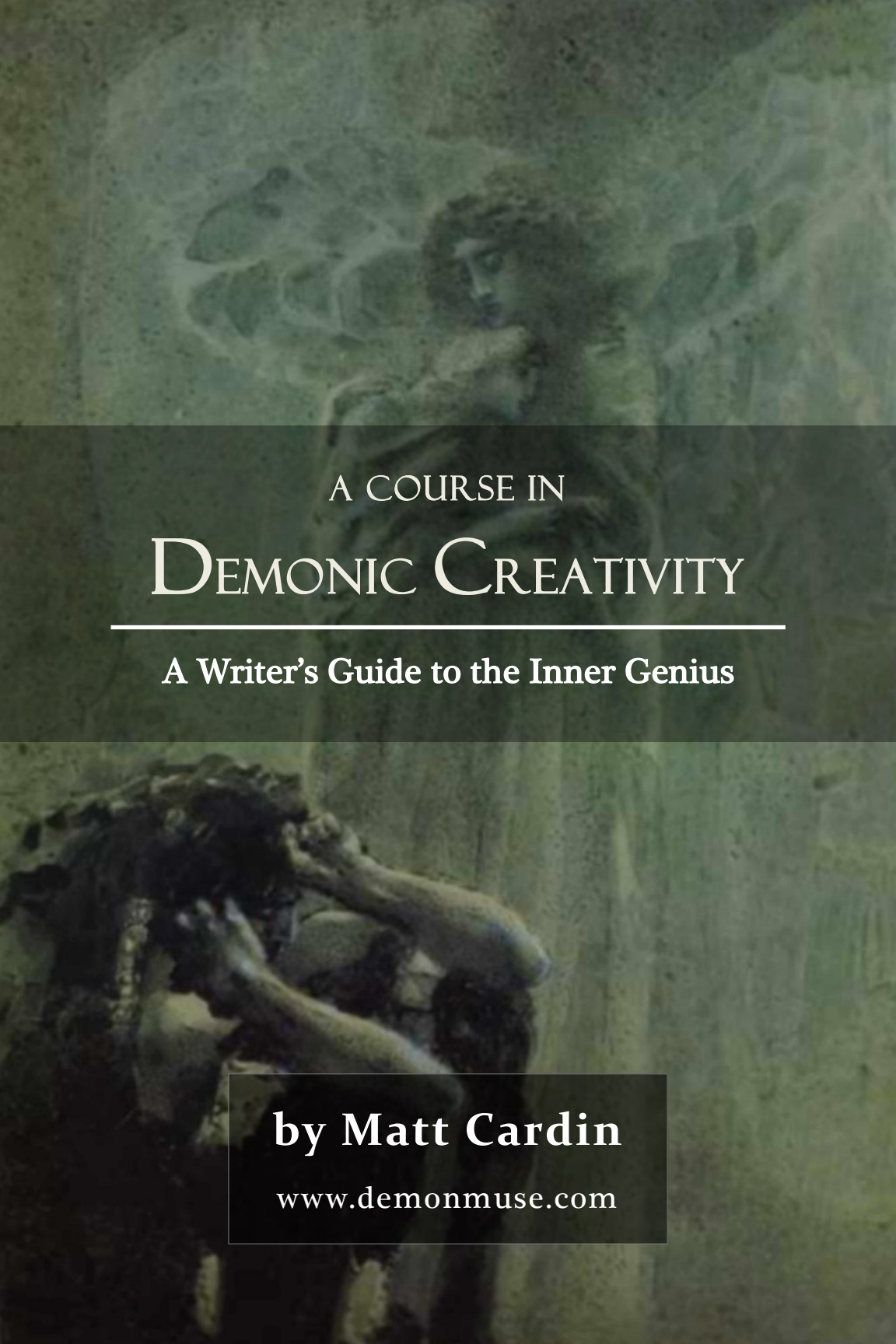

A COURSE IN DEMONIC CREATIVITY

A Writer's Guide to the Inner Genius

by Matt Cardin

www.demonmuse.com

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Cover image: "Demon and Angel with Tamara's Soul" (1891) by Mikhail Alexandrovich Vrubel [public domain], an illustration for Mikhail Lermontov's *The Demon* (1842), via Wikimedia Commons

But if a man comes to the door of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that technique alone will make him a good poet, he and his sane companions never reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman.

— Plato

The task of setting free one's gifts was a recognized labor in the ancient world…It was believed that each man had his idios daemon*, his personal spirit which could be cultivated and developed…The* genius *or* daemon *comes to us at birth. It carries with it the fullness of our undeveloped powers. These it offers to us as we grow, and we choose whether or not to accept, which means we choose whether or not to labor in its service.*

— Lewis Hyde

This leap of the intellect defies rational analysis. It is invention (and every job is a new invention), the fire from heaven, the inspiration of the muse, the dictates of the genius, the promptings of the daimon, the brainwave, the wheeze. It can neither be planned nor counted on, it can only be wooed—and can equally be stifled.

— A.J. Harris

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INTRODUCTION

Where does creativity come from? Why do ideas and inspiration feel as if they come from "outside," from an external source that's separate from us but able to whisper ideas directly into the mind? Why have so many writers throughout history—and also composers, painters, philosophers, mystics, and scientists—spoken of being guided, accompanied, and even haunted by a force or presence that not only serves as the deep source of their creative work but exerts a kind of profound and inexorable gravitational pull on the shape of their lives?

These are all questions addressed by the ebook you're now reading. *A Course in Demonic Creativity* is a book about the deep nature of artistic and life-level creativity. Its starting point is the proposition that we all possess a higher or deeper intelligence than the everyday mind, and that learning to live and work harmoniously and energetically with this intelligence is the irreducible core of a successful artistic life, and also of a successful life as a whole, if true success is defined as fulfilling the purpose for which you were born (and failure as its soul-crushing opposite).

We can call this intelligence the unconscious mind or the silent partner. We can call it the id or the secret self. But "muse," "daimon," and "genius" are so much more effective at conveying its subversive and electrifying emotional charge. The hundred-year history of modern-day depth psychology that started with Freud has numbed us to the

radicalness inherent in the very idea of an unconscious mind, but we can begin to reclaim the transformative power of the original psychoanalytical insight by recognizing that right now, even as our eyes dance across this page or screen, and as a matter of brute, first-person fact, each of us is sharing his or her subjective space with a second self. Presently and always, there are at least two intelligences looking out from behind our eyes.

We can also begin to intuit the uncanny impact of this recognition by recalling that the idea of demonic possession in its distinctively Christian and pre-Christian form arose from the very same thought stream that gave us the muse and the daimon. The guiding daimon of the ancient Greeks, always an ambiguous and volatile figure, became the purely evil demon of the Christians, prone to usurp the personality and destabilize the community. At the same time, aspects of it were channeled into the emerging figure of the Christian guardian angel. So if we seek to enhance our art by fashioning ourselves into conduits for this force—a common enough goal, recommended by many popular books on creativity and self-development (very few of which, however, actually mention the muse, daimon, or genius)—then we're playing, as it were, with fire. But that certainly shouldn't stop us. Deliberately personifying your unconscious mind, whether as an act of pure attitudinal adjustment or a more concrete matter of giving it a name and imagining its visual appearance, makes it all the more easy and manageable to hand over your

creative problems to it, and then later to accept the breakthrough insights and rushes of inspiration when they emerge.

What follows is a substantial expansion and integration (for purposes of making a coherent book) of articles that were originally published at my blog Demon Muse, as well as at other blogs and websites. To get their overall feeling, imagine a college lecture course, or better, a graduate seminar, where the point isn't so much to lay out a strict structure of assignments and information in lesson-plan format as to engage in an open, yet focused, conversation about the subject, and to see where it takes us. Chapter One serves as a kind of template for the book as a whole, and broaches many themes that are explored later in more detail and depth. Chapter Two traces the historical and cultural origins of the daimon and the genius, and explains their profound relevance to creative work. Chapter Three lays out a basic working model of the psyche, tailored to the needs and interests of writers and artists, and keyed to the information in the previous chapter. Together, the first three chapters communicate the philosophical, psychological, spiritual, historical, cultural, and general theoretical background to the book's muse-based approach to daimonic creativity. The remaining six chapters explore the practical applications of this understanding to our lives as writers and artists, from figuring out our individual missions and directions to understanding the impact of "inner collaboration" on our practical working methods. Throughout the book, I draw extensively on the multitude of

writers and thinkers whose work has profoundly informed and enriched my own understanding.

Taken together, these discussions and explorations form a loose course in what might be called the Way of the Muse or the Path of Deep Inspiration. I've given it the overarching title *A Course in Demonic Creativity* not only because it has a nice ring to it, but because this captures the presiding spirit. As touched on above, and as will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Two, the word *demon* carries a host of deep meanings that have been largely lost to modern awareness, and their excavation reveals the fascinating, troubling, exhilarating, terrifying depths of what it means to be saddled with this pervasive and inescapable sense of a separate, guiding, inspiring, dominating presence within the psyche. Coming to terms with this presence, getting in stride with it, divining its leanings and desires, learning to embrace it, and identify with it, and "channel" its energy—this is the deep discipline of embodying and fulfilling your unique creative calling in life and art.

Your unconscious mind truly is your "genius." Befriending it as such, and interacting with it as if it really is a separate, collaborating presence, puts you in a position to receive its gifts, and it in the position to give them to you. This book, drawn from my own personal experiences and studies as an author, musician, and inner explorer, is my attempt to explain what this really entails for writers and artists, and how you can verify it for yourself.

About the Author

When someone has the audacity to offer you advice about creativity, particularly when they tie it to wider issues of life and psyche, it's important to check their credentials. The recognition of this fact leads me to offer you the following paragraphs about myself in order to spare you the trouble of Googling me (although if you still want to do that, you'll find plenty of information). At the same time, as I've gone about writing this self-profile—and more, as I've gone about writing this book as a whole—I've been haunted by the voice of one of my early and important philosophical influences, who warned us all to take with a grain of salt any person who "inflates himself to writing books of advice like this one."[1] With that front and center, here's the least you may need to know in order to feel that I'm worth listening to.

By title, occupation, and existential gravity, I'm a writer, college teacher, and musician. My two previous books, *Divinations of the Deep* (Ash-Tree Press, 2002) and *Dark Awakenings* (Mythos Books, 2010), explore the intersection of religion and horror. My work has appeared in anthologies, magazines, journals, websites, and reference works, including *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, *Cemetery Dance*, *Lovecraft Studies*, *The Encyclopedia of the Vampire*, and *Icons of Horror and the*

[1] Thaddeus Golas, *The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 1995; 1972), 95.

Supernatural. It has also been praised by *Publishers Weekly*, recommended for the British Fantasy Award, and long-listed for the Bram Stoker Award. I've appeared as an expert panelist at the World Horror Convention, the World Fantasy Convention, and other writing and publishing conferences, and have spoken about my horror writing and the psychological/spiritual experiences behind it on radio and podcasts, including the nationally syndicated Mancow Muller Show. I'm also a professional blogger with a portfolio of satisfied clients in the corporate and nonprofit worlds.

There may be more to say. I have a master's degree in religious studies; I was Glen Campbell's video director in Branson, Missouri; in 2009 I released an album of electronic/instrumental music titled *Daemonyx: Curse of the Daimon*, which crosses over directly with major themes in the book you're now reading. But the upshot is that I've had a long involvement in writing and publishing (especially in the horror field), the arts, and the study of creativity, psychology, religion, and related matters, and that in all of my creative pursuits, the idea of the demon muse, the compelling, personified psychic force that whispers directly into the mind and inspires equal parts exhilaration and dread, has come to define my creative process, and has even entered into the subject matter of my work itself, the present ebook being the most pointed example.

So those are my credentials. They may or may not add up to my being a good guide. That's a judgment for you to make.

Demonic Creativity

Chapter One

Perspiration Meets Inspiration, or The Return of the Muse

We all know the old saw, usually attributed to Thomas Edison, that "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." The problem with this ubiquitous speck of folk wisdom, despite its undeniable dose of insight, is that it not only provides a catchall cliché for scoffing at those who dare to suggest that inspiration plays a crucial and substantial role in creative work, but it—or at least the commonly received understanding of it—plainly and grossly misrepresents the relationship between creative inspiration and active effort. In an interview for NPR's *Radiolab*, Elizabeth Gilbert characterized the saying (while attributing it to Henry Ford) as "a very mechanical way to divide it up. [It] assumes those two things have equal weight, that they're the same quality. I agree with ninety-nine percent inspiration and one percent perspiration, but it's ninety-nine percent oyster and one percent pearl. You can't

even compare the matter. It's a bargain to get one percent inspiration."[2]

So right here at the start of this exploration, let it be said once and for all: inspiration and effort are not contradictory but complementary. Their relationship is mutually enhancing. Each enables and empowers the other. What's more, the ancient model of creativity that views inspiration as the experience of being inwardly filled with ideas, emotions, energies, and images from an external source offers an ideal conceptual vehicle for grasping and using this truth. It's also an idea that is right now gaining cultural and spiritual currency as it revives from a long historical hibernation.

A species of divine madness

The muse model tells us that creativity can be pictured as an external force or presence that visits a person on its own timetable and inspires him or her—that is, "breathes into" him or her—the idea and motivation to perform some sort of work. "It comes from the gods," says Steven Pressfield, author of *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, a series of best-selling historical novels, and the awesome creativity guides *The War of Art* and *Do the Work*. "It's a species of divine madness. Socrates called the poetic variety of this condition 'possession by the Muses' (and rated it

[2] "Me, Myself, and Muse," narrated by Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, Radiolab, March 8, 2011, http://www.radiolab.org/2011/mar/08/me-myself-and-muse.

superior to technical mastery), though he could have referred with equal accuracy to seizure by any Olympian deity.[3]

Those of an Edisonian cast of mind have tended to view such statements as nothing more than an excuse for idleness and/or a discouragement from the hard work that's the real secret of successful creativity. The idea of "waiting for inspiration," they warn us, is just a euphemism for laziness. But in point of fact, far from encouraging laziness, the muse model of creativity represents the very epitome of proactiveness when rightly understood, for it counsels an active approach to waiting on creative inspiration that entails the strictest sort of discipline.

Waiting and working

As I'll discuss at greater length in Chapter Seven, the type of waiting that goes with creative inspiration is analogous to the type of waiting that's commonly counseled in religious and spiritual contexts. In Zen Buddhism, for example, zazen meditation is framed as a method of waiting for enlightenment, which cannot be actively achieved but (usually) must be actively courted. In the New Testament, Jesus, Paul, and others talk repeatedly about the importance of waiting attentively for the appearance of God, the arrival of the Son of Man, the End of the Age, the

[3] Steven Pressfield, "Depth of Work, Part Two," Steven Pressfield Online, March 3, 2010, http://www.stevenpressfield.com/2010/03/writing-wednesdays-29-depth-of-work-part-two.

coming of the Holy Spirit, and so on (all of which some theologians and spiritual thinkers have interpreted as metaphors for the experience of divine illumination). The correspondence with creative work is obvious: the quality of one's mindstate is crucial while waiting for creative inspiration to spark, and it's our job as writers to cultivate and maintain the right inner state and attitude for receiving the muse's messages.

Nor is reliance on the muse an excuse for laziness. Active waiting doesn't exclude effort and practice. In fact, it demands it. What good is a muse if you don't have the technical facility to embody her words when she speaks? The most profoundly wonderful performances, the really memorable effusions of brilliance that endure as true works of art with real personal and cultural significance, come through those individuals who are both inspired and expert, those who have learned to commune and collaborate with their inner genius, and have likewise honed and refined their technical skills in their particular art form so that they can effortlessly express the inspiration that comes to them. "[H]ave you trained yourself so that you can say what you want to say without getting hamstrung?" asks Ray Bradbury in *Zen in the Art of Writing: Releasing the Creative Genius within You*. "[W]e are working not for work's sake, producing not for production's sake…What we are trying to do is to find

a way to release the truth that lies in all of us."[4]

The inner alien

So this all gives the lie to the perspiration-inspiration dichotomy. But a valid question still remains: Why refer to muses, personal geniuses, and personal daimons at all? Why not speak of inspiration generically and avoid invoking those troublesome figures from ancient religion and mythology at all? It's a reasonable question. There's also a reasonable answer, and it's found in the sheer utility of the muse model, both psychologically and artistically.

Psychologically, the idea of creative inspiration as the infusion of ideas from a personified external presence gives us a name and concept by which to understand and employ a fundamental truth about human psychology. As an apparently irreducible phenomenological fact of first-person experience, we are all divided, roughly speaking, into two major selves, the conscious ego and the unconscious mind. The unconscious feels to the ego like an alien visitor, an "other" within the psyche. Invoking the concepts of the muse, daimon, and genius to explain this situation provides us with a conceptual hook to hang our hat on, a useful metaphor that's packed with subtle meanings and benefits. It also helps to guard against two very real dangers: the alternating ego inflation and

[4] Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing: Releasing the Creative Genius within You* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 47, 133.

deflation that occur when we claim sole credit for our work, and the destructive attitude of rationalist-empiricist reductionism that commonly characterizes our view of the unconscious mind (see below).

Artistically, the muse model is useful because it corresponds perfectly to the steps of the creative process as we have come to understand them in terms of incubation, illumination, and so on (see Chapter Six). It also imparts an exotic-electric emotional charge to the whole thing that promises to stimulate creativity in general, as witnessed by, among other phenomena, the widespread expressions of fascination and delight that greeted Gilbert's 2009 TED talk about the need to resurrect the idea of genius as something that one *has* (as the ancient Greeks and Romans taught) instead of something that one *is* (as we've all been taught to think for the past three hundred years). And then there's the rather epic "high" value of the concept, as argued by Herbert Read in "The Poet and His Muse": "[T]he myth or image of the Muse in art personifies certain stratagems of the creative imagination that enable the artist to endow his work with universal significance."[5] In other words, if we regard art as coming not solely from the confines of an individual man or woman's private psyche but from a deep and mysterious spiritual source that speaks from elsewhere, then we also have to concede that art may well,

[5] Herbert Read, "The Poet and His Muse," *British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1964): 99.

and probably will, express meanings pertinent to us all.

The difficulty, of course, is the question over whether the decision to view the situation this way is merely arbitrary and instrumental or a recognition of a real truth supported by facts and experience. In this book you'll find me repeatedly hinting that there may be a middle ground between these options, and that this luminal zone is the most fruitful mental position for a writer to occupy.

Rehabilitating the muse

Another reasonable question arises in response to all of this: If the muse, genius, and daimon are so life-giving and useful, then how did the perspiration-inspiration dichotomy ever get so entrenched in common thought? How did the very idea of inspiration get so devalued in the first place? The answer lies beyond the scope of this essay, but it can be summarized in four words: Enlightenment rationalism and scientistic reductionism.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, the intellectual and cultural revolution that gave birth to modern science in the West was accompanied by a revolution in our collective conception of the inner, psychological life. Exotic states of consciousness—exotic relative to the newly minted materialistic conception of life and the universe, that is—were anathematized, as were all the formerly universal notions of the human soul having traffic with angels, demons, and spirits. Art, literature, and

other creative products were now deemed to be the result of sheer human invention, as powered by the newly internalized conception of genius as discussed by Gilbert (who probably drew her ideas at least in part from Ken Frieden's 1985 book *Genius and Monologue*, which is well worth your time to track down). Certainly, there were champions of the older view. Goethe, for example, valiantly defended the ancient view both philosophically and existentially at the turn of the nineteenth century. Jung and the entire field of analytical psychology championed it via their central concept of the objectivity (i.e., the independent reality) of the psyche throughout the twentieth century. Jung spoke and wrote openly about daimons and muses. But this kind of thing officially remained nothing more than a quirky backdoor phenomenon, wonderful as fodder for conversations at high-end cocktail parties, or, in the case of Jung, for providing talking points for Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*, but finally and firmly divorced from the really respectable discourse that embodied the collective common sense of the era's high intellectual culture. The end result was that nobody, not Goethe, not Jung, could keep the muse and her kin from falling into semi-official disrepute among the mainstream Western literati and intelligentsia.

Today, however, the tables are turning, and the muse, genius, and daimon are being resurrected and rehabilitated for a new era. This is evident from a number of striking data points, some of which can seem arbitrary and trivial at first, but which upon further inspection show up as

really remarkable for what they reveal about a widespread sea change in perceptions and attitudes toward creativity and related fields such as psychology, philosophy, and spirituality. All kinds of topics and issues that have been largely framed as ludicrous or negligible by mainstream Western intellectual culture for a very long time, including, especially, ones related to all of those former notions of a multiplicity of forces in the human psyche, are now being given a serious hearing.

Consider, for example, this loosely related chain of recent developments in the American publishing world: In 1997, archetypal psychologist James Hillman landed on American best-seller lists with *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, a thoroughly daimon-based exploration of creativity and life mission. This came shortly after forensic psychologist Stephen Diamond charted significantly related territory in *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic: The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil, and Creativity* (1996). Diamond's book was republished in a new edition in 2006, and currently he has a blog at the *Psychology Today* website titled "Evil Deeds," where he talks about matters related to the book and writes articles with striking titles and themes, such as "Giving the Devil His Due: Exorcism, Psychotherapy, and Possession Syndrome." When Diamond's book was originally published, it came right on the heels of the 2005 launch of British novelist Philip Pullman's best-selling young adult fantasy series *His Dark Materials*, whose overarching fictional-philosophical cosmology is centered prominently upon the idea

of personal daemons.

In 1990, psychiatrist Rick Strassman received U.S. government approval to begin conducting the first research into the effects of psychedelic drugs on human subjects in more than 20 years. His resulting work with DMT raised legitimate questions about the reductionist materialist view of the world and the possible reality of autonomous, other-dimensional entities that sometimes communicate and interact with humans. He wrote about his research in *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (2000), a book that spawned a 2010 documentary film, and that had significant things to say about the relationship between psychedelics, intra-psychic "encounter" experiences, and creativity.

In 2006, journalist and psychedelic culture hero Daniel Pinchbeck, who had previously been identified by *The New York Times* magazine as one of thirty young Americans likely to have a profound impact on the culture, published *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl*, a book about the meme of the 2012 apocalypse as related to the modern-day renaissance of shamanism with its bustling psychic cosmology of powers and entities. It culminated in a several-page message that Pinchbeck, speaking with all due self-consciousness and self-skepticism, said he had experienced as a literal transmission to him and through him from the great Mesoamerican deity named in the title. The book became a kind of philosophical touchstone for an army of like-minded readers. *Time Out New York* praised it as "the most fascinating publishing oddity of the season."

