

The meaning of the Black Sun

ADL Hate on Display™ Hate Symbols Database / Sonnenrad

The sonnenrad or sunwheel is one of a number of ancient European symbols appropriated by the Nazis in their attempt to invent an idealized “Aryan/Norse” heritage. The sonnenrad appears in the traditional symbology of many countries and cultures, including Old Norse and Celtic cultures. [...] Because sonnenrad imagery is used by many cultures around the world, one should not assume that most sonnenrad-like images necessarily denote racism or white supremacy; rather, they should be analyzed carefully in the context in which they appear.

Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.23

I approached the confines of death, and having trod on the threshold of Proserpine, I returned therefrom, being borne through all the elements. At midnight I saw the Sun shining with its brilliant light; and I approached the presence of the Gods below, and the Gods of heaven, and stood near, and worshipped them.

Aristophanes, choral ode from *The Frogs*

Iakchos, much-loved resident of these quarters,
– Iakchos, O Iakchos! –
come to this field for the dance
with your holy followers,
setting in motion the crown
which sits on your head, thick
with myrtle-berries, boldly stamping the beat
with your foot in the unrestrained
fun-loving celebration –
the dance overflowing with grace,
dance sacred to the holy initiates!
Wake the fiery torches which you brandish in your hands,
– Iakchos, O Iakchos! –
brilliant star of the all-night celebration!
The meadow is aflame with light;
old men’s knees cavort!
They shake off the pain
of long years in old age
in their holy excitement.
Hold your light aloft
and lead the youthful chorus, Lord,
to the lush flowers of the sacred ground!

Arnobius of Sicca, *Adversus Nationes* 5.20

After the tenth month she bears a daughter, of beautiful form, whom later ages have called now Libera, now Proserpine; whom when Jupiter Verveceus saw to be strong, plump, and blooming, forgetting what evils and what wickedness, and how great recklessness, he had a little before fallen into, he returns to his former practices; and because it seemed too wicked that a father openly be joined as in marriage with his daughter, he passes into the terrible form of a dragon: he winds his huge coils round the terrified maiden, and under a fierce appearance sports and caresses her in softest embraces. She, too, is in consequence filled with the seed of the most powerful Jupiter, but not as her mother was, for she bore a daughter like herself; but from the maiden was born something like a bull, to testify to her seduction by Jupiter. If any one asks who narrates this, then we shall quote the well-known senarian verse of a Tarentine poet which antiquity sings, saying *Taurus draconem genuit, et taurum draco* ["The bull begot a dragon, and the dragon a bull."] Lastly, the sacred rites themselves, and the ceremony of initiation even, named Sebadia, might attest the truth; for in them a golden snake is let down into the bosom of the initiated, and taken away again from the lower parts.

Charles Baudelaire, *Le Desir de Peindre*

Unhappy perhaps is the man, but happy the artist, who is torn with this desire. I burn to paint a certain woman who has appeared to me so rarely, and so swiftly fled away, like some beautiful, regrettable thing the traveller must leave behind him in the night. It is already long since I saw her. She is beautiful, and more than beautiful: she is overpowering. The colour black preponderates in her; all that she inspires is nocturnal and profound. Her eyes are two caverns where mystery vaguely stirs and gleams; her glance illuminates like a ray of light; it is an explosion in the darkness. I would compare her to a black sun if one could conceive of a dark star overthrowing light and happiness. But it is the moon that she makes one dream of most readily; the moon, who has without doubt touched her with her own influence; not the white moon of the idylls, who resembles a cold bride, but the sinister and intoxicating moon suspended in the depths of a stormy night, among the driven clouds; not the discreet peaceful moon who visits the dreams of pure men, but the moon torn from the sky, conquered and revolted, that the witches of Thessaly hardly constrain to dance upon the terrified grass. There are women who inspire one with the desire to woo them and win them; but she makes one wish to die slowly beneath her steady gaze.

Clarence Brown, *Mandelstam* pg 218

Mandelstam's *Tristia* uses the phrase солнце черное 'black sun' twice (including the last line), and the center of the poem is Phaedra's amazing line "Любовью черною я солнце запятнала," "with my black love I have besmirched the sun." The black sun furnishes us (line 13) with 'guilty love,' put literally, after Racine, as 'black flame.' After the refrain this has become, in line 15, a funeral torch. The black sun in ancient usage was the opposite of the sun of day, i.e. it was the night. And that is what Phèdre herself becomes in line 18: she is the night, and immediately says: 'With my black love I have soiled the sun.' Night 'falls' in Russian as it does in English, and to 'fall upon' is to attack. The night, the black sun, that has overcome Hippolytus, falls also upon Theseus, the hapless mourner of two deaths at the end of the tragedy. The black sun that arose in the first choral speech, gleamed darkly amid the broad daylight of the second,

now lights the funeral of the last. In the final line, it is extinguished. The Russian verb *uniat*, meaning ‘to calm, cool, assuage,’ has seldom had so sinister a meaning as here, where it refers to the death of Phèdre by her own hand, the final ‘cooling’ of her hot passion, for in this transformation of imagery, she has become the black sun, the night.

Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 2.30

Dionysos was anxious to descend into Haides, but did not know the way. Thereupon a certain man, Prosymnos by name, promises to tell him; though not without reward. It was a favour of lust, this reward which Dionysos was asked for. The God is willing to grant the request; and so he promises, in the event of his return, to fulfil the wish of Prosymnos, confirming the promise with an oath. Having learnt the way he set out, and came back again. He does not find Prosymnos, for he was dead. In fulfilment of the vow to his lover Dionysos hastens to the tomb and indulges his unnatural lust. Cutting off a branch from a fig-tree which was at hand, he shaped it into the likeness of a phallos, and then made a show of fulfilling his promise to the dead man. As a mystic memorial of this passion phalloi are set up to Dionysos in cities. ‘For if it were not to Dionysos that they held solemn procession and sang the phallic hymn, they would be acting most shamefully,’ says Herakleitos.

Max Dauthendey, *The Black Sun*

Worlds and wills still blaze in the dark:
behind the White Suns glitter and sparkle
the Black Suns of nightmare realms.
The Disillusioned,
the Day-Sun Weary,
eagerly stalk the Dark Suns.
Those ravaged by Life,
those wounded by the Day-Sun
stalk the Suns of the Netherworld.

Mark David, *The Black Sun*

The symbol of the black sun or Sonnenrad is a sunwheel for the “Black Sun” with origins in Germanic *Zierscheibe* (German for “ornamental disk”) an ornamental brooch from the Iron Age found in women’s graves and are thought to have been worn as pendants attached to the tunica, or as part of a belt pouch. Early examples date to ca. 800 BC. with characteristic designs notably attested from Alamannic graves from the migration period.

During the 1920s, Karl Maria Wiligut wrote down 38 verses (out of a number purportedly exceeding 1,000), the so-called *Halgarita Sprüche*, that featured the Black Sun. He claimed to have memorized the verses as a child, taught by his father. Wiligut had designed his own “runic alphabet” for this purpose. Werner von Bülow and Emil Rüdiger of the *Edda-Gesellschaft* (Edda Society) translated and annotated these verses. They claimed that numbers 27 and 1818 are connected with the Black Sun. Verse number 27 according to Willigut is a 20,000 year old “solar blessing”:

Sunur saga santur toe Syntir peri fuir sprueh Wilugoti haga tharn Halga fuir santur toe

Werner von Bülow translates this as follows:

Legend tells, that two Suns, two wholesome in change-rule UR and SUN, alike to the hourglass which turned upside down ever gives one of these the victory / The meaning of the divine errant wandering way / dross star in fire's sphere became in fire-tongue revealed to the Earth-I-course of the race of Paradise / godwilling leaders lead to the weal through their care in universal course, what is visible and soon hidden, whence they led the imagination of mankind / polar in change-play, from UR to SUN in sacrificial service of waxing and waning, in holy fire Santur is ambiguously spent in sparks, but turns victorious to blessing.

Santur is interpreted as a burnt-out sun that was still visible at the time of Homer. Rüdiger speculated that this was the center of the solar system hundreds of millennia ago, and he imagines a fight between the new and the old Suns that was decided 330,000 years ago. Santur is seen as the source of power of the Hyperboreans.

In the epic of the tower of Babel Nimrod was the son of Cush and grandson of Ham, founder of the city Babilu on the plain of Shinar, which means "Gate of God." "Babel" is what the Hebrews called it, and thus when Moses, a Hebrew, wrote *Genesis*, he called it "Babel." Babel is the Hebrew name which means "confusion." At Babilu is found the following inscription:

At the top of the world stands the midnight mountain. His light is eternal. The human eye cannot see him – And yet he is there. Over the midnight mountain the Black sun. The human eye cannot see them – And yet it is there: inside, your light shines. The brave and the righteous are solitary; but with you is the divinity.

In another cipher:

White Sun, beaming above the world earth – You give light of the day. Black Sun, shining inside us – You give the power of knowledge. -Reflecting the kingdom of Atland, Which was high at the pillar of heaven before the sea rage devoured it. Thinking of the wise giants, who came and taught beyond Thule.

Derveni Papyrus col. 13 and 16

He swallowed the phallus of [...], who sprang from the aither first.

Since in his [i.e. Orpheus] whole poetry he speaks about facts enigmatically, one has to speak about each word in turn. Seeing that people consider that generation is dependent upon the genitalia, and that without genitals there is no becoming, he used this word, likening the Sun to a phallus. For without the Sun the things that are could not have become such ... things that are ... the Sun everything

It has been made clear above [that] he called the Sun a phallus. Since the beings that are now came to be from the already subsistent he says:

[with?] the phallus of the First-born King, onto which all the Immortals grew (or: clung fast), blessed Gods and Goddesses and rivers and lovely springs and everything else that had been born then; and he himself became solitary

In these (verses) he indicates that the beings always subsisted, and the beings that are now came to be from (or: out of) subsisting things. And as to (the phrase): ‘and he himself became solitary’, by saying this, he makes clear that the Mind [Nous] itself, being alone, is worth everything, as if the others were nothing. For it would not be possible for the subsisting things to be such without the Mind. And in the following verse after this he said that Mind is worth everything:

Now he is King of all and will always be

.... Mind and ...

