literature, films and television of the 20th and 21st centuries the Minstrel as a character is commonly used as a figure of comic relief – occasionally an unlikely hero and sometimes a vessel for great wisdom in an unconventional form, but almost always behind a mask of foolishness and comedy.

5.1 Alan-a-Dale

In Disney's animated film *Robin Hood* (Reitherman, 1973) all the traditional characters are revisualized as anthropomorphic animals. Robin is a fox, Maid Marian is a vixen, the Sheriff of Nottingham is a

wolf and the Minstrel, Alan-a-Dale (voiced by the Country and Western singer, Roger Miller) is a cockerel. As well as playing a lute and singing expository songs in a C&W style, he also serves as the narrator of the film, regaling us with his wisdom: “we folks of the animal kingdom have our own version. It's the story of what really happened in Sherwood Forest” (ibid). While signs of gender or sexual variance are unlikely to appear in the heroes of a Disney film of this period, the character's clothes do reflect the traditional Fool/Troubadour/Faery colour scheme. He wears green breeches over his yellow legs and feet and, while his tunic is blue, his gloves and tail feathers are green and the ensemble is topped off with a bright red comb and wattle.

5.2 Jof

An example of a Minstrel as an unlikely hero is the loveable Jof (played by Nils Poppe) in Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film, *The Seventh Seal*, which examines 'God's silence' in the face of death and horror. The film tells of a mediaeval knight who returns from the Crusades to Sweden to find the country ravaged by plague. The knight meets Death, in the archetypal form of the Grim Reaper, and challenges him to a game of chess to delay his own demise as he seeks answers - an image which has since become iconic, even to people who have never seen *The Seventh Seal*. Jof is one of group of travelling players who are met along the way by the knight and his squire, and whom they accompany on

a journey, with others, back to the knight's castle. Opposite in nature to the dour knight, Jof stands as comic relief in what might otherwise be a slow and overly intellectual film. He is silly, weak, funny, and he capers and sings songs and tells jokes both on stage and off. He is also 'fey' in that he sees visions of the Virgin Mary walking with the baby Jesus, (recalling True Thomas) and of Death, which give him the wisdom to hide behind his foolishness to save his wife and child. Jof and his family are the only people to survive the plague and, in the final scene, Jof sees a vision of the *Danse Macabre*, Death leading the rest of the knight's band in a solemn dance over the hilltops to oblivion. Since *The Seventh Seal* is Scandinavian, it's tempting to think of Jof as *ergi* here. He's small and weak, not a particularly masculine man especially when compared with the characters around him, but he's also full of joy and fun, and he's 'fey' in the sense of being unworldly and gifted with 'second sight'. He even plays a lute and wears (although it's impossible to tell which colours in a b&w film) bi-coloured tights.

5.3 Cacofonix

Another notable, and entirely comedic, Minstrel is Cacofonix, of the *Asterix* comic books, created by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo in France in 1959. Cacofonix is the bard of a village in Roman occupied Gaul around the year 50BCE. His role is to sing at feasts, generally to celebrate the village's victories against the Roman soldiers.

Unfortunately, he is so bad at playing and singing, and so insistent on carrying out his Minstrels-ly duty, that he is usually either abandoned, hit over the head by the blacksmith, or tied and gagged and hung from a rafter. He has even been known to cause thunderstorms with his singing although, unlike Narada, he has yet to cause bodily deformity in his listeners. That may be because he rarely has the chance to sing for any period of time. In common with Disney's Alan-a-Dale, and as would be expected in children's literature of the period, Cacophonix has no obvious attributes indicating gender or sexual variance. However, his slim shape, red cloak and flamboyantly worn blonde hair could be considered 'queer-coding', and he is certainly the least 'macho'-looking of the adult male characters in the comics.

5.4 Brave Sir Robin

Similar to Cacophonix in having a purely comic purpose are Sir Robin's Minstrels from the film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam, 1975). They prance through woodland paths wearing impractical, flamboyant clothes, following their master and playing music, while their head Minstrel (played by Neil Innes) extols the virtues in song of "Brave, brave, brave, brave Sir Robin" who is "Not at all afraid to be killed in nasty ways [...] to be mashed into a pulp [...] to have his eyes gouged out [...] and his bottom burned off". That is, at least, until he insists that they shut up. They even carry on their duty,

singing their master's praises, when Sir Robin absconds from a conflict:

Brave Sir Robin ran away. ("No!")
Bravely ran away, away. ("I didn't!")
When danger reared its ugly head, he bravely turned his tail and fled. ("I never!")
Yes, brave Sir Robin turned about, and gallantly he chickened out. ("You're lying!")
Swiftly taking to his feet, he beat a very brave retreat.
Bravest of the brave, Sir Robin!

While the purpose of Sir Robin's Minstrels is entirely comedic and unlikely to hold any deeper meaning, they are surprisingly accurately depicted in archetypal and historical terms, despite one playing a plastic recorder. They wear bi-coloured clothing of yellow and green - the lead Minstrel's hat being especially flamboyant - and they create songs to celebrate the bravery of their patron:

But their [13th century harpers] main task on campaign was to take note of those individual acts of prowess that were afterwards recorded in the form of sirventois or 'duty' songs to be recited after the battle, and then, in a more polished state, on occasions such as the Ipswich feast. (Southworth, 1989:87).

5.5 Baal

A personal favourite literary Minstrel - and the 'other side of the coin' from the Minstrels I have so far mentioned, yet unmistakably within the Wandering Minstrel archetype - is Bertolt Brecht's amoral anti-hero, Baal, from the musical play of the same name. This was Brecht's first play, written in 1918, in response to the fashionable

Sturm und Drang tradition which romanticised the solo maverick in a similar way to Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* or, later, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Even today, the (anti-)hero who fights alone against 'the system' is a common, popular stock figure and plot device in many best-selling films and novels. Baal is an outsider to the shallow and bourgeois society into which he could never fit, and which he despises but must rely on for his living. He is a hard-drinking itinerant musician who abuses several women, one of whom commits suicide and another of whom is left pregnant. He murders his best friend, Ekart and, caring nothing for the consequences of his actions, eventually dies alone in a forest hut, a victim of his own debauchery. Despite his irredeemably vile nature, Baal fits the archetype of the Wandering Minstrel well: he stands outside of normativity - physically, spiritually and sexually - in his rejection of bourgeois morality, and in the demonstration of his bisexuality in which he kills Ekart in a fit of sexual jealousy:

EKART: You're not jealous of her? *Baal gropes, a glass falls to the floor.*

EKART: Why shouldn't I have women? *Baal looks at him.*

EKART: Am I your lover? *Baal throws himself at him, chokes him* (Brecht, 1979:56).

Even though Baal is referred to in the original text as a "fat lump" and called "elephant" at least once, Alan Clarke chose to cast the extremely slender David Bowie as Baal in his 1982 televised

adaptation. Due to Bowie's already established reputation as a flamboyant and openly bisexual performer, the casting lent a further air of gender and sexual variance to Baal's character.

5.6 Cantus

The wisest, most mystically mysterious wandering Minstrel to appear in popular culture is not human, nor even an anthropomorphised chicken. He is a Fraggles, and his name is Cantus. *Fraggle Rock* was a children's television series, running from 1983 to 1987, created and produced by Jim Henson, creator of *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*. Henson used his signature muppet-puppets to produce a show with the intention of fostering beliefs of harmony, unity, diversity and general peace and love - to change the world for the better by offering children an alternative way of thinking in a TV world dominated by *He-Man*, *Thundercats* and other conflict-led programmes. It was intended, successfully, for an international market and appeared in various local English-language versions in Canada, the USA and the UK, as well as in German and French versions, all which were translated to other worldwide markets. The multi-coloured, furry-tailed Fraggles are only one of the (mostly) anthropomorphic creatures that live in and around Fraggles Rock and they particularly love their community and music. Cantus Fraggles appears in five episodes of the series, but in each case he brings with him lessons - experiences through which young Fraggles encounter situations in which they learn

something edifying about themselves. This might include finding their own inner song (1:18 *The Minstrels*, 1983) or finding bravery and self-worth when facing a frightening situation (4:05 *Junior Faces the Music*, 1986). In each case the arrival of Cantus, sometimes with his band of fellow Minstrels, sometimes alone, is heralded by a tune on his magic pipe. He provides an almost Zen-like presence with his ‘ambiguously exact’ nuggets of Trickster-like nonsense wisdom such as, “There are no rules, those are the rules.” and “Invisibility is in the eye of the beholder”. In *The Minstrels*, a band member asks him a question, and after the reply turns to the other band members: “Did he answer my question?”. One nods, another shakes his head. “Yeah, that’s what I thought”. While gender does exist in *Fraggle Rock*, gender roles and sexuality do not appear to. This makes it difficult to find any overtly Queer elements in Cantus which would bring him in line with the Fae/fey nature of other Minstrels. However, he lives outside of normal *Fraggle* society and he is a ‘snazzy’ dresser, even by *Fraggle* standards. I would suggest that these and his personal strangeness and ambiguity could suggest an interesting Queer reading of Cantus. Or we might just ask, in the words of Red *Fraggle*, “Who is this guy?”.

5.7 Jaskier

The final modern popular culture Minstrel that I will mention here is also the most rounded and complex - being a developing character in an

ongoing television show. Jaskier (played by Joey Batey) is the sidekick of Henry Cavill's monster hunter, Geralt in the Netflix fantasy television series, *The Witcher* (released in December 2019 and ongoing, with multiple directors) based on the novel of the same name by Andrzej Sapkowski, and a subsequent video game. It is also possible to gain a great deal of knowledge of Jaskier's nature and activities through fan websites and YouTube videos. These often have enlightening titles such as *Jaskier being fruity for 9 and a half minutes*, or *Jaskier being a bi icon for seven minutes straight*. Although of noble birth, Jaskier (also known as Dandelion) has chosen to become a travelling Minstrel, accompanying Geralt and composing songs on his lute to improve Geralt's image. The pair encounter many obstacles and monsters and have several adventures which bring them closer together (*The Official Witcher Wiki*, 2022). What is most interesting about Jaskier here is his ambivalent sexuality. In one episode he asks Geralt to be his bodyguard at a society wedding, not because he would normally need a 'bouncer' but because of the large number of powerful men present with whose wives and mothers he had had assignations or affairs. In another he talks fondly about the possibility of rubbing chamomile into Geralt's "lovely bottom". While Jaskier's dress is not the traditional motley it is still rather more flamboyant and less traditionally masculine than other male characters, and his manner is fast-talking, clever and undeniably

‘fruity’. Unlike the other Minstrels, however, Jaskier is a developing character in an ongoing television series and so will evolve, as will his relationships with other characters, particularly Geralt, as storylines increase.

6. Bridging

If you visualise a bridge, what you’ll most likely see is an object which joins two places by crossing a divide that would otherwise be impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to traverse – like a river or a huge chasm in an adventure movie. And just like in that movie, the bridge isn’t simply a thing in itself, it also partakes of the nature of, or the landscape of, whatever exists at either end – whether that be Tower Bridge joining the City of London to Southwark, or a jungle rope bridge with the bad guys at one end and safety for the intrepid heroes at the other. A bridge joining two towns across a river, for example, ‘belongs’ to both towns and is a landmark in both, yet is also an independent structure with an existence of its own both within and outside of the limits of either town. The Minstrel can be, according to this definition, a ‘bridge’ who connects the audience to the world of stories and imagination he carries, joining the minds of the people he entertains to the histories he expounds. Traditionally the wandering Minstrel was one who could cross borders with some

impunity, and carry news from one land to another, thus crossing not just boundaries of time with his tales, but boundaries of space, culture and politics. As demonstrated above, Minstrels exist in cultures across the globe, their existence becomes a bridge which crosses the divides of culture and language

6.1 Kobzari

For example, in Ukraine there is a tradition of itinerant bards known as the *Kobzari*, many of whom became musicians because they were blind, a tradition which aligns with common practices in rural Ireland and Japan. The *Kobzari*, like the courtly bards of mediaeval western Europe but unlike itinerant Gleemen-Minstrels, would sing songs of a specific repertoire, liturgical themes and epic poems being common. They would accompany themselves on a lute called a *kobza*, and were trained in guilds from the 16th century until the 1930s, when Stalinist purges destroyed *Kobzari* culture. They were replaced with Soviet-approved folk musicians.

6.2 Guslari

Fortunately still extant, the *Guslari*⁷ of the Balkan states and the area that was once Yugoslavia, sing epic songs of history and legend. The finer details, and their playing and singing styles, vary from state to state, but their overall consistency speaks of a long and

⁷ Players of the *gusla*, a one- or two-string bowed instrument about the size of a viola but played upright on the lap like a rebec or a small cello.

well-respected tradition and, just like the *Kobzari* and the *Griots* mentioned earlier, the *Guslari* bridge the divide of time as keepers of history and tradition.

6.3 Other Minstrels

The *Bauls* of India are a highly spiritual and religious culture who dedicate themselves to communication through songs and ecstatic music. Known as the Bards of Bengal, they live in their own communities or:

may wander through the countryside or live in the ashram or akhara (monastery). These ashrams are frequently supported by the local villagers. Bauls who wander from village to village may also contribute from their earnings from begging (*madhukari*) or singing (McDaniel, date unknown).

Wandering beggar musicians also appear in the traditions of the Uyghurs of north-western China and amongst the Azerbaijani, and in Japan where they were known as the *biwa hoshi*⁸ who sang traditional and epic tales. In each of these cases, the Minstrel is not only a bridge between the modern and the historical or legendary, but also between the worlds of the spirit and of normal, mundane life.

6.4 Carnival

Like the shaman from whom they are arguably descended, the Minstrel also crosses the boundaries of sex and gender, and sometimes even species. “During carnivals, they would disguise themselves as women

⁸ *Biwa*-priests, a *biwa* being a type of lute.

or beasts; some even went about naked” (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:235) and, according to Mikhael Bakhtin (also quoted in Cassell’s Encyclopedia):

Among the figures featured in celebrations, those of the ‘beastly’ (or vegetal) human hybrids and transgendered figures (primarily transgendered males) predominated, including the Wild Man, the Green Man, Bessie, Judy, Mollie and Our Old Lass (ibid:104).

Southworth also makes mention of carnival costumes - quoting Thomas de Chabham, the Sub-Dean of Salisbury around 1213 - of which the church disapproved:

One rare, thirteenth-century attempt to classify the different types of medieval performer - albeit from an ethical point of view - describes the lowest and most reprehensible kind as ‘those who transform and transfigure their bodies with indecent dance and gesture, now indecently unclothing themselves, now putting on horrible masks’ (1989:17).

Not only were they considered indecent, “Their behaviour seems to have been perceived as belonging to a third or alternate gender” (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:235) since they were considered to have the attributes of both the feminine (graceful movements, a penchant for gossip) and masculine (belly laughter and uncouth jokes), and this ‘third gender’ may help to define the Minstrel-as-Bridge which partakes of both sides yet is also a thing in itself.

6.5 Polari

The Minstrel’s connection to the sexual and gender-variant can also be seen in the history of *Polari*. Too complex to fully explore here,

Polari, briefly, is the British secret 'slanguage' of the Queer person used, when homosexuality was illegal in the UK (pre-1967) as a smokescreen to hide one's intentions from an oppressive society and an identifying badge for other Queer individuals:

Polari was a secret, mainly spoken form of language which occurred in private conversations among people who were not part of a social elite, and has roots in forms of language that were around long before the invention of recording devices (Baker, 2019:33).

Polari developed from the multi-lingual and multi-cultural patois of travelling entertainers, containing words from multiple languages including Italian, French, Yiddish and Roma, plus back-slang, rhyming slang and thieves' cant. It was still in relatively common use by drag entertainers right into the 1970s. Several *Polari* words, ('butch', 'camp', 'mince', 'scarper') have become adopted into standard English since their use by (officially closeted) gay performers on television and radio, such as the immensely popular Julian and Sandy (Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Williams), whose comedy sketches appeared on BBC Radio's *Round the Horne* from 1965 to 1968. "Polari's links with the theatre were also acknowledged in the characters of Julian and Sandy, two out-of-work actors who took on various temporary jobs between roles" (ibid:60) *Polari* has nowadays lost its status as a spoken patois and become primarily a subject of academic study. However, there are groups who consider its preservation a vital part of LGBTQ history and keep it 'alive'. The

prime example is an association of drag nuns called the *Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence*, who began as a LGBTQ and HIV-AIDS charity in San Francisco in 1979, and have since expanded to include political lobbying and providing spiritual ministry to the Queer community, as well as being drag queens. The Sisterhood has now spread across the world, and the UK chapters have adopted Polari as an essential part of their rituals. These rituals, marriages, house blessings and the canonisation of 'saints', for example, all include the use of a *Polari Bible*. The filmmaker, Derek Jarman was canonised at his home in Dungeness in 1991 (three years before his death in 1994) and the performance artist, David Hoyle (aka The Divine David, and now Saint David of the Avant-Garde) was canonised, at Manchester Art Gallery in 2022, a ceremony which I was privileged to attend. The *Polari Bible* is available online. Here is an example from the first three verses of the book of *Genesis*:

1. In the beginning *Gloria* created the heaven and the earth.
2. And the earth was *nanti* form, and void; and *munge* was upon the *eke* of the deep. And the *fairy* of *Gloria* trolled upon the *eke* of the *aquas*.
3. And *Gloria* cackled, Let there be *sparkle*: and there was *sparkle*.

Added to his multiplastic armoury of multiple skills, the use of Polari, albeit within the limitations of comprehensibility, by modern Minstrels serves to bridge the past and present of LGBTQ history. In performing to a multitude of audiences, the Minstrel also brings that

history and culture out of the sub-cultural 'closet' and into the larger public sphere, creating another bridge of communication between Queer and 'straight' audiences.

7. The Minstrel as Performance Persona

As mentioned earlier, Thana has written extensively on the theory behind Minstrelsy, and that has included an argument that not only can one's persona or identity be considered as fluid, but also that fluidity itself can be persona or identity⁹.

7.1 Fluidity

For many people multiple personae may be considered as specific aspects of themselves in certain circumstances, such as in their job as opposed to their family life, or a developed stage persona versus a relaxed and relatively unguarded backstage persona. Erving Goffman called these personae *face*, "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1967:5) itself an aspect of *front*, "insignia of office [...] sex, age [...] posture; speech patterns; facial expression" (1959:34) and "something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter" (1967:7). Simplifying Goffman, the *you* at

⁹ *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona - Part 2: Persona*. Section: The Performer's Perspective

home is not going to be the same *you* as the *you* at work, or with friends at a football match, because the circumstances in which, and the people to whom, you present yourself are different, despite the fact that you are still the same person. You are, effectively, multiple people in one.

7.2 Captain Self

Another way to understand this viewpoint is to visualise a diamond. Focus closely and one facet is fully visible. Pull back to widen focus, you can see the entire diamond. Thus, the diamond can be seen to have many shapes, sizes and possibly even colours yet still remain the same diamond. Seán has borrowed Virginia Woolf's term, the "Captain self" as a name for this conceptualisation:

This is what people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self which amalgamates and controls them all (Woolf, 1928:221).

However, there are certain individuals for whom fluid movement through multiple personae, specifically public performance personae, is so prevalent that it is arguably the fluidity itself which is the persona. Like the Tricksters mentioned above, they *are* polyvalence and multiplicity, *and* they are also performance personae. Lady Gaga and David Bowie's would be strong examples of this fluidity-as-persona. Both have had a fluid plethora of public faces, yet all are

manifestations of Gaga and Bowie. Similarly the archetypal Minstrel as performance persona, the performed Captain Self, partakes of that plethora of identities/personae/faces/fronts as a multiplastic entity.

7.3 Performing

The Minstrel is not simply a funny man with a lute, neither does he *just* tell stories and sing. In doing so he embodies the subjects of those songs, in the forms of music and story, and through voice, physicality, presence and performance skills. He is an entertainer and must make his songs and stories 'come alive' through the use of performance techniques, including the fluid embodiment of the archetypal forms which he communicates. This multiplasticity in storytelling might take the form of changes of posture, alterations of voice, or the more subtle techniques of allowing a flow of imagination to the extent that he becomes a conduit *for* the songs and stories rather than a performer *of* them. Humour is a useful tool for carrying stories and their messages, because a relaxed and happy audience is also a more receptive audience and the well-judged use of humour can create that. It might be argued that Brecht's Baal could only get away with being such an appalling individual because of his use of humour, for example singing a song to his drunken patrons about using the lavatory: "A place to set the cheeks aglow, with stars above and excrement below" (Brecht, 1979:14). Such techniques have their dangers, one of which is the loss of the importance or depth in a

story. Experience and practice are the cures for this ailment. More importantly in the long run is that there is a danger for the performing Minstrel to lose the anchoring 'Captain Self' in the fluidity of personae. The multiplastic Minstrel is in danger of sacrificing them-Self psychologically on the altar of performance, in the same way that the shaman is in danger of losing his identity when possessed by a god or spirit. A similar consideration could apply to the Queer-identified person who either chooses to express their Queerness at the risk of personal safety, or hides it and risks their sense of identity being subsumed by normative conformity. If the Minstrel can be, therefore, both himself as performed Captain Self, and a creature of both mythological power *and* literary comedy, it remains to discover what archetypal forms he can embody and communicate in order to bridge the chasm between the world of archetypes and a sense of identity, and how to do it, especially if those archetypal forms have been overwritten by religious and political ideologies.

8. Concluding

8.1 Necessity

The Minstrel in the form of the travelling entertainer can be viewed as an archetype split between the Clown and the Trickster, partaking

of both. He bridges the gap not just between those archetypes but also between archetypal figures and myths of past, and present-day storytelling. As historical, mythical and literary forms have shown, he is a creature who bridges opposites (power/weakness, seriousness/foolishness, feminine/masculine, kings/peasants, the Queer/‘normal’), partaking of both while remaining a thing in himself. His enduring popularity attests to his status as a highly recognisable archetypal figure who will reappear on a regularly. I would suggest that the Minstrel, in common with other archetypal figures, not only appears in myths, legends, faery tales and modern stories because we like him, but also because we *need* him. We need him to tell the stories through which we examine ourselves and understand who we are, and which offer alternatives to deepen our understanding of who we might be.

8.2 Neo-Minstrels

It remains to ask what forms the Minstrel is taking or could take nowadays and what stories he is or could be telling, and what could be learned from those performers and stories. Considering this question I am drawn towards modern Queer performance poets such as Rosie Garland, Dominic Berry or Gerry Potter whose stories told in verse reflect the fundamental elements of their lives for audiences with matching experience, while offering them for scrutiny and understanding towards others without. This role, I suggest, may

similarly be taken by drag queens - not only the singing, dancing queens who work the DJ decks of Canal Street, but alternatives like Cheddar Gorgeous whose performance defies, parodies, and therefore bridges, not just gender boundaries, but boundaries even of species. Mention could also be made of the drag queen's anti-drag queen, David Hoyle, a storyteller who bridges the gap between genders by defying their existence completely, and whose performances are, in themselves, legendary.

(11,829 words)

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Seany Minstrel: The Minstrel doesn't just come from one place. If he's multiplastic and a bridge between archetypes and humanity, then he's got to come from everywhere, all at once. I'm a syncretism! In this essay our academic, Thena, makes an examination of the multiple theories that form the foundations for the existence of the Minstrel and the syncretism of those theories which underlies Minstrelsy as a practice. This is just part one, though. Part two looks more deeply at what persona can be, but for now she starts by working from the general to the specific. Seems like a good idea to me!

The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)

by Thena

Abstract

This essay is the first of two which examine the theoretical backdrop to the work. As the basis is in multiplicity rather than coming from a single point, I have divided this section into four viewpoints from which to view the work – spirituality, sexuality, psychology and the stage or performance. These viewpoints, when brought into syncretic combination create the grounds for the methodology in Practice as Research

Keywords:

Persona; archetype; archetypal psychology; spirituality; autoethnography; sacred clown; identity; sexuality; queer; minstrel; multiplastic

Contents:

Introduction and Principal Theoretical Questions; Spirituality; Sexuality; Psychology; The Stage; The Syncretism; References

1. Introduction and Principal Theoretical Questions

This research has grown multiple autoethnographic roots which extend beyond the strict boundaries of, but have served to profoundly inform, this PhD thesis. They reach into 'Captain Self' Seán's¹⁰ lifelong understandings and experiences of spirituality, sexuality, identity and performance practice over more than 50 years. Due to the multiplastic and entangled interdisciplinary nature of Minstrelsy "integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a real synthesis of approaches" (Jensenius, 2012), I (Thena) have found it useful to simplify my approach by framing four inter-related theoretical 'viewpoints', a syncretism of which forms the basis for the Practice-as-Research methodology of *Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance*. For ease of understanding I have named these viewpoints as follows: *Spirituality; Sexuality; Psychology; and The Stage*.

1.1 Viewpoints

Thus, *Spirituality* comprises theoretical and experiential understandings of religious philosophy and activity, mythology and spiritual practices such as yoga, qigong or meditation. Spirituality is explored as a universal human trait, attempting to define its essential qualities, and its effective purpose as the finding of one's 'true self' while questioning the singular nature of that 'true self'. *Sexuality* concerns ideas of personal, specifically Queer, identity as intimately intertwined with performative notions of gender and sexuality. These notions are questioned and recontextualised in

¹⁰ Explained in section: 3.9 Woolf

relation to James Hillman's 'acorn theory' of the *daimon* as a 'controlling program' and Virginia Woolf's concept of the 'Captain Self', held as the self-identity basis for the performed Minstrel Self. *Psychology* takes as its basis a study of Jungian and post-Jungian Archetypal Psychology. The Jungian 4-part model of the human psyche is examined, the concept of the Anima/Animus is questioned in the context of fluid gender identity, and reformulated as *daimon* or Soul capable of multiple forms in a multiplastic manner. *The Stage* examines performance methods and training, with a bias towards specific traditional and physicality-based styles. These styles are considered via a lens of archetypal spirituality, finally positing the Soul as equivalent to the archetype of the Clown and pointing to an understanding of the Minstrel archetype as an aspect of the Fool, standing between and partaking of both Clown and Trickster.

1.2 Syncretism

The fifth category, *Syncretism*, combines the four *viewpoints* into a theoretical tool with which to define and shape the practical methodology of the PaR practice, and posits the Minstrel Self as that which dissolves the limitations of identity conceived as the 'true self'. Below I examine each *viewpoint* in turn, noting differences and overlaps, as well as each *viewpoint's* contribution to the overall syncretic theory. The pattern follows a step-by-step logical argument leading to a conceptualization of the Minstrel Self.

2. Spirituality (finding oneself[s])

There is no reason why spirituality or mysticism cannot be combined or intertwined with empirical research [...] scientists pursue their work not merely for reasons of instrumentality or intellectual curiosity but also with joy, passion and pleasure" (Spatz, 2015:134).

2.1 Definition

While it cannot reasonably be denied that spirituality has had enormous historical influence on humanity, a precise definition is very difficult to pin down. In modern academia spirituality is generally considered a subjective experience and therefore "There is no widely agreed definition on spirituality today" (Koenig, 2012:36). Many opinions take spirituality as the necessitating aspect of religious belief, "Religion in one or other of its many aspects is a universal phenomenon and it appears to be as old as the human race itself" (James, 1958:7) but that statement is problematic since the definition of a religion can be equally complex and subjective. For some, a religion is a series of rules, traditional behaviours imposed by an all-powerful deity (for example, *Kashrut*, the Kosher dietary laws) often encapsulated a holy book or series of scriptures, as with the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For others, especially in pre-Christian Europe, various sub-Saharan African countries and among traditional native Americans, 'folk religion' has a wider scope in the pluralism of deities and the richness and complexity of mythologies, but few imposed ethical behaviours. Hinduism, considered a major religion, could equally be described as a poly-deistic philosophy, while in several forms of Buddhism gods are not strictly required.

2.1.1 Colonial Attitudes

Until recently an hierarchical Darwinian attitude to religion has been held in the West, in which animism (the 'primitive' belief that all things partake of consciousness) was thought to 'evolve' through polytheism to the 'superior' forms of monotheism. I would argue that colonial attitudes of racial superiority have been major driving forces in formulating this theory, as demonstrated by the sophistication of African and Native American 'folk' religions and Japanese Shinto. The potential de-colonisation of 'folk' religious myth, legend and faery tale is something Tim considers elsewhere¹¹. James Hillman makes a similar point from a psychological perspective, "Culture and religion do not move upwards from the many to the one, from disorder to order, from Babel to Yahweh: monotheism is not identical with superiority except from within its own *Anschauung*" (2013:132).

2.1.3 Alternatives

Atheism, a profession of non-belief, has become increasingly common in recent decades, while coinciding with the rise, in the West since the end of the 19th century, of occultism and 'alternative' religions. Forms of Hinduism and Buddhism are the most popular of the alternatives being adopted especially in the late 1960s, but a dramatic rise in native European and Pagan spirituality should also be mentioned, noticeably manifesting in the codified neo-Paganisms, Wicca, Druidry and Asatru. Additionally, there are those who consider themselves 'spiritual not religious', a commonality of the

¹¹ Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation

syncretic 'New Age' movement and its overlaps with Transpersonal Psychology. There is even a movement of atheist spirituality, spearheaded by the philosopher and neuroscientist, Dr Sam Harris, an advocate of Eastern meditation practices who “sees no contradiction between his objective studies of the mind and the subjective experience of escaping its perpetual noise” (Anthony, 2019).

2.1.4 Physiology

It is reasonable to assume that the urge to spirituality, ill-defined as it may be, is a natural human trait experienced, or at least tacitly understood, by most people. In 2018, scientists at Columbia and Yale universities suggested that spiritual experience, or a sense of the spiritual, may have a physiological basis, specifically within the brain's parietal cortex of the brain. They have recognised it to have an important social and survival function: “the barrier between the self and others can be reduced or even eliminated altogether” and that it is important in “resilience and recovery from mental health and addictive disorders” (Livni, 2018). In her foreword to *Cassel's*¹², Gloria Anzaldúa describes spirituality as “a source of sustenance, a way of knowing, a path of survival” (Conner, Sparks and Sparks, 1997:ix).

2.2 Manifestations

If we cannot clearly define what spirituality *is*, perhaps we can still describe what it is *for* and how it might manifest in the context of this study. I suggest that the three most common manifestations, intersecting in ways which make them difficult to separate cleanly, are ritual, spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, yoga) and the building of

¹² *Cassel's Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit* – See References, Conner, Sparks and Sparks, 1997)

myth. “Man, apparently, cannot maintain himself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth” (Campbell, 1969:4). I examine myth as a psychological trait below¹³, but for now it will suffice to demonstrate the ubiquity of myth in relation to human experience. C.G. Jung, the ‘father’ of the concepts of archetype and the collective unconscious “concluded that there was a myth-creating level of mind, common [...] to people of different times and different cultures. This level of mind he named the *collective unconscious*.” (Storr, 1973:35). I return to the collective unconscious as this essay’s argument progresses¹⁴.

2.2.1 Myth

Myth (including legend and faery tale)¹⁵ has been shown to occur in every culture worldwide. The scriptures of monotheistic religions, in that they juxtapose spiritually and supernaturally based stories alongside rules of conduct, can be considered mythological. Nowadays, traditional stories have been superseded by the new mythologies of science-fiction and fantasy, sometimes¹⁶ including figures such as Thor, Loki and the Valkyries appropriated directly from ancient mythology. “Political, social and religious history repeat archetypal patterns; fiction, film, folktale, drama, and the plastic arts too, are structured by myth” (Hillman, 2013:73). Though overlap is common and expected due to the commonalities of human experience, it is this term, *archetypal patterns*¹⁷, which defines myth - archetypes and archetypal patterns being those

¹³ Section: 4. Psychology

¹⁴ Section: 4. Psychology

¹⁵ See Glossary for a full explanation of this term

¹⁶ In the popular films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, for example

¹⁷ See Glossary

universal figures and elements of story which transcend culture. “The primary, and irreducible, language of these archetypal patterns is a metaphorical discourse of myths. These can therefore be understood as the most fundamental patterns of human existence” (ibid:14). Archetypes, even though they are universal and thus transcend culture, manifest in shapes formed by cultural forces. Thus, an archetype such as the *Holy Fool* (or aspects, *Trickster* or *Sacred Clown*) might appear as a coyote to Navajo people, an unwashed raving madman to a Russian Orthodox Christian, or the drunken god Dionysos, “the spirit of nonconformity, revolution and [...] chaos” (Fitton, 2012:1) to an Archetypal Psychologist.

