

Set as Dark Self:

An Analytical Psychological Interpretation of the Figure of Set as found in the Public Documents of the Temple of Set

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This paper is not about Satan. In fact, one could argue that this paper does not fit within the confines of Satanism at all. Rather, this paper is an introduction to my preliminary and cursory Jungian interpretation of the image of Set as recounted in the publically available documents of the Temple of Set. While the Temple of Set has emphasised how it differs from “conventional” Satanism, focusing instead on its place as a school of the Left Hand Path, it still has some correlations with Satanism that warrant at least a qualified inclusion under that socially nefarious heading. It is not the image of Satan that links the Temple to Satanism nor is it an emphasis on the carnal and the hedonistic as found in the Church of Satan. It is the emphasis on the centrality of the individual psyche, the acknowledgement of the darker, shadow elements of the human experience as well as the emphasis on psychological antinomianism that brings the Temple of Set’s vision of Set under the aegis of Satanism—at least for the purposes of this paper.

This paper begins by reviewing how Jung understood and defined the Self and how Dr. Lucy Huskinson emphasises the darker or violent aspect of the Self. Following this introduction I will review how Set is presented in the writings of members of the Temple and then indicate how Set can be seen as an archetypal

image of the dark and violent aspect of what Jung called the archetype of the Self. Though the classical theories of Jung tend to fly in the face of the current postmodern sensibilities of the Academy, Jung's notion of the collective unconscious and the archetypes found therein can still be a useful method of analysis so long as the model and its components are not held as "ultimate truth" and it is in this manner that I turn to Jung's model.

Jung's ultimate psychological concern was with what he termed the process of individuation or the process of becoming a psychologically *whole* person as opposed to one that is swayed or controlled by either the inner psychic regions of the unconscious or the external, collective dogma found within society at large. Jung's model of the psyche is comprised of the following general components: the ego, the complex we refer to as "I" and its corresponding social mask, the persona (the mask we portray ourselves to others); the personal unconscious including the shadow, or that which we do not wish to be, and other outgrown or repressed biographical portions of psychological development; the contra-sexual component of the psyche, the anima and animus (current post-Jungian thought posits that individuals possess both an anima and an animus¹); and the central organising archetype of the psyche, the Self. There are a myriad of other collective archetypal potentials but these are the core components of Jung's model.

Before continuing it is important to recall that one cannot come to consciously *know* an archetype—they are unconscious and therefore not under the scrutiny of conscious experience. However, the transpersonal archetypes

can be known through psychic images, dreams, fantasies, and projections. It is the assumption of this paper that Set can be seen as an archetypal image of the Self, but a particular aspect of the Self—that is to say its violent manifestation.

The Self, as Jung understood it, has been through various transformations. Initially the Self was seen as an ego ideal, then as an encompassing term for the personality, and finally the theory expanded into the Self as the totality of the psyche with collective, universal aspects.² The more common understanding of the Self comes from Jung's definition found in volume 6 of his collected works: *Psychological Types*. Here Jung states: "As an empirical concept, the Self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole...[but] can be only in part conscious...."³ In other words the Self is the totality of the psyche but the totality of the Self is not consciously accessible to the awareness of the ego-complex. Despite the common adjectives used to describe the Self such as wholeness and totality and despite the fact the Self commonly appears in dreams and fantasies as a king, hero, prophet, and saviour the Self can also appear as a *complexio oppositorum* in the guise of the hostile brothers, the hero and his adversary (arch-enemy or dragon), or Faust and Mephistopheles.⁴ The Self can be experienced paradoxically as a blessing and threat or as both the "light" and "dark" aspects of the psyche and it is toward the latter that we now turn.

Dr. Lucy Huskinson was dissatisfied with the positive or sanitised view of the Self that is commonly associated with Jung. Huskinson discusses this notion

in her article “The Self as violent other: the problem of defining the self” and while we need not delve into the nuances of this aspect of Jungian thought in great detail, an investigation into how her findings can be used to interpret Set is useful.

At the core of the experience of the Self is the overwhelming experience of numinosity. Huskinson states the Self is “an affective experience that can bring destruction and transformation to all that was hitherto considered secure and fundamental to ego-consciousness.”⁵ Huskinson is aware that while an over emphasis on the numinous would be detrimental acknowledging this aspect of the Self is essential.⁶ Adjectives used to describe the Self in this numinous capacity include: awefulness, overpoweringness, urgency, and violence.⁷ Violence for Huskinson occurs when “the ego is exposed to the creative forces of the Self that seek to destroy the inferior ego-orientation with its tendency to prejudice in order to create a more affluent and well balanced ego-orientation...the Self therefore constitutes a primordial experience of the ‘visionary’ mode of artistic creation.”⁸

In other words, from the perspective of the ego-complex the visionary capacity (I would also say imaginary capacity) or drive of the Self is perceived as violence. The violence “describes the destruction necessary to initiate the vital creative process of individuation, and the Self is ‘violent’ because it is experienced as an overwhelming force that violates the self-contained ego, and forces the ego, often against its will, into a new identity.”⁹ From a Setian perspective the violent aspect of the Self could be seen as linked to the notion of

the Black Flame or the Gift of Set where the drive to *Xeper* or Coming into Being manifests in the external world through the medium of imagination cultivated within the subjective universe.

The history of the Temple of Set and its roots in the original Church of Satan are thoroughly represented and interpreted in the Temple's founder Dr. Michael Aquino's works the *Church of Satan*¹⁰ and *The Temple of Set*¹¹. I will not recount the history of the Temple except to say that Aquino was dissatisfied with the direction the Church of Satan was taking and was compelled to conduct the "North Solstice Working" in June of 1975 that produced the inspired text *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*.¹²

In this text Aquino is mandated by the Prince of Darkness, in the form of the ancient Egyptian *Neter* or god-form Set, to become Magus of the Aeon of Set and reconsecrate Set's temple. It was in this text that Set delivered the word of the new aeon, *Xeper* (translated as "Become" and later re-Uttered by Don Webb as "I have come into Being"). Whatever one's view of Aquino's text and its reception, *The Book of Coming Forth by Night* reveals some important aspects of Set from the Temple's perspective. While Aquino's works are important in understanding the Temple and Set in a broad sense, it is in the works of Don Webb where we find valuable theories suited to our present purposes.

The former High Priest of the Temple, Ipsissimus Don Webb, has written a significant amount on the nature of Set. In his *Uncle Setnakt's Essential Guide to the Left Hand Path*, Webb describes Set as "the archetype of Isolate Intelligence" and as the oldest known form of the Prince of Darkness.¹³ Set is seen as the

“personification of the process of Initiation—of Becoming more and more your own self.”¹⁴

In *Mysteries of the Temple of Set* Webb indicates that in the Pyramid texts there is mentioned a Source of Healing for the damage inflicted by Set. Webb tells us that the damage is “his Gift”.¹⁵ Set’s Gift is that which separates the consciousness of *Homo sapiens* from that of other animals. According to Webb the Gift “turned us from happy monkeys to creatures with a desire for meaning, hence creatures with fear, misery, and anxiety.”¹⁶ This darker aspect of Set, fear, misery, and anxiety (also known in the Temple as The Black Flame¹⁷) is an important link to the archetype of the Self. I will return to this notion shortly.

Webb indicates there are three ways one can come to know Set.¹⁸ The first is self-knowledge. Webb states, “As we expand our imagination we encounter all things It encountered. We encounter loneliness. We encounter the desire to know things, and the mix of frustration/delight when we discover the more we know the more there is to know.”¹⁹ The second way to know Set as the Prince of Darkness is through looking for his influence throughout history, for example when certain factors are present such as: secret societies, openness to exotic ideas, interest in the imagination, and the commitment to take the products of the mind into the objective world by action.²⁰ Finally, and most dangerously Webb warns us, is talking to It. This is not to be taken as a casual chat but rather a life altering experience based on the Need of the Setian.²¹

Again in *The Mysteries of the Temple of Set* Webb cites fellow Setian Ipsissimus Stephen Flowers' essay on Set and his Gift. The essay is comprised of nine short statements of which three are particularly relevant: Set is dynamic (evolving); Its purpose is self-maintenance, expansion, and perpetuation. It is not omnipotent—it must work for the changes it causes.²²

While this extremely brief review of Set within the Temple of Set has left many avenues unexplored there are still several key concepts revealed about Set that are of importance to the current analysis. First, Set is conceived of as being in some way connected to the depths of the individual's psyche. Second, while Set is a symbol, image, archetype to be emulated by Setians he/It has a dual nature. Set is both an image of the potential to become a complete and whole human being (even more than human) and he is also the bringer of strife, challenge, and pain. He is both the giver of the Gift of the Black Flame of individual self-consciousness and the one to ensure the Gift is fully utilised. Finally, Set's Gift participates or is realised in the objective universe through the faculty of imagination.

The Temple of Set focuses on the individual and his or her psychic, subjective reality with *Xeper* or "Coming into Being" as the *raison d'être* of initiation. With Jung's psychology there is a focus on the subjective universe as part of one's psychological maturation or individuation and is reflected in the centrality of the dream in classical analysis and Jung's research into synchronicity. Of course there are differences too. While the Self is the organising structure of the psyche Set seems to lack that explicit function. In

fact, the antinomian focus of the Temple of Set and its patron would seem to be at odds with acknowledging a collective central organising factor within the psyche. Yet in *The Book of Coming Forth by Night* we find that HarWer (Horus) was created by Set. Set informs us

“HarWer, my Opposite Self, is a strange and fitful presence. I, Set, am my Self distinct from the Order of the Cosmos, yet am ordered in and of my Self. HarWer I was when I was once part of the Cosmos and could achieve identity only by becoming what the Cosmic order was not. By HarWer I cancelled the imbalance, leaving a Void in which true creation could take form as Set.”²³

There are some links between this passage and Jung’s model. Jung’s Self holds a central, organising role in his theory of the psyche. The Self is also found in the objective universe especially in the way humans perceive and project divinity and form religions. An intra-psyche archetype most certainly can have an impact on the external world. This is most evident, and terrifying, in Jung’s paper “Wotan” where the “god of storm and frenzy” is understood to have swept through Germany in the form of National Socialism.²⁴ We can see Set, as Set, in a dynamic intra-psyche capacity and see Set as HarWer, in an ontological and structural capacity. In other words, Set and the archetype of the Self are evident both within the psyche and external to the psyche. But what difference do surface similarities of two philosophical views of depth make from a Jungian perspective?