Dio Chrysostom, *Oration 12.33-34*

So it is just as if someone were to initiate a man, Greek or barbarian, leading him into some mystic shrine overwhelming in its size and beauty. He would see many mystic spectacles and hear many such voices; light and darkness would appear to him in alternation, and a myriad other things would happen. Still more, just as they are accustomed to do in the ritual called *enthronismos*, the initiators, having enthroned the initiands, dance in circles around them. Is it at all likely that this man would experience nothing in his soul and that he would not suspect that what was taking place was done with a wiser understanding and preparation? ... Still more, if, not humans like the initiands, but immortal Gods were initiating mortals, and night and day, both in the light and under the stars were, if it is right to speak so, literally dancing around them eternally.

Epiphanius, *Panarion*

And he says that the world began in the likeness of an egg, and the wind encircling the egg serpent-fashion like a wreath or a belt then began to constrict nature. As it tried to squeeze all the matter with greater force, it divided the world into the two hemispheres.

Eratosthenes, *Vat. Fragm. 24*

When he descended to the underworld to recover his wife, Orpheus saw things there and ceased to honor Dionysos, through whom he had gained glory. Instead, he considered the Sun to be the greatest of the Gods, calling him Apollon.

Jesús Ángel Espinós, *The realm of Hades and its symbols in Mandel'shtam's Tristia: a transparent path to redemption*

So, through the mediation of bees and their honey Persephone softens her gloomy character and takes on a new redeemer aspect through which the bees, probably a metaphor of the souls of the dead, transmute their honey into sun, and consequently transcend their earthly existence, as can be observed in the final verses of poem I, 208:

Take for joy my wild gift,

A homely and dry necklace
Of dead bees who transformed
honey into sun.

The last word of the poem, “sun”, inserts itself into a fundamental network where metaphors pertaining to “black sun” and to “night sun” claim attention. In both epithets it has been observed as an Orphic influence that refers to Dionysus Nyktelios, the “Dionysus of the night sun”. Broadly speaking, the imagery of both suns, particularly that of the “night sun”, has to be related to Vjačeslav Ivanov, classical philologist and erudite Symbolist poet, who exerted a great sway on Mandel’štam, especially in his youthful years. Ivanov employs the image of “night sun” in several works such as in the articles ‘Мысли о символизме’ (‘Thoughts about Symbolism’), ‘Орфей’ (‘Orpheus’), in the essay ‘Взгляд Скрябина на искусство’ (‘Skrjabin’s View of Art’), and in the poems ‘Ночное солнце’ (‘Night Sun’) and ‘Сердце Диониса’ (‘Dionysus’ Heart’) among others. Orphic rituals enable us to expiate the guilt inherited from the Titans, and consequently avoid the punishments of afterlife and the cycle of reincarnations. In addition, Plutarch suggests that there must have been a work dedicated to Dionysus Nyktelios, which probably described the mourning for the god’s death and the orgiastic rites in honor of his rebirth. Nevertheless, in spite of Plutarch’s witness, the existence of such a work, perhaps an epic poem called Νυκτέλια, cannot be proved. In this hypothetical poem the initiates would be instructed in the symbolic meaning of the night, which should be explained by the opposition night/day, shadow/light, an opposition that can be observed in the Mandel’štamian oxymora “night sun”, and to a lesser extent “black sun”. On the other hand, this interrelation of opposite qualities can be traced back to Ivanov, who closes his poem ‘Ночное солнце’ (‘Night Sun’) with the following command: “В полночь зови незакатный свет!” (“At midnight call the never setting light!”; v. 7). In sum, from this point of view, the Orphic sun of poem I, 208 (v. 15), created by the honey of dead bees, should be understood as a sun of salvation that, under the appearance of a Dionysus reborn, would set us free from the continuous and numerous gloomy metaphors that dot Mandel’štam’s *Tristia*. On the other hand, the bees were a symbol of poetic talent in classical Antiquity as must be inferred from the recurrent scene of bees that perch on the lips of future poets when they are still in the cradle or that, in the case of the young Pindar, even build a honeycomb on his lips according to Pausanias (*Description of Greece* IX, 23, 2), or feed him with honey as Philostratus (*Images* II, 12, 2, 4) states. So, I might venture that the bees, by means of their poetic force, defy death, which is the same as saying that poetry, incarnated in the honey, reveals itself as immortal.

Euripides, *Bakchai* 918-922

Pentheus: What is this? I think I see two suns, and not one seven-gated city of Thebes but two. And, as you are leading me, you look like a bull and horns seem to have sprouted on your head. Were you ever before a beast? You have certainly now become a bull.

Ezekiel 1:1, 4-5,15-16

Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures . . . Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside

each living creature with its four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

Marsilius Ficinus, *Liber de Arte Chemica*

The body must be dissolved in the subtlest middle air: The body is also dissolved by its own heat and humidity; where the soul, the middle nature holds the principality in the colour of blackness all in the glass: which blackness of Nature the ancient Philosophers called the crow's head, or the Black Sun.

Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation*

Mandelstam's fundamental assumption about Pushkin was not radically different from that of Gippius or Rozanov; nor was his view of an artist unrelated to Ivanov's Orpheus participating in the "divinely erotic process." Where he differed from them was in his pattern for presenting Pushkin's "passion" or "pathos." Developing his main thesis that the death of an artist "from a fully Christian point of view" represented his ultimate and central creative act, Mandelstam recalled the government's shameful concealment of the place and time of Pushkin's funeral service:

Pushkin's funeral was held in the night. It was a secret funeral. The marble St. Isaac's—a magnificent sarcophagus—waited in vain for the solar body of the poet. It was at night that the sun was placed into the coffin, and it was in freezing January that the sleds creaked, taking the poet's remains to an out-of-the-way church. I am recalling the picture of Pushkin's funeral in order to evoke in your memory the image of the night sun, the image of the last Greek tragedy created by Euripides—the vision of the unfortunate Phaedra.

It has been noted that Euripides' Phaedra had no such vision,[76] but the meaning, at least in the most immediate sense, is not hard to come by. Whatever else Mandelstam may have had in mind, the image of the "night sun," although most likely borrowed from the vocabulary of Viacheslav Ivanov,[77] is emblematic of Hippolytus, who in chastity and innocence had to suffer for the most unchaste of crimes. Taking his cue in part from Gippius and in part from Annenskii's interpretation of Euripides, Mandelstam presented Pushkin as a martyr to the cause of sublimating sensuality into Passion (the "fiery asceticism" of Gippius) and freeing humanity from, in Annenskii's words, "the yoke of the vegetative form of the soul." Furthermore, as in Euripides, the one who set the fatal trap for Hippolytus was herself an innocent and tormented victim. Now, in 1915, Phaedra's vision had returned once again: "In the fateful hours of purgation and storm, we have raised Skriabin over our heads, his sun-heart burns over us; but—alas!—this is not the sun of redemption, but the sun of guilt. Affirming Skriabin as her symbol in the hour of a world war, Phaedra-Russia . . ."

The extant manuscript breaks off at this point, but the overall context allows one to reconstruct with some certainty the symbolic meaning that "Phaedra-Russia" was meant to convey: Hippolytus was to Phaedra what Pushkin and Skriabin were to Russia. Although Mandelstam

may have intended to be no more than suggestive, his analogy between the relationship of Hippolytus to Phaedra in Euripides and that of the two symbolic figures of Russian art to their country was quite deliberate. Indeed, the enigmatic and unexpected Phaedra is invoked in the essay four times, whereas the Orpheus of Viacheslav Ivanov, who provided Mandelstam with the image of the “sun-heart,” appears only once, and in a negative context at that.

Footnote 76: In his introduction’ to SS 3, Iurii Ivask suggests that the image of the “black sun” may have been associated with Nerval’s “soleil noir” from “El desdichado” (SS 3, pp. xxii). Mandelstam was certainly aware of Nerval, whose work appeared in translations in Russia in early 1910, for instance in *Severnnye zapiski*, in which Mandelstam was frequently published. Many possible sources of Mandelstam’s image are offered by the editors of SS 3 (pp. 404-411), from antiquity through the Old and the New Testaments, the Talmud, and early Christian literature to *The Lay of Igor’s Campaign* and Avvakum’s autobiography. Kiril Taranovsky pointed to Viacheslav Ivanov’s poetry as a possible source (*Essays on Mandel’stam* [Cambridge, Mass., 1976], p. 87). Nadezhda Mandelstam gives particular emphasis to Avvakum’s Life (“a book he was always reading”), *The Lay of Igor’s Campaign*, Gogol’s words about Pushkin’s death, and, finally, the eclipse during the Crucifixion in Matthew and Luke (NM 2, pp. 127-128). As she has also pointed out, the association of Pushkin with the sun being buried may go back to Gogol’s lamentation after Pushkin’s death (NM 2, p. 127). Contrary to her assertion, however, a careful perusal of Annenskii’s critical prose yields no instances of “black” or “night sun.” The image, however, was common enough in contemporary poetry, and it appears in a Briusovian poem by Mikhail Lozinskii, “West” (1908; in *Gornyi kliuch*, 2d ed. [Petrograd, 1922], p. 73). I have narrowed my discussion to the sources that help define the “trajectory” of Mandelstam’s usage without attempting an exhaustive catalog of possible allusions.

Footnote 77: Cf. Viach. Ivanov’s “Serdtshe Dionisa” (The Heart of Dionysus, 1910) from *Cor ardens*: “Oh Parnassus, . . . offering a sacrifice, thou concealed in the solar sepulcher the heart of the ancient Zagreus . . . the heart of Sun-Dionysus.” Or consider his “Orfei rasterzannyi” (Orpheus Rent) from *Prozrachnost’* (1904): “O night sun, sing to thy dark music the testament of day in the tears of darkness.” A more recent relevant text: “The lyre-player [Orpheus], both as Phoebus and as the creator of rhythm [Eurhythmos], sang in the night the harmony of the spheres, setting them in motion and thereby calling out the sun. He himself was the night sun, like Dionysus, and, like him, he was a martyr. The mystical Musagetes is Orpheus, the sun of the dark depths, the logos of the profound, internally empirical knowledge” (Viach. Ivanov, “Orfei,” *Trudy i dni* 1 [January-February 1912]: 63). Taranovsky suggests Racine’s *flamme funeste* and limits Mandelstam’s usage in “Fedra” to the “black sun of wild and sleepless passion” (*Essays on Mandel’stam*, p. 150n. 6). Note that a good key to Mandelstam’s usage of the image may be found in Vladislav Khodasevich’s “Ballada,” which thematizes the same usage in reverse: a sixteen-watt bulb of prosaic and meager existence is replaced by the lyre-playing astral Orpheus.

Gold tablet from Pelinna

Now you have died and now you have been born, thrice blessed one, on this very day. Say to Persephone that Bakchios himself freed you. A bull you rushed to milk. Quickly, you rushed to milk. A ram you fell into milk. You have wine as your fortunate honor. And rites await you beneath the earth, just as the other blessed ones.

Gold tablet from Pharsalos

You will find another one, from the Lake of Memory,
cold water pouring forth; there are guards before it.

They will ask you, with astute wisdom,
what you are seeking in the darkness of murky Hades.

“Who are you? Where are you from?”

You tell them the entire truth.

Say, “I am a child of Earth and Starry Sky. My name is Starry (Asterios.)”

Gold tablet from Thurii

A: I come from the pure, o Pure Queen of the earthly ones, Eukles, Eubouleus, and you other Immortal Gods! I too claim to be of your blessed race, but Fate and other Immortal Gods conquered me with the star-smiting thunder. And I flew out from the hard and deeply-grievous circle, and stepped onto the crown with my swift feet, and slipped into the bosom of the Mistress, the Queen of the Underworld. And I stepped out from the crown with my swift feet.

B: Happy and blessed one! You shall be a God instead of a mortal.

A: I have fallen as a kid into milk.

Hayes Hampton, *The Invocation of the Black Sun: Alchemy and Sexuality in the Work of Coil*

Crowley envisioned the highest level of initiation as the point where man, having dissolved his individual humanity, resolves into god, or what Crowley called “Unity...above all division.”

Thus, Crowley’s magical system aims at psychic alchemy, using the aspirant’s habits, proclivities, and even resistance to change as transformative material. In his most complete statement, *Magick: Liber ABA*, in a chapter entitled “Of the Eucharist; and of the Art of Alchemy,” he describes the later, more painful stage of the process: “just as the Aspirant, on the Threshold of Initiation, finds himself assailed by the ‘complexes’ which have corrupted him ... so does the ‘First Matter’ blacken and putrefy as the Alchemist breaks up its coagulations of impurity.”

Here Crowley writes of the *nigredo* phase of alchemy, which he often symbolized with a black dragon, though traditional alchemical literature more typically symbolizes it with the symbol of the black sun. Coil adopted the black sun as their logo and as a frequent lyrical image, using a drawing from Crowley’s *Liber Arcanorum* which can be viewed as a visual pun: both sun and anus. As a glyph joining the *nigredo* with elimination of bodily waste, the black sun combines two of Coil’s major tropes: the fragile, contingent nature of the individual self and the exploration (and alchemical use) of forbidden or rejected materials and sexualities. Stanton Marlan, in *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness*, looks in depth at the black sun’s relationship to the alchemical *nigredo* and its metaphoric eclipse of consciousness. The black sun, in Marlan’s summary, brings together “blackness, *putrefactio*, *mortificatio*, the *nigredo*, poisoning, torture, killing, decomposition, rotting, and death ... a web of interrelationships that describe a terrifying, if most often provisional, eclipse of consciousness” --that is, the dissolution of the mundane self both desired and feared by the magician, and the confrontation with the “dark forces” he or she must master in order to evolve spiritually. These “forces” were

understood by twentieth-century magicians like Crowley not so much as external, demonic forces but as psychological negativity: shame, guilt, fear, and disgust.

For Balance and Christopherson, the “dark forces” included psychological negativity in the form of gay self-hatred and puritanical body-phobia and also what is culturally constructed as physiological negativity: blood, urine, shit, and (gay) semen — the ultimate forbidden substance of the 1980s, worse than crack cocaine. All of these substances, Coil’s work insists, travel along the subterranean rivers of our cities and our psyches, poisoning us unless we transmute their subtle energies. Coil’s debut album, *Scatology* (1984), which John Balance called “alchemy in sound,” explores the psychic and bodily terrain of waste matter. “Literally,” Balance told an interviewer, “some of the sounds -- shitting and toilets --were ... raw noises. We were making good things from what is perceived as being basically, bad things; dealing with subjects other people wouldn’t touch such as rotting and death.”

The black sun logo, prominent on the album’s cover, serves as a visual reference to other lacunae, holes, and forbidden spaces mentioned in the songs or in the album’s extensive liner notes: “The Devil’s Hole” that Charles Manson told his followers awaited them in the California desert, Salvador Dali’s “Humanism of the Arsehole,” the psychic and corporeal depletions of vampirism, gluteal injections of antibiotics to cure STDs, and, most memorably, the shit- and piss-spattered setting of “The Sewage Worker’s Birthday Party.”

Inauspicious as each of these may be, each also contains the possibility of transmutation; as *Scatology*’s liner notes summarize, “It is about performing surgery on yourself – psychic surgery— in order to restore the whole being, complete with the aspects that sanitised society attempts to wrench from your existence.”

Horace, *Satires* 1.9.73

To think so black a sun as this has shone for me!

Victor Hugo, *Les Contemplations* vol 6 pg 339

And we see in the background
when the eye dares to go
beyond life, breath and sound
a terrible black sun shines in the night!

Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2.5

Those who wrote the *Argolica* give the following reason for the constellation Corona. When Liber received permission from his father to bring back his mother Semele from the Lower World, and in seeking a place of descent had come to the land of the Argives, a certain Hyplipnus met him, a man worthy of that generation, who was to show the entrance to Liber in answer to his request. However, when Hypolipnus saw him, a mere boy in years, excelling all others in remarkable beauty of form, he asked from him the reward that could be given without loss. Liber, however, eager for his mother, swore that if he brought her back, he would do as he wished, on terms, though, that a God could swear to a shameless man. At this, Hypolipnus showed the entrance. So then, when Liber came to that place and was about to descend, he left the crown, which he had received as a gift from Venus, at that place which in consequence is

called Stephanos, for he was unwilling to take it with him for fear the immortal gift of the Gods would be contaminated by contact with the dead. When he brought his mother back unharmed, he is said to have placed the crown in the stars as an everlasting memorial.

The author of the *Cretica* says that when Liber came to Minos with the hope of lying with Ariadne he gave her this crown as a present. Delighted with it, she did not refuse the terms. It is said, too, to have been made of gold and Indian gems, and by its aid Theseus is thought to have come from the gloom of the Labyrinth to the day, for the gold and gems made a glow of light in the darkness.

Carl Gustav Jung, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 1932

And just as Faust is embroiled in murderous happenings and reappears in changed form, so Picasso changes shape and reappears in the underworld form of the tragic Harlequin – a motif that runs through numerous paintings. It may be remarked in passing that Harlequin is an ancient chthonic god. The descent into ancient times has been associated ever since Homer's day with the Nekyia. Faust turns back to the crazy primitive world of the witches' sabbath and to a chimerical vision of classical antiquity. Picasso conjures up crude, earthy shapes, grotesque and primitive, and resurrects the soullessness of ancient Pompeii in a cold, glittering light – even Giulio Romano could not have done worse! Seldom or never have I had a patient who did not go back to neolithic art forms or revel in evocations of Dionysian orgies. Harlequin wanders like Faust through all these forms, though sometimes nothing betrays his presence but his wine, his lute, or the bright lozenges of his jester's costume. And what does he learn on his wild journey through man's millennial history? What quintessence will he distil from this accumulation of rubbish and decay, from these half-born or aborted possibilities of form and colour? What symbol will appear as the final cause and meaning of all this. In view of the dazzling versatility of Picasso, one hardly dares to hazard a guess, so for the present I would rather speak of what I have found in my patients' material. The Nekyia is no aimless and purely destructive fall into the abyss, but a meaningful *katabasis eis antron*, a descent into the cave of initiation and secret knowledge. The journey through the psychic history of mankind has as its object the restoration of the whole man, by awakening the memories in the blood. The descent to the Mothers enabled Faust to raise up the sinfully whole human being – Paris united with Helen – that *homo totus* who was forgotten when contemporary man lost himself in one-sidedness. It is he who at all times of upheaval has caused the tremor of the upper world, and always will. This man stands opposed to the man of the present, because he is the one who ever is as he was, whereas the other is what he is only for the moment. With my patients, accordingly, the *katabasis* and *katalysis* are followed by a recognition of the bipolarity of human nature and of the necessity of conflicting pairs of opposites. After the symbols of madness experienced during the period of disintegration there follow images which represent the coming together of the opposites: light/dark, above/below, white/black, male/female, etc. In Picasso's latest paintings, the motif of the union of opposites is seen very clearly in their direct juxtaposition. One painting (although traversed by numerous lines of fracture) even contains the conjunction of the light and dark anima. The strident, uncompromising, even brutal colours of the latest period reflect the tendency of the unconscious to master the conflict by violence (colour = feeling). This state of things in the psychic development of a patient is neither the end nor the goal. It represents only a broadening of his outlook, which now embraces the whole of man's moral, bestial, and spiritual nature

without as yet shaping it into a living unity. Picasso's drame interieur has developed up to this last point before the denouement. As to the future Picasso, I would rather not try my hand at prophecy, for this inner adventure is a hazardous affair and can lead at any moment to a standstill or to a catastrophic bursting asunder of the conjoined opposites. Harlequin is a tragically ambiguous figure, even though – as the initiated may discern – he already bears on his costume the symbols of the next stage of development. He is indeed the hero who must pass through the perils of Hades, but will he succeed? That is a question I cannot answer. Harlequin gives me the creeps – he is too reminiscent of that 'motley fellow, like a buffoon' in Zarathustra, who jumped over the unsuspecting rope-dancer (another Pagliacci) and thereby brought about his death. Zarathustra then spoke the words that were to prove so horrifyingly true of Nietzsche himself: 'Your soul will be dead even sooner than your body: fear nothing more than I.' Who the buffoon is, is made plain as he cries out to the rope-dancer, his weaker alter ego: 'To one better than yourself you bar the way' He is the greater personality who bursts the shell, and this shell is sometimes – the brain."

Eva Kingsepp, Foreword to *The Liber Nigri Solis*

The swastika as a graphic symbol of the Sun (or Pole star) is of course interesting as compared to the Black Sun. Throughout history the latter has been depicted (especially in alchemy) most often as a blackened sun, sometimes carrying the corona of solar eclipses. Today this glyph is increasingly challenged by another: the sun wheel with twelve crooked rays, or Sig-runes, of the Wewelsburg Castle in Westphalia, Germany. The castle was the spiritual center of Heinrich Himmler's SS during the Third Reich, and this striking floor mosaic in the North tower is nowadays supposed to carry esoteric meanings connected to the presumed occult teachings of the SS. In Germany it is used among right-wing groups as a visual substitute for the forbidden *Hakenkreuz* (the Nazi swastika). But the Schwarze Sonne of the Wewelsburg is today becoming increasingly popularized in mainstream popular culture, especially spawning from the US.

We find it almost every time when 'Nazi occultism' is a topic : in speculative popular history, sensationalistic cryptohistory, conspiracy theories, web chat rooms, movies, computer games ... I will not go further into this, as the field is truly vast and in most cases historically thoroughly inaccurate. Suffice to say that this particular Black Sun, despite all the writings and all the more or less credible 'documentary' films on the History Channel, was not an esoteric symbol used by the Nazis. It was not even known as a 'Black Sun,' until post-war popular culture turned it into one.

However, this is certainly not without importance for those who today wish to use the Black Sun in a spiritual context. The popular associations with Nazism significantly add to the Otherness of it, underlining its previous cultural connotations to death, destruction and Evil. This also adds to the dimensions of taboo, 'holy fear,' already prevalent in much cultural imagery of the Black Sun. The result is that there is an immense amount of social energy invested in the symbol: if one chooses to use it for spiritual purposes, the whole legacy of cultural meanings associated with it is there as well and must be dealt with. In this respect it is quite fascinating to consider the use of the Black Sun in alchemy and in Jung's psychoanalytical philosophy as a symbol for *nigredo*. As already

indicated, Jung describes this stage in the process of development as "difficult and strewn with obstacles; the alchemical opus is dangerous. Right at the beginning you meet the 'dragon,' the chthonic spirit, the 'devil' or, as the alchemists called it, the 'blackness,' the *nigredo*, and this encounter produces suffering." Already in this short quote from Jung there are obviously several interesting concepts. The fact that the repulsive Other is something that most people do not wish to encounter or deal with, but in fact need to if they are to develop as individuals, is very important.

This also has to do with why 'we' tend to seek security in the collective, as hiding in the group we are not as vulnerable as when alone. However, as it has been expressed in the context of Sufism, the reaching of a 'superconsciousness' cannot be a collective phenomenon: "it is always something that opens up at the end of a struggle in which the protagonist is the spiritual individuality."

Barbara Larson, *The Franco-Prussian War and Cosmological Symbolism in Odilon Redon's Noirs*

Odilon Redon found inspiration for his fantastic charcoals and lithographs in transformations in scientific fields in the second half of the nineteenth century. "Germination", with its eclipselike central orb surrounded by flame-like projections, may also contain a reference to another aspect of the emerging new astronomy: the birth of solar physics, which was indebted to the development of spectroscopy and, in these early years, eclipse studies.

The eclipse of 1870 is surely the source of Redon's repeated images of a black sun, and it first appeared in his work in 1871 in association with a despairing military figure. In his *Woman Wearing a Kepi*, the female, who undoubtedly suggests Marianne, personification of France, stands before a black sun with her head lowered. She wears bandages and the cap of French military men.

The dark orb in Redon's work has traditionally been traced to the image of the "black sun" in Romantic literature. The black sun is used, for example, as an abstract poetic reference in the writings of Nerval where he refers to "the black sun of melancholy" ("El Desdichado"). Baudelaire had often evoked nocturnal scenes and the contrast of light and dark. The sun could be cruel or nourishing or treated as a duality of rising or setting on the horizon. The contradictory phenomena of light and dark recur often in Redon's favorite work by Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*. Gautier too was interested in the "black sun" and treated it as a sign of the agony of the universe. He tied it to one of Redon's favorite prints, Durer's *Melancholia*, a copy of which the artist kept on his studio wall. Gautier interpreted the comet that appears in the print as a "black sun":

Dans le fond du tableau , sur l'horizon sans borne,
Le vieux pere ocean leve sa face morne
Et dans le bleu cristal de son profond miroir
Reflechit les rayons d'un grand soleil noir
Une chauve-souris, qui d'un donjon s'envole
Porte ecrit dans son aile ouverte en banderole:
Melancholie

Gautier would evoke Durer's Melancholia in his *Tableau de siege*(1870-71) in the context of the unhappiness that penetrates France under "l'ombre du crepuscle."

References to solar mythology were popular in fin-de-siecle writing. Mallarme, who later befriended Redon, believed that all myths were variations on solar mythology. The Symbolist Rimbaud was also interested in solar myths. Among other images he used that of the setting sun to suggest the Prussian advance.

Tying together fin-de-siecle and cosmological catastrophe, the subject of the *Apocalypse of Saint John* with its visionary index of celestial disorder became current in the late nineteenth century. This is the subject of a set of Redon's lithographic prints of 1899 which draws on Durer's celebrated *Revelation of Saint John* woodcuts. Redon's Apocalypse prints united the idea of overwhelming demonic forces, a subject popular in the nineties, and uncontrollable celestial events. Among these prints is "And There Fell a Great Star Burning as if it Were a Lamp." Here the destruction of the world by a molten dislodged star echoes the warnings of star-gazing doomsayers at the end of the century. This image responds to the biblical verse, "The third angel blew his trumpet and a great star fell from the heaven blazing like a torch."

The Liber Nigri Solis pgs 36-37

With the eschaton immanentized - the apocalypse present and accounted for already in the proclamation of the 'end of history' - nihilism itself becomes an aeonic word whose emptiness is mere redundancy. The totality of meaninglessness fetishized by the active nihilist, and adopted as a new meaning by the passive nihilist, offers the occultist - nothing - by definition. A gnosis of eternal chaotic becoming - a gnosis of all power purely of and for itself - cannot help but cascade into this formless blindness. It is an occultation of this undefined, limitless brilliance, a restriction

of it, which focuses it to a point, opening it as an eye which can witness its own absolute ipseity: its self-hood.

This Gnosis of the Black Sun signifies not only a 'new aeon' but also a new order of the ages: while the aeonic current of the Black Sun surely shines its shadow over each age within a given aeonic cycle, its focus and inception, its greatest glory, is persisting as a darkly resplendent fetter binding together whole chains of ages, like the serpent who encircles the lion-headed god Ahriman, Prince of Shining Darkness and 'Lord of the Eclipse; who embodies the supreme aeon, holding the Key of the Abyss.

This gnostic key opens the gateway to the abysses beyond history where the magician can gain a clear view of the cycle of ages before plunging once more into the current of becoming. From a linear perspective, this current appears as a spiraling repetition of psycho-historic patterns moving along a track of increasing sophistication and technological progress, simultaneously moving farther and farther away from its gnostic center until it finally achieves, in its nihilistic ecstasy, the void of chaos.

These cascading aeonic waves in the abyssal psycho-historic ocean form patterns described in various traditional cosmologies: proceeding from some Golden Age of seemingly undying awareness, bliss, and nobility, dwindling through degenerating ages of increasing impurity, and ultimately dissolving into post-modern murk as the original cultural forms are lost and replaced with a confused diversity aiming to achieve final union with chaos. A graduated mortification of the 'vulgar sun' of a particular civilization which, when finally eclipsed at the ending of its world-age, signals the possibility of transfiguration into an absolute, total singularity of consciousness - at least for those who are able to dis-identify from the profane outer forms while retaining awareness of formless, occult essence. With this awareness maintaining itself in activity, and cohered around some central axis, a cycle of ages begins anew; with such awareness precisely focused in deep contemplation, the reon collapses into its own singular point, like a star becoming a black hole: total destruction opening the way into another reality.

Such a 'black sun' necessarily exists independent of the current of time in which it has manifested or will manifest. Behind whatever cultural forms and aeonic symbols take the role of the 'vulgar' or 'profane' sun, which when glorified in some aeonic imperium is the 'Sol Invictus' and when profaned by universal, moralistic humanism becomes the depersonalized Aten sun-disk, the Black Sun persists. It remains as an occult potentiality representing the possibility of surviving the death of the age as well as the possibility of escaping final stagnation through a spectacular, catastrophic collapse.

The Liber Nigri Solis pg 49

It breeds its own conquest and nourishes those who would overcome it, so that it can overcome itself anew - as and through this myth, it can survive itself eternally.

Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentarium in Somnium Scipionis* 1.12.12

Members of the Orphic sect believe that material mind is represented by Dionysos himself, who, born of a single parent, is divided into separate parts. In their sacred rites they portray him as being torn to pieces at the hands of angry Titans and arising again from his buried limbs alive and sound, their reason being that *nous* or Mind, by offering its undivided substance to be divided, and again, by returning from its divided state to the indivisible, both fulfills its worldly functions and does not forsake its secret nature.

Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.18

Orpheus here has called the Sun “Phanes” (φάνερός), from its light and enlightening, for the Sun sees all and is seen by all. The name Dionysos is derived, as the soothsayer himself says, from the fact that the Sun wheels round in an orbit. Cleanthes writes that the name Dionysos is derived from the Greek verb meaning “to complete” (διανύσαι), because the Sun in its daily course from its rising to its setting, making the day and the night, completes the circuit of the heavens. For the physicists Dionysos is “the mind of Zeus” (Διὸς νοῦς), since they hold that the Sun is the mind of the universe; and by the universe they mean the heavens which they call Zeus — and that is why Aratus (*Phaenomena* 1), when about to speak of the heavens, says:

From Zeus be our beginnings.

The Romans call the Sun Liber, because he is free (*liber*) to wander — as Naevius puts it:

Here where the wandering Sun flings loose his fiery reins and drives nearer to the earth.

The Orphic verses, too, by calling the Sun “Eubouleus,” indicate that he is the patron of “good counsel”; for, if counsel is the offspring of the Mind and if, in the opinion of our authorities, the Sun is the mind of the universe from which the first beginning of intelligence is diffused among mankind, then the Sun is rightly believed to preside over good counsel. In the line:

The Sun, which men also call by name Dionysos

Orpheus manifestly declares that Liber is the Sun, and the meaning here is certainly quite clear; but the following line from the same poet is more difficult:

One Zeus, one Hades, one Sun, one Dionysos.

The warrant for this last line rests on an oracle of Apollo of Claros, wherein yet another name is given to the Sun; which is called, within the space of the same sacred verses by several names, including that of Iao. For when Apollo of Claros was asked who ‘among the Gods was to be regarded as the God called Iao, he replied:

Those who have learned the mysteries should hide the unsearchable secrets, but, if the understanding is small and the mind weak, then ponder this: that Iao is the supreme God of all Gods; in winter, Hades; at spring’s beginning, Zeus; the Sun in summer; and in autumn, the splendid Iao.

For the meaning of this oracle and for the explanation, of the deity and his name, which identifies Iao with Liber Pater and the Sun, our authority is Cornelius Labeo in his book entitled *On the Oracle of Apollo of Claros*.

Again, Orpheus, pointing out that Liber and the Sun are one and the same God, writes as follows of the ornaments and vestments worn by Liber at the ceremonies performed in his honor:

Let the worshiper first throw around him a crimson robe,
like flowing rays resembling fire.
Moreover from above the broad all-variegated skin of a wild fawn
thickly spotted should hang down from the right shoulder,
a representation of the wondrously-wrought stars and of the vault of heaven.
And then over the fawn-skin a golden belt should be thrown,
all-gleaming to wear around the breast a mighty sign

that immediately from the end of the earth the Beaming-one springing up
darts his golden rays on the flowing of ocean.

Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: the Alchemy and Art of Darkness* pgs 82-84

The *Rosarium* pictures illustrating the dying process are one grouping among several others. The death experience was pivotal, and Sol niger was often intimately linked to the *nigredo* and *mortificatio* aspects of the process.

The metaphoric expression of the dying process is also found in other alchemical manuscripts. For example, chapter two ends with an illustration from Mylius's *Philosophia Reformata* (1622), in which the image of a skeleton is standing on a glowing black orb marking the *nigredo/putrefactio* stage in the death-rebirth process. Other alchemical manuscripts likewise place images of the black sun in similar positions in the process. For instance, alchemist Edward Kelly, in his paper "The Theatre of Terrestrial Astronomy," comments that "the beginning of our work is the black raven which, like all things that are to grow and receive life, must first putrefy. For putrefaction is a necessary condition of solution, as salvation is of birth and regeneration."

In figure 3.5 we see an image of conjunction in which a black sun is contained in an alchemical vessel. Behind the furnace is a field of green barely springing up out of the earth, again linking death with regeneration. This process is beautifully described in the alchemical manuscript *Cabala Mineralis*, in which Sol is described as undergoing "sophic calcinations, and putrefaction." The common Sun is watered with new mercury and made "one body black and not porous." Then germination takes place. The Sun is changed from its black color and becomes green and is spread out into the vegetation.

Another image (figure 3.6) of Sol niger is found in *The Hermetic Garden of Daniel Stolcius*. This is an essential, seventeenth-century sourcebook in the symbolic and meditative tradition in alchemy and one of its most important emblem books. A translation of the Latin inscription accompanying the emblem reads as follows:

Let the highest point of your magistrery
Be to remove the earth born shade from
the rays of the Sun.
Let the bird die, and rise up again into the air
So that it may know how to increase its life.

We have seen that images have played an important role in the expression of complex psychological processes, processes that seem to exceed our traditional ways of speaking and imagining. The attempt to explore ontological "pivot points" and to penetrate paradoxes like Sol niger are aided not only by allegorical images but also by the study of artistic expression in general. How can we understand a death that means new life or a darkness that shines? Images such as these have long interested artists and writers, even "after alchemy itself had fallen into disrepute as a natural science." The death of the ego, blackness, and the transformation of the soul, which were so important in alchemy, were also concerns for a number of artists. Mona Sandqvist writes that "alchemy has been kept alive in art, music, and literature by a chain of

masters: painters like Bosch, Brueghel the Elder, Max Ernst and Rene Magritte; musicians like Mozart, Scriabin, and Schönberg; and writers like E.T. A. Hoffman, Balzac, Gerard de Nerval, Mallormé, Autard, Yeats and Joyce.”

The paradox of the black sun is that it is an image that simultaneously expresses what traditionally has been held to be a pair of incompatible and opposing phenomena: darkness and light, blackness and luminosity. Yet, in the image of Sol niger, they are intimately linked.

This luminous paradox at the heart of the black sun has been a theme both explicit and implicit in the work of painters who have painted in black. Explicitly, there have been a number of artists who have painted black suns, including Motherwell, Matisse, Ernst, Calder, and others. More implicitly, the theme of painting luminous blackness has been an important part of the history of painting and would require a booklength study in its own right. Malevich, Rothko, Reinhardt, Soulages, Stella, and Rauschenberg are well known for their focus on blackness and the dialectic of light and dark and have dedicated a part of their careers to exploring this theme.

Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: the Alchemy and Art of Darkness* pgs 169-174

Following his hospitalization, he struggled with many aspects of Sol niger including a masculine-feminine split and issues of the heart, death, suicide, and obsessionality as well as with what he called a black hole and spiritual transformation.

One of the first things he did upon visualizing the image of the black sun was to look through Jung’s works for references. One particular passage impressed him immediately, though it was not until a good deal later that he started to experience what his intuition told him was important. This is the passage he found:

Despite all attempts at denial and obfuscation there is an unconscious factor, a black sun, which is responsible for the surprisingly common phenomenon of masculine split-mindedness, when the right hand mustn’t know what the left is doing. The split in the masculine psyche and the regular darkening of the moon in woman together explain the remarkable fact that the woman is accused of all darkness in a man, while he himself basks in the thought that he is a veritable fount of vitality and illumination for all the females in his environment. Actually, he would be better advised to shroud the brilliance of his mind in the profoundest doubt.

His personal experience strongly resonated with Jung’s description, and he wrote in a letter:

My relationships with women have never been particularly satisfactory. I like women and get along well as friends and colleagues, but intimacy has been difficult. This was the case in my marriage, and in the couple of relationships I have been involved with since then. Since dealing with the black sun, I have recognized a lot in myself that the Jung passage implies, and have come to see that this has been at least part of what has been at the heart of my difficulties with women.

There were several things that the pastor was almost entirely unaware of before his experience of the black sun. One was his tendency to blame women for his problems. He had done this for years, and even though women, including his former wife, complained about the kind of superiority, hostility, and condescension that can come from such an attitude, he simply could never see it. He always felt himself to be in the right and usually wondered what in the world was wrong with them that they could not see it the way he did. However, he did have the insight that a lot of his feeling life had been deeply buried for a long time. He began to sense that the feelings of which he was unaware were manifested in the ways he experienced and dealt with women. For example, he writes that he had been guilty sometimes of falling into an automatic teaching/lecturing posture with women. He then became aware that this was set off when women expressed their ideas through feelings. It was as if he then had to counter this with his “superior” intellect because he could not deal with it on the feeling level. He realized that he believed that a woman’s feelings were inferior and that she needed his bright intellect to enlighten her. For him, feeling was part of the unknown and thus part of the black sun, which he feared.

The pastor reflected that in relation to the black sun, whatever its ultimate significance, a man needs somehow to come to terms with these feelings of superiority in order to also be aware of the duality in himself. If a man can do this, then he might not have to project the unseen aspect onto a woman, a displacement that had occurred not only for himself but also for other men with whom he had worked professionally or who were his friends and colleagues. While he knew this kind of attitude could be very hard to make conscious, he never really believed that it was buried in him.

According to Jung, men often prefer to see their thinking associated with the light of consciousness, and thus it is very easy for them to project their own dark moods and thoughts upon women.

Although the pastor did not think of it in this context, after writing to me about the preceding observations, he recalled an earlier encounter with the theme of Sol niger and the heart. One day he had developed a pain around his heart and had gone to the emergency room at a hospital, but the doctors found nothing physically wrong. One week from that day, the same thing happened, and he went back to the hospital, and again nothing was found. When he next went to see his analyst and told him what had happened, the analyst suggested that since nothing physical was found, the problem must lie elsewhere. He suggested that the pastor do some active imagination in relationship to the heart to see what might happen. For fourteen days in a row, he actively imagined what was going on in his heart, and each time he drew a picture of what he had “seen.”

He came to relate what he had considered his masculine-feminine split to problems of the heart that he traced back to wounds associated with his father. As he meditated and actively imagined what was going on inside his heart, he saw an angry fist, a crowbar, a large black stake piercing his heart, and later a large black iron ball that later he had identified with the black sun. He speculated on the relationship between depression and heart disease and commented that it cannot be healthy

to carry around a twenty-four-pound ball of iron in your heart.

The work with active imagination eventually led him to a healing process: images of a surgical procedure and the extraction of the iron ball, a black snake with green vegetation leading the way to the emergence of blue waters and a dolphin accompanying a small sailboat in the final picture of the series. The image that most struck him, however, was the black iron ball that had emerged and was now outside.

Although there was a healing of the heart, this image pointed to something outside of himself and outside the realm of consciousness. For him it was some darker expression of the soul—instinctual, emotional, symbolic, and archetypal. At its core the darkness of this other was uncanny and strange and perhaps even unknowable, he thought. It could have devastating consequences, physiologically and in his relationships, and it was as unrecognized as a black hole.

The theme of a black hole became important to him as an “outer image” that helped him to grapple with his inner darkness. Just becoming aware that such things exist in the universe helped him when he felt he was losing his sanity or even “becoming a bit psychotic.” He began to do some spontaneous active imagination on the model of a black hole. He writes that when he was in the throes of the depression, he would draw a blackened circle on a piece of paper. Then, when he looked at it and realized what he had drawn, he was horrified by it. It was as if it was able to draw attention and consciousness right down into it. As he thought more about what black holes are, he was able to see that they did exactly the same thing in the outer universe that the inner image had been doing to him. Black holes are so dense that no light escapes them. There were times when his depression felt exactly like that. In addition he had the sense that he could literally be pulled down into this thing and lost, in just the way things do not come out of black holes, at least not where they went in.

At one point, the pastor’s concerns turned toward death, and he reflected on it as it appeared in his depressive states. He connected death with the black sun. He noted that the primary way that thoughts about death entered in was with the preoccupation that he was going to die. The pattern was that the death thought would be most prominent from the morning into the early evening, but through the late evening it would subside completely. He would then go to bed somewhat peacefully, and then in the morning, it would start again. This continued over a three-year period. Every morning for three years, he woke with the same concern about death. During that whole time, not once did it make any difference on any of those mornings that he knew the fear had subsided the night before and had done so every time.

Every single day was a repeat of the identical pattern, seemingly disconnected from the day before.

Although he felt that the ultimate significance of his death thoughts was symbolic, for a long time he experienced the thought on a literal level. It took the form of preoccupation with his actual death. “I don’t know when that awareness [of the literal quality of these thoughts] began to

change, but it did. I think it changed a good deal in relationship to the spiritual changes which eventually came” through a kind of death/rebirth process.

In studying the material on the tomb of Ramses VI, he was struck by the following phrase: “the rebirth of the sun at dawn after its night-time netherworld journey, the resurrection of the king after his dark and difficult passage through the underworld following his death, and the emergence of a higher level of consciousness after the arduous and often terrifying examination.” He felt this well

described what he went through: “I think I have had to live with the black sun for these past years to get ready to deal with the further meaning. . . . There is work to be done, though. I think part of it will be more precise thinking and amplifications regarding the black sun.

In other words, there is still unanswered somewhat the question, ‘Why the black sun?’ ‘Why a black sun?’”

It was a question the pastor knew could never be fully answered through analysis or therapy. He noted that his dark experiences, like the sun, had an incredible, seemingly inexhaustible energy. Probably the most significant thing for him with regard to the whole experience is that it eventually led him to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church.

He had previously been ordained as a Protestant minister for twentythree years. He felt that because of the depth to which the whole experience of the depression and the black sun took him, it ultimately resulted in a spiritual revolution. Since becoming Russian Orthodox seven years ago, he has continued to understand some things through the spirituality of that tradition that continued the theme of the black sun. He began to offer a number of reflections on the relationship of the black sun and the dark side of God. He stated that,

In Orthodoxy, it is common to think about God both in terms of “positive” and “negative” theology. This is not unique to Orthodoxy either. The positive theology involves those clear affirmations we are willing to make about God; that God is love, that God is omnipresent, etc. The negative theology proceeds in a different way and basically is the encounter with God through the experience of being stripped of our delusions and illusions about God and ourselves. My sense is that this corresponds more to the idea of the “essence” of God. Now, with all said, the place I am coming to in regard to Sol niger is to say that what it has of God in it is close to this dark, mysterious aspect of God. One way that I have seen that has been in terms of the change which I experienced in relation to the image. Initially, it was terrifying and something that I wanted to flee but could not.

Sol niger and the depression made him aware of things that had to be faced and dealt with on the psychological level. At the same time, however, he had come to see that all of these factors needed spiritual work as well. In other words, what Sol niger and the depression revealed to him about his soul, he had come to see in his relationship to God as well. While this might sound strange, if the psychological and the spiritual are different but intimately related dimensions, then each will need its own kind of work.

Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: the Alchemy and Art of Darkness* pgs 175-77

The theology of the fifth- or sixth-century mystical philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius further amplifies Sol niger in its luminescent aspect. Many have come to discern in his writing the hand of a brilliant epistemologist, an early philosopher of language, a Socrates-like teacher, and a mystical theologian. Perhaps the best designation of Pseudo-Dionysius is the one underlined by twentieth-century philosopher and theologian Edith Stein: “Father of Mysticism.” For Stein, his theology represents the highest stage of “secret revelation,” and she notes that “the higher the knowledge, the darker and more mysterious it is, the less it can be put into words.” In short, “the ascent to God is an ascent into darkness and silence.”

In his letters, Pseudo-Dionysius writes “The divine darkness is that ‘unapproachable light’ where God is said to live.”

In another place he writes, “The pure, absolute and immutable mysteries of theology are veiled in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness.”

His *Mystical Theology* has been considered to exemplify the Dionysian method and to be a key to the structure of the entire corpus. Pseudo-Dionysius begins with the question What is Divine darkness? and responds that Divine darkness “is made manifest only to those who travel through foul and fair, who pass beyond the summit of every holy ascent, who leave behind them every divine light, every voice, every word from heaven, and who plunge into the darkness where . . . there dwells the One who is beyond all things.”

According to the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, what remains of what can be known is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial.

In such a litany, one gets the experience of the process of negative theology, which has a tendency to reduce one both to silence and to a darkness that one cannot even call darkness. So, in an attempt to continue to express what the author is referring to, the image of Divine Darkness stands in the place of having nothing left to say. Throughout his text, we find the metaphors of a darkness of unknowing that is higher than knowledge: a cloud of unknowing; he who has made the shadow his hiding place; a darkness hidden by light; a nakedness that exceeds light; a

brilliant darkness resplendent; a dazzling obscurity of secret silence; a ray of Divine shadow that exceeds all existence; an outshining of all brilliance with the intensity of darkness; a supraessential Divine Darkness, beyond affirmation and negation; mystical ecstasy; a transcendent energy that lifts up, beyond sense and intellect; and an eclipse of consciousness that drives one out of one's mind and leaves one in silence.

Glen McKnight, *Aletheia: The Orphic Ouroboros* pgs 26, 28-33

The Dionysian is mutually its own ancestor and descendent, devouring itself in unification. The Empedoklean elements within the *Hymns* thus describe an anthropomorphised creation, while the *bákkhoi* create themselves out of themselves, in “a chain of deaths”. This *metempsychosis* is thus the *katabasis* or *sparagmos* upon the cosmic scale, that is, a cosmogony as anthropogony.

[...]

The Orphikoí constructed not a binary but a continuum, a unity of Eros and Thanatos, that *bakkheúein* and *askesis* culminated in the liberation of the *psyche* from the tyranny of existence: one transforming the other by virtue of its virtue.

This is the grief for which Persephone must be repaid, not the *death* but *birth* of Dionysos by she who “bore divine Euboulos by yielding to human need”. This is the depth of the *katabasis*, the rage of Melinoe in the *Hymns* as “a two-bodied spectre sprang forth from Persephone's fury”, a fury, we note, directed not at Hades, nor the Titans, but Zeus. As the violated conception of Kore-Persephone anticipates that of Dionysos, so the *sparagmos* of Dionysos, as Wildberg asserts, lost in self-contemplation in the Titans' Lacanian mirror, is also anticipated by the divided body of Zeus, dispersed as the self-pervading cosmos. The crime of Zeus, the grief of Persephone, is life itself.

Orphism sought to reconcile this apparent paradox. The violent castration of Ouranos by Kronos—replicating the sundering of Phanes by Khronos—enacts the emergence of individuation. The death of Orpheus is likewise a *sparagmos*, an *órgia* of *mystai* and maenads as each recognises themselves within the other in the epiphany of *ékstasis*. Victims of *sparagmos* deny and yet incarnate as Dionysos: a death, renunciation, and rebirth; a *katabasis*. The serpent-wound *kērúkeion* unifies the juxtaposed in the descent to the underworld, just as fragmentary Dionysos is reassembled in the temple of Apollon, to, as Anathassakis and Wolkow state, “reconstitute the esoteric knowledge that leads to a revelation”. *Sparagmos* is thus the poetic moment of union between life and death; as Herrero de Jáuregui observes, the mystery of the oracle is solved in the revelation of the *mystēs'* own identity. The barrier to initiation is not paradox, but the appearance of paradox where none exists.

The bone tablets of Olbia, carved “*bíos thánatos bíos*”, read not only of a sequential interchangeability in life and death, but of the functional interdependence between them, a simultaneity. The leaves of Pelinna read similarly, “You have died and you have been born, thrice blessed, on this day”. This is the rebirth Dionysos provides: a Herakleitean interdependence of opposites because of the very tension of their opposition, symbolised in the consumption and regurgitation of the gods by K(h)ronos, the bone-white masks of the Titans standing before

Dionysos-Zagreus, faces chalked with ritual gypsum, and even pale-faced Agriope, Orpheus' bride who was known in the underworld as Eurydike, an epithet of Kore-Persephone. All represent the conflicted symbol of seen and unseen: the light of life and the pallid mask of the dead; the white and radiant cypress, tree of death and mourning, standing in the Orphic leaves beside the Lethe—of psychic Oblivion and *thus* rebirth. This was the essence of initiation.

The initiate's struggle is to navigate between these tensions, to submit their dreams to introspection, their desires to transfiguration. They must slay the outer body of the *psyche* to free it, let it die so that it might be reborn, howling with bacchic frenzy. The *mystai* renounce Oblivion through disciplined askesis, to face the truth of self-perception. They sunder the mythically unbreakable chains of Kronos, supplanting them with the chains of virtue, binding themselves to Persephone's blessed meadow in the very heart of Hades.

[...]

The whirling roar of Dionysos is turned against itself. Korybas is slain in order to arise. In short, the *Hymns* form a cyclical *katabasis*, a ring-composed *sparagmos* by which the fragmentary identity of individual and collective are resituated, if not restored.

The Orphikoí thus reject the violent materialism of society to better understand the selves within it. We may contemplate that when Damaskios, last scholarch of the Athenian academy, wrote of the fragmentation of *psyche* in his commentary on Plato's *Phaedo*, that "This is what the Titans do to us in that we too tear apart the Dionysos in us", perhaps he spoke against such violence inflicted upon the psychological-spiritual self, or perhaps he spoke of its necessity.

Glen McKnight, *Aletheia: The Orphic Ouroboros* pgs 34, 36

The first step of *katabasis* is death. It is a return to darkness, a psychological despair, by which the old self may be undone. In ancient Greek truth was *alētheia*, "nonoblivion": the Orphic renunciation of the waters of the Lethe. Revelation is thus remembrance, as Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal argue, the initiates' drink at the spring of Mnemosyne, requiring a primordial unity to which they return. In the practice of justice and moral purity by *askēsis*, the pool of Mnemosyne reflects the "pure light" of Orphic Phanes in *The Orphic Hymns*. Hence we read the ritual proclamation of the *mystai* in the gold leaves: "pure I come from the pure". In the leaves, the *mystai* face the dark and lifeless gloom of Tartaros, held back by the sacred meadow of Persephone in its heart. They escape neither suffering nor sorrow, yet revel at Hades' very throne. The *bákkhoi* join the retinue of Bakchos, to become themselves the light of Persephone's meadow. The revelation of light is, in fact, a return to darkness, to non-being as the precursor of becoming. That is, in Orphic theogony, all things come from Night, and to Night, then, they return. The *mystai* sought Night in the *teletai*. This darkness was essential to becoming, and thus will be essential to Romanticist and modernist adaptations.

[...]

Clearly, Orphic texts are "deliberately ambiguous", continuously conflating initiation with death and death with liberation. Each is a crossing of Okeanos, the exploration of the dream world of

the *psyche*, somewhere between being. The psychological interrogation of Mnemosyne liberates one from the “terrible cycle” of the wheel of life. This transmigration of souls, *metempsychōsis*, condemns the uninitiated “to lie in the mire”, an explicitly psychological allegory in Plato, which to Plutarch thus represents unenlightened humanity, that is, “the mob of living men ... herded together in murk and deep mire”. The crises of initiation then, are the psychological processes by which the *mystai* face the suffering of life through a reorientation of identity, and thus transfigure the darkness of Hades, reflecting the *psyche* within it.

The unfolding of the imprisoned *psyche* in *katabasis* is an anthropogony as theo-cosmogony: a dissolution of one world in the creation of another, an immolation in *apothēōsis*. The immediacy of death and *apotheosis* then, is not to reduce the arduous *katabasis* or torturous *sparagmos* into a single moment, but to present the ecstatic *bákkhoi* in an act of resolution within this simultaneity of opposites, bound inseparably, each to the other.

Gerard de Nerval, *Der Schiffbrüchige*

There lives a woman in the North,
A beautiful woman, royally beautiful.
Her slender, cypress-like form
Is swathed in a light, white raiment.
Her locks, in their dusky fullness,
Like a blessed night,
Streaming from her braid-crowned head,
Curl softly as a dream
Around the sweet, pale face;
And from the sweet pale face
Large and powerful beams an eye,
Like a black sun.

Gerard de Nerval, *El Desdichado*

I am the man of darkness - the widower - the inconsolable,
the Prince of Aquitaine of the ruined Tower:
my only star is dead - and my celestine lute
bears the Black Sun of Melancholy.

Gerard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient*

The black sun of melancholy, which pours its dark rays in front of Albrecht Dürer's dreamy angel, sometimes also rises alongside the bright plains of the Nile, as on the banks of the Rhine in the cold landscape of Germany.

Nonnos, *Dionysiaka* Book 38

A foreboding sign was shown to winefaced Bacchos in the sky, an incredible wonder. For at midday, a sudden darkness was spread abroad, and a midday obscurity covered Phaethon with its black pall, and the hills were overshadowed as his beams were stolen away. [...] Then another happy omen was seen by impatient Bacchos, an eagle flying high through the air, holding a

horned snake in his sharp talons. The snake twisted his bold neck, and slipt away of itself diving into the river Hydaspes. Trembling silence held all that innumerable host.

Theodore J. Nottingham, *The Strange Life and Visions of Victor Hugo*

Like most of us, Hugo was a man of a thousand faces. Some of them have become caricatures carried down through the years to the detriment of the great man's legacy. But those who have judged or mocked him for that voracious appetite for the opposite sex which obsessed him even as an octogenarian have failed to deal with the mighty paradox of his existence. Hugo was a man of colossal mystic visions and one who was immersed in an intense life of prayer. Yet this paradox was also wrapped in a riddle, for this deeply spiritual genius rejected the Church of his time and despised its priests.

This herculean ego who relished raw meat and spent nineteen years on a rugged isle in the North Sea, refusing to leave his exile even after the Emperor had permitted his return, was also the sensitive poet whose odes, ballads, and lyrical prose are among the finest ever penned. The author of the savage horror story *Han of Island* was also the writer of *Contemplations*, a work of stirring spiritual poetry.

Those who can read the original French know that Hugo is the Bach-Beethoven-Mozart of prose till wrapped into one. Those who have wandered through the landscape of his monumental fiction will agree that every sentence was forged by a heart that bled for the agonies of the world and truly loved humankind. Those who have stepped into the dark light of his poetry, particularly the epics of his later years such as *The Legend of the Centuries*, *God*, and *The End of Satan*, know that their creator was a soul radiant with a rare consciousness of other worlds.

With all of these extremes present in one individual, Hugo stands in history as a classic case of the sinner/saint paradox. His life was a giant tension between light and darkness arid it spilled out onto paper with thunderous impact.

"Creation enters into the invisible and the imponderable, and disappears for you, vile flesh, lighting Infinity with a dazzling world, mirror of the darker one ... Know that She begins in the worlds of mystery, the worlds of terror and abandonment. And that She comes, among pale visions, from the precipice where slither larvaes and crimes. For beneath us, in the horrible plenitude we believe empty, evil disgorges a monstrous vapor that lives! There, engulfed in floods of disasters, the hydra Universe writhes. There all floats and sinks in an obscure shipwreck. In this gulf without edge, all that has lived rains endlessly in ashes. And one sees at the very bottom, when the eye dares to descend that far, beyond the noise of existence, a horrible black sun from which radiates the night!"

Victor Hugo achieved success early on and was acclaimed as a literary genius before the age of twenty. Even as a youth, his words vibrated with a luminous vision:

"I hate the noise of this world and I fear its dust. Seclusion, peaceful and proud, demands and independent heart. I wish no slave, I wish no master! Let me dream alone in the desert of my being. There seek I the burning bush."

For nineteen years, he would wander four hours a day along the rocky coast of the isle of Guernsey, contemplating untamed nature. From this isolation came his greatest masterpieces, among them *Les Misérables* and his visionary poems. He was finally in touch with his true destiny.

"Dreamers are terrible. They forever have their gaze lost in the deep. Do not seek to reach in the darkness for these mysterious madmen led by a glow, these thinkers, these demons who wish more than to live! They have for mission to grasp the Unknown. They know that the pure, the absolute, the sacred, the real, have mysterious entryways!"

He reached heights of mystic experience which lifted his art to new levels.

"I have died. In Thy breath of fog and of light I vibrate, Heaven, as if bearing in me the filament of creation. As if all the invisible threads of being were entwined in the cosmos filling my breast!"

At the same time, he became involved with the spiritualism of his time, namely, seances and moving tables. He claimed to have contacted through a medium his daughter Leopoldine who had died as a newlywed in a tragic boating accident. His encounter with mysterious forces became a daily, reality and his nights were tormented with overpowering dreams.

"We spy upon noises in the dismal void. We listen to a breath as we wander in the gloom. And at times, we see, brightening with overwhelming gleams, the window of Eternity! All is full of souls! All has consciousness! All speaks!"

On his deathbed, he whispered to his beloved grandchildren the synthesis of the understanding he had forged in his long and pain-filled life: "Love, seek love. Give happiness, and take it, in loving as much as you can." The dramatic mystic that he was left us with an enigma as mysterious as his own nature which lie slipped over to the other side: "I see black light."

The saga of his life covered nearly a century of historic turmoil, from the era of Napoleon through the bloody revolts in Paris so poignantly documented in *Les Misérables*, to the city's siege where he climbed the ramparts and harangued the invaders. In the midst of countless affairs, humiliations and glorious successes, death and despair, Hugo maintained his search for the transcendent and his message to humanity remains one of hope and vision:

"Oh, how all the harmonies will sing, how the blessed spheres will glow, how the heavens will melt in ecstasy, when matter finally loosens its hold, dissolving all misery, inundating night with beauty! The depths will say to the heights - I love you, when the banished return! Toward God, each will carry his brother and sister. Arms will open out to them, crying out - "It is you!" The tears will dry. Sorrows will vanish in the shadows below. An angel will cry -- the Beginning!"

Orphic Hymn 6. To Protogonos

Incense: Myrrh

Upon two-natured, great and ether-tossed Protogonos I call;
Born of the egg, delighting in his golden wings he bellows like a bull,
This begetter of blessed gods and mortal men.
Erikepaïos, seed unforgettable, attend to my rites,
Ineffable, hidden, brilliant scion, whose motion is whirring,
You scattered the dark mist that lay before your eyes,
and, flapping your wings, you whirled about
and throughout this world, you brought pure light.
For this I call you Phanes and lord Priapos and bright-eyed Antauges.
But, O blessed one of many counsels and seeds,
Come gladly to the celebrants of this holy and elaborate rite.

Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.40.6

After the precinct of Zeus, there is a temple of Dionysos Nyktelios, a sanctuary built to Aphrodite Epistrophia and an oracle said to belong to Nyx.

PGM IV ‘Sword of Dardanos’

I call upon you, author of all creation who spread your own wings over the whole world, you, the unapproachable and unmeasurable who breathe into every soul life-giving reasoning, who fitted all things together by your power, firstborn, founder of the universe, golden-winged, whose light is darkness, who shroud reasonable thoughts and breathe forth dark frenzy, clandestine one who secretly inhabit every soul. You engender an unseen fire as you carry off every living thing without growing weary of torturing it, rather having with pleasure delighted in pain from the time when the world came into being. You also come and bring pain, who are sometimes reasonable, sometimes irrational, because of whom men dare beyond what is fitting and take refuge in your light which is darkness. Most headstrong, lawless, implacable, inexorable, invisible, bodiless, generator of frenzy, archer, torch-carrier, master of all living sensation and of everything clandestine, dispenser of forgetfulness, creator of silence, through whom the light and to whom the light travels, infantile when you have been engendered within the heart, wisest when you have succeeded; I call upon you, unmoved by prayer, by your great name:

AZARACHTHARAZA LATHA IATHAL Y Y Y LATHAI ATHA LLALAPH IOIOIO AI AI AI
OUERIEU OIAI LEGETA RAMAI AMA RATAGEL, first-shining, night-shining, night
rejoicing, night-engendering, witness, EREKISITHPHE ARARACHARARA EPHTHISIKERE
IABEZEBYTH IT, you in the depth, BERIAMBO BERIAMBEBO, you in the sea,
MERMERGO U, clandestine and wisest, ACHAPA ADONAIE MASMA CHARAKO IAKOB
IAO CHAROUER AROUER LAILAM SEMESILAM SOUMARTA MARBA KARBA
MENABOTH EIIA

Plutarch, *De Anima* fragment preserved in Stobaios *Florilegium* 120

When the soul comes to the point of death, it suffers something like those who participate in the great initiations (*teletai*). Therefore the word *teleutan* closely resembles the word *teleisthai* just as the act of dying resembles the act of being initiated. At first there are wanderings and toilsome running about in circles and journeys through the dark over uncertain roads and culs de sacs;

then, just before the end, there are all kinds of terrors, with shivering, trembling, sweating, and utter amazement. After this, a strange and wonderful light meets the wanderer; he is admitted into clean and verdant meadows, where he discerns gentle voices, and choric dances, and the majesty of holy sounds and sacred visions. Here the now fully initiated is free, and walks at liberty like a crowned and dedicated victim, joining in the revelry.

Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta* 22

Thus at length he came to a certain gaping chasm, that was fathomless downward, where he found himself deserted by that extraordinary force which brought him thither, and perceived other souls also to be there in the same condition. For hovering upon the wing in flocks together like birds, they kept flying round and round the yawning rift, but durst not enter into it. Now this same cleft within had the appearance of a Bacchic grotto with fragrant scents, arousing wondrous pleasures and such a mood as wine induces in those who are becoming tipsy; for as the souls regale themselves on the sweet odours they grew expansive and friendly with one another; and the place all about was full of Bacchic revelry and laughter and the various strains of festivity and merry-making. This was the route, the spirit said, that Dionysos had taken in his ascent and later when he brought up Semele; and the region was called the place of Lethe. On this account, although Thespesius wished to linger, the guide would not allow it, but pulled him away by main force, informing him as he did so that the intelligent part of the soul is dissolves away and liquefied by pleasure, while the irrational and carnal part is fed by its flow and puts on flesh and thus induces memory of the body; and that from such memory arises a yearning and desire that draws the soul toward birth. At length, after he had been carried as far another way as when he was transported to the yawning overture, he thought he beheld a prodigious standing goblet, into which several rivers discharged themselves; among which there was one whiter than snow or the foam of the sea, another resembled the purple color of the rainbow. The tinctures of the rest were various; besides that, they had their several lustres at a distance. But when he drew nearer, the ambient air became more subtile and rarefied, and the colors vanished, so the goblet retained no more of its flourishing beauty except the white. At the same time he saw three Daemons sitting together in a triangular aspect, and blending and mixing the rivers together with certain measures. Thus far, said the guide of Thespesius's soul, did Orpheus come, when he sought after the soul of his wife; and not well remembering what he had seen, upon his return he raised a false report in the world, that the oracle at Delphi was in common to Night and Apollo, whereas Apollo never had any thing in common with Night. But, said the spirit, this oracle is in common to Night and to the Moon, no way included within earthly bounds, nor having any fixed or certain seat, but always wandering among men in dreams and visions. For from hence it is that all dreams are dispersed, compounded as they are of truth jumbled with falsehood, and sincerity with the various mixtures of craft and delusion.

Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi*

As for his passage and distribution into waves and water, and earth, and stars, and nascent plants and animals, they hint at the actual change undergone as a rending and dismemberment, but name the God himself Dionysos or Zagreus or Nyktelios or Isodaïtes. Deaths too and vanishings do they construct, passages out of life and new births, all riddles and tales to match the changes mentioned. So they sing to Dionysos dithyrambic strains, charged with sufferings and a change wherein are wanderings and dismemberment.

Plutarch, *On the face which appears in the orb of the moon* 942b

For Kronos himself sleeps confined in a deep cave of rock that shines like gold — the sleep that Zeus has contrived like a bond for him —, and birds flying in over the summit of the rock bring ambrosia to him, and all the island is suffused with fragrance scattered from the rock as from a fountain; and those spirits mentioned before tend and serve Kronos, having been his comrades what time he ruled as king over Gods and men. Many things they do foretell of themselves, for they are oracular; but the prophecies that are greatest and of the greatest matters they come down and report as dreams of Kronos, for all that Zeus premeditates Kronos sees in his dreams and the titanic affections and motions of his soul make him rigidly tense until sleep restores his repose once more and the royal and divine element is all by itself, pure and unalloyed.

Proklos, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* 3.296.7

The happy life, far from the roaming of generation, that is desired by those who, in Orpheus, are initiated in Dionysos and Kore and told 'to cease from the circle and enjoy respite from disgrace.'

***The Book of Revelation* 6:12**

Then I saw the Lamb open the sixth seal. There was a powerful earthquake. The Sun turned as black as sackcloth made of goat hair, and the full Moon turned as red as blood.

Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde* pg 253

I looked fixedly at the black lights beckoning to me with a familiar smile in the night of my sorrow. Now a piercing pain from dark suns burned me with unbearable brilliance, now a beautiful luminosity hovered and flowed as if to lure me on.

SEG XXVIII, 659

Life. Death. Life. Truth. Zagreus. Dionysos. Orphikoi.

SEG XXVIII, 660

Peace. War. Truth. Lie. Dionysos

SEG XXVIII, 661

Dionysos. Truth. Body. Soul.

Sophokles, choral ode from *Antigone*

God of the many names, Semele's golden child,
child of Olympian thunder, Italy's lord.
Lord of Eleusis, where all men come
to mother Demeter's plain.
Bacchus, who dwell in Thebes,
by Ismenus' running water,
where wild Bacchic women are at home,
on the soil of the dragon seed.

Seen in the glaring flame, high on the double mount,
with the nymphs of Parnassus at play on the hill,
seen by Kastalia's flowing stream.
You come from the ivied heights,
from green Euboea's shore.
In immortal words we cry
your name, lord, who watch the ways,
the many ways of Thebes.

This is your city, honored beyond the rest,
the town of your mother's miracle-death.
Now, as we wrestle our grim disease,
come with healing step from Parnassus' slope
or over the moaning sea.

Leader in the dance of the fire-pulsing stars
overseer of the voices of night,
child of Zeus, be manifest,
with due companionship of Maenad maids
whose cry is but your name.

Julian Strube, *Nazism and the Occult*

The Wewelsburg castle has been identified, within both popular literature and scholarly studies, as the location for a number of occult rituals performed by the SS, or even as the repository of the Holy Grail and the Holy Lance (Hüser 1987; Höhne 1967; Siepe 2009). Indeed, popular narratives about SS 'rituals' even found their way into the studies of esteemed experts (Fest 1963, 159-60; cf. Hüser 1987 68). Recent scholarship, however, has shown that no 'cults' or 'rituals' of any kind have ever been performed at the Wewelsburg (Schulte 2009). Himmler's plans for turning the castle into a *weltanschauliches Zentrum* and an organizational base for the SS were never realized.

There is no historical evidence to suggest that there has been anything like a powerful 'esoteric circle' within the SS. It is clear that Himmler consistently had to hide his private esoteric interests from the public and other party elites like Hitler and Goebbels. His future plans for the SS, including the Wewelsburg or the Externsteine, never left the planning stage (Halle 2002; Schulte 2009). Those individuals within the SS who were following an esoteric agenda – notably Wiligut and Rahn – were pushed out of the organization and met tragic ends. Certainly, there is no evidence to indicate that those individuals interested in esotericism in the SS had the power to develop secret weapons or to build subterranean bases and worldwide networks.

The official stance of the state towards esoteric individuals and organizations became increasingly hostile after 1933. While there is evidence of continuities between esoterically inclined currents, such as Ariosophy, and National Socialism, those affinities never resulted in 'occult' influences at a state level. Esoteric groups influenced by such movements as Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Ariosophy, Mazdaznan, or New Thought were classified as

‘sects hostile to the state.’ In the view of state officials, their unwillingness to adapt to the National Socialist

Weltanschauung encouraged disunity amongst the *Volksgemeinschaft*. As Corinna Treitel (2004) suggests in her study of German occultism, two specific transgressions led to the persecution of esoteric groups by the authorities: the first was the denial of rigid racial hierarchies that, for example, became evident in the Theosophical proclamation of a ‘brotherhood of humanity’; the second was the accusation of ‘superstition’ that would poison the minds of the German people. Hence, in July 1937, all Freemasonic lodges, Theosophical circles, and related groups were dissolved and *okkultistische* as well as *spiritistische* publications and activities were forbidden. The famous flight by Rudolph Hess, who, in an attempt to bring an end to the war, had parachuted over Scotland in 1941, led to an increased suspicion of occult influence. It was, for example, claimed that the influence of astrologers and other ‘charlatans’ surrounding Hess had led to his ‘insanity.’ Hitler and, especially, Goebbels had always protested against ‘superstition’ and ‘mysticism,’ which now had to be finally eradicated. The resulting crackdown in June 1941 led to a brutal suppression of esoteric activity in Germany, to the interning of occultists and the forcing of many underground. Ironically, this purging of the occult and the sectarian took place under the aegis of the police chief, Himmler, who, while privately expressing an interest in esotericism, officially supported the crackdown on superstition, which he perceived to be a threat to the unity of the German people (cf. Dierker, Staudenmaier, and Meyer in Puschner 2012).

Victor Terras, *The Black Sun: Orphic imagery in the poetry of Osip Mandelstam*

The myth of Orpheus and Euridice has found an echo in many works of world literature, including Russian. It also appears in Mandelstam, but it is not per se the source of orphic imagery, such as that of a black sun. Rather, orphic imagery is derived from religious cults founded by Orpheus. The evidence on these cults from classical antiquity is sparse and contradictory. In particular, Orpheus’s relation to Dionysus is problematic. Legend has it that Orpheus was torn to pieces by Maenads for favoring Apollo over Dionysus, but then, too, he is often identified with Dionysus, “the suffering god.” The pursuit of moral and physical purity is “orphic,” but so are Dionysian revels. The orphic tendency to a dualist worldview leads to an ambivalence of opposing principles, such as *life: death, day: night, and heaven: nether world*. Specifically, a Dionysus-Nyctelios is venerated as an antipode of Apollo-Helