

Myth, Mind and the Screen

Understanding the heroes of our times

John Izod

*Stirling Media Research Institute
University of Stirling*



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5 The pop star as icon

It is not hard to see that the techniques of Jungian textual analysis can be used to interpret the cultural meaning of those music stars who stir the popular imagination. Rock and pop stars have comparable standing as popular icons to their equivalents in film and television. In so far as the production of star personalities is concerned, this occurs because the publicity machines and marketing apparatus behind all the leisure industries construct and promote their stars to audiences through broadly similar mechanisms. What is more, the industry prefers crossovers, with stars working in more than one medium, as a means of broadening the market. So pop stars produce not only CDs, audio tapes and vinyl, but also video tapes for TV broadcast. Web sites are set up in their names; corporate concerns market tie-ins with their images, such as T-shirts advertising concert performances, or personal endorsements of products (Madonna advertising Max Factor make-up in glossy magazines in 1999). And this is to say nothing of their appearances in movies.

Star personalities in every medium possess a form of capital, namely their own image. The right to make use of that image is the saleable commodity that, guided by agents, managers and publicists, they control and exploit. In semiotic terms, what they sell is a sign. As their cross-media activities imply, stars function as signs, no matter in which medium they flourish, that have been more or less deliberately constructed to carry certain meanings. One of their distinguishing traits is that as signs they operate in more registers than the images of other musicians and actors. An actor is a sign whose principal denotative function is to delineate a character in a drama. Movie stars have this function too, but simultaneously they also signify themselves. The audience does not forget the player behind the role as they may do with the actor. Furthermore, the roles of movie stars extend beyond the characters they play in the cinema and encompass their lives off screen (see Dyer 1998: 20). It hardly needs saying that much of the information available to fans (in so far as it comes from sources within the control of the star's publicity machine – press conferences and releases, personal appearances, fan

magazines, gossip columns, television and radio interviews) is no less a construction than the on-screen character parts. Like screen actors, pop stars have dual roles, although it may be less obvious in their case because the gap between their performances and lives is usually narrower than in drama.

Taking up the perspective of those who consume the star image, it is clear that fans have a strong desire to discover as much as possible about not only their professional roles but also their private lives. Typically, the more fans find out about the object of their desire, the more they want to know. Like movie stars, pop stars connote some significance more subtle than they denote. Often what the star in any medium connotes is semi-consciously apprehended rather than fully comprehended by fans. The latter may well find it difficult to put a star's meaning or value into analytical words. In part this is usually because those qualities are communicated to them as much by actions, looks (physical appearance, costume, hair-style, make-up, gesture) or sound (the timbre of the voice, characteristic intonation patterns or speech rhythms) as by what is said. But where fans find they cannot analyse exactly what their heroes mean, their very inscrutability adds to the sense of charisma and magic surrounding the personalities of stars. Publicity agents work hard to create such an aura around the figures they offer to the public as stars for the simple reason that fans require to experience this sense of something magical about their heroes if they are to recognise them as stars. It follows in Jungian terms that while a star's image is propagated as a sign, it is received by his or her fans as a symbol. This holds true whether the star's image remains more or less constant throughout his or her career (Tom Jones and Barry Manilow being cases in point) or changes radically from time to time (as have those of Michael Jackson and Madonna). The needs of the audience can be projected as effectively on a pop star as a film star because, for a fan, the admired star carries a distinctive archetypal energy, as the following two case studies make clear.

Androgyny and stardom: cultural meanings of Michael Jackson

Previous chapters have highlighted the contrasexual archetypes – the anima and animus – and have shown instances of their representation on screen. But there exist also powerful myth-bearing figures that mix the two genders. In contemporary popular culture, the androgyne is current as an adolescent figure upon whom are projected the desires of a great many pre-teens and teenagers. The popularity of such figures is sometimes explained through the suggestion that they provide young people with an

image that is simultaneously sexy and reassuring. The androgynous star, whether David Bowie, Annie Lennox or Boy George (that is, whatever the gender or private sexual orientation of the individual behind the mask), has an image that displays male and female sexual characteristics with dual emphasis. It is sometimes argued that s/he projects an unthreatening sexuality because of these features. Young girls in particular are said to be able to identify with the androgyne before they attain their own full sexual maturity. The case of Michael Jackson suggests that this explanation may be partially true, but that it leaves a lot unsaid.

The sexually immature androgyne has celebrated forebears. Barbara Greenfield has identified one carrier of the relevant archetypal image in a figure she names (with reference to its classical origins) 'the flower boy'. (We shall encounter other androgynous figures later in the child, the berdache and the syzygy.) Examples of the flower boy in mythology include Adonis, the boy lover of Venus, who was killed when hunting – in other words, when prematurely asserting his independence as a man. Another was Hyacinth: he died in the attempt to compete on equal terms with his mentor (and lover) Apollo, only to be reclaimed by the mothering earth, from which he arose again as a flower. Greenfield says that the appeal of such a boy to girls may be that he is not only young and beautiful, but that he is not yet powerful enough to be threatening. Meanwhile, some older women find that a beautiful boy arouses the desire to mother him. From a Jungian perspective, Greenfield argues that flower boys like these represent a time in life when ego consciousness is a fragile thing. In that phase of life, it remains still at risk of being drawn back into a state of unity with the mother (the unconscious) (Greenfield 1985: 193–4).

Although we shall recognise the signs of the flower boy in Michael Jackson's image, there are other aspects to the pleasure his figure communicates. As Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs recall, in the early 1960s the Beatles shocked adults and appealed to adolescent girls through the ambiguous sexuality their long hair seemed to connote (Ehrenreich *et al.* 1992: 101–2). For some girls the attraction may indeed have been that the mixed-gender markers sported by the boys made these others seem less sexually threatening than, for instance, the full-blown masculinity of Elvis. But the Beatles were a band, not solo artists. The idea of a pack of flower boys seems absurd, given that young men usually gather in groups to enhance their sense of power. Thus their collective image, like that of Michael Jackson, could be read in a number of ways. For instance, their single most distinctive visual symbol, the famous shoulder-length hair, carried different meanings for different people. For many middle-aged people in Europe and the USA who had grown up with the convention that a short back and sides cut was the only hairstyle

that declared a frankly masculine nature, long hair on men made for an all-too-visible and suspicious break with gender uniformity. Time and again young men heard their elders complain that they looked just like girls, an accusation that left open notions of licentiousness too shameful to specify. Further, by invoking such a dark confusion of symbolic categories, long male hair was often read (no doubt by those displacing anxieties aroused by the threat to gender boundaries) as a sign of dirtiness. As Raymond Firth observed, what exacerbated public reaction was the realisation that long male hair was a symbol for deliberate, quasi-political protest against society. Well aware of this, many young men of orthodox and demure heterosexual orientation let their hair grow long as a mark of freedom from the repressed values of their parents' generation (Firth 1973: 276-7).