Publishers Weekly described it as "a paradigm-buster capable of forcing the most cynical reader outside her comfort zone."

The same year saw the publication of *Is There Life after Death: The Extraordinary Science of What Happens after We Die* by British author Anthony Peake. This one, too, became something of a sensation, and two years later Peake published a sequel in which he further explicated his fascinating daimonic model of consciousness and amplified it with an analysis of muse-based creativity. The title was *The Daemon: A Guide to Your Extraordinary Secret Self*, and the book arrived on the scene right around the same time Gilbert, who was famous for writing *Eat, Pray, Love*—a fairly galactic best-seller of a memoir that showed the author seeking and receiving unexpected guidance from a spiritual source—all but shook the world with her talk about muses and geniuses at the 2008 installment of the zeitgeist-gauging TED Conference.

Whatever else may be true of the current cultural moment, this much is certain: the baseline of what's acceptable to talk about in public without expecting to be sneered at is rapidly and fundamentally shifting, and much of the new conversation involves issues that are directly related to our central concern here in this book. If muses and daimons were locked out of respectable discourse beginning in and around the eighteenth century, then today the increasingly widespread fascination with them and their kin shows that they have unquestionably begun to reenter through the backdoor of our collective psyche. As is, we may note, their wont.

Daimonic creativity in an age of apocalypse

There's more than a mere dose of synchronicity involved in the fact that this subtle but epic return has been accompanied by a wave of apocalyptic sentiment that's even now sweeping through the developed world. At some point in the first decade of the twenty-first century—or perhaps in the final decade of the twentieth, if we date from the onset of Y2K mania—"doomerism," the giddy, gut-level sense that we're living in an age of apocalypse and meltdown, went from being a venerable subcultural phenomenon to a vibrant mainstream one. Peak oil, economic collapse, catastrophic climate change, and other dire scenarios that were formerly fringe obsessions moved center stage and started playing on the minds and lips of ordinary people. Currently, my in-laws, my birth family, my friends, and my co-workers all tend toward the opinion that we're living collectively through a fundamental breakdown in the nature of things. Some think of it religiously and metaphysically. Others read it in purely political, economic, social, and/or cultural terms. All share it as a defining emotional coloration. Just a few years ago, I was a lone crank squawking in the wilderness of my social circumstance whenever I got a bit too worked up about my sense of some great doom descending on our collective way of life here in America and around the world. Today, on the rare occasions when I enter the same mode, I find I'm preaching to the choir.

Jung thought, apparently correctly, that the personal psychic upheaval he experienced after his break with Freud in 1913 was a premonition of the outbreak of World War I. Seventy-six years later, in October 2009, his fabled *The Red Book* or *Liber Novus*, which had its origin in that psychic emergency, and which served as the literary *fons et origo* of his developing philosophy of psychic objectivity, finally saw the light of day in a truly historic publishing event. In appropriately synchronistic fashion, it dropped right into a rich cultural stew whose apocalyptic simmer was just then reaching the boiling point.

In light of all this, one can't help speculating that the reawakening muse's contribution to human life may really and truly be bound up with the sense of universal significance that Herbert Read identified in certain works of art, and that this significance may extend into the wider world of life at large with its unfolding of inexorable historical-cultural trajectories and collective spiritual and psychological experiences. As our world continues to change in dramatically interesting ways, the discipline of learning to wait, in the deep and vibrant sense, on the action of this alien presence in the soul may prove a more necessary and vital thing than most of us, Edisonians and otherwise, have ever suspected.

CHAPTER TWO

A Brief History of the Daimon and the Genius

The understanding of creativity as a mysterious external force with which you carry on "a peculiar, wondrous, bizarre collaboration and conversation"[6] (to quote Gilbert's vivid characterization of the inner relationship) redefines the customary view of things in our contemporary culture and endows the artist with new gifts and responsibilities. This insight is fundamental to the whole outlook I'm presenting here. It's also paired with a corollary proposition: that a conscious, working knowledge of the intertwined histories of the daimon and the genius in religion, psychology, and philosophy is indispensible.

What follows is distilled from my long essay "Icons of Supernatural Horror: A Brief History of the Angel and the Demon," which appears in my book *Dark Awakenings*. A shorter but still substantial version appears in the two-volume encyclopedia *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural* from Greenwood Press. If you want to enhance your creative life, one of the most potent ways to do it is to get a real handle on not just the bare information I'm about to relate, but on the actual, living

[6] *Elizabeth Gilbert on nurturing creativity* [video], retrieved July 14, 2011, http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius.html.

cosmology of the psyche it describes. It's not just something you read about or think about. It's an epiphany that overturns your world.

The Greeks and their *daimones*

Both the idea of the daimon and the idea of the muse come to us from the ancient Greeks, who in addition to worshiping the gods and goddesses familiar to all of us through the stories of classical mythology believed in spirits they called *daimones* or daimons (known more commonly today by the variant spelling "daemons"; see below). In fact, if we are to believe classical scholar Reginald Barrow, worship of the daimons made up an underground mainstream in ancient Greek religion: "Because the daemons have left few memorials of themselves in architecture and literature, their importance tends to be overlooked…They are omnipresent and all-powerful, they are embedded deep in the religious memories of the peoples, for they go back to days long before the days of Greek philosophy and religion. The cults of the Greek states, recognised and officially sanctioned, were only one-tenth of the iceberg; the rest, the submerged nine-tenths, were the daemons."[7]

In one respect the daimons weren't very different from the animistic spirits that have populated the belief systems of all peoples throughout

[7] Quoted in Stephen A. Diamond, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic: The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil, and Creativity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 67.

history. They were thought to be local, limited spirits who inhabited certain places, affected the weather, brought good and bad luck, and so on. But the Greeks also held a more distinctly spiritualized or psychologized view that eventually outstripped the first. In this second version, the daimons were understood to exist deep within the human psyche or spirit, where they made themselves known through their influence upon human thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and actions. They were conceived as intermediate spirits, neither divine nor human but bridging the gap between the two realms, whose function was to mediate the will and messages of the gods to people, and vice versa. It was such a potent concept that it eventually swept through the ancient world and became one of the cornerstones of Western psychological and spiritual thought. The iconic figures of both the angel and the demon in Western religion have their origins in the ancient Greek daimons, as combined with ancient Jewish beliefs about spiritual hierarchies, which themselves had been inherited from Zoroastrianism (a long and complex line of influence, to be sure, and one that I explore in some depth in my above-mentioned "Angel and Demon" essay).

The Romans and their genii

In Hellenistic Rome (circa 4th-1st centuries BCE), the word *genius*, like the Greek daimon, came to refer to spirit beings in general. Tangentially, and interestingly, it also had a direct connection to the word *genie*,

which itself derived along obscure lines from the ancient Persian desert demons known as the *djinn* (singular: *djinnee*, that is, *genie*). In the course of Rome's enthusiastic absorption and imperial broadcasting of everything having to do with Greek culture, the idea of the genius inherited, and was eventually fused with, all of the meanings and connotations associated with the Greek daimons. Thus was born the idea of the personal genius, the individual attendant spirit that accompanies a person through life and represents his or her divine intelligence and inbuilt destiny. This concept, like that of the daimon, exerted a profound influence on the course and tenor of Western intellectual, religious, and artistic history for two millennia, until the cultural explosion of a new type of humanism arising out of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in the 15th through the 18th centuries subsumed the idea of the genius under the newly emerging rubric of autonomous human selfhood and egoic heroism. The genius as a separate, guiding spirit was transformed rather suddenly into the radically altered notion of an extraordinary intellectual intelligence or artistic giftedness that is possessed by only a few exceptional people.

This was a significant reversal, since it meant the idea of genius went from referring to a separate force or entity that guided and inspired people to referring to a special inner quality owned by people themselves. Instead of a genius that inspired and possessed artists, the culture now had artists who possessed the quality of genius. Among the Romantics of

the 18th and 19th centuries, there persisted a "cult of genius" that held onto some of the concept's earlier meanings, but the overall course of things still tended inexorably toward the absorption of the idea of genius into the human psyche.

Daimons in the modern world

The twentieth century saw several stirrings of what might be termed a daimonic revival. The interconnected web of publishing events in the last 20 years, some of which I noted in the previous chapter, is just one part of a larger story that includes such major players as psychologist Rollo May, who famously turned to the ancient concept of the daimonic for help in articulating his understanding of the human psyche. In his classic book *Love and Will* (1969), he described the daimonic in terms that clarify the actual experiential side of what the Greeks and other ancient peoples were talking about when they referred to spirits that acted with an inner force upon the human mind and personality: "The daimonic is any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person. Sex and eros, anger and rage, and the craving for power are examples. The daimonic can be either creative or destructive and is normally both."[8]

This last idea—that the daimonic can be creative or destructive, and

[8] Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969), 123.

that it often expresses itself in both modes at once—winds its way through the entire history of art and literature, and is something of an accepted truism even among those who haven't articulated it as clearly as May. For those do hold a self-aware knowledge of it, the polar tension embedded in the daimonic can even become an object of artistic representation in itself. Science fiction legend and literary force of nature Harlan Ellison, for example, concluded his classic short horror story "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs" (1973), about worshipers of an ancient god of violence and brutality in modern-day New York, with an epigraph drawn from May's book that connects the modern experiences of social alienation and urban violence to an upsurge of daimonic energy stemming from widespread experiences of psychological alienation and dehumanization. In other words, Ellison posits that the story's dark god is only active because of modern urban society's creative-spiritual deadness.

As noted in Chapter One, Stephen Diamond's *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic* is subtitled "The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil, and Creativity." The book is organized around Diamond's exploration of the interrelationships among the three named areas; he writes of "the intimate relationship between the daimonic and creativity," and observes that "There has always been a connection linking creativity—and religiosity—with the transforming phenomenon of daimonic possession…'Creativity' can be broadly defined as *the constructive utilization of*

the daimonic."[9]

Jung, whom we've also already mentioned, was another major figure who invoked the concept of the daimonic to help explain the nature and workings of the human psyche. With his exquisitely developed articulation of the idea of "psychic objectivity," which, again, is the understanding that the human psyche is as real as the physical world and must therefore be recognized and interacted with as a reality in its own right, Jung recalled the major tropes of the ancient daimonic psychology of the Greeks. He also took pains to point out that this is hardly a new insight: "the idea of psychic objectivity is by no means a new discovery," he said. "It is in fact one of the earliest and most universal acquisitions of humanity: it is nothing less than the conviction as to the concrete existence of a spirit world…'Spirit' is a psychic fact."[10]

From daimons to demons (and angels)

Of special interest is the connection between the word "daimon" and its modern descendent, "demon." At some point during the Dark or Middle Ages, the Greek word *daimon* became the Latinized *dæmon* or *daemon*. Eventually the "ai" that had mutated into "æ" or "ae" collapsed

[9] Diamond, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*, 133, 136, 256. Emphasis in original.

[10] *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 136.

into the simple "e" of the modern word. As we all know, a demon in the modern sense is an exclusively evil being that, according to Christian theology, was formerly an angel until it rebelled against the almighty monotheistic God. But when you mentally travel back in time and strip away the various religious and historical accretions and interpretations, you eventually encounter the ancient, pre-Christian dæmons or daimons, which are much more ambiguous and multidimensional, and which, as mentioned above, served not just as a source for the Christian demon but for the Christian angel as well. The conventionally positive and life-giving aspects of the daimon were channeled into the figure of the angel, while its dark, negative, wild, destructive aspects went to the demon. Many writers, especially in the fantasy and horror genres, have made a practice of using the more archaic spelling, referring to daemons instead of demons when they want to invoke these older, wider connotations. (Think of the epithet H.P. Lovecraft often used to describe Azathoth, his fictional horrific god of ultimate chaos: "the daemon sultan.") The uniting of the modern angel-figure and demon-figure in the daimon (and genius) helps to underscore the simultaneous fear and fascination, terror and joy, dread and exhilaration, destructiveness and creativity, that accompanies both the abstract idea of the daimon and the actual experience of its eruptions into consciousness and daily life. (For more on the implications of the *dai*monic vs. the *de*monic in the experience of creative inspiration, see Chapter Seven.)

Your daimon and your destiny

For creative artists, and probably for everyone else as well, one of the most potent and meaningful ideas about the daimon and genius that we have inherited from the ancient Greeks and Romans is the idea that each person is accompanied through life by a specific daimon/genius with whom he or she was paired before birth. In this view, the daimon is the accompanying "higher self" that holds, guards, and represents the spiritual template for the life a person is intended to lead by the gods—or rather, the life that each person has *chosen* to lead; the major version of the story, coming to us from Plato, holds that each of us was allowed before birth to choose his or her daimon.

We've all noticed that everyone seems to be born with certain preset predilections and personality traits. It seems that each of us possesses, or rather is possessed by, a set of innate passions and interests, attractions and aversions, traits and tendencies. It also often seems that we're each led to encounter and experience certain kinds of life experiences and circumstances that are beyond our power to prevent or control. The theory of the daimon explains such phenomena as the magnetic workings of our guardian spirit or higher self, which inevitably keeps drawing us back into alignment with our pre-chosen life template. In this regard, we can observe a particularly interesting manifestation of this nexus of ideas in the "Holy Guardian Angel" of modern Western occultism and

esotericism, which each practitioner is charged with contacting in order to initiate and further his or her spiritual development. (For a detailed exploration of this subject, see the Demon Muse website and my article "In Search of Higher Intelligence: Aleister Crowley, Timothy Leary, Robert Anton Wilson," in which I look at the experiences of the three named individuals in contacting the Holy Guardian Angel or "higher intelligence.")

Importantly, crucially—and to start drawing out the real-world creative and personal implications of all these things—you don't actually have to believe any of this in a literal sense in order to feel its artistic-emotional pull and sense its marvelous explanatory power. It's possible to view the idea of the daimon as nothing more than a perfect metaphor that encapsulates a profound truth about human experience and allows us to work with it productively. This was the tack taken by, for example, May, who, as we've seen, referred not to daimons but to "the daimonic," conceived as a force or reality in the psyche but not as an actual being or entity. "The daimonic," he wrote, "is obviously not an entity but refers to a fundamental, archetypal function of human experience—an existential reality in modern man and, so far as we know, in all men."[11] On the other hand, British scholar Patrick Harpur, author of the wonderful brain-and-mind-changing *Daimonic Reality: A Field Guide to the Otherworld*,

[11] May, *Love and Will*, 123.

regards the daimonic realm as truly the realm of daimons, although not literally so—an ontological distinction he makes with great subtlety as he traces the cultural route by which the liminal zone of the daimons was simultaneously banished from mainstream Western intellectual culture and given a new home not in some external spiritual space but in the human psyche, resulting in a situation wherein our very perceptions are affected: "Imagination is independent and autonomous; it precedes and underpins mere perception; and it spontaneously produces those images—gods, daimons, and heroes—who interact in the mysterious unauthored narratives we call myths…We need double vision [i.e., the mode of poetic perception championed by William Blake] to see the daimons—to see that they are real, but not literally so. Unfortunately we have become so literal-minded that the only reality we recognize is literal reality which, by definition, rules out the daimons…But wherever they have as it were broken the surface and emerged from their 'esoteric,' even 'occult' underworld, they have been accompanied by the most extraordinary efflorescence of creative life."[12]

It's also possible to refuse to assign the daimons an ontological status at all. This seems to be the approach of, for instance, archetypal psychologist James Hillman, who studied under Jung, and who for the past

[12] Patrick Harpur, "Seeing Things: The Daimonic Nature of Reality," *Seven Pillars*, February 24, 2011, http://www.sevenpillarshouse.org/article/seeing_things. Reprinted from *Elixir Magazine*, No. 3 (Autumn 2006).

several decades has arguably served as the heir apparent to the Jungian tradition. Hillman devoted the whole of his best-selling 1997 book *The Soul's Code* to laying out his theory of the daimon as a kind of life calling which can serve as a permanent source of personal orientation. And he did so while consciously refusing to define this presiding idea as "real" or "fictional"—which perhaps lands them in Harpur's real-but-not-literal category.

My personal daimonic passion, and yours

For a practical illustration of these matters, I present you with some details from the case of myself and my own lifelong struggle and engagement with the artistic temperament and its accompanying daimonic passions.

When I was eight years old, I started taking piano lessons. My identification with the instrument was immediate. I took to it as if I had been waiting all my life to play it. The same instantaneous identification likewise happened with books, reading, and writing. At the age of three and four I got so frustrated at my inability to read that I sometimes cried over it. Later, when I was in high school and college, my passion for playing music became linked to an additional passion to compose it. During and after college my desire to write (short fiction, essays, and more) went volcanic, resulting eventually in publication. Today this entire webwork of passions remains vitally active in a mutually reinforcing loop. My

writing flows into my musical pursuits, which link into my reading life, which reciprocally feed into and flow out of my writing passions. In daimonic terms, the self-sustaining momentum of these interlinked pursuits, none of which I could neglect or deny without becoming inauthentic to what I experience myself to be on the deepest and most personal level, indicates that these things are aspects of my personal daimonic calling.

The same principle applies not only to the activities themselves but to the subject matter that I'm naturally drawn to explore. Without my being able to prevent or explain it, there has always been something dark, dreary, horrific, melancholic, and/or mournful lurking beneath the surface and often breaking through into plain sight in all of my creative works. I'm also ineluctably drawn to explore philosophical and spiritual ideas like the ones I'm discussing here. By the time I encountered the concepts of the daimon and the personal genius, I had already spent many years musing over my sense of being driven by a motivating force that I couldn't understand, a force that led me to feel passionate about things I hadn't chosen and couldn't control. The daimon theory gave me a name and context for contemplating these things more effectively.

And of course I'm not alone in all of this. You, too, have your own daimon or genius. It shows up in your inbuilt likes and dislikes, passions and aversions, drives and talents, and also in the life circumstances to which you feel magnetically drawn, and which appear to be magically

drawn to you. Learning how to understand the very concept of the daimon or genius as a psychically objective reality—as the very objectivity of the psyche itself—can be a major step in discovering and coming to terms with the calling that's implanted in you. And if you're still concerned with the question of its reality or unreality, I invite you to meditate on this insight from Hillman: "Our archetypal fictions keep their mythopoeic, their truly fictional, character beyond what we do or say about them. We can never be certain whether we imagine them or they imagine us, since creation myths always place Gods prior to mankind. All we can know is that we seem unable to imagine without them; they are the precondition of our imagination. If we invent them, then we invent them according to the patterns they lay down."[13]

[13] James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992; 1975), 151.

CHAPTER THREE

A Writer's Guide to the Psyche

The whole truth

We've defined and clarified the meaning(s) of the muse, the daimon, and the inner genius, and have located these figures within their overarching and underlying historical-cultural context(s), in order to reach the point where we can make the following broad assertion and have its full range of connotations come through loud and clear: In broad terms, and drawing on everything that's been said up to now, all a writer or any other creative artist needs to know about the psyche can be stated in a pair of linked propositions:

1. Your psyche, your entire inner world of thoughts, memories, emotions, drives, and so on, is comprised of two major levels, the conscious and unconscious minds, each of which plays its own discrete and proper role in the creative act.
2. Your best gambit is to regard the unconscious mind as a separate presence, a personified entity with which you work in collaboration.

Naturally, this is a simplification. Naturally, there are many more nuances that can and sometimes should be drawn when thinking and talking about the psyche's layers and their functions and relationships.

But for our practical purpose here, the above two points really do cover the necessary bases. They state the whole truth in a bullet-pointed nutshell. What follows is just elaboration.

The ghost in the attic

One of the most important truths I've learned in my life as a writer is that a working knowledge of the psyche—how it's composed, how it operates—is indispensable to artistic success. Every successful creator knows something about basic psychological reality. But not all of this knowledge is equal. Some hold it only intuitively. Others know it consciously. Some of the greatest writers and artists in history have let the deep psychology of their creative activity remain perpetually vague.

This is perfectly fine; there's something to be said for deliberately embracing an attitude of mystery when it comes to psychological matters. Lewis Thomas, for example, advised us in a famous essay, and in all seriousness, that we would collectively benefit from abandoning psychotherapy and pursuing a vigorous course of voluntary psychic repression:

> It has been one of the great errors of our time that to think that by thinking about thinking, and then talking about it, we could possibly straighten out and tidy up our minds. There is no delusion more damaging than to get the idea in your head that you understand the functioning of your own brain. Once you acquire such a notion, you run the danger of moving in to take charge, guiding your thoughts, shepherding your mind from place to place, controlling it, making lists of regulations. The human mind is not meant to be governed, certainly not by any book of rules yet

> written; it is supposed to run itself, and we are obliged to follow it along, trying to keep up with it as best we can. It is all very well to be aware of your awareness, even proud of it, but never try to operate it. You are not up to the job…We might, by this way [i.e., by deliberately hiding from ourselves a portion of our psyches], regain the kind of spontaneity and zest for ideas, things popping into the mind, uncontrollable and ungovernable thoughts, the feeling that this notion is somehow connected unaccountably with that one."[14]

Likewise, one of history's most exquisitely sensitive inner observers, Henri-Frédéric Amiel, wrote movingly about the need to protect the mystery of one's inner self by avoiding a too-quick and too-keen attitude of psychological self-awareness: "Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for the unknown God. Then if a bird sing among your branches, do not be too eager to tame it. If you are conscious of something new—thought or feeling—wakening in the depths of your being—do not be in a hurry to let in light upon it, to look at it; let the springing germ have the protection of being forgotten, hedge it round with quiet, and do not break in upon its darkness; let it take shape and grow, and not a word of your

[14] Lewis Thomas, "The Attic of the Brain," *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 141, 140.

happiness to any one! Sacred work of nature as it is, all conception should be enwrapped by the triple veil of modesty, silence, and night."[15]

The attentive reader will have noticed that nothing in any of this stands in conflict with our basic undertaking here. In fact, the point made by Amiel and Thomas meshes perfectly with our focus on daimonic muse-based creativity. When we cultivate the sense that the ultimate center of our creativity is psychically separate from us and possessed of its own mind, will, and personality, what else are we doing besides following Amiel's advice to "let mystery have its place in us" and Thomas's advice to give up a sense of mental control so that we can experience "spontaneity and zest for ideas, things popping into the mind, uncontrollable and ungovernable thoughts"? Unlike most matters, this is one where you can have your cake and eat it, too. You don't have to worry that a conscious understanding of your psychological makeup will destroy the mystery that tantalizes and drives you on, because the second of the two major points stated at the beginning of this chapter plunges such knowledge back into shadow and secrecy. The trick of personifying your unconscious self, of regarding it as your collaborating muse, daimon, or genius, accomplishes the signal feat of combining mystery with knowledge. By means of it, you can understand the psyche and still gain the

[15] Henri-Frédéric Amiel, *Amiel's Journal: The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel*, trans. Mrs. Humphrey Ward (London and New York: MacMillan and Co., 1893), 16.

inestimable benefits of the inner vitality and spontaneity of thought that Thomas rightly cherishes.

Ray Bradbury, who in addition to being a bona fide living legend is one of the most openly and passionately muse-led writers around, spoke directly about this potent fusion of knowledge and control with mystery and ecstasy in a 2004 interview for Fox News:

> FOXNEWS.COM: How did you come up with the images of Mars and Martians that are so vivid in "The Martian Chronicles" and your other works?
>
> RAY BRADBURY: Well, you either have an imaginative mind or you don't. All of my writing is God-given. I don't write my stories—they write themselves. So out of my imagination, I create these wonderful things, and I look at them and say, My God, did I write that?
>
> FOXNEWS.COM: So they all just came to you? You can't explain it?
>
> RAY BRADBURY: Everything comes to me. Everything is my demon muse. I have a muse which whispers in my ear and says, "Do this, do that," but it's my demon who provokes me.[16]

Conscious and unconscious: "You" and your inner other

So what, exactly, do we mean by "conscious" and "unconscious"? This is the often unacknowledged question that's begged in discussions like the present one, and it behooves us to avoid a smug certainty that we know in advance what we're talking about. The epochal influence of

[16] "An Interview with Sci-Fi Legend Ray Bradbury," FoxNews.com, November 23, 2004, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,110367,00.html.

Freudian psychology on Western culture in the early 20th century made psychoanalytical terminology a regular part of common public discourse, even as the popular meanings of such terms were watered down, sometimes to the point of rendering them virtually meaningless. A reflexive certainty that we already know what's entailed by the words "conscious" and "unconscious" can stand in the way of learning something useful. As Alexander Pope famously remarked, "Some people will never learn anything, for this reason, because they understand everything too soon."

To start with a rough-and-ready definition: The conscious mind, in the simplest possible terms, is what you mean when you say "I." The psychoanalytic term for it, which also happens to be the term adopted by various nondual spiritual teachers (e.g., Eckhart Tolle) and neurological researchers (e.g., Michael Persinger), and which is also the term I'll regularly use here, is the *ego*. The ego or "I" is your wakefulness, your awareness, your subjectivity, the mental space in which you're aware of your own thoughts and emotions and the external world around you. When you engage in rational thought, that's the conscious mind. When you perceive the sights and sounds around you, that's the conscious mind. When you recall a memory, you do so in the conscious mind. When you feel an emotion, you feel it in the conscious mind.

To call the conscious mind the ego or "I"-self is to express a crucial truth about it, namely, that we're apparently hardwired to feel that the boundary of our conscious mind is the boundary of who and what we

are. In the course of growing up, you learn to make the distinction between "in here"—the space of your conscious self—and "out there"—the world you perceive as external. (Tangentially, you might note the interesting fact that your physical body occupies the second category.) From then on, you conceive and perceive yourself as a subjective presence in an external environment that is "not you," an environment that acts upon you, and upon which you can act. This is all common knowledge.

What's less readily acknowledged by many of us, even in our supposedly sophisticated and intellectually enlightened age, is that the boundary that has been erected between "me" and "not me" by the time each of us achieves a recognizable personality in childhood also extends into the mind itself. The ego self that you sense as your sole identity is confronted by something that it perceives as other, as "not me," not only externally but *internally*—from behind, so to speak—in the form of the unconscious mind.

This can't be emphasized too strongly. We all "know," as a matter of pop psychological wisdom, that we have an unconscious mind. It's the stuff of TV sitcoms and self-help books. But the penetrating reality of it is something much more profound, because in a very real sense it's just as true to say that your unconscious mind has *you*. A major portion of your full psychic identity lies outside your conscious grasp. "You" don't stop at the boundary of your conscious sense of self.

Forget the quaint amusements of Freudian slips and all that. This is a

revolutionary revelation on a deep life level. Your unconscious is "mind stuff," a portion of your mental self or psyche, that has been walled off from who and what you feel yourself to be, and that right now feels rather like an alien presence. But its alienness is far more singular and uncanny than that of the external world, for it is an *inner* alienness, a sense of otherness within your very self. How many presences are looking out from behind your eyes right now? Answer: at least two.

The more you dwell on it, the more bizarre and unsettling it seems. And yet it's a foundational fact of human selfhood: yours, mine, everybody's.

"Our souls, our psyches, are themselves partly alien"

To compound the weirdness, and to extend the whole thing into realms dwarfing and encompassing the issue of artistic creativity *per se*, consider the following extended quotation from Patrick Harpur as he explains the relationship of the unconscious mind to the psychological/ontological "realm" that he has famously termed "daimonic reality":

> [Daimonic reality is] an intermediate world, or reality, between what we think of as the material world and what we have traditionally called the spiritual world. Daimonic reality is like the unconscious, but daimonic reality came before the unconscious. The unconscious is a recent model of daimonic reality, which we've placed inside us. But, in fact, it is not inside us, any more than it is outside us…It was this in-between realm which C.G. Jung re-discovered and called the Collective Unconscious. At first he located it solely inside us but was later forced to recognise that it lay

> outside us as well. Reality, in other words, is always psychic, lying between us and the world, partly inside, partly outside; partly personal, partly impersonal; partly material, partly immaterial; and so on—a reality which is as ambiguous as the daimons who personify it…There's an inescapable psychological law formulated by Freud that whatever is repressed returns in another guise. This is as true of the daimons in the Soul of the World as it is of our unconscious complexes—those independent fragments of the psyche that Jung called "the little people"! The daimons always come back. There must be a reciprocal relationship between us and them for the health of our souls because, finally, our souls, our psyches, are themselves partly alien. And the aliens, part of us.[17]

Which is all to say that if you begin to dig down and study creativity as a muse-based, daimon-driven phenomenon in which you really and truly experience your unconscious mind as an objective presence accompanying your conscious self, you'll do well to keep your expectations open and your assumptions soft. Here be dragons.

The inner division of labor: Daimonic creator, egoic editor

So when we consider the basic structure of the human psyche, we find that things can be boiled down to a simple but profound insight for writers and other creators: You are psychologically divided into two selves, the conscious and unconscious minds, but you feel yourself to be

[17] Jimmy Lee Shreeve, Interview with Patrick Harpur, August 17, 1999. Reprinted at Automatic Kaos Foundation, December 14, 2008, http://akf4ever.wordpress.com/2008/12/14/patrick-harpur-interview.

only the conscious part—a statement that's basically a tautology, since to feel implies to feel consciously—and this means your inner life is characterized by a strange doubleness. Simply as a given, as a brute fact of irreducible psychological reality, you carry around with you the sense of being accompanied by an external presence that resides "behind" your conscious thoughts and sense of self.

Once you have a grasp on this wondrous, bizarre, and universal situation, a pointed question naturally arises: Now what? What do we actually *do* with this insight? How do we put it to practical and productive use? As already hinted, the answer is found in the very nature of the differences between the dual aspects of the psyche. Each of these aspects works in its own way, and each has a proper and crucial role to play in the creative process. We put our knowledge of the psyche to practical use by, first, *learning* these roles, and then by *capitalizing* on them.

As it turns out, they're very simple to delineate: the unconscious mind supplies the content of what we write, while the ego, the voluntary conscious self, channels and shapes this unconscious material. The poet Stanley Kunitz famously formulated this intra-psychic symbiosis as a quotable dictum: "the unconscious creates, the ego edits." The ideas that you work with, the chains of thought and impression that appear in your mind as if from nowhere, as if by magic. and seem to take on a life of their own as you race to record and refine them, all carry that perceived quality of independence and spontaneity because they're emerging into

consciousness from your unconscious mind. When you enter this "inspired" state, you are literally engaged in a psychologically collaborative effort between your two selves in which one is providing something to the other. "We…rightly speak of intuition or inspiration as a gift," Lewis Hyde tells us. "As the artist works, some portion of his creation is bestowed upon him. An idea pops into his head, a tune begins to play, a phrase comes to mind, a color falls into place on the canvas. Usually, in fact, the artist does not find himself engaged or exhilarated by the work, nor does it seem authentic, until this gratuitous element has appeared, so that along with any true creation comes the uncanny sense that "I,' the artist, did not make the work."[18]

Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize winner and master writing teacher, offers an excellent and conceptually useful description not only of the way this all works, but of its practical ramifications: "The crucial awareness you must keep is this: do not will the work. Do not write until it's coming from your unconscious…It's a funny state. It's not as if you're falling asleep at your computer, but neither are you brainstorming. You're *dreamstorming*, inviting the images of moment-to-moment experience through your unconscious. It's very much like an intensive daydream, but a daydream that you are not controlling…The state of

[18] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007; 1979), xvi.

communion with your unconscious—the zone I'm trying to describe—is absolutely essential, *absolutely essential* to writing well in this art form."[19]

Meet the demon muse

Is it even necessary to state the further point: that for purposes of developing our working psychology of creativity, we can equate the unconscious mind with both the muse and the daimon? In Western history the muse is the classical symbol of creative inspiration. The word "inspiration" in its root sense connotes a state of being filled with a divine presence ("in" + "spire" means both the act of physical inhalation and the act of infusing someone with spirit). As stated in Chapter Two, the daimon, for its part, is the keeper of a person's deep character, life pattern, and destiny. Pairing the two figures yields the idea of the demon muse: the spirit that inspires a person to do the work for which he or she is uniquely gifted and intended. Getting to know this aspect of yourself is getting to know the permanent visitor in your psyche and the deep life pattern it wants to actualize through you.

Thus, one of the most powerful acts you can take to develop a rich creative life is to deliberately give up conscious control over the ultimate shape, nature, and direction of your work. Hand over the responsibility

[19] Robert Olen Butler, *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 28, 31.

for those things to your deep self, your unconscious mind, your demon muse, and recognize that your role as ego is simply to midwife and refine the material that wants to be written.

The inner reservoir

But what exactly *is* this unconscious material that wants to be written? What is it that your demon muse wants to create through you? On this point, as in so many others, Ray Bradbury is helpful. In his essay "How to Keep and Feed a Muse," Ray Bradbury offers a vibrant description of the inner source of each person's creative uniqueness: "[I]n a lifetime, we stuff ourselves with sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and textures of people, animals, landscapes, events, large and small. We stuff ourselves with these impressions and experiences and our reaction to them. Into our subconscious go not only factual data but reactive data, our movement toward or away from the sensed events. These are the stuffs, the foods, on which The Muse grows. This is the storehouse, the file…What is The Subconscious to every other man, in its creative aspect becomes, for writers, The Muse. They are two names for one thing…Here is the stuff of originality. For it is in the totality of experience reckoned with, filed, and forgotten, that each man is truly different from all others in the world."[20]

Students of all things Bradburyan know quite well that he drew this

[20] Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*, 35-36.

description directly from his actual, ongoing experience as a writer. The story of, for instance, his unhappy stay in Ireland when he was writing the screenplay for director John Huston's Hollywood adaptation of *Moby Dick* (as recounted in Bradbury's 1998 autobiographical novel *Green Shadows, White Whale*) is legendary. So is the fact that many years later Bradbury was surprised to find stories set in Ireland erupting spontaneously from his typewriter. He had thought he thoroughly hated the place and gained nothing from it in the way of authorial inspiration. But in fact his demon muse had treasured up countless impressions of Ireland and its inhabitants, and after many years of secretly processing them, began to present them to his conscious awareness. He could easily have ignored this inner event. He could have suppressed it. But a lifetime of learning the wisdom and discipline of creative midwifery had taught him to pay attention to his inner voice, and so he followed his muse and wrote several stories set in a vibrantly realized Ireland. Moreover, his experiences with Huston and *Moby Dick* emerged as a major part of the personal mythic life journey that he has retold many times in books, essays, and lectures.

Think of this when recalling his previously quoted words: "I don't write my stories. They write themselves. So out of my imagination I create these wonderful things, and I look at them and say, 'My God, did I write that?'...Everything comes to me. Everything is my demon muse."

Then think of this, too: Bradbury isn't the only one with a demon

muse, an inner spirit that transforms experience into creative inspiration in the service of an overall life theme. You, too, have just such an inner guide, and so do I, and we can both access a creatively inspired state of flow and fulfillment by first coming to terms with the very existence of this inner partner and then "tuning in" to its innate tropes and rhythms.

The practice of the presence of the genius

As for how exactly to accomplish this feat of self-knowledge, the above-described act of renunciation, in which you forcefully choose to let your work be driven by your creative unconscious and make a deliberate decision to attend to your creative partner's promptings, is an excellent first step. Perhaps it's not tangential to point out that this is all quite similar to the classic advice given by Brother Lawrence about the inner spiritual life in *The Practice of the Presence of God*: "[He said] that it all consists in one hearty renunciation of everything which we feel does not lead to God; that we should make a habit of continual conversation with him, with freedom and in simplicity. That we only need to recognize God intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment."[21]

Beyond this, one of Ray Bradbury's writing gurus, a woman he credits with having given us "a really fine book" about the subject, offers us

[21] Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, revised by Jim Johnson (San Jose, CA: Reset Publishing, 2009), 35.

some eminently useful advice in her masterwork about the training of authorial genius: "[I]t is possible to train both sides of the character [i.e., the conscious and unconscious selves] to work in harmony, and the first step in that education is to consider that you must teach yourself not as though you were one person, but two…By isolating as far as possible the functions of these two sides of the mind, even by considering them not merely as aspects of the same mind but as separate personalities, we can arrive at a kind of working metaphor, impossible to confuse with reality, but infinitely helpful in self-education…If you are to write well you must come to terms with the enormous and powerful part of your nature which lies behind the threshold of immediate knowledge."[22]

In light of this, and as a useful experiment, you might consider paying attention to the interplay of conscious awareness with unconscious processes in your own mind, since you have to learn the difference between them before you can take action to train them. Whenever memories pop up from nowhere, and/or thoughts and ideas take off on wild and spontaneous tangents, and/or you find yourself helplessly fascinated by a person, idea, scene, situation, or circumstance, you're probably experiencing the interaction of your two natures. You-as-ego are receiving deliveries from the unconscious mind, which are recognizable as such

[22] Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putman, 1981; 1934), 44, 48, 151.

by the fact of their psychologically involuntary character. These deliveries are in turn the product of your unconscious mind's interpretive and transformative action upon the things you have encountered and experienced in the world around you. This same synergistic process is the root of all authentic creativity. Learn the deep workings of your own mind, and you learn the key to cooperating with psychological reality and thereby realizing (making real) what wants to be said through you.

CHAPTER FOUR

Getting to Know Your Creative Demon

Once you have a working understanding of the daimonic or muse-based model of creativity—which, again, holds that creative inspiration can effectively be regarded as an external reality with which you negotiate and collaborate instead of a personal achievement that you generate through effort—a valuable next step is to get acquainted with the specific inclinations of your own creative demon. "To maintain the delicate equilibrium between ego and unconscious," writes Victoria Nelson in *On Writer's Block*, "each writer needs to give attention to the unique 'personality' of his creative nature."[23] After all, when you take the approach recommended here, you're opting to *personify* your creativity. You're viewing it as a force or being with a mind of its own. Taking the attitude that you need to learn its peculiar motives, tastes, style, and preferences is simply the obvious and reasonable thing to do. You would never collaborate with another person on any project without first gauging your respective goals and temperaments. The same reasoning applies to the process of artistic creation, except the collaborative relationship in this case is an inner one between you and your creative unconscious.

[23] Victoria Nelson, *On Writer's Block: A New Approach to Creativity* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 8.

Spiritual vs. secular

The available techniques for getting to know the character of your unique genius fall along two general lines. I'll call them spiritual and secular. On the spiritual side are all of the occult- or pseudo-occult-oriented recommendations and practices involving such things as breathwork, ritual magic or magick (especially theurgy), psychedelics, and so on. One can also make a strong case for the idea that the indigenous spiritual disciplines of the world's major religious traditions are highly relevant here. On the secular side are less flashy techniques such as guided introspection, journaling, and certain intra-psychic exercises of a more muted sort than those in the former category. Then there are some that occupy a middle ground.

Here I'll be focusing on the secular category, since these techniques are available to everybody, whereas the spiritual ones can be off-putting to those who view such things as irredeemably flaky. But if they're your cup of tea, then by all means you should investigate them. You'll find no end of books, websites, gurus, and teachers to guide you.

The first technique: Morning writing

One tried and true technique for discovering your unconscious mind in its uniqueness and particularity is to engage in the regular practice of writing in the early morning, right after you wake up. This entails a discipline that's somewhat technical and, at times, rather arduous. It's more

than just sitting down to freewrite. There are specific rules.

The trick with this technique is to have everything ready when you go to bed—pen and paper laid out if you'll be writing by hand, typewriter or computer standing by if you're planning to type, coffee and breakfast already chosen and, ideally, prepared and waiting—and then to get up a little earlier than normal the next morning and head straight to your writing station, where you *immediately and unreflectively begin writing*. Write what, you ask? Quite simply, write anything that comes to mind. A memory of last night's dream. A rehash of some event from the previous day. A nursery rhyme. A story idea. Complaints about how tired you are and how you'd rather be lying in bed. A stream-of-consciousness flow of relative nonsense. Wisdom, insight, and life advice from yourself, to yourself. Expressions of dread or anticipation about the day ahead of you. Write absolutely anything that arises in your mind-space, and keep doing it for at least ten minutes. Or if you feel more comfortable measuring quantity instead of time, do it for at least two pages. Over time, gradually build up to longer sessions.

When you perform this exercise diligently and correctly, approaching it with a nonjudgmental attitude by simply following the instructions and letting your thoughts and feelings flow without reflection or hindrance onto the page, you effectively tap into your unconscious mind before your ego has had a chance to fully wake up. Your normal mental defenses and filters are down. Things just come up and out that you're

later shocked to find you've written.

This element of revelatory self-discovery is, of course, the whole point. It's built into the very nature of the exercise, but you'll need to commit to the practice for it to work. Make at least a two-week commitment, and preferably a longer one. A month is good. Solemnly vow not to reread what you've written until the whole period is over. Then let your work cool off for another week after that. If you do this, when you finally pick your work up and read back over it, you'll be surprised at the things you wrote with absolutely no memory of having done so, and/or you'll be struck by the significance of things that didn't seem all that striking when you wrote them. Yes, you'll have to wade through pages of tedious, muddy junk to find the diamonds, and you may well cringe at the rawness of your unrestrained effusions of half-waking interiority. But the upside will far outweigh the downside. If you will deliberately look at these writings with a critical and objective eye, as if they were written by somebody else whose personality and passions, interests and abilities, voice and style you're trying to discover, you'll make considerable headway in finding out the native bent of your inner genius.

Be advised that Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer*, Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*, and Robert Olen Butler's *From Where you Dream* contain detailed instructions, each slanted and colored according to the author's idiosyncratic personality, for using this technique. Brande includes particularly valuable information about extending the exercise

into the daylight hours and training your unconscious to speak freely not just in the early morning but at any time. For that matter, Natalie Goldberg, in her classic *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, offers page after page of useful advice, both practical and attitudinal, for coaxing a free flow of words from the unconscious in all sorts of circumstances and surroundings.

The second technique: Dialogue between the ego and the unconscious

Next comes a technique that, as opposed to sneaking up on your muse or genius by observing its unguarded output, is more of a direct attempt to personify it by giving it a voice and interacting with it as a separate entity. I'll cede the floor momentarily to Nelson, who does a fine job of describing this exercise: "[Y]ou must begin to make a conscious acquaintance with what lies within. One way to begin is to compose a completely spontaneous dialogue between your conscious self ('I') and your unconscious (give it a separate identity and name, or let one emerge from the dialogue). When you finish your dialogue, describe the personalities of the two speakers. What kind of person is the 'I'? What kind of person is the unconscious? (Individuals are highly variable....) Are they opposites or are they kindred spirits? Are they at loggerheads,

or do they achieve resolution?"[24]

The kinship between this technique and the first one should be obvious. In both cases you're trying to divine the peculiar character of your unconscious mind by letting it speak on paper. But in the first you do so by writing at a time when the ego is relatively subdued, so that the unconscious can speak through you with little interference, whereas in the second you deliberately inhabit your fully-awake ego space and generate a sense of talking with your unconscious as an outside entity.

As with morning writing, I recommend that if you decide to use this technique, you should dedicate yourself to it with pre-made plans—for instance, by deciding ahead of time that you will dialogue with your unconscious for, say, fifteen minutes, and then let the writing cool off for at least a day before revisiting it. You might want to schedule these sessions daily for a week, or weekly for a month, setting aside a specific time and place as if you were making a formal appointment with a very important person. Which, in fact, you are.

(I assume it goes without saying that you should feel free to imagine you're talking with your daimonic muse instead of your unconscious mind. Or better yet, try to hold both views at once.)

I can tell you from having personally practiced both techniques—morning writing and dialoguing with the unconscious—that they both

[24] Nelson, *On Writer's Block*, 40.

really do "work." They both yield crucial information about yourself and your creative unconscious, information that's relevant not just to your life as a writer but to your life in general. Both are equivalent to self-psychotherapy, since the primary goal of all forms of psychotherapy, regardless of their specific schools, is to achieve a harmonious relationship between the conscious and unconscious minds by airing the contents of the latter. It's axiomatic that whatever is unconscious has the power to dominate you in ways that you do not and cannot recognize. Establishing a clear channel of self-aware exchange between your two selves reduces the unconscious mind's demonic-daimonic potential to induce possessed-type behavior in the form of delusions, complexes, and violently uncontrollable fantasies and impulses (regarding which, see Chapter Eight).

Of course, you may well *want* to be a violently impulsive writer, one who creates in accordance with Wordsworth's dictum that poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and then manages through his writing to discharge and re-establish that original flaming emotion within the reader. This often describes my own daimonic urge whenever I'm gripped by the creative impulse. But even this approach works better when you're working *with* your daimon instead of blindly flailing before it or, worse, actively and unwittingly subverting it. Think of yourself in your conscious aspect as a kind of conduit or channel for the unconscious energies wanting to come through you. In getting to know your

unconscious mind, your daimon, your genius, you're unblocking a blocked channel, and you're learning to step aside and lightly direct the torrent as it flows into the world.

The third technique: Read your life like a work of art

The first two techniques aim at engaging your genius directly and trying to channel its voice onto paper. The third one, by contrast, counsels you to search for clues about your demon muse's nature and temperament by reflecting on the overall outline of your life and personal character. It also urges you to remain cognizant of the fact that you're living in permanent inner partnership with a being that you can only glimpse indirectly, and whose existence you are free to take as a metaphor, a literal reality, or some combination thereof.

Your unconscious mind, muse, or daimon is the inner genius that presides over your life and houses the deep patterns of creative energy that want to express themselves in and through you. Discovering these patterns in the unfolding outline of your life over time is a potent means of discovering the type of work and typical themes that you're innately suited to pursue. To say the same thing differently: Your purpose is to step out of the way and second the direction your daimon wants to take you. The question at hand is not only how to do this, but what such an approach to creativity truly, deeply means and looks like on a whole-life level.

1. CONSIDER YOUR INNATE PASSIONS AND AVERSIONS.

One of the classic ways your daimon or genius makes itself known is through a definite attraction to certain things and a definite aversion to others. Thus, to get a sense for its character, you can look to your involuntary loves and hatreds, desires and loathings, passions and boredoms. And be sure to consider your entire life history as you do so.

What sorts of subjects have always fascinated you? What sorts of people, places, ideas, activities, and circumstances have you always been drawn to? What things have always filled you with a sense of electric attraction and exhilaration? Conversely, what things have always had the opposite effect? What has sucked the life right out of you or filled you with a distinct sense of resistance in the form of disgust, indignation, boredom, or anger? It's been said that the daimon often manifests itself as a definite and incontrovertible inner response of "Yes" or "No" to a given provocation. Paying attention to this sense within yourself can yield a good idea of what your demon muse needs to be fed and, on the other end of the matter, protected from.

Bradbury hits upon exactly this point when he describes the "feeding of the muse" as "the continual running after loves."[25] In the past he referenced this point repeatedly in his many lectures when he strongly advised his audiences to pursue what inflames their passions and flee from

[25] Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*, 44.

what deadens them. "You have lunch with certain people," he'd say, "and they bore the shit out of you. Cut out the lunches."

James Hillman highlights the same point from a slightly different angle in *The Soul's Code* when he underscores the importance of paying attention to your spontaneous childhood attitudes and actions. Many childhood obstinacies and tantrums, he says, stem from a young person's flailing attempts to negotiate between the unyielding demands of his or her daimon and the accidents of circumstance into which he or she was born. "A child defends its daimon's dignity," he says. "That's why even a frail child at a 'tender' age refuses to submit to what it feels is unfair and untrue, and reacts so savagely to abusive misperceptions."[26]

Get relaxed and focused, and do some serious reflecting on these types of inner experiences from your early life, or even the manifestations of them that are still emerging in your life right now. What do you truly, deeply want?

2. CONSIDER YOUR INNATE TALENTS.

Talent is another classic avenue of daimonic expression. In some people's lives, as in the case of child prodigies—Mozart and music, Tiger Woods and golf—daimonic or "God-given" talents are blatantly obvious. An inborn genius shines through virtually from birth. In other cases it

[26] James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 27.

may not be so spectacular, but it's still there, still emerging in the nexus of things that a child is naturally good at.

In particular, you should look for any talents that manifested as a burning desire to do a particular something-or-other long before you were actually able to do it. This aspect of innate talent is deeply connected with the daimonic expression of loves and hatreds described above. You may have been drawn magnetically to a particular activity as a child, and been terribly frustrated when, simply as a function of your mental and/or physical ability at that stage of development, you were unable to do it, or to do it as well as you wanted. Then, later in life, as a result of normal maturation and maybe some formal training, you gained the technical facility to actualize that desire. These active desires implanted in you from birth can be read as signs of a daimonic calling.

3. CONSIDER THE RECURRING PATTERNS OF YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

This approach to divining your demon muse is simple but enormously evocative and powerful: Look for enduring or recurring themes in your outer life, recognizable patterns in the events and interpersonal relationships that keep cropping up again and again to define the overall tenor of your relationship to the outer world. Interpret these as if you were interpreting art or literature.

You'll recall that one of the functions of the daimon/genius in its

classical Greco-Roman guise was to provide the blueprint for an individual's life and destiny, and to be constantly working to draw each person back into alignment with this plan. Have you ever noticed how each of us seems to live within a web or network of recurring motifs? One person is always unlucky in love, while another seems positively destined for a life of romantic fulfillment. One person seems doomed to recurring professional and business failure, while another experiences professional and financial success as if by magic, as if by magnetizing money and positive circumstances to himself. One person's life is filled with the unexpected, with variation and adventure, even when she deliberately tries to calm it all down, while another can't escape a long-term, entrenched pattern of calmness and steadiness in her life's events even when she actively tries to shake things up. This type of thing is a matter of daily experience and observation. We all see it, know it, experience it.

Although radically new patterns do sometimes assert themselves to disrupt the general direction of these deep life tendencies, they're exceedingly rare, and are often tamed and even counteracted by a kind of existential gravity that inexorably pulls our lives back into what comes increasingly to seem like a predetermined shape. And yes, this may sometimes emerge from what seems not so much like a deep creative calling as a destructive personal inertia. Sometimes this tendency of our lives to manifest the same situations over and over again is a sign that we're living in the grip of psychological complexes that need to be dealt with. But

then, *that's exactly what we're talking about*. "Our inclinations," writes Sandra Lee Dennis in *Embrace of the Daimon*, "*especially our pathologies*, help define our individuality, and can point us toward the most creative sources in ourselves. From addiction, perversion, and madness, to our everyday irritability, these pathologies hold promise to unfold our destinies when followed as the daimonic spirit-infused guides they can be."[27]

To say the same thing slightly differently, the inherent gravitational pull of our lives can be a sign of deep truths about what we're "meant" to be and do, even if—sometimes *especially* if—this pull and these truths seem unpleasant or repugnant to our egoic sensibilities. Forget about the spiritual idiocy that is Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* with its pop-featherweight recycling of New Thought's so-called "law of attraction." We're talking about something much more profound here, something outside of our conscious ability to will, control, or change. Jung explained the phenomenon of synchronicity, that tendency for "meaningful coincidences" to occur, as the result of the psyche's autonomy and relative externality. Some psychic events occur in our private minds. Others occur in the external world. Both are the action of the same reality, and their occasional convergence looks like magic, like the action of

[27] Sandra Lee Dennis, *Embrace of the Daimon: Sensuality and the Integration of Forbidden Imagery in Depth Psychology* (York Beach, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 2001), 33. Emphasis added.

some supernatural or metaphysical force that manipulates events and circumstances according to its own occult motives. And indeed, that may well be what we face, each and every one of us, in this life. Or maybe thinking and talking about it this way is just a kind of conceptual bridge, a purely symbolic way of reading objective events in subjectively meaningful terms. Even further, maybe it's an act of blatant psychological projection and "magical thinking" (although not the sort that proceeds from a belief that we can supernaturally exert our individual wills upon the objective world, since this demonic muse-oriented worldview locates the presiding will not within us-as-egos but within a wider surrounding context, so that we-as-egos live and move within its embrace). Whatever the case, the practical truth is that if you want to get to know the character of your personal demon muse, one avenue is to start by reading your outer life in search of these deep-meaningful themes that appear to "want" to emerge spontaneously out of and within it.

The late philosopher and culture critic Theodore Roszak touches briefly on something like this in his brilliant *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Post-Industrial Society* when he points out that whereas most modern Westerners are accustomed to confronting the waking, objective world with the rational empiricist attitude that asks "How does it work?" and "What caused it?", when it comes to dealing with our nocturnal dreams we reflexively turn to a question that "our ancestors habitually asked of their experience as a whole, awake or

dreaming." Specifically, we ask, "What does it mean?" In our dreams, he says, we immediately recognize "a symbolic presence which makes what is before us other and more than it seems." The question of meaning is thus automatic and reflexive. In waking life most of us only encounter such things in art, where we find, in Roszak's words, "a residue of a reality we first learned in sleep"[28]—that is, in a direct experience of deep psychic reality, minus the egoic alienation, which disappears in sleep.

Can you grasp what it would be like to understand and experience your life in terms of *meaning*, in the same way that you automatically and effortlessly find meaning in music, literature, films, and so on? Can you grasp what it would be like to attribute this life-level meaning to the influence of a deep aspect of yourself that's guiding you through life and creating exactly the circumstances that are vitally necessary for you to encounter, experience, know, and respond to? Equally to the point, can you grasp what it would be like to look around and realize that everyone else is similarly engaged?

Again, and to repeat an already repeated caveat or qualifier, you should feel free to regard all of the above, and especially the last part of this third technique, as a mere hypothetical exercise if you prefer, a fictional view of things that may have some utilitarian value for gaining

[28] Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 1989; 1972), 86.

self-knowledge and stimulating creativity, but nothing more than that. You should also feel free to view it as something else and something more. Either way, the proof's in the living, and if you haven't been accustomed to reading your life in this daimonically slanted manner, then you may be surprised at the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which your overall sense of things can begin to shift when you start attending to events in a new way, and noticing what appear to be definite tropes and centers of gravity emerging from the flux of your inner and outer reality.

Not incidentally, these are the very themes you'll write about, and the very themes you'll write *from*, when you start writing from the center of who you are and what you're meant to bring into the world.

The fourth technique: Take a life inventory

This technique employs a concrete tool to help you conduct the self-examination we've been discussing. It consists of composing and answering a series of carefully targeted questions about yourself, your life, your talents, your likes and dislikes, your personal history, and so on. It thus incorporates elements of the previous three techniques for divining your daimon.

Some of the most important questions might include:

1. What have you always done well?
2. What have you always loved to do?
3. What have you always hated to do?

4. What do you detest? What things in life are guaranteed to arouse your anger, indignation, or disapproval? What can you not abide?
5. What drains your energy and leaves you saying with Hamlet, "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world"?
6. Who have been your mentors and models? Who has inspired and/or helped you to know the life you want to live and the person you want to be?
7. What works of art—novels, poems, biographies, essays, films, music, plays, paintings, sculptures, anything—speak to you most deeply? Can you discern any kind of common thread among the ones that make you say, "I wish I had created that"?
8. What kinds of emotional states, mental currents, personal relationships, and life circumstances have manifested so persistently in your life that they've formed a stable, long-term pattern?

If parts of this sound a little reminiscent of an MBTI personality test or a career aptitude assessment, this isn't an accident. Those tests, and indeed all personality and life/career inventories, are intended at least in part to gauge your involuntary temperament and leanings, which are just other ways of describing a central aspect of your daimon. You might well find it valuable to discover your MBTI type, for example, or your Enneagram type, especially if you bear in mind that what these tools give you is, in large part, a typological description not of your ego but of your unconscious. Also bear in mind that one of the foundational points of

the Enneagram system in particular is that you need to learn to work *against* your natural inclinations if you're going to achieve ultimate spiritual wholeness and maturity. In other words, your true self, fully and deeply imagined, encompasses more than just your partisan passions.

In any event, a carefully constructed and conscientiously answered life inventory can reveal aspects of your deep self that you might otherwise remain unaware of, and these can help you to triangulate your creative core, your daimonic *raisin d'être*. (This is, or may be, especially true if you'll give yourself permission to engage your imagination and play fast and loose with the objective facts. The recommendation is to be conscientious *according to the dictates of your demon*, whose persona and promptings, if you'll heed them, may well lead your hand to begin working on its own and writing things that bear little resemblance to the reality of you-as-you've-conceived-yourself. This is all excellent. In many cases a half-fictional or half-fantastic rendering of your life might be just as, or even more, valuable than a journalistically truthful one.)

A personal illustration

For a concrete example of how to read a life in terms of its deep thematic patterns, I offer you the illustration of myself. What follows builds on the short self-reflection I offered in Chapter Two. I present you with four pages of autobiography in which enduring themes are all too obvious, and encourage you to take the time to reflect on, and write

down, your own personal journey, letting your unforced interest and attention lead you wherever it will as you review your life.

I'm 41 years old as I type these words, and I can still vividly recall grabbing a crayon and drawing long, looping lines, vaguely reminiscent of chain links, across the pages of many a coloring book and sheet of paper when I was just three and four. This wasn't mere random scribbling; I was trying to write words and sentences. Once I filled all the pages of a *Star Trek* coloring book with lines that I pretended were technical explanations of the ship's engines and inner working, much like some of the computer-ish text that flashed across the screen during the opening credit sequence of *The Six Million Dollar Man* (another show that played often during my youngest years). Today I can still remember the palpable sense of *craving* that possessed me as I strove to write down deep and meaningful things with my untrained hand and undeveloped motor skills. I was positively desperate to commit words to paper, and to have them communicate something important. Many years later I found those coloring books and remembered that craving, right at a time when I was beginning to see my first success as a published writer.

I also recall teaching imaginary classrooms full of students in my early childhood, and using white pages filled with those same meaningless scribbles (this time in ink) for my "lessons." A quarter of a century later, I became a professional educator, right around the same time that I became a published writer.

Also since childhood, I've been drawn by a kind of inbuilt gravity to dark stories about supernatural things. This includes all of the standard elements of supernatural horror tales—ghosts, haunted houses, vampires, werewolves, demons, and so on—but during my teen years it started to tip definitively toward cosmic or weird horror, starting with H.P. Lovecraft. Right about the same time, I turned into a lifelong addict and connoisseur of horror films. In the formative movies and television shows that hypnotically horrified and enchanted me during this period—*Tales from the Darkside*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Creepshow*, George Romero's Living Dead movies, *Halloween*, some of the Hammer horror films, and many, many more—I saw a kind of resonant reflection of my own raging yearning for what I would only later be able to articulate as an apotheosis of darkness.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, when I was introduced to the piano via formal classical lessons at the age of eight, it was like being suddenly tapped into a source of vital nourishment that I hadn't known I needed. Today, music, both the playing of it and the composing of it, remains a central part of my life, and the themes involved in my composing are identical to those involved in my spiritual and gothic-supernatural interests.

Running parallel to this, I was possessed from earliest age by a fierce religious and spiritual instinct. I grew up steeped in a conservative version of evangelical Protestantism, and I practiced my inherited religion

with the utmost seriousness. Then in my teens an interest in comparative religion began to grip me as strongly as my interest in horror (which was accompanied by an interest in fantasy and science fiction). I devoured texts both ancient and modern on various world religious and philosophical traditions. In college I minored, and almost majored, in philosophy, and studied all sorts of religions both academically and experientially, befriending people from various religious and cultural backgrounds, and seriously pursuing various meditative practices. Through it all, I had the *eros*-driven sense that I was pursuing, or being pursued by, some sort of ultimate fulfillment in an experience of transcendence or enlightenment. Perhaps it's needless to say that this interacted in strangely synergistic ways with my aforementioned craving for darkness and depth. The sense of being *driven* or *hounded* by something I couldn't quite pin down, something that categorically eluded my direct view, but that was obviously entwined with my very selfhood at its deepest root, was palpable.

In the 1990s, shortly after graduating from college, and acting in full awareness of what I recognized as a raging inner obsession, I began to write stories and essays that channeled all of these diverse interests. Both types of writing came out as thematic hybrids that channeled ideas, emotions, and intimations from religion, spirituality, and philosophy to explore the deep reality of cosmic horror, and cosmic horror to explore the deep reality of religion, spirituality, and philosophy. Within a few years, I was published, first online and then in print. In the past several years the

subject of creativity, depth psychology, the muse, the daimon, and the genius has asserted itself as a complement to all of these other interests, emerging from them with apparently organic ease.

Jumping back in time a bit, a few years after graduating from college, I started pursuing a master's degree in religious studies. It took me seven years in all to complete the degree, and my professors were good to let me combine my interests by delving deeply into the connections among religion, horror, and entertainment culture—something I was driven by a deep craving to do. This, too, became bound up with my publishing career.

To add a note of meta-self-awareness, I'll point out what you may already have noticed: that when I go to hash out my enduring life patterns, I immediately and naturally turn to the realm of art and ideas, and to what I perceive, rightly or wrongly, as the exercise of my implanted talents in these areas. Other people who turn the same sort of attention upon their own lives might well focus more on human relationships, jobs they've held, places they've lived and traveled, their life travails or joys, their race or ethnicity or gender, or any number of other things. And of course these things have all been hugely significant to me as well. Psychologically speaking, each person is at root a total package. It's just that certain strands of the total tapestry of human possibilities leap to the fore in unique and different combinations for each of us.

And this, clearly, is the whole point and thrust of these self-revealing

ruminations that I'm putting before you. When I consider them, I recognize that both their basic content and the very fact that *they*, and not something else, are how I automatically read the high points of my deep life, serve to announce that my daimonic mission is bound up with the communication of ideas, and also, significantly, with the depth of emotion they arouse, and that it's all bound up with intimations of darkness, depth, and mingled horror, terror, wonder, and longing. My avenues of getting at this are writing, scholarship, teaching, and music.

In *The Soul's Code* Hillman counsels us to "read our lives backward" to discover the origins of our life-dominating themes in the daimonic tendencies that showed up in childhood. "We must attend very carefully to childhood to catch early glimpses of the daimon in action, to grasp its intentions and not block its way," he says.[29] My own life has borne this out. Perhaps yours has, too. When you write and create, do so from the center of all this.

Knowing and loving your creative force

"Engaging in an act of art," says Victoria Nelson, "is very much like establishing a relationship with another person…[If] you form a friendship based on mutual respect, then over time, with much love and patience, you can form a secure bond…To function as a writer, one must,

[29] Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, 8.

above all, love and honor one's creative force."[30] For those like me whose creativity has led them in decidedly dark directions, it's heartening to bear in mind that this is the same Victoria Nelson who has observed that whereas authentic creativity only "blossoms in conditions of gentleness and respect," still "the conditions of creativity are not synonymous with its results: self-love is not the same as adopting a tone of optimism in one's work. Gloomy, despairing works of art as well as 'cheerful' ones are the product of a positive relationship between conscious and unconscious in the artist's psyche."[31]

The artistic drive and the aesthetic sensibility are all-encompassing. Works of darkness and gloom are as valid and necessary as their kinder, gentler counterparts. Your genius may be prompting you to produce one type or the other, or perhaps both or something in-between. At the same time, and as explained by the demon muse theory in general, your genius is leading you to relate to the world in a certain way and to encounter certain types of life circumstances and experiences. Your primary task is to divine the peculiar personality and guiding theme or themes of both your outer life and your inner partner, and to deploy your conscious efforts as wisely and shrewdly as possible for the purpose of birthing whatever it is that wants to be born and accomplished through you.

[30] Nelson, *On Writer's Block*, 9, 7.

[31] Ibid., 8.

Doomed to be artists, or Keep the channel open

Perhaps the nature of the situation is made a little clearer—perhaps starkly so—by a line from Robert Edmond Jones, the influential 20th century stage director, producer, and set designer. Jones liked to tell his classes, "Some of you are doomed to be artists." This becomes all the more evocative when considered against the etymological backdrop of the word "doom," which connotes not just an unhappy destruction but a person's deep destiny.

The legendary dance choreographer Martha Graham liked Jones's line so much that she became known for repeating it frequently to her own students. Then, in a moment of sheer inspiration, she expanded and deepened it in a conversation with her fellow dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille (of the famous Hollywood de Milles). The latter was experiencing a season of self-doubt, during which, in her own words, she was "bewildered and worried that my entire scale of values was untrustworthy…I confessed that I had a burning desire to be excellent, but no faith that I could be."

De Mille recounted how when she expressed these feelings to Graham on one occasion, Graham, speaking "very quietly," told her, "There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it.

It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open."[32]

A better description of the nature and action of the genius demon, and also of your responsibility in relation to it, would be difficult to come by. Life and creativity merge in the fact of this inner force.

[32] Agnes de Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Random House, 1991), 264.

Chapter Five

The Practice of Inner Collaboration

You can never exhaust the depth of discovery in your demon muse. This is built into the very structure of human consciousness, since the unconscious genius lies perpetually "behind" the conscious ego. The harmonizing and integrating of these two selves represents not a discrete, one-time accomplishment, like a finish line to be reached, but an ongoing, ever-deepening relationship in which communication flows with increasing freedom between you and your daimon.

In this process, getting familiar with your creative demon's general nature as described in the previous chapter is only the beginning: a (very) necessary step, but not a sufficient one. This is because you'll soon discover that in addition to a general direction, your demon muse has specific habits and desires. These can sometimes pertain to things so seemingly prosaic and trivial that you'll be tempted to dismiss them as meaningless. But that would be a mistake. The experience of creative diminishment or full-blown creative block often arises from your unwitting attempt to force your genius to deliver through channels or means that it simply doesn't like and refuses to comply with. Conversely, you can stoke your creative fire by finding and using the *right* approach for your genius. Through trial and error, you can learn exactly how your creative

demon likes to work, right down to the most humdrum daily details of methods and materials.

Kipling's daemon and "the blackest ink"

The practical pickiness of the inner genius is vividly illustrated by something Rudyard Kipling recorded about a tiny but crucial aspect of his authorial life. In his posthumously published autobiography *Something of Myself*, in a chapter titled "Work-Habits," Kipling explained how he overtly externalized his own creative genius and framed it exactly as we have been doing here: in terms of the ancient concept of the personal daimon or daemon. "Let us now consider," he wrote,

> the Personal Daemon of Aristotle and others, of whom it has been truthfully written, though not published:—
>
> This is the doom of the Makers—their Daemon lives in their pen.
> If he be absent or sleeping, they are even as other men.
> But if he be utterly present, and they swerve not from his behest,
> The word that he gives shall continue, whether in earnest or jest.[33]

Let's pause to unpack these lines. The "doom of the Makers," says Kipling—that is, the unavoidable burden, mission, and destiny of inspired writers (and presumably of other artists, too)—is that "their Daemon lives in their pen." In other words, their creativity has a mind and will of its own, and this is only realized (made real) in the concrete act of

[33] *Rudyard Kipling: Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 121-2.

committing words to paper. When the inspiration isn't there, writers "are even as other men," with nothing guiding or empowering them but their conscious efforts. But if the inspirational spirit is moving, the writer who follows it faithfully ("swerves not from its behest") finds the work taking on a vibrant life of its own, so that effort falls away and the creative act becomes one of flow, guidance, and grace.

This is obviously a description of the very phenomenon we've been exploring here. So is Kipling's claim in *Something of Myself* that his daemon made itself known early in his life and provided his career's enduring direction: "Most men, and some most unlikely, keep him under an alias which varies with their literary or scientific attainments. Mine came to me early when I sat bewildered among other notions, and said; 'Take this and no other.' I obeyed, and was rewarded." He says he first discovered his daemon in the writing of "The Phantom Rickshaw" and quickly learned that he would have to make a lifelong point of following the creative influence entirely, because otherwise his work would inevitably suffer: "I learned to lean upon him and recognise the sign of his approach. If ever I held back, Ananias fashion, anything of myself (even though I had to throw it out afterwards) I paid for it by missing what I then knew the tale lacked." He tells us that his daemon was palpably involved in the writing of, for instance, the *Jungle Books* and *Kim*, as evidenced by the fact that "when those books were finished they said so

themselves with, almost, the water-hammer click of a tap turned off." [34]

But what of the specific, nitpicky, nuts-and-bolts aspect of daemonic matters mentioned above? What does Kipling have to say about the role of his daemon in determining his concrete work habits? This is where his account adds something brand new to our exploration. Up to now, we've been exploring the broad outlines and deep meanings of the demon muse's influence in creative work. Our vantage point has been, for the most part, the proverbial bird's-eye-view. But although Kipling, too, is keen to acknowledge this broad view of the matter, he also narrows it down to what might seem at first the most trivial of points.

At one point he starts talking about *pens*. He devotes several sentences to the history of the pens he found it necessary to use in his career. Then he shares the odd fact that his daemon had a highly specific and undeniable preference for a certain shade of ink: "For my ink I demanded the blackest, and had I been in my Father's house, as once I was, would have kept an ink-boy to grind me Indian-ink. All 'blue-blacks' were an abomination to my Daemon, and I never found a bottled vermilion fit to rubricate initials when one hung in the wind waiting."[35]

This may sound odd to people who haven't pursued authorial work themselves, but to those who have, or to those who have ever been

[34] Ibid., 122.

[35] Ibid., 134.

acquainted with a creative artist, it probably strikes an immediate note of recognition. Writers and artists are notorious for their idiosyncratic work habits, which often involve curiosities like Kipling's black ink, and they're usually only too happy to tell you why: It's because when they don't adhere to these seemingly arbitrary rules, they don't feel the creative flow as strongly as they'd like, or perhaps not at all. Something within them demands a particular circumstance, tool, or method, and in the absence of it they feel mired in that appalling cognitive-emotional deadness which is the living hell of creative block, sterility, or miscarriage.

The "something within them" that makes these peculiar demands is, or can be taken for, the daimon, the muse, the unconscious genius that asks (demands) to be honored, in return for which it gladly gives you its gift when the time is right.

For your demon's pleasure

In my own life as a writer, I've discovered there's something talismanic about taking a break from typing, whether on a computer or an actual typewriter, and returning to the handwritten word. Most of my best work has started off as either handwritten notes or, quite often, full drafts written by hand, which I later typed.

This was true of all the stories in *Divinations of the Deep*. It's true of half the pieces in *Dark Awakenings*. The very ebook you're reading now, and the Demon Muse blog from which I developed it, started as a

handwritten brainstorming process. I didn't set out with conscious intent in the early stages to create a blog about the daimonic model of creativity. Rather, that direction emerged from some focused tooling around. Specifically, it arose out of a sustained bout of brainstorming and concept mapping with a pen.

Speaking of which, my best creative feeling, the state of mind and spirit where I can really feel the flow, has tended to come through a blue ballpoint ink pen with a modulated flow of ink that's not too thick or thin, and that provides a suitably scratchy feeling on the page. Roller ball pens and gel pens are thus to be avoided. Interestingly, this dislike of their feel and performance reaches all the way back to my childhood, when I unself-consciously hated them. My calligraphic needs aren't nearly as refined as Kipling's. Cheap, disposable, blue Bic ballpoints with a medium width are my best tool, as verified by nearly twenty years of experimenting.

That said, sometimes I need a break from ink entirely. Sometimes a pencil—preferably a real wooden one, a yellow #2 "school pencil"—is needful. Not only the dry scratching of graphite on paper and the feeling of the wooden pencil shaft in my hand, but the appearance of the grayish letters on a crisp, white background of smooth paper, feels unaccountably but undeniably satisfying to my eye and sensibility.

Not incidentally, that sense of satisfaction is the very thing you should be looking for when you go about gauging your own demon's

practical work preferences. Pay attention to the conspicuous absence or appearance of a sense of heightened passion or power, a kind of delicious buzz that says you're "in the zone." Sometimes it's delicate. Sometimes it's subtle. Sometimes it's electrifyingly obvious. But it's definitely there—or else not. And its presences and absences can become a kind of map or guide to your creative demon's pleasure and displeasure with specific tools and techniques.

For me and my daimon muse, that zone is accessed not just via writing by hand, but by "unfolding" this handwritten material in the typing of it. The very act of transferring my handwritten work to a sheet of typing paper or, these days, a computer screen effectively opens them up and unfolds possibilities that were only latent in their previous incarnation. It's as if I record a highly concentrated version of the inspiration when working by hand, and then unpack, expand, and enflesh it into fully finished form in the act of typing it. A few years ago when I read Stephen King's account of writing the first draft of *Dreamcatcher* entirely by hand, a circumstance that came about because he started the novel in a hotel where the electricity had gone out and then decided on the fly to keep writing in that mode until the end, his description of the vibrancy of the process really resonated. He said writing such a long book by hand reconnected him with the language in a way he hadn't experienced for years. My inner partner and I knew then, and know now, exactly what he was talking about. Maybe you and yours do, too.

Fifty pens for H. P. Lovecraft

One person who certainly understood the matter was H. P. Lovecraft. In a charming anecdote in an equally charming memoir of their long and close friendship, Frank Belknap Long recounts how once in the 1920s he accompanied Lovecraft on a trip to buy a new pen in New York City. Lovecraft, Long informs us, "was fascinated by small articles of stationery—writing pads, rubber bands of assorted sizes, phials of India ink, unusual letterheads, erasers, mechanical pencils, and particularly fountain pens. He used one pen, chosen with the most painstaking care, until it wore out, and several important factors entered into his purchase of a writing instrument. It had to have just the right kind of ink flow, molding itself to his hand in such a way that he was never conscious of the slightest strain as he filled page after page with his often minute calligraphy. It also had to be a black Waterman; a pen of another color or make would have been unthinkable."

Long left his friend at a New York stationery store to visit a nearby pipe store, and, after an absence of forty-five minutes, returned to find a striking sight: "[T]here were at least fifty pens lying about on the counter and Howard was still having difficulty in finding one with just the right balance and smoothness of ink flow. The clerk looked a little haggard-eyed but he was still smiling, wanly." Long closes the story by noting that while "The careful choice of a fountain pen may seem a minor

matter and hardly one that merits dwelling on at considerable length," to him it "always seemed a vitally important key to the basic personality of HPL in more than one respect."[36]

From our daemonically informed viewpoint, we're just as justified in reading Lovecraft's obsessiveness over his calligraphic needs as a clue to his demon muse's personality and preferences as we are in attributing it to the quirks of his conscious personality like Long does. After all—and to anticipate something that I'll mention again in the next chapter—this is the same man whose authorial work was often so profoundly and directly inspired by his dreams—that is, by his unconscious mind; that is, by his demon muse—that he actually questioned whether he could personally take credit for it. Just as Kipling's daemon demanded a certain hue of ink, so Lovecraft's demanded a certain feeling in a fountain pen.

The lesson for the rest of us in all of these things is, I should think, patently obvious:

Trial and error

When you have the daimonic muse-based understanding firmly grasped, and when you're really starting to cultivate both the general experience of your creativity as an external force and the specific understanding of what your particular creative demon is like, then, and only

[36] Frank Belknap Long, *Howard Phillips Lovecraft: Dreamer on the Night Side* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1975), 75-6, 77.

then, can you can begin to make good, productive use of all the self-accounts you'll hear from writers and artists about their idiosyncratic work habits.

And these habits are virtually infinite in their variation. Some writers have to stand while they write. Others have to sit. Still others write in bed. Some need silence and solitude. Others need noise and company. Some play music in the background. Others find this a deadly distraction. Some find mornings more congenial to creative flow. Others find nights or another time of day to be just the thing. Some write by hand and with a specific type of instrument, while others need a typewriter or computer. Some write regularly, on a rigid schedule. Others do it occasional, in passion-driven bursts. For an excellent compendium of writer's habits, see the chapter titled "Work Habits" in *The Writer's Chapbook*, an anthology of excerpts that George Plimpton put together from his *Paris Review* interviews. Yes, it's over-weighted in the direction of writers who represent realism and "literary" fiction in the manner typical of the mid-20th-century, but it's still a fascinating and valuable resource, and it offers a rainbow view of the many quirks and habits that "the Twentieth Century's Preeminent Writers" (as designated in the book's subtitle) truly did find it necessary to honor.

The point is that when you're anchored by your first-person understanding of and relationship with your demon muse, you can conduct mental or practical trial runs of any number of tricks and techniques for

executing creative work, and not have to worry that you're just distracting yourself and tooling around on the surface with merely cosmetic changes, because you'll know that what you're doing is feeling out your inner partner's idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. This is imperative. The only way to find out your demon muse's habits is by trial and error. It will definitely let you know when you are or are not on track. Just pay attention to that electric flow feeling, that heightened sense of creative aliveness, or to its conspicuous absence.

A fragile muse, a delicate inner relationship

Still speaking of concrete matters, but going beyond the subject of work habits as such, your daemon can also provide specific guidance on a career-level basis. Remember when Nick Cave turned down the MTV Award in 1996 and refused all such awards in the future, citing his innate sense that his music "exists beyond the realm inhabited by those who would reduce things to mere measuring," and stating, "I am in competition with no one"? Do you remember the rest of what he said in that letter to MTV? It's worth quoting, since it displays a profound understanding of everything we're talking about: "My relationship with my muse is a delicate one at the best of times and I feel that it is my duty to protect her from influences that may offend her fragile nature. She comes to me with the gift of song and in return I treat her with the respect I feel she deserves—in this case this means not subjecting her to the indignities of

judgment and competition. My muse is not a horse and I am in no horse race and if indeed she was, still I would not harness her to this tumbrel—this bloody cart of severed heads and glittering prizes. My muse may spook! May bolt! May abandon me completely!"[37]

Now there's someone who takes his relationship with his inner genius seriously, and assigns the utmost gravity to the matter of its personified needs. May we all learn to do the same.

Drift, wait, obey

And so this all brings us back to Kipling. In a review of Harry Ricketts' 1999 biography *The Unforgiving Minute: A Life of Rudyard Kipling* for the *Sewanee Review*, William B. Dillingham describes Kipling's decision not to accept money for poems about important national subjects that he submitted to the London *Times*. This feeling, says Dillingham (summarizing Ricketts), was based on Kipling's feelings about his daemon: "Kipling felt that if he took money in payment for such works, he might lose his creative inspiration—that is, his 'daemon' might consider him unworthy and desert him. Terrified of losing his ability to create, he therefore made a deal with his daemon and with fate to forego monetary reward for poems like 'Recessional.'"[38]

[37] Nick Cave, letter to MTV, http://www.nick-cave.com/mtv/mtv.shtml.

[38] William B. Dillingham, "The Kipling Question," *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 109, No. 3 (Summer 2001), 451-2.

Was this a groundless and irrational fear, or was Kipling really onto something? Was he sensitively aware of something that we all need to into account in our own creative lives? Is it truly possible for your demon muse to desert you? Kipling obviously believed that it is. As we've seen, so does Nick Cave. Both men acted on this fear—or call it a recognition or inspired intuition—and made concrete, real-world decisions to forestall the possibility of inner creative abandonment. These decisions affected their careers. And they made them in deference to, and in honor of, their respective creative demons.

Based on this, and also on the collective legacy of all the artists who have similarly paid homage to the daimonic muse and let its needs influence their practical working lives, I urge you to take Kipling seriously when he offers what still stands as one of the most valuable pieces of instruction ever given to creative artists: "When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey."[39] Just remember while you're drifting and waiting to experiment—casually, relaxedly, even playfully, with an open mind—in order to find out exactly *in what manner* and *with what tools* and *under what conditions* your inner creative partner wants to work.

[39] Pinney, *Rudyard Kipling*, 123.

CHAPTER SIX

Divining Your Daimon's Rhythm

Along with learning to collaborate with the demon muse by discovering its practical working preferences, for many of us one of the hardest things to learn is the necessity of falling into step with our demon's innate rhythm. Your inner partner is invested with a certain schedule, pace, or tempo, and a major part of your job as a writer is to discover it.

Note the emphasis: You don't choose when the creative goods will be delivered; rather, the moment chooses you. Cooperating with your inner genius isn't like ordering fast food. Delivery may be fast, or it may be slow. It may be regular, or it may be intermittent. Regardless, your task, the job of you-as-ego, is first to *find* your demon's natural schedule, and then to *welcome* it, to second it, to work with it wholeheartedly. Semi-paradoxically, this deliberate cooperation is also what enables you eventually to exercise, if not outright control, then some sort of benign mutual influence over the comings and goings of your creative cycles.

The overall principle is nicely illustrated by something Lovecraft said about his authorial process in a 1928 letter to Frank Long: "I never *try* to write a story, but wait till it *has to be* written."[40] That's what we're

[40] H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters I: 1911-1924*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965), 166.

talking about: waiting for the moment when creative work *has to be done*, as indicated and dictated by the internal pressure of daimonic necessity. "Drift, wait, and obey," Kipling said.

(For more about active waiting, see the next chapter. For more about the fine art of divining your creative demon's rhythm, read on.)

The creative process: A review

At this late date, the classic stages of the creative process as first enumerated by Graham Wallas in *The Art of Thought* (1926) probably don't need to be restated from a strictly informational point of view, since the pattern they describe has passed into universal knowledge and been absorbed into our general discourse about creativity and art. But for purposes of illuminating the importance of the topic at hand, we'll be well-served by a review the whole thing.

Incidentally, my personal introduction to this particular way of understanding creativity came in 1989 via one of the textbooks adopted by Dr. Betty Scott, master trumpet player and creativity teacher extraordinaire, for use in a class titled, appropriately, "The Creative Process," which she developed and taught through the honors college at the University of Missouri-Columbia. As I recall, the book introduced this process and its stages without reference to Wallas's name. That is, it simply presented them—and again, I stress the qualifier "as I recall"—as a generally recognized truth about the way creativity is experienced in

actual practice. In the decades since then, I, like you, have seen it described and discussed countless times in countless different contexts, sometimes with and sometimes without Wallas's name formally attached.

The creative process according to the Wallas-influenced tradition consists of four, or maybe five, stages:

1. Preparation, in which you clarify the problem, issue, or creative project you're dealing with, gather information about it, think diligently about it, make some trial runs, and/or otherwise take conscious and positive action to get started.
2. Incubation, during which the project or issue sinks into the unconscious mind, which then goes to work on it. During this stage nothing much appears to be happening on the surface. You have no conscious sense of making progress in your creative visioning. You may even forget all about the project, or think you've suffered a failure or had a creative misfire, because you feel like a ship becalmed at sea. This is sometimes known as the "fallow period" (see below).
3. Intimation and Illumination (sometimes listed separately, sometimes with the second word changed to "Insight"), in which you receive a mental-emotional inkling of imminent inspiration, followed by the eruption of a new image or idea into your conscious mind. This is the stage most of us tend to think of as the creative moment pure and simple. It is, or it involves, the archetypal "Aha!" or "Eureka!" moment, when the surge or spark of an idea or image arrives in consciousness.

4. Verification, in which you act on the received idea or ideas, test them, and refine them, as when you begin putting down words on paper in the hope that the story (novel, essay, poem, whatever) really is ready to be written.

Note that stages 1 and 4 involve conscious and deliberate work, while stages 2 and 3 occur on their own timetable and outside of your conscious ability to control. This intimately intertwined relationship between effort and relaxation, control and surrender, trying and waiting, systole and diastole, is the heart of the whole thing.

The importance of trusting the process and its timing

To put some flesh on these bones, I offer the following real-life example from my own experience of the creative process with its alternating stages of active effort and passive waiting.

In 2006 I was contracted to write an essay titled "The Angel and the Demon," about the origins and histories of these two iconic figures in horror entertainment, for the encyclopedia *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural*. This is the same essay I mentioned earlier in this book, the one that served as the basis for Chapter Two. I began the project by reading a veritable mountain of material about the subject: history, anthropology, religion, folklore, literary criticism, and more. It was a subject I found fascinating, and one that I already knew a lot about, so I expected the writing to be easy and enjoyable.

Partly before and partly after doing all of that reading, which of course served as Stage 1: Preparation for my work on that particular project, I created what I thought was a workable outline. I used it to write the introduction and the first two sections, and all seemed to be going well. I was enjoying having a well-monetized excuse to devote so much time and attention to a subject of intense personal interest, and I felt pretty sure of my progress toward completion.

Then, without warning, the essay stalled after a few thousand words. The reasons were beyond my understanding, but the first-person reality was clear: I simply couldn't see my way through to the end. What I had thought was a viable direction revealed itself in actual execution to be off-target in ways I couldn't quite articulate. Was the problem structural? Had I organized the outline in an illogical or unworkable way? Did I simply lack enough knowledge about the subject? Did I need to stop and do more research? Was I simply a hopeless screw-up who had been fooling himself with the thought that he could tackle such a project? Should I never have accepted the assignment in the first place? (Any writer can tell you that these crises of confidence are all too common. Since you're probably a writer yourself, you're already acquainted with them.)

Luckily, the project's editor was S.T. Joshi, the renowned scholar and editor of Lovecraftian literature, supernatural fiction in general, and skepticism/atheism/freethought. He proved marvelously patient and supportive when I contacted him to detail my difficulties and express my

doubts about going forward. (That was only my second time working for him. I later found, while working as a house reviewer for his horror review journal *Dead Reckonings* from 2006 to 2011, that such generosity is typical of his style.) He offered some practical and personal advice. On the practical side, he suggested that I might consider breaking the essay down into even smaller sections and tackling each individually. On the personal side, he suggested that I might take a brief break to relax and regroup. I mainly took the latter option, and let the project lapse into a coma. I gave up on it, let it sink into mental oblivion, and refused to think about it. The experience was actually quite relaxing and liberating, although negative thoughts and emotions about my self-perceived inadequacy still flitted about and tried to lodge within me.

And then, a couple of weeks later, in confirmation of the lessons I had already learned in my decades-long engagement with creative projects of all sorts, the validity of the stage model with its underscored fallow period asserted itself. I found my mind turning spontaneously toward the essay again, and I let my thoughts move over and through it as they wanted, and when I finally dared to focus directly on the matter, fearing that the block would still be there, I discovered that my various structural and tactical errors were now glaringly obvious. I sorted through my thoughts, went back to work, and found that the whole essay came together quite nicely in a way that only a few of my projects have managed to do, so that I saw the shape of the finished piece flowing

out ahead of me like an unfurling carpet even as I was still thousands of words away from writing the final lines.

What had happened? What had made the difference between my feeling of being lost, blocked, and defeated, and then my sudden entry into a state of creative confidence and empowerment? Quite simply, on the front end I had run into trouble by trying to foreshorten or sidestep the incubation stage. I had tried to do all of the work myself, without the help of my demon muse. When I recognized my mistake with the aid of S.T.'s gentle prodding, I dumped the whole thing onto my unconscious mind, which is where it belonged in the first place, and let my inner partner take over and run with it. How did I accomplish that dumping? Simply by letting go, by refusing for a time to devote any conscious thought or effort to the project, and by refusing to take the bait whenever those negative thoughts and feelings tried to get their hooks into me while the project was gestating and my daemon was working.

And that, my friends, is the trick. You really and truly have to *give up*, not holding in reserve some idea of control, and you have to trust the process to work on its own. You have to trust your genius implicitly, and wait for its knock upon your inner door to signal that it's time to proceed. Otherwise, you're not only "working without a net," you're working without a soul.

This 'enormous and powerful part of your nature'

Your ability to achieve this trust is facilitated by the recognition that one of the innate functions of the unconscious is to analyze experience and knowledge for their possible patterns of meaning, and from these to synthesize new insights. To put it differently, your unconscious, your inner genius, is a *meaning machine*. It naturally goes to work on what you think, know, and encounter, and delivers up what might clumsily but accurately be termed a "sense of sensefulness," a "take" on things that's infused with your personal stamp and sensibility. This is the stuff of inspired creative originality. Armed with this knowledge, you can confidently cooperate with your inner partner in creative work by first giving up your sense of control and letting your daemon do what it likes to do best, and then by remaining attentive so that you'll know when the goods are ready for delivery, as signaled by the onset of Wallas's "intimation" substage, which arrives as the nagging and definite feeling of an impending idea or revelation.

To quote Dorothea Brande: "The unconscious should not be thought of as a limbo where vague, cloudy, and amorphous notions swim hazily about. There is every reason to believe, on the contrary, that it is the great home of form; that it is quicker to see types, patterns, purposes, than our intellect can ever be…[I]f you are to write well you must come to terms with the enormous and powerful part of your nature which lies

behind the threshold of immediate knowledge."[41]

The myth of constant output

Reaching the point where you're emotionally able adopt such an attitude of trust is, however, extremely difficult, and one of the main reasons for this is our apparently inbuilt inability to give up our egoic goals until life beats them out of us. It's common for those of us who are driven to pursue work in the creative arts to have in mind an ideal end that we're aiming at. Along with hopes of having our efforts recognized by an appreciative audience, one of the most common desires is to achieve a state of regular, and even constant, creative flow, a condition of perpetual blessedness in which, as Lawrence Block niftily described it, we're "plugged into the Universal Mind"[42] and are constantly able to feel the pleasure of this combined experience of power, guidance, rightness, and flow. Even those writers—and there are plenty of them/us—for whom the actual act of writing is often a matter of sheer drudgery have experienced those moments of deep satisfaction when everything comes together, the stars align, the chi flows, and it's as if the universe does the work through you. It's only natural to wish it could always be this way.

Natural—but dangerous and unrealistic. A number of unexamined

[41] Brande, *Becoming a Writer*, 151.

[42] Lawrence Block, *Telling Lies for Fun and Profit: A Manual for Fiction Writers* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994; 1981), 49.

assumptions lie behind the myth of perpetual creative output, and it's hard to decide which is the more pernicious and damaging to deep and authentic creativity. The basic problem is that a person in this state is judging himself according to an artificial, external, and impossible standard. As described above, the creative process involves a gestation or incubation period during which the work sinks into the unconscious mind. While this is going on, you may feel as if you've lost the creative thread entirely, since consciously, nothing's happening. That's why this part of the process is also known as the "fallow period." The term is drawn from the age-old agricultural practice of letting fields lie unplanted (fallow) for a time before planting new crops, in order to allow time for essential nutrients in the soil to be replenished. A fallow field looks barren. Fallowness by definition entails a period of inactivity.