From an analytical psychological perspective any aspect of the unconscious that is brought into consciousness is psychologically beneficial both individually and collectively. One cannot psychologically integrate what one has

not experienced consciously and this applies equally to the violent potential of the Self as well. The Temple of Set and its understanding of Set could be seen as an attempt to make conscious, to explore and understand, the violent potential of the Self. The publically available material from the Temple, especially that of Webb, suggests a Left Hand Path approach to the process of individuation, satanic in the most general sense of the word. The material emphasises an abhorrence of stagnation and projected platitudes made to an external deity or social control structure such as various religions or political parties, for example. While it is the individual who must come to find his or herself both the Temple and Jung acknowledge that such undertakings may not be for everyone and that few people may wish to take on the added burden of self-development.

Jung, writing to Father Victor White, describes the unconscious (and by implication the archetype of the violent Self and perhaps Set's Gift):

I only know there is no point in wishing to *know* more of the collective unconscious than one gets through dreams and intuition. The more you know of it, the greater and heavier becomes your moral burden, because the unconscious contents transform themselves into your individual tasks and duties as soon as they become conscious. Do you want to increase loneliness and misunderstanding? Do you want more and more complications and increasing responsibilities? ²⁵

The Setian answer to these questions, as well as anyone working with the "darker" or "deeper" approach to individuation, would be "yes".

While Jung may have warned of the dangers of delving into the unconscious his life was lived in a manner that did not strictly follow the advice he may have given a patient who was finding it difficult to deal with the complexities of day-to-day life. For Jung, and I would say for the Temple of Set,

at least based on the publically available literature, the difficulty and danger of approaching the violent Self are to be sought after and experienced, not avoided. In a seminar on dream analysis Jung states: “When we are unconscious of a thing which is constellated [i.e. psychically active], we are identified with it, and it moves us or activates us as if we were marionettes. We can only escape that effect by making it conscious and objectifying it, pulling it outside of ourselves, taking it out of the unconscious.”²⁶ By attempting to avoid delving into the unconscious one runs the risk of psychological stasis becoming a puppet suspended by psychological strings—that is until something comes along to disrupt the perceived calm.

When the violent nature of the Self moves, when the Black Flame stirs within the individual, there are two alternatives: either one can attempt to avoid the conflict and repress or ignore the experience (and risk psychological complications) or acknowledge and accept it as part of the process of psychological maturation, individuation, or *Xeper* (and endure the burden of increased contact with the unconscious). Either way, the choice to repress or acknowledge the violent Self is up to the individual and either way it is the individual who must live with those consequences both within the psyche and in the world around them.

End Notes

¹ Susan Rowland. *Jung: A Feminist Revision*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, 173 and *Jung as Writer*. New York: Routledge, pp. 49-69.

² Carl Jung. "On the Psychology of So-Called Occult Phenomenon", *CW 1*, pars. 132, 136 discusses the character formations for the future personality. See Gary V. Hartman's "History and Development of Jung's Psychology: The Early Years, 1900-1935" at <http://www.cgjungpage.org/articles/hdself3.html>.

³ Carl Jung. *Psychological Types*, *CW 6*, par. 789.

⁴ Carl Jung, *CW 6*, par.790.

⁵ Lucy Huskinson. "The Self as violent Other: the problem of defining the self" in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2002, 47, 437-458. P.437

⁶ *Ibid.* 438.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ <http://www.xeper.org/maquino/nm/COS.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.xeper.org/maquino/nm/TOSd8.pdf>

¹² Aquino, *The Temple of Set*, draft, 8th Edition, p. 11-12, February 2009.

¹³ Don Webb. *Uncle Setnakt's Essential Guide to the Left Hand Path*. Smithville, TX: Rûna-Raven Press, 1999, 108.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Don Webb. *Mysteries of the Temple of Set*. Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2004, 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* On page 7 of *Mysteries* Webb indicates that the Gift is one of Imagination: "In the realm without imagination there is no immortality."

¹⁷ Webb, *Mysteries*, 55.

¹⁸ A further area of research I plan on undertaking is seeing how these three approaches to Set can be applied to the Self.

¹⁹ Webb, *Mysteries*, 7.

²⁰ Webb, *Mysteries*, 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Webb, *Mysteries*, 55.

²³ Aquino, *The Book of Coming Forth by Night in The Temple of Set*, Appendix 2.

²⁴ Jung, "Wotan", *CW10*, pgs. 179-193.

²⁵ Jung, *Letters*, v.2, 172.

²⁶ Jung, *Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1928-1930 by C.G. Jung*, William McGuire, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 217.

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- CW 10- Civilization in Transition* (1964; 2nd ed., 1970)
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