The Beatles' appearance could be read either as a mark of youthful rebellion or as sexually androgynous, depending on one's perspective. Ehrenreich *et al.* think it likely that the Beatles' sexuality did convey to young women attractive muted suggestions of androgyny because it lifted sex out of the rigid scenario of mid-century American (and we may add British) gender roles. Hitherto, sex, for very young women at least, had been seen as leading directly to marriage and domesticity, but the Beatles treated sex more casually and playfully. They suggested to girls not only that it could be guileless and fun, but also that they could identify with members of the band and seize the power these boys from nowhere had taken, to shape their own lives (Ehrenreich *et al.* 1992: 102-3).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Michael Jackson was in some of these respects one of the Beatles' successors for a new generation of teenagers; but he did not simply replicate the Beatles' appeal. As a solo artist over changing times, he too projected a complex of values. Some embodied the vulnerability of the flower boy; and read in this way today, his girlish voice, long hair, cosmetic surgery and pallid facial make-up supply markers of an insistent feminine softness. Thus, even in his mid-thirties, Jackson was still invoking the archetype of the juvenile androgyne. However, these signs were vividly counterpointed by potent adolescent signifiers of rebellious maleness such as the crotch-grabbing dance routine and the parodies of military costumes. Members of his audience who looked no further could easily read his image (as many did) in one of two complementary ways – either as the unthreatening male, or as the sexual idol who would liberate the young from the bonds of the previous generation's middle-aged and repressive sexuality. The latter image, of the teen hero as a liberator from parental culture, has recurred time and again since its discovery in the mid-1950s as one of the fundamentally marketable stereotypes for an emerging teen culture.

Paradoxically, Michael Jackson's image may actually have offered as much reassurance to young men as young women. The need for it could be due to the impact of feminist values on the culture of young people. Starting in the early 1980s, many young men in school and college in the USA or Britain encountered a new, healthily anti-sexist orthodoxy endorsed not only by their teachers but also by their peers. One product of this orthodoxy, emerging towards the end of the decade, was the idea of the New Man (or Soft Male), a figure who had supposedly discarded (along with many other features of unreconstructed maleness) his old sexual aggressiveness, substituting for it a caring sensitivity. For many young men, however, this new cultural model had too much in common with the faded flower boy to symbolise the urgent drive of the young male sexual hunter. While they might have paid lip service to the pieties of the new sexual decorum, young men transferred their allegiance back to older models of conduct when they were actually out with their friends.

The interesting thing about Michael Jackson's double image as flower boy *and* rebellious youth is that these two can be mapped on to the roles represented by the New Man and the macho male. In other words, Jackson's performances neatly supplied, for the early adolescent young men whose need was to find it, an illusory bridge across the gulf between the two modes of sexual address. Identifying with his image may have helped them persuade themselves that the gentle lover and the macho man are the same thing. In fact, of course, they are far from identical, and this duplicity is merely one instance in which we shall find that concealed splits in the Jackson image mask potentially dangerous conflicts.

For instance, aspects of the Michael Jackson image attract a number of projections that have an unexpectedly dark feeling-tone. A case in point occurs in the videos that repeatedly associate the hero with images of powerful beasts of prey – figures which are well-known metaphors for awakened male sexuality. In *Thriller* a hitherto gentle Michael, who has been sweetly keeping company with his girl, suddenly metamorphoses into a wolf. This image, a shorthand metaphor for rapacious male appetite, springs straight out of the horror genre. Kobena Mercer has argued that the meaning of the metamorphosis is undermined by the incongruity of the college-boy jacket the wolf-man is wearing (Mercer 1991: 311). However, even if seen this way by the spectator, Jackson's association with an aggressive male sexuality still has had to be denied, and opposites are never far to seek in his videos. Mercer believes that, located as they are in the tradition of African-American music, Jackson's androgynous performances challenge dominant stereotypes of macho black masculinity. For this reason he celebrates them as pleasantly subversive (*ibid.*: 314). But as

we have just seen, they could be taken just as subversively as celebrating macho sexuality in an age which had abandoned it, seemingly.

We see further evidence of image/meaning splitting along a different axis in the way in which, in the 1980s, Jackson's appeal appeared actually to have been designed by his image-makers and marketing advisers to straddle the generation gap. Audiences (as they had been twenty-five years earlier with the Beatles) were invited to read his androgynous image in two quite contradictory ways. He was presented to younger viewers as exciting and sexy; yet he appealed to their parents' generation as safe and squeaky clean. Each part of the audience (in part precisely because many of the older group had in their time been fans of bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones) was positioned to ignore this potentially explosive conjunction of opposites. And the rhetorical and commercial success of the strategy of meaning-splitting was signalled when Pepsi-Cola (perhaps not having learned its lesson with an earlier androgynous spokesperson, Joan Crawford) used Jackson to front a major advertising campaign. All in all, as Mercer says, his image attracted and maintained the kind of cultural fascination that made him more like a movie-star than a singer. His face could be thought of as a mask, an aesthetic surface on which society writ large its own preoccupations (ibid.: 313-14).

It has for many decades been typical of Hollywood movies that they are constructed so as to allow different members of their audiences to project entirely contradictory meanings, opinions and beliefs on to their characters and narrative. The ambiguity helps to increase the size of the audience. The music-video industry (in part because of shared ownership) simply imitated the practice of the movie business in recognising the commercial benefit of having things both ways. In marketing terms, that is the single most characteristic feature of the music video's postmodernist aesthetics: among students of communication, it is widely recognised that (in the sampling of fragments of imagery, sound and narrative from earlier, 'classic' texts) such videos split their signifiers. However, they also bring about a splitting of signifieds. Put less formally, the dazzling abundance of references with which the typical postmodernist text sparkles encourages the consumer to find support for whatever values she or he brings to it. Every viewer and listener can be satisfied, so long as they buy the video – or donate the consumer time to watching it.

Because of its diversity of sources, the postmodernist video text appears to be ideologically neutral in its impact, but this claim is plainly disingenuous in relation to its base in and advantage to the image and music industries. Further, such a claim fails to account for what happens when certain images and sounds impact in a way that is experienced as peculiarly potent. And of course it is precisely this emotional potency

which causes viewers to inscribe their own desires and fears on to the mask that the star presents to them, driving people, for instance, to make sense for themselves of the multiple meanings that can circulate around a figure such as Michael Jackson.

Considered from a Jungian perspective, the figure of the androgyne – one of the principal symbols with which Jackson is associated – is readily identifiable as an archetypal image precisely because of its fascinating powers. Beyond the ambivalence it arouses in members of our own society, we can easily find evidence that the image of the androgyne has been, in a number of cultures, the vehicle for both positive and negative meanings even more deeply coloured than those we have already touched upon. Positively charged androgynous images include those of the berdache in American Indian culture. These were men living and marrying as women, and honoured by their tribes because of their spiritual leadership. According to Hopcke, they lived out an identification with the androgyne, and were therefore associated with spiritual transformation and meditation (Hopcke 1991: 174–6). Further, a number of figures in religion and myth are associated with deity and endowed with androgynous qualities. The best known of these in the western world is Christ. While all androgynous figures exhibit a common function in that their dual sexuality is an obvious mystery, when positively charged this archetypal image draws the mind on to contemplation of the secret mysteries with which all religions are concerned. Such images do this by deploying the energy which imbues such figures with numinous potency to juxtapose the mind's unconscious disposition to its conscious orientation. The positive androgyne represents the harmonious integration of unconscious drives with consciousness. Conversely, it appears that images of negative androgynes may occur when an imbalance between the unconscious and the conscious needs to be resolved. Then the androgyne can be the vehicle for unconscious energies which are attempting to force themselves into consciousness. We could mention, among the images of accursed androgynes in European mythology, Tiresias, condemned to blindness for his too-complete knowledge of human sexuality, yet given the power to foresee the future by way of compensation. After him come numerous female witches who have distinctively male characteristics accompanied by the power not only to foretell, but also to shape malevolently, what is to come.

It should come as no surprise to find that Jackson's videos incorporate motifs hinting at the monstrous androgyne, including those that tend toward the Frankensteinian. For instance, in the early 1990s the long hair always had a single dishevelled lock falling forward like a crack in the face of a china doll. And one of his trademarks, a single glove, was

often fingerless and ragged. It looked like a bandage. As such it brought to mind the cosmetic surgery done to his face and the popular suspicion that his pasty new complexion was the result of unsuccessful repair work. An interesting sign of the way his image continues to be pulled towards the pathological is the fact that doubts have persisted despite Jackson's claim to Oprah Winfrey in 1993 that his pallor had been caused by a medical condition. Here hints of the monstrous in his image come into conjunction with its infantilism, each aspect intensifying the other.

By the early 1990s, Jackson's performances had been presenting audiences with this conjunction for some years: at age 35 he was still evoking the archetype of the (damaged) juvenile androgyne. The signs implicit in the stage and video performances were reinforced by his appearance on a special show hosted by Oprah Winfrey, in which he guided television viewers round his personal Xanadu. (Complete with theatre, carousel and rides, this fabled haven turned out to be nothing less than a child's private theme park. The more bizarre signifiers could be read as implying the psychic damage done to the Peter Pan lost-boy figure by endlessly prolonging childhood.) Mapping Jackson's performances back on to his own life (as the Oprah Winfrey special encouraged us to do), we found that both his girlish mannerisms and the constant gesturing towards his genitals could be read equally well as signs of a deeply unsure masculinity, as of the great potency his hold on the box office suggested.

The enormous scandal that broke in the summer of 1993 played directly on, and greatly amplified, these contrary indications. If confirmation were needed that, along with its other meanings, Jackson's image resonated with something latent in the psyche of considerable numbers of people in North America and beyond, that confirmation came brutally in the instant press response to allegations that he had sexually exploited under-age boys. Although neither charge nor proof of guilt had been brought, massive media coverage was given to the story in both the US and Britain, and it was immediately asserted that his image would be fatally sullied whatever the truth of the matter might turn out to be. Even journalists who reported that Jackson might be the victim of a well-orchestrated extortion attempt confidently predicted that Pepsi would have to cancel the advertising deal and that his career would be in ruins. Jackson did call off his 1993 tour before it had reached its end, and Pepsi-Cola cancelled its deal, claiming that the corporation's obligation had ended because it had undertaken only to sponsor the tour. But in January 1994 Jackson's legal representatives agreed to an out-of-court settlement with the family of a 14-year-old boy who had made the original allegations of misconduct and laid formal charges against him, without an admission of guilt by the singer, who went on to marry Elvis Presley's daughter.

What were the particular cultural and psychological factors with which Jackson's public image and alleged private misdemeanours intersected? How do these help to explain the sudden reversal of the numinous energy that Jackson's presence conveyed and the cynicism with which his continuing popularity is received by the press? To phrase the issue in Jungian terms, what had happened to the sophisticatedly innocent side of the singer's image (an aspect charged with intense archetypal energy for many of his fans)? Had it suffered total eclipse – and if so, why were his many fans still supporting a fallen idol?

At least some parts of an answer are found in the record of a conversation between James Hillman and Michael Ventura. When discussing the sexual abuse of children, they argue that although it has always been inexcusable behaviour, it has actually been going on forever. However, the *obsession* with child abuse is something new, a phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s, a fact suggesting that a culturally specific syndrome has seized white America and much of Europe. Describing it as an obsession with childhood, Hillman and Ventura trace its source to the prevalent (and erroneous) notion that we are born innocent, which the popularising of psychoanalysis has done much to propagate. The misconception advances on these lines:

1. We are born innocent and happy
2. In adulthood we are neurotic and wretched and have been robbed of our birthright to enduring happiness
3. Since psychoanalytical theory has taught us to look to the first years of our lives to find the source of our current miseries
4. it seems to follow the most casual inquiry that our innocence and happiness must have been stolen from us in childhood.

As a consequence of this new logic of disappointment's development, an obsessive centring on childhood has come to implicate many of the cultural values of North America and Europe as specifically child-abusing. Plain evidence for the power of this conviction is found in the huge numbers of individuals seeking to regain that supposed innocence by purging the hell they believe they must have suffered when they were children, and doing it sometimes on the flimsiest of evidential bases with the help of psychotherapists (Hillman and Ventura 1992: 191–3).

Where a particular figure is loaded with emotional significance for large numbers of people, there an archetypal image is discovered. The abused yet abusing child therefore must be such a figure. In one respect, we can say that its origins reach back deep into folk memories and can be traced there through fairy-tales. But we can also see, as the history of Michael Jackson indicates, that its manifestation in the mid-1990s through his

image was a culturally specific episode. It resonated with the unconscious of large numbers of people in Western societies who found themselves becoming absorbed by emotions generated by the allegations about his behaviour.

One of the functions of the child archetype is, obviously enough, to recall the experiences and emotions of childhood. This archetype thus has a compensatory function in a culture bent on early specialisation because, as we saw in chapter 4, it provides access to a more holistic youth that has been lost. It also looks forward to the future and a form of rebirth. As Jung remarked, it is not surprising that so many of the mythological saviours are child gods. Indeed, many of them were androgynous, a factor which reinforced their significance as symbols pointing forward to a goal not yet reached, the *conjunctio oppositorum*, unification of the most striking opposites, the two sharply divided regions of the psyche (Jung 1951: 162-4, 173-4).

But if the child archetype is intended, like an actual child born into a middle-aged family, as an unqualified boon, a sign of hope, why then has its manifestation in Michael Jackson been so ambivalent? Again, to find the answer, we have to look at the career of the star. First, Jackson is someone who has notoriously long since left childhood behind, and has had himself operated upon to erase even the links to that childhood in his physical features, to a degree that Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney never dreamed of. Secondly, and speaking strictly of the archetype as a metaphor, there is an important sense in which many western cultures are massively predisposed towards abuse of the child in the psyche because its symbolic and archetypal qualities are ignored. The very fixation upon childhood described above is actually a symptom of this abuse. The infantile obsession with 'rediscovering' a false innocence occupies the mind with a distorting personal vision which closes off the possibility of seeing the child as the numinous, almost impersonal image that an archetypal representation can be. It is an operation on the child, a perversion of him/her. As Jung taught us, the archetypal child symbolises not only the things that have been lost with the passing of time (not a supposed innocence, but a vivid immediacy of contact with the intuitions and emotions), but also what the future will bring: it is a figure that frequently heralds rebirth both in the individual and the community.

In a number of ways, the infantilism surrounding Jackson has signalled a destructive failure to recognise the archetypal child and, in many ways, a reversal of the values attaching to it. Rather than imply the future this image, like the Reagan era in which it was born, represented an attempt to stop the clock. In a wider sense, it stood for the distortion to the point of absurdity of the desire for unending youth. This desire is so common

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in western cultures in the second half of the twentieth century in part because advertising has done so much to nurture the appeal of goods and service though association with images of young and beautiful people. The advertiser's calculation is that the desire to possess through their images these succulent but unattainable young bodies will transfer to the purchasable goods with which they are associated. But undoubtedly not all that introjected energy transfers, and the residue leaves many people who are no longer young experiencing the aching need for youth – either by preserving it artificially in themselves or by capturing it through those who are young. Here again is a culturally specific manifestation arising from the group unconscious.

The child god or hero, often abandoned and in danger, is 'smaller than small'. This child hero's awesome power, which makes it 'bigger than big', arises from his vulnerability, the uncertainty of his origins (Jung 1951: 165–7). By the 1980s, however, Jackson was universally recognised as a megastar, a figure surrounded by an army of managers, agents, spokespeople, lawyers, and domestic employees – not to mention his musicians, dancers and fans. He was not a child but an adult masquerading as a sexually precocious child, and his origins were well documented. If, then, it is correct to speculate that in his new Disneyland incarnation he had become the object of widespread infantile projection, those who underwent such a fixation on him would have been blocking, along with their star, their rediscovery of what they had really left behind in childhood. In effect the fixation upon a false image of childhood actually suppressed the true archetype of the child.

A symbol representing something distressing the psyche of those who were preoccupied with his fate, what happened to Michael Jackson's image in 1993–4 demonstrates vividly what occurs when energy constellated by an archetype is repressed.

It is an axiom of psychology that when a part of the psyche is split off from consciousness it is only *apparently* inactivated; in actual fact it brings about a possession of the personality, with the result that the individual's aims are falsified in the interests of the split-off part. If, then, the childhood state of the collective psyche is repressed to the point of total exclusion, the unconscious content overwhelms the conscious aim and inhibits, falsifies, even destroys its realisation. Viable progress only comes from the co-operation of both. (Jung 1951: 164)

Read symbolically, the boy who charged that Jackson had sexually interfered with him was actually effecting the reactivation and return of the child archetype that had been repressed. Jackson began to stand not for the renewal of conscious connection with the unconscious, but for its denial, even its suppression. His image became suddenly the symptom of

the deep and widespread reluctance to face the disruptive, often painful energies of a creativity that does not seek to hold the child in place.

Yet, even in Jackson's work, there have been hopeful hints of an eventual recovery of the transpersonal. We must therefore be grateful for the occasional glimpses of the positive and joyous androgyne, the ancient symbol of union. A striking example comes in the video *Black or White*, released just as the scandal was breaking, when the singer's mask metamorphoses into the beautiful faces of a succession of women and men. These young people, who come from many races, are welded by computer-driven dissolves through time into one – a representation both male and female and multiracial. The magic of the new technology makes the blending of all these people into one composite being a fitting image for not only the multicultural societal unity that is the song's theme, but also the free communication of conscious and unconscious that is the present possibility in an age when images can reproduce and metamorphose freely.

A goddess who comes? Madonna as trickster

The image of Madonna, possibly the most famous female media star of her epoch, makes an interesting comparison with that of Michael Jackson. On the surface rather similar in terms of its marked ambivalence, the underlying thrust of the meaning values surrounding her is quite distinct from those generated around Jackson.

When we categorise Madonna's public personality in terms recognised in analytical psychology, we find it belongs to two large classes of archetypal images. Her stage name registers the first of these obviously in that she projects herself as a type of goddess.⁶ The second is the *trickster*, a figure which Jung found recurring in numerous places including dreams, myths, religious iconography and rituals, and of which we have seen a restrained example in the case of Jules in *Diva*.

As Jung observed it, the trickster took many different forms. However, almost all of them were male (Jung 1956b: 255–72). Although, as we have mentioned, Jung's imperfect attention to the myths of women has been remedied by a number of his American followers, the archetypal figure of the trickster has not attracted much attention in the arenas of feminism. This may well be because its awkward, irritating characteristics, its unpredictable mannerisms and abrupt reversals of behaviour do not sit comfortably with the self-images of women as they have evolved through the late twentieth century. The trickster is too erratic, too disruptive to be

⁶ Although Madonna was given this name by her parents, the decision to use it alone without her surname has in effect turned it into a stage name.

a welcome companion on women's route to full self-realisation. No matter how uncomfortable its presence, however, recognition of the trickster can be no less empowering for women than men.

What, then, are the traits of the trickster archetype as Jung discovered it? In common with every other archetypal image that he identified, it embraces the extreme poles of an opposition. To take a rudimentary example, we associate water both with life (because we must drink to survive) and death (it drowns those who fall in it). Such contradictions, in defiance of logic, are an essential feature of the archetypal image. In the case of the trickster archetype, its marked duality consists in its representing simultaneously both the animal and the divine; it is a figure that manages to be both inferior and superior to humanity.

In Europe, the trickster has been seen plainly as a leading player in all those mediaeval customs in which misrule overturns accepted order. He is present too in folklore, carnival, revels and picaresque tales (Jung 1956b: 255–60). Frequently no less grotesque, scurrilous and violent than Punch (one of his numerous manifestations), he may be as unconscious of self as a circus clown, or insinuating as a jester. Significantly, he cannot be tied down: he is a shape shifter, appearing at one moment in one form, only to transmute and make his next entrance in quite another. Such versatility matches his function in running counter to the orientation of the individual's conscious mind. Thus Jung found that in modern life, at the trivial level of personal embarrassment, the trickster disturbs conscious intent with gaffes and *faux pas*. Or, more distressingly, the same archetype may afflict the person who seems suddenly to be at the mercy of a succession of annoying 'accidents' (ibid.: 262).

The trickster is not, however, an exclusively negative figure. Virtually every quality Jung attributes to him maps on to the figure of Mercurius (Mercury), who in turn reproduces the character of the classical Hermes. On the dark side, the latter is a god of thieves and cheats, but at the same time he is also, in his role of messenger, a god of revelation (Jung 1948a: 230–4). That is the very role he played, through Jules, for Cynthia Hawkins in *Diva*. His rooted duality means that he consists of all possible opposites, both material and spiritual. Jung describes him as 'the process by which the lower and material is transformed into the higher and spiritual, and vice versa'. He is potentially both salvific and demonic. Not surprising, then, that the trickster myth can express a longing for the coming of the saviour.

In psychological terms, the trickster's turning away from stupidity towards a measure of good sense indicates that some calamity has either occurred and been overcome, or has been foreseen and integrated at a deep level. In other words the image of the trickster (like every other

archetype) contains the seed of a conversion into its opposite (Jung 1956b: 266, 271–2). Jung (naming this principle *enantiodromia*) identified a tendency for every psychological extreme to contain its own opposite and to run towards it.

As a figure of myth (a mythologem) the significance of the trickster is both wider than, but yet linked to, the history of any one individual. For in the history of both the individual and the collective, Jung argues, everything depends on the development of consciousness – and here lies the importance of the trickster figure. Its function is to hold an older, less civilised state of consciousness in conscious view. On the surface of things this is unexpected because, as Jung remarks, we might anticipate that with the progressive development of consciousness the older, cruder version would fall away and disappear. In practice the trickster has been actively sustained and promoted by consciousness as a reference point. The confirmation of this lies in the fact that, far from being subject to repression, this mythologem is frequently a figure of fun which has often given widespread social pleasure.

When recollection of the trickster occurs, it is mainly due to the interest which the conscious mind brings to him, recalling him from the darkness. When that happens, an inevitable concomitant is 'the gradual civilising of a primitive daemonic figure who was originally autonomous and even capable of causing possession' (Jung 1956b: 265, 267; Samuels 1990: 270). Conversely, the absence of the figure in social ritual can be sinister in its implications. When this occurs, a form of repression has taken place, whereupon the contents secreted in the unconscious gradually gain in dynamic energy so that they eventually force an irruption somewhere in the psyche. If they are brought back to the realm of consciousness, they may constellate once again as an image bearing the characteristics of the trickster. If, however, they are unrecognised (that is, refused by consciousness) they may enforce their return as dangerous shadow images which both individuals and the collective project in ignorance of their true meaning on those whom they take to be their enemies. Present-day Europe reveals numerous instances (for example, Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia) of entire communities projecting such dark shadows 'over the border' on to their neighbours – who in turn project their own deepest shadows back the other way. It is only a matter of time before inner repression becomes social conflict, perhaps even war. If the anarchic activities of the trickster can (in whatever social arena) inhibit the projection by powerful social groups of such daemonic collective psychological energies onto the victims they intuitively seek out for the split-off shadow, then the value of cultivating this mythologem needs no further demonstration.

Madonna's social arena is not (yet) that of international and intercommunal politics. But for a long time it was that of sexual politics. And for Jungians no less than Freudians this is a particularly interesting field of human activity because it directly links social and cultural practice (and beyond that, certain features of social policy) to the emotional life both of individuals and the collective. As we have remarked previously, Jungian theory holds that changes in human affairs (whether relating to an individual's selfhood or the dominant social ethos) are led through the experience of emotions. Emotions in their turn may be aroused either by personal circumstances or by images and events that occur whether in the objective or the collectively apprehended world. Inevitably we are talking about an image collectively experienced in discussing an immensely popular star who exerts a fascination, as Madonna has done for many years, which all those feel who both love and hate what they take her to stand for. No question then but that her fans apprehend her as an image carrying an archetypal energy, which they recognise through what they perceive as her numinosity or magical charge. She is to them in part a mysterious figure, the full power of which the conscious mind feels readily enough, but has difficulty in understanding. Like other archetypal images, Madonna's image is a centre of energy around which ideas, images, affects and myths cohere. However, she is also, like Michael Jackson, a signifier of the group or cultural unconscious in ways which we explored in chapter 3. That is to say, her image carries an archetypal charge to which her fans and perhaps those who strongly dislike her image respond – but to which others are indifferent. The fans seem to use it as a repository of cultural experience. It is as though her image were the content filling out the empty template of their cultural needs so that she becomes a kind of record of where their intuitions have taken, and are taking them, in the company of a large group of their fellow beings. And simultaneously her image is used as the means of concretising their sense of cultural difference from their peers (see Samuels 1993: 328). Since the same can be said of Jackson's image, it follows that a fan of either star is not necessarily a fan of the (or indeed *any*) other.

Accepting that Madonna's image does function to give body to the cultural unconscious, the shape-shifting characteristic of her work carries with it the risk that her image may jump cultural boundaries that not all her fans are capable of crossing. On the other hand if she does carry them with her, as the immediate success of *Frozen* implies, she may draw them into an unexpected and ultimately civilising interior journey.

Jung demonstrated that every individual experiences the grip of a variety of archetypes in the course of a lifetime. However, as has already been said, he proved most adept at elaborating the archetypes that govern the

lives and psyches of men. In redressing the balance, feminist Jungians have in recent years worked at identifying archetypal images that inform the lives of women. In the process, while building on the work of sympathetic archaeo-mythologists such as Marija Gimbutas, they returned to European pre-history and discovered that the dominance of male gods both in the Christian pantheon and in several of the world's most powerful faiths has not been the timeless phenomenon the faiths themselves declare. On the contrary, long before the accession of the male gods the peoples of Old Europe worshipped the Great Goddess, and the male principle had little if any place in their belief system. The gifts of life and death, feast and famine were all in the hands of the Goddess. The symbols of her energy included chevrons, vulvae, snakes, spirals, sprouting seeds and shoots; and images of warfare were strikingly absent from art centred on her (Gimbutas 1989: xvii-xx).

All this changed with the invasion of cattle-herding Indo-European tribes who overran Europe between 3500 and 2500 BC. They imposed their patriarchal culture and bellicose male gods on the conquered people. Yet as Gimbutas and Jean Shinoda Bolen show, the Great Goddess did not disappear without trace. She became the subservient consort of the invaders' gods, and most of the attributes of power that originally belonged to her were given to a male deity. Other attributes were divided among less powerful goddesses. In this way many of her symbols were subsumed into the new patriarchal mythologies. For example, the Birth Giver and the Earth Mother aspects of the Goddess eventually fused with the Virgin Mary. Meanwhile her negative aspects, formerly expressed in her function as the Mother who regenerates life from death, also split off. They became attached to the many women who learned the occult secrets of the Goddess and kept them alive (Gimbutas 1989: 318-19; Bolen 1985: 20-1). Thus the satanic witch hunts organised by the Catholic Church from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries (during which more than 8 million women were murdered) can be seen as a consequence of an unbridled collective shadow projection by followers of a faith dominated by a male god. We may guess that, driven by fear of the dethroned Goddess's continuing potency, they projected negative archetypal images upon women whom they believed to be her devotees, then sought to extirpate their demons by killing those whom they had caused to bear them (Jacoby 1992: 201-4). To judge by letters to the press, Madonna has for some years carried the projected shadow of many (both male and female) who loathe her. Her image is for some people malevolent enough that her trickster was tainted with the witch's darkness before she embraced the image herself in 1998.

Long before the Christian era, however, the attributes, symbols and power formerly belonging to the Great Goddess had been divided among a number of powerful Greek goddesses and their Roman successors; and it is these figures who have been recalled to the service of Jungian analysis. Bolen, for instance, has picked out seven classical goddesses who form a pantheon of archetypal images derived from the Great Goddess. On the basis of her observations as a practising analyst, Bolen argues that (whether singly or more typically clustered in groups) they represent the influence exerted by archetypes governing the lives of women.

Even a cursory look at the seven deities reveals that most of them do not at all bear on Madonna's public image. First, she in no way represents Demeter (Ceres to the Romans) who was goddess of motherhood and fertility. Sex in her routines has nothing to do with procreation, and nothing changed in this regard after she herself became a mother.

Second, she is not the child of Demeter, Persephone (the Roman Proserpina) who, in Bolen's opinion, has two dominant aspects. In one she is the Kore, the nameless maiden who does not yet know who she is, the mother's daughter, a child-woman whose sexuality is unawakened. She wears her other aspect as Queen of the Underworld, as the guide for those who visit that place. Where Persephone rules a woman may have reluctant access to her own unconscious, and may have the power to escort other women into the mysteries of their own dark realms. Clearly her first aspect does not match Madonna's public persona. But neither does the second, for although Madonna also mediates between the unconscious and conscious worlds, she is not, like Persephone, a psychological captive, the quality that enables this goddess to help other depressive women (Bolen 1985: 199-203).

Third comes Hera (or Juno), goddess of marriage. She too is not an archetype to fit Madonna, despite the latter's celebrated marital adventures. For Hera embodies an attitude to marriage much in harmony with patriarchal values. This archetype represents a woman's overwhelming desire to be a wife; she does not feel truly alive until she has a husband, and all other activities, such as career or motherhood, come second to the securing and holding of a man (*ibid.*: 142-3).

The fourth goddess is also completely foreign to Madonna. Hestia (whom the Romans did not represent as a human figure, but as Vesta, a flame) was goddess of the hearth. Bolen describes her as the archetype active in women who find housekeeping a meaningful activity and who through tending to chores discover inner peace and a centring activity equivalent to meditation. Her detachment shields her from the battering of external experience, and her devotion to the inner life gives her the

qualities of the wise woman (*ibid.*: 110–13). She is like an inverted image of the singer.

When we turn to the fifth goddess, Athena (Minerva to the Romans), we meet the first of the archetypal figures who govern Madonna. As goddess of wisdom, Athena was known for her winning skill as a strategist, detached even in the heat of battle and able to plan with clear foresight. Ruled by the head, the woman led by the Athena archetype works to make something of herself: 'The equivalent of a female Horatio Alger is almost always an Athena woman' (*ibid.*: 78–88). Madonna, who has been described as just such an all-American, rags-to-riches hero, is celebrated for planning her career, polishing her image and relentlessly producing herself as a commodity (see Tetzlaff 1993: 258, 261). It is perhaps her one universally agreed claim to fame.

In addition to these strong resemblances, however, there are equally distinctive mismatches. Bolen observes that the Athena woman shows a tendency to do everything in moderation and to live within the Golden Mean. Indeed she lives in her mind and is often out of touch with her body; typically she is neither sensual nor sexy (Bolen 1985: 92–3).

Resemblances between Madonna and the sixth goddess, Artemis (later Diana) queen of the hunt, are not as strong, but nonetheless exist. Plainly the goddess's virginity and immunity to falling in love have no meaning for the star; but they share the focused intensity and perseverance that Bolen itemises as Artemis' other dominant characteristics. They endow her with the ability to aim and hit the target no matter what the distractions. And there is another important connection with Madonna's public image in that (like today's Artemis women) she treats sex as a recreational sport or a physical experience rather than as an expression of emotional intimacy or commitment (*ibid.*: 49–50, 60).

In this important detail, then, Madonna's sexual behaviour differs from what might be expected of a woman under the influence of Aphrodite (Venus), the seventh and most potent goddess in Bolen's pantheon, who 'governs women's enjoyment of love and beauty, sexuality and sensuality'. Like Aphrodite, Madonna has potent sex appeal and falls in love easily; she also displays every sign of being overwhelmed by eroticism. But unlike the goddess she does not represent the drive to procreate; nor does she seem to want to become involved to the point of merging with her partner, but rather, Artemis-like, expresses an interest in enjoying the physical experience.

Both Aphrodite and Madonna are tremendous forces for change; and this connects with not only their sexual but also their artistic fertility. Bolen argues that creative work springs from an intense and passionate involvement almost like that with a lover, as the artist interacts with the

'other' to bring something new into being. But while dedication to her work makes Madonna a true Aphrodite woman, there is a significant difference. Women ruled by this goddess tend to live in the immediate present, taking life as if it were no more than a sensory experience and there were no future consequences to their actions (ibid.: 238–41, 255). In this respect, as we have seen, Madonna, a clever strategist, is much closer to Athena.

Thus the two virgin goddesses Athena and Artemis, together with the goddess of love Aphrodite, furnish archetypal images that frame and energise a number of elements of Madonna's public personality. But they do not account for the entire personality for two reasons. First, she is a shape-shifter, only constant like the virgin goddesses in her certainty of aim and command of strategy. Second, her performances, despite her passionate commitment to them noted above, often lack the resonance of lived emotional experience: Madonna seems not to be celebrating love and sexuality in their own right so much as playing with the idea of them, even while she is making them the one constant theme wound through her countless metamorphoses.

Many commentators have noticed these qualities. For example, E. Deirdre Pribram and David Tetzlaff concur in labelling her a chameleon of appearances who refuses all fixed meanings. Behind the post-modern play with masks there is no authentic Madonna, no personal or inspirational centre to the vision (Pribram 1993: 202; Tetzlaff 1993: 255–6). Tetzlaff calls her the Teflon idol.

Nothing sticks to her. The sleaze, the blasphemy, the perversity all slide off. Perhaps the audience recognises that Madonna only inhabits these positions as if she were modelling a collection of fashions... unaffected for having worn them for a while. This is represented in the videos themselves, which always end with Madonna seemingly unfazed by the cultures and struggles she has encountered, dancing off screen to the perky disco bounce. (Tetzlaff 1993: 259)

As these remarks hint, Madonna has something in common with the male trickster both in shape-shifting and sexual ambivalence. The shapes and roles she has chosen to perform and then discarded are extraordinarily diverse. We can add to them the roles that her fans and critics have discovered in her acts, through either wish-fulfilment or revulsion playing upon deliberately ambiguous film editing – a further sign of the power of the cultural unconscious to find appropriate contents with which to fill its forms. Earlier personae included the Boy Toy and the Bitch. Later on in the music videos *Justify My Love* and *Express Yourself* her sexual roles were seen as those of a heterosexual partner, lover of a gay man, of an androgynous man/woman, and of a lesbian; she has also dallied

with masochism and sadism, and played at group sex. Then, in her stage rendering of 'Like a Virgin' for *In Bed With Madonna (Truth or Dare)*, she simulated masturbation; and seen backstage in the same documentary film, she entertained her dancers by mock-fellating a bottle and hinting that she might be a gay male, claiming that the sight of two men kissing would give her a hard-on.

No question then but she has played to the lesbian and gay audience. Just as some feminists tried to recruit her uninhibited sexuality to support their gender politics, so some lesbians and gays have sought to appropriate her rich sexual ambiguity to back gay activism. On the surface of things they had a good case, since her deployment of artifice, glamour and multiplicity appealed to them as something familiar, because gays too must use such devices to pass in straight society (Henderson 1993: 121). An important aspect of this in her 1980s and early 1990s performances was Madonna's alternation between masquerade (burlesquing feminine norms through excess) and drag (as a performance of gender reversal) (Schwichtenberg 1993: 134–5). In fact Pribram observes how in *Express Yourself* Madonna's clothing (a combination of male business suit and female corset) referred to both genders simultaneously (Pribram 1993: 198).

In practice her long parade of grotesques makes it impossible to enlist Madonna's image in support of any single cause. It is always ambiguous, if for no other reason than that which Tetzlaff notes, the routine commercial recognition that the straight audience is many times larger than the gay one.

It is simply wishful thinking to imagine that anyone who comes up with a good old-fashioned sexist interpretation of these texts is misreading them. Madonna and her creative cohorts are not stupid... After all, the media industry is still controlled by men, and men compose a large part of the mass market. (Tetzlaff 1993: 252)

Despite this adeptness and her multiple transformations, Madonna is in control of her image, not trapped by it. Indeed 'control' and 'power' are terms used repeatedly in connection with her. As Susan Bordo observes, they accumulate to give a sense that the star is self-created (Bordo 1993: 285–6). But this is also a characteristic of archetypes. Not only can they draw the lives of individuals and communities into new channels, but they are autonomous. In other words they charge images with an energy which gives them what appears to be an independent existence of their own. Of no archetype is this more true than the trickster.

Madonna's presentations appeal to (or repel) many different sorts of people in many different ways; but perhaps the one common thread that

most of her fans and critics felt tugging at them in her work up to the mid-1990s was that spun from sex and power – the power of seduction, the seduction of power. We said earlier that the trickster simultaneously represents the animal and the divine in humanity. In societies like those of the western world in which sexuality is given high priority and organised religion depreciated, entry into no other sphere of activity than sex is so much desired. No other channel for desire offers so many people the gratifying illusion of power. They seem to sense that through its ecstasies sex might let them breach the limits of the body to touch immortality. Power seems even to many of the powerless to be within reach here – a perspective which informed Madonna's role as the heroine of Alan Parker's *Evita* (1997).

Of course the search for power tends to corrupt no matter where it is found; and for every sexual relationship that empowers its partners, delivering them to ecstasy, there are others dogged by misery. Far from being a romantic, lyric or even comfortable figure, the trickster invariably presents us with an awkward, uncomfortable personality as well as a persuasive, amusing prankster and sexual polymorph. This is all the more significant when we realise that Jung saw the divine as profoundly ambivalent, so that in his psychology the sexual linking of animal and divine, conscious and unconscious can equally well be positive or negative, blessed or cursed.

What then does the wide appeal of Madonna's image signify? We made the point earlier that the fact that a female trickster has emerged in the person of Madonna fits well with the enhanced standing of women – the trickster masked in a star persona confirms that she is not to be taken as pliable. A creature of infinite variety, she bends only to her own whim, not to the fancy of man. Perhaps there is some kind of role model for young women here; however, it is worth suggesting that a model who in the past offered so much parodic sex with so little emotion was not in the longer term a reliable one.

We should therefore go further than this. Jung's writings lament the way in which twentieth-century western humanity continues to bring many of its worst pains upon itself. Complacent in the knowledge of advances in human consciousness which science and technology daily confirm, civilised people undervalue the unconscious. Whether we forget it, repress it or devalue it by ridiculing an interest in the activity of the unconscious as superstition, we cut ourselves off from it at our peril, he argued. The trickster keeps an older state of consciousness in our minds. The rambunctious and downright irritating nature of this mythologem's presence reminds us, however, that among the other characteristics of earlier states of consciousness was an openness to the

kinds of intrusion of unconscious impulses that the trickster herself represents.

One strand of imagery that Madonna often favours, and which supplies recurring parodic references to Catholicism, consists of icons such as the crosses and stigmata she receives on her hands in the video *Like A Prayer*, and (more insistently than anything else) her name. She pulls all these images out of their normal context and relocates them centrally in her ceremonies of sex. We can of course say with E. Ann Kaplan that, with the aid of these religious icons, Madonna constructs a thinly disguised autobiographical account of her rebellion against a repressive Catholic upbringing; and we can agree that such an adolescent story may well appeal to some of her fans (Kaplan 1993: 162). But it is questionable whether the subversion of sexual repression accounts for the Madonna phenomenon in its entirety.

From the Jungian point of view, the intrusion of Catholic icons into Madonna's celebrations of sexuality brought into play an all but moribund set of images. They now express a dogma that has lost its spiritual and emotional excitement, and which for most people in Western cultures has no vitality. Reintroducing these icons suits well Madonna's task as trickster because it recalls to mind an older state of consciousness involved in the observance of organised religious practice and the formal approach to the unconscious. So Madonna as trickster draws the old ways back to mind, but in the absence of an effective organised religion, she placed them prior to 1998 in the setting of another fundamental human activity. Her performances proffered sexually electrified images to supply the charge by which those of her fans who (in whatever confusion or uncertainty) sensed the need for self-knowledge, might be stimulated into beginning to feel their way, so to speak, towards that inner goal. It is entirely to the point that, as it confronts our conscious selves with urgent drives and dream images that arise out of the unconscious, sex, like religion, causes us both pleasure and pain, and forces us to experience more fully both the light and the dark, promising both ecstasy and despair.

All this may seem to prepare the way for grandiose claims that Madonna is a priestess. Finally, it does not. The priestess serves organised religion and obeys a pre-existent doctrine which she ministers to the faithful. She must by definition be conscious that she is following the practices of her predecessors in her rituals while mediating between the gods and humans, between the unconscious and the conscious. Madonna may or may not be aware of what she is doing in sponsoring this kind of mediation; but she is by no means observing a doctrine.

As a trickster, however, she has something of the shaman about her. This figure, an unconscious healer, also sometimes plays tricks on people,

inflicting discomfort on them (which may well rebound upon him- or herself) in the process of breaking through to and healing the psyche (Jung 1956b: 256). For the shaman is, as Maggy Anthony says, one who works by intuition and seeks a way alone, unaided and one step at a time through the wilderness of the human condition to discover who the gods are and what they say (Anthony 1990: 99). Before 1998 it might have been difficult to claim that Madonna consciously practised such powers or had special insight into the human unconscious. But nonetheless the emotional decentring caused by the force of her performances gave her imagery the catalytic power shared by trickster and shaman. It had the power to stir ancient passions and symbols in the collective unconscious of those people within her audiences in whom the appetite for the inner journey is awakening.

In 1998 with her video *Frozen*, Madonna staged a performance in which she consciously played the role of the shape-shifter, using an imaginative mix of live action, slow motion, visual overlay and computer-generated imagery to give the maximum force to her work. The result is intriguingly complex in that lyrics and imagery pull against each other in the creation of meaning, as this transcript of the opening moments reveals.

Images

The Steadicam glides in towards Madonna. Dressed in a flowing black robe, she is found in the empty wastes of a dried-up sea bed. Colour tones are exceptionally muted – blacks, greys and tints of cold blue. Madonna is not standing on, but *above*, the desert floor.

Her shadow takes life and snakes across the ground to her, and she takes it up and makes it her cape.

She falls like a tower and breaks into pieces. The fragments turn

Lyrics

You only see what your eyes
want to see.
How can I feel what you want
it to be?
You're frozen
When your heart's not open.

You're so consumed with how
much you get,
You waste your time with hate
and regret.
You're broken
When your heart's not open.

(cont.)

Images

into crows and fly off over her as she rises unharmed from the ground.

Her hands weave as if performing magic, and we see that her

fingers are painted with leaves. When she next moves we see three images of her – a coven. A single crow flies over, keeping low.

As she dances, the black cape flies around her and she wraps herself in it, shrinks down to the ground and metamorphoses into a black dog. Yet we cut back to Madonna who is still singing.

The dog runs past.

Madonna continues an involved dance with the cape which winds around her in impossible shapes.

She beckons. Clouds gather in a backlit sky which mixes through to a starlit night sky.

Listen to the lyrics alone, and *Frozen* can be heard as a love song in which the singer calls on her cold lover to unfreeze by giving less devotion to material wealth (a nice reversal this for a one-time Material Girl) and more to love. But the pictures have nothing to do with such a scenario, and they make such a dramatic claim on the viewer's attention in their

Lyrics

If I could melt your heart,
We'd never be apart.

Give yourself to me.
You are *the key*.

Now there's no point in
placing the blame,
And you should know I suffer
the same –
If I lose you
My heart will be broken.

Love is a bird. She needs to
fly.
Let all the hurt inside of you
die.
You're frozen
When your heart's not open.

If I could melt your heart,
We'd never be apart.
Give yourself to me –
You are *the key*.”

own right that they pull the words into a different frame. Madonna plays a witch or shaman, able to transform herself at will. The associations of the imagery are as dark as the robes that clothe her. She is still in a muted sense the seductress (the back of her bodice is cut in bands that bring to mind bondage costume), but she seems to invite her viewers to partake of something darker than sexual passion. The black dog and the black crow are the familiar harbingers in folklore of despair and death. Yet, having noted that, we must accept that the lyrics prevent the thought which the unaccompanied imagery alone might otherwise license – that she is acting as death's temptress.

From women's perspective it is no accident that the most potent symbol systems, of which religions are a prime example, vest power in the masculine, giving it a sacred cast. Writing in 1987, Demaris Wehr said,

As long as we live with masculine symbols for the Divine intact, we avoid the discomfiture that feminine symbols of the Divine tend to evoke. If we allow ourselves to change our religious language to feminine language, and to experience fully all the ambivalent feelings that change elicits, we can begin to comprehend the ambivalence we have toward the full power and authority of female being in general. We will begin to see the degree to which our feelings have been conditioned by the dearth of symbols of female authority in our society. (Wehr 1987: 24)

Wehr's insights enable us to go beyond the notion that the individual's self-regulating feedback is channelled through the symbol in order to implicate the social. In fact Jung himself demonstrated how the unconscious stands in compensatory relation to the conscious not only in relation to the individual but also on a collective basis. In the work he did on the great European upheavals in the first half of the twentieth century, he revealed how the propagation of archetypal images of terror led to the direct stimulation of unconscious energies through the collective unconscious. For her part, Wehr demonstrates that symbols impact on the psychology and behaviour of all sectors of our communities, and do so even when society is on the surface of things quiescent, that is, at a time when the collective unconscious does not appear to be aroused. Not only that, but when social pressures intersect with libidinous energies, they take part in shaping the archetypal images that result. The social, the cultural and the collective unconscious are linked together in a system in which each influences and interacts with the other.

The tricksters and jesters of the past were almost always male. For this reason alone the female trickster has an especial importance for women. Previously, men rather than women could violate society's norms, acting the awkward prankster, behaving unpredictably or even in a downright malevolent way, and get away with it. But women who did so would have risked being excoriated and labelled as witches. It is significant that, no

matter how much Madonna has aroused anger and vilification, she has (occasional short-term banning of videos aside) neither been silenced nor pilloried. She has not suffered the witch's fate. On the contrary, in playing the trickster she has empowered herself, and now the archetype she has activated is available to help other women take first the psychological and then the socio-cultural powers they need.

Madonna's work in *Frozen* illustrates this. Her cultural allure as a media star helped to thrust the video up to the top of the popular music charts within days of its release. That fact clearly demonstrated its efficacy as a cultural symbol, and in turn makes it possible to speculate that some at least of those who were excited by it felt in it a potential to satisfy needs which they may not fully have articulated – that is of which they were by no means fully conscious. The videotape does present itself as dealing in mystery both because of the magical nature of the imagery and because lyrics and imagery interfere with each other, as we saw, in such a way that the easy explicit reading of either is made impossible by the other. And this is the point. As trickster Madonna offers her audiences, and particularly the women among them, what in earlier times saviours brought – the promise of revelations to come. But these revelations are not to be brought by an external goddess of whose coming Madonna is the advance messenger. Rather they are to come to those who respond to the invitation to look at the source of the mystery – the unconscious.

'Give yourself to me –
You are *the key*.'