What we have to do in our creative work is not just accept that this is inescapably the case, but wholeheartedly embrace it, and also embrace the fact that the specific manifestation of it will differ for each of us. Not everybody can be a Charles Dickens or a Stephen King who produces a gargantuan body of work at a rapid pace (although King, we should note, speaks candidly about the fallow period in his own creative process). Nor does everybody have to be a Harper Lee, spending three years writing a single novel and then never writing anything else to speak of.

But Dickens and King *do* have to be themselves, and that means pro-

lificacy. And Lee *does* have to be herself, and that means being the modern archetype of the "one-book author." Jeffrey Weinstock, a literature professor at Central Michigan University, observed that Lee and others like her represent a particular species of author: "Sometimes a great author has just one singular idea and when they have expressed that idea, they are done. They have nothing else to put out there."[43] Lee herself, when she was invited to speak to the audience at a ceremony inducting new members into the Alabama Academy of Honor in 2007, responded to the long-standing question about her one-book career by saying, "Well, it's better to be silent than to be a fool."[44]

To avoid being a fool, you have to learn to speak when your demon muse gives you something to say, and remain silent when it holds back. This is true no matter how jarringly fast or achingly slow its schedule may be. As indicated by the example of Lee, and also of the authors discussed below, for some people this can mean something very different indeed from the rosy ideal of a constant output.

[43] Paul Harris, "Mockingbird author steps out of shadows," *Guardian*, February 5, 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/feb/05/books.usa.

[44] "Author has her say," *The Boston Globe*, August 21, 2007, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2007/08/21/author_has_her_say.

Finding your natural creative condition

In 1982 Philip Larkin gave an interview to the *Paris Review*. In the course of the conversation, the interview did the math on Larkin's poetic output over the course of his career and asked rather incredulously, "Did you really only complete about three poems in any given year?" Larkin replied, "It's unlikely I shall write any more poems, but when I did, yes, I did write slowly. I was looking at 'The Whitsun Weddings' just the other day, and found that I began it sometime in the summer of 1957. After three pages, I dropped it for another poem that in fact was finished but never published. I picked it up again, in March 1958, and worked on it till October, when it was finished. But when I look at the diary I was keeping at the time, I see that the kind of incident it describes happened in July 1955! So in all, it took over three years. Of course, that's an exception. But I did write slowly, partly because you're finding out what to say as well as how to say it, and that takes time."[45]

Commenting on this in *On Writer's Block*, Victoria Nelson offers an insight that arrested me when I first read it, and that I invite you to consider closely and ruminate on: "In [Larkin's] and other such cases, that negative space around the three poems per year looms large in retrospect. Blaming oneself for low productivity, however—an activity Larkin

[45] Philip Larkin, "Philip Larkin, The Art of Poetry No. 30," *The Paris Review*, http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3153/the-art-of-poetry-no-30-philip-larkin.

himself engaged in only in private—is punishment for a crime that did not exist until it was named. *An uneven artistic output, for many, is a natural condition of creativity*."[46]

For some of us, including me, and perhaps including you, truer words were never spoken. For some of us, not only an uneven artistic output but a perpetually *minimal* output might be a natural condition of creativity. If this describes you, then agonizing over it or beating yourself up over it won't help, and will actually hurt, because the only way to achieve what you're meant to achieve and become who you're meant to become in your creative work is to do what we've been talking about in this ebook: first, divine the deep nature, desires, and tendencies of your demon muse, your inner partner, the holder of the patterns of meaning that explain your life's unfolding, and then consciously embrace these by intentionally aligning yourself with them. If this reveals that you're one of those authors endowed with an uneven output, or even one of those whose task is to express Weinstock's "one singular idea," then so be it.

On the other hand, you may find that your natural condition is to be prolific. For writers the extreme manifestation of this state is known as *hypergraphia*, the medical condition in which a person is possessed by an overpowering urge to write. (The opposite condition, the inability to write—i.e., writer's block—has a medical name, too: hypographia.)

[46] Nelson, *On Writer's Block*, 166-7. Emphasis added.

Neurologist and Harvard professor Alice Flaherty, who has firsthand knowledge of hypergraphia, examines its literary, human, and neurological aspects in connection with the experience of muse-like inspiration in her fascinating 2004 book *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain*. In a chapter titled "Metaphor, the Inner Voice, and the Muse," she points out that although the concept of the muse fell out of favor in modern creativity studies for a long time, some psychologists have returned to studying it in recent years, and their work suggests that "The muse is more than a poetic device"—that it is in fact "an attempt to say what inspiration actually feels like, about the way it seems to come from the outside air just as the air you breathe does during respiratory inspiration."[47]

Observing that some writers want to deny the existence of inspiration and/or the possibility that they have ever experienced it themselves, Flaherty says that although it's certainly their prerogative if they want to proceed based solely on the ideal of personal effort, "It is my proposition…that such sensations of flow or inspiration or the muse—however irrational they may be—are so highly motivating that they drive people to do their best work."[48]

She also draws a major piece of advice from her studies of writer's

[47] Alice W. Flaherty, *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain* (New York: Mariner Books, 2005), 236.

[48] Ibid., 238.

block both as a neurological phenomenon and as something described by writers themselves: "Perhaps the most crucial implication is not to keep yourself from writing when not inspired, but to be ruthless about writing whenever inspiration hits."[49] In other words, when the creative spirit speaks, you should listen and act at all costs. This means that if you happen to be paired with a particularly prolific inner genius, perhaps even to the point of experiencing hypergraphia, then a major part of your creative discipline will involve keeping up with it, arranging your life and marshaling your resources so that you're always ready to record the frequent inner outpourings of inspired thinking.

The bottom line is that you simply can't know your own creative rhythm—occasional, erratic, or prolific—until you actually do the work of finding out who you are by making friends with your daimonic genius, and then by approaching your work openly and experimentally in order to discover the pace and volume at which your creativity wants to emerge.

Toll booths, radio aërials, and the blessing of silence

As you go about learning this inner tempo, you may find it consoling and encouraging to know that you're not alone. Every writer and artist has had to figure out his or her native rhythm, and even those who downplay the role of inspiration and recommend more of a "nose to the

[49] Ibid., 86.

grindstone" approach are obliged by the nature of the situation to recognize the necessity of receptivity and careful awareness.

A notable example is novelist Joe Hill, who in a 2010 interview extolled the virtues of hard work and expressed open scorn for the idea of relying on inspiration: "The definition of an unpublished writer," he said, "is a dude who only writes when he feels inspired. Writing is a job—you punch the clock like anyone else. I go six hours a day on weekdays, and if I'm on deadline for something, I'll usually sit down and do a little more in the evening. And I write two to three hours a day on the weekends, just to keep my hand in. If I don't feel like it or I'm not in the mood, I do it anyway." But having said that, he immediately followed it by offering a metaphor for his experience of the authorial process that neatly summarizes the relationship between working and waiting, and that emphasizes the independent and elusive nature of the mental material that's captured through all of that hard work: "I tell myself I'm a guy who works in a toll booth. Ideas are the cars that pass through. Sometimes there's no traffic, but I still have to sit in that toll booth in case someone turns up."[50]

Interestingly and appropriately, Hill's father, Stephen King, agrees with the spirit of these words. In a 2006 essay about the writer's muse for

[50] James Grainger, "Joe Hill: The Man Who Wouldn't Be King" (interview with Joe Hill), *The Excerpt*, March 22, 2010, http://books.torontoist.com/2010/03/joe-hill-the-man-who-wouldnt-be-king.

The Washington Post, King characterizes the muse as a "small animal, sometimes quite vicious, that makes its home in the bushes… a half-wild beast that lives in the thickets of each writer's imagination." He then describes his relationship with his own muse in terms that harmonize nicely with his son's: "The place one calls one's study or writing room is really no more than a clearing in the woods where one trains the beast (insofar as it can be trained) to come. One doesn't call it; that doesn't work. One just goes there and picks up the handiest writing implement (or turns it on) and then waits…My muse may visit. She may not. The trick is to be there waiting if she does.[51]

Both of these images, the toll booth and the clearing where the writer waits for the muse to emerge from the bushes, are related in spirit to the poet Amy Lowell's comparison of poets to radio antennas. In her classic essay "The Process of Making Poetry," Lowell claims there is something fundamentally mysterious about the making of poetry. She says the poetic mindset is a *sui generis* psychic state that is entirely different from normal consciousness. "Let us admit at once," she says, "that the poet is something like a radio aërial—he is capable of receiving messages on waves of some sort; but he is more than an aërial, for he is capable of transmuting these messages into those patterns of words we call

[51] Stephen King, "The Writer's Muse," *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/28/AR2006092801398_pf. html

poems."[52]

She identifies the source of these messages as "the subconscious mind" and describes it as a "temperamental ally" that will sometimes "strike work at some critical point," after which "Not another word is to be got out of him." Whenever this occurs, she says, it signals the decisive point of transition between relying on inspiration and exerting active effort: "Here is where the conscious training of the poet comes in, for he must fill in what the subconscious has left, and fill it in as much in the key of the rest as possible." She also says the inherent consistency of the subconscious mind is what enabled her to continue writing on a given poem in a consistent way even after long interruptions, since sometimes she could enter a semi-trance state in which she became acutely aware of her subconscious mind and was able to write directly out of its sea of ideas and feelings. But—and here's the really salient point, the one that reinforces what we've been saying here—this could only work when an idea was ripe for the writing, since "no power will induce it [i.e., the trance] if the subconscious is not ready; hence the sterile periods known to all poets."[53]

If you take only one thought away from all of these observations, let

[52] Amy Lowell, "The Process of Making Poetry," in *The Creative Process: A Symposium*, ed. Brewster Ghiselin (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 110.

[53] Ibid., 111-112.

it be this: It's crucial that you learn your own daemon's rhythm, and learn to embrace those sterile periods when they come over you, for they are when the soil of your inner creative field is being replenished. They're when unborn ideas are gestating in the silent womb of your unconscious mind. Pick one of the metaphors offered above, or come up with one of your own devising (or better yet, ask your demon muse give one to you), and let it be your anchor. You're a toll booth operator waiting for cars. You're a radio antenna waiting for a signal. You're a farmer waiting for seeds to sprout. You're a midwife waiting for a child to be born. My own master metaphor, obviously, is that of the demon muse. I'm a

There's a natural rhythm to the process, and it's entirely *your* rhythm, and whether it's fast or slow, erratic or regular, your job is to find it and second its motion, and, critically, to be alert, ready, and willing to do your work when the inspiration arrives. Nelson writes, "Silence is often as blessed a condition as its opposite. Writing/not writing represents a natural alternation of states, an instinctive rhythm that lies at the heart of the creative process…This rhythm, moreover, takes a unique shape from artist to artist. For every writer who is a relentlessly systematic worker, another is not. For every writer who allows a month of silence to fall between works, another allows a year."[54]

[54] Nelson, *On Writer's Block*, 162.

Dreams and nightmares

I began this chapter with H.P. Lovecraft's assertion that he never actively tried to write a story but instead waited until he was gripped by the feeling that it *had* to be written. I quoted this not only because of its relevance to the subject at hand, but because of the relevance of Lovecraft himself to our overall endeavor here. For his case is particularly useful for illustrating our supervening focus on creativity as something we can fruitfully personify and relate to as an autonomous force in the psyche.

It's well known that Lovecraft possessed, or was possessed by, an astonishingly vivid dream life. This was central to his career as a writer, since he drew many of his characters, settings, place names, and even entire plots directly from these nocturnal visions. He wrote his apocalyptic prose poem "Nyarlathotep," for example, after a fantastically vivid and horrifying nightmare in which not only the title word but the entire story was given to him virtually intact. The piece in its finished form is essentially a dream transcript, and its powerfully oneiric quality is due partly to the fact that he leapt out of bed and wrote most of it before he was fully awake. His short story "The Statement of Randolph Carter," describing a nocturnal descent into a tomb, had a similar origin. The bat-winged "Night Gaunts" of his dreamland stories came directly from his boyhood nightmares.

In noting that these "compelling impulses" were communicated

directly to Lovecraft by his dreams, the French literary scholar Maurice Lévy makes a significant observation about the import of the whole thing for Lovecraft's creativity: "When he tried to write by forcing himself, the result was flat and cold. He knew not how to compose a worthwhile tale except under the incitement of dream. He even carried this scruple to the point of wondering whether those works he wrote in this other state ought truly to be considered his own."[55]

Lévy is referring to something Lovecraft said in a letter from 1919. After first offering a transcription of the dream that he soon developed into "The Statement of Randolph Carter," Lovecraft speculated momentarily in that letter about the relationship between his dream life and his authorial one: "I wonder, though, if I have a right to claim authorship of things I dream? I hate to take credit, when I did not really think out the picture with my own conscious wits. Yet if I do not take credit, who'n Heaven will I give credit tuh? Coleridge claimed 'Kubla Khan', so I guess I'll claim the thing an' let it go at that."[56]

In this brief and tantalizing passage, Lovecraft raises what are, for us, the most important questions of all: Did he, and do we, have a right to

[55] Maurice Lévy, *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, trans. S.T. Joshi (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 98.

[56] H.P. Lovecraft, Letter to the Gallomo (Alfred Galpin, Samuel Loveman, and Maurice W. Moe), 11 December 1919, http://www.hplovecraft.com/ writings/texts/letters/1919-12-11-glm.asp

claim ownership of the things we receive from dreams and inspiration? Can we take credit for gifts from a force or source over which we have no conscious control? And if we don't take credit, then to whom is it due? This ebook is an attempt to justify answering "No" to the first two questions while offering a definite and fruitful answer to the third. No, we cannot take credit for what we do not consciously supply. But there's definitely one to whom credit is due, and learning its timing is a non-negotiable necessity if you want to truly succeed as a writer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Art of Active Waiting

To review, it's vital in creative work that you learn to embrace the recurring fallow periods during which you feel like you're not getting anything done, since these are when your unconscious genius is performing its magic by going to work on things you've learned and planned through conscious effort, and is transmuting them through a process of psychological alchemy into the stuff of inspired originality.

However, as discussed briefly in Chapter One, not all waiting is alike. It's common to think of waiting as a passive activity, but the type of waiting that's integral to the practice of daimonic creativity is quite active, so much so that we may be just as well served by thinking of it as an aggressive *courting* of the demon muse, a kind of "come-on" that encourages our inner partner to provide an influx of inspiration. No matter how you want to regard it, learning to practice this art effectively represents a milestone in your maturation as a creative artist.

Lessons from religion

Given the profoundly spiritual roots of the muse, daimon, and genius, it's appropriate that an analogy to what we're talking about can be found in religion, where millions of people are engaged in a type of

waiting that's directly equivalent to the type involved in daemonic creativity. Two examples, one from the East and one from the West, are enough to establish the point.

ZEN: WAITING FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

In Zen Buddhism, zazen meditation is framed as a method of waiting for enlightenment, which cannot be actively achieved but must be actively courted. Practitioners are taught the basic mechanics of sitting meditation—the correct posture, manner of breathing, etc.—and also the right mental and emotional attitudes to adopt. (See for example the beautiful commentaries on these matters in Shunryu Suzuki's 1970 classic *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.) Rule number one in the attitudinal department is the importance of recognizing that you aren't meditating to *attain* enlightenment, but to clear a space in which enlightenment can spontaneously *arise* or *occur*, since the very idea of attaining some sort of transformation, or indeed attaining anything at all for your little ego self, is a symptom and expression of the very condition of cosmic delusion for which enlightenment is the cure. Enlightenment has to happen on its own, outside the sphere of effort, because it's a realization that reveals a reality that categorically transcends everything about who and what you perceive yourself to be. It breaks through from beyond the ego's shell, and this necessarily means that effort, which is of the ego, and which is predicated on axioms and presuppositions that enlightenment will expose

as provisional, only strengthens the basic human state of delusion.

A famous Zen story tells of a monk who was obsessed with meditating. He spent far more hours in the monastery's meditation hall than any of the other monks, sitting there morning, noon, and night, and stealing every spare moment to sit some more. One day the master asked him, "Why do you meditate so much?" The monk replied, "Because I want to become a Buddha." (That is, he wanted to attain enlightenment.) Hearing this, the master immediately snatched up a floor tile from the meditation hall and began scrubbing it furiously with the sleeve of his robe. The monk asked in astonishment, "What are you doing?" The master told him, "I'm trying to make a mirror." The monk exclaimed, "But you can't turn a floor tile into a mirror by polishing it!" And the master, dropping the tile, bellowed back, "You can't make a Buddha by meditating!"

So what, then, is the purpose of meditating? Since my personal engagement with Zen is of the informal (but definite) sort, I'll answer by passing on an oft-quoted remark from American Zen master Richard Baker that repays careful reflection: "Enlightenment is an accident. Meditation makes you more accident-prone." This is easily altered to yield an equivalent statement about the purpose of waiting actively on your demon muse in creative work: "Inspiration is an accident. Actively waiting on it makes you more accident-prone."

CHRISTIANITY: WAITING FOR JESUS, AND JESUS ON WAITING

Along the same lines, in a section of *The Power of Now* titled "The esoteric meaning of waiting," Eckhart Tolle draws attention to "a qualitatively different kind of waiting [than laziness or boredom], one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment, and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it."[57] He says this in the context of commenting on Jesus' parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), which he interprets symbolically as a teaching about the importance of waiting attentively for divine illumination.

Speaking of Jesus, we're all familiar with the mainstream Christian doctrine of his eventual return. Hundreds of millions of Christians live in anticipation of this event, some with a spiritual or metaphorical attitude and others with a literal expectation of seeing the clouds part and a man in a glowing white robe descend from a spatially located heaven. In both cases, the religious life is invested with a quality of alert expectancy for the arrival of something that's completely beyond the human ability to control. It will just happen when it happens. The Christian's proper task, whether conceived mystically and metaphorically or concretely and literally, is to remain watchful and receptive. As the synoptic Jesus tells his listeners in the famous apocalyptic passages of Matthew 24, Mark 13,

[57] Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 95.

and Luke 21, nobody, not even the angels, knows the day or the hour when the "end of the age" will come. "Therefore keep watch," he says, and "be ready," because you don't know when the great event will happen.

What wants to be said through you

The applicable point we learn from religious and spiritual traditions is this: that the quality of our mindstate is crucial to our success when we're waiting for creative inspiration to spark. If we're not paying attention, not mindfully watching and waiting for the inspiration to arise so that we can greet it and engage with it somehow or other, then we may well miss it. "[A] writer has to take it when it comes," William Burroughs once wrote, "and a glimpse once lost may never come again, like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. Writers don't write, they read and transcribe. They are only allowed access to the books at certain times. They have to make the most of these occasions."[58]

Author and photographer David Ulrich, in *The Widening Stream*, his manual on the deep nature of the creative process, explains the process of active waiting on creativity like this: "Creativity requires that we enter a region of risk, not depending on what we know or leaning on our

[58] William Burroughs, introduction to *The Retreat Diaries*, reprinted in *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002; 1976), 155.

comforting habits or past formulas. Seeking a creative response, we sit quietly in front of ourselves and the task at hand, waiting but not-waiting…taking the risk of just being. Sometimes we experiment and play; sometimes we do nothing. Eventually, something wells up from within, a new impulse, a fresh response that can help and guide us. If we alternate doing with not-doing, activity with rest, insights will come in response to our deepest questions and most perplexing problems. And it does work. All we must do is try."[59]

Note well that neglecting to pay attention and wait actively for the motions of your demon may result not only in your failing to hear its voice, but in its failure to speak at all. If you're not ready when a moment of inspiration arises, then it may pass over you in search of a more alert and receptive point of entry. Recall that our supervening concept is the personification of creativity as an independent presence or force. If you truly adopt this attitude and live your life by it, then regardless of whether you think of the daimonic muse as simply a useful psychological metaphor or a recognition of something "really real," one logical corollary is the recognition that creativity not only chooses to visit you according to its own wishes but can freely choose *not* to visit if you misuse, ignore, or otherwise abuse it. As Elizabeth Gilbert lucidly put it in her

[59] David Ulrich, *The Widening Stream: The Seven Stages of Creativity* (Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, 2002), 96-7.

Radiolab interview, "I kind of do believe that the world is being constantly circled as though by Gulf Stream forces, ideas and creativity that want to be made manifest, and they're looking for portals to come through in people. And if you don't do it, they'll go find someone else."[60]

Of course, it was also Gilbert who in her 2009 TED talk recounted a story told to her by Tom Waits, who said he was once driving down the road when a burst of musical inspiration came to him. He had no way to capture the idea at the moment, and, as he later told Gilbert, he entered a new phase of his creative life when he spontaneously spoke to the sky, addressing the creative force itself and asking it to go away and come back when he was in a better situation to greet it. For writers, the practical application of this anecdote is brought out by Julia Cameron, who says that since writing opens us up to being filled with inspiration from "the subconscious, the unconscious, the superconscious, the imagination, or the muse"—"It doesn't matter what you call it," she says, since "The point is that writing allows you to contact it"—this necessarily means that we can "turn off" our writing to deal with life's demands without fearing we'll lose our ideas, because this approach transforms writing and its spiritual source into a "full partner but not a domineering or jealous spouse."[61] Greeting and engaging with your muse's communications

[60] "Me, Myself, and Muse," op. cit.

[61] Julia Cameron, *The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 101, 104.

doesn't have to mean dropping everything you're doing and ignoring all of your other responsibilities on the spur of the moment. Merely to acknowledge that you heard the whisper, and to affirm that you intend to set aside time to listen closely and act on it later, can be enough.

The point is that we have to be both actively attentive and receptive, remaining on the lookout for our demon muse to speak, and also confident of its constancy and loyalty if we really will adopt this discipline. Think of the well-established tendency of ideas to coalesce from the cultural aether, as it were, and pop up from independent sources in strikingly synchronicitous fashion. The separate and simultaneous invention of the differential calculus by Newton and Leibniz in the 17th century is only the most famous example. The same phenomenon is happening all the time. We're all mouthpieces for the world soul. And if you want to increase your odds of being chosen to say what's wanting to be said, you should take a hint and begin training yourself to hear your inner voice, whether by learning to meditate, by rearranging your life and schedule to allow for more mental "breathing room," by praying or otherwise speaking directly to your muse (a practice that a number of us real writers really do engage in), or by taking some other action.

Working, waiting, and courting the muse

In Chapter One, I quoted Ray Bradbury on the necessity of practice: ""[H]ave you trained yourself so that you can say what you want to say

without getting hamstrung?...[W]e are working not for work's sake, producing not for production's sake...What we are trying to do is to find a way to release the truth that lies in all of us." His words call out the crucial practical aspect of active waiting, which is the necessary complement to the mental-emotional aspect described above. This state of stillness infused with alert expectancy can and often should be accompanied by active engagement in any number of concrete pursuits. The greatest idea in the world, the most transformative transmission of inspiration ever received by a human being, would be effectively worthless if it were received by someone who was mute to express it. Hence, painters practice brushstrokes. Musicians practice scales. Writers pound out endless pages in order to refine their sheer ability to string together words gracefully and effortlessly. All these are instances of what can be called waiting-as-preparation, waiting as the deliberate discipline of molding oneself into a vessel capable of holding and channeling the dictates of the daemon. Fortunately, it's your daemon that draws you to crave the act of writing, painting, or playing the piano in the first place, so the relationship here is thoroughly symbiotic and self-propelling.

Additional examples of this phenomenon in action come from Ulrich, who invokes the images of "the artist in the cluttered working studio, the carpenter in the well-equipped woodshop, the chef in the within-arms-reach-of-everything kitchen, the dancer in the mirrored hall with polished, spacious floors, the writer seated at his or her simple desk, or a

writer like myself seated at a digital command module with a scanner, laser printer, full-page monitor, and several computers within easy reach." He observes that "all these scenarios and many others invite a way of working for each individual that may encourage the muse to appear, invite inspiration and new understanding, and help incur fresh combinations of form and language." All of this, he says, constitutes "the work of craft," which includes both learning the technical requirements and processes of our work and searching for "the suitable—the right and true—sense of form to clothe our ideas."[62]

Steven Pressfield, author of *The War of Art*, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, and several bestselling historical novels, gets at the same thing in a March 2010 blog post about the awesome creative power of *habit*. "The Muse favors habit," he writes. "Each day when she looks down on us from Mt. Olympus, her first question is: Where is that S.O.B. who was sniveling and beseeching my aid yesterday? If she sees us in our studio, at our desk, making our calls, a warm glow suffuses her immortal heart. Ah, she says to herself, a true devotee! The Muse is like any other boss; she values talent, yes, but what she favors even more is devotion, dedication, perseverance. When she sees our butts in our seats, she can't help herself; 'Okay, okay, I'll give this poor sucker a couple of ideas today.'"[63]

[62] Ulrich, *The Widening Stream*, 124.

[63] Steven Pressfield, "Habit," *Writing Wednesdays*, March 31, 2010, http://www.stevenpressfield.com/2010/03/writing-wednesdays-32-habit.

Taken in the right sense, all of this advice—and more, all of the advice about practice and effort that you've ever received, and that may have caused you to despair as you contemplated the seemingly unattainable summit of technical skill you were told you'd have to attain—can lead you to a new and deep level of fulfilling alignment with your creative demon. You're working not for work's sake, but for the sake of your inner genius. With the pressure to provide your own basic inspiration and motivation removed, and with ultimate responsibility for the work itself removed, since you know these aren't your areas of responsibility, you're free to begin putting in the "10,000 hours" of practice recommended by the popular meme, without feeling that the entire burden of your creative life rests upon you and you alone.

Ms. Brande observes that "the difficulties of the average student or amateur writer begin long before he has come to the place where he can benefit by technical instruction in story writing." But once you have "made yourself into a good instrument for the use of your own genius" by learning the realities of the inner creative relationship, you're finally in a position to benefit from the technical instruction and practice that properly constitute the exoteric aspect of active waiting.[64] Combined with the attitude of alertness and receptivity that is the esoteric aspect of the discipline, this type of daemonically-oriented preparatory work is the

[64] Brande, *Becoming a Writer*, 21, 170.

surest way to court real, measurable success as a serious writer, i.e., a writer whose goal is to state the truth you've come here to state.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Discipline of the Demon Muse

As we close in on the end of these discussions and explorations, it's time for a reality check. When you engage in a serious, in-depth study of creativity like the one we've been pursuing, it's all too easy to forget the "big picture," to lose sight of the forest among the trees. Specifically, it's easy to get so caught up in the magnetic attraction of ideas and theories that we end up forgetting what the whole thing is really, ultimately about. This can dampen our enthusiasm for actually performing creative work. Conversely, recalibrating our attitude and outlook to a practical focus on the underlying point can have the opposite effect of inflaming our muse.

What it's all about, this daimonic or daemonic approach to creativity, this muse-based theory of inspiration, this discipline of embracing the inner genius, is the alignment of our creative *act* with our deep creative *intent*. It's about divining our daimonic passion, and then letting this be our guide when we write.

However, we can only do this effectively, we can only "get it right," when we're not self-conscious about it. During the act of creation itself, we can only ride the daimonic wave, we can only tune in to the muse's wavelength, by entering into the experience of it in full, first-person

fashion—that is, by focusing attention exclusively and intensively on our intuitive sense of guidance. When we come to the actual moment of putting down words on paper, the way to unleash our unconscious partner is to forget all about theory and dive into passion. The moment of creation isn't the time to be reflecting on—or, God help us, deliberately trying to follow or implement—psychological theories or concepts about creativity. Rather, it's the moment when we should abandon all reflection about what we're doing, willingly embrace a sense of ignorance, and therefore openness, about where we're headed and how we'll get there, and simply heed the impulse of what wants to be said.

And how, pray tell, are we supposed to do that? Quite simply, we find and follow what truly, deeply, and inescapably *feels right*. This is the irrefutable and infallible voice of our creative demon speaking. Learning simultaneously to hear it and to heed it is our lifelong discipline, and it's one in which the deep coherence of our daimonic self, and the relationship between us and it, become clarified in ways that draw together everything we've been talking about.

Daimonic guidance: The unbidden voice of the beyond within

It's an obvious enough concept, really, but it took years for me to fully grasp it: Guidance from the unconscious, or indeed any sort of psychic communication from beyond the ego at all, is instantly recognizable by the fact that it feels like an involuntary and external "pull" on

consciousness, even though it's clearly arising from an inner instead of an outer source. It arrives as an objective presence within subjectivity: the "beyond within" of Jungian psychology and mystical philosophy. Or maybe it comes from a complex, a knot of repressed desires and motivations lodged in the unconscious or preconscious and exerting an unwholesome influence on the psyche. More about that in a minute.

In any case, a foolproof way to recognize the emergence or arrival of content from outside the ego is to become aware of that inner pull, that automatic psychic tug. Your innate passions and obsessions, for instance, all of those natural tendencies we talked about in Chapter Four that define your unique creative demon, can be recognized as arising from the unconscious by the mere fact that they're innate, that you have no control over them as they exert a powerful pull on your conscious experience. This means that as writers, we should, we must, follow the thread of whatever truly moves and grips us, because this is what each of us is truly "meant" to write, if indeed the unconscious is the realm of, or is identical to, the muse or daimon, which houses and guards and broadcasts and emblematizes our deep destiny.

Daimonic vs. demonic

Crucially, none of this negates the fact that a careful tending and shepherding of unconscious material is necessary. As discussed in Chapter Three, this is the proper and primary role of the conscious ego.

Anybody afflicted by, for example, obsessive-compulsive disorder can testify to the unpleasant and unwholesome relationship that can sometimes exist between the conscious and unconscious minds. So can that stock figure of turn-of-the-millennium horror entertainment, the serial killer, a human monster driven to commit hideous acts by an uncontrollable, cyclical, repetitive compulsion. Discrimination is definitely required when cultivating and navigating the conscious-unconscious collaboration. Following your daemon doesn't mean refusing to recognize mental or emotional disorders for what they are.

Then again, even in the case of a bona fide psychological disorder, the proper response may not be to reject it and seek a "cure," but to recognize and work *with*, instead of against, the disorder, to honor it as an expression or conduit of our creativity. We already quoted Sandra Lee Dennis on this point (see page 70): "these pathologies," she tells us, "hold promise to unfold our destinies when followed as the daimonic spirit-infused guides they can be." James Hillman likewise points out that the things that surface as *symptoms* in our lives are the very things we need to observe and work with most closely, since their symptomatic nature, the way they emerge involuntarily and reveal enduring complexes and themes, marks them as expressions of our daimon: "Soul enters only via symptoms, via outcast phenomena like the imagination of artists or alchemy or 'primitives,' or of course, disguised as psychopathology.

That's what Jung meant when he said the Gods have become diseases."[65]

Stephen Diamond offers further insight:

> The more conflict, the more rage, the more anxiety there is, the more the inner necessity to create. We must also bear in mind that gifted individuals, those with a genius (incidentally, genius was the Latin word for daimon, the basis of the daimonic concept) for certain things, feel this inner necessity even more intensely, and in some respects experience and give voice not only to their own demons but the collective daimonic as well.
>
> So they are kind of like little oracles of Delphi, or canaries in a coal mine, sensing the dangers, the conflicts, the cultural shadow, and trying to give it some meaningful expression…Creativity, then, can in part be thought of as the capacity to express the daimonic constructively. This is what all great artists do.[66]

The very idea of the daimonic in its specifically psychological context, as developed throughout the 20th century in the work of Jung, May, Hillman, Diamond, and others, is bound up with the dark, id-flavored impulses of rage and other violent emotions. But as May points out in the foreword to Diamond's book, there is an important distinction to be made between the daimonic and its purely negative cousin, the demonic: "The daimonic (unlike the *demonic*, which is merely destructive) is as

[65] "In the Words of James Hillman: Psyche's Hermetic Highwayman," terrapsych.com, http://www.terrapsych.com/hillman.html.

[66] Douglas Eby, "The Psychology of Creativity: Redeeming Our Inner Demons" (interview with Stephen A. Diamond), *Talent Development Resources*, n.d., http://talentdevelop.com/interviews/psychcreat.html.

much concerned with creativity as with negative reactions. A special characteristic of the daimonic model is that it considers both creativity on one side, and anger and rage on the other side, as coming from the same source. That is, constructiveness and destructiveness have the same source in human personality. The source is simply *human potential*."[67]

Distinguishing between the daimonic and demonic in yourself is, therefore, a necessary skill to acquire as you attune to your involuntary promptings from within and seek to channel them in your art.

Actors, artists, and mass murderers

This inner discrimination requires considerable shrewdness, since both tendencies, the daimonic and the demonic, are simply the same raw reality, the same intra-psychic energy, channeled and manifested in different ways. The actor Terence Stamp once claimed—and I'm paraphrasing from a long-ago memory of something he said when I was a child, in an interview he gave in connection with his portrayal of the villainous General Zod in director Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978) and *Superman II* (1980)—that if he hadn't been an actor, he probably would have been a mass murderer. Similarly, Diamond says most mature artists "realize the relationship between rage and creativity. It is their rage that, when redirected and channeled into their work, gives it the intensity and

[67] Rollo May, foreword to *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic* by Stephen A. Diamond, xxi. Emphasis in original.

passion that performing artists such as actors and actresses seek." He cites Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Jack Nicholson, and Jessica Lange as examples of "artists [who] have learned how to harness the power and intensity of their own rage (among other daimonic emotions), deliberately tapping into their personal demons to animate and intensify their acting."[68]

This provides as good a description of the goal we're pursuing here as any we could ask for. What is potentially demonic within us is the very source of our creative power, and when we listen to it by attending to our deepest impulses, including, pointedly, the "negative" ones, we're looking to harness the power and intensity of our daimonic self, and to deliberately tap this reservoir of inner power in order to animate and intensify our art, whose ultimate motivation and direction, let us not forget, resides right there in the figure of our daimon /muse/genius to begin with.

The daimon's language: Involuntary feelings and images

In line with its quality of involuntariness, the unconscious mind communicates primarily through feelings and images. Or rather, it communicates through a combination of these: images infused with emotion, emotions and moods conveyed through imagery. They're inseparable, as in our dreams, where we experience not just a sensory virtual reality but

[68] Eby, "The Psychology of Creativity."

an all-pervading world of emotional resonances. In dreams there is no distinction between mood, knowledge, and perception. The sight, sound, smell, and tactile feel of, say, a dark house is indistinguishable from its emotional tone, which grips us entirely and inescapably, and informs us with thoughts and knowledge about the setting and events that we could not possibly, literally know.

Dreams are the arena where we experience communion with the unconscious in its most direct form, but this same communion occurs in a slightly more mediated form in waking life, and when it does, we can recognize it by the presence of a dominant emotion and/or image that grips our imagination, and that we are helpless to resist. This can take the form of nagging hunches, moods, or mental pictures that refuse to go away, and that thereby shout to be recognized and channeled into our work. Or they may emerge, sometimes, as dramatic psychological-spiritual upheavals, as in the now-classic case of Jung's transformative crisis early in his career, exquisitely chronicled in his legendary (and finally published, in 2010) *Liber Novus* or "Red Book. Also see the case of Dennis's terrifying imaginal eruptions as recounted in her *Embrace of the Daimon* (2001). Both Jung and Dennis found themselves swamped for a time by surging inner imagery from the unconscious. Both feared they were going mad. Both were transformed by the experience, which forced them to confront, come to terms with, and somehow integrate

into their conscious, daily lives the experiential reality of the psyche's autonomy.

In either instance—an emotionally charged mental picture or a full-blown imaginal explosion—consciousness encounters an intrusion from the "psychic outside" in the form of feeling and image, and a creative direction from somewhere beyond your conscious ability to choose and control is handed to you, if you want to accept it. Tuning into your muse's communications on this wavelength entails giving deliberate attention to both the inner theater of your imaginal eye and its accompanying flux of moods-emotions-feelings. James Bonnet, author of *Stealing Fire from the Gods: A Dynamic New Story Model for Writers and Filmmakers*, explains it this way:

> The key to all of this is your feelings. Feelings are at the threshold between the conscious and the unconscious worlds, and while playing with your creative ideas, the positive and negative intuitive feelings you are experiencing are important messages from your inner creative self. If you learn how to read these feelings, then playing with your creative ideas becomes a direct means of contact. Getting in touch with your feelings is getting in touch with your self. Getting in touch with your self through your feelings is the heart and soul of the creative process. And it is the key to unlocking the power of story within you…The important thing is to engage your feelings because that puts you in touch with your inner creative self and the energy behind those images.[69]

[69] James Bonnet, "Unlocking the Power of Story within You," *Writers Store*, n.d., http://www.writersstore.com/unlocking-the-power-of-story-within-you.

John Gardner, whose renown as a novelist was matched by his fame as a writing teacher, likewise noted the significance of intense mental imagery in his classic *On Becoming a Novelist*, where he emphasized the centrality of the "fictive dream," the mental-imaginal movie that it is the novelist's task and calling to enter as deeply as possible, and to channel with all accuracy, grace, and skill onto the page so that it can be re-created in the imagination of the reader. "Every writer," he said, "has experienced at least moments of this strange, magical state…But it is not all magic. Once one knows by experience the 'feel' of the state one is after, there are things one can do to encourage its onset. (Some writers, with practice, become able to drop into the creative state at any moment; others have difficulty all their lives.) Every writer must figure out for himself, if he can, how he personally works best."[70]

Gardner also wrote the laudatory preface to the edition of Dorothea Brande's 1934 classic *Becoming a Writer* that currently appears in bookstores, and that I have quoted here several times because of Brande's focus on the pressing necessity of training yourself to write as if you were two (or even three) minds housed in a single body. I refer you again to her recommended discipline of morning writing, in which you commit to the practice of pouring your first waking thoughts with their density of

[70] John Gardner, *On Becoming a Novelist* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999; 1983), 120, 122.

unconscious content directly onto the page, since this might prove particularly useful as a means of training yourself to hear and understand your creative demon's native language.

The demon with a typographic mind

Of course, for some people, myself most emphatically included, the unconscious mind, despite its predilection for speaking in raw emotions and images, also makes itself known rather paradoxically by speaking in slightly mediated form as a persistent idea or train of thought. I'm one of those people who possess an innately verbal, conceptual, reflective cast of mind, and this means many of the things that move me strongly, whether they come from within or without, tend to be expressed in words, which for me arise almost instantly to cloak emotions and images in a verbal overlay.

So I've had to learn to pay extra-careful attention to my looping chains of thought, which are abundant and varied on any given day. For me and others like me—and there are still quite a few of us around, even amid the current civilization-wide rise of a new image-based culture and the death of the classically "typographic mind"[71]—a valid and necessary

[71] Regarding the rise of the image and displacement of text as the *lingua franca* of technological culture, see, e.g., Christine Rosen, "The Image Culture," *The New Atlantis*, No. 10 (Fall 2005), http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-image-culture. Regarding the idea of the "typographic mind," see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the*

way of training ourselves to hear the voice of our demon muse is to become deliberately aware of the verbal thoughts that involuntarily grip us, and then to read their persistent themes as clues to creative direction and daimonic destiny.

If this describes you, too, then you might find it useful in this endeavor to learn one of the available techniques for increasing real-time awareness of your thoughts and inner states. The writings of Eckhart Tolle, the general practice of mindfulness, training in Gurdjieff's "Fourth Way," or any type of meditation practice can help with this, and you'll find no lack of available resources online and in bookstores.

That said, please note that this attitude toward the value of verbal language and mental talk is quite distinct from the usual Zen/nondual/mystical dismissal of such talk as nothing but the perpetual insane chatter of the "mad monkey," the ceaseless patter of the verbal mind that babbles endlessly about vapid nothings, and whose insanity and emptiness it is our proper task to see through, by which activity we thereby *quiet* that mind as we dissociate from it and realize our true identity, which is higher or deeper than words and conceptual thought. While it's undeniably true that a great deal of our mental chatter really is useless and distracting, and that we really will benefit from recognizing it as

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Age of Show Business (1985), especially chapters 3 and 4. John David Ebert's *The New Media Invasion: Digital Technologies and the World They Unmake* (2011) also has some brilliant analysis.

such in accordance with tried and tested techniques of inner liberation, it's nevertheless a grave mistake to assume that this warrants a dogmatic dismissal of every last scrap of self-propelling inner talk.

The very recommendation to pursue the goal of totally quieting the verbal mind smacks of the same rejection of deep psychic reality that, e.g., Dennis talks about in *Embrace of the Daimon* when she notes that religion, "a realm we might suppose open to imaginal reality," actually has a long history of distrusting and suppressing the imagination, and that this is far from being solely a Western phenomenon, since the relatively recent and ongoing incorporation of the Eastern religious sensibility and related practices into Western religion has confronted Westerners with the fact that "Most forms of Buddhism (the Tibetan tradition being an exception) reject the imaginal even more emphatically than Christian tradition" because this aspect of psychic reality "is viewed as a delusion that Buddhist practitioners attempt to 'deconstruct' along with all experience."[72]

The case of William Burroughs and his relationship with Buddhism is instructive. Although Burroughs wasn't fond of Buddhism like his friends and colleagues Jack Kerouac and the other Beats, in 1975 he agreed to go on a retreat at a Tibetan Buddhist meditation center founded by Chögyam Trungpa. He wrote about the experience in *The*

[72] Dennis, *Embrace of the Daimon*, 42.

Retreat Diaries (1976), and prefaced his account with an introduction in which he explained why he saw a fundamental incompatibility between the goals of Buddhism and the vocation of the writer: "I am more concerned with writing than I am with any sort of enlightenment, which is often an ever-retreating mirage like the fully analyzed or fully liberated person. I use meditation to get material for writing. I am not concerned with some abstract nirvana. It is exactly the vision and fireworks that are useful to me, exactly what all the masters tell us we should pay as little attention to as possible…I sense an underlying dogma here to which I am not willing to submit. The purposes of a Bodhisattva and an artist are different and perhaps not reconcilable."[73]

No less damaging to creativity than Buddhism's (and sometimes Christianity's and other religions') wholesale rejection of the psyche's imaginal realm and output is the kneejerk branding of all involuntary inner talk as empty chatter to be seen through and abandoned or suppressed. We can draw enormous help in our creative work from religious and spiritual sources. We can also be damaged if we uncritically swallow everything these sources try to tell us. The conflict here is a long-running antagonism in the realm of spiritual-philosophical-religious thought and discourse, and I advise you to use discrimination and sensitivity in adopting religious practices, disciplines, or attitudes in an attempt to relate

[73]Burroughs, introduction to *The Retreat Diaries*, 155.

better to your own inner words and voices, since rejecting these inner manifestations for the sake of enlightenment or liberation may be tantamount to rejecting your muse.

"A generally intensified emotional sensibility"

Even in the case of hyper-verbal people like me and my ilk, what's really fundamental is the deep emotional charge with which these demon-driven words and thoughts are invested, and so emotion is the inner trigger or signal that we should always be on the alert for in the background of our awareness. It's like what Dorothy Canfield described in her 1920 account of the origin of one of her popular stories. She said that the act of writing fiction always started for her with a heightened emotional responsiveness to the world: "No two of my stories are ever constructed in exactly the same way, but broadly viewed they all have exactly the same genesis, and I confess I cannot conceive of any creative fiction written from any other beginning [than] that of a generally intensified emotional sensibility, such as every human being experiences with more or less frequency. Everybody knows such occasional hours or days of freshened emotional responses when events that usually pass almost unnoticed, suddenly move you deeply…I have no idea whence this tide comes, or where it goes, but when it begins to rise in my heart, I know

that a story is hovering in the offing."[74]

Students of supernatural fiction may hear in Canfield's words a distinct echo of Lovecraft's repeated accounts of being gripped by a sense of transcendent longing and heightened responsiveness to architectural and natural beauty. These states were so central to his creativity and emotional worldview that he judged them to be "the impulse which justifies authorship…The time to begin writing is when the events of the world seem to suggest things larger than the world—strangenesses and patterns and rhythms and uniquities of combination which no one ever saw or heard before, but which are so vast and marvellous and beautiful that they absolutely demand proclamation with a fanfare of silver trumpets. Space and time become vitalised with literary significance when they begin to make us subtly homesick for something 'out of space, out of time.'…To find those other lives, other worlds, and other dreamlands, is the true author's task. That is what literature is; and if any piece of writing is motivated by anything apart from this mystic and never-finished quest, it is base and unjustified imitation."[75] Not everybody, of course, works in the emotionally rarefied vein of cosmic wonder and horror that Lovecraft mined, but we can abstract from his, and Canfield's, words the

[74] Dorothy Canfield, "How Flint and Fire Started and Grew," in Ghiselin, *The Creative Process*, 174.

[75] H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters II: 1929-1931*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1968), 142-3.

general principle that it's valuable stay on the lookout for this sense of being charged by a deep emotional responsiveness, and that whenever it arises, we should act on it.

Regardless of the exact way or ways in which you experience this state, whenever you do experience it you can know that your unconscious mind is seeping through the cracks in your egoic shell to infuse your daylight experience with a dose of nightworld significance, and that the resulting psychic stew is precisely the state of infinite inner richness and raw, self-evident meaningfulness that you as a writer are looking to tap.

Trusting the coherence of your deep self

As already mentioned, to accomplish this nightside tapping you have to give up the idea that you know, ultimately, what you're doing. If you think you know what you're creating, where it's headed, and how you'll get there, then this sense of knowledge will almost inevitably result in an attitude of control and ownership over the work. And this is, bar none, the most reliable way to block out the light, whether of the bright or the dark variety, that your genius is trying to shine through you.

The way to overcome the problem is to sidestep it entirely by embracing conscious ignorance and relying on your demon muse to carry you through and inform your work with a deep, organically coherent direction. The words and experiences of five noteworthy and sensitive

individuals—a psychotherapist, a poet, an author, a filmmaker, and a television writer—bring out both the practical and the philosophical aspects of this truth.

In her book *On Not Being Able to Paint*, a classic Freudian study of artistic creativity first published in 1950, British author and psychotherapist Marion Milner, writing under the pseudonym Joanna Field, recounted and reflected on her experience of learning to produce meaningful drawings and paintings by learning to surrender to the subjective pressures within her psyche. At the outset of her training, she was someone who had long considered herself a person who simply "couldn't draw" and "couldn't paint." In the course of discovering that this wasn't the case, she experienced a profound revelation about the nature of subjectivity and human experience.

She said she began by abandoning conventional notions of artistic beauty and aesthetic correctness like those expounded in books and classes, for, as she explained, it occurred to her "that preconceived ideas about beauty in drawing might have a limiting effect on one's freedom of expression, beauty might be like happiness, something which a too direct striving after destroys." For a time she dedicated herself to the practice of free-drawing, and soon found that "although the drawings were actually made in an absent-minded mood, as soon as one was finished there was

usually a definite 'story' in my mind of what it was about." [76]

She soon progressed to the practice of sitting down to draw whenever she noticed strong emotions becoming active within her. Through this, she found that she could start with no idea of what she wanted to draw, and the emotions would somehow be discharged by the very act of drawing and thereby transferred into the drawings themselves, which would then serve to arouse those same emotions when she later viewed them. (It may go without saying that with this particular practice she was consciously and experimentally working to divine the deep nature of art itself.)

A fascinating incident, and one that brought out the large-scale implications of Milner's experiment, occurred early on when she was working in accordance with the idea, gleaned from a book she had read, that in art one should simply "find what the eye seems to like." Over a span of weeks she produced a series of drawings that she collectively titled "Earth. Only afterward did she realize that what she had drawn—an approaching storm over a dark sea where a mythic snake and a New Mexican Indian drum are rising out of the waves; a dove hovering over water; messy, chaotic scribbles; a tree; a sea wall—were united by the theme of chaos encroaching on order, as in the biblical story of Noah and the

[76] Marion Milner, *On Not Being Able to Paint* (New York: Routledge, 2010; 1950), 7, 9.

great deluge with its waters of primal uncreation that wiped out the world, after which a dove brought back evidence of solidity's reappearance from beneath the deep.

This was all in accord with an unsettling recognition about the nature of perception and subjective identity that had been subtly emerging out of her experiments in seeing the world's visual appearance nakedly and truly, without preconception. At the time she made the "Earth" series, she had been noticing for awhile that "the effort needed in order to see the edges of objects as they really look stirred a dim fear, a fear of what might happen if one let go one's mental hold on the outline which kept everything separate and in its place."[77] This was in turn a facet of the wider realization that had begun to grip her as she saw that "original work in painting, if it was ever to get beyond the stage of happy flukes, would demand facing certain facts about oneself as a separate being, facts that could often perhaps be successfully by-passed in ordinary living."[78]

In short, she found that a thread of order and coherence, stemming out of her overall state of mind and soul, wound its way through her attempts at drawing even, or in fact *especially*, when she forsook any attempt at a wide or long view, and simply gave herself up to the impulse of the moment.

[77] Ibid., 18.

[78] Ibid., 14.

The applicable point for the rest of us is probably obvious, but to make sure, I ask you to bear Milner's realization in mind as you consider our next case study: In "A Way of Writing," one of the finest essays about writing that I've ever read, and one that you can easily find for free on the Internet, William Stafford, onetime Poet Laureate of both the state of Oregon and the United States, speaks of the "strange bonus" that sometimes happened to him when he pursued the act of writing in a deliberate attitude of not-knowing-ness, simply setting aside time each morning to write poetry and then noting down whatever came to him, relying the whole time on the vibrant inner "richness" that he had discovered when he first started writing in school. "At times," he says, "without my insisting on it, my writings become coherent; the successive elements that occur to me are clearly related. They lead by themselves to new connections. Sometimes the language, even the syllables that happen along, may start a trend. Sometimes the materials alert me to something waiting in my mind, ready for sustained attention. At such times, I allow myself to be eloquent, or intentional, or for great swoops (Treacherous! Not to be trusted!) reasonable. But I do not insist on any of that; for I know that back of my activity there will be the coherence of my self, and that indulgence of my impulses will bring recurrent patterns and meanings again."[79]

[79] William Stafford, "A Way of Writing," in *Writing the Australian Crawl*

Both Stafford's and Milner's experiences recall the motto that Ray Bradbury—the third person on our list—said he learned from his friend, the filmmaker Federico Fellini: "Don't tell me what I'm doing. I don't want to know." Fellini—our fourth person—apparently said this in reference to the necessity of looking at the daily rushes while shooting his films. He meant that he didn't want to think ahead of time about what he was trying to accomplish, but instead wanted to shoot and gather footage in a kind of ecstatic way, and only afterward discover the coherent themes and meanings that naturally wanted to emerge from it. Commenting on this in a 1997 interview, Bradbury drew general advice from it for all writers: "Get your work done. Then, after it's done, you find out what you did. But you can't know ahead of time. So, therefore, the unconscious act turns into creativity. All of a sudden, you have a book, a novel."[80]

Bradbury's, Fellini's, Stafford's, and Milner's experiences all resonate in our modern-day mass media milieu with those of our fifth and final figure, American television writer Matthew Weiner. His credits include *Becker*, *The Sopranos*, and, in a turn that has seen him not only write but create a show, the entertainment phenomenon that is AMC's *Mad*

(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1978), 18-19.

[80] "People in Books: Creating Something Memorable," *Bookselling This Week*, February 1997, reprinted at RayBradbury.com, http://www.raybradbury.com/articles_bestselling.html.

Men. In a 2009 feature story in *Vanity Fair*, Weiner and some of *Mad Men*'s writers and producers talk about the deep place within him that serves as the source of the show's hypnotically gripping images and themes. "To hear the show's writers discuss Weiner's creative process," says *Vanity Fair* writer Bruce Handy, "it's almost as if the *Mad Men* world and its ongoing narratives exist fully formed somewhere deep in the recesses of Weiner's mind, tangible but elusive, like dreams half remembered upon waking. He retrieves fragments and shards and brings them into the writers' room, to use as building blocks for larger dramas."

Handy quotes writer-producer Lisa Albert, who told that him some of Weiner's creative process "is, frankly, mysterious. Like, Matt will have an image in his mind, and he's not sure why, and we sit around and talk about it and try and figure out why this thing keeps coming in his mind."

Weiner himself describes the matter in a way that perfectly illustrates and forcefully caps off our exploration of the interplay between embracing conscious ignorance and following the daimonic thread: "I start with me, like any writer. I start with what I'm feeling, what I identify with…I count on my subconscious to be consistent. And how that works I have no fucking idea, and I don't even want to investigate it. Because if I lose that I have nothing to say."

Weiner's case also illustrates the balance between the daimonic and its negative twin, the demonic, and brings out the sizzling import of this

razor-edged distinction for energizing us creatively. After describing some of Weiner's fiery and intense personality traits—he has a temper, and he sometimes weeps when writing emotionally intense scenes, and even when remembering scenes from his favorite movies—Handy offers a succinct assessment of the crucial role the man's inner conflicts play in fueling his creative success: "Whatever Weiner's demons, they work for him."[81]

Finding your own way

And now, after all of that, a caveat: Not all advice is equally applicable to all individuals, and not all writers and artists can or should work explicitly and perpetually in Weiner's, Bradbury's, Fellini's, Stafford's, and Milner's intuitive way. One thinks here of the advice Bradbury has given for writers on taking other people's advice: "Never listen to a damned thing anybody tells you." (Or at least that's my loose paraphrase, quoted from memory.) This way of writing in ignorance, of giving into deep feeling, recognizing it as daimonic guidance, and striking out in search of a final form and meaning that you can't currently see, isn't necessarily for everyone. The distinction between intuitive and rational writers is a venerable and valid one. Some writers require more structure, more planning, more of an effort at creative foresight, than others do. I

[81] Bruce Handy, "Don and Betty's Paradise Lost," *Vanity Fair*, September 2009, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2009/09/mad-men200909.

myself have had to adopt a rational, systematic approach for much of my career, because this is simply the way my creativity has wanted to emerge. So I certainly can't and won't counsel you to avoid all planning and wide-scope visioning on permanent principle.

And yet…and yet…it's still necessary to recognize that in the end, ignorance, not-knowingness, temporary intellectual endarkenment, really is the only doorway through which the daimon can effectively enter. Even within the cycles of a creativity whose expression demands something more systematic and structured than pure intuitive foraging, there's a recurrent moment when the ego has to release its stranglehold on a sewn-up sense of knowledge and stability, and let something not of itself spill through the corners and seams. Otherwise the artist is committing the error that renowned religion scholar Huston Smith, writing in a separate but related context, has identified as the defining ethos of the modern Western mindset with its soul-killing worldview of scientific materialism: "An epistemology that aims relentlessly at control rules out the possibility of transcendence in principle."[82] If we insist on knowing and controlling everything, then we automatically rule out the possibility of being informed and inspired by something from beyond the boundaries of our current knowledge and ability.

[82] Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 134.

This epic act of letting-go isn't an easy thing to accomplish, not least because it is by definition the very opposite of what we usually mean by "accomplishing" something. The fear of loss of identity that Milner sensed as she pursued the goal of authentic art was certainly real, and certainly warranted. To get past its inherent limitations, your ego has to give itself up—which is to say that *you* have to give *your*self up—to guidance by a force that exists above/below/beyond/within you, and this triggers an inherent fear, built into the nature of the human psyche itself, of loss of identity and obliteration of cosmic boundaries, both personal and universal, as you allow your other self to descend from the heights, ascend from the depths, emerge from the shadows, and speak to and through you. (Metaphors, remember, are its native idiom.) We all cling to our small, isolated ego-identities in a multitude of ways that we aren't even conscious of, precisely because of the fear, the terror, the cosmic horror, that grips us when we're confronted by the inner evidence, and also the outer evidence, in the spontaneous shape of our lives, of that other presence within us. And yet that presence *is* us, in the deepest and truest sense. Coming to rest in that realization, and learning to release the daemonic truth of our natures in our writing, is the chief task of a lifetime.

This is the terrifying and exhilarating state of affairs you'll have to recognize and willingly face, again and again, if you truly intend to submit to the discipline of the demon muse.

Conclusion

So: Have you gotten to know your creative demon? Have you begun to establish a conscious relationship with your genius or muse? Have you started learning the specific personality of the deep psychological force that intrinsically motivates you to be passionate about, fascinated with, and energized by this instead of that and some things instead of others? Have you experimented with reading your life's trajectory, both inner and outer, as a work of art or literature that embodies central, recurrent motifs and themes, and have you recognized these as clues to the natural direction that your creativity would like to take you?

If so, then you're way ahead of the game. Most people never do these things, and you, by contrast, may be experiencing a new or renewed sense of creative potency and possibility. This is a heady and alternately (or reciprocally) frightening and exhilarating development. As with everything I've talked about in these pages, I speak from personal experience.

What you'll notice that I have *not* talked about is the experience of actually conversing with a separate-seeming figure that supplies ideas and words to you via literal, audible speech. That's a subject for a different book—one that I'm not qualified to write—and you'll find some interesting thoughts about it in, for example, Alice Flaherty's *The Midnight Disease*. You can also read the abundantly available information about

Jung's experiences with his inner mentor, a mythological-looking being that announced its name as Philemon and, according to Jung, appeared to him and conversed with him regularly. You can read Julian Jaynes's *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, or better yet, the summary of it along with the addition of much fascinating information about the long history and present-day reality of "hearing voices" in Daniel Smith's *Muses, Madmen, and Prophets: Rethinking the History, Science, and Meaning of Auditory Hallucination*.

What I've been about in *A Course in Demonic Creativity* is explaining the theoretical background and practical implications, not of auditory hallucinations, but of *inspiration* and its perceived origin in a source that is both autonomous and subjective. Its point of contact is our psyche. It speaks to us from within, not from without, and ferreting out the distinction between its voice and our own—a process that begins with an unself-conscious identification between the two, progresses through a clean delineation, and ends with our voice and that of our demon muse being united again at a higher level of integration that categorically transcends the former naïve union—is a life path unto itself, since in coming to know the demon muse we're coming to know our own deepest and most authentic selves.

What follows are points I've already made, but they're widely scattered throughout these pages, and so I thought it would be useful to end the book by boiling it all down into a shorter, more pithy form. Here's

the review version, the one you can turn to for a quick refresher on the high points of demonic creativity, presented as a list of benefits this approach offers to writers and creators.

1. Demonic creativity removes performance pressure.

In the West, the abandonment or burial of the muse/daimon/genius model around the time of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, in favor of the new view that instead of having geniuses certain heroic individuals *are* geniuses, kicked off a long-term, culture-wide cycle of creative stress and burnout. With the burden of their work resting solely upon their own shoulders, writers and artists were driven to hubris and despair in formerly unknown ways. The demon muse model automatically undoes this damage. We all know that the surest way to block creativity is to force it by insisting that you *have* to be creative. This cuts far deeper than the distinction between "good" stress and "bad" stress, the latter of which paralyzes us and the former of which galvanizes us. The modern muse-less view of things warps our experience of creative work all the way to its foundations.

All creative block is ultimately identifiable as a manifestation of performance anxiety or performance guilt. Offloading your sense of responsibility for creative work onto another self is like flipping a switch. It instantly removes that pressure and lets you breathe again. It returns you to the state of relaxed receptivity that characterized your earliest efforts,

when you were just playing around in a "beginner's mind" mode. This is when the best work happens.

2. Demonic creativity marries effort with inspiration.

There are two basic errors you can fall into in creative work. One is workaholism: exerting yourself so frantically on a project that you use yourself up and burn yourself out. The other is laziness: doing nothing and hoping you'll magically feel motivated and inspired to get it done eventually. Both are wrong because they leave out half the real story. Work without inspiration is dry and dead. Inspiration without work is mute and meaningless.

The discipline of following your daemon helps you to avoid both of these negative poles by providing a natural division of duties. Your demon muse is responsible for providing the ideas and the energy, the fundamental fire of the work, and also the basic orientation toward life and the gravitational pull toward a specific destiny that the ancients viewed as ordained by the gods. Your responsibility, by contrast, is to wait when your daemon says wait, respond when it speaks, and make yourself a fit vessel for it by undertaking whatever kind of practical work and training is necessary to make you fluent.

3. Demonic creativity organically enhances the creative process.

Whichever model of the creative process we adopt (Wallas's stages or something else), the fact remains that creative work necessarily involves a

fallow period or incubation period, an interval of surface inactivity during which the unconscious self is doing the deep formative work that is its forte. Relating to this self, to your creativity, as an intelligent, autonomous, personified entity or force not only accords with this recognition but enhances it. You aren't just waiting on the motions of a dark and mysterious something-or-other, an "it," the Freudian id, but on a real, living entity or power. This attitude strengthens your trust in the process, increasing the likelihood of a positive outcome (a judgment which is, of course, made according to criteria that are themselves largely supplied by the demon muse itself).

4. Demonic creativity opens you to your deep intelligence.

As a matter of incontrovertible, self-evident truth, each of us experiences himself or herself as at least *two* selves, two centers or levels of identity: a conscious ego and an unconscious "companion." In recent years psychologists and neurologists have made astounding strides in their understanding of the mechanics of the mind, so our view of these things will probably be greatly refined and corrected before too long. But the basic insight of depth psychology from the 19th century up until today—which holds that you are divided into these two minds, these two centers of identity—still holds true, as you can verify for yourself right now without moving a muscle.

You-as-ego, the conscious you who is reading these words, may feel

that you have voluntary control over yourself. You may feel that you are in control of what you think, where you put your attention, what you intend, what you'll do, and so on. But if that's all true, then why do certain involuntary memories, moods, impressions, and other psychic flotsam keep surfacing from time to time? Where are they coming from? For that matter, why are you, as a unique individual, drawn with passionate interest to certain people, subjects, ideas, and activities, and equally repelled by others? Do you have control of these passions? What about those talents of yours that seem to be innate? Where do they come from? Why do you really think, feel, act, and speak as you do? Is it really all a matter of choice, or is that sense of autonomy largely a delusion? Are you in fact swamped from below, behind, above, and within by moods and motives and thoughts and inner images that are spontaneous and involuntary, and that are inflicted, as it were, upon you-as-ego in a manner completely beyond your control?

Regardless of the real cause or nature of this psychological division, the salient point is that in terms of your first-person experience, all of these mental processes really are autonomous, and so relating to them deliberately as an "other" and regarding them as your muse or genius is the most direct route to aligning both halves of you, the conscious and unconscious selves, in harmonious cooperation. This isn't to deny the truly awesome benefits that you can experience from learning to "reprogram" yourself, perhaps in the manner of "metaprogramming" your

psychic computer *a la* the advice and instructions given by John Lilly, Robert Anton Wilson, and thinkers/writers in that vein. But it is to point out that too often these and other goals, including creative artistic ones, are pursued from the vantage point of surface consciousness, of the ego with its untransformed and unredeemed motivations. The goals and motivations themselves change as you go deeper within yourself and find them emerging from previously unsuspected levels of who you are, and the demon muse is the ultimate figure in which they inhere, not as matters of choice, but as metaphysical givens.

We've long recognized the epic problem-solving and idea-synthesizing powers of the unconscious mind. Adopting the demon muse model gives you a way to actively engage with these functions, and also with all of those deeper life-level, destiny-level realities that otherwise lie dormant behind the veil of your surface self mired in its culturally conditioned trance of daily existence. As I said in this book's introduction, your unconscious mind truly is your *genius* in a sense that was long lost to history, but that has now returned to enrich us. Befriending it as such in the classical manner puts you in a position to receive its gifts, and it in the position to give them to you. I wish you well as you go about your work and take these thoughts for whatever they're worth to you.

AFTERWORD

I launched the blog Demon Muse in February 2010 as a writers' guide to the subject of creative inspiration by the daimonic muse. More recently, I developed this PDF edition of *A Course in Demonic Creativity* from some key articles at the blog. I'm offering it as a free download because I view it as a kind of gift to the world, and also because, quite seriously, I feel directly urged by my demon muse/creative self to do so. I urge you to share it freely, making sure to adhere to the limits of the Creative Commons license described on the title page (i.e., no selling it, no altering it, and please mention me as the author).

And speaking of sharing, if you find what's presented here to be of value in your own creative work, I'd love to hear about it. Please stop by the Demon Muse website (www.demonmuse.com) or my other blog, The Teeming Brain (theteemingbrain.wordpress.com), and leave a comment about your thoughts and experiences. I look forward to hearing from you.

Matt Cardin

September 26, 2011

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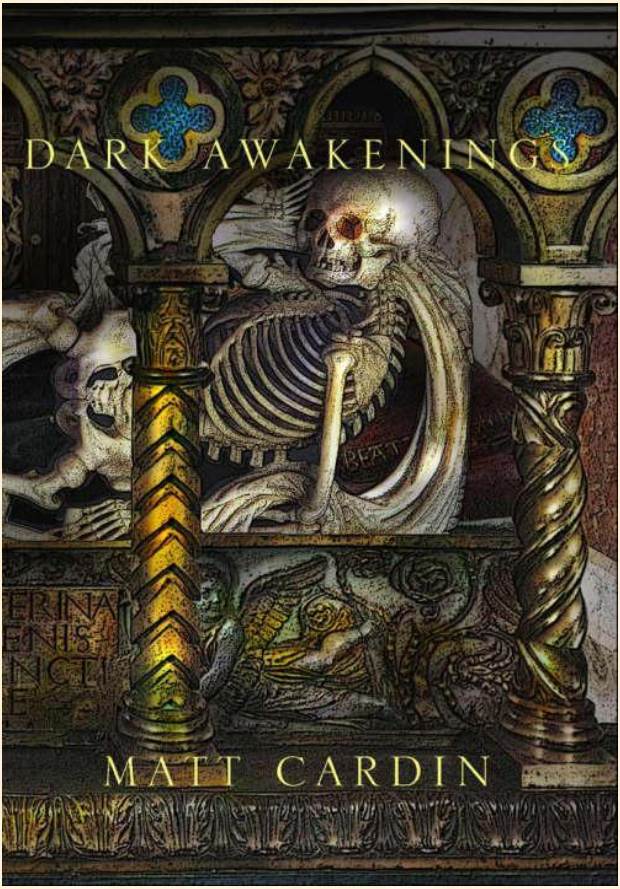

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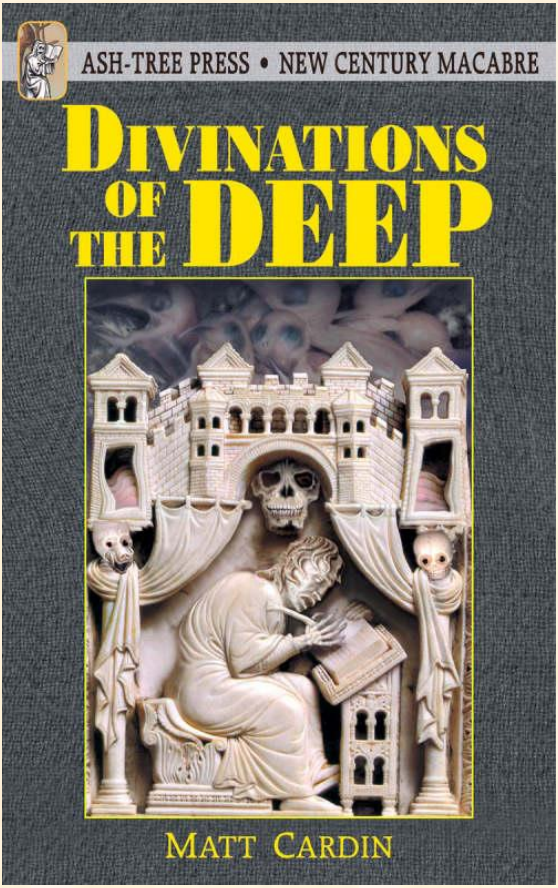

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