Puer-pater-senex:
Toxic Masculinity and the Generative Father in an Age of Narcissism

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Abstract: There is a suppurating father wound in the Western psyche that has manifested today in toxic masculinity and regression to patriarchy embodied in political strongmen. The wound is represented mythically by a recurrent classical theme of fathers who destroy their children rather than nurturing them—who, in fact, refuse to become fathers in any real or meaningful way. The wound also is inscribed in contemporary archetypal theory by an omission: Hillman's (2005) discussion of the *puer-senex* tandem names youth and elder but without the crucial role that mediates them, *pater*. Restoring the archetypal father to this tandem, one who values beneficence not brutishness, creates the more stable triad *puer-pater-senex*, a triad that is parallel to the female developmental pattern, maiden-mother-crone, drawn from goddess traditions. Supporting the emergence of the generative father, and seeing where he already exists in contemporary culture, can detoxify masculinity and help us recognize and confront toxic patriarchal leaders.

Keywords: father, maiden-mother-crone, malignant narcissism, politics, *puer-senex*, toxic masculinity, archetypes, Greek mythology

Mature, generative men seem to be rare among today's political leaders, or they simply may be overshadowed on the world stage by populist strongmen who resemble schoolyard bullies. Political bullies, like their childish counterparts, successfully draw attention away from the quieter margins where numerous competent leaders, men and women, daily sacrifice their time for the public benefit. Our gaze returns repeatedly to the noisome bully.

Focusing on those who abuse power may be symptomatic of the painful struggle to know how to turn our communities, nations, and species toward the serious problems we face. Such focus alerts us to the presence of soul: it exemplifies what Hillman (1992) calls *pathologizing*, one of the soul's natural activities that describes its "autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering" and "to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective" (p. 57). Our afflictions and our eye for them show "the concrete mess of psychological existence" (p. 56) as we live it day by day. Being faithful to that pathology, rather than rushing to fix it, can deepen political events into psycho-cultural experiences because "only when things fall apart do they open up into new meanings" (p. 111). This essay adopts the pathological eye to explore the archetypal and mythic background of our present communal strife.

The pathological eye exposes the toxicity of political strongmen who symbolize and intensify nostalgia for patriarchal tradition and what it supposedly offers: social order, gender certainty, and the restoration of cultural greatness. Nostalgic regression to an idealized past is neither creative nor sustainable. It is a defensive response to a suppurating

wound in the Western psyche related closely to malignant narcissism. The wound is represented mythically by a recurrent theme of tyrannical fathers who destroy their children, refusing to become fathers in any real or meaningful way. After probing this mythic wound and its contemporary relevance, I turn to the ways in which the wound is inscribed in archetypal theory by an omission: Hillman's (2005) extensive discussion of the *puer-senex* tandem that names youth and elder without the crucial role that mediates them, *pater*. The emergence of the generative father in this tandem, one who values beneficence rather than brutishness, creates the more stable triad *puer-pater-senex* that is parallel to the female triad maiden-mother-crone. How might generative fathering enlarge our understanding of masculinity in its many manifestations and help us recognize and confront toxic patriarchal leaders?

Diagnosing political elites

Many observers, laypeople and professionals, have attributed the behavior of political strongmen—which includes unapologetic efforts to promote themselves, extend their power, and consolidate their prestige among fellow elites—to psychological causes if not actual diagnosable mental illness (Cruz & Buser, 2016; Brooks, 2017; Comey, 2018; Henderson & Stein, 2019; Lee, 2017, 2019; Lee & Glass, 2018; McCabe, 2019; Schwartz-Salant, 2016; Singer, 2016, 2017). Specifically, such leaders exhibit many of the traits associated with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) described in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), a painful and potentially destructive condition that manifests in "poor empathy and problematic intimacy"; grandiosity, which is "feelings of entitlement, either overt or covert, and self-centeredness, a belief that one is better than others;" as well as "excessive seeking for admiration" and "need for approval" (Paris, 2011, p. 220). In its more pathological forms (Kernberg, 1970), sometimes referred to as malignant narcissism to distinguish it from healthy self-regard, NPD can include paranoia and aggression. Malignant narcissists frequently have fantasies of unlimited power and success, exploit people and situations to achieve it, and surround themselves with others of high status (Cruz & Buser, 2016, pp. xii-xiii; Mika, 2017, p. 299). In the last two decades, malignant narcissism has been equated with another sociopathic disorder, Machiavellianism, "a cynical, ruthless, and deceptive approach to interpersonal and organizational behavior" (Stellwagen 2011, p. 35).

The scholarly literature rarely addresses the inverse relationship between the self-aggrandizement of malignant narcissism and the service orientation of generative fathering from which the father derives his moral authority. Samuels's works on the father (1985, 1989) are the exception. Yet the relationship is hiding in plain sight within the Jungian community. For example, on the dedication page of *A Clear and Present Danger: Narcissism in the Era of Donald Trump*, the editors quote Nelson Mandela's 1990 speech following his release from prison. Mandela declares himself a "humble servant" of the people who will "place the remaining years of my life in your hands" (2016, n.p.) Also cited for his leadership is George Washington. Known as "the father of our country," Washington "declined to serve more than the two terms and risk establishing a new monarchy" in the fledgling American nation (2016, n.p.). Mandela and Washington, although separated by more than 200 years, both exemplify generative men. Concerned for the welfare of others, they fulfill themselves through contributing to the public good and creating a beneficent legacy that outlasts their personal wealth or social prestige.

Readers familiar with Western personality theory will undoubtedly hear echoes of Erickson (1982) in the word "generativity." His mid-century development of psychoanalytic theory, which was profound and substantial, remains relevant as a model for males. (Feminists including Jordan et al., 1991; Gilligan, 1993; Hancock, 1989; and Miller, 1986 argue that female psychological development follows a different trajectory.) Erickson made important modifications to Freud's stages of childhood development by emphasizing social influences—helping to move psychoanalysis into its present focus on relational psychology. His significance for this paper is the extension of stage theory beyond childhood. "Erikson is the first Freudian and one of the few developmental writers of any persuasion to propose separate stages for the adult years" (Crain, 2005, p. 289). His ideas might best be considered a sketch of a theory "but if so, we should remember that he is writing about an uncharted area" (p. 289). Erikson (1982) identified central tensions at each stage of life, which he describes as a basic orientation that persons must negotiate. In adulthood, the choices are generativity or self-absorption. Whereas the former is growth-oriented and creative, the latter leads to stagnation (p. 67).

Although Erikson tended to literalize generativity as raising children, the concept also has symbolic meaning as the production of things and ideas, suggested by the metaphorical question *What will I give birth to during my life?* Generativity requires personal sacrifice, a patient and disciplined focus on durable values as opposed to the momentary satisfaction of one's own vanity, and caring for another more than oneself—unless, of course, the aim is simply to produce a "mini-me." It should be evident that malignant narcissism is antithetical to Erikson's generativity, which may explain why his developmental theory defined generativity as the goal for late middle age and beyond (1982, pp. 67–69). Devoting oneself to others is an achievement, not a given. The mythical Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was devoted only to his own reflection, blind and deaf to everything else.

It is one thing to live with a paranoid, aggressive, malignant narcissist in one's own family. But what if "aggressive, paranoid, malignant narcissist" describes the individual who represents one's nation on the world stage? What if he is the political patriarch, meant to embody moral authority, the ambassador to other nations, and the face of one's country who has the power to shape its social, economic, and political future for decades to come? Then we are speaking of a profoundly wounded, psychologically unstable leader who is joined to the citizenry—all citizens. Those joined to him include, most painfully, citizens who do not support him, refuse to recognize him as "their" president, find in him a total absence of moral authority, and know full well that he lacks a popular mandate to be commander in chief. Then we are speaking of a fresh cultural wound: millions of people who are appalled and humiliated that this man is their emissary.

On the one hand, of course, I am speaking of Donald Trump. His election exposed the deep, painful fissure in the American psyche between who liberal Democrats thought "we" were and who "we" are. It is nearly too much to witness, let alone understand—yet any one of us who has not entirely retired from the social world is confronted, sometimes hourly, by fresh reminders of the pain his presidency symbolizes. Trump supporters, nearly a majority of the U.S. population—that is, 46% of voters in the 2016 election—love him to the same degree that liberals loathe him. Elsewhere I have quoted Jung (1966) who said that "hatred is tremendous cement" (pp. 5–6) to explain why Americans on the political Left and Right are stuck, glued, fastened to this president (Nelson, 2019).

On the other hand, I am *not* speaking of Donald Trump. In many respects, he is superfluous to the larger, older movements of psyche that manifest in the soul of a culture as well as the individual soul. From the lens of Jung's "complex psychology" (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 13), the present political moment can be understood as a type of psycho-cultural wound having a distinctive mythological pattern. When the age of Trump is examined through this lens it is not adequate to think of our circumstance simply as a political situation in which citizens take sides and fight for their beliefs. Rather, we think archetypally and historically, imagining our circumstance as a cultural condition in need of psychological attention. The twisted and sick, the abusive and cruel, belong and cannot be eradicated (Hillman, 1992, p. 57). In fact, illuminating the archetypal background of our present pain renders superfluous all diagnostic labels despite the perverse fact that labels remain useful in helping us speak to one another.[1] If Americans reach backward toward a more ideal time—the presidency of Barack Obama for liberals, 1950s white patriarchy for conservatives—we are not reaching far enough. Instead, we must seek "a display of the recurring forms that do not change through time and which repeat in every age and society" (Hillman & Moore, 1989, p. 163). Then the chronic disorders of culture help citizens "become present to the timeless incurable aspects of soul" (p. 164). The discussion below begins this shift in perspective.

Cultural narcissism

Psychological terms such as narcissism, usually reserved for trait assessment of individual persons, also help explain the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of social groups. For example, a cross-cultural study of Americans and Japanese (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) reported striking differences in conceptions of the self, which has personal, social, and political implications. The "independent construal of the self" may also be labelled "individualist, egocentric, autonomous, idiocentric, and self-contained" (p. 226). The "interdependent construal of the self" emphasizes fundamental connectedness and is referred to as "sociocentric, holistic, collective … and relational" (p. 227). Paris (2011), focusing on western culture, correlated "excessive individualism" with modernity, conjecturing that "individualistic values, if held too strongly, shade into narcissism" (p. 222). These two essays only hinted at the considerable scholarly attention devoted to the question of how individualism and narcissism affects culture.[2] The question has also been discussed in popular media. Wolfe (1976) noted the widespread narcissism in contemporary American culture in response to the progressive and communitarian 1960s. His *New York Magazine* essay, which popularized the phrase "the Me decade," asserted that rising wealth afforded the possibility of self-determinism for the average American. The prevailing ethos shifted from public service, enshrined in John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, toward preoccupation with getting ahead. Shortly thereafter, in 1979, Lasch published his bestselling book *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*, a title that could easily describe contemporary American life 40 years later. For the purposes of this essay, Lasch made a telling point about the impact of narcissistic world leaders. They "thrive on the adulation of the masses" and, from a position of eminence, "play a conspicuous part in contemporary life" by setting the tone in both the private and public spheres (2018, p. 231). As de Vos (2010) pointed out in his critique of Lasch,

> Lasch had to distinguish the contemporary narcissist from the rugged individualist of old. If the individualist saw the world as "an empty wilderness to be shaped by his own design," then for the narcissist, the world is a mirror. Apparently free from family ties and institutional constraints, the narcissist can only overcome his insecurity by seeing his grandiose self "reflected in the attentions of others, or by attaching himself to those who radiate celebrity, power, and charisma." (p. 540)

Since the industrial revolution, empty wilderness has given way to built environments filled with man-made objects. In them man can contemplate the grandeur of his own achievements. What better sustenance for the narcissist?

Though care should be taken in diagnosis, people have a long history of sketching the character of their leaders, as they should. The powerful are always scrutinized by those whom they dominate, just as prey species keep a wary eye out for local predators. Vigilance is a matter of survival. Brooks (2017) noted in the *New York Times*, for example, that the Trump administration has produced "a perverse situation in which the vast analytic powers of the entire world are being spent trying to understand the guy"—but, he asks, "what if there's no there there?" (n.p.). Brooks, a keen social observer without psychotherapeutic training or clinical experience, nonetheless spotted Trump's vacuity, his "empty self"—a concept discussed by Cushman (1995) in *Constructing the self, constructing America*, a fine example of applying psychological insight to culture. Cushman's description of the empty self eerily foreshadows a president whose true symbols are not a white house but a gilded high-rise on Fifth Avenue and, once upon a time, a pristine star on Hollywood's walk of fame.[3] Cushman linked the empty self "that strives, desperately, to be filled up" with "America's consumer-based economy and its charismatically-oriented political process" (p. 79). The one without the other "would be inconceivable" (p. 79). Now psychological emptiness, personal charisma, and material success appear to be united in the figure of the American president.

Cushman's work uniting psychological insight with cultural observation is equally apparent and highly controversial in the two bestselling books edited by Bandy X. Lee (2017, 2019). Lee's collection of essays by dozens of mental health experts exemplify the "vast analytical power" (Brooks, 2017) that has been devoted to understanding Trump. The experts' findings are neatly summed up in the last line of Lee's (2017) Prologue: "Collectively and with our coauthors, we warn that anyone as mentally unstable as Mr. Trump simply should not be entrusted with the life-and-death powers of the presidency" (p. 8).

Even before Lee's books were published, they drew considerable ire from the American Psychological Association (APA). The APA believed that the contributors were overstepping their professional boundaries by diagnosing someone from afar, thus obviating the Goldwater Rule. Two of the authors responded, "without diagnosing Trump in a specific way, as the Goldwater rule prohibits, it is not only acceptable but vitally necessary to have a public conversation about the mental state of our nation's leader" (Lee & Glass, 2018, n.p.). The premise of psychocultural observation is that mental health experts have a right to comment on "the traits" of leaders "only in relation to the public office he [or she] holds" (n.p.). Moreover they have a duty to do so, since expert observation contributes to "the betterment of public health" and upholds the "principles of medical ethics" (n.p.). Lifton, in his Foreword to Lee's (2017) book, called this stance the

activist witnessing professional. Therapeutic work addresses individual suffering as well as cultural ills as it "either affirms or questions the directions of the larger society" (p. xviii). In fact, a key premise of Jungian and archetypal psychology (Jung, 2009; Jung & Sabini, 2005; Jung & von Franz, 1964; Hillman, 1982, 1992) is that the individual cannot be divorced from her surroundings; if one is ill, both are, and the mutual wounds need to be carefully and thoroughly probed from multiple directions. Viewed in this way, the activist stance of analysts like Lifton is necessary and socially responsible, not grandiose or self-serving. As Lifton (2017) noted, publishing their expert assessment "does not make us saviors of our threatened society, but it does help us bring our experience and knowledge to bear on what threatens us and what might renew us" (p. xix).

Jungian theories of culture and politics

Jung and Jungians have offered psychological commentary on political leaders and those they purport to represent. Jung (1977), for instance, spoke candidly in a 1939 interview about the rise of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. Were Jung alive today, he would be keenly interested in Trump as a "character type" said Stein (Henderson & Stein, 2019). Stein then offered his own observations. "In Trump we see a different type of the alpha male, a titanic adolescent, undisciplined and impulsive, often comically so, with grandiose fantasies of himself as King" (Henderson & Stein, 2019, n.p.). Stein's description is provocative, but focusing on Trump's titanism risks missing the crucial psychocultural issue: Trump speaks for a large percentage of American people. Removing Trump only obfuscates the deeper issues, including the longstanding cultural complexes that his improbable election revealed (Singer, 2016, 2017). As painful as this moment of conflict is, Trump's election has been a psychological boon because he has given Americans eyes with which to see. In particular, Trump as president has made visible our collective wounds and the wounds to the collective—the ways in which our cultural persona is shadowed by shameful events from the past that persist in the present.

The theory of cultural complexes, developed by Singer and Kimbles (2004), addresses the psychological working of collective life, which "more often than not has fallen into the Jungian shadow" (p. 4). Cultural complexes are built up over time and, when activated as they are now, in the era of Trump, "are lived out in group life" in addition to being "internalized in the psyche of individuals" (p. 20). Like personal complexes, they are involuntary and autonomous, "and tend to affirm a simplistic point of view that replaces more everyday ambiguity and uncertainty with fixed, often self-righteous attitudes to the world" (de Shong Meador, Samuels, & Singer, 2010, p. 234). Cultural complexes aggregate a blend of facts and alternative facts about societies and their members. "Perhaps most potent," said Singer, "when cultural complexes are activated, very primitive, destructive affect states of fear, hatred and murderous rage—as well as more positive affect states of joy and sharing—are generated in individuals and groups of people" (p. 234). Informed Americans witness and feed on destructive affective states in their daily news feeds such as fear, hatred, and murderous rage of the other. Fixed, self-righteous attitudes are plainly evident on both sides of the political divide.

As a citizen and liberal Democrat, I feel my fear, hatred and murderous rage in private. Like many of us, these are the intolerable affects I live with each day. As a Jungian, I am obligated to accept the unpalatable fact that even though Donald Trump is not "my" president, he is the American president. To borrow from Jung (1973), we ourselves "are a

conflict that rages in itself and against itself, in order to melt its incompatible substances” (p. 375). It is torturous psychocultural work. It is work for grownups.

Puer and *senex* in Jungian theory

Narcissism is associated with youth, in part because the mythical Narcissus is a beautiful young man in Ovid’s (2009) *Metamorphosis* and in part because a healthy amount of self-regard is needed for the lifelong project of knowing ourselves in the midst of a demanding culture. In fact, Erikson’s (1982) developmental stages agree in spirit with Jungian individuation in that psychological aims and difficulties mutate as one ages. “It seems to me that the basic facts of the psyche undergo a very marked alteration in the course of life,” said Jung (1929/1982a), “so much so that we could almost speak of a psychology of life’s morning and a psychology of its afternoon” (p. 39). In a stronger warning, Jung (1933) declared that “we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life’s morning—for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie” (p. 108). Whereas youth is associated with self-absorption as Narcissus was enchanted with his own reflection, individuation raises one’s eyes to the trees, then the forest, and beyond to the surrounding hills and mountains and all those who inhabit it. In the words of Hollis (2006):

> Of each critical juncture of choice, one may usefully ask, “Does this path enlarge or diminish me?” Usually, we know the answer to the question. We know it intuitively, instinctively, in the gut. Choosing the path that enlarges is always going to mean choosing the path of individuation. The gods want us to grow up, to step up to that high calling that each soul carries as its destiny. (p. 15)

Although Hillman (1996) describes this same impulse as growing down rather than growing up, Hollis and Hillman agree that the soul demands growth not stagnation, which always means looking beyond the self. Individuation “must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation” (Jung, 1921/1971, p. 448). Echo is only one of the creatures who seeks Narcissus’s attention; the whole world is waiting. Instead, he falls into his own image and dies.

The mythical Narcissus is an archetypal *puer*, the Latin word for “youth” or “young man.” In archetypal theory he is frequently paired with the *senex*, Latin for “old man.” Although *puer* and *senex* may be employed as developmental concepts that reference linear age, they are useful in thinking about archetypal patterns of thought and behavior at any stage in life. “The *puer* suggests the possibility of a new beginning, revolution, renewal, and creativity generally,” welcome qualities whether one is 6 or 60, whereas “the *senex* refers to qualities such as balance, steadiness, generosity toward others, wisdom, farsightedness” (Samuels, 1989, p. 3), archetypally available, and perhaps necessary, at 6 or 60. In their extreme forms, *puer* and *senex* can become pathological.

> Unmitigated *puer* is redolent of impatience, overspiritualization, lack of realism, naive idealism, tendencies ever to start anew, being untouched by age, and given to flights of imagination. Pure *senex* is excessively cautious and conservative, authoritarian, obssessional, overgrounded, melancholic, and lacking imagination. (p. 3)

Samuels's emphasis on the extreme poles of thought and behavior in both patterns, *puer* and *senex*, is important cautionary information, and it is echoed in the work of Hillman.

Hillman (2005) explores archetypal *puer* and *senex* in a series of essays now collected as volume 5 of the *Uniform Works*. The *puer* has trouble with "timing and patience. It knows little of seasons and waiting" (p. 51), whereas the *senex* has learned, patience, right timing, and is willing to wait. "Commitment as duty clips the wings and binds the feet" of the *puer* (p. 56), a painful condition for one who is flighty. On the other hand, the visionary boldness of the *puer*, his insouciance, is essential to the creative process. He is associated to birth, new life, and Spring; the *senex*, an Autumnal figure, "presides over the harvest" (p. 37). Hence Hillman's critical point: *puer* and *senex* function best in tandem, although not without tension.

Psychologically, when the *puer* is disconnected from its archetypal complement, the *senex*, the result is dangerously one-sided and impulsive thought and behavior. Attacks on authoritative sources, expertise, and professionalism manifest resistance to the *senex*, the one who thinks before speaking, weighs alternatives before deciding, and considers the consequences of his choices for all. Part of the cultural resistance to the *senex* is inability or unwillingness to envision long-term moral, social, and political consequences. We have little imagination of the harvest. Whereas this breadth of vision requires slowness and patience, Western culture is enraptured with speed. As a result, few are tending the delicate organic balance that is America, with a long view towards what we are sowing and what we will eventually reap. In words that have political and cultural relevance for the Trump era, Hillman (2005) says, "we struggle with the psychological connections between past and future, old and new, expressed archetypally as the polarity of *senex* and *puer*" (p. 31).

The missing third?

The *puer-senex* tandem discussed at length by Hillman (2005) is a fitting counterpoint to the mother-son tandem emphasized by Jung (1954/1969c): the *puer* is a heroic son whose successful struggle for consciousness is a "life-delivering escape from the primal warmth and primal darkness of the maternal womb; in a word, from unconsciousness" (p. 96). Neumann (1955/1983), who extended classical Jungian theory, focused an entire book on *The great mother*.

Whether as son-hero or son-lover of the Great Goddess, the *puer* is male. The closest linguistic equivalent is *puella*, Latin for girl, which is akin to the Greek *kore*, the maiden who is the youthful aspect of a woman. Mythically and psychologically *puella* and *kore* are not paired with the *senex*. In fact, it is rare for females to be generationally paired at all—Athene, as her father's daughter, being the noteworthy exception—since the archetypal and developmental female pattern favors threes. Even when a strong mother-daughter theme emerges in stories such as the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (Boer, 1970), there is another female figure in the background symbolizing a third generation, a wise woman, elder, or crone. The young woman or girl is one part of a complete female triad, maiden-mother-crone, symbolizing all stages of biological life, derived from earth-based religions centered on a goddess (Haruach, 2008, p. 381).[4] Mythological sources offer no male equivalent, no male triad, excepting Laertes (*senex*), Odysseus (*pater*), and Telemachus (*puer*), who are separated from one another by time and geographical distance long before their reunion in the *Odyssey* (1996). Instead, pairs are prominent: *puer-senex* (two males) or *puer*-mother (male and female).

Pairs and triads are different mythically and energetically. Triads, or the third, figure prominently in Jungian thought as a reconciliation of opposites (Jung, 1957/1969d), the volatile uniting substance in alchemy (Jung, 1955–1956/1970), and the creative space of therapeutic work (Jung, 1946/1982b). Discovering the third is a psychological achievement, the recognition of a middle way that offers another quality of thinking and being. It is "the place of soul," Hillman (1992) told us, "a world of imagination, passion, fantasy, reflection that was neither physical and material on the one hand, nor spiritual and abstract on the other, yet bound to them both" (p. 68). Because it is its own realm or space, "psyche has its own logic—psychology—which is neither a science of physical things nor a metaphysics of spiritual things" (p. 68). Psyche itself symbolizes the third.

Discovering the third may, in fact, be rediscovery, finding what has been lost. Thirds and threes call to mind the humble yet sturdy three-legged stool, useful for sitting close to the earth as our ancestors did for millennia. In calling attention to the third, it seems rather obvious that the male tandem emphasized in archetypal psychology, *puer-senex*, is an unstable pair when imagined alongside the female triad maiden-mother-crone. The key question is *What is the missing figure in the male pattern that corresponds to the mother in the female pattern?* The answer is that the father (Latin, *pater)*, provides the missing figure. *Pater* is an image of generation and generativity. Without *pater*, the male tandem literally names the playful, mutable boy child and the stern, brittle elder but without the middle stage of fathering that relates them to one another and also introduces a related quality in the pattern.[5] Inserting *pater* into the *puer-senex* dyad draws attention to when, where, and how *eros* is expressed across all three ages from youth to old man. It is politically relevant in the elder male, the age of most elites, because the *senex* without fathering is different from the crone, whose pattern connects her to mothering. Their wisdom manifests differently.

The Latin word trivia, which describes the three-fold female pattern maiden-mother-crone, suggests how the wisdom of the crone is different from the *senex*. *Trivialis* means "of the street, common, usual, and everyday. In European languages trivial denotes—commonplace, common, trite, ordinary, rubbish, trifle, of little worth or importance" (Popovic, 2008, p. 389). Trivia is easily overlooked, yet trivia is catnip for depth psychologists. Where people neglect to look is frequently the source of treasure in dreams and in life.[6] There is much about actual fathering (and mothering) that is common and ordinary: wiping a child's runny nose, preparing a snack, helping him with homework, listening to her laments. As a culture we denigrate ordinary tasks, yet family life is constituted by such trivia. The man who knows the trivia of fathering understands the deep ground of relatedness: he is shaped by the lived experience of vast responsibility accompanied by vast humility. Actual fathering is far removed from the exalted spheres of political gamesmanship because nothing will destroy the illusion of control more quickly than pacing the floors of a hospital emergency room while a child's life hangs in the balance.

Toxic masculinity, dominance hierarchies, and the "Dark Triad"

Without the related and generative archetypal pattern of *pater*, whose guiding principles include beneficence, a lacuna opens for toxic masculinity. As an academic concept in women's studies curricula, toxic masculinity "has been around forever" (Salam, 2019,

n.p.). In the Trump era, it has gained popular attention and controversial social acceptance. The Good Men Project defined toxic masculinity as

> a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression. It's the cultural ideal of manliness, where strength is everything while emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly "feminine" traits—which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual—are the means by which your status as "man" can be taken away. (O'Malley, 2016, n.p.)

In toxic masculinity, sex is conquest, and women are property. Since aggression and violence establish superior manhood, it is clear that adherents of toxic masculinity view the world as a dominance hierarchy. Life is deadly serious predation, a zero-sum game in which winning is the only goal. Generosity, beneficence and generativity never enter into it. Veering between *puer* grandiosity and *senex* cruelty, those who play this game do their utmost to exert control over what they perceive as weakness and chaos, both of which are coded female.

Fontelieu (2018) describes the political tenor of the last two decades as the resurfacing of "a kind of hypermasculine leadership" and "neoconservative undercurrent" (p. 1). I fully agree—and argue that the two go hand-in-glove. Sustaining a dominance hierarchy justifies all manner of manipulation because those who rise to the top of the political, social and economic heap are winners and, by definition, the fittest. Dominance hierarchy is also supported by the presumption of entitlement: whatever I have the power to take is mine to have, by any means necessary. Historically, America's sense of entitlement is enshrined in the concept of Manifest Destiny, which reached its zenith about a century ago during the presidency of Teddy Roosevelt (Bederman, 1995). Entitlement is also at the core of the #metoo movement, in which powerful men have abused their positions to treat others as objects that they can play with at will—and without consequence. The #metoo movement reveals a key aspect of toxic masculinity and malignant narcissism: profound relational incapacity that manifests as the presumption that others are objects, not people, who can and ought to be manipulated at will. Although women clearly suffer in such a system, vulnerable men do, too, which means any man who values and expresses so-called feminine emotionality and personal qualities of kindness, compassion, love, and self-sacrifice. Toxic masculinity works alongside conservative, repressive patriarchy to put "the feminine"—wherever and by whomever it is expressed—in its proper place.

Of course the contemporary resurgence of repressive patriarchy was certainly not the first time when winning at all costs was valorized. For that we need to look 400 years earlier at Machiavelli's (1532/2005) treatise *The Prince*. In fact, describing American culture as "narcissistic" is inadequate. The prominence of toxic masculinity and the rise of white supremacist hate crimes (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019, p. 1) attests that something deeper and much darker is at work. A cluster of related personality disorders, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, which clinicians call the "Dark Triad," has more cultural explanatory power.

The Dark Triad was given its name by Paulhus and Williams (2002) due to the "high degree of theoretical similarity in the conceptualizations of psychopathy, narcissism,

and Machiavellianism" (Stellwagen, 2011, p. 26). All three disorders revolve around egotism and antisocial behavior. Machiavellianism, like malignant narcissism, is "an insatiable drive for power and adulation" (Mika, 2017, p. 299) in which ruthlessness and deception are standard, acceptable practices (Stellwagen, 2011, p. 35). Other power theorists throughout history offered advice similar to Machiavelli's, but *The Prince* "provided a uniquely illuminating inner glimpse of the psychology of interpersonal exploitation" (p. 35). Machiavelli's view of humanity was transparently cynical and entirely rejected traditional morality as a guide to social and political behavior. It is an operational philosophy of callous expediency. Others are not merely objects to be manipulated; they are resources to be abused and ultimately destroyed when they have no more value. (Shortly, we shall see that this is true even between fathers and their children.) Thus, although narcissism describes the character of our twenty-first century putative princes, Machiavellianism better attunes us to their zero-sum worldview—and the behavioral outcome as they shape international politics as well as the fate of the planet. How are such zero-sum fields constituted? Custodians of patriarchy past and present (Goldberg, 1973; Stevens, 1982; Peterson, 2018) argue that dominance hierarchies are natural and necessary; without them, the world would degenerate into chaos. True, there are numerous examples of hierarchies in nature. In many of them, displays of dominance are important to maintaining order. In the last 6,000 years of recorded human history, patriarchy—in its simplest definition, "rule of the fathers"—is the dominant dominance hierarchy. Patriarchy has so dominated culture that some individuals seem to think that it is natural and right, the only legitimate form of social organization. The king is dead; long live the king, so long he can mandate order out of chaos.

Toxic masculinity and gender uncertainty

I would like to point out what will probably be obvious to all: One person's chaos is another person's diversity. To conservative, probably religious, and straight-laced Americans, heteronormative gender conformity is "orderly." Anything else is chaotic. After all, if toxic masculinity and patriarchy both require sexual dimorphism and gender binaries to create social order and maintain the superior rights and status of males, then challenges to beliefs about sex, gender, and society are, by definition, a threat. They create anxiety. The nostalgic longing for regression to simpler, less confusing times makes psychological sense even as it perpetuates systematic misogyny and feeds toxic masculinity. Those of us like me who welcome gender diversity and fluidity and thought that it would simply continue were naïve. Wiser Jungians, which includes me now, explain the resurgence of dominance hierarchies to control chaos as a compensatory psychological regression. The resurgence is the longing (by some) for a return to strict, orderly sexual dimorphism and white-male dominance—which was never a fact but was, and is, a potent fantasy (for some).

To understand rather than condemn the nostalgia inscribed in movements such as "Make America Great Again," Samuels's (1989) theory of gender certainty and uncertainty are helpful. Samuels began by wisely stating that "it is hard to write flexibly and fluidly about what is flexible and fluid" (p. 94). He was speaking of "our current preoccupation with gender" 30 years ago (p. 94). Yet the same danger, "that we might become too clear and too organized" in our gender theories, applies today and, I argue, for the same reason: conscious gender clarity can be

a reaction formation to the inevitable anxiety (and guilt) we experience at finding that what we thought was solid and fixed is perforated and shifting. Humanity is not just divided into women and men but also into those who are certain about gender and those who are confused about gender. (p. 94)

Samuels advocated leaving in "suspension" the "question of 'masculine' and 'feminine' … even, and the word is used advisedly, in some confusion" (p. 94). Some gender confusion "is a necessary antidote to gender certainty and has its own creative contribution to make" (p. 97). Among other things, gender confusion helps shred the gender scripts, or at least prompt questions about what is posited as "natural" and "right," to encourage gender fluidity and gender play. Yet gender fluidity is precisely what threatens the institutionalized dominance hierarchy known as patriarchy and erodes the justification for toxic masculinity. Neither can withstand the anxiety and instability of gender confusion.

The cultural transformation wrought by feminists and LGBTQ activists in the last few decades is immense. Cultural transformation has been furthered by advances in medical technology that facilitate remaking the sexed human body in ways that challenge strict sexual dimorphism. Moreover, contesting the biological categories "male" and "female" can intensify uncertainties about traditional gender classification. If male and female—biological distinctions that once seemed so manifestly clear, unchanging, and self-evident—are now fluid, then gender must necessarily be even more so. What do "masculine" and "feminine" really mean and to whom do they apply? Any thoughtful person engaging with these issues readily perceives how gender uncertainty can breed anxiety about how one is supposed to live and act in the social world. As Samuels (1989) suggested, unconscious gender uncertainty can foment conscious and aggressive gender clarity as a reaction formation whereby the rigidity of one's displayed attitudes about gender is a measure of one's dissociated fear.

Nearly three decades ago, Butler (1990/2006) asked, "is the breakdown of gender binaries… so monstrous, so frightening?" (pp. viii-ix) For many social conservatives today, the answer is yes. The restoration of social order and national greatness goes hand-in-hand with distinct gender roles: men and women know their proper place *as* men and women and *in* the social hierarchy—and they remain there, teaching the next generation its proper place. Gender uncertainty is the monstrous idea that must be killed as Marduk heroically slayed the female monster Tiamat in the ancient Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish* (Dalley, 2009). Toxic masculinity is Marduk in modern dress: a coercive cultural movement in which modern-day alphas use aggression and violence to maintain dominance hierarchies.

Seeking Machiavelli's kin: Classical origin stories and the tyrannical father

Depth psychologists attuned to archetypal patterns like dominance hierarchies and zero-sum thinking notice the continual flux of belief systems over time and across cultures. From a Foucaldian perspective, the broad movements in culture are *discourses* that underscore, share, and perpetuate distinctive ideologies. Such ideological discourses are so powerful, however, that adherents take them to be reality, not a discourse. They grow blind and deaf to other coterminous discourses and suffer from the monotheistic disease that persuades them that *their* story is *the* story. They have all the facts; the rest is just fake news.

For example, when looking broadly at Western intellectual history we can detect traces of both Heraclitus and Hesiod in Machiavelli's political advice. The 130 fragmentary statements by Heraclitus (Wheelwright, 1959), all that is left of a scroll he deposited at the temple at Ephesus, are considered foundational to the Western intellectual tradition. Before the sixth century BCE, "there are virtually no evidences of anything that could be properly called philosophy" (p. 3). Heraclitus asserted that strife, war, or conflict "is both the father and king of all" (fragment 25, p. 29) and that "all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife" (fragment 26, p. 29), declarations that contemporary Machiavellians would find agreeable. In the absence of strife, "all things would cease to exist" (fragment 27, p. 29). Those same Machiavellians might be less sanguine with Heraclitus's philosophical theme of unceasing change since it threatens their dream of perpetual dominance. "Everything gives way and nothing stays fixed," Heraclitus declares in fragment 20, which, according to Wheelwright, means that "what we call [perceive as] permanent is simply an example of change in slow motion or in hidden guise" (pp. 29, 30).

Heraclitus expressed his philosophy of conflict approximately 200 years after the appearance of Hesiod's (1988) *Theogony*, circa 800 BCE. Described as a "Succession Myth" (p. xi), *Theogony* narrates the creation of the world by personified divine powers who symbolize the physical universe. Heaven, Earth, Sea, the Mountains, the Rivers, the Sun and Moon "are treated as gods and put in a genealogical relationship with the rest. Genealogy thus takes the place of cosmogony" (1988, p. x). In the first generation, Heaven (Ouranous) mates with Gaia (Earth) to give birth to the race of Titans. Heaven and Earth, the first generation, is overcome by the second generation, the Titans, who are in turn overcome by the next generation, the Olympians. Hesiod's succession myth "is a story of crude and bizarre acts of violence, of gods castrating, swallowing, and generally clobbering each other" (p. xii). West, who translated Hesiod's (1988) tale, did not make explicit that the "crude and bizarre acts of violence" are perpetrated by *fathers*. In fact, if the first father, Ouranous, had had his way, there would have been no next generation and no generativity. There would have been no father or fathering. Instead, the tyrannical ruler would have become the first male to treat his female mate (the world) as a convenient object to be dominated for his sexual pleasure.

Like other endeavors in psycho-cultural analysis, this essay links archetypal patterns of thought and behavior found in the mythic tradition to contemporary events. Clearly, pointing out the missing father in the *puer-senex* tandem is ripe territory for scholarly investigation.[7] Such investigation must extend far beyond the toxicity of any single political leader. Instead, the task is to seek the larger story that can inform long-term depth psychological citizenship and nurture our "capacity for destiny" (Dunlap, 2008, p. 14). An archetypal perspective frames the question this way: which gods are present in our contemporary political dis-ease, and how shall we listen? Amplifying our understanding in this manner will, I hope, lead to a more generous and soulful sense of the strife that besets us.

Theogony tells us that "Earth bore first of all one equal to herself, starry Heaven" then mated with him to produce "the most fearsome of children" (Hesiod, 1988, p. 6). From the beginning, however, "their own father loathed them … As soon as each of them was born, he hid them all away in a cavern of Earth, and would not let them into the light; and he took pleasure in the wicked work, did Heaven, while the huge Earth was tight pressed inside, and groaned" (p. 7). In response, Gaia created a great sickle out of adamant and

addressed her children: "Children of mine and of an evil father, I wonder whether you would like to do as I say? We could get redress for your father's cruelty. After all, he began it by his ugly behavior" (p. 8). Her son Kronos agreed to help, whereupon Gaia "set him hidden in ambush, put the sharp-toothed sickle into his hand, and explained the whole strategem" (p. 8). When Ouranous "desirous of love … spread himself over Earth," Kronos followed his mother's plan: "he took the huge sickle with its long row of sharp teeth and quickly cut off his father's genitals, and flung them behind him" (p. 8).

One may wonder what Kronos the son learned about fathering from Ouranous. Kronos's behavior toward Rhea, his sister, mate, and fellow Titan, duplicates the Ouranous pattern almost to the letter. "Rhea, surrendering to Kronos, bore resplendent children" (Hesiod, 1988, p. 16). Kronos swallowed them all, one by one, except Zeus, who was preserved only through Rhea's stratagem.

> None but he of the lordly Celestials should have the royal station among the immortals. For he learned from Earth and starry Heaven that it was fated for him to be defeated by his own child, powerful though he was, through the designs of great Zeus. So he kept no blind man's watch, but observed and swallowed his children. (pp. 16–17)

Speaking psychologically, we see a repeated pattern of fathering that is selfish and undermining rather than generous and related. It does not end there. Zeus, who helped defeat his father Kronos, recapitulated this father pattern with his first great wife, the Titaness Metis. He was warned that Metis will give birth to a clever child, "a pale-eyed daughter, Tritogeneia [Athena], with courage and sound counsel equal to her father's, and then a son she was to bear, king of gods and men, one proud of heart" (p. 29). Zeus, concerned about the birth of an equal and then a potential successor, circumvented this outcome by swallowing Metis, his mate.

> When she was about to give birth to the pale-eyed goddess Athene, he tricked her deceitfully with cunning words and put her away in his belly on the advice of Earth and starry Heaven … so that no other of the gods, the eternal fathers, should have the royal station instead of Zeus. (p. 29)

Zeus clearly learned something from the experiences of his father and grandfather: The greatest danger to tyrannical rule arises from angry, clever, and bold females. Rather than deal with Metis's potential rage as an external opponent, Zeus swallows her, symbolically incorporating her wisdom. Their child Athena is born from Zeus's forehead, remains a virginal father's daughter, and gives birth to no rival. Instead, she takes his part to consolidate the Olympian patriarchy and "ensures that [Zeus's] power is secure forever" (p. 71). Zeus, another patriarch who feels entitled to appropriate his mate in the most literal way possible—swallowing the pregnant Metis whole—may have created the first "father's daughter." The provocative question remains: what other creative possibilities, including the genuine child of a mother and a father, did he thereby lose?[8]

Conclusion: The emergence of the generative father

This essay has adopted the pathological eye to explore the archetypal background of our present communal strife. The pathological eye, however, can miss the generous and compassionate exercise of power elsewhere in our communities. The key point is that no eye, whether attuned to pathology or to health, sees the whole picture. Any attempt at

psycho-cultural analysis must be modest for at least two reasons. First, we join with other disciplines to understand and explain political events; analysis is a conversation with many threads. Second, as depth psychologists, we acknowledge that the deep structure of the psyche is archetypal, that is, organized in patterns, which are "modes of apprehension" (Jung, 1919/1969a, p. 137). The archetypal basis of perception asserts that we see differently depending upon context, situation, and players. An eye for generativity may support the emergence of the *pater* as the third necessary figure in the *puer-senex* tandem.

The psychocultural lens I have used in this essay bridges history, mythology, cultural studies, and psychology. By going deep, psychocultural analysis helped us think more clearly about both fathering and leadership over the long and complex-ridden history of our species to show the crucial difference between toxic patriarchs and generative fathers. Examining ancient mythic patterns reveals a wound at the heart of the western tradition—fathers who dominate their mates as sexual objects and destroy their children rather than nurture them. Recognizing the absence of the related, generative father in the *puer-senex* dyad and imagining the *pater* as the missing third begins to assuage this wound. It is a new model of twenty-first-century leadership. It may even be possible to re-vision patriarchy itself, transforming it from a dominance hierarchy into a system of social relations centered upon an ethic of respect and care. Integrating *pater* into the *puer-senex* tandem—as well as recognizing the generative, ethical fathering that is already occurring in our communities—could be archetypal medicine for the contemporary sickness of narcissism and Machiavellianism, offering a new standard of male behavior and a new definition of masculinity to replace the regressive 1950s fantasy of turgid patriarchy. The generative father, the *pater*, stabilizes the *puer-senex* tandem in the same way that a three-legged stool can stand. *Puer-pater-senex*, like the female triad maiden-mother-crone, is a more complete image of psychological development.

Jung urged us "to conceive of death as a goal and a fulfillment" (1934/1969b, p. 405) that is "pregnant with meaning" (p. 409). The toxic, tyrannical father resists death through empire building. He attempts to consolidate himself as the center of his own created order in a misguided effort to approximate immortality. The generative father accepts death by dispersing himself through loving service. He understands dissolution as nature's way, and follows his soul's trajectory downward to embody earth-centered wisdom.

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Notes

[1] Diagnostic labels can start conversation, but they carry a hidden danger of simplifying and reducing lived experience. Hillman (1992) describes this as the temptation of nominalism (pp. 58–61) in which naming and categorical definitions, seemingly clear and descriptive, serve to deprive person and situation of their subtle, complex, and soulful dimensions.

[2] Interested readers might begin with the work of de Toqueville (1835/2000) who described the outcome of individualism as "leaving society at large to itself" (p. 98). More recently, Bellah et al. (1985) asserted that the divide between public and private experience undermines democracy because few individuals actively participate in political life. Feminists who recognize this problem include Gilligan (1993) and Miller (1986). For a comprehensive review of this history, see Dunlap (2008), *Awakening our faith in the future: The advent of psychological liberalism.*

[3] Trump's star, which has drawn intense controversy since he announced his candidacy for president, is a symbolic place where supporters and detractors express their views. For more information, see https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-trump-hollywood-star-20181209-story.html.

[4] The female pattern maiden-mother-crone and goddess-centered religions are contested historical facts but of enduring importance as archetypal fantasy; goddess traditions are a potent inspiration for some contemporary men and women.

[5] Cautious readers will detect that I am indulging in gender essentialism and assuming, for the moment, that the male developmental pattern speaks primarily to men whereas the female developmental pattern speaks primarily to women. This provisional assumption is worthy of a deeper look, which I undertake in a future work.

[6] In Latin, however, *trivia* refers specifically to the place where three roads meet. In our tradition this immediately calls to mind Oedipus, the myth that conferred its name to the central archetypal pattern identified by Freud: patricide. At "the place where three roads meet", said Sophocles, Oedipus fulfilled his Fate by killing his biological father, Laius—without knowing what he did. Using association and amplification, two key moves in Jungian dream work (Whitmont & Perera, 1992), we move from *puer-senex* to *puella* to maiden-mother-crone to the *trivia* to the place where three roads meet to Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* to Oedipus's patricide to Freud's Oedipus complex and the desire to kill the father to the absent father in patriarchy back to the *puer-senex*.

[7] As an example of the theoretical work that remains to be done, consider the phrase "devouring father." Mythologists and depth psychologists, particularly Jungians, make much of the devouring mother as an archetypal pattern but I can recall no reference to the devouring father, which is another way of describing the subject of this essay.

[8] I have limited this discussion of archetypal fathers to the Greek mythological tradition. In an earlier rendition of the essay (June 2018), I noted that the Judeo-Christian pattern describes a patriarch who shares some similarities with Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus. "Almighty God" the father is punitive and unforgiving in the original testament (Genesis 1 & 2). In the New Testament, he consents to the suffering and sacrifice of his only son Jesus, but is unrelated to a wife, consort, or lover, a putative mother figure to Jesus and has nothing to do with fathering. Instead, the Holy Spirit inseminates Mary, the mother of Jesus. The historical Jesus, as far as scholars can tell, was a male figure with a well-integrated feminine side; that is, in scripture he exemplifies many so-called feminine traits, including compassion, gentleness and love, and attracted the unyielding devotion of female disciples. Before Jesus could literally become a generative father with biological progeny,

the toxic patriarchy of Rome—a civilization characterized by hyper-masculinity—sentenced him to death.

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