2.2.2 Practices

The use of specific exercises as ways of experiencing the divine or achieving transcendent states are common practices worldwide. One might arguably divide these exercises into two categories: serious and playful. Prayer, meditation, yoga “a process [...] to realize in full self-consciousness, one’s identity with the Supreme” (Slater, 1966:1) or *taiji* and *qigong* “somatic and energetic [...] traditions of postural initiation” (Mayer, 2015) might be considered ‘serious’ methods. However, since “Play is ubiquitous among the higher animals” and “Artists play with colour and space. Musicians play with sound and silence. Eros plays with lovers. Gods play with the universe. Children play with everything they can get their hands on” (Nachmanovitch, 1990:42) there are other, ludic and creative, spiritual practices with the same purpose. Such might include playing music or ecstatic dancing as forms of ego-destructive meditation, “It is curious that both meditation and dancing are ways to ‘disappear”

(ibid:53). Playful methods often have a strong element of performed physicality and, unlike internalised meditation or silent prayer, lend themselves to communal activity and the third manifestation of spirituality: ritual.

2.2.3 Ritual

'Ritual' can mean anything from a High Church service to the regular time and manner in which one cleans one's teeth. In this instance I use 'ritual' to define activities which aim to place those involved in touch with archetypal figures/patterns via enactment or dramatization of myth. "When we speak myth we really are not speaking myth but myth-ology, the *logos* or telling of myth. For myth is action [...] myth follows from ritual or is embodied in ritual" (Intellectual Deep Web, 2019). Rituals are used to mark specific moments of change, such as the turning of seasons, the crowning of a king or a child's coming of age. The ritual connects the participants to archetypal figures/patterns via parallels with myth. Easter¹⁸, for example, connects to a seasonal rebirth theme through the symbolism of eggs and rabbits, but also stands in direct relation to the scriptural myth of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Communal ritual is generally performed in an hierarchical fashion, led by 'priests' (a village shaman, the Pope, or anything in between) considered more directly linked to the spiritual realm than 'normal' people, and witnessed or participated in by a congregation. As Victor Turner noted, transition from religious ritual to modern theatre is a matter of steps, "Theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes" (182:12).

¹⁸ A variant of the Jewish *Pesach* (Passover)

2.3 Purpose

This leaves the question of the purpose myth, practices and ritual. What is spirituality *for*? To an orthodox Jew, in an argument which appears circular, it is to follow Torah.

We live spiritual lives in order to follow Torah, and we follow Torah in order to live spiritual lives. However, this ultimately means:

By making the spiritual and ethical insights of our Torah the foundation of our lives, we transcend our human limits. We connect ourselves to God, and can join our people's prophets, priests, kings, heroes and sages as one of those who live and teach Torah (Eron, 2017).

One could interpret that statement as 'to know oneself as a Jew', that is, self-realisation in relation to God and Torah. Similarly, for followers of other religions or none:

When the shaman hears the voice of the Great Spirit or the Christian mystic experiences the Christ within, both are referring to an archetype of wholeness, the archetype of Self, represented as an image of God (Hyde and McGuiness, 1999:112).

The purpose of spirituality, then, appears to be self-realisation in relation to the divine or the spiritual. A question leading towards the multiplasticity of the Captain Self/Minstrel Self, however, is what that 'self' is that can be realised, and whether there is only one:

Authenticity is the perpetual dismemberment of being and not being a self, a being that is always in many parts, like a dream with a full cast. We all have identity crises because a single identity is a delusion of the monotheistic mind (Hillman, 1994:39).

Further, I ask if there is something essential and permanent, perhaps pre-existent, behind concepts of self and identity.

3. Sexuality (knowing oneself[s])

Inasmuch as 'identity' is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous' gendered beings who appear to be persons who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined (Butler, 1990:23).

If one's sense of identity is, at least in modern western society, inextricably entangled with one's sense of one's own gender and sexuality, it implies that any fluidity in sexuality or gender identification and expression indicates fluidity of identity. Fluidity of identity, or of self is, therefore, 'culturally unintelligible', but also personally and spiritually liberating. In relation to the gender essentialism of traditional western religious belief, "The very act of subverting something so primal and fixed in society as one's gender role can unleash a creativity that is truly needed by society – like a shamanistic act" (Conner, Sparks and Sparks, 1997:xii).

3.1 Butler-Spatz

Outside academia, gender and sexuality are mostly considered to be stable qualities. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) provided a new take on gender, as a socially constructed concept and a behaviour which is learned and performed. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990:34). Similarly, Ben Spatz reframes that performativity as embodied technique:

It is therefore not wrong to think of the substrate of gender as sex, sexuality, sexual reproduction or sexual difference. The substrate of gender can include all of these [...] the substrate can never be finally defined apart from its technique. The technique of gender determines what counts as sexual difference (2015:181-2, my emphasis).

3.2 Peterson

While Butler's and Spatz's views are considered positively within academic circles there are some who disagree and see gender in essentialist terms. In 2016, Dr Jordan Peterson of Toronto University refused, despite potentially breaking Canadian equal rights laws, to use gender-neutral pronouns for non-binary or transgender students. His defence was 'the right to free speech' in which he considers using non-standard (he/she) pronouns and accepting alternative gender identities to be a government imposition: "he argues terms like 'gender identity' and 'gender expression' are too broad, are the 'propositions of radical social constructionists', and are being used to bully opponents into submission" (Murphy, 2016). Peterson's views are not popular in academic circles and are considered to have a more personal agenda. In the same article Peterson's non-binary colleague, Dr Lee Airton made the following reply, "If you actually listen and you parse out the arguments, it becomes very clear that this not about freedom of speech, that this is about reducing transgendered people's needs as excessive and illegitimate" (ibid). Outside of academia, though, Peterson has become a popular author and speaker, appealing to a largely young, white, male conservative part of the Western population. His book, *12 Rules For Life* has, in the USA, sold more than 5,000,000 copies within three years, and he has a huge online presence. His Twitter account had 1.8 million followers at its height. However, Peterson appears to be swimming against the tide of overall popular opinion¹⁹ and acceptance of gender-variance and alternative living in the West:

¹⁹ As evidenced by his Twitter account being suspended for hate speech in 2022

Peterson's opposition to the notion of gender identity seems to take root in his fetishization of the nuclear family. For those of us who recognise a plurality of happy romantic and familial arrangements, his position reeks of conservatism. It is best left in the past, where it belongs (Ashley, 2019).

3.3 Greer-Paglia

A similarly essentialist has also been espoused by individuals considered the 'old guard' of 20th century feminist politics, such as Germaine Greer and Camille Paglia.

Greer was reported as saying that a transgender person could not know their real gender identity, because "you don't know what the other sex is" and that, "I don't think that post-operative transgender men are women [...] I'm not saying that people should not be allowed to go through that procedure, what I'm saying is it doesn't make them a woman" (Wahlquist, 2016). Paglia was reported as saying that she rejects "state-sponsored coercion to call someone a 'woman' or a 'man' simply on the basis of his or her subjective feeling about it" (Willis, 2017). These viewpoints argue that one's gender identity is not performed but is a direct result of biology, albeit with the addition of social elements. Interestingly, Abigail Thorn reverses that viewpoint in her 'coming out' video.

3.4 Thorn

Thorn is an actress, philosopher and the creator of the YouTube channel, *Philosophy Tube* since 2013. Most importantly here, Thorn is a transgender woman. In her 2021 video, *Identity: A Trans Coming Out Story* (Philosophy Tube, 2021) she appears for the first time as Abigail, at the 25th minute of a 37-minute film, to "drop the act" because "this is not a performance [...] this is real" and "this is the real me". The implication is that there is something in Thorn's identity which is essential and "real", possibly pre-

existent, defining her not as the biological male she was declared at birth, and was expected to pretend to be (to 'perform'), but the woman she is now and is specifically *not* performing. In the video she states of her transformation, "It's like I was made for it, which of course I was". Thorn is using *perform* in the sense of pretence, to pretend to be someone she is not, but as Hans-Georg Moeller states in a response video, "Abigail still performs a gender [...] Any gender must be performed, otherwise we wouldn't notice it" (Carefree Wandering, 2021). Moeller explains that "Any identity at all is performed" and that "to express that you're not performing, you must do so in the form of a performance" therefore Thorn paradoxically "performs that she is not performing." However, this does not invalidate Thorn's identity, it simply looks at it from a different angle. "Identity is performed, and through the performance it is experienced as genuine, both by the performer and the audience" so that "genuineness is not the origin of the performance, but it is the result of the performance" (ibid).

3.5 Goffman

While these statements align with Butler and Spatz, there are still those who feel that there is something of the essential in the search for identity and selfhood. Erving Goffman saw people analogously as performers performing changing roles according to need and context and the performed self as a *thing possessed* by a person but shaped by those needs and contexts:

In analysing the self, then, we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments (1959:245).

3.6 Normality?

I contend that conservative, essentialist views of gender and sexuality (sex and gender are equivalents and heterosexuality is 'normal') take no account of the complexity of humanity expressed by the above commentators, socially, biologically, psychologically *and* spiritually. 'Normality' sells us very short indeed. However, as Thorn and Goffman have shown, there appears to be something essential within the person *despite* the reality of sexuality/gender/identity as learned and performed techniques. A question arises, particularly considering Thorn's experience is: If gender is a learned technique which "can sediment in the body to the point where it is mistaken for physiological inevitability" (Spatz, 2015:188) how would one *know* that the technique one has learned is, in fact, the wrong one? Assuming that we grow "within the obligatory form of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990:185), then techniques of behaviour outside of this 'heterosexual matrix' are unlikely to be easily learned and sedimented.

3.7 Hillman

A possible answer to this quandary is available in a spiritual form. The 'acorn theory', explained in James Hillman's *The Soul's Code* (1996), examines the lives of exceptional people who appear to have defined themselves despite their upbringings, by positing the existence of a pre-existent personal *daimon*. "At the outset we need to make clear that today's main paradigm for understanding a human life, the interplay of genetics and environment, omits something essential – the particularity you feel to be you" (p6). The acorn theory rejects the standard psychological narrative of identity, "By accepting the idea that I am the effect of a subtle buffeting between hereditary and societal

forces, I reduce myself to a result" (ibid) in favour of a spiritual viewpoint in which "Your daimon selected both the egg and the sperm, as it selected their carriers, called 'parents'. Their union results from your necessity – and not the other way around" (p64). Hillman suggests it was "the rise of rationalism and the Enlightenment, which blinded the modern eye to the invisibles, and consequently to the independence from the self of the genius and the daimon" (p258). It would not be overreaching within this argument, therefore, to reframe gender and sexuality as particularities of the *daimon*, which then reacts to the gender and sexuality techniques it has learned to perform. Rachel Pollock (1995), although without reference to *daimon*, further explains that while "someone born with a penis is assumed to be male, desire women when grown up, and exhibit masculine behaviour" (p12) that "The transsexual person must learn, and accept, what everyone needs to learn, that we cannot decide ahead of time who we are, or what identity we would like to have" (p4). However, repeating Hillman's statement above, if there is an "independence from the self of the genius and daimon" perhaps we *can* decide our identity ahead of time and perhaps in multiple forms, at least within specific limitations. We might consider the *self* and the *identity* to be multiplastic and controlled by the *daimon*, which decides that one is able to accept certain identities as comfortable and validating, but not others. Arguably, Thorn could accept and identify with the labels of 'actress', 'philosopher' and 'YouTuber', and probably many others, but the identity of 'male' was unacceptable to her soul or *daimon*. She can be many things but, despite biology and upbringing, she cannot be a

man because she has the soul of a woman. Someone may, potentially, have the soul of a man or a woman, or both man and woman, or neither, or something else entirely.

3.8 Gender Variance

Reflecting precedents exist in myths and polytheistic traditions. In many north American tribes gender variance is a normal aspect of native culture. Individuals, defining traits varying from tribe to tribe, have been given the English umbrella term 'two-spirit'. Examples include the *Hwame* (Mohave), *Miati* (Hidatsa) tribe and *Winkte* (Lakota) who were "especially powerful healers and magicians, often effecting transformations through chants" (Conner, Sparks and Sparks, 1997:348). Similarly, the Yoruba sea-*orishá*, Olokun is either male, female or both-in-one depending upon viewpoint and circumstances. "He-she is not only transgendered but also a hybrid human-fish (or sea serpent) linked to both gender and theriomorphic transformation" (ibid:254).

3.9 Woolf

As this *daimon* can be the controlling aspect of multiplastic self or identity (by being many things but not all things) it recalls Virginia Woolf's concept of the 'Captain self', from *Orlando: A Biography*.

This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all (1928:221).

Later I posit this Captain Self, "compact of all the selves we have it in us to be" as the basis of the Minstrel Self, the performance persona of the Captain Self.

4. Psychology (understanding oneself[s])

Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life (Jung and Jaffé, 1961:182-3).

As mentioned above²⁰ it was Jung who, in the 1920s, discovered (or invented) the “myth creating level of mind” he called the Collective Unconscious, a ‘place’ populated by themes and figures common across the myths, legends and faery tales of humanity, “ancestral memories, which Jung called archetypes, are represented by universal themes in various cultures, as expressed through literature, art, and dreams” (McLeod, 2018). It is important to clarify what is meant by ‘archetype’ since there are two overlapping kinds : Jungian and Mythological.

4.1 Archetypes-Jungian

Jungian Archetypes are four conceptualizations which model a theoretical make-up of the human psyche, these being the Self, the Persona, the Shadow and the Anima or Animus depending on the gender of the person concerned. The Jungian Persona is the ‘mask’ we present to the world, “It conceals our real self and Jung describes it as the ‘conformity’ archetype. This is the public face or role a person presents to others as someone different to who we really are” (ibid). The Jungian Shadow is that which we hide, often from ourselves, the uncivilised, amoral, animal side of our personalities.

²⁰ 2.2 Manifestations

The Jungian Self is that which we are aiming to become, our 'true selves', through a process of self-realising integration known as *Individuation*.

4.1.1 Anima

The Jungian Anima/Animus is the most problematic conceptualization in relation to this research on, and understanding of, gender, gender identity/fluidity and multiplasticity. According to standard theories of the Anima/Animus:

The personality or persona naturally takes on the gender role that you are born to physically [...] Women take on a feminine role and persona. Men take on a masculine role and persona. The psyche compensates for this by birthing a contra sexuality in the inner life of the person. So: Women have a contra sexuality which is masculine in nature and this is called the Animus. Men have a contra sexuality which is feminine in nature and this is called the Anima (Farah, 2015).

A Queer theoretical lens troubles this definition, pointing out the normativity implied in the terms, 'feminine' and 'masculine'. One might ask how this categorization would apply to a person born intersex, or to a self-identified non-binary person, or whether a transgender person's Anima/Animus transitions psychologically as they do physically. Similarly, since a method of Anima/Animus integration is through "A mature and lasting relationship with a member of the opposite sex in the world, typically in the form of marriage. In a marriage one is relating in effect to one's soul's image." (ibid) it would exclude homosexual relationships. While recognizing Jung's binary classification as 'of its time', the 'one size fits all' approach cannot be deemed appropriate here.

4.1.2 Anima-Soul

However, integrating the Anima/Animus can still be seen to have value for

psychological health. As Ben Spatz has argued, gender is a learned technique because “identity categories are acquired through embodied training” (2015:161). It is possible to reframe the Anima/Animus as the psyche’s oppositional balance to our normative gender training. Jungian therapy is based on wholeness through *individuation*, “integration or balance within the individual mind itself” (Storr, 1973:10) involving “the individual becoming himself, a unique person, emancipated from undue influence [...] concerned with his own inner development” (ibid:27). In this case, the ascribed gender of the Anima/Animus is of less consequence than it simply being a balancing quality of one’s personality regardless of whether those qualities are viewed as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’. I propose, therefore, for the purposes of this essay, a re-envisioning of the Anima/Animus. The original word, Latin for the soul or ‘breath of life’, is replaced from here onwards with the ungendered, capitalised English word, *Soul*.

4.2 Archetypes-Mythological

Despite the difficulties I have demonstrated, Jungian psychology is widely influential and concepts like the Collective Unconscious and Archetypes are often accepted uncritically. As shown above, though, the archetypes of Self, Persona, Shadow and Soul do not appear as characters in myth in the same way that Mothers, Witches, Fools and Minstrels do. It is common within Jungian psychology to see characters in dreams as representing the Jungian Archetypes within the dreamer’s psyche. A Mother may represent the Soul, a Hero might stand as the Persona. In the Jungian exercise, *active imagination*, the patient is encouraged to interact with these characters as

personalities within their own right to gain understandings of them, eventually integrating them into the whole Self.

4.2.1 Both-And

It is also possible for Mythological Archetypes to be seen as psychological characters with a Self, Persona, Soul and Shadow of their own. I have mentioned the Trickster²¹ as a well-known archetype, the Norse Loki being a good example. One might investigate the Mythological Archetype of Loki as Trickster via the four lenses of Jungian Archetypes. In the story in which Thrym the Giant holds Thor's hammer to ransom²², Loki's Persona is the clever liar who persuades Thor to wear a wedding dress and convinces Thrym that Thor in drag is really Freyja, the goddess of love. Loki's Shadow would be his fear of a straight fight, especially against Freyja whose temper is legendary, and his Soul would be his understanding of the importance of saving Thor's hammer, a massively powerful symbolic object. His individuated Self can be seen as the combination of all these elements which comprise the story and his growth through it. From polytheistic perspectives it is important to see Mythological Archetypal figures in this holistic way. Doing otherwise would deny the richness and complexity of the gods, and through them the world and ourselves. Jay Livernois says of some modern depictions of Aphrodite:

The problem with [...] these visions of Aphrodite is that there is no dark side or shadow to the goddess. In a living polytheistic system, a goddess or god holds both good and bad attributes at the same time [...] The problem with all this sweetness and light is that polytheistically goddesses and gods not only carry shadow, but we often contact them –

²¹ 1.1 Viewpoints (and following)

²² Which Tim has rewritten as a weblog article (Fitton, 2/11/2020)

and they often contact us – most vitally through shadow (1995:93).

4.3 Beyond Jung

Jungian psychology's important contribution is the recognition of more than a personal aspect to the psyche, something missing in Freudian and some other psychological methodologies. This has led to the rise of multiple schools of Transpersonal Psychology, all of which recognise:

higher functioning states in which our perception becomes intensified, we experience an increased sense of connection to nature and to other human beings, become more compassionate and altruistic, have a wider sense of perspective and live more authentically (Taylor, 2015).

Many schools work somatically in ways that resemble traditional mind-body techniques like yoga and qigong. Sandra Reeve's *Movement Psychotherapy* "pays attention to the whole person in movement (which includes stillness)" (Reeve, 2017). While such techniques are relevant to the methodology of this project²³, the most influential *theoretical* school is the more cerebral Archetypal Psychology.

4.4 Archetypal Psychology

Archetypal Psychology (as much a philosophical stance as a psychological methodology) sees the psyche as directly affected by and connected to myth and archetype expressed as images:

Archetypal psychology presents the polytheistic structure of a postmodern consciousness. It is a style of thinking, a fashion of mind, a revisionist engagement on many fronts: therapy, education, literary criticism, medicine, philosophy and the material world (Hillman, 2013:60).

²³ See Seany Minstrel: *How to be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes*

The 'father' of Archetypal Psychology, James Hillman describes it specifically as, "a psychology deliberately affiliated with the arts, culture, and the history of ideas, arising as they do from the imagination." (ibid:13) and the strength of Archetypal Psychology lies in its use of imagination to create a powerful connection between archetypal forms and patterns and the events, proclivities and problems of the human condition. "All things have an archetypal significance and are available to psychological penetration, and this interiority is manifested by the physiognomic character of the things of the horizontal world" (ibid:36, my emphasis).

4.4.1 Active Imagination

An important therapeutic method used in Archetypal Psychotherapy, taken from Jung, is *active imagination*. One encounters archetypal forms, generally in dreams, but in a non-interpretive, non-analytical manner:

The moment an image comes up and you interpret it, you are standing in the way of it [...] Interpretation, reductive, clarifying interpretations are a way of getting rid of imagination [because] The phenomenon is always more interesting than the explanation of the phenomenon. (Individuation Portal, 2018).

Hillman explains that the main purpose of Archetypal Psychology, and of life in general, is *soul-making*, a necessary aspect of individuation:

Soul-making is also described as imaging, that is, seeing or hearing by means of an imagining that sees through an event to its image. Imagining means releasing events from their literal understanding into a mythical appreciation. Soul-making, in this sense, is equated with de-literalizing – that psychological attitude that suspiciously disallows the naïve and given level of events in order to search out their shadowy, metaphorical significances for soul (2013: 35).

Imagination is important because “imagination is not merely a human faculty but an activity of soul to which the human imagination bears witness. It is not we who imagine, but we who are imagined” (ibid: 18).

4.4.2 Soul

There seems a contradiction between the pre-existent *daimon* also known as the soul, and the soul which must be made in soul-making. Is this soul identical to the Soul which encompasses the Anima/Animus. Nothing in Hillman's work suggests that the soul he speaks of is *not* pre-existent, and if identical with the *daimon* then it must necessarily be, but he does say that it is a natural part of the human psyche, and indeed of the whole world, which can be nourished or starved:

Since anything around can nourish our souls by feeding imagination, there is soul stuff out there. So why not admit, as does deep ecology, that the environment itself is ensouled, animated, inextricably meshed with us and not fundamentally separate from us? (1996:153).

Argument equates the Anima/Animus-Soul with Woolf's Captain Self via Hillman's soul and *daimon*, through Archetypal Psychology's multiplastic embracing of “the multiplicity of meanings and fates and the multiplicity of intentions embodied by any subject at any moment” (Hillman, 2013: 58) and through Hillman's translation of *daimon*:

into more modern terms such as ‘angel’, ‘soul’, ‘paradigm’, ‘image’, ‘fate’, ‘inner twin’, ‘acorn’, ‘life companion’, ‘guardian’, ‘heart's calling’. This multiplicity and ambiguity inhere in the *daimon* itself as a personified imaginal spirit who in Greek psychology was also your personal fate (1996:257, my emphasis).

“Inner twin” and “life companion” would describe a retranslation of Anima/Animus into Soul. As a thing-in-itself it is distinct from the Jungian Self (but not necessarily from

the present conceptualisation of the 'Woolfian' Captain Self). "You carried your fate with you; it was your particular accompanying genius. That's why translators of *daimon* sometimes say 'fate' and sometimes 'genius'. But never 'self'" (ibid).

5. The Stage (being oneself[s])

But we are discovering that a holy theatre is still what we need. So where should we look for it? In the clouds or on the ground? (Brook, 1968:72)

5.1 Physicality

Accessing the spiritual via the physical is a methodology as old as humanity. In many societies, including the pre-Cartesian West, there is often thought to be no significant difference between the two:

That confident ability to separate the physical from the intellectual is a result of culture not anatomy. For instance, the mind-body split announced by Descartes was not so well established when John Bulwer was thinking about gesture. He saw muscles as the only means by which the soul can express itself (Shepherd, 2006:131).

Similar antiquity could be applied to acting²⁴. This is evidenced by the image of 'The Sorcerer', a cave painting dated to around 13,000 BCE, in the caves of Trois-Frères in southern France. 'The Sorcerer', a god, a human, or something else entirely, is the figure of a man wearing a stag skin and antlers. Joseph Campbell describes him:

if the vivid, unforgettable lord of the animals in the hunters' sanctuary of Trois Frères is a god, then he is certainly a god of sorcerers, and if a sorcerer, he is one who has donned the costume of a god [...] when the sacred regalia has been assumed the individual has become an epiphany of the divine being itself [...] He does not merely represent the god,

²⁴ 'Acting' defined here as deliberate, temporary self-identification with, and performance of, someone or something different from one's normal identity.

he is the god (1969:311).

5.1.1 Ritual

Shepherd says “The ritual mask is an outward transformation of the sort of potent symbol which crosses cultures and evokes archetypes” (2006:44). Spiritual performance by ritual identification using masks and costumes is a worldwide phenomenon, particularly in the traditions of sub-Saharan Africa:

In most traditional African cultures, the person who wears a ritual mask conceptually loses his or her human identity and turns into the spirit represented by the mask itself [...] Some of the most complex rituals that have been studied by scholars are found in Nigerian cultures such as those of the Yoruba and Edo peoples, that bear some resemblances to the Western notion of theatre (National Museum of Ghana, 2019).

Outside Africa, other cultures have theatrical performance also traceable back to ancient ritual traditions and identification with animals, gods and spirits. The *Kathakali* of southern India, with mythological stories, formalised movements and scripts, and elaborate costumes and face paint, is an example. Similarly, Japanese *Noh* theatre has the deepest of its roots in a mixture of Japanese, Chinese and Mongolian shamanisms, “In Noh we may recognize remnants of palaeolithic shamanic rituals. The shamanic cosmology of three levels of consciousness (subterranean, ordinary, and celestial) is especially relevant” (Abraham, 2012).

5.1.2 Mumming

In the West, theatrical performance has been used for centuries for both entertainment *and* to express spiritual and religious truths, often in a ritualised manner. The Roman Catholic church had, until they became too rowdy, mediaeval Mystery Plays, written to dramatize Biblical stories in vernacular (accessible)

language. Other performances have complex, tangled roots. An example is the Mumming play, usually taking place at Christmas or Easter, commonly known in northern England as *Pace-Egging*²⁵. A traditional Pace-Egging play is highly ritualistic and has a selection of stock characters identifiable by their costumes, who, while rarely masked in the literal sense, are sometimes metaphorically masked with face-paint. Characters usually include Saint George, The Turkish Knight, The Fool and The Doctor. Eddie Cass describes it as a “hero-combat” play with the essential features as follows:

after the presentation or introduction, first, a series of vaunts [boasts] expressed by at least two characters; and, next, a one-to-one fight or series of such fights during which at least one of the combatants is wounded or ‘slain’. There is then a ‘lament’ for the victim by one of the characters, the Fool or the King of Egypt, for example, after which the victim of this wounding or supposed killing is brought back to life by a quack doctor (2001:16).

The final act culminates in a collection of money from the audience. A difficulty with Mumming plays lies origin and meaning. Peter Harrop (2019) forwards the view that they were an 18th century offshoot of touring theatre, later appropriated by folklorists. Others have a more subjective relationship:

there is no clear evidence that the play has a meaning. This is not to ignore the fact that some performers of mumming plays are of the view that they are participating in some ancient ritual, whilst for others the play represents a deep spiritual experience (Cass, 2001:3).

They are, however, ancient or modern, not beyond an archetypal viewpoint:

²⁵ Pace-Egging is a corruption of *Pesach*, the Hebrew name for the Jewish festival which is rendered in English as Passover but in other European languages provides the root for the name of the Easter festival – for example, as *Pâques* (French), *Pasqua* (Italian) and *y Pasg* (Welsh) - and from which the dating of Easter is directly derived. Appropriately, Pace-Egging is always performed at Easter.

The replacing of one culture's god or image by that of another is well known, and works all the better if they are simply aspects of one proto-typical divine power. As Bel fought and conquered Tiamat, so did Saint George fight and conquer the Dragon. As Beli slew his brother Bran, in the cultural and seasonal myth, so does Saint George in mummer's plays slay the Turkish Knight. This transfers the cultural battle from one era to another, but does not alter the metaphysical symbolism, the root appeal which keeps the myth alive (Stewart, 1988:66, my emphasis).

5.1.3 Commedia

Also of mysterious origin and also having masked stock characters and a ritualised style, is the Italian tradition of *Commedia dell'Arte*. It would be untenable to ascribe any deliberate spiritual meaning to the *Commedia*, which has always been performed as social and political satire and it may be argued that Commedia's characters are fixed socio-economic types, rather than archetypes, but this would be to assume that the two are mutually exclusive²⁶. Characters are as relatable now as they were in 16th century Florence, including *Il Dottore* and *Pantalone* (comedic reversals of wise-old-sage archetypes) and *Zanni*, particularly *Arlecchino* (aka Harlequin), clown-like performers taking the role of servants.

5.2 Lecoq-Grotowski

An actual, physical mask as a method of identification²⁷ is still used in performer training, particularly in the *École internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq*, in which, “I ask each student, with the mask on, to become the different elements of nature: water, fire, air, earth. To identify themselves with water they play at being the sea, but also

²⁶ I would argue that this view is incorrect. See the Glossary for further clarification.

²⁷ For detailed study on mask as identification see my essay, *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 2: Persona)*, especially Section: 2 Historical Perspective.

rivers, lakes, puddles, drops of water.” (2000: 44). Particularly important is the Neutral Mask:

The neutral mask is adopted in order for the students to encounter archetypal images, to find the collective within the body, [...] The central archetypal fixed point, evidenced by the neutral mask, is Lecoq's view of Self [...] the mask presents no role or character, no “other” [...] The mask is intended to be a version of yourself that has not been shaped by culture or history [...] This suggests an archetypal Self that is both shared and personal (Pinchin, 2019:117).

As Hillman explains, “Authenticity is *in* the illusion, playing it, seeing through it from within as we play it, like an actor who sees through his mask and can only see in this way” (1994: 39) However, and seemingly in contradiction to the idea of identification through the mask, in the 1960s Jerzy Grotowski began to develop intensively physical actor training methods, the *via negativa*, with the aim of removing psycho-physical blocks and pushing the performer beyond the metaphorical ‘masks’ of their personae:

when Grotowski writes that the function of art is ‘to take us beyond our limits, to fill our void, to overcome our disabilities, in short to realize ourselves’, the casually undifferentiated juxtaposition between authentic and elevated conditions suggests that the exalted self is synonymous with the real self where both are opposed to the unreality of social masks (Mitter, 1992: 91).

Grotowski was not the first of the modern directors to use specifically physical training methods, which can be traced back to Stanislavski's *Method of Physical Actions* and Meyerhold's *Biomechanics* and certainly further. It can be argued that Grotowski's extreme style had an entirely political basis and purpose, stemming from his experiences as a child in Nazi-occupied Poland and the history he learned from that time, and a wish to communicate in as effective a fashion as possible:

This “conquer” of internalization was not simple nor immediate, and was the result of a complex strategy which considered in a nondirect, veiled manner, the tragic history

of Polish-Jewish relations, the Holocaust and Auschwitz (Pagani 2012).

For many, though, particularly when considering his stress on the transformation of the actor, it took on a more spiritual aspect:

Grotowski's actors offer their performance as a ceremony for those who wish to assist: the actor invokes, lays bare what lies in every man – and what daily life covers up. This theatre is holy because its purpose is holy (Brook, 1968:67).

Equally, for some the practices that Grotowski developed “are not just an artistic method, they are also a spiritual practice. They are like sacred texts that offer us clues to help us search for artistic and personal authenticity” (Gregory, 2000: 328). The rare public performances by Grotowski's company dealt in archetypal themes through the use of classical texts with archetypal subject matter²⁸ and an absolutely unfettered connection between the performer and audience:

Grotowski believed that, given the absence of a common belief system, it was only in the direct connection between actor and spectator, without artifice, in ‘the perceptivity of the human organism’, that myth could allow us once again to experience a universal human truth (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007: 59).

5.2.1 Descendants

Grotowski's legacy is being carried forward by many companies and individuals, most directly by the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera, Italy which works towards developing Grotowski's concept of *Art as Vehicle*, “the investigation of how gesture, sound and personal images can transform not the audience, but the actor himself.” (Wangh, 2000: xxiii). More independently, there are

²⁸ For example, *Dr Faustus* (1962), who sells his soul to the devil, in common with clerics such as Theophilus and Urban Grandier, and several musicians such as Paganini and Robert Johnson.

Song of the Goat in Poland, run by Grotowski's one-time student, Grzegorz Bral whose *Bral Acting Method* "consists of the organic linking together and integration of voice, text, energy, and imagination" (*Song of the Goat*, date unknown) or Britain's Animikii Theatre who "present MYTHS and LEGENDS with a dedication to character study and the story's essential expression at the centre of our work" (Animikii, date unknown).

5.3 Adishakti

Spiritual traditions are upheld in new forms in theatres across the world. An example is the Adishakti Laboratory for Theatre Art Research in Pondicherry, India which was established in 1981 by the late Veenapani Chawla. Adishakti explores "research into and re-animation of traditional and folk knowledges in theatre, music and movement" and uses other Indian practices such as *pranayama* and martial arts in their training. "This is based on certain Indian knowledge and physical forms like *Kalaripayattu*, the Kerala martial art form, breath practices for psychological expression used in *Koodiyattam*, a form of classical Sanskrit Theatre" (Adishakti, 2019). M.K. Gayatri explains how Adishakti's:

focus on research and experimentation can be seen as a development of Veenapani's compelling vision of a contemporary Indian theatre that could express philosophical dilemmas about the individual's relationship to the collective, archetypes and choice, hybridity and belonging, and most importantly a search for self that unlike Grotowski's vision was not based in sacrifice but in cultivation and celebration (2018: 173).

5.4 Therapies

Cultivation and celebration can also be seen in psychophysical therapies developed by performers from training practices and used as spiritual disciplines, often in combination with methodologies from yoga, Feldenkrais Technique and Alexander

Method. Sandra Reeve's *Movement Psychotherapy* attempts to re-unite the Cartesian body-mind split which "still forms the major part of Western daily life practice and is promoted not least by orthodox (allopathic) medicine" (2011: 6) through movement methods a somatic viewpoint seeing "movement as inherently meaningful rather than looking for the psychology or story that a movement sequence is revealing." (ibid: 49).

Gabrielle Roth's *5Rhythms* couches a similar purpose in different terms:

Doing the Rhythms is about waking up to your most essential nature, stretching your intuition and imagination as surely as your body. It's a formless form, one that expands your range of physical and emotional expression and introduces you to forgotten parts of your psyche. It awakens intuitive intelligence and artistic sensibilities (1997: 12).

5.5 Clown

A possible difficulty in these examples is a conflict between the 'mask' and what is thought of as 'the authentic'. Whereas Lecoq's actors, as Hillman implied, find themselves *through* a physical mask, Grotowski's aim was to remove all masks (literal and metaphorical) and create connection via the actor's search for absolute authenticity. However, this need not be an 'either-or' conflict, and may be resolved ('both-and') in the search for one's personal clown²⁹. Lecoq (2000) explained that:

The clown doesn't exist aside from the actor performing him. We are all clowns [...] Unlike in Commedia dell'Arte there is no established character to support the actor [...] so he has to discover the clown part within himself [...] Above all, he must avoid playing a role, but give free rein, in the most psychological manner, to the innocence inside him (p154-5).

²⁹ This will be demonstrated (5.5.2 Soul) to be a necessary aspect of the multiplastic Minstrel as both archetypal figure and performance persona.

In other words, not to find oneself *within* the clown but to find that innocent, open part of oneself which is naturally the clown. John Wright elaborates, “clown is like life, which seems a startling observation at first, but clowns come alive at a level that is quintessentially *you*” (2006:183). We have already established, “clowns of one sort or another crop up in all cultures; they’re anarchic spirits, madmen, fools, scapegoats, or just popular entertainers adept at being stupid in public” (ibid: 180). Like the Sacred Clown of myth, theatrical clowns take many forms from the most innocent Pierrot to the most horrible, filthy, tricky of *Bouffons*. The clown’s painted face is not a mask or a disguise but an outward expression of the clown within, that which the performer explores by allowing it to be, rather than performing it.

5.5.1 Sacred Clown

The natural playfulness of clowning is, arguably, a sacred activity:

Creativity is a harmony of opposite tensions, as encapsulated in our opening idea of *lila*, or divine play. As we ride through the flux of our own creative processes, we hold onto both poles. If we let go of play, our work becomes ponderous and stiff. If we let go of the sacred, our work loses its connection to the ground on which we live (Nachmanovitch, 1990:12).

Following on one can argue that if the Anima/Animus is identical with the Soul (the inner balance of outer Personae) that the Soul is pre-existent, identical with the *daimon*, and being a clown is to be “quintessentially *you*”, then the Soul of the human being *is* the Sacred Clown. This metaphysical juggling and (sacred) semantic playfulness cannot prove anything beyond the existence of names for qualities we feel we possess, that does not mean that it cannot lead us to at least consider a deep truth

about humanity, we are all, in essence, “one and the same with the absurd” (Jung, 2009:161).

5.5.2 Soul

The final question is one of Soul. If identity is performed and can therefore be fluid, and the ‘Captain Self’ self lies within and flows through those fluid identities or personae, what part does the Soul play? If the Soul and one’s Sacred Clown are identical, can one ‘perform’ the Soul by being “quintessentially you”? However, the Clown, even the Sacred Clown, and no matter how much that Clown rehearses, cannot be said to be fully Clown without an audience. “Everything’s a game; everything is for the audience” (2006:184) because “It’s an open invitation to do what you like, how you like, but only for as long as we like it. Our pleasure as an audience is your only control factor in playing a clown” (ibid:180) This implies that the Soul, similarly, needs some sort of connection to other Souls in order to be Soul. To repeat Hillman, the connection need not be other human Souls: “why not admit, as does deep ecology, that the environment itself is ensouled, animated, inextricably meshed with us and not fundamentally separate from us?” (1996:153) However, as demonstrated by Tim³⁰ the Clown is an aspect of the Fool archetype alongside his ‘sibling’ the Trickster, and the archetypal Minstrel is a multiplastic re-blending of Clown and Trickster. One may suggest that the performed ‘Minstrel Self’, multiplastic and, because of that, to some extent ‘Tricksterish’, has the Soul of a Clown.

³⁰ Tim, *The Minstrel as a Bridge*

6. The Syncretism (blending everything together)

Multiplicity is basic to human nature (Hillman, 2013:40).

On a practical level, then, the outcomes of this research should involve playful techniques in which a constantly unfolding, multiplicitous sense of identity may be continuously explored using performance-based methods to encounter archetypal figures from myth, legend and faery tale. For the sake of brevity here, these methods (autoethnographic approach, encouraged serendipity, freewriting, journaling, archetypal movement exploration, reflection, performance), the development of performance personae (Baron Sam, Tim, Guru Tovski, Thena, Seany Minstrel) and the history of their performances (*The Dionysian Spirit; Orpheus' Mistake; The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret, Queering the Old Fool; The Endymion Project; The Green Man Speaks; Thomas the Rhymer*) are examined by Seany Minstrel his own essays³¹.

6.1 Minstrel Self

This section ends by conceptualising the Minstrel as the archetype of multiplasticity, who contains all other archetypes through his songs and stories, and the gestalt performance persona, that is to say a blending in the Minstrel Self of those personae who were separated aspects of the Captain Self. That Captain Self being “compact of all the selves we have it in us to be”, is also, therefore, a creature of fluid identity

³¹ Seany Minstrel, *How to be a Minstrel – Methodologies and Outcomes*. Seany Minstrel, *(re)Evolution of the Minstrel*

(multiplasticity) and thus, so is the Minstrel Self as the performance persona of the Captain Self:

Performing, after all, is about playfulness, where acquiring roles and altering oneself is a main goal [...] Every performance becomes a channel for depicting identity, providing a pathway for being persuaded and entertained (Hawkins, 2009:119).

This conceptualisation raises a final, open, question: Since “identity itself is trained and practised to a large degree as embodied technique.” (Spatz, 2015:157), meanwhile positing an essential Soul which controls the possibilities of one’s personal identities, are there limits to the techniques Seán can learn, to the fluid personae he can embody as the Minstrel? As well as asking who he/I/we can be, I need also to ask who he/I/we can *not* be, and why.

(9,299 words)

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Seany Minstrel: I am a performance persona, but what on earth does that mean? What is it to be a persona, or an identity, or a self - and are they really all that different? In this second essay on the theoretical background of Minstrelsy and Queer archetypal performance persona, our academic, Thena, takes a deep dive into what 'persona' actually means. And, potentially more importantly, what it could mean for a multiplastic performing Minstrel and anyone else who wishes to take the Minstrel path to self-understanding

The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 2: Persona)

By Thena

Abstract:

The practical, public-facing element of this research work depends on the enactment of archetypally based performance personae. This essay examines in depth the term, 'persona' via its accepted and possible meanings and from multiple perspectives. I introduce the concepts of 'sounding through' and 'Persona-from-Within' as theoretical tools with which to follow this line of enquiry, beginning with the original masks of ancient Greek theatre. I finish with a short consideration of the Minstrel as multiplastic performance persona.

Keywords:

Persona; mask; sounding through; multiplasticity; prolificity; archetype; fluidity

Contents:

Introduction; The historical perspective; the psychological perspective; the social perspective; the performer's perspective; conclusion

1. Introduction

We are masks (*personae*) through which the gods sound (*personare*)
(Hillman, 1994:38).

Following Nelson's (2013:34) assertion that the rigour of a literature-practice review within practice-as-research "lies in syncretism", I (Thena) apply a syncretic approach to formulate an understanding of *persona*. I examine a range of approaches to *persona*, placing them in mutual conversation, against a binary framework of *Persona-from-Within versus Persona-from-Without*, employing the theme of 'sounding through' as a "clew through it" (ibid:37) with which to draw conceptualizations together. Using this clew, I follow a step-by-step progression to conclude with an examination of Seán Fitton's work through various *personae* and the multiplastic *persona*, Seany Minstrel.

1.1 Perspectives

I begin with a brief investigation of the etymology and history of the word, *persona* as both a literal and metaphorical mask to establish 'sounding through' within the framework of *Persona-from-Within versus Persona-from-Without*. Next, I consider a psychological perspective concentrating firstly on the work of C.G. Jung, briefly comparing Jung's *persona* to the commonly known phenomenon of autistic 'masking', and then via Archetypal Psychology, demonstrating how the 'sounding through' of archetypal forms from the collective unconscious questions the Within-Without binary. Then I examine a social perspective beginning with Erving Goffman's theatrical ascriptions, *front* and *face*, contrasted with the post-structuralist ideas of Michel Foucault and their expansion through Judith Butler, Ben Spatz and Hans-Georg

Moeller, leading to a philosophical dissolution of 'sounding through' and Within-Without as impossibilities. Finally, I consider *persona* from a performer's perspective, comparing David Tennant's *Hamlet* with Bryony Kimmings' *Fake It 'Til You Make It*, and Philip Auslander's musical *personae* with Goffman's *face*. I consider social media as performance via Moeller's *proficiency* and second order observation, and their effects on 'sounding through' and Persona-from-Within versus Persona-from-Without. I follow that with an examination of Lady Gaga, Cindy Sherman and Euripides Laskaridis as examples of fluidity-as-*persona*, and finally a discussion of the syncretic nature of Seán's work, the use of specific *personae* and the gestalt *persona*, Seany Minstrel, and their relationships to the Within-Without paradigm and 'sounding through'.

2. The Historical Perspective

2.1 Masks

Etymologically, *persona* is taken from Latin, literally meaning a mask, but figuratively a character, person or personality and, in later Roman history, a social role. It is considered related to the verb *personare* (*per-sonare*) meaning to resound or, more literally, to 'sound through' and is likely derived from the ancient Greek *prosopon* (modern Greek, προσωπο), a face, or a character role. This recalls the use of literal masks in ancient Roman and Greek theatre which were 'sounded through' by the actor delivering a speech and which, in common with other masked theatres such as Japanese *Noh*, can be traced back to earlier religious ritual masks. Because "The ritual mask is an outward transformation of the sort of potent symbol which crosses

cultures and evokes archetypes” (Shepherd, 2006:44) the use of this type of specific *persona*-mask in ritual is still widespread, particularly in polytheistic cultures in which the ritual participants enact myths by performing as the archetypal personae represented by their mask.

2.2 Sounding Through

Simply donning the mask and saying the right words, or making the right movements, is rarely adequate. In many religious ritual situations it is vitally important that the participant identifies completely with the *persona*-mask, temporarily losing their day-to-day identity to the *persona* performed. “In most traditional African cultures, the person who wears a ritual mask conceptually loses his or her human identity and turns into the spirit represented by the mask itself” (National Museum of Ghana, 2019). An *Egungun* (ancestor) dancer of the Yoruba, for example, in donning the *Egungun* mask would therefore be positioning himself as a conduit for the spirit of an ancestor. Effectively the ancestor spirit ‘wears’ the dancer as the dancer wears the mask³², and the ancestor ‘sounds through’ the mask by ‘sounding through’ the dancer.

2.3 Folly/Prufrock

Persona as ‘sounding through’ also appears in literature to describe an author’s practice of expressing their own ideas or opinions through the voice of a fictional character. Such *personae* are usually written in the first person, to speak directly to the reader. An example is the character Folly, in Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Praise of*

³² In Yoruba culture the relationship between humans and spirits or gods (*orishas*) is more often considered in sexual terms “a mystical union in which the *orishas* are ‘inside’ their brides. They ‘descend’ and ‘mount’ their devotees” (Murphy, 1988:89).

Folly (originally published in 1515), whose voice Erasmus uses to humorously, often harshly, critique society and expound Humanist principles: “I think I should copy the rhetoricians of today who fancy themselves gods on earth if they can show themselves twin-tongued” (Erasmus, 1993:14). Similarly, T.S. Eliot ‘sounds through’ the poetic *persona* of J. Alfred Prufrock to explore feelings of disillusionment, sexual frustration and the indignities of increasing age, “I grow old . . . I grow old . . . I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled” (Eliot, 2002). Often these *personae* express thoughts which the author is unable to express as their ‘normal’ self, in the same way that a ventriloquist might use their puppet to comedically say something controversial, and then comment on. Here, identification with the mask is reversed. The mask becomes a shield for the author to shelter behind rather than a figure to lose his original identity in.

2.4 Within-Without

Binary considerations concerning *persona*/mask arise from these examples. The *Egungun* mask exists *before* the dancer, as do the ancestors it represents, while Prufrock and Folly are their authors’ creations. The ritual mask is inhabited and identified with, Prufrock/Folly are not, and can distance words from their authors - “If anything I’ve said seems rather impudent or garrulous, you must remember it’s Folly and a woman who’s been speaking” (Erasmus, 1993:134). An *Egungun* mask, though considered sacred, has no ‘life’ of its own and must be ‘enlivened’ by wearing it. Prufrock/Folly continue to ‘live’ and speak through their literature, though Eliot and Erasmus are deceased. Further, an *Egungun* mask is relatively open and non-specific,

such that any trained male dancer of Yoruba descent may wear it, but both Folly and Prufrock are manifestations of the imagination of only one specific author each and therefore effectively closed to anyone else's use. A polarity is created, with Persona-from-Without (pre-existent, adopted, enlivened, open) at one side and Persona-from-Within (created, personal, alive, closed) at the other. The simplicity of this polarity will be questioned in the development of this essay.

3. The Psychological Perspective

The early 20th century saw the rise of psychology and, arguably, it's three greatest thinkers, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). Each created forms of psychological therapy³³ and each theorized a model of the psyche. Jung's model is of interest here (considered in more detail elsewhere³⁴) because of his specific description of *persona* as an element. Jung divides the psyche into four parts: *self*, *shadow*, *anima/animus*, and *persona*.

3.1 Jung-Self

The term, *self* in Jung's system is problematic in that it takes two forms, individuated and unindividuated, the individuated *self* being an integration of all four separate parts into a psychologically healthy whole. However, *self* is already a confusing term with multiple meanings outside of Jung's definitions:

³³ Psychoanalysis, Individual Psychology and Analytical Psychology, respectively.

³⁴ Thana: *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*

The 'self' that permeates our daily language has expanded to titanic proportions. The New Oxford English Dictionary – the 'shorter' edition! – gives ten columns in its small print to compounds of 'self': 'self-satisfaction', 'self-control', 'self-defeating', 'self-approval', 'self-contempt', 'self-satisfied'[...] and maybe five hundred more (Hillman, 1996:257).

Even a strictly Jungian conceptualization of the *self* is difficult to simplify into a single definition:

Jungian analytical psychology sees the self as many things including psychic structure, developmental process, transcendental postulate, affective experience and archetype. It has been depicted as the totality of body and mind, the God image, the experience of overpowering feelings, the union of opposites and a dynamic force which pilots the individual on his/her journey through life (Schmidt, date unknown).

To avoid unnecessary complexity, I offer a simplified working definition of *self*, for the purposes of this essay, as 'self-image', that which one sees and understands as oneself and identifies as oneself. Even this simple definition is beset with problems, not least from the awkward semantic tautologies involved.

3.2 Jung-Shadow

Shadow is the dark side of the *self*, that which one does not wish to see, understand or identify as oneself. "I have called this inferior and less commendable part of a person the *shadow*. We have met with this figure in literature; for instance Faust and his shadow, Mephistopheles" (Jung, 1940:20). One might visualize *self* and *shadow* as the *yang* and *yin* of a *Taiji* symbol, each necessary to the other, flowing around and fading in and out of each other at their conjunction, thus avoiding the tendency to think of them as independent objects which do not change over time.

3.3 Jung-Anima/Animus

Anima/animus is the contrasexual part of the psyche. If we “regard the ‘other side’ as a trait of character, you will produce a picture that shows what I mean by the *anima*, the woman in a man, and the *animus*, the man in a woman” (ibid:19). As explained elsewhere³⁵, the gender essentialism of *anima/animus* is problematic when positioned against Seán’s views of gender fluidity, but it is unhelpful at this stage to delve into this argument. In light of what is discussed in that essay and for the purposes of this one, I offer a redefined *anima/animus* as a spiritual ‘controlling program’, balancing the qualities of *self/shadow* and creating the possibilities and limits of how *personae* might manifest. Henceforth, I refer to it by the gender-neutral term, *Soul* (with the distinguishing capital S).

3.4 Jung-Persona

Persona, in Jung’s conceptualization, is the metaphorical mask we present to the world, “It conceals our real self and Jung describes it as the ‘conformity’ archetype. This is the public face or role a person presents to others as someone different to who we really are” (McLeod, 2018). *Persona* here could be described as a negotiation between the individual *self-shadow/Soul* and outer influence from, for instance, one’s family, job or public appearances. The *self-shadow/Soul* ‘sounds through’ the *persona* but the sound is metaphorically distorted by the *persona*, like a voice being muffled by a full-face mask:

³⁵ Thena: *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)* Section: 4.1.1 Anima

The Persona is conditioned by social class, job, culture and nationality. There are often different personas we use to suit different situations. But we adopt a general Persona based on our superior functional type (e.g. thinking) because it comes easiest to us (Hyde and McGuiness, 1999:91).

For Jung, the creation of *persona* is, in some part, conscious and deliberate, as well as involving a more subconscious negotiation with the outer world. There is an attendant danger in over-identification with a single one:

Every calling or profession, for example, has its own characteristic persona [...] A certain kind of behaviour is forced on them by the world, and professional people endeavour to come up to these expectations. Only, the danger is that they become identical with their personas - the professor with his text-book, the tenor with his voice. Then the damage is done; henceforth he lives exclusively against the background of his own biography (Jung, 1990:123).

3.5 Masking

To “endeavour to come up to these expectations” and its attendant dangers recalls the ‘masking’ behaviour commonly displayed by people on the autistic spectrum, particularly young girls. Masking is a deliberate, conscious method of *persona*-creation, very similar to a realist actor’s building of a character. In “children with ASD - when they learn, practice, and perform certain behaviours and suppress others in order to be more like the people around them.” (The Autism Service, 2021) An account by the journalist, Jen Elcheson explains:

I learned to pass by observing others, watching shows/movies, devouring young adult contemporary fiction, and collecting women’s magazines. They were all intense interests, but definitely not a healthy way to acquire realistic social skills. Unfortunately I became very rigid about this supposed ‘normal’ version of myself and it really messed with my identity (Elcheson and Cook, 2018:37).

It is too complex a subject to enquire further into autistic masking here, but from the account and descriptions above, it is tempting to consider *persona*-creation in the

Jungian sense as Persona-from-Within, like Prufrock and Folly. However the negotiation, deliberate or subconscious, with pre-existent qualities such as perceived expectations and 'normal' behaviour belie that assumption. One may argue that social role *personae* such as 'professor', 'tenor' or 'normal girl' already exist in some archetypal manner, are adopted, and with them a full identification is, temporarily and sometimes damagingly, necessary, and therefore also Persona-from-Without. The defensive shield becomes, at the same time, the dancer's archetypal mask.

3.6 Shamdasani

Sonu Shamdasani, in his 2009 introduction to Jung's *The Red Book*, adopts a similar viewpoint: the *persona* as "one's 'mask' or 'role' – the segment of the collective psyche that *one mistakenly regarded as individual*" (p50, my emphasis). This implies that the *persona* or *personae* we perform in our daily lives are not simply emanations of our individual *self-shadow/Soul* in negotiation with societal norms, but also have a collective or universal quality. It may be argued that rather than being simply personal, *persona* can connect one to archetypal forms in a manner not unlike the *Egungun* dancer's use of a literal mask. "After Jung, I cannot pretend to know myself unless I know the archetypes" (Hillman, 1994:63).

3.7 Archetypal Psychology

Jung, through his interest in myth, mysticism and 'the occult', conceptualised the *collective unconscious*, "a myth-creating level of mind, common [...] to people of different times and different cultures." (Storr, 1973:35) populated by archetypal

forms, universal figures which appear in “myth, esoteric teaching and fairy tale” (Jung, 1940:54), because “the *psyche* contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths” (ibid:55). This psycho-spiritual theory underlies the creation of Archetypal Psychology which has elaborated Jung’s understanding of the ‘mythopoeic’ (myth-making) into a philosophy which “presents the polytheistic structure of a postmodern consciousness. It is a style of thinking, a fashion of mind, a revisionist engagement on many fronts” (Hillman, 2013:60). Archetypal Psychology’s vision of what an archetype is differs from Jung’s, however, in that:

For Jung, they are anthropological and cultural, and also spiritual in that they transcend the empirical world of time and place and, in fact, are in themselves not phenomenal. Archetypal psychology, in distinction to Jungian, considers the archetypal to be always phenomenal (ibid:14).

Archetypal Psychology holds that “All things have an archetypal significance and are available to psychological penetration, and this interiority is manifested by the physiognomic character of the things of the horizontal world” (ibid:36).

3.7.1 Personality

The word *persona*, in James Hillman’s version of Archetypal Psychology, is replaced by the word *personality*, although the meaning appears identical:

personality is imaginatively conceived as living and peopled drama in which the subject ‘I’ takes part but is neither the sole author, nor director, nor always the main character [...] The healthy or mature or ideal personality will thus show cognizance of its dramatically masked and ambiguous situation (ibid:58).

Personality is not considered to be a single thing, but can appear in various forms according to circumstance. “Multiple personality is humanity in its natural condition” (ibid:57) since “Jung’s model of personality is essentially multiple, and Jung correlates

the plurality of its archetypal structure with the polytheistic stage of culture” (ibid:40), demonstrating that “a single identity is a delusion of the monotheistic mind” (Hillman, 1994:39), because “a society based on monotheism assumes that people are one thing, and one thing only” (Pollack, 1995:12). *Personality* is not only a multiplicity of negotiations between inner and outer influences, but also infers a direct connection to *both* a sense of identity and to archetypal forms. *Persona/personality* becomes a negotiation between the outer world, the *self-shadow/Soul*, and the collective unconscious. *Persona* is no longer either Persona-from-Within or Persona-from-Without, but also Persona-from-Without-via-Within and the result not only of ‘sounding through’ the mask of *persona*, but of archetypal forms echoing that sound back from the mirror of the collective unconscious.

4. The Social Perspective

4.1 Goffman

Erving Goffman analogised humanity as actors, and our social interactions as performances for each other. We have a *front* made of our *setting*, “the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within or upon it” (1959:32-3), and a *personal front* consisting of *appearance*, “insignia of office [...] sex, age [...] posture; speech patterns; facial expression” (ibid:34) and *manner*, “those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation” (ibid:35). Goffman did not use the word, *persona*, but his concept of *face*, which we might consider an aspect of *front* is

extremely similar. *Face* is “an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (1967:5) which is created via the *line* (behaviours which express one’s view of a social interaction) as a combination of projection from oneself and interpretation from those interacted with. Goffman describes *face* as “something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter” (ibid:7). Maintaining *face*, or *face-work* is “the effort to align lines with face, or simply to act as the person we and other people think we are.” (Silva, 2018). *Face*, is similar to, but not identical with, identity, related directly to social roles and close to Jung’s original concept of *persona*, as both a protective shield for the ‘true self’ and multiple in nature. If each *face* is dependent upon a negotiation between its wearer and its witnesses, then each social interaction must present a different *face*. There is also a major difference between what Goffman considers *front* and *backstage* behaviour: “Here the performer can relax: he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (1959:115). In our terminology, we could consider *face* as a blending of Persona-from-Within and Persona-from Without, deliberately inhabited by the individual according to social need, and ‘sounded through’ in order to gain or maintain a social status.

4.2 Butler/Spatz

Like Goffman, Judith Butler and Ben Spatz do not speak of *persona* as such, and where Goffman’s *face* is a type of performance, Butler and Spatz also speak of identity³⁶ as performed. Following Foucault’s proposal that sexuality as an identity is societally

³⁶ Specifically gender identity in Butler’s case

constructed (Mills, 2003:87) Butler describes gender identity as rooted in “a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices” (1990:188) and ‘created’ by its own performance: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (ibid:34). Gender identity is not an internal reality but “a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” (ibid:191). Spatz clarifies the complexity of Butler’s ideas by offering the concept of *embodied technique* which “can sediment in the body to the point where it is mistaken for physiological inevitability” (2015:188) as a way of both acquiring and performing gender identity in much the same way as an actor trains, “the sedimentation of acting technique in the body contributes to and can even transform a person’s identity” (ibid:157).

4.2.1 Challenges

While Goffman posits an actor-*self* as the inner person behind the *face*, “he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time” (1959:245), Butler requires only a body as the creator-performer of identity by challenging the whole concept of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ as:

Linguistic terms that facilitate and articulate a set of fantasies [...] ‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability [...] If the ‘inner world’ no longer designates a topos, then the internal fixity of the self and indeed, the internal locale of gender identity, become similarly suspect (1990:182-3).

For Spatz, identity is a form of method acting in which the actor, the acting and the acted are identical, identity itself is being “trained and practised to a large degree as embodied technique” (2015:57):

These two points are equally important: first, that identity categories are acquired through embodied training; and second, that professional training constitutes identity no less fundamentally than does cultural training or socialization (ibid:161).

Butler and Spatz break the polarity of Persona-from-Within and Persona-from-Without by challenging the notion of Within-Without, making *persona*, *self* and identity into one performed technique. Hans-Georg Moeller explains, “Any gender must be performed, otherwise we wouldn’t notice it. Any identity at all is performed” (Carefree Wandering, 10 March 2021).

4.3 Moeller

Moeller, sometimes abetted by Paul D’Ambrosio, does not examine *persona* as such. Moeller’s philosophy, instead, considers ‘authenticity’ and what he refers to as *genuine pretending*. He explains (Carefree Wandering, 23 June 2021) that in traditional societies self-identification was identical with social role which, with the rise of modernity:

began to appear as external facades imposed on people whose real self was to be found somewhere underneath. The conception of the social role as a mask, covering up one’s true identity, became a prime metaphor.

But Moeller also denies the necessity of that ‘true identity’ because of “The inherent self-contradiction of authenticity, its insistence on a false individualism suggesting that everyone ought to be unique” (ibid). Instead Moeller offers *genuine pretending*.

However, one has to play roles in society, simply because society is constituted by roles. Thus, one can avoid a direct conflict between one's true self and one's roles – and thereby hypocrisy, lying, and, ultimately, insanity – only by avoiding the adoption of a true self in the first place. If there is no self, then there can be no conflict between a true self and one's social persona. If there is no such conflict, then the playing of one's role is genuine. If there is no self, there is no falsity involved in role-playing. Role play without falsity is genuine pretending (Moeller and D'Ambrosio, 2017:126).

Like Butler and Spatz, Moeller's philosophy defies the polarity of Persona-from-Within and Persona-from-Without by stating that there is no thing which is able to 'sound through' the *persona*. *Persona*, role, identity and *self* blur into a continuum in which any one is not distinguishable from the others.

5. The Performer's Perspective

5.1 Contrasts

For the stage performer, the Persona-from-Without/Within binary seemingly stands out clearly, as evidenced by the obvious differences between a pre-written character (*dramatis personae*), which the actor must inhabit and enliven, and a staged personality developed by the performer who 'plays herself'. One might contrast David Tennant playing Hamlet in *Hamlet* with Bryony Kimmings playing Bryony Kimmings in *Fake It Til You Make It* (2015) in this polarity. Hamlet, the pre-existent role and archetypal tragic hero is, effectively, the *Egungun* mask for whoever attempts to play him. Though every actor must, by virtue of being different people, play Hamlet differently, the subsuming of the actor's individuality into the on-stage identification with the role makes it an adopted Persona-from-Without. Hamlet's words already

exist and thus the character of Hamlet is allowed to 'sound through' Tennant 'sounding through' the character. Kimmings, alternatively, is using her own creation, 'Bryony Kimmings Performing Bryony Kimmings', to expound thoughts on mental health and masculinity. She 'sounds through' a performed version of herself and thus a Persona-from-Within.

5.2 Auslander

In an interview about his book, *In Concert: Performing Musical Persona*, Philip Auslander (2021) described the *persona* of a performing musician as "necessary and inevitable. If you present yourself to an audience, you present a persona" because "Persona is the interface between the performer and the audience". We could see this as a clear-cut example of 'sounding through' Persona-from-Within, however as Auslander explains elsewhere, "all musicians enact a persona, and that persona derives more from the social expectations surrounding their musical genre" (Ferreira, 2021) which makes a performance *persona* into the negotiated form exemplified partly by Goffman's *face*, but also, due to the pre-existence of a musical genre, into an adopted Persona-from-Without. *Persona* may even be imposed against the musician's wishes, an example being "Bob Dylan as the voice of his generation" (Auslander, 2021). This adds an extra layer of complexity to Persona-from-Without. Here it is not adopted and enlivened but imposed and denied, yet still exists, and so troubles how much conscious control we have over our *personae*, and the relevance of identification with a *persona*. The mask had been placed on Dylan's head and he 'sounded through' it because he could not get it off.

5.3 Profiles

The *persona* over which we, arguably, have most control, making anyone using it a performer interfacing with an audience, is the *online persona*, or the *profile*. A Facebook profile picture can be almost anything and the profile's content is at the whim of the person posting. With the exception of Facebook's rules of conduct and the design of a page, negotiation is minimal. Moeller (Carefree Wandering, 23 June 2021) calls this *proficiency*. "We form identity by curating profiles. Profiles are images of ourselves presented for second order observation³⁷. By looking at them, others can see how we like to be seen as being seen". This would seem similar to Prufrock as *Persona-from-Within*, but second order observation which "observes something, or oneself, indirectly by observing it from the perspective of other observers" (ibid) makes it a complicated negotiation between self-image, external observation and self-observation of that external image, *Within* observing *Without* being observed by *Within*, 'sounding through' a mask which both hides and reveals at the same time.

5.4 Gaga

Professional musical performers use second order observation as a matter of course. They ('encouraged' by industry moguls) choose how they wish to "be seen as being seen" and there are some³⁸ whose professional *personae* change over time in order to remain relevant. Others, like Lady Gaga, have taken *persona*-change to what may be

³⁷ For clarification see Glossary

³⁸ For example David Bowie or Madonna

its logical limit and adopted a fluid approach to their *personae*, increasingly so in the age of social media, until identity becomes a matter of whim:

For me, Lady Gaga is the perfect exemplar of this cultural moment in that she both embodies and problematizes the concept of musical persona through her constant shifting of identities and platforms. Unlike David Bowie, whose continually shifting identities were sequential and tied to specific albums and projects, thus allowing the feeling that they were all manifestations of the same underlying entity, Gaga morphs seemingly at will and at random creating a proliferation of identities rather than a sequence (Auslander in Ferreira, 2021).

However, though Lady Gaga has a proliferation of identities, they are all still *presented* as manifestations of Lady Gaga. Rather than having a proliferation of identities, Gaga *is* the proliferation itself, she 'sounds through' as recognizably herself within the plethora of *personae*. Arguably (via Butler, Spatz and Moeller) this plethora is a layer of performed *personae* on top of the already performative *persona* of Lady Gaga the woman, but it also implies (contradicting of Butler et al), that there is some commonality within or behind that and the multiple public *personae*, which is essentially Gaga.

5.5 Sherman

The visual artist, Cindy Sherman also troubles the construction of identity. "Playing with the visual and cultural codes of art, celebrity, gender, and photography" (Gaylord, 2016), Sherman questions how mass media representation informs our self-perception by both adopting and subverting it through thematic series of self-portraits in which the stereotypes presented are often clearly faked, "drawing attention to the artificiality and ambiguity of these stereotypes and undermining their reliability for understanding a much more complicated reality." (ibid). An example is *Untitled #216* (1989) in which

Sherman portrays a renaissance image of the Virgin Mary about to breastfeed the baby Jesus, parodying this stereotyped image of female spiritual perfection through crumpled robes and an obviously fake, plastic breast. More recently, using her Instagram page, Sherman has begun digitally manipulating her images, creating weird, unnatural facial shapes, providing a comment on *proficiency* and the use of filters in 'selfies'. Sherman 'sounds through' Persona-from-Without in a deliberate way, seemingly hiding her true self behind a plethora of identities. In common with Lady Gaga, one could argue that Sherman's *persona* is fluid identity as Persona-from-Within reflecting Without, the plethora itself, and that somewhere underneath is the essential Cindy Sherman.

5.6 Laskaridis

A similar point comes in a review of Euripides Laskaridis' one-man show, *Relic* in which he plays with transformations of gender and identity through the use of outlandish costumes:

Depending on dress, Laskaridis' mannequin figurine slides between male and female. At one point, in a white sheet, blonde wig and a string of pearls, it seems like a plump well-to-do woman; a posh gallerist giving a gobbledegook speech with a wine glass in hand, perhaps. At another, a black-haired bodybuilder in a pink tinsel bikini morphs into a moustachioed male rocker lashing a whip (Trueman, 2017).

However, underneath this plethora of identities "there's the same misshapen mess and, at some level, *Relic* is an expression of our essential, existential selves" (ibid), an expression underlined finally when Laskaridis "peels away the mask to reveal the human beneath the outlandish costume, and it's unexpectedly affecting" (Gardner, 2017). Laskaridis 'sounds through' his plethora of weird Personae-from-Within to

distortedly reflect the *personae* around him suggesting there is something more 'real' behind them.

5.7 Personal Praxis

In Seán Fitton's praxis, he syncretizes several elements, using Archetypal Psychology as a philosophical framework on which to layer performance practices as an approach to exploring fluid identity, via performance *personae*, multiplying Andy Lavender's view singular view:

The persona appears to signal a specific self, a being at the borderline between characteristic originality (the things that make one different from anyone else) and characterful fabrication (made-upness precisely for presentation) (2016:127).

Similarly, he uses performance *personae* such as myself³⁹ as an expression of *self-shadow/Soul* in negotiation with the outer world, in which each is an embodiment of an aspect of his own psyche in a Jungian framework. Because Archetypal Psychology views all archetypes as phenomenal and moves from "recognizing myths in life to the recognition of life as myth" (Hillman, 2013:74) each *persona's* worldly manifestation is also related to a mythical archetype. Each *persona* becomes a blending of Persona-from-Within, expressed through a psychic aspect, with Persona-from-Without expressed via embodying an archetypal form. In 'sounding through' each persona he is embodying and examining both that aspect of his psyche and his relationship to that archetype as identity.

³⁹ The development of which are examined in detail in Seany Minstrel's essay, *The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel*

5.7.1 Tovski

There is an extra level of complexity involved with the *persona* Guru Tovski⁴⁰ who also represents his outer *persona* perceived via second order observation. Tovski is the *performance persona* of his *persona* choosing how to be seen according to how people see him. The blending of Within and Without also occurs in the emergence or creation of his performance *personae* in that there are slippages and overlaps. For example, the *persona* Tim has been described as ‘just Seán with the brakes off’, since he emerged naturally in the development of a performance and is, as are we all, still developing. However, his development has also utilized the mythological archetype of The Innocent to inform his appearance and delivery style. Finally, that slippage becomes a re-blending of the previously separated psychic elements (Guru Tovski, Tim, Baron Sam, Thena) into Seany Minstrel, the multiplastic gestalt *performance persona* who stands as an equivalent concept in performative terms to Jung’s Individuated Self or Virginia Woolf’s ‘captain self’: “compact of all the selves we have in us to be” (1928:221).

5.7.2 Multiplasticity

Following Moeller, I agree that identity is performed rather than being essential and there is no such thing as a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ *self* that is not, in some way, performed. However, I do not agree that there is no *self* at all, only that there is no ‘true’ self⁴¹. The development of *personae* as a negotiation between *self-shadow/Soul* and the outer

⁴⁰ An embodiment of the Sage archetype

⁴¹ That is to say, authentic and unchanging, (and equally *shadow* and *Soul*)

world reflects back and affects *self-shadow/Soul* in a constantly flowing reciprocity. Thus the *self-shadow/Soul* and *persona* share in their authenticity, and the *personae* which Seán deliberately performs are no more or less ‘the real Seán’ than the more subconsciously derived day-to-day *personae* over which they are consciously layered. In other words, identity and *persona* are not different things but intermingled elements of an overall, multiplastic ‘captain self’.

5.7.3 Restrictions

If it is true that “Identity is performed, and through the performance it is experienced as genuine, both by the performer and the audience” so that “genuineness is not the origin of the performance, but it is the result of the performance” (Carefree Wandering, 10 March 2021), and comparing that to Sherman’s manipulated and unrealistic images, one is led to question what might constitute an *inauthentic persona*. In the same way that there are some roles a particular actor could not play convincingly (for reasons such as age, apparent gender, appearance) I would ask whether there are *personae* that one *cannot* be, archetypes one cannot embody or that cannot ‘sound through’ one if one were to wear their masks, and why that would be the case. I have considered this question elsewhere⁴², in relation to issues of transgender identity and Hillman’s notion of the personal *daimon*.

⁴² Thena: *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)* Section: 3 Sexuality

6. Conclusion

Persona is a complex subject. In establishing a simplistic binary framework of Persona-from-Within (Prufrock/Folly) versus Persona-from-Without (the *Egungun* mask) as the masks for the person to 'sound through' I was immediately forced to deconstruct that framework. In Jungian terms *persona* is a negotiation between *self-shadow/Soul* and the outer world which appears in multiple form encapsulating both Persona-from-Within and Persona-from-Without at once. Archetypal Psychology refines that further by connecting *personality* to archetypal forms and thus Persona-from-Without-via-Within. In the social sphere, Goffman's *face* is similar to Jung's *persona*, a multi-form negotiation between inner person and outer world within social interactions, creating a performed identity. However, post-structuralist notions forwarded by Foucault and expanded by Butler, Spatz and Moeller, of performed identity defy an inner-outer binary and thus the validity of the Within-Without framework, making *persona*, role, identity and *self* into a performative continuum. The binary framework at first seems to hold together in theatrical performance, but again it is shown to blend its opposites into multiple forms, and is troubled by Auslander's understanding of some *personae* as imposed and Moeller's *prolificity*, whose reliance on second order observation requires multiple inner and outer viewpoints to observe and influence each other. It is also demonstrated, via Lady Gaga, Cindy Sherman and Euripides Laskaridis that a fluid proliferation of *personae* can be a *persona*. Finally, Seán has shown through his practical work with *personae* that a syncretic approach combining performance practice with Archetypal Psychology and an attitude which

questions the validity of binary forms allows an understanding of *persona* as a multiplastic blending of multiple viewpoints from Within and Without and an understanding of the authenticity of *persona*, and through *persona* an understanding of identity and archetype.

6.1 A final Question

A question remains. If *persona* is the way we present ourselves to the world, what happens when we are not being observed? Does one have a *persona* when one is alone? An answer, that we observe ourselves constantly, is suggested by Slavoj Žižek: “If there is a big lesson of all those Big Brother and other reality shows it is that, even when we are just ourselves in private life, we always play being ourselves” (Big Think, 7 June 2015).

(5,875 words)

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***Seany Minstrel:** Forms of self-identity, especially gender identity, have increased dramatically in recent years but, unfortunately, so has a backlash against the validity of those forms to the extent that the term 'culture war' has become a popular description. In this short essay our academic colleague, Thena, makes an examination of the current social situation regarding identity issues around gender and sexuality and then considers the position of Minstrelsy as a way of dealing with those issues, through its understanding of archetypes.*

In order to place archetypes and identity into dialogue, you must first find the archetypes that resonate, and so, a following essay by Tim is referenced in the text which investigates methods of re-interpreting myths, legends and faery tales in line with the Minstrel's ethos of multiplasticity. Thena finishes by exploring the place of the Minstrel myself as a spiritually and socio-politically validating archetype within the 'culture wars'.

The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment.

By Thena

Abstract:

This essay examines the recent and evolving social environment in which increasing forms of self-identity are currently being explored and positions the methodology of Minstrelsy, as a method of Queer self-identification as multiplastic, within that environment by offering the reinterpretation of myth, legend and faery tale as a method of Minstrelsy.

Keywords:

Identity; multiplastic; Queer; Queer Theory; decolonisation; myth; legend; faery tale; archetype; minstrel.

Contents:

Introduction; The Proliferation of Identity; The Hostile Environment; Positioning the Minstrel.

1. Introduction

The theory and practice of Minstrelsy as a perspective on Queer self-identity as multiplastic via archetypal persona performance is, necessarily, inclusive of all variant, non-normative expressions of personal gender and non-abusive forms of non-hetero-normative sexuality (including consensual BDSM) and is open to new forms and definitions as they evolve over time. However, the recent expansion of new and subtly variant perspectives on forms of self-identity in western society has been mirrored by an opposing reaction amongst more conservative elements, who consider the evolution of variant gender and sexual identities, and the acceptance of other forms of diversity, to be a corruption rather than an improvement of societal values.

1.1 Media

Popular media, and particularly independent internet sites and influencers, have, according to their political bias, foregrounded this evolution and reaction framed as 'culture wars' leading to a hostile environment in which 'TERFs' (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists) protest against the 'Trans-Agenda', right-wing nationalist organisations march on drag events, and Christian fundamentalist politicians draft laws to prevent the discussion of gender or sexual variance in schools.

1.2 Positioning

This essay examines the positioning of the Minstrel and the practice of Minstrelsy within the present 'culture wars', foregrounding Minstrelsy as a methodology which embraces the non-normative, and in which the active 'Queering' of myth, legend and faery tale as a method of Minstrelsy leads to a perspective on self-identity as

multiplastic in relation to archetypal forms⁴³, and through that to a sense of spiritual validation for the Queer individual.

2. The Proliferation of Identity

A small pamphlet, purchased at the Pride event in Bury, Greater Manchester in April 2023 and entitled *The Pocket Guide to LGBTQIA+ Identities* (Adam Xx, date unknown) lists a total of fifty-seven separate identities that one might see expressed at Pride, through the display of those identities' attendant banners, with space allowed (and a request offered) for any further identities which have either been missed by the author(s) or may develop in the future. These identities are divided into three sections: twenty-nine banners indicating "Sexuality and Romantic Attraction"; eighteen "Gender Identities"; and a further ten "Other Flags You Might See at Pride".

2.1 Sexuality-Overlaps

At first glance some of these identities would appear to be almost identical to others, or at least to partake of an extensive overlap, and differences are often subtle. For example, *Bisexual* identity (three horizontal stripes: red-pink, purple and blue) is described as:

A person who is attracted to more than one gender. Bisexuality is inclusive of all genders, so the people that a bisexual person is attracted to can include people from across the gender spectrum (ibid, 5).

⁴³ See Tim: *Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation*

Meanwhile, *Pansexual* (three horizontal stripes: red, yellow, blue) is defined as “A person who is attracted to all genders, without preference. The prefix ‘pan’ meaning ‘all’ in Latin” (ibid, 10). It might be argued from these examples that there is no difference in practical terms between a person whose sexual attraction is “inclusive of all genders” and one who is “attracted to all genders”. This argument is tacitly acknowledged by the recognition of the flags denoting *Multisexual* (four horizontal stripes: purple, white, pale blue, red) “an umbrella term for any form of attraction to more than one gender” (ibid, 9) and *Omnisexual* (five horizontal stripes: pink, red, black, purple, pale blue) “A person who is attracted to all genders or any gender while still having a preference” (ibid).

2.2 Gender-Overlaps

Similarly, the eighteen banners representing gender identities appear to have several overlapping themes, many of which are variations on a *Non-Binary* (horizontal yellow, white, purple, black) identity: “A person whose gender does not fall strictly within the category of the binary genders of male and female” (ibid, 16). Relevant instances would include *Neutrois* (horizontal white, green, black) “a neutral or null gender”, *Trigender* (horizontal pink, purple, green, purple, pink) “three distinct gender identities”, *Demigender* (horizontal dark grey, light grey, yellow, white, yellow, light grey, dark grey) “a partial connection to a specific gender identity”, *Genderfluid* (horizontal pink, white, purple, black, deep blue) “not fixed but can move fluidly”, *Agender* (horizontal black, grey, white, green, white, grey, black) “not having a gender identity”, and even

Greygender (horizontal dark grey, light grey, white, dark grey-blue, white, light grey, dark grey) who are “just not [...] invested in the concept of gender” (ibid, 12-16).

2.3 Nuance

It might be argued that the increasing proliferation of gender and sexual identities shows an inability to understand or accept the requirements and realities of a binary society, and an immature, attention-seeking need to be ‘different’. Conversely, it might also be argued that the demand for new identity categories, subtly different from older categories which are no longer felt to ‘fit’ are a symptom of a society which is evolving at a grass-roots level towards a more nuanced, open, inclusive and tolerant structure than had previously been the case, and one which celebrates diversity and the individual, rather than conformity and a sense of duty to uphold a stable *status quo*. However, not everybody considers this societal evolution to be a positive thing, and rather view it as societal corruption and degradation.

3. The Hostile Environment

3.1 Drag

One of the most popular recent targets, due to its highly visible and performative nature, for those who see increasing diversity in identity as threatening is the persona performance art form, *Drag*. On the 7th May, 2023, Mark Townsend reported in *The Guardian* an event which he described as the “latest in a series of ‘culture war’ protests by far right and rightwing groups”. This one concerned a Drag Queen Story

Time in Lewisham, south London, an event aimed at encouraging reading in young children by having stories read to them in public libraries by drag performers.

3.1.1 Drag Queen Story Time

Drag Queen Story Time as a concept was first envisioned and staged in San Francisco in 2015 by the author and activist, Michelle Tea, and such events have since spread well beyond the English-speaking world. The rationale for using drag queens to tell the stories was that Tea found libraries to be a heteronormative environment, unintentionally but still effectively excluding LGBT+ youth to a large extent and leading to a feeling of being unwelcome. Thus, as well as the fact that “Children love larger than life, magical characters, and drag queens have the biggest hearts and most creative minds” (Middleton, 2022), drag performers also offer an open example of gender diversity which captures “the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and gives kids glamorous, positive, and unabashedly queer role models” (Quinlan, 2019). The *Drag Story Hour* website (2023) makes the following statement:

Drag Story Hour celebrates reading through the glamorous art of drag. Our chapter network creates diverse, accessible, and culturally inclusive family programming where kids can express their authentic selves and become bright lights of change in their communities.

3.1.2 Protests

Protestors disagree. The protest in Lewisham was organised by the group, *Turning Point UK*⁴⁴, whose members have described drag performers as “groomers” (and, by implication, transgender women, revising the common tropes of transgender women

⁴⁴ Turning Point UK is an extreme right-wing British offshoot of the pro-Donald Trump US youth campaign,

being homosexual men and homosexual men being sexual predators), British schools as “Maoist indoctrination camps”, and campaigned against the use of public buildings for Ramadan prayers (Walker, 2023). It has informal links to the British Conservative party. A recent article in *The Herald Scotland* described Drag Story Hour as:

an opportunity, should a drag queen read a story to them once in a while, that children will be less likely to grow up with judgmental attitudes about gender, sexuality, and what men and women are supposed to do, say, and wear. And that’s a good thing, isn’t it boys and girls? (Smith, 2023).

There were twelve comments from nine readers in response to this article, only one of whom could be clearly said to have been supportive of the issue. Negative statements included: “There is something unwholesome not to say downright creepy about involving children in all this gay, drag, alternative lifestyle stuff”; “In what world do we want adult men dressed in a hypersexualised way, and perpetuating sexual stereotypes of women, anywhere near children?”; “Is there a lesson? Yes keep them out of schools and away from our children”; and “Drag is just black face for women.”

3.1.3 Tennessee

In 2023 the state of Tennessee, USA attempted to enforce a new law which would, effectively, ban drag acts from appearing in any place where minors would be present. The aim of the bill was to ban “adult cabaret entertainment”, described as “topless dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers, strippers, male or female impersonators, or similar entertainers” in public areas or private places where it might be viewed by minors. Supporters of the bill say that it is necessary “to safeguard children against exposure to inappropriate entertainment” (Lavietes, 2023). However, the wording of

the bill has been described as “intentionally vague” and there are concerns that highly conservative individuals could use it as ammunition against non-sexualised performances of which they, personally, do not approve, and against the public existence of transgender people in entertainment, for example, the British comedian, actor and political activist, Suzy Eddie Izzard, framing them as ‘female impersonators’:

For them to pass further legislation governing this ‘obscene’ art form of drag, it doesn’t serve any purpose other than to stir up the people who already hate us and make it harder for us to just exist out in the world,’ said Luke Conner, a Memphis drag queen whose stage name is Anyanka. ‘It’s not about protecting children anymore. It’s about silencing an entire group of people’ (ibid).

The bill’s ratification into law has since been temporarily halted by a federal judge, citing “constitutional protections of freedom of speech in issuing a temporary restraining order” (Helsel, 2023). The bill was contested in court as unconstitutional by the LGBTQ theatre group, *Friends of George Inc*, who have stated: “This law threatens to force a theatre troupe into a nightclub, because Tennessee legislators believe they have the right to make their own opinions about drag into law” and argued that if a drag performer and a Tennessee Titans cheerleader were to dance in public only the drag performer would be considered in any way sexualised and thus illegal (ibid).

3.2 Florida

Tennessee’s attempted ‘drag ban’ comes one year after Florida’s ‘Don’t Say Gay’ bill, “a controversial piece of legislation aimed at restricting schools in the Sunshine State from teaching students about sexual orientation and gender issues” (Woodward, 2022) similar to Britain’s Clause 28 which remained in effect from 1988 to 2003. It was signed into law by Republican Governor and devout Roman Catholic, Ron DeSantis who

was quoted as stating that “the bill will ensure that ‘parents can send their kids to school to get an education, not an indoctrination’” (ibid).

Protestors have argued that the bill would “effectively silence already-vulnerable LGBT+ students and hinder or harm their personal development while potentially violating educators’ freedom of speech and First Amendment rights” and:

Analysts argued that the law’s broad scope could prevent classroom discussion or instruction about LGBT+ people, history and events, or students’ families, or questions from students about any of those issues, under threat from potential lawsuits against school districts over perceived violations (ibid).

3.2.1 The UK Debate

Turning our attention away from the United States, issues around transgender rights in the UK have also become a prominent ‘political football’, especially in the run-up to the July 2024 general election. In May 2024, the Conservative education secretary, Gillian Keegan published guidelines “aimed at stopping ‘gender ideology’ that was ‘ignoring biological sex’ being used in some schools” (Courer and Adams, 2024) although without clearly defining “gender ideology”. Jo Morgan, a former teacher and head of Engendering Change⁴⁵ commented:

Presumably they are concerned that teachers are teaching students that sex and gender are different things, and therefore that you can change your gender [...] And they are concerned that schools are becoming breeding grounds for transgenderism. There’s no evidence to support that [and] not teaching such a contested and prevalent topic would be “doing children a disservice’ (ibid).

Pre-election responses to transgender issues have become polarised across British politics. Right wing parties typically take an essentialist view, the Conservatives

⁴⁵ An education and corporate consultancy which provides workshops on Education, Diversity and Inclusion.

promising to “protect female-only spaces and competitiveness in sport” by rewriting the Equality Act (Lawrie, 2024) while Reform UK “plans to ban what it describes as ‘transgender ideology’ in schools in England. In practice, this means ‘no gender questioning, social transitioning or pronoun swapping’” (ibid). More left-leaning parties, such as Green and Liberal Democrat, generally support self-identification⁴⁶ without the need for a medical diagnosis (ibid). Labour, who subsequently won the election, took a less committal stance, pledging to ban conversion therapy in all cases and make radical changes to the Gender Recognition Certificate⁴⁷, while abandoning a proposed law allowing self-ID without medical diagnosis (The Explainer, 2024).

3.3 Rowling

In December 2019, J.K. Rowling, the extremely successful author of the children’s book and film series, *Harry Potter*, published a Tweet in support of Maya Forstater, a tax expert whose own Tweets concerning gender identity had caused her to lose her employment. Fortstater had made public comments which questioned changes to the UK’s Gender Recognition Certificate, which would make greater allowances for self-identity of gender, and implied that she had the right to ignore anyone’s self-identity, using statements such as “men cannot change into women” and “A man’s internal feeling that he is a woman has no basis in material reality” (Muir, 2023). The judge, James Tayler is quoted in this instance: “Ms Forstater’s position is that even if a trans

⁴⁶ Including the recognition of non-binary identities.

⁴⁷ Removing the need for consent from a spouse, replacing the two-year living-as-preferred-gender period with a two-year ‘reflection’ period and replacing the approving legal and medical panel with a single, specialist doctor.

woman has a GRC, she cannot honestly describe herself as a woman. That belief is not worthy of respect in a democratic society” (Drake, 2019). In June 2022, after a number of employment tribunals, it was judged that Forstater’s ‘gender-critical’ views were held to be protected beliefs under the European Convention on Human Rights and could not, therefore, be used to discriminate against an employee. In this final tribunal, Mr Justice Choudry is reported to have:

stressed that while so-called gender critical views may be ‘profoundly offensive and even distressing to many others [...] they are beliefs that are and must be tolerated in a pluralist society’ (Cooke, 2022).

3.3.1 TERFs

Rowling’s support of Forstater’s case, and responses to critiques of her position and later Tweets and public statements on gender issues, have resulted in Rowling becoming a figurehead for the gender-critical movement and being labelled a TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) both by supporters who identify with that term and detractors who use it as an insult, and placed her at the centre of a polarizing debate. Several of the actors whose careers began in the *Harry Potter* film series, including the three main stars, Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, have distanced themselves from Rowling’s views and made public statements in favour of transgender rights. At the same time Rowling has been offered public support by, and has appeared in association with, many people with gender-critical views. These include Allison Bailey, co-founder of the LGB Alliance⁴⁸ and podcaster, Posie Parker.

⁴⁸ An advocacy group created to campaign against LGBT charity, Stonewall’s policies on transgender issues

Parker⁴⁹ is a self-described 'women's rights activist', and a campaigner specifically against the rights of transgender people to be legally recognized as their gender, against their rights to participate in sports or to use the public toilets aligning to their gender, and against drag performances.

3.3.2 Far-Right

However, Parker's podcasts, her organised protests and her associations have extended beyond the single issue of sex-based versus gender-based rights and have led some gender-critical activists to distance themselves from what appears to be her increasingly far-right political stance. Examples of this would include the appearance of neo-Nazis at rallies⁵⁰, associations with right-wing groups, individuals and publications such as The Heritage Foundation, *The Spectator* magazine, The Soldiers of Christ Online, Hans Jørgen Lynglimt Johansen, and her public praise of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon⁵¹ (Elliards, 2023).

3.3.3. Media

The above examples could be considered the 'tip of the iceberg' when considering negative attitudes towards Queer identities, in that they are the most easily accessible and presently considered the most newsworthy. It might also be argued that their appearance as highly visible news items is no more than the latest fashion in selling

⁴⁹ Real name, Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull

⁵⁰ Which Parker, in one instance, condemned in an interview the following day but which were tolerated at the time

⁵¹ aka Tommy Robinson, a British anti-Muslim campaigner, founder of the English Defence League and past member of the British National Party, who has been imprisoned four times for violation of UK laws, including assaulting a police officer, libel, privacy violations and harassment.

news media. However, these two arguments need not be contradictory and may contribute to each other in reciprocal fashion.

3.3.4 Statistics

Using the UK as an example, it is not possible to accurately state the number of self-declared LGBT people before 2021, since questions of sexuality and gender identity did not previously appear in the decennial census. It is reasonable to assume, though, that the actual *amount* of LGBT people in the population has remained steady for many years, probably centuries, and it is the decriminalization of homosexuality⁵² and further improvements in LGBT rights over the following decades which have enabled the greater visibility of LGBT people, to the extent that even small towns have instigated their own Pride events, which are welcomed (or, at least, not contested) by the majority of the general public.

3.3.5 Hate Crime

However, according to the UK government's statistical publication, *Hate Crime England and Wales 2021/22*, (Home Office Report, 2022) in which a 'hate crime' is defined as "any crime where the perpetrator's hostility or prejudice against an identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimized" hate crimes against individuals based on their (assumed) sexuality or transgender status have risen dramatically in the past ten years. In 2011/12 there were 4,345 crimes reported under the "hate crime strand", *Sexuality*, and a further 313 under *Transgender*⁵³. In 2021/22 there were 26,152

⁵² The Sexual Offences Act 1967

⁵³ Which covers multiple definitions outside the essentialist gender binary.

and 4,355 incidents reported under the same respective strands. This makes an increase by a factor of 6 for *Sexuality* and a factor of 14 for *Transgender*. It should be noted that hate crimes have risen in all strands over the last ten years, but these numbers stand against *Race* (35,944 to 109,843, a factor of 3), *Religion* (1,618 to 8,730, a factor of 5) and *Disability* (1,748 to 14,242, a factor of 8). Using these figures as evidence, and accepting mitigating statements that may be made for the increasing ease in reporting hate crimes and increasing police vigilance in investigating them, the rise in Transgender hate crimes should still be considered extremely concerning. It would appear that the increase in gender-based self-identification and the visibility of gender-non-normative people in public life and various media has been mirrored by an alarming increase in violent opposition.

4. Positioning the Minstrel

Minstrelsy is an unapologetically Queer methodology. It embraces the non-normative and rejects gender essentialism and hetero-normative expectations as evidentially incorrect, both throughout human history and within the archetypal models provided by myth. The active 'Queering' of myth as a method within Minstrelsy leads to a perspective on self-identity as multiplastic in relation to archetypal forms, and through that to a sense of spiritual validation for the Queer individual. The Minstrel, therefore, first finds 'identification with' by means of the discovery of archetypal forms which resonate with aspects of the self-recognized self, and the use of those archetypal forms in the development of performance personae. The formation of multiple

personae of this type found through 'identification with' leads to a self-understanding of 'identification as' in multiple terms, in other words, Queer self-identity as multiplastic discovered and spiritually validated via myth.

4.1 Practical Methods

While the specific methods used in the practice of Minstrelsy, are described elsewhere⁵⁴, the reader is here directed to Tim's follow-up essay⁵⁵ which concentrates on the discovery of archetypal forms for 'identification with' through the analysis of some examples using the method of 'Queering', and compared to another method for finding alternative interpretations of archetypal patterns, decolonisation.

4.2 The Minstrel's Place

In the socio-political 'culture wars' the archetype of the Minstrel and the practice of Minstrelsy, therefore, stand firmly in opposition to cis-hetero-normative assumptions concerning sexual and gender self-identifications, the gender-essential, the gender-critical and the trans-exclusionary, and firmly in support of increasingly nuanced and individual forms of self-expression and self-identification, amongst which Queer multiplasticity and the Minstrel Self are counted. Politically, the Minstrel stands alongside and in support of those groups and individuals, the *Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence*, or Scotland's *Cabaret Against the Hate Speech* for example, who use entertainment, flamboyance and a sense of fun to promote their pro-diversity and

⁵⁴ Seany Minstrel, *How To Be a Minstrel - Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide*

⁵⁵ Tim, *Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation*

tolerance agendas, and as “a response to hate, ‘fueled by queer joy, the love of music, celebrating our community and coming together as a positive presence in the space” (Morava, 2023).

(3,420 words)

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Seany Minstrel: In order to place archetypes and identity into dialogue, you must first find the archetypes that resonate, and so in this essay, our mythologer, Tim investigates methods of re-interpreting myths, legends and faery tales in line with the Minstrel's ethos of multiplasticity. He finishes by exploring the place of the Minstrel myself as a spiritually and socio-politically validating archetype.

Reinterpreted Myth: Gaining understandings of multiplastic self-identity as archetypal through Queering and decolonisation

by Tim

Abstract:

This essay focuses on the differences and commonalities between two methods of mythological re-interpretation: Queering and decolonisation. It investigates how those interpretations might bring archetypal forms into dialogue with Queer identity and the implications for the archetype of the Minstrel as the centering point of multiplastic Queer identity.

Keywords:

Identity; multiplastic; Queer; Queer Theory; decolonisation; myth; legend; faery tale; archetype; minstrel.

Contents:

Introduction; Re-Interpreting Myth, Legend and Faery Tale; Queering 'Defined'; Decolonisation Defined; Three Examples; Queer and Decolonised Readings; The Minstrel; Conclusions and Implications.

1. Introduction

The specific methods of archetypal connection used in the practice of Minstrelsy⁵⁶, are described in detail by Seany himself⁵⁷. This essay concentrates on the methods of discovering archetypal forms for ‘identification with’ by analyzing three mythological examples. The main method, which will be described, is ‘Queering’, enhanced where it’s feasible with James Hillman’s triadic *mytho-/morpho-/etymo-logical* method, and compared to one other potentially useful method for finding alternative interpretations of archetypal patterns, decolonisation.

2. Re-Interpreting Myth, Legend and Faery Tale

Myths, legends and faery tales⁵⁸ are fundamental to understanding archetypal patterns. However, these same stories are often overlaid with the moral, political, racial and/or spiritual ideologies of their collectors, editors and publishers, ranging from mediaeval monks to the 19th and 20th century scholars such as Robert Graves and Lewis Spence, whose work is still being read today. This essay examines and compare two methods of re-reading myth: Queering and decolonisation. I consider each in turn, its methods, advantages and disadvantages,

⁵⁶ Including *freewriting*, journaling, Archetypal Movement Exploration, encouraged serendipity and the overlay of multiple performance techniques in an archetypal personae performance

⁵⁷ Seany Minstrel: *How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide*

⁵⁸ Henceforth referred to collectively as ‘myth’ or ‘myths’

followed by how those methods might be applied to mythological materials. I then consider how these re-readings might bring archetypal forms into dialogue with Queer identity, and finally that dialogue's implications for the archetypal figure of the Minstrel as a performance persona.

2.1 The Argument

I'll begin with a brief examination of Queer Theory, and what it means to 'Queer a text' or to offer a Queer reading of a text, and attempt to understand Queer reading in order to apply it to a study of myth. I'll also compare Queering with James Hillman's multi-modal reading of archetypal figures to find their commonalities and differences, and any ways in which the one method might inform the other. Following that I'll consider decolonisation in a similar way, looking at its uses in the political and historical arena in order to discover a method of decolonisation which can be applied to myth. I then move on to the examination of three archetypal forms (stories or figures) from a variety of cultures. These are *The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* from 15th century Scotland, the goddess Kali-Ma from India, and a story from the Yoruba culture of Nigeria about how Obatala made people, and I present them in their most commonly known forms, with notes on any variations should they prove valuable. The examination continues with a Queer reading of each myth or figure in turn, followed by a decolonised reading and a comparison of the two. Finally, I'll

investigate how the strategies of Queering and decolonising might be applied to the archetypal figure of the Minstrel and how Minstrelsy stands in relation to the socio-political 'culture wars' considered by Thana⁵⁹.

3. Queering 'Defined'

As the inverted commas above are intended to imply, a strict definition of how to Queer a text may not be a feasible aim. Queer Theory as a whole has been criticized for its lack of a clear reference point from which to base Queering arguments⁶⁰ and thus it is often defined in negative terms, such as "analysis outside a heteronormative framework" (Chung, 2022) or a "theory that destabilizes normative associations among gender, sexuality, bodies, and desire" (Ryan and Hermann-Willmarth, 2013). In each of these cases Queer Theory, and therefore Queering as an act, are defined by what they are not. They are 'outside the heteronormative' and they 'destabilize the normative', or put more simply, 'Queer' is that which is 'not normal', something which itself can be defined as the standard assumption, in modern western society, that a story, character or person would fit "the obligatory form of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990:186) unless explicitly stated otherwise. Queering is

⁵⁹ Thana, *The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment*.

⁶⁰ Although others have seen this as an advantageous flexibility

therefore, by virtue of the vagueness of its definition, a multi-valent approach dependent on non-normative perspectives, and this definition is particularly useful for the purposes of this section of the essay which, unlike the more socio-political approaches taken by early progenitors of Queer Theory such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, takes the subjective experience of spirituality and the 'spiritual truth' as its framework:

It is time for us to move beyond confining parameters of what qualifies as knowledge. When we refuse to consider the value of knowledge that is rooted in the body, in the psyche, in paralogical experience, we fail to challenge colonialist, post-Renaissance, Euro-Western conceptions of reality. We need to move beyond the facile dichotomy of 'essentialism' and 'constructionism' to embrace other theoretical paradigms inclusive of embodied and in-spirited knowledge (Anzaldúa, 1997:vii-viii).

3.1 Appropriation

As Anzaldúa shows here, Queering itself can also function as a form of decolonisation. However, as the occultist author, Phil Hine, has pointed out in a recent online article, there is a problem of appropriation in this approach:

I have become increasingly wary of the tendency to uncritically look for evidence of 'queerness' across cultural and historical divides, without regard for difference or specificity. To do so, I would argue, is to repeat the errors of the orientalists; to adopt, even unconsciously, an interpretive position of privilege to reveal 'truths' that may not, when we look closer, be actually present(Hine, 2022).

Hine expresses a valid and important point in instances when one speaks in terms of *objective* interpretations. In that specific article he is questioning the claiming of the elephant-headed Hindu

deity, Ganesha as a Queer deity according to various psychological and symbolic readings, and concludes that to state such a claim as true is effectively a form of cultural appropriation, or perhaps even colonisation. In an *objective* sense, I would agree with this conclusion. However such a conclusion does not preclude an entirely personal and *subjective* Queer relationship with any deity or myth. As I argued above, Queer Theory is multi-valent and dependent on perspective, or put more simply, subjective. Queering in a spiritual sense allows a personal reading of a text, or even a deity, which need not reference objective truths in order for the reader to form their own internal truths in relation to that text or deity. A Queer spirituality need not seek to outwardly affect the accepted meaning of a myth, although that is certainly an option should it prove feasible. Rather it can be a key for the non-normative individual to access a personal, spiritual understanding of that mythological material and form a unique relationship with its archetypal figures.

3.2 Subjectivity

The application of Queer theory to myth, then, is a matter of subjective understanding and relationship forming on a spiritual level. However, in its purest form such an understanding cannot easily translate to the written word, and contains the danger of a completely inappropriate misinterpretation due to the interpreter's lack of knowledge. Thus, in the following Queer readings of my

selected myths I will attempt to argue the feasibility of my interpretations in as objective a manner as possible, but I must still stress that those interpretations are, in the final instance, necessarily personal and subjective.

3.3 Hillman

Similarly to Queer Theory in terms of its multi-valent approach, James Hillman's methodology for interpreting archetypal patterns and images has parallels in its subjectivity and potential for appropriation, but also in its usefulness for discovering and deepening one's personal relationship to that archetypal pattern. Using the example of an acorn he explains how it can be understood on multiple levels:

A narrow, naturalistic definition of 'acorn' as the seed or fruit of the oak tree establishes only one level of its meaning, giving it only a literal, botanical place in the mind. The first level can block the others from showing; the acorn also has mythological, morphological, and etymological meanings. The acorn is also a mythical symbol; it is a shape; and it is a word with ancestries, tangents and implications, and suggestive power (Hillman, 1996:276).

To interpret a myth in a *mythological* fashion seems an unnecessary tautology, but that does not mean that such an interpretation cannot be carried over to the archetypal patterns which appear in a myth, in this instance, acorns. It may be possible, then, to use these methods to aid in the development of, or enhance, a subjective Queer reading of a story or understanding of an archetypal figure.

4. Decolonisation Defined

The decolonisation of a myth or a specific archetypal figure may work as a balancing opposite to Queering in that, where Queering lays a personal and subjective interpretation onto a story, decolonisation attempts to remove overlaid interpretations to find a more objective perspective. Where Queering may be seen as re-interpretation, decolonising can be framed as an “un-interpretation”. Strictly, the process of decolonisation indicates that a colonising force or culture is removed from a land or culture which it has aggressively taken over, “the withdrawal of political, military and governmental rule of a colonised land by its invaders” (Akel, 2020), and by extension can be applied to historical, cultural or literary subjects. In an article specifically examining the British university education system, Akel describes this as “the process in which we rethink, reframe and reconstruct the curricula and research that preserve the Europe-centred, colonial lens” (ibid) referencing the fact that history, and the education system that goes with it, is written by the colonisers. It comes from their point of view alone, and with the power to appropriate from the colonised whatever it may use to support its position while ignoring anything which may challenge that hegemony. Decolonisation is, therefore, a political movement and rarely applied to spiritual matters but as the quote from Anzaldúa above argues, Queering can be a form of decolonisation by questioning

the need for a specific type of (western European intellectual) knowledge, rather than embodied or in-spirited forms of knowledge.

4.1 Colonised Myth

We are then led to the question of whether archetypal figures and their associated myths could have been colonised in this sense. I would argue that many of them already have been, and for various reasons including cross-cultural evolution, appropriation by a colonising culture, the protection of public morals and deliberate negative propaganda. An example of negative propaganda, and one which I'll examine in more detail further below, would be the Indian figure of Kali-Ma, who became associated both with Tantric sexual rites and the murderous cult of the Thuggee during the period of the British Raj.

4.2 Christian Colonisation

Perhaps more subtle and difficult to notice are the early Christian colonisations of European and British myths, legends and faery tales. A tale I'll examine below is the *Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer*⁶¹, a story which may, arguably, be traced via commonalities with other stories to an early shamanic 'model' in which a hero is taken to an 'otherworld' and returns after some time with enhanced abilities. This is a common theme, particularly in pre-Christian British and Irish literature.

⁶¹ Sections 5.1-5.2 and 6.1-6.1.5

However, this story is overlaid with a Christian ideological gloss.

Thomas at first assumes that the Queen of Elfland must be the Queen of Heaven (i.e. the Virgin Mary) and later the Queen shows Thomas three roads, one of which leads to Heaven, one to Hell and the third to 'fair Elfland'.

4.3 Dangers

There are dangers in decolonisation, however, which are directly related to its search for objectivity. These are the assumption that one's un-interpretation is the 'right' one and, similarly, the assumption that there could be some kind of absolute original version of a myth or archetypal figure. Myths and the figures within them have a history as long as the humans who have told those stories and thus have been coloured, interpreted, retold and overlaid by almost uncountable cultures over several millennia. It must be recognised then, especially in the case of tales which extend a long way into the past of one's own culture, that un-interpretation by the removal of certain influences is also necessarily a form of re-interpretation according to one's own biases, and therefore the existence of a certain degree of subjectivity must also be conceded.

5. Three Examples

5.1 Thomas

The first of the three examples of archetypal patterns I'm examining is *The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer*, a story whose most well-known form can be found in Francis James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1904) and popularised in song by Steeleye Span in 1974. The version I am using as my source material is the one printed in Froud and Lee (2002). The ballad itself is traced by Child to 1700CE and is considered to stem from a late mediaeval romance. Though the archetypal roots of the ballad may arguably be traced to a time before historical record, its eponymous hero was a real person⁶², and the tale purports to explain how he acquired his powers of poetry and prophecy.

5.2 Thomas' Story

The story tells how True Thomas⁶³, while resting one day upon a grassy bank, spots a lady on a white horse riding towards him. The lady is so beautiful, and glamorously dressed in green, that Thomas assumes she must be the "Queen of Heaven". She corrects him, "I am but the Queen of fair Elfland", and then tells him that she had come to find him in order that he become her servant:

But ye maun go wi me now, Thomas,
True Thomas, ye maun go wi me,
For ye maun serve me seven years,
Thro weel or wae as chance may be

⁶² Sir Thomas de Ercildoune (1220-1298) of Earlstone in the Scottish Borders

⁶³ So named because of his absolutely honest nature

(Froud and Lee, 2002).

The Queen immediately takes Thomas onto her horse and they ride at great speed for forty days and nights through a blighted landscape of “red blude to the knee” without the light of sun or moon. There follows an episode in which Thomas offers to pick fruit in a garden, but is told that it is poisoned by all the plagues in hell. The Queen feeds Thomas from her own supplies and then shows him three roads: the path of righteousness, leading to Heaven, which “is beset wi thorns and briers”; the path of wickedness, leading to Hell, which is a “braid braid road” that some call “the road to Heaven”; and thirdly the “bonny road [...] to fair Elfland”. The ballad ends with the Queen forbidding Thomas to talk about anything he sees and gifting him with a coat and green velvet shoes. The final line states that Thomas was not seen for seven years. Further versions tell how Thomas is given the gift of prophecy and eventually returns to Elfland, never to be seen again.

5.3 Kali

The second examination is of the Indian goddess, Kali-Ma⁶⁴ whose representation in popular European culture is almost entirely negative and death-related. She appears as the goddess of the murderous Thuggee cult in the 1984, Steven Spielberg film, *Indiana Jones and the*

⁶⁴ Sanskrit: ‘Black Mother’

Temple of Doom, “an obscenity that worshipped Kali with human sacrifices” and as Captain Nemo’s patron goddess in 2003’s *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (Stephen Norrington) “A man who worships death. Can we trust him?”. The stereotypical western image of Kali-Ma “depicts her as a scary, bloodthirsty, out-of-control demon. She was notorious as the spirit venerated by the now infamous *Thuggees*, secret fraternities of thieves who may have strangled victims in her honour” (Illes, 2009:542).

5.4 Obatala

The third archetypal pattern examined is the story of how Obatala became the *Orisha* of disabled people. The Yoruba religion is based around a spiritual hierarchy of which the head deity is *Olodumare*, a transcendent being beyond human reach “the ultimate destiny of all creation; from him all existence comes forth, and to him it all returns” (Murphy, 1988:7) who divides himself into more human-like accessible aspects called *Orishas*, with which the Yoruba worshipper may foster direct relationships. A Eurocentric viewpoint might conceive of them as demi-gods or Roman Catholic saints and, indeed, in the syncretic religion of *Santería*, which was developed⁶⁵ by Yoruba slaves in the Americas who had Christianity forced upon them, the *Orishas* have become identified with certain saints.

⁶⁵ In much the same way as Voudon and Candomblé

5.5 Obatala's Story

Obatala, identified as acting through Saint Mercedes, is described as the “King of the white cloth. *Orisha* of creation, wisdom and spiritual clarity” (ibid, 180) and usually visualised as an elderly but healthy man, a king and a sculptor, dressed in white. The story in question tells how the world was nothing but water, and Olodumare sent Obatala to create land. He did it so beautifully that Olodumare sent him back to create plants and animals and then, equally pleased, sent him back a third time to create people. Obatala started well but it was thirsty work and so, after a while, he reached for a refreshing bowl of palm wine. And then another:

Once under the temporary influence of Palm wine, however, Obatala breached the duty of care and made some defective human beings. When an individual suffers because of an existential defect, including organ or limb malfunction, genomic disorder, or hereditary flaw, Obatala is most kindhearted because he knows that he shares part of the blame (Khan, 2017).

6. Queer and Decolonised Readings

6.1 Thomas the Rhymer

In attempting a Queer reading of the *Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* I have found myself drawn to ask two questions. Firstly, why did the Queen of Elfland specifically choose Thomas, and secondly why did Thomas immediately and unquestioningly accept her ‘job offer’? I would argue that the answers to these questions could be that,

firstly, she saw something in him that she recognised and secondly, that he saw exactly the same thing in her, and that that thing was sexual or gender variance.

6.1.1 Thomas Queered

The ballad states that the Queen of Elfland wore a skirt “of the grass-green silk”, but does not describe exactly what True Thomas wore. As I’ve explained elsewhere⁶⁶ an historical image of Thomas as a minstrel would also suggest that he wore green. “From at least the twelfth century, troubadours (one might also say *jongleurs*) traditionally wore costumes of yellow and green complimented by red cloaks” (Connor, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:164). In the final verse of the ballad, the queen also gifts Thomas with a coat of “even cloth” and a pair of shoes of “velvet green”. The specific use of the symbolic colour green in their clothing immediately indicates a connection to Faeries who “typically dress in yellow, green and red” (ibid), and would also imply a certain non-normativity in Thomas via the “associations of green with figures on the margins or altogether outside society” (ibid). Similarly, the reputation of minstrels and other poets and entertainers was such that:

Their behaviour seems to have been perceived as belonging to a third or alternate gender category [...] minstrels were generally depicted as ribalds, as erotic rebels having multiple partners [...] associated with

⁶⁶ Tim, *The Minstrel as a Bridge*, Section: 3.11 Colour

both male prostitution and homoeroticism (ibid, 235).

Further Queer interpretation of the text, and a potential answer to the second question of why Thomas followed the queen so readily might suggest that, as well as being a humanoid figure, the queen could symbolise what might be thought of as ‘the call’. I would suggest⁶⁷ for many people, particularly Queer individuals existing in normative situations such as those provided by a family or a workplace, there is often a powerful internal urge which, regardless of upbringing or genetics, requires an outlet in which they may authentically express their ‘real you’. James Hillman, although not specifically examining sexuality or gender, has made a similar point:

At the outset we need to make clear that today’s main paradigm for understanding a human life, the interplay of genetics and environment, omits something essential – the particularity you feel to be you. By accepting the idea that I am the effect of a subtle buffeting between hereditary and societal forces, I reduce myself to a result. The more my life is accounted for by what already occurred in my chromosomes, by what my parents did or didn’t do, and by my early years long past, the more my biography is the story of a victim. I am living a plot written by my genetic code, ancestral heredity, traumatic occasions, parental unconsciousness, societal accidents (Hillman, 1996:6).

6.1.2. Self-Expression

Thus, the Queen of Elfland may be framed as the all-but irresistible urge towards authentic self-expression or being ‘the real you’, whatever that may mean to the specific individual concerned. I would

⁶⁷ A suggestion examined in more detail using James Hillman’s concept of the *daimon* in Thena: *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)* Section: 3.7 Hillman

argue that, despite the view expressed throughout this whole thesis that the ‘true self’ (the Captain/Minstrel Self) is, or at least *can be*, fluidly multiplastic in form, and may even be fluidity itself, the majority of people believe that there is such a thing as a ‘real you’. Equally, many Queer-identified people feel that they are unable in normal social circumstances to express that ‘realness’, and therefore must behave in a manner similar to autistic ‘masking’. Although it would not be possible to back this statement up with formal data, anecdotal evidence from Seán’s personal experiences and informal conversations with people within various Queer communities⁶⁸ strongly suggests this to be the case. Similarly, an autoethnographic search of Seán’s own experiences and feelings in such self-expression highlights not just its powerful necessity, but also its very real dangers of psychological and physical violence when one’s ‘difference’ is perceived as threatening. Many people seek out a safe space, such as a Pride event or a BDSM club, in which to ‘take off their masks’ and express their ‘real selves’, and this can be an interpretation of what the queen is offering to Thomas in her statement that, “True Thomas, ye maun go wi me, For ye maun serve me seven years”.

6.1.3 Thomas and Hillman

Would Hillman’s threefold methodology of analysis help in this case?

⁶⁸ Overlapping bisexual, polyamorous, gender-variant and kink

The mythological method would necessarily have to concentrate on the archetypal figures of the queen and of Thomas himself as a minstrel. I'll examine the Minstrel archetype in more detail towards the end of this essay⁶⁹. A focus on the Queen, however, proves enlightening. A consideration of the Queen of Elfland immediately recalls the mythological figures of queens, both good and evil in a multitude of tales. A queen is unusual in that she is a female figure of great power in a male-dominated world and may, therefore, come to represent a balancing force against the dominating masculine, or an alternative viewpoint to the expected norm. Morphologically, this queen is the same basic shape as any human woman but she is also vastly more beautiful which indicates her specialness, as does her glamorous attire and her well-bedecked white horse. Therefore she is beyond normal humanity and may represent something out of reach in normal life, an aim or a state of being beyond mundane reality. Etymologically, the English word 'queen' is linguistically unusual in that it is not a feminine form of the word 'king'⁷⁰ but is descended from proto-Germanic words meaning 'woman'. This implies that the Queen of Elfland is a woman not only of great power but of entirely independent power, the etymological existence of a queen not depending on the existence of a king. The word 'queen' also recalls the use of

⁶⁹ Section: 7 The Minstrel

⁷⁰ For example, *roi/riene* in French, *könig/königin* in German, and *rí/banríon* in Irish

the term to describe a particularly flamboyant gay man and brings to mind the image of this Queen as a drag queen, exotic and certainly gender-complicated, and Elfland by extension as a metaphorical gay bar or 'safe space'.

6.1.4 Thomas Decolonised

Decolonising the *Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* in any objective manner is more difficult than its Queering. We might argue that the story follows the archetypal theme of the shaman who disappears to another world and returns changed or empowered in some way. Stories similar in basis appear worldwide. In Norse myth, for example, Odin leaves his home in Asgard to drink from Mimir's Well between the roots of the world-tree, Yggdrasil and acquire, at the cost of one of his eyes, the ability to see the future. The Sumerian goddess, Inanna descends to the underworld and, through the humiliation of being divested of all her clothing and protective talismans and then, finally, her death, returns to life with the aid of demons and becomes the goddess of vengeance. Symbolically similar is the Indian story of Narada, a (male) travelling minstrel who appears in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, who falls into water⁷¹ and emerges a woman. It would appear, then, that the specifically Christian elements of True Thomas' story, could be interpreted as ideological glosses onto an otherwise

⁷¹ Commonly an otherworld symbol

universal type of myth. These would include the sections in which Thomas believes the queen to be “the Queen of Heaven”, the proscription against eating the fruits of a specific land because “For a’ the plagues that are in hell, Light on the fruit of this countrie”, and the three verses in which the queen shows Thomas the difficult road of righteousness, the easy road of wickedness and the “bonny road” to “fair Elfland”. However, there is no historical evidence which can trace this specific story to any period before approximately 1400CE. In other words, despite its theoretically archetypal provenance, *The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* was written by Christians for a Christian audience in a Christian country, and so the Christian ideology is an integral part of the story rather than any kind of later addition. It is important to note, though, that Elfland does not appear in the Bible, nor in any canonical Christian teachings. At the period of the ballad’s earliest official form, Biblical literalism was the norm and, although hardly anybody was able to read it for themselves, the Roman church’s interpretation of Biblical text was considered to be absolute law. Yet, at the same time, belief in Faeries and other supernatural beings was also considered perfectly normal:

Many non-literate members of secular society and some clerics “believed” [...] in the existence of fairies as fairies; furthermore, many members of the clergy and some laypeople believed [...] in the existence of fairies as devils [...] Statistical evidence is impossible, but taken together these two groups clearly made up a significant portion of medieval society. Furthermore, many non-

literate members of secular society and some clerics believed [...] in the ability of fairies/devils to influence things like weather, crops, health, and prosperity (Green 2016).

I would argue, therefore, that the blending of both Christian and non-Christian elements within the ballad are less of an ideological overlay and more an emergent development in the slow, millennium-long, syncretisation of Christian ideology with those folk beliefs which survived in Europe from before the Roman church's colonisation. This would suggest an explanation of the assumed physical similarities between the Queen of Heaven and the Queen of Elfland, and the fact that the bonny road to Elfland lies, figuratively if not geographically, between the hard road of righteousness with its thorns and briars and the broad road of wickedness which "lies across the lillie leven". The land of Faery is thus shown to be a place not of absolute evil, nor of absolute good, and since it is not of earth it must therefore be a place which is 'queer' inasmuch as it has its own behaviours, rules and morals unlike those of the 'normal' world.

6.1.5 Thomas' Conclusion

Judging from the above considerations, Queering and decolonising the *Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* have led to similar conclusions: a variance from normativity as the defining quality of Elfland, and of its denizens and guests, the acceptance of which in oneself leads to great achievements. In True Thomas' case that is indicated by the gift of prophecy, but for the modern Queer person a great achievement

might manifest as, for example, a level of self-acceptance which improves personal confidence and self-expression in public.

6.2 Kali-Ma

The figure of the Hindu goddess, Kali-Ma, is often considered shocking to the western mind. She is usually depicted with dark blue or jet-black skin⁷², her hair is wild and unkempt and her body is almost naked. Her multiple arms carry various weapons and a severed head, she has boar-like tusks and her tongue protrudes from her mouth. She wears a necklace of shrunken heads and a skirt of dismembered arms and, finally, she dances triumphantly upon the corpse of a male figure, generally considered to be her husband, Shiva. Yet, despite this apparent love of extreme violence, she is one of the most revered of all of India's multiplicitous pantheon and worshipped, especially in Bengali tradition, as a Great Mother at the Diwali festival.

6.2.1 Kali-Ma Queered

The decolonisation of Kali-Ma is a political matter based on understanding the British Raj's colonialist propaganda and Indian nationalist uprising, and can therefore be seen in a relatively clear, objective light. Queering the figure of Kali-Ma, however, may prove to be rather more 'muddy' and almost entirely founded on a personal relationship between the goddess and her worshippers, but that

⁷² Sky blue being the more usual skin colour for deities in the Hindu pantheon

interpretation itself accords well with “a long tradition of diversity of Hindu practice and belief and immense personal freedom in one’s relationship with the divine” (Viswanath, 2022). According to the same Hindu scholar, despite the notorious conservatism in Indian society, the queering of a Hindu deity cannot be seen as improper or sacrilegious because:

Hinduism is historically very open toward sex and sexual difference. Innumerable stories in Hindu Scriptures tell of same-sex relationships, children born of same-sex relationships and characters – some of them gods – who are gay, queer or trans (ibid).

The question remains, then, can Kali-Ma actually be thought of as a Queer deity? She is certainly seen by many, especially in a feminist light, as a non-normative, non-conformist figure of power. “Caste system, economic disparities, wage gap, gender divide – she never warmed up to these social constructs either.” (Chaterjee, 2020) Similarly, “Kali breaks conventional stereotypes of feminine beauty and sexuality in Hindu goddess mythology. She is the dominant sexual partner straddling the prone Siva and the wild warrior goddess drinking demon blood.” (Chakravarty, 2017). In demonstrating such non-normativity to her worshippers, it seems logically to follow that those worshippers would also lean towards non-normative behaviours, and this would appear to be the case. The UK’s largest LGBTQ club with a specific aim towards the south Asian population is called Club Kali, and their online presence is the Club Kali Network. In India

itself, devotees of Kali, in certain of her aspects, deliberately defy the socially normative expectations of vegetarianism and sexual prudence and instead offer “worship involving blood and flesh offerings, wine and the use of sexual intercourse” (ibid).

6.2.2 Kali-Ma Decolonised

The British Raj’s relationship with Kali has been one of, quite literal, political demonisation. Kali has much in common with the Welsh Cerridwen and the Irish Morrigan in that, as well as being a fearsome and terrifying figure⁷³, she is a fierce protector of her ‘children’. To decolonise Kali, then, is to attempt to see her as her own people do, a Great Mother and protector of immense power. A companion article to the British Museum’s 2020 exhibition *Tantra: Enlightenment to Revolution* explains that:

The Tantric goddess Kali, who rose to prominence in Bengal at this time [about 1750-60 CE], provided her devotees with maternal love while embodying the cosmic interconnectedness of creation and destruction. From the early 19th century, British missionaries and imperialists in India fantasised about Tantra, and Kali worship in particular, as a depraved cult of violence and ecstasy that justified their civilising presence (Wolfers, 2020).

This is not to say that violence did not exist in the worship of Kali, as I mentioned earlier concerning the Thuggee cult. The Thuggee did exist. They considered themselves to be born from Kali’s sweat, and the cult was officially suppressed and considered destroyed by the Raj

⁷³ A witch in the first case and a warrior in the second

around 1830. However, there are also theories which consider the Thuggee to be little more than groups of highway robbers whose devotion to Kali in her violent aspects was used as political propaganda against Indian self-rule. A 2008 online article by Alexander Lyon MacFie, for example, questions “how far the *thuggee* archive, created by William Sleeman, the British official mainly concerned, can be considered reliable, and how far it should be seen as an orientalist construct” and at the same time examines how the depiction of the Thuggee has been more recently used as “a significant image representing oriental (Indian) backwardness and barbarity” (ibid). It may be argued, though, that this demonisation of Kali and her followers led, paradoxically, to the greater rise of Kali and the practice of Tantra as symbols of national pride, exhorting Indian nationalists to fight their oppressors in violent revolution:

Tantra’s macabre associations made it a useful framework with which to render India as a smouldering cremation ground (*bharat-shmashan*), a space of dereliction inhabited by the half-dead and the abject. But just as Tantra often reflected on death to bring the urgency of life more vividly into focus, its uncanny symbolism enabled the colonised to cultivate militant dreams of revolutionary transformation (Wolfers, 2020).

6.2.3 Kali-Ma Conclusion

Kali-Ma is an enormously complex figure and any attempt to do her justice in only a few hundred words is necessarily incomplete, yet her image in Western popular media has turned her into little more than a

simplistic, ravening demon. Even though India⁷⁴ has had official independence from British rule since 1947, it would be difficult to say if the archetypal figure of Kali-Ma, the Indian Great Mother, is likely to recover from her own colonisation nearly as well. Her assumption as a Queer goddess may help that process.

6.3 Obatala

The story of how the *Orisha* Obatala makes people is a very simple and straightforward mythopoeic explanation of the existence of inborn disabilities such as albinism, dwarfism or Down's Syndrome. Such individuals are the children of a drunken god and he cares for them with a special empathy beyond that given to 'normal' people. In Queering this story I am led to enquire exactly how drunk Obatala became and for how long.

6.3.1 Obatala Queered

The palm wine that Obatala drinks⁷⁵ has an alcoholic strength of around four percent. This is approximately equivalent to the majority of beers bought in public houses worldwide, and I feel that it would be justified to assume that Seán's experiences with alcohol of that strength are typical of most humans' reactions. Even when one is extremely fatigued, which Obatala is described as being, alcohol has

⁷⁴ And consequently Pakistan, and later Bangladesh

⁷⁵ Which is a very common drink amongst the Yoruba of Nigeria and something that the originators of the story would have had much experience of.

an immediately enlivening and refreshing effect for a period of time before it becomes soporific. It releases inhibitions, relaxes tense muscles, raises a sense of euphoria and leads to impulsive behaviour. I would suggest, then, that we expand the section of the story in which the tired and thirsty Obatala takes his first sip of palm wine to include the gradual descent from tired attentiveness, through merry, impulsive euphoria, and into drowsiness, clumsiness and eventual stupor. We might then re-imagine what sort of humans he would create throughout the stages of his increasing drunkenness. I would also tentatively suggest that, as disabled people are considered in this myth to be the children of a drunken god, perhaps the neuro-divergent, the gender-variant, the sexually non-normative and the self-identified Queer may be understood mythopoeically to be the children of a 'tipsy' god, merrily experimenting with new forms.

6.3.2 Yoruba Culture

Even though conservative and male-dominated⁷⁶, Yoruba culture is relatively gender-balanced in comparison with neighbouring African cultures, and there are precedents for gender and sexual variance within its language and myths. Yoruba has no gendered pronouns equivalent to 'he or she', for example, and the words for man (*okunrin*) and woman (*obinrin*) translate literally to 'one who strong-

⁷⁶ A man may have many wives at once, for example, but a woman must have only one husband.

walks' and 'one who sway-walks' respectively. (HipHopera Guy, 2022) Gender-variance is also common amongst the *Orishas*. Obatala himself has an aspect in which he is divided into a male-female androgynous pairing known as Oddudúa and Yemmú (Connor, Sparks and Sparks, 1997:253), Eleggua (aka Legba) is “existing beyond duality [...] androgynous or transgendered” (ibid:213) and Olokun who rules the sea is “not only transgendered, but a hybrid human-fish [...] linked to both gender and theriomorphic transformation” (ibid:254).

6.3.3 Obatala Decolonised

Decolonising the story of Obatala's creation of people would require an understanding of how non-normative people were treated in pre-colonial Nigeria and before the Yoruba diaspora, which was a direct result of colonisation and the international slave trade. There are those who argue that the present patriarchy in Nigeria and in Yoruba culture is a direct result of imposed colonial behaviour and point to the mythologies as evidence, with the belief that:

Black cosmologies that embrace indeterminacy and multiplicity subvert the Manichean colonial imposition of linear and binary logic so necessary to the arithmetic of racial capitalism and its oppositional calculations of white/black, gay/straight, man/woman, mind/body, debit/credit, and profit/loss (Pandiloni Jr., 2017).

However, there are other scholars who contend that despite the imposition of Islam and Christianity by colonial forces, Yoruba culture was already patriarchal in its structure and those impositions

simply strengthened that which was already there: “Religious practice was also strongly gendered, with women preponderant in the cult of most oriṣa, but men in the main oracular cult, Ifa” (Peel, 2002) and there was “clear evidence of pre-colonial gender constructs” (Pearce, 2015).

6.3.4 Obatala Conclusion

Yoruba history is complicated, based on oral transmission and therefore muddied by colonialism and the slave trade. To make any objective and definite claims as to the attitudes of the Yoruba people to the non-normative within their society is, though perhaps not impossible, beyond the bounds of this essay and my own knowledge. In this case, it may be necessary to leave the decolonisation to expert historians and foster a purely subjective relationship with Obatala as the tipsy father of Queer people.

7. The Minstrel

I examine the archetypal figure of the Minstrel in detail elsewhere⁷⁷. In this section I’ll be reiterating any conclusions found that may prove helpful, in an abbreviated form, and expanding upon them where appropriate.

⁷⁷ Tim: *The Minstrel as a Bridge*

7.1 Minstrel Queered

To the question of whether the Minstrel could be seen as a Queer archetype, I would argue that he very much already is. His appearance in popular culture, from Cacophonix in the Asterix comics to *The Witcher*'s Jaskier, is flamboyant and his behaviour, traced back to the ribald reputations of mediaeval jongleurs, is 'fruity'. He stands as an allegorical bridge between the worlds of myth and of mankind by means of his songs and stories and through them, in a manner which may justifiably be described as shamanic, he embodies and communicates archetypal forms.

7.2 Minstrel and Hillman

Using the first of Hillman's threefold methodology, the Minstrel looked at *mythologically* is a creature of multiplicity and fluid nature, a wanderer and shape-shifter. Like Odin, the practitioner of *Seiðr*, he crosses not just political boundaries, but also gender and sexual boundaries. He has magical talents like Gwydion in *The Mabinogion* and Narada in *The Mahabharata* and his skills are recognised, in the case of True Thomas, by the Queen of the non-normative Elfland. *Morphologically* the minstrel is the same shape as an ordinary man, but that does not mean he appears as one. The tradition of wearing the flamboyant motley immediately marks him as an outsider to normative society and places him in a "subculture comprised of dancers, jugglers, prostitutes, card players, thieves,

homeless persons, persons with physical and mental impairments, practitioners of magic, and the transgendered and homoerotically inclined” (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:239). His traditional use of green and yellow, as already pointed out, allies him with the land of Faery. *Etymologically* the word ‘minstrel’, which by the 14th century had evolved to exclusively mean a type of musician, had previously indicated a servant or a minor court official and can be traced back to the Latin root word *ministerium*, a root which it shares with our modern word ‘minister’ (Etymonline, 2019). A minister is either a government or church official and ‘to minister’ means to give aid or advice to someone in need. An implication is therefore presented which recalls the very beginning of Minstrelsy as a form of shamanism in which songs and stories are brought by the shaman from the Otherworld and presented to the people to give advice, offer succour in times of difficulty, or even as verses to heal or curse with. Similarly, that ‘ministering’ brings to mind the present conceptualisation of the practice of Minstrelsy as providing a sense of archetypal multiplastic self-identity and through it the ‘healing’ of spiritual validation which may not be available in more normatively-based spiritual structures such as the major world religions.

7.3 Minstrel Decolonised

Untangling the archetypal figure of the Minstrel from colonisation is

a tricky (and, perhaps, unnecessary) task since the Minstrel appears in the cultures of both coloniser and colonised. Although a minstrel of a specific culture might lose his position and be replaced by a coloniser's minstrel telling a coloniser's stories, as a figure of multiple worlds the archetypal Minstrel crosses the boundaries of colonisation. It may also be the case that human⁷⁸ minstrels would prefer, where possible, to adapt to their new political situation and take on the coloniser's stories, as well as keeping their own familiar stories alive by presenting them to the colonisers in new, more suitable, forms. The idea that one who is already considered an outcast would retain any loyalty to a specific culture seems unlikely.

8. Conclusions and Implications

8.1 Queering

In the archetypal patterns given above (two stories and two figures) I have attempted to compare the effects of two re-interpretive methods in order to gain understandings of myths, legends, faery tales and archetypal figures. In defining the first method, Queering (occasionally enhanced where appropriate by Hillman's triadic *mytho-morpho-etymo-logical* methodology), and in its application, I have discovered that despite what evidence may be brought forward to

⁷⁸ Rather than mythological ones

justify any claims of re-interpretation, those claims must ultimately be considered subjective. This does not mean that a Queer reading of a myth, legend, faery tale or archetypal figure is invalid, as such, simply that any interpretation's objective value takes a lower place of importance than the interpreter's personal relationship to that mythological material. However, the experiences of Queer-identified people can be said to have commonalities which have led them to their Queer identities. Thus to offer a Queer reading of an archetypal pattern, even though subjective, is also to offer a possible route to a spiritual connection with that archetypal pattern whereby another's subjective experience may match one's own.

8.2 Decolonisation

The method of decolonisation, which seeks for objectivity, has proven more difficult to apply to certain tales and figures. While it clearly applies to the figure of the Hindu goddess Kali-Ma, and to specific figures in other stories, I have found that it does not appear to apply to the archetypal figure of the Minstrel at all. The Minstrel crosses the boundaries of colonisation rather than being contained by them. I would argue that this is an indication of the Minstrel's universality as an archetype alongside other figures such as clowns, heroes, queens and witches.

8.3 Minstrelsy

The Minstrelsy proposed and practiced throughout this thesis involves inhabiting the performance persona of the Minstrel as the archetype who embodies other archetypes through song and story. This interpretation makes the Minstrel Self a performance-persona-based identity reminiscent of to Virginia Woolf's 'Captain self':

This is what people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self which amalgamates and controls them all (1928:221).

These concepts resonate closely with Jung's process of Individuation in which one integrates archetypal forms, through a type of dialogue with those forms, into a wholeness that is indisputably oneself.

Jung's highly personal work, *The Red Book* demonstrates that method:

The task of individuation lay in establishing a dialogue with the fantasy figures – or contents of the collective unconscious – and integrating them into consciousness, hence recovering the value of mythopoeic imagination which has been lost to the modern age, and thereby reconciling the spirit of the time with the spirit of the depth (Shamdasani, 2009:49).

Taking on the archetypal form of the Minstrel as a performance persona, then, is a method of attempting self-understanding and self-identification through the integration of the archetypal aspects of the self with the universal archetypes found in myth ('identification with'). Equally it is also a method of communication which offers potential insights to an audience into opportunities and roads for

self-identity, and particularly Queer⁷⁹ self-identity by the presentation of archetypal forms in an entertaining way ('identification as'). The interpretation of these forms, the necessarily subjective but not necessarily unshared Queer interpretation, enhanced by Hillman's threefold methodology or by decolonisation where fitting, provides the content of that communication.

8.4 'True Self'

Thena has contended elsewhere⁸⁰, and I re-iterate here with a quote from James Hillman, that the idea of self-identity, need not be single. Especially in the case of the Queer-identified person it may also be fluidly multiplastic, or even fluidity itself.

The self divided is precisely where the self is authentically located [...] Authenticity is the perpetual dismemberment of being and not being a self, a being that is always in many parts, like a dream with a full cast. We all have identity crises because a single identity is a delusion of the monotheistic mind that would defeat Dionysos at all costs (1994:39).

Exactly whether that is the case and whether the Minstrel as performance persona may successfully find and offer that option of self-identity through Queer fluidity is the purpose of this PhD project and beyond.

⁷⁹ That is: non-normative, fluid and multiplastic

⁸⁰ *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*

(7,693 words)

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Seany Minstrel: *It's my turn now! I'm not just a pretty face, I'm a finding! I am the result of quite a lot of work and practical techniques. What you're about to read below takes you through those techniques to explain how they work and how they inter-relate and influence each other. Maybe you could try a few of them yourself.*

How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide. by Seany Minstrel

Abstract:

This essay examines the multi-layered practical methods I use in my Practice as Research PhD work, both 'behind the scenes' and as the performance persona, Seany Minstrel. It also demonstrates how those methods - supported by the attitudinal method of 'encouraged serendipity' - inform not just the work itself but also each other, and my practical understanding of my work's theoretical basis.

Keywords:

Autoethnography; archetype; movement exploration; persona; reflection; encouraged serendipity.

Contents:

Introduction; Theoretical Underpinnings; Journaling; Freewriting; Archetypal Movement Exploration; Reflection; Personae; Performances; Summing up

1. Introduction

In the following essay I am going to show the reader how to find their personal Minstrel - or, in more academic terms, I examine the auto-ethnographic self-study and performance methodology I have developed for the Practice as Research PhD project, *Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance*. Don't worry, that isn't nearly as boring as it sounds.

1.1 Theory

I'm going to start off by considering the theoretical underpinnings of the work that I do as it applies to PaR in general and in my specific case, and then I'll investigate the way in which subconscious methods create accidental or emergent/serendipitous discovery (this is where the 'encouraged serendipity' comes in) as part of the methodology, and how those methods sit within PaR paradigms.

1.2 Practice

After that I'll go through each of my specific methods in turn, beginning with the three primary content-creators, *journaling*, *freewriting* and *archetypal movement exploration*, then reflective writing as a consolidation of those discoveries and then onto the development of performance personae, the performance itself and forays into video performance and beyond. I'll also show how these methods inter-relate and 'feed-back' into each other, which is super important.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical underpinnings of the overall project, the things that Thena examines in her first essay⁸¹, such as spiritual study, post-Jungian Archetypal Psychology, and gender and sexuality studies, cover what Robin Nelson (2013:37), using his triangular visualisation of PaR methodologies, called “know-that (‘outsider’ distant knowledge)”. Admittedly, I’m not entirely in agreement with Nelson here. I’m not sure that such knowledge is truly ‘distant’ or ‘outsider’, because of its specialised nature and the fact that it demands deep study, and because of its appeal to specific personal interests and mind-sets. On the other hand, I’m still choosing to adopt the term ‘know-that’ since this knowledge need not be acquired experientially, but can be almost entirely composed of ‘book-learning’.

2.1 PaR

The PaR methodology I have chosen to use is based around the idea of being open to emergent discovery⁸² via autoethnographic self-study, and that self-study is in relation to archetypal forms. All this provides Nelson’s “know-how (tacit knowledge)”, or what I would consider newly discovered (or perhaps even subconsciously forgotten and re-uncovered⁸³) experiential knowledge, influenced and enhanced by theoretical knowledge, filtered through subconscious expression. Enhancing that “know-how” through reflective documentation and expressing it through the creation of performances completes Nelson’s triangle with the “know-what (tacit made explicit)” form of knowing. What is expressed through practical performance, and

⁸¹ Examined in detail by Thena in *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*

⁸² An attitude or method I have come to name ‘encouraged serendipity’. See the Glossary:

⁸³ Which I examine in my other essay *(re)Evolution of The Minstrel*)

reflected upon in documentation, is dependent on the practical discoveries which emerge in the use of my research methods and the 'feedback' of reflective documentation. However, the distinct delineation of Nelson's three types of knowledge, which appear to work in a three-step linear format, has become blurred in my work in that each form of knowledge crosses into the two others and discoveries made in each affect and alter each.

2.2 Serendipity

A really good example of this, as encouraged serendipity in action, would be the, seemingly unbidden, appearance of the name, Endymion, in my ('know how') journaling. This emergent element led to a return to ('know that') books in order to acquire information that my sub/unconscious self had appeared to be reaching for, and that I may (sub/unconsciously) already have known but had forgotten. In this case 'know how' has preceded 'know that' and the resultant 'know what'⁸⁴ has itself fed into the learning of sound and video editing techniques, or further 'know that' and 'know how'.

2.3 Blurring

As the Minstrel, performances are obviously the primary outcomes of my research and, preferably, in the form of live, public performances. However, I have found that the dividing lines between outcome, documentation and reflection are rarely completely clear. In fact, they're positively fuzzy, and so the nebulous, cross-over nature of the work has taken on the nature of a kind of complex, multi-layered 'feedback loop'. All aspects of the work both inform, and are informed by, all other aspects, causing self-generated accidental discoveries

⁸⁴ The video performance, *The Endymion Project*

(encouraged serendipity again) which cross, and in doing so, blur the boundaries of each aspect. Documentation, such as this essay, may also stand as an outcome, yet at the same time it also functions as a reflection, and each reflection becomes, by the simple means of writing it down, also documentation. Consequently, I am finding a large amount of my work evolving in an emergent manner, serendipitously in many instances.

2.4 Theory into Practicality

Barton (2018) has suggested that the most common methodological preoccupation among researchers in Artistic Research Practice⁸⁵ is “the emergent nature of both its processes and its products” (p11). My own primary practical research methods are designed with the intention of taking advantage of that emergent nature by encouraging accidental discovery through sub/unconscious means, those means being *journaling*, *freewriting* and a psycho-physical exercise I have called *Archetypal Movement Exploration*. Technically, these three exercises are the province of Guru Tovski, whose ‘job’ it is to explore the misty realms of subconscious expression, associative logic and non-rational understanding. However, as the gestalt persona I can lay claim to Tovski’s work as my own because he’s a part of what makes me me (Thena’s, Sam’s and Tim’s, too), and so, for the sake of simplicity, that’s what I’ll do wherever it’ll save confusion.

3. Journaling

The first of these methods takes the form of *journaling*, but in a deliberately non-rational fashion, rather than the boring, ordinary recording of a day’s activities. This journaling is a form

⁸⁵ Barton’s own umbrella term which includes PaR

of automatic writing, based on Julia Cameron's *morning pages* exercise, which involves "the act of moving the hand across the page and writing down whatever comes to mind. Nothing is too petty, too silly, too stupid, or too weird to be included" (1993:10). In common with Cameron, my own *journaling* has specific, albeit slightly different, rules. In Cameron's case those rules are that it is always done first thing in the morning, it is always longhand and that it should always take up three full sides of A4 paper. My own rules are that it is always handwritten, that it is always done in one sitting, and that it always takes up four pages of the particular A5 book that I am using as the journal at the time, thus taking (usually) somewhere between thirty and forty minutes.

3.1 Adaptation

However, whilst efforts are made to write the journal first thing in the morning, like *morning pages*⁸⁶, this has sometimes proven unfeasible and so I have adapted the strict timing of *morning pages* to allow writing to take place a little later in the day⁸⁷ should it prove necessary. I have found, for example, the experience of *journaling* in a coffee shop before work will often produce results quite as good as strict *morning pages* writing. I will admit that, like any open-ended creative endeavour, the vast majority of what gets put into a journal is mundane nonsense, but not everything. Resulting texts are occasionally surreal and amusing, as well as having the effect of clearing one's mind for the day ahead, and I occasionally publish the ones I

⁸⁶ For the similar reason that the newly awakened mind is often still partially asleep and so works differently from one that has been awake for several hours

⁸⁷ Although always to be completed before 10am

find most enjoyable on a weblog created for that purpose, or present them at spoken word events, whether they have strictly informed my overall work or not.

3.2 Artist Brain

The purpose of this style of *journaling*, again in common with Cameron, is to bypass the ‘logic brain’⁸⁸ and begin to use the creative, holistic ‘artist brain’. In my own experience that could be described as allowing things to rise, or emerge serendipitously, from the sub/unconscious mind, and this often takes a period of time:

We are victims of our own internalized perfectionist, a nasty internal and eternal critic, the Censor, who resides in our (left) brain and keeps up a constant stream of subversive remarks that are often disguised as the truth (ibid:11).

According to Cameron, the *morning pages* “teach logic brain to stand aside and let artist brain play” (ibid:13) because they “provide us with a spiritual ham-radio set to contact the Creator within [...] It is impossible to write morning pages for any extended period of time without coming into contact with an unexpected inner power” (ibid:14).

3.3 Mythopoeic Imagination

Looking at it through a lens of Archetypal Psychology, this “Creator within” and “inner power” can be considered to posit a direct connection to archetypal forms⁸⁹ residing in the collective unconscious, but that such a direct connection requires a certain, open, state of mind. This is the ‘mythopoeic imagination’ which occurs in dreams and has “always been the basis of man’s thinking – the whole treasure-house of mythological motifs” (Jung, 1920:139). When awake,

⁸⁸ Which is also described as our ‘Censor’

⁸⁹ Minstrels, for instance!

attaining glimpses into that state requires some ‘switching off’ of the conscious mind by allowing images to flow unbidden into written words. In terms of practical outcomes, it is this *journaling* which provided the first impulses for various performances and presentations. These have included a Bugs Bunny story which became a central element of the video presentation, *Queering the Old Fool* (Seán Fitton, 2/6/2021), the mysterious name, Endymion which led to the creation of *The Endymion Project*, and, of course, the earliest steps towards the show, *Thomas the Rhymer*⁹⁰.

4. Freewriting

The second of the written techniques, and one which is, again, based on *morning pages*, I have chosen to call *freewriting*. Unlike *morning pages* and *journaling*, *freewriting* deliberately incorporates a variation of a Jungian psychological technique called *active imagination*.

4.1 Active Imagination

Active imagination is an exercise which:

encourages the dreamer to dialogue with dream figures in waking life. We ask and through their answers we associate what these figures might mean to us. Do they bring any stories, myths or fairy tales to mind? (Kushner, 2016).

In Jung’s case this sense of ‘dialogue’ is very literal, indicating an exercise in which the ‘dreamer’ (i.e. the psychiatrist’s patient) involves dream figures in a direct conversation, asking questions and listening to their answers, sometimes even arguing with them. Jung himself used

⁹⁰ I examine all of these in *The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel*

active imagination as a method of self-analysis and for the creation of *The Red Book* (2009)

which comprises many such conversations. Sonu Shamdasani explains in the introduction:

Jung held that the significance of these fantasies was due to the fact that they stemmed from the mythopoeic imagination which was missing in the present rational age. The task of individuation lay in establishing a dialogue with the fantasy figures – or contents of the collective unconscious – and integrating them into consciousness, hence recovering the value of the mythopoeic imagination which has been lost to the modern age, and thereby reconciling the spirit of the time with the spirit of the depth (p49).

4.2 Mythopoeic Imagination

It's arguable whether the mythopoeic imagination has truly been “lost to the modern age” or has simply changed the forms of its stories and archetypal figures to reflect the cultural milieu of the imaginers. I'd suggest that we can see such examples today in the ‘gods and monsters’ and archetypal themes of the massively popular superhero and science fiction films. A prime candidate would be Luke Skywalker's ‘hero's journey’ in *Star Wars: A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977) in which the young Skywalker is drawn away from ordinary life to manifest his destiny as a hero by undergoing various ordeals, defeating his evil ‘twin’ and returning home a changed man with a ‘prize’ for his people which, in this case, was the renewed hope of a successful rebellion against an evil empire. However, at the time Jung was working, generally accepted and deeply held social and spiritual beliefs - what Jean François Lyotard later referred to as *metanarratives*, “such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth”(1984:xxiii) were being questioned in their relation to the rise of science and the scientific method, and particularly in the wake of two devastating world wars. A mythopoeic frame of mind and a romantic sense of the spiritual in daily life was, if not actually lost, certainly becoming rarer.

4.3 Variations

In his use of *active imagination*:

Jung had drawn and painted his own visions and dreams. He encouraged patients to do likewise; or, if they preferred it, to write poems, make models or sculptures, or even dance their phantasies [...] Jung was more particularly interested in the kind of phantasy which comes to people when they are neither awake nor asleep, **but in a state of reverie in which judgement is suspended, but consciousness is not lost** (Storr, 1973:115-116, my emphasis).

In my own version of *freewriting*, I have again relaxed the rules of Cameron's *morning pages*⁹¹ so as to allow the exercise to be utilised wherever and whenever one happens to be. However, I have added other rules, these being the necessity of a subject to write about⁹² and a 'time restriction', in that any session of *freewriting* cannot be less than 30 uninterrupted minutes long. The intention of this particular length of time is to allow the writer to run out of things to consciously write about and become, effectively, *bored*, thus forcing the mind (and the pen) to keep going in order to bypass the 'Censor' or the 'logic brain' through intensive concentration. It is this pushing through boredom which allows creative impulses to arise from the sub-and unconscious levels. This does not appear to make sense at first:

To propose boredom and depression as gateways to imagination, as working tools for theatre — indeed as master teachers—contains a fair share of provocation. In looking to boredom there is an overt rebellion against models of imagination that monopolize our sense of creativity (Pardo, 1988).

Theoretically, this boredom ultimately pushes the writer into Jung's "state of reverie in which judgement is suspended, but consciousness is not lost", a state similar to deep meditation, or "involving us in a highly skilled and exhausting activity, as in dancing or playing a Bach partita,

⁹¹ Always practiced first thing in the morning, always written longhand, and always filling three sheets of A4 paper

⁹² Not necessarily to 'dialogue with', although such a possibility is not precluded, but to monologue about

[in which] the ordinary boundaries of our identity disappear, and ordinary clock time stops”
(Nachmanovitch, 1990:53).

4.4 Purpose

Freewriting, therefore, would best be described as a timed essay of automatic writing which attempts, via an examination of a specific archetypal subject⁹³ to develop an understanding of one’s relation to that subject on the level of mythopoeic imagination, and to encourage serendipity to arise. Additionally, as I mentioned earlier, this is one of the ways our mystic, Guru Tovski, creates his written meditations and finds his moments of wisdom⁹⁴.

5. Archetypal Movement Exploration

Active imagination is taken a step further in the next method, *Archetypal Movement Exploration*⁹⁵. As I explained above, in *active imagination* one encounters archetypal figures and engages them in some way, preferably in the form of a conversation, later bringing that experience out into the world in a more concrete style, for example, in writing or painting. This practice is almost identical to methods of creative visualisation used in many psychological disciplines, and in the neo-Pagan practice of *pathworking*. AME, however, uses two techniques

⁹³ For example, an image from a Tarot deck, or a character from a faery story

⁹⁴ These can be found in Guru Tovski’s section of the thesis.

⁹⁵ Known as ‘AME’ from here on, because I gave it such a long name

which *active imagination* does not, those being [a] deliberate identification and [b] physical embodiment.

5.1 Body-Mind

Commonly, meditation techniques work from a rather simplistic Cartesian mind-body viewpoint, in that the mind is active and deliberately focussed but the body is effectively 'shut down', with the assumption that the one can be utilised without the other. Hofstadter calls this duality the "caged bird metaphor": "'One brain, one soul' [...] the cage, being, of course, the cranium, and the bird being the soul" (2007:259). However, the AME approach is to treat the body-mind relationship as a unity rather than two interacting but separable elements, a philosophy similar to the somatic methodologies used in (amongst others) qigong, yoga, the Feldenkrais Method and polyvagal therapy, which "focuses on specific neural exercises that provide opportunities to optimize the regulation of physiological state" (Porges & Dana, 2018:62).

5.2 Method

In this technique, the AME practitioner visualises themselves as the archetype they wish to explore, rather than it being an independent entity to engage with⁹⁶ and attempts to embody that figure within an imaginal setting using their own physical movements combined with imaginary sensory input⁹⁷. A fairly easy example of this, and one that I'd recommend for a beginner to try out, would be to visualise oneself as *The Hermit* from any standard Tarot deck, by copying his bodily posture, imagining wearing his clothes and holding his staff and lantern,

⁹⁶ Part [a] - identification

⁹⁷ Part [b] - physical embodiment.

while visualising the surroundings as depicted on the card. The visualisation is often easiest with the eyes closed, but some people can visualise an imaginal environment within the worldly environment they can already see, and a talented mime artist can even make someone else see it. Then, through physical interaction with the ‘mythopoeic imagination’, the student explores the ‘world’ of that archetype. I have found that the mixture of physicality with imagination creates a kind of sensory-imaginal ‘feedback loop’ which increases the perceived reality of the experience well beyond anything I have experienced in static meditations. Similarly to how the talented mime I just mentioned makes their audience see the objects they are pretending to interact with, the reality of an AME experience comes largely from the body’s signals to the brain interacting with the imagination. For example, using one’s hands and mouth to drink an imaginary cup of coffee has a more accessible and ‘truer’ sense of reality than does imagining the same act without any physical movement.

5.3 Immersion

It is important, for similar reasons to those stated in the section on *freewriting*, that an AME lasts for no less than 30 minutes. Movement-visualisation in this exercise, unlike writing, tends not to include an element of boredom as such, but instead I have found that the longer one spends in the exercise, the easier it is to become immersed in its ‘reality’ and the more concrete the imagery tends to become. The practitioner needs a safe space in which to move around (potentially with their eyes closed, so trip hazards should be minimised), as clear a mental image as can be created, and the ability to physically move within that image. This latter is something I have found to be of the greatest importance in order that “the dreamer is in the image rather than the image in the dreamer” (Hillman, 2013: 17). That is to say that

what manifests is an ‘imaginal environment’⁹⁸ rather than nothing more than pictures in one’s head.

5.4 Commonalities

As well as directly referencing Pagan/shamanic and psychological techniques, AME’s use of identification has quite a lot common with the Stanislavskian acting technique called *psycho-physicality* which:

refers to the dialogue between your body and your psyche. Your body can give you as much information about the character as your brain does, and your psychology inevitably affects how you use your body. It’s an inner-outer transference (Merlin, 2007: 21).

AME takes deliberate advantage of the “inner-outer transference” by creating a specifically directed dialogue between body and psyche, such as the identification with and embodiment of a Tarot figure or other archetypal form.

5.5 Soul-Making

Additionally, one might even consider this type of play-work in a longer-term manner, as a method of what James Hillman refers to as *soul-making* because “imagination is not merely a human faculty but an activity of soul to which the human imagination bears witness” (2013: 18), by means of amplifying the personal experience of an archetypal form. “Amplification can be a method of soul-making by finding the cultural in the psyche and thereby giving culture to the soul” (ibid: 127). However, since each of our personal experiences is necessarily different, any AME experience will also be unique, reflecting not so much the archetype itself as our

⁹⁸ That being an environment which is experienced through the imaginative faculty but treated as ‘real’ as the practitioner can imagine it in their circumstances

personal relationship with that archetype in our own sub-/unconscious minds, and our personal connection to the collective unconscious. Archetypal Psychology calls this ‘transference’:

Nowhere does the impersonality of myth strike a human life more personally. Thus transference is the paradigm for working through the relations of personal and literal with the impersonal and imaginal. Transference is thus nothing less than the eros required by the awakening of psychic reality (ibid: 56).

In practical terms, this greater understanding of particular archetypes has helped lead to the development of my various performance personae⁹⁹. A notable example would be Baron Sam, whose development was very strongly informed by AME sessions examining the Tarot card, *XIII Death* and the Voudon *loa*, Baron Samedi.

6. Reflection

The above exercises are enhanced through semi-formal documentation and reflection which Seán has done on his weblog, *Spirituality, Sexuality, Psychology and The Stage*¹⁰⁰. As the ‘Captain Self’, Seán has used the weblog to, amongst other things, catalogue rehearsal room activities, respond to books he has read, to *freewrite*, and as a reflective diary. This diary allows him to reflect not only on the work done in the previous week, its usefulness or otherwise, its potential meaning and development, and any discoveries that have been made, but also to reflect on his personal health and state of mind in relation to the work. This encourages a greater self-understanding which ultimately feeds back into the work of self-examination.

⁹⁹ I discuss these in Section: 7. Performance Personae, and in much greater detail in my other essay, *The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel*.

¹⁰⁰ seanfittonphd.wordpress.com

6.1 Personae

The weblog also functions as a place to allow personae to 'speak' through writing in order to develop their personal voices. This was particularly useful before the personae began to evolve into more three-dimensional forms and before my own development as Seany Minstrel the Minstrel Self. Following that, Seán moved onto recording the personae on video. Video recording allows us personae to have physical as well as literary properties, thus making us more 'real'.

6.2 Video

Making video also fulfils the performers' need to perform, particularly when the covid pandemic had brought live performance to a difficult, often impossible stage. Many performers took to using video as a method to reach out to audiences for whom watching live shows had become unfeasible. Examples of these would include Amanda Palmer, Betty Grumble, Reuben Kaye and Gerry Potter, who use their Instagram accounts to both perform and promote their performances. Another example would be Ron Athey, who has extended the availability of his work through video by making his performance, *Self Obliteration III: Mortification*¹⁰¹. Also of interest is the Muslim female rapper and PaR PhD student, Haleemah X, who uses video almost exclusively as a performance medium to respond in song and through the voices of a variety of characters, to the issues which surround her and her work.

¹⁰¹ Available on the National Review of Live Art website (<https://nrla30.com/the-artists/ron-athey/>).

7. Performance Personae

It's at this point that I feel that I ought to change trajectory slightly because, while I can give written instructions in how to perform specific exercises like AME or *freewriting* to inform their performances and their connection to personae, I can't really tell anyone how they should perform or in what personae. You, dear reader, might be a singer or a dancer, or a non-performing academic and must, therefore, find your own personae, voices and ways of performing. Since that is the case, I'm going to treat the next part of this essay in a more historic way, explaining what I (or Seán, before I appeared) did and how, with the offer that any reader might take these activities as loose suggestions and pointers rather than instructions.

7.1 Fluid Identities

In the initial consideration of fluid identities as identifiers which surround or describe some aspect of a central "I" or soul¹⁰², and before the emergence of myself as The Minstrel, which will be examined below, it seemed inappropriate to present a performance as simply one identity (i.e. the staged self, or 'Seán playing Seán'). Therefore, Seán developed a variety of performance personae through which he could examine an issue from various angles. For example, in *Queering the Old Fool*, he could use personae to examine his gender and sexuality (Queer) identities in the context of age and social milieu via the specific nature of each persona.

7.2 The First Four

In developing the first four personae, he worked from the principle of them being aspects of a

¹⁰² Discussed in depth by Thana in both *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)* and *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 2: Persona)*

'central me' based on the analogy of a diamond being one of a variety of different shapes depending on the angle and distance of view, but it remaining the same diamond no matter where it is viewed from. Thus, each performance personae is Seán, but also an aspect of Seán 'writ large' as if seen from a specific viewpoint so that only that aspect can be seen. Each persona, therefore, has its own way of questioning and understanding issues laid before it. He found it particularly helpful in this case to consider each persona as a 'way of doing things', as much as an identity, and therefore a method in itself. The connection to the collective unconscious is paramount in the development of the personae, and so each one is related to some form of archetypal figure as found in myth. So far there are four of these, and thus Seán also found it useful to also relate them to the four Jungian archetypes of the psyche. These first four are as follows:

7.2.1 Baron Sam

Baron Sam is based on Trickster-archetypes blended with the archetype of Death as an entity. A prime example of that in world religion is the Voudon *loa*, Baron Samedi, from whom Sam's name derives. Samedi has multiple roles, particularly in relation to the dead and the dying, but in contrast to European sensibilities, he is visualised as anything but dour about it. He is loud, raucous, a lover of rum and cigars, and he has a particularly ribald sense of humour. In Jungian terms, then, Sam is Seán's *Shadow*, the things one hides from 'polite company' and sometimes even from oneself. For some people, their Shadow might manifest as something fearful or violent. In his own case, the *Shadow* is excess and debauchery, particularly in alcohol and sexual license. Sam, who has elsewhere been described as a 'multi-gender filth monkey' therefore, allows Seán to celebrate, as well as examine, those 'darker' aspects of himself in a

way that can be entertaining to perform and witness. Sam never takes an issue seriously, preferring to communicate mostly through rude songs and poetry as another way of celebrating their non-normativity. Similarly, they also dress in a manner which deliberately challenges gender norms.

7.2.2 Tim

Tim (The Excited Mythologer) is an Innocent archetype, which in simple terms means that he does not really understand the subtleties and minutiae of normal adult behaviour. In mythology, he would be a youthful hero like Perceval of the Arthurian cycle, excitable, intelligent, often quite knowledgeable in certain things, but innocent of the ways of the wider world. In Jungian terms, Tim is the *Self*¹⁰³ and reflects the parts of Seán which, while he fully appreciates its more useful manifestations, he has increasingly come to suspect may be related to undiagnosed childhood ADHD. Consequently, Tim is 'nerdy'. He loves mythology and telling stories, and particularly the more 'adult' parts of myths that have been edited out by earlier, more conservative, storytellers, but his easy distractibility makes it difficult for him to tell those stories coherently and he tends to become side-tracked.

7.2.3 Guru Tovski

Guru Tovski is a Sage archetype, exemplified in myth by the Arthurian Merlin or in literature by Tolkien's Gandalf the Grey¹⁰⁴ who expresses Seán's interests in spiritual practices such as meditation or Tai Chi. In Jungian terms he is the *Persona*¹⁰⁵ that image one projects to the

¹⁰³ Which I define for the purposes of this essay as 'how one sees oneself'

¹⁰⁴ Or possibly Yoda from *Star Wars*

¹⁰⁵ With a capital P to distinguish it from the more general and performance-based uses of 'persona'

outside world. Since, as writers such as Goffman and Auslander have shown, one's *Persona* can be subtly or even dramatically different depending on circumstances, this persona-as-*Persona* has the potential of making Tovski unfeasibly complicated as an aspect of Seán 'writ large'. He therefore based Tovski on the distant image he felt someone in the Pagan community might have of him if they only knew him by reputation as an author and organiser of events. Tovski takes a spiritual view of the issues he comes across. However, in 'playing' Tovski, Seán has found it interesting and amusing that he appears incapable of making definite statements and can only ask questions, as if he is a guru who does not actually know anything.

7.2.4 Thena

The last of the four personae is Thena, a Wise-Woman archetype named after Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, tactics and the city of Athens. For Jungians, she would be Seán's *Anima*, the contrasexual Self, although Thena herself discusses the gender-complicated aspects of this conceptualisation¹⁰⁶. Thena is an academic and examines issues in a calm, nuanced and intellectual manner as befits her Wise-Woman status. Thena also creates a balance in the four personae in that she allows Seán (a biologically male-bodied person) to experiment with and examine gender presentation experientially, without feeling the need to make it humorous, as the other personae tend to be. For instance, while Thena could technically be described as a 'drag' persona, he deliberately avoided the often clown-like, highly stylized make-up or the performative 'high-camp' of drag in favour of a more sedate and, within the limits of feasibility,

¹⁰⁶ In *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*, Section: 4.1.1 *Anima* – 4.1.2 *Anima-Soul*

realistic depiction of himself as a woman. This does not mean that Thena is without humour, simply that her humour is more subtle and cerebral than her persona 'siblings'.

7.3 Development

Each of these personae has been developed, and is still developing, over a period of time using the techniques outlined above, along with spontaneous evolution during their performances.

As previously mentioned, Baron Sam's development has been formed primarily through AME and *freewriting* about Trickster archetypes, Baron Samedi and the Tarot card, *XIII Death*. Thena came, at first, from rough journal thoughts about the nature of the Jungian model of the psyche and of the *Anima* as being able to speak. The fuller understanding of her as a performance persona was strongly informed by *freewriting* about, and an AME experience as, the Greek goddess Athena. Since then her development has proceeded according to both planned and emergent influences. For example, her red backdrop in *The Endymion Project* was deliberately chosen to co-ordinate with her scarf and earrings, but those items were both serendipitous acquisitions from charity shops on day trips. Similarly, while Baron Sam's appearance is deliberately designed to incorporate elements from Baron Samedi and the MC from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972), their rainbow-skull backdrop was another serendipitous discovery, while searching for Thena's backdrop. Thena, however, has only ever appeared on camera, and only from the chest upwards. So far there has not been any impetus towards her development as an on-stage performer with an entire body, rather than a 'talking head'. Tim and Guru Tovski have evolved in a less structured manner, in that they have emerged spontaneously from exaggerated versions of Seán's day-to-day self in specific situations. In Tim's case, the tendency to become excited in talking about discoveries hidden within mythology and fairy stories, and in

Tovski's instance teaching meditation, Tai Chi and other spiritual practices in his capacity as a Pagan 'authority'. Unsurprisingly, then, Tim and Tovski both wear clothes Seán already owns (and in an unaltered state) and both wear their hair in styles which he commonly uses. Tim's heavy rimmed spectacles and pocket full of pens were a deliberate choice to make him look more 'geeky' and so more easily distinguishable from Seán's usual appearance.

7.4 Seany Minstrel

For some time Seán deliberately concentrated on performing the embodiment of each of these four personae, specifically because they fit elegantly into the Jungian four-part pattern, and he used them in the development of performances to add varying voices and viewpoints to each piece. However, this did not preclude the emergence of other personae outside of that Jungian pattern, or potentially ones which would test the extent of mythological archetypal patterns as phenomenal entities, which is where I (Seany Minstrel) came in.

For Jung, [archetypes] are anthropological and cultural, and also spiritual in that they transcend the empirical world of time and place and, in fact, are in themselves not phenomenal. Archetypal psychology, in distinction to Jungian, considers the archetypal to be always phenomenal (Hillman, 2013:14).

7.4.1 Captain Self

During the research stage for *The Endymion Project*, which examines the idea of a sense of self through changes of consciousness involving sleep, Seán examined three stories: the myth of Endymion (who sleeps forever); the faery tale, *Sleeping Beauty* (who is forced into an enchanted sleep and equally forced to awaken); and Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel, *Orlando: A Biography* (who sleeps for an extended period and awakes having changed sex). In re-reading *Orlando* he also recognised a moment of encouraged serendipity in which he was presented

with a new (or previously forgotten) conceptualisation of self, and one which has been cited multiple times, such is its importance, the “Captain self”:

This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all (p221).

7.4.2 Green

Some time later he was offered a commission to create a one-off site-specific show about the history of a local park, for which he created a combined music, poetry and semi-historical storytelling performance, delivered through the voice of the Green Man, the spirit of the trees and woodlands. A second moment of encouraged serendipity appeared in which he discovered the use of green and yellow clothing as an early form of ‘Queer coding’ (Conner, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:239).

7.4.3 Emergence

I investigate my own emergence as the performance persona, Seany Minstrel in much greater detail in the essay, *The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel* . For now, and in short, it is these two emergent discoveries, combined with research into our modern image of mediaeval wandering minstrels as aspects of the Fool/Trickster archetype, and the development of the show, *Thomas the Rhymers* which led to the birth of the performed Minstrel Self. The Minstrel¹⁰⁷ is thus the gestalt performance persona. If the ‘Captain Self’ is the ‘compact of all the selves we have it in us to be’ then the multiplastic Minstrel Self is the performance persona equivalent discovered (or, perhaps, rediscovered), as were the others, using the methods I’ve explained above.

¹⁰⁷ Examined much more deeply by Tim in his essay *The Minstrel as a Bridge*

8. Performances

The major part of my researches' outcomes are intended to take the form of live performances, in a style I would describe as 'immersive storytelling' by several personae led by myself, Seany Minstrel, using monologue, poetry, music and song¹⁰⁸. In keeping with the psycho-spiritual nature of the base theories and other practices, performances have so far taken a loosely ritualistic form and, in line with Jacques Copeau's lofty aim, hopefully provide a "potentially universal communication uniting its participants in a communal experience and instilling in them a new sense of human worth" (Auslander, 1997:16). Performance is where archetypal engagement occurs, no longer just between Seán and the archetypes but between the archetypes and the audience through me/us, and thus also forms a testing ground for the authenticity of those archetypal personae performed. The word 'ritual' often has implications of severe seriousness but this is not the case in my work which relies on engagement through direct interaction with audience members via the "all-too-human bond of the sense of humor" (Hillman, 1994:109). It must, however, still take the form of "a special ornament or elaboration [which] marks otherwise ordinary activity, rendering it separate and intensified, even sacred" (Nachmanovitch, 1990:74).

8.1 Setting

My preferred ritual setting, and the one used for *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret* (2019) is a cabaret club, the intention being that it would be a familiar situation for the majority of the

¹⁰⁸ Along with anything else that might help, such as humour, movement, audience interaction

audience who would tacitly understand its 'rules'. Yet at the same time it would be a space rendered separate from normal daily activity and therefore special. It also allows me, and the other personae, to interact directly¹⁰⁹ with audience members in a situation which could be considered immersive, with immersive theatre's sense of complicity, but without the participatory expectations which are "in many ways extorted from immersive theatre audiences." (Alston, 2013).

8.2 Covid and Video

A level of intimacy is therefore important in my performances as a way of expressing and experiencing my own personae in action, but also experiencing the personae that are expressed back to me and considering and reflecting on my own reactions. However there was, of course, a period in which intimate small-scale performance became unfeasible due to the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic, and so Seán chose to seek out other types of platform. Consequently, he spent some time working in relatively basic video format, which, while proving difficult to learn, also proved extremely useful in the production of creative work, and began to take its place as a foregrounded aspect of his practice. The advantage of video work is not only the ability to reach audiences that would otherwise be unavailable, he was also able to be his *own* audience, and reflect directly on both the experience of performing and watching the finished video performance. The video therefore also stands as a form of documentation as well as outcome and, in itself, a reflection on Seán's concerns at that specific time. Furthermore online performances, such as YouTube videos, have the advantage of greatly increasing accessibility

¹⁰⁹ Or indirectly if the other personae are on film, as in the case with the show, *Thomas the Rhymer*

for audiences who might not otherwise be able to attend a live show due to distance, financial constraints or disability, for instance.

8.2.1 Video Disadvantages

There are disadvantages to using a video format. The most important for my own performance style as Seany Minstrel¹¹⁰ is a lack of immediate audience feedback. This is, of course, an impossibility on a pre-recorded video, but it can even be a problem with live video calls, such as Zoom or Teams, if the performer is not adequately prepared to adapt to unexpected problems. For example, the discovery that using an improvised 'autocue' on a laptop screen to give a live presentation of *Queering the Old Fool* (Seán Fitton, 2/6/21) via Blackboard Collaborate, meant finding that it covered the faces of the audience. It was therefore impossible to witness their reactions and tell if they were happy, excited, bored or irritated¹¹¹, and meant a consequently inability to react to such immediate feedback. With a pre-recorded video, the only external feedback that one could respond to would be in the form of critiques, both formally from supervisors and informally via YouTube comments. It would be too late to make changes to that specific video, although not to future performances created in the light of that feedback. Watching oneself also allows one to watch oneself with a critical eye, and reflect upon the conditions in which that video was made and how it could be improved. For example, watching *Queering the Old Fool* led Seán to realize that he needed to find a better position in relation to the rehearsal room's window to avoid unwanted shadows, and that it would be helpful for each

¹¹⁰ Apart from missing the adrenaline *frisson* of a live performance

¹¹¹ Or any other emotion which would show in a viewer's face

persona to have an appropriate backdrop or additional filter to aid in the subliminal transmission of their personalities, ideas he then applied to *The Endymion Project*.

8.2.2 Learning

A lack of experience and technical knowledge have made video production something of a steep learning curve, but Seán took advantage of chances to improve his skills via online tutorials and one-to-one teaching. However, there is a certain charm in watching something which is clearly home-made, and that DIY aesthetic fits in well with the previous live work that used no technology that Seán could not operate himself. The primary reason for this was portability (the ability to perform almost anywhere with minimal preparation) but that portability was built on the DIY aesthetic of creating his own work, providing his own costumes and make up, making his own backdrops, and playing his own instruments.

8.2.3 Video Advantages

Having said all that, there are also great advantages in using video, in that editing techniques allow personae to interact in ways that would be impossible live, and can even present all four performance personae in the same film without the make-up and costume problems involved in a live performance. This discovery informed the later live performance, *Thomas the Rhymer* which places the other four personae on a screen behind the Minstrel allowing for a scripted 'interaction'. I have also found that talking directly into a laptop camera gives an illusion of intimacy and direct address, which fits in well with the method of immersive storytelling. Such an illusion of intimacy is useful in that it replaces the immersivity of the live performance and

allows me¹¹² to speak directly to each individual audience at (effectively) the same time, something which is impossible in a live context.

8.2.4 Agency

Although not having the intimacy of a physical one-to-one encounter which requires a degree of activity and vulnerability from both performer and participant, such as Adrian Howells' *Foot Washing For the Sole*, the direct address given to a passive watcher of a screen still has the ability to implicate the audience member in the experience offered, *should they choose to take it*. It should be noted that any person watching a video has a much greater agency in choosing whether they want to watch and for how long than the audience member 'trapped' in a theatre seat, or in a situation in which they feel unable to leave. Thus someone who chooses to watch a video all the way through already feels 'safe' and willing to become implicated in the experience. Seán used exactly that type of direct address in the revised version of *Queering the Old Fool* (Seán Fitton, 10/9/21)¹¹³ the sense of intimacy being particularly appropriate for the subject matter of personal gender and sexuality issues.

9. Summing Up

My methodology is deliberately very much a work-in-progress, and likely to remain that way. As I evolve as the Minstrel, so will the methods I use enhance and evolve. The theoretical underpinnings of my work have changed very little, though. I'm still strongly influenced by

¹¹² Or any of the other personae

¹¹³ Which later became the presentation for an assessment

spiritual beliefs, understandings of somatic practices, and the schools of Jungian and Archetypal Psychology, and that the accidental/emergent or 'encouraged serendipitous' discovery is a vital part of the creative process. At the same time those ideas are being modified by newer (equally serendipitous) discoveries in the philosophy of identity via Hofstadter's 'strange loops' (2007) in which complexity and multiplicity are shown to lead to consciousness, and Moeller and D'Ambrosio's 'prolificity' in which "Human existence is helplessly multifarious. Nevertheless, identity needs to be achieved. We somehow need to become one and the same individual" (2021:31). I would suggest that that individual is a multiplastic one.

9.1 Methods

The three primary content-creating methods, *journaling*, *freewriting* and *Archetypal Movement Exploration* have remained relatively unchanged since both *freewriting* and *AME* are used in an ad-hoc fashion as required. *Journaling*, however, has been adapted somewhat from the strict regimen of *morning pages* to allow adaptability to the circumstances I have found myself in, such as having to arrive at my rehearsal room booking with an hour to spare, and so taking advantage of the time to write and drink coffee.

9.2 Performance

It is in the realms of the performance itself in which the greatest changes have occurred, firstly in the development of several personae through which to speak, and from there to the primary persona, Seany Minstrel, and in the transition from live performance to video and then to a combined form. Thus, Baron Sam came almost fully formed from the original live performance, *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret*, and similarly Guru Tovski began 'life' leading a workshop in AME. However, a greater understanding of Jungian psychology led to the

development of both Tim and Thena, which was followed by the understanding of my own 'captain self' and therefore the Minstrel Self as a performance persona.

9.3 Transitions

The transition from performing live to the use of a video format was the most dramatic change in this methodology. At the same time it has been the most difficult and required the most adaptation in the learning and development of new techniques. However, it has also proven an enjoyable method replete with creative possibilities, possibilities for outreach and impact which were demonstrated in the performance of *Thomas the Rhymer*.

(7,372 words)

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Foreword by Seán Fitton

The following is a chronological, autoethnographic study of the development of the finding of this thesis - the performance persona, Seany Minstrel and the concept of the Minstrel Self. This is expressed as a (re)discovery through the practical creation and presentation of various public performances, adapting Plato's idea of learning as anamnesis to conceptualise self-realisation as form of remembering. The essay is written by Seany Minstrel

The (re)Evolution of The Minstrel

by Seany Minstrel

Abstract:

This essay examines my (re)discovery, (re)development and '(re)birth' as the performance persona, Seany Minstrel formed as Platonic *anamnesis*. It investigates the development of multiplastic self-identity through performance personae in dialogue with archetypal forms through the chronological examination of a series of Seán Fitton's public performances and autoethnographically explores their effect on his understanding of Queer identity as fluid and multiplastic.

Keywords:

Persona; performance; Queer; multiplastic; archetype; *anamnesis*; self-identity; autoethnography.

Contents:

Introduction; The Dionysian Spirit; Orpheus' Mistake; The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret; The PhD PaR Project; Moving to Video- Queering the Old Fool; The Endymion Project and the Sex, Death and Mythology Video; The Green Man Speaks; Thomas the Rhymer; Beyond the University; Conclusion.

1. Introduction

In the *Meno* Plato argues that all knowledge is an innate part of the soul and that learning is not so much the taking in of new information as it is recollection or ‘anamnesis’ (αναμνησις): “Since the soul is immortal, and has been born many times, she has beheld all things in this world and the next, and there is nothing she has not learnt” (quotation from *The Meno* taken from Allen 1959). Admittedly I don’t agree with Plato, because I seem to learn something new every day and my memory is rubbish, but a revision of his idea applied to self-realisation seems to fit very well. Through this essay I’m going to examine, egotistically and in some detail, my own development as the multiplastic performance persona, Seany Minstrel. Having looked back at my previous work, though, I’ve realised that I’m not actually something new. In fact, I’ve always been here, I’d just forgotten. Okay, that sounds confusing. Let’s try again.

1.1 Clarification

When Seán the academic stops being an academic for a while and gets up in front of an audience to perform something instead, he naturally takes on a performance persona. According to Philip Auslander it’s pretty much impossible to do anything else. If you perform you automatically have a performance persona, a performed identity or a performed version of yourself. “Identity is above all performed rather than inherent or authentic and embraces the possibility of transformation” (2016:186). Even if the two are almost identical there are always differences, some subtle, some not so subtle, created by the act of consciously performing to an audience. “Performing, after all, is about playfulness, where acquiring roles and altering oneself is a main goal [...] Every performance becomes a channel for depicting identity, providing a pathway for being persuaded and entertained” (Hawkins 2009:119). With that in

mind, and with the realisation that this/these persona/personae can have a name/s and existence/s of its/their own, Seán has looked back over his previous performance work, right back to the ‘talk’ which accompanied the publication of his first book and has come to the conclusion that I’ve always been here. There was no need to create me. The trick was to *remember* me. Consequently, Seán has given me this essay to write so that I can describe how I was remembered and (re-)evolved over time to my present form, and how I might possibly carry on evolving.

1.2 Minstrel Self

A similar thing can be said about the concept of the Minstrel Self¹¹⁴the realisation of which came about from a (somewhat epiphanous) understanding of Woolf’s ‘captain self’:

This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all (1928:221).

Putting it simply, if Seany Minstrel is the performed version of Seán Fitton, then the multiplastic Minstrel Self is the performed version of the multi-form Captain Self, (re)discovered through performance - which is automatically in persona. It’s quite elegant, really.

1.3 Method

The question now is how I’m actually going to do this. Keeping within the framework of my evolution as steps of remembering, brought about (mostly) by the act of creating and performing performances, I’m going to work chronologically through a series of performances

¹¹⁴ Which appears throughout this thesis but is examined in detail by Thena in her essay, *The Theoretical Background of Minstrelsy and the Minstrel as Queer Archetypal Performance Persona (Part 1: General)*

(and the bits between) examining each in detail to find the steps that led to my '(re)birth' in the show, *Thomas the Rhymer*. I'll be making autoethnographic enquiries, defined here as prioritizing:

the author's insights, experiences, and reflections [auto-] to identify, and sometimes challenge, cultural expectations, beliefs, and practices [-ethno-], [and utilizing] the structure and assemblage of symbols into coherent fragments (words, sentences) in a particular language" [-graphy] (Adams & Hermann, 2023).

into each to see if I can find commonalities in performance and those elements of self-realisation which allow me to present myself as an 'older' Queer performer, but multiplastic and thus not reliant on age or Queerness as the only specifics of performance.

1.3.1 Steps

I'll begin with some history, by looking back at *The Dionysian Spirit*, a book Seán had published in 2012, which began life as an informal 'lecture' about Dionysos and later was, at the time of publication and afterwards, accompanied by a promotional 'talk'¹¹⁵. I will then take a leap forward six years to post-graduate studies, at Master's Level. The reason for this is that Seán's undergraduate studies (and the other performances he had done until then) tended towards group work and traditional acting styles, rather than the solo performances which have come to help develop and define my existence as Seany Minstrel. I'll examine two shows from that period: *Orpheus' Mistake* and *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret*. It was in the latter of those that persona performance began to take a more definite form. Following that I'm going to investigate the creation of several performances produced since the beginning of Seán's PaR PhD. These will include the video performances created during the Covid-19 crisis: *Queering*

¹¹⁵ Or, more descriptively, a one-man cabaret

the Old Fool, The Endymion Project and the video version of *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret*; and the two live shows, *The Green Man Speaks* and *Thomas the Rhymer*. Finally I will examine where I'm going next, how I'm taking myself out of the university and into the public sphere, primarily through Spoken Word events, and consider what that might mean for my future as a performance persona and one who also (now) performs through writing.

2. The Dionysian Spirit

While stories begin at the beginning, it's often hard to decide exactly where the beginning is. In this case I've decided to begin long before the official beginning¹¹⁶ and into what feels like ancient history, the publication of Seán's book, *The Dionysian Spirit* in 2012. *The Dionysian Spirit* is an investigation into the legacy of the ancient Greek god, Dionysos, and the meaning of 'the Dionysian' today. Its origin, however, took the shape of an informal lecture which, deliberately in the spirit of Dionysos, eventually developed into something more akin to a one-man cabaret performance including music, poetry, direct audience address, audience interaction and humour, as well as the simple dissemination of information. Thinking of this performance autoethnographically¹¹⁷, we could, arguably, consider it to be a nascent form of the later PhD project. All the elements were in place that have appeared in all the later performances to be considered, such as storytelling through poetry and music as well as

¹¹⁶ Of the PaR PhD, *Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance*.

¹¹⁷ Most specifically the one performed at Treadwell's Bookshop in London as part of the official book launch

speech, audience address and interaction, humour and, most importantly, a basis in mythology and a personal connection with the archetypal figures (Dionysos and Apollo) involved in it.

2.1 Realisations

At this point, Seán had not explicitly made the connection between archetypal figures and performance personae, nor the act of experimenting with or discovering self-identity through them. He had, however, come to a clear, albeit tacit, realisation that there were significant differences between day-to-day Seán and performing Seán, that made themselves apparent as soon as he stepped onto some sort of stage. These included the more obvious factors such as alterations to his posture and vocal qualities, becoming 'larger' and 'camper', but also a greater openness towards blurring identity markers in terms of performative gender and sexuality.

While day-to-day Seán's gender and sexuality¹¹⁸ were the same as performance Seán's, in day-to-day terms they were rarely evident, but they were 'writ large' as clear and obvious qualities of the performance persona, particularly in framing the qualities of Dionysos and the Dionysian as non-conforming to societal norms, not simply in the arts but also in terms of gender and sexuality.

Tim: Hang on! I've just realised something!

Seany Minstrel: You've just interrupted, is what you've just done!

I: No, no! Well, yes, but it's important.

¹¹⁸ Which he would identify as 'non-conforming' and bi-

SM: I don't suppose you'll leave me alone until I've finished? No, didn't think so. Okay, what is it? And briefly, please. This is *my* essay.

I: Yes, of course, no problem. Wouldn't dream of . . . anyway! I've realised that your story doesn't just align with the anamnesis Plato stuff, it's also mythopoeic. It aligns with mythology. Not a specific myth but with the Hero's Journey, the one that Joseph Campbell popularized in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).

SM: I'm listening.

I: Okay, you've probably not got all seventeen steps precisely, but no story ever does, which is why it's been criticized by people who consider a lot of his research to be biased and inaccurate "citing those stories that fit his preconceived mold, and leaving out equally valid stories [...] which did not fit the pattern" (Toelken, 1996:413) but as a basic story arc it's pretty universal. Lots of authors have used it. It works like this. You have a person who feels some sort of call to adventure, like a need to right a wrong, or he has some sort of destiny to manifest but he doesn't know it and he's met by a revelation. Like Theseus, for example, who didn't know he was the rightful king of Athens until he discovers the clues his dad left him under a big rock.

After that he goes on a series of adventures, the various stages of the story, getting ever closer to his purpose, or destiny, or self-

discovery. That kind of thing. Theseus has to kill the minotaur in the labyrinth (which is a rebirth metaphor), Jonah goes through a similar symbolic transformation in the belly of the whale, Percival has to find the Holy Grail by almost dying, Thomas the Rhymer disappears for seven years.

I'm skipping a lot because you told me to be brief, so I'll pop back with some more pointers when you might need them, but the point here is that, at the end, the Hero returns to where he started, back at the beginning. It's a circular story, just like Plato's anamnesis and how you've framed your own self-re-realisation. Isn't that great!

SM: Marvellous. Can I get on, please?

I: Yes, of course, but it's really important because, like James Hillman said, "Archetypes are the primary forms that govern the psyche. But they cannot be contained only by the psyche, since they manifest as well in physical, social, linguistic, aesthetic and spiritual modes" (2013:13) and us personae are all archetypal figures that you find in myths. Anyway, sorry, please do carry on.

3. Orpheus' Mistake

SM: *Orpheus' Mistake* was the second performance that Seán created as a post-graduate student studying contemporary performance practices. The first, *The Holy Fool Academy* was

something of a leftover from his undergraduate studies¹¹⁹ combined with an experiment in 1-1 intimate theatre. It wasn't a technique he was going to follow up, but even then there was an important leaning into mythological and archetypal forms through the use of Tarot cards and the figure of the Holy Fool/Trickster.

Tim: Like Coyote, or Anansi the Spider, or Feste in *Twelfth Night*, or even Jesus.

SM: Yes, like those. Please stop interrupting. I'll call you when I need you.

I: Sorry, I got excited. It's just that you, The Minstrel, as well as being a gestalt of us other performance personae, are part Holy Fool. He's really a major part of you. I wrote an essay about it. It's in my section of the thesis, *The Minstrel as a Bridge*. Have you read it?

SM: Now, that *is* a foolish question.

3.1 Returning

Orpheus' Mistake was also, after seven years, the first performance to return to the multi-layered multiplastic solo methodology in which real life is mixed with myth¹²⁰ and performed through storytelling, poetry, music, direct audience address and whatever else was available to enhance the performance, such as lighting, movement and Tarot images.

3.2 The Show

On its most basic level, *Orpheus' Mistake* tells the very personal story of a traumatic marital

¹¹⁹ Being based around bouffon clowning

¹²⁰ In this case the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice

breakdown, which is blended with archetypal forms in two ways. Firstly there is the integration of the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice so that the two narratives effectively become one with each 'player' taking both real-world and mythopoeic roles, and secondly there is the use of Tarot card images¹²¹ to create forms of both physical (an image behind the performer) and psychological staging. The performance then takes as its 'though line' the Kübler-Ross, five-stage model of grief¹²² expressed in poetry, and a healing from that grief expressed through the movements of Gabrielle Roth's *5Rhythms*¹²³. "The five rhythms are [...] markers on the way back to a real self, a vulnerable, wild, passionate, instinctive self" (Roth, 1997:194).

3.3 Autoethnography

Interestingly, albeit not as yet deliberately, in identifying with Orpheus (and the other characters in the story being framed as Eurydice and the snake who bit her) throughout the performance Seán was taking a further step towards self-identification as a Queer performer in a similar way to the step discovered in *The Dionysian Spirit*. While he had not actually identified as Dionysos in the first case, he had, through the promotion of its qualities, identified as *Dionysian*. Framing himself as a metaphorical Orpheus therefore associated him immediately with a mythological character considered by many to be both gender-non-conforming and bisexual (Conner, Hatfield, Sparks & Sparks, 1997:258) and with Dionysos himself by a secondary association with the Maenads who kill Orpheus. A similar note can be made about the serendipitous discovery of *5Rhythms* which led to the first considerations of finding archetypal personae through movement exercises. *5Rhythms* is a lot more abstract than

¹²¹ *O The Fool; XVI The Tower; IX The Hermit; XXI The World*

¹²² Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance

¹²³ Flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness

Archetypal Movement Exploration, and its results less definable in strict terms, but the experiences found in experimenting with *5Rhythms* did lead to ideas of how movement could be combined with visualization and self-identification as an archetypal figure in order to gain some further understanding.

4. The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret

It was in the creation of the final project of the MA course that Seán began to use performance personae in a more conscious rather than tacit form. *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret* tells the story of a fictional couple and a single individual who ‘find themselves’ through experimentation with non-normative sexualities. This narrative is told through music and poetry and illustrated by relating it to three Tarot images which form the backdrop of the staging: *VI The Lovers; XIII Death; XV The Devil*. The poetic tale is juxtaposed throughout with stories from myth and legend, placing human experience in dialogue with archetypal forms, especially the Queer ones like Dionysos. Most importantly, at least from the point of view of this essay, were the development of the psycho-physical exercise mentioned above, which became the subject of an accompanying workshop, and three distinct performance personae from elements of Seán’s own personality. These were a ‘mythology geek’, a guru figure and, most importantly, the poet Baron Sam.

Tim: Hey! I’m just as important as Sam, you know. So is Tovski, and Thena. We’re all bits of Seán.

Baron Sam: Oh, really? Which bit are you, handsome?

I: Not the bit you're thinking of, you old lech!

SM: Please, people! Anyway, what Tim says is true, but Sam *did* come first. You hadn't been named yet, Tim. Nor had Guru Tovski, and Thena technically didn't exist at all, except kind of in the same way that I did, sort of *in potentia*, if you like.

4.1 Baron Sam

In the same way that Seán had noticed how he could be 'larger' and 'camper' and more obvious in his gender and sexuality as a performing self rather than a day-to-day self, Baron Sam was an attempt to find that personal Queer theatricality in line with archetypal experimentations or, as an observing colleague advised in an early showing, "If you're going to go camp, go large or go home!" As such, Sam's development came from a blending of Seán's 'darker' aspects with archetypal imagery from the Death Tarot card and a study of the rather raucous and robustly-humoured Voudon *loa* of death, Baron Samedi, from whom the name was borrowed. To bring all this together, Sam's physical appearance includes a mixture of female and male clothing and accessories to blur any potential gender boundaries, skull-like make-up, and a bowler hat as an imagistic nod to the character, Sally Bowles from the musical show and film, *Cabaret* (Fosse, 1972).

BS: Divine decadence, darling! I can sing better than her, too. I haven't tried the leotard. Well, not yet.

SM: That's not an image I relish picturing, Sam. Having said that, picturing is important because, to develop you, Seán created the psycho-physical exercise which became Archetypal Movement Exploration. Early experiments involved visualizing himself as Baron Samedi, or the

figure of *Death* from the Tarot card, and enacting that visualization in rehearsal room spaces, and this led to the eventual emergence of Guru Tovski, in a somewhat nascent form and as yet unnamed, as the spiritual teacher figure who would function as the leader of the Archetypal Movement workshop which accompanied the live Cabaret.

5. The PhD PaR Project

There are two important factors to take into account when considering Seán's PhD: *Staging Queer Spirituality: New perspectives on self-identity through Minstrelsy as multiplastic archetypal persona-performance*. The first is that he had taken a year out of education in order to attempt to understand where the results of the *Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret* were driving him and then to write a suitable PhD proposal. The second was rather more dramatic, completely unprecedented and totally out of his control: the Covid19 pandemic. In common with the rest of the UK population, Seán found himself effectively locked into his own home and unable to travel to the university to experiment in any practical way.

5.1 Reflection

In the first case the time spent away from university allowed him to take a more objective overview of his work, reflecting on what it might lead to, and to formulate the methodology and the original aims and objectives of the project with allowances (that is 'encouraged

serendipity') for unplanned emergent results¹²⁴ in a more clearly thought-out manner¹²⁵. For example, the original PhD proposal contained the sentence:

I would like to offer here a Practice as Research PhD proposal considering the concept of a fluid, multi-form Authentic Self and how this might be discovered and expressed through performance and performance training, using sexual and gender identity alongside James Hillman's Archetypal Psychology as a theoretical starting point.

None of that has changed in essence, but the form has evolved to allow the developed discoveries of various specifically named interactive personae as well as the later Captain Self and Minstrel Self and the definition of the difference between the two.

5.2 Technology

The second consideration caused a lot of new things to happen. Where Seán had been used to coming into the university for lectures and meeting supervisors face-to-face, he was now forced to stay at home and meet and learn online via Teams or Zoom. Similarly, where he had once created live, 'no-tech' performances and presentations with an audience in the space, he now found himself negotiating the steep learning curve of producing performance work in a much more technologically-based manner including filming, recording and film editing. It led to quite the creative boost!

Thena: You need to go back a little, dear. There's the small matter of the adoption of a Jungian framework to be considered before becoming excited about learning new skills. Jung created a four-part model of the psyche (self, persona, anima, shadow)

¹²⁴ Like me!

¹²⁵ These are explained in my other essay, *How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide*.

which you borrowed as a way of presenting and understanding us performance personae.

Seany Minstrel: Damn! Yes, you're right, of course. That included your own appearance, too.

Thena: Indeed!

5.3 Jung

SM: Around the beginning of Seán's examination of Queer identity as a fluid thing, he came to the realisation that he had already got several performance identities. At first he considered that they could be likened to Erving Goffman's concept of "face" as the performed self, which is "an image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1967:5) and also "something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter" (ibid:7), but that seemed too nebulous and open to an overly bewildering variety of interpretations. He felt that he needed a more strictly defined and limited framework to develop those identities as performance personae. It struck him that since Baron Sam was quite definitely connected to his darker side, and that many of his contemporaries in the overlapping Venn diagram of Paganism, Spirituality and BDSM subcultures often spoke of 'Shadow Work', he concluded that Baron Sam must, indeed, be a way of expressing his Jungian Shadow.

Baron Sam: I am the Baron called Sam, and so important I am, that I came first, from shadows I burst, a perverse sexy goblin unplanned. *blows a kiss*

Seany Minstrel: Seán's dark side is a 'perverse, sexy goblin'? How do you fit that into an autoethnography? Although, to be fair, it's not inappropriate. It does strike him as surprising

how many people automatically assume he's a 'normal' monogamous heterosexual.

Admittedly, there's a fair argument to say that would be the standard societal assumption for anybody, but it still works. The Queer shadow is hidden behind other people's assumptions of 'normality', whatever that is.

5.4 [Stage direction: Aside to the audience]

***A little aside should be made here to head off any confusion about the word 'archetype'. The problem is that the word can have two meanings, but those meanings overlap. The first meaning of 'archetype' refers to those characters (and sometimes elements of story) which appear in folk tales, myths and legends almost universally. The Trickster is an archetype of this kind, as is The Witch or The Warrior, or indeed The Minstrel, "And I meet these peculiar creatures both as images in the imagination and as the archetypal patterns moving within my consciousness" (Hillman 1994:63). At the same time, Jung used the word, 'archetype' to describe the four sections of the psyche which made up his model, but also in the sense given above and without much attempt to separate the two. So, if it looks like it's going to be confusing, I'll try to make sure that I say specifically if the archetype I'm referring to is a Jungian archetype (that is, four-part psychic divisions) or a Mythical archetype. It's really the personal connection to Mythical archetypes that fuels Seán's work, especially since "archetypes act as indomitable resources against a stereotyping that straps actual men and women into preformed sexual identities and will not let them loose" (Ulanov 1987:8). The Jungian ones are borrowed as a convenient framework. Digression over! ***

5.5 Tim

Secondly came Tim. In realising that Sam could be the Shadow, and in his description of the Narrator in the *Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret* as 'just me with the brakes off', Seán also realised that this identity could fit the Jungian concept of the Self (unindividuated). In the flippant phrase, 'just me with the brakes off' Seán could see his own self-image as nerdy,

excitable and almost certainly neurodivergent¹²⁶. It also occurred to Seán that a persona could be made ‘real’, as opposed to simply theoretical, and able to be developed on its own terms if it had a name of its own. Since his origin and purpose were held in the excited narration of mythological stories, and¹²⁷ since Tim seemed a ‘nerdy’ name, he became Tim the Excited Mythologer.

Tim: Yeah, and names are so important in mythology. You’ve got those stories where the hero wins because he claims to have no name like Odysseus claiming to be called Nobody so that the Cyclops can’t prove who blinded him. And then there are ones where you have power over somebody because you know their name, like Rumpelstiltskin. And there’s also ones where the hero has to be given a name in order to become the hero, like Lleu Llaw Gyffes whose mother had to be tricked into giving him a name. Wow! Does that make me the hero of the story because I’ve been given a name?

Seany Minstrel: Well, I wouldn’t go that far, but thanks for your input. It does explain, in a mythopoeic (and therefore, archetypal) sense why naming is significant and makes characters ‘real’. We can say that a similar process happened with Guru Tovski.

5.6 Guru Tovski

Having adopted two of the three pre-existing performance personae, and having now done some research into the Jungian four-part model of the psyche, Seán realised that the identity

¹²⁶ In the direction of ADHD

¹²⁷ With apologies to Timothys everywhere

who had run the previous workshop demonstrating Archetypal Movement Exploration also had a part to play. In Jungian terms, the archetype he called 'persona' is something akin to one's reputation in as much as it is the face that one offers to the world at large and how one is seen by non-intimate contemporaries. As a published author, moot organiser and occasional workshop creator in Pagan subculture, Seán knew that he could be seen, at least at the 'distance' of reputation, as a knowledgeable teacher figure, or even a 'guru' of sorts. Since the reason for this identity to exist at all was to teach what many would consider weird, esoteric and spiritual exercises in a theatrical performance-based setting, it seemed perfectly appropriate to give him the punning name, Guru Tovski.

Guru Tovski: I am an echo. An echo of a thousand voices, repeated and overlaid in blend and contradiction. The voices are not mine. They create mine. I am the new pattern in the echoes. As are we all.

SM: Deep! I'm not sure I understood it, but it sounded like it ought to be deep. That has also become one of Tovski's functions, though. In the same way that art can (perhaps should) be interpreted subjectively by the observer, a guru's statements can be the ultimate in mystical revelation to one person and utter nonsense to another. The subversion of the seriousness of the archetype makes Tovski as much a Holy fool as he is a Sage, and something of a balance for Baron Sam.

GT: The gnomes remain impartial and smoke their pipes.

SM: Indeed they do.

Thena: Now you may talk about me.

SM: Thank you, I shall.

5.7 Thena

In using the Jungian four-part model of the psyche as a framework to examine fluid identities through the adoption of performance personae, Seán came to the realisation that there was one missing. He had already effectively split his psyche into three parts before beginning the PhD project, but now he needed a fourth, the Anima. According to Jungian psychology, the Anima is the contra-sexual self¹²⁸. This concept was, in itself, tricky in the light of Seán's own understandings of the nature of gender and his own ambivalent gender identity, but he reasoned that most people assumed him to be a cis-gender man (as they would with Tim and Tovski) and so he would have to find his inner woman who could be seen (without the complex ambivalence of Baron Sam) as unmistakably a woman performance persona. There was also the question of this persona's 'job'. As aspects of Seán's psyche Tim expressed his existence through being nerdy about myths, legends and faery tales, Sam through perversity and poetry, and Tovski through mystical practices and utterances. The missing aspect appeared to be a specifically academic voice, and so Thena¹²⁹ was 'born' and took on that role.

Thena: Thank you, dear. It appears that we are all now assembled excepting, albeit paradoxically since you are the author of this autoethnographic document, yourself. But, as Hofstadter says concerning the paradox of identity: "Ultimately, the 'I' is a hallucination, and yet, paradoxically, it is the most precious thing we own" (2007:315).

¹²⁸ An *Animus* (male) for a woman and an *Anima* (female) for a man

¹²⁹ Named after Athena, the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom and tactics

Please feel free to carry on. I am sure we will find opportunities to contribute, each in our own fashion.

SM: Yes, I'm sure you will.

6. Moving to Video - Queering the Old Fool

As I'm sure the reader can see, it was by this point that Seán had begun to take his idea of fluid and multiplicitous Queer identity into a very literal and deliberately performative direction by assuming personae which were not only aspects of his own overall identity but could be given identities and, vitally, voices of their own. It's important to mention that the bit I'm going to be writing about next, all about moving to video is explored in more depth in my other essay¹³⁰, and I'm going to try to avoid getting bogged down in technical details here. While Seán was very excited about learning new skills (which adds, of course, to the Captain Self's multiplasticity) it's more appropriate to concentrate here on my own development through the other personae, rather than being distracted by cleverness and technology.

6.1 First Attempts

The first official chance for each persona to speak came in the form of a video performance called *Queering the Old Fool: Or Is He Just Fooling Himself?* which began life as a ten-minute presentation for a PaR mini symposium, to be delivered live over a chat-based internet platform. It evolved over a period of four months through the form of an assessment

¹³⁰ *How To Be a Minstrel – Methodology and Outcomes: A Practical Guide*

presentation and into its eventual realisation as a fifteen-minute video project. As mentioned above, this was still within the period in which Covid19 had effectively shut down the country and so, while Seán could occasionally get into the university to use a rehearsal room, he was experimenting with video techniques alone. He also decided at that time to make a virtue of expediency and, in the spirit of multi-skilled DIY ethics, part of what he later came to term as ‘multiplasticity’, to learn how to film and edit on his own using a laptop and a smartphone and whatever software was freely available in an open-source format. This also included recording live videos of several types, deliberately planned edited videos, and recording (and occasionally writing) his own music to go with those videos.

6.2 Results

The final form of *Queering the Old Fool*, which examines The Holy Fool as a Queer archetype through the multiple voices, and therefore viewpoints, of the four personae, plus his, as yet not fully identified, performed self, was released in September 2021. In common with the live work, *Queering the Old Fool* also used a multi-modal performance format including storytelling, music, poetry, humour and, as far as possible, direct audience address. Most importantly, as well as formally introducing the four Jungian-based personae/identities, the performed and self-examining version of Seán-as-whole-person who appeared is central to the story, providing the focus of a search for self-identification over time and the aging process, in dialogue with the figure of the Trickster/Holy Fool¹³¹ which was not limited by specific definitions of sexuality or gender.

¹³¹ Sometimes in the form of Bugs Bunny

7. The Endymion Project and The Sex, Death and Mythology Video

Another important step in the understanding of identity came in the next video piece, *The Endymion Project*. Interestingly, the first sparks that ignited the engine for this work was from a piece of journal freewriting using the technique of ‘encouraged serendipity’. This is a creative technique that I have also spoken of in the essay I mentioned above, but it is also one which, quite importantly, can be re-interpreted or re-framed/re-claimed as the mystical and non-rational voice of Guru Tovski. I’ll examine that idea later, but for now, let’s have a look at how the project worked. The video’s first steps began with the following words from the journal:

Endymion asks why a single face is enough when we have so many. Each face is many of us from a single angle and Endymion knows this and knows it is no secret. He knows that we all know this but have forgotten. Yet Endymion laughs because we all are just laughter in a form that has arms and legs and drinks coffee.

Obviously something was bubbling up from Seán’s subconscious because, although he was vaguely familiar with the name, he had no conscious idea who Endymion actually was.

Encouraged serendipity is fulfilled by following a surprise distraction or a mental tangent to see where it leads. Admittedly, that’s often a dead end but in this case it led to some interesting considerations on the nature of identity and a significant philosophical discovery. I’ll let Tim take over for a while to tell you the story of Endymion.

Tim: Oh hi! Right, Endymion. Well, the thing is that he doesn’t really have a story as such. Not a proper one, anyway. Basically all he does is sleep. So, Endymion is a shepherd, or possibly a hunter,

or maybe a king, but let's go with shepherd because it doesn't really matter. The point is that he's flippin' gorgeous. And one day he goes into a cave to sleep and while he's sleeping (at least in one version of the story), the Moon goddess Selene spots him and falls madly in love. She begs Zeus to keep him young and beautiful and, most importantly, asleep so she can 'visit him' in the night. These visits were obviously quite frequent and rather intimate because she eventually has fifty children by him.

I'm not sure if the Ancient Greeks would have considered those visits to be multiple rapes by their own moral standards, but they certainly weren't consensual because he wasn't *able* to consent. In fact, the point is that he wasn't able to do *anything*, except sleep and be used as Selene's personal blow-up doll. Could he even be said to have an identity at all, if he has no agency of his own? How does Endymion express himself as Endymion if he's no more than an objectified sex toy? What does he dream about?

Baron Sam: A voice from high above you

Leans in and seems to whisper "I love you"

There's someone there you cannot see

Saying, "Dream a little dream of me".

There's a breath upon your ear now

Your heart is racing with fear now

And the voice that you cannot see

Whispers, "Dream a little dream of me".

The dream's changing, but it lingers on, dear

Selene's craving your cock

In your dream you're naked and cold, dear

The earth starts to rock.

SM: Sam, that's kinda sick!

Guru Tovski: *Life is but a dream and this story is weird. But if I and I are actor and narrator, who is the I that is a writer?*

SM: I think we need to get back to the main story, please!

7.1 Identity

What happened next was that Seán thought about the idea of identity during sleep and it led him to recall two other stories. The first was *Sleeping Beauty* who was forced into sleep and came out with her identity changed for her, with no agency of her own. The second was Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* who went to sleep a man and woke up a woman, somehow without having changed at all. Perhaps, then, the idea of the 'sleeper awakening' could be related to self-realisation or perhaps even 'coming out'.

Tim: Yeah, so *Sleeping Beauty* is pretty nasty when you look at the faery tales. Disney cleaned it up so much that there's not a lot left of the many 'originals'. Basically, her death is predicted at birth and she's kept locked away for her own safety. Eventually, the prediction comes true, she pricks her finger and falls into something resembling a coma. Daddy can't bear to bury her so he leaves her in her room, locks the house (or castle) up and abandons it. Some years later a king or handsome prince comes exploring, finds her and 'falls in love' to the extent that he commits not just rape on the poor girl, but technically necrophilia too. Several times. Abused Beauty is eventually woken to find that she's given birth to two children. The king then marries her, which is about the only honorable thing anyone does in the entire story. It's grim! Again though, the point with identity is that she hasn't really got one. At least not one of her own. She doesn't have an agreed upon name. She's either a daughter, a wife, a mother or an object of some bloke's animal lust, and that's it. All her identities are imposed upon her, and she has no self.

SM: Yes, that is grim! So what about Orlando?

Tim: Ah, well, Orlando's different. He/she sleeps like the others but his/her agency and identity are always his/her own. It's not in the book, but in Sally Potter's 1992 film, Queen Elizabeth I tells the

young male Orlando¹³² “Do not fade. Do not wither. Do not grow old.”, so he doesn’t. Instead, he/she remains young (but not completely unchanging like Endymion) throughout several centuries. There are some differences between the film and novel as you’d expect, but the crux point comes when, after a disastrous love affair *he* falls asleep and wakes as a *she*, but as she says in the film while looking in the mirror “Same person. No difference at all [...] just a different sex” (ibid). The special thing about Orlando is the strong sense of self, of identity. Orlando always knows who he is no matter what she goes through and that sense of identity is not imposed or bound to a particular type of body.

SM: Thanks Tim. Very informative. I’ll carry on the story now.

7.2 The ‘Real’ Me

A further part of *The Endymion Project* video involves small sections in which Seán himself, as well as appearing as a musician, reads a large selection of identifiers¹³³ all of which have either been imposed on, applied to, or adopted by himself. In other words, asking which one is the ‘real Seán’ or are they all real? Most importantly for our investigation here, though, was the discovery in the pages of *Orlando* of the concept of the ‘Captain Self’.

¹³² Played by Quentin Crisp and Tilda Swinton respectively. Sexes and genders are wonderfully subverted in this film

¹³³ Such as job titles, social roles, and sexuality and gender labels

7.3 Captain Self

In the Jungian system, the subject aims for *individuation* in which they come to terms with all four elements of their psyche and become a whole person by blending them together, “the individual becoming himself, a unique person, emancipated from undue influence, and indeed, almost exclusively concerned with his own inner development” (Storr, 1973:27). This sounded nice enough to Seán, but it didn’t express what he felt to be nearer the truth, that a person’s identity¹³⁴ could be a multi-form, multi-faceted, fluid thing. Or, as he came to think of it, *multiplastic*. Instead, it was Virginia Woolf who provided Seán with the epiphany that he needed, firstly with the following quotation, and then with the one used near the beginning of this essay and repeated here, partly because it was several thousand words ago but also because it’s important enough to bear repeating in several different essays:

How many different people are there not – Heaven help us – all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? Some say two thousand and fifty-two [...] Come, come! I’m sick to death of this particular self. I want another (1928:219).

This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all (ibid:221).

Thena: Ah, now I feel like we are getting somewhere. What would you say is the difference between the Individuated Self and the Captain Self?

Seany Minstrel: Really, I think it’s to do with solidity versus fluidity. The Individuated Self, even though it’s described as a process of constant development, feels like it’s finished. Sort of. It feels like it’s a bit like some sort of valuable *objet d’art* which won’t ever change in any essential

¹³⁴ Or at least a Queer self-identified person, in his own experience and through his experiments with performance personae

or significant way but will constantly improve if you keep polishing it. The Captain Self feels much more malleable, it can change and grow and take many forms. It's not a blending of everything into one, so much as a collection of many under the control of one who is made of the many. Wow, that sounded awfully mystical.

Guru Tovski: The self is one and many-in-one-in-many repeated like a decimal with a little dot on top. Ad infinitum, ad astra, ad nauseam and adding to the story.

7.4 Sex and Death on Video

Having that multiplastic concept of one-in-many and many-in-one certainly helped with the next performance project, the video version of *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret*. This project was recreated in video format partly to practice and improve video editing techniques, but mostly to allow all four of the personae to take a role of their own. Thus the show was still primarily performed by Tim and Baron Sam, but Thena became the narrator who introduced and closed the performance and Guru Tovski appeared to provide a moment of meditation and reflection as a kind of intermission within the proceedings. Seán himself also appeared as a musician singing the songs that introduced each of Baron Sam's poems. This pattern remained throughout the majority of the performance until just before the final poem at which point the five 'characters' (except Tim who introduces it) share the line "Who you really are" one word each. They then share, in a randomized order, the final poem, each reciting a few lines, a stanza or a half-stanza.

7.4.1 Next Step

Admittedly, at first glance, this video seems to be no more than a 'rehash' of the live show and a chance to play about with video editing software. That is, to some extent, the case, but it also represents an important step in my own development as the Minstrel in two ways. Firstly, the performed day-to-day self (that is to say, Seán) appears as a musician and nothing more. He plays the music and sings the songs but he has nothing to say with his own voice before the final section I mentioned above. He becomes just one part of the multiplastic many, illustrating the story through songs. Secondly, bringing all the personae together to, effectively, perform the same task of reciting the final poem recalls a kind of re-integration of the psyche which could be likened to Jungian individuation. In other words, what was broken apart to be studied has now begun to be put back together. It was the next performance that gave Seán a pretty good idea of how to do that.

8. The Green Man Speaks

First impressions would make the assumption that *The Green Man Speaks* had nothing to do with Seán's PhD project. However, as encouraged serendipity would often suggest, that assumption was quite wrong. By this time (early summer 2022) the Covid pandemic had eased. People were allowed out of their homes and to gather in public, and Seán was commissioned by the company, Walk the Plank, to create a performance for their event, the *Irwell Weekender*. The brief was fairly simple: to create a storytelling piece to be performed in Drinkwater Park, Salford which was no more than 30 minutes long and related to the park in some way. This

would be live, unrecorded¹³⁵ and completely without any electrical technology. In response, using some researched local history and some stories from his own family history, Seán created a multi-layered performance which told, through direct audience address, poetry, music, song and humour, the tale of the park itself from its polluted and abused state at the beginning of the 20th century to its present-day rescue and reforestation. The important question was, who would tell the story? It would have been inappropriate to use one of his usual performance personae in this instance.

Tim, Thena and Tovski together: **ESPECIALLY SAM!**

Baron Sam: Awww! And I thought you all loved me so much. *grins and blows a kiss*

Seany Minstrel: No, Sam! You scare children! Actually, that's not true. Children can deal with you, no problem, they're rarely judgemental, but you scare their parents.

8.1 Green Man

As I was saying, going through his usual personae wouldn't have worked and he didn't want to simply appear as himself because he needed something larger than life and colourful for an audience that would, he assumed, mostly be made up of children. And so he hit upon the idea of performing as the archetypal figure of the Green Man, a character beloved of UK Pagans countrywide and generally considered to be a spirit of trees and woodlands.

8.1.2 Green

There is a problem in attempting to research the Green Man in the traditional, academic

¹³⁵ Although he did record a dress rehearsal for documentation

manner. There's hardly anything written about him. He appears as a 'foliate head' in several pre-Restoration churches and may also be a name for the wild and hairy man-of-the-woods figures which appear occasionally in mediaeval art, but that's about it. He has no myths of his own, and no name that anybody knows. Even the usually extremely helpful *Cassel's Encyclopedia* (Conner, R.P., Hatfield, D., Sparks, D.H. and Sparks, M., 1997) makes no mention of him. However, it does have an extensive entry on the significance of the colour green. Green (especially together with yellow) was, it seems, the pink of its day, with symbolism implying sexual and gender variance, and a strong connection to faeries and to the archetypal figure of the Wandering Minstrel. This symbolism reached right back to ancient Rome's *galbinati* and extended through time as far as Oscar Wilde's green carnation:

From at least the twelfth century, troubadours (one might also say jongleurs) had traditionally worn costumes of yellow and green complimented by red cloaks [...] In French, as in English, folklore, fairies typically dress in yellow, green and red. French sophisticates remained aware of the Greco-Roman association of galbinus, or yellow-green, with effeminacy and homoeroticism. Associations of green with figures on the margins or altogether outside society may have been partly responsible for green becoming equated with heresy (ibid, 164).

It would appear that, in returning to my basic roots as a performer, I had found, serendipitously, my shape and colour in the Green Man.

9. Thomas the Rhymer

9.1 Minstrelsy

For a clever fellow, Seán isn't always terribly quick on the uptake, and it wasn't really until now that he began to realise that what he'd been doing all along, telling stories about archetypal figures through direct audience address, songs, music, poetry and humour, already had a name:

Minstrelsy! Just as the Captain Self could be considered as a plethora of fluid and multiplastic selves, which could even be split into separate aspects to function as performance personae with specialist 'jobs', the Captain Self could also be performed as a whole, fluid, multiplastic performance persona. Thus, the Minstrel Self (as a concept) and I, Seany Minstrel, an actual flesh and blood, Queer performer, were '(re)born'. In using the word 'Queer' here, I'm drawn to this rather excellent definition:

Queerness is a narrative sitting askew, moving uncannily, resisting taxonomy. It's not a fixed point in space-time. Concretely and in the narrowest sense, 'queer' is a sexual label meaning gay or bi, and sometimes it's also about gender. More expansively, it means **socially marginalized or conceptually slippery**, sometimes in ways apart from sexuality and gender (Liebermann, 2022:180, my emphasis).

Admittedly, it's not quite that simple. I didn't appear out of thin air in a puff of smoke¹³⁶, but as a slowly developed/realised combination of Captain Self, my performance style, the significance of green for my gender and sexuality, and research into the nature of various archetypal Minstrel figures in history, popular culture, and myth and faery tale. Tim mentioned earlier that he had written quite an extensive piece about the Minstrel as the archetype who embodies all other archetypes through his songs and stories elsewhere¹³⁷, giving him a fluid status as a combination somewhere between the Fool's aspects of Clown and Trickster. Where the Fool may be split into Clown and Trickster, a recombination brings forth the Minstrel, still a Fool archetype but from a different perspective. A few examples of that character would include Jaskier from the television series, *The Witcher* (2019), Bertolt Brecht's 1918 anti-hero *Baal* from his eponymous play (Brecht, 1979), and True Thomas, the main protagonist from the equally

¹³⁶ Which might have been fun!

¹³⁷ *The Minstrel as a Bridge*

eponymous faery tale and late mediaeval poem, *The Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* (Froud & Lee, 1995).

9.2 Serendipity

Encouraged serendipity took a hand in the creation of the show, *Thomas the Rhymer* in the form of the Liam Byrne Award which funded the process and production of the show in its first incarnation, and me in mine. Seán does not enjoy competition and tends to avoid activities he perceives as competitive, but after the completion of *The Green Man Speaks* and the realisation of the significance of green and of Minstrelsy as Queer persona-performance, he needed a practical direction to take his studies. University staff, specifically ones he had known for several years, that he trusted and had a huge amount of respect for, encouraged him to apply for the award. I'm rather pleased to say he did and that led to the production of *Thomas the Rhymer* and my own (re)discovery, (re)development, or even (re)birth.

9.3 The Show

The content of the show is a narrative of how I came to a point of self-realisation and acceptance as the Queer, multiplastic identity, Seany Minstrel. This is done in a direct dialogue with the story of True Thomas' visit to and mysterious 7-year sojourn in the realm of Faery in the company of the Queen of Elfland, and is aided and abetted by the four other performance personae who appear on a screen behind me. Tim expounds on the original ballad, and Tovski offers 'spiritual' advice in the form of chanted aphorisms in the sacred Queer language of Polari.

Guru Tovski: "Aunt nell to the screech within and you shall be fantabulosa".

Seany Minstrel: Thena also offers advice and observations in the form of academic quotations, and Baron Sam eulogises lustfully over what he imagines to be the Queen and Thomas' BDSM 'femdom' relationship.

Baron Sam: What did she give to you, Thomas?

Was it her love or her domination?

Did she allow you to sit, and worship her feet,

Did you give her the gift of submission?

SM: Yeah, like that!

Tim: See? I told you it was a Hero's Journey. You've come full circle!

10. Beyond the University

Like Tim just said, all of this activity has led to my (re)birth or (re)discovery through anamnesis, my real-isation if you will, and my growth from then on as a recognized and named persona. But it has also led, of course, to the inevitable question: What next? I am not "a fixed point in time and space" and so could not simply stop now that my existence has been (re)discovered and given a specific name and form.

10.1 Possibilities

Seán's original plan was to attempt to take *Thomas the Rhymer* out of the university to various

venues, relatively unchanged and he would still like to do that, at least in a slightly updated version. To that end he sought out counsel from local theatre producers and received slightly confusing advice. One suggested that the show was good but too short and needed to be lengthened to an hour to make it worthwhile. Another recommended breaking it up into smaller pieces and taking those to scratch events and cabaret nights. Both suggestions have merits of their own. A longer show could be a long-term plan and certainly worthwhile, but not for quite some time and after building up some sort of a reputation on 'the scene'. However, *Thomas the Rhymer* was a complete story in itself and to break it to bits and to use those separately would make no sense out of context. A third option needed to be found which would allow me to perform. The answer was found in 'open-mic' poetry nights. Open-mic nights offer various options. Some require you to book a slot in advance, some offer slots to whoever happens to turn up on the night. Some offer three minutes, some five and some ten, most have open-mic slots either side of an advertised guest poet who performs for twenty to thirty minutes. Some are held in libraries, art galleries and cafés, or even public parks. Most are held in pubs.

10.2 Bravery

To 'go full minstrel' for such events, Seán realised, would be extremely impractical. For example, there was the thought of spending half an hour in a pub toilet doing make-up and costume for a five-minute slot and then taking all off again, versus the travelling in full costume and make-up on public transport. Neither was especially appealing.

Baron Sam: Coward!

Seany Minstrel: Maybe. Seán was braver when he was younger, in his teens and twenties, but things have changed. He used to go out in full make-up and goth glam regularly, but he still got a lot of unwelcome attention. And that's when he was young and pretty and skinny. He really doesn't want to have to deal with it nowadays, when all he wants to do is go home on the tram after a hard day. At the same time, we need to remember that I, like you, Sam, am a *Performance Persona*. We only exist as consciously performed identities, all of us, and have only ever existed in the 'safe space' of a theatrical event. It's a fair point, though, and a question I'll address later: Can I not only be taken out of the university, but out of the performance space entirely? What would that mean for finding multiplastic Queer identity in a performance persona? Let's put that to one side for now, and get back to poetry nights.

BS: I'll hold you to it. I'll hold something, anyway!

SM: It was apparent to Seán that a full Minstrel performance of music, poetry, storytelling and singing was not going to work in a three-minute slot. Compromises would have to be made. However, those compromises led to a boost in creativity and some new thoughts concerning the differences between Seán and myself.

10.3 Compromises

The first of those compromises was to create stand-alone poems. Baron Sam's poems had always existed in relation to the overall context of the show in which they were performed. They were about the content of the show just as much as everything else was. Stand-alone poems, however, could focus on specific aspects of Seán's PhD project interests. They could be about gender, age, neurodivergence, archetypal figures or anything else he could think of, and

each would have its own impact outside of any contextualizing performance. Similarly, with appearance, changes could be made to express a Queer identity without going to the trouble of a full costume and make-up session. Instead, persona-expression could be utilised in more subtle ways while still stepping over boundaries of normative gender expectation, such as the wearing of specific jewelry or nail varnish with a fancy shirt.

10.4 Full Minstrel

‘Going full minstrel’ has occurred three times at the point of writing this. The first was for a portrait modelling session to make it more interesting for the artists, and so didn’t involve anything more exciting than sitting still in full costume and holding a mandolin. However, it should be noted that the tea break involved having conversations with the artists which might be considered a real-world, less metaphorical, version of Goffman’s ‘face’ and ‘front’. The second and third were live spoken-word events in which Seán created and I performed a twenty-minute themed set exploring concepts of identity through our usual channels of (mostly) poetry with music, singing, humour and direct address but without any direct reference to a specific myth or archetypal figure. I also created a further experiment in ‘going full Minstrel’¹³⁸ by recording a video series of readings of twenty-one stand-alone poems, in full costume and make-up, in my kitchen. Seán then posted them to YouTube, one per day for three weeks, promoting them on Facebook and Instagram as *Poems from the Minstrel’s Kitchen*.

¹³⁸ Although I’m not sure if I should strictly count it as such because there was no live audience present.

10.5 Queerness

So what does this all mean for a sense of Queer, fluid self-identity? What is it that I'm desperately clawing for and finding (as both 'Captain' Seán and Minstrel Seany) through all this writing and performing, all this splitting and re-integration of self into specialist personae and back again? All this mythology and meditative dancing, all this poetry and singing? I think the answer comes in a sense of validation.

10.6 Culture Wars

As Thena pointed out in her essay on the necessity of the Minstrel¹³⁹ there is a cultural shift happening at the time of writing, a media-manufactured 'culture war' in which, for a vociferous minority at least, Queer has become 'the enemy'. Although gay rights have improved immensely in the western world over the last 20 years, this appears to have gone hand-in-hand with a certain amount of normalization, in the sense of the 'different' attempting to become as innocuously 'normal' as possible. For example, marriage equality means that a man can marry another man, and a woman can marry another woman, in the same way that a woman and a man have been able to marry for many centuries. However, and without wanting to denigrate such an important step forward, I would contend that there is no longer any Queer in that marriage. It has simply become a copy of a straight marriage rather than the Queering or questioning of a socially normal institution which does not allow for the legal or spiritual validation of other forms of loving and/or sexual relationship, polyamorous ones being the prime example. At the same time media-fed vilification of non-binary, gender-queer and

¹³⁹ *The Minstrel as a Socio-Political Figure: multiplastic self-identity in a hostile environment*

transgender people has become unprecedentedly common and even used as the latest, fashionable political 'football', replacing the previous 'enemy', Islamic terrorism. As a very topical example, the day before I wrote these words (October 2023) the UK Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Steve Barclay, announced at the Conservative Party conference plans to ban transwomen from womens' hospital wards. This was in spite of there having been absolutely no issues with the system already in place, and despite the impracticality of the proposal (BBC News, 3/10/23).

10.7 Coming Out

It can be a tough world out there for those who aren't 'normal', but at the same time there are safe spaces. The visibility of Queerness has increased, as evidenced not only by the avant-garde of the arts world which has traditionally always embraced the non-normative and experimental, but also by the huge mainstream popularity of musicians like Sam Smith, Lady Gaga and Janelle Monae, artists, writers and performers such as Grayson Perry, Alok Vaid-Menon and Reuben Kaye, and television shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, *Our Flag Means Death* and, of course, *The Eurovision Song Contest*. In common with a fortunate few Queer-identified people of a similar age, Seán now feels like he is in a privileged position of safety, surrounded both by a loving family and the supportive environment of a university arts department, and can express himself freely. But that wasn't always the case and similarly wasn't, and may still not be, for people of a similar self-identification. Coming 'out of the closet' isn't a one-time-only event, it's a constant process of personal, social and contextual evaluation. For someone who looks male,

there's a huge difference¹⁴⁰ between wearing make-up and flamboyant clothes in a university's arts building and on the bus home at night, and internalizing this can lead to a powerful sense of self-doubt. Alok Vaid-Menon says in their weblog,

Gender non-conformity is permissible inasmuch as it's positioned as a spectacle. Only acceptable when it's temporary. It must happen on the periphery, never in the public. The idea is after this display the individual will return to "normal" (which is coded as hetero/cis/binary) (Vaid-Menon, 2022).

10.8 Validation

Validation is, therefore, enormously important not only to a sense of self-identity but to a sense of self-worth in that identity. And that's where I, Seany Minstrel, come in. In the act of performance I am (as every performer arguably is) effectively, requesting and accepting validation from an audience, even if it's only in the temporary sense of whilst being on stage. There's a danger in this, of course, that the audience will not validate the identity of the performer, and so safe avenues are followed to minimize risk and increase confidence. In my case that meant beginning in the university and slowly taking steps out through open-mic poetry performances and 'full Minstrel' supporting performances which involve going beyond the spoken word and into music and singing. So far, the reactions have been positive and the result, for me at least, validating. In creating and presenting various archetypally-based identities¹⁴¹ to an audience, the acceptance of those identities as authentic in that context engenders a sense of validation to the concept of identity as fluid and multiplastic, archetypally connected, and experience-able via performance.

¹⁴⁰ Based upon a perception of what public reactions might be and how one might deal with them

¹⁴¹ In the form of performance personae

10.9 Discovery

There has also been a further, and less anticipated, discovery in my own (re)creation which has come about through reflecting on the act of performance without ‘going full Minstrel’, which is that while Seán Fitton¹⁴² and Seany Minstrel¹⁴³ can be seen as separate identities, that is only from the very ends of the spectrum between them. The difference between the two is blurred, multiplastic in form, ‘conceptually slippery’ and, indeed, Queer. But, again, this is in the context of staged performance with the signs and symbols that inform the audience that it is a performance of the traditional style: a stage area, a microphone, directed lighting.

10.9.1 Questions

Can this sense of identity exist outside of an officially sanctioned performance? Vaid-Menon argues that society considers otherwise, citing the example of being assaulted on a tram in Sydney, Australia after a highly successful gig, “back to being nothing [...] back to being that thing that belongs on a stage and not a tram” (Cain, 2022). There are complex arguments here: Is a stage only a stage if it’s agreed to, and where are the limits of that stage, ranging from a proscenium arch platform to a busker’s street pitch? Can a stage-based performance persona even function without a stage? If identity can be fluid, and “all identities are performed” can it be valid if it is temporarily hidden rather than outwardly performed? If the Captain self and the Minstrel Self are two ends of the same spectrum, does ‘red’ still exist if you can only see ‘violet’?

¹⁴² Writer and academic

¹⁴³ Performer

Thena: Darling, I think you may have stepped beyond this project's boundaries

Seany Minstrel: How do you mean?

T: You're speculating about the future, and questions you can't really answer. This Practice-as-Research PhD is all about understanding fluid, multiplastic Queer self-identity by experimenting with *performance* personae, like me, and our other archetypal friends. To take it beyond the realms of performance is laudable, but it's really a separate project. Perhaps one to be kept to one side until after you've completed this.

SM: So, you think I've demonstrated our point, that it's possible to gain understand of one's own multi-plastic self-identity as a Queer person by experimenting with performance personae and their relations to myth, legend and faery tale? (That was quite a mouthful!). Seán will be pleased.

Thena: Indeed he will, assuming he can organise all our various contributions into a final form that other people can understand. Time to sum-up, dear. Write your conclusion.

11. Conclusion

SM: This is the bit where I'm going to try to summarise everything I've waffled on about in the last 10,000 words or so, and try to make it clear and comprehensible. I've often thought that a conclusion seems a bit like gilding a lily, because all the information is already there. Then I found out that some academics read the conclusion first to see if the rest is going to be a

pleasant and meaningful read or a dense and painful slog, and it all made sense. Plus, I do like to make things clear in my own mind. So, here goes.

11.1 Framing

The whole essay was designed to be a chronological consideration of my own development as the Queer performance persona, Seany Minstrel, framed as a rediscovery of self in line with Plato's ideas of *anamnesis* (remembering) and what that means autoethnographically to a sense of self-identity. In other words, how my vague sense of self as fluid and multiplastic has become more realised through practical experiments in the form of performances and their creation, as well as my own. I am aided here by Tim, who jumps in unexpectedly with a few helpful observations.

11.2 Early Work

Beginning well before the present PaR PhD project, I first examined Seán Fitton's 2012 book and associated performance, *The Dionysian Spirit* in order to give some context as to what it was I was actually remembering. That was, specifically, the tacit realisation that there was a distinct difference between day-to-day Seán and the 'larger' and more flamboyant performance Seán, and how performance Seán manifests through the staged performance which already contains all the elements which he would use in later performances, such as poetry, music, direct address and mythological elements. Next, I examined the two shows which Seán created for his MA degree, and which functioned as a formative core for both his practical performance methods and his philosophical enquiries, both of which placed lived human experience into dialogue with archetypal and mystical forms. Specifically that was the mythological story of Orpheus and Eurydice in *Orpheus' Mistake* and several mythological themes of non-normative

sexuality in *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret*. It was in the latter of these that he began to experiment with performance personae in the shapes of Baron Sam, a poet-pervert-presenter, and the (as yet unnamed) Tim the Excited Mythologer and Guru Tovski, and through these that he began to formulate ideas of fluid identity which could be examined by means of performance personae.

11.3 PhD

After building these foundations, I began to examine the PhD proper in the context of starting it during the Covid19 pandemic, the discovery and naming of the four performance personae¹⁴⁴ and their place in a framework based on Jungian psychology. By this time each persona has managed to make their presence known by interrupting the narrative of this essay, but not entirely unhelpfully. Three video presentations were also investigated for their relevance to the development and (re)discovery of me. *Queering the Old Fool* examined self-realisation as it might be found through identification with the archetype of the Holy Fool, and *The Endymion Project* explored the relationship of identity, agency and self-awareness. The third video, *The Sex, Death and Mythology Cabaret* (revisited) in combination with the serendipitous adoption of the concept of the 'Captain Self', discovered during the research phase of *The Endymion Project*, served to reintegrate the various personae to work together towards a common goal of multiplastic identity.

11.3.1 Green

Once the Covid19 lockdowns were ended I created a, seemingly unconnected, performance

¹⁴⁴ Baron Sam, Tim the Excited Mythologer, Thena the Academic and Guru Tovski

called *The Green Man Speaks*. This was examined because of its serendipitously discovered relationship to the soon-to-appear Minstrel-me in which the form and expression of the Minstrel Self had begun to take shape through the significance of the colour green. The last live official performance to be examined was *Thomas the Rhymer*, in which I appeared in my full form as Seany Minstrel, along with 'help' from the other personae on a video screen, demonstrating the circular 'hero's journey' which brings me back to the performed Seán of *The Dionysian Spirit*, but as a newly formed, self-aware, multiplastic identity.

11.4 Next?

The final part asked what should come next for Seany Minstrel. I looked at the things I've done in an attempt to spread my wings outside the safe environment of the university, how that has affected the understood relationship between Seán Fitton and Seany Minstrel and the importance of validation as discovered by performing in persona. The ultimate question was whether I should now step out of the relatively safe world of the stage and into the 'real world', and whether that's even possible.

Tim: What happens to us when this project is over? That's what I want to know.

Thena: As do I, dear. Is our existence entirely contextual, within the framework of performance and its associated philosophy? Will we simply be subsumed, or are we now too 'real' to fade away?

Baron Sam: You won't get rid of me so easily. I know what porno you like!

Guru Tovski: I am my own narrator (one of them) so I tell my own story and I can change the ending and the characters and the love scenes and the fight scenes and the way that the mystery is solved using little grey cells and the dust from a lapel that shows me to be an airline pilot with two small dogs who has just come back from Kabul with some illegal toffees and an affair with an international arts tycoon. Maybe I shall become a new story.

Seany Minstrel: I'd like that, too.

(11,515 words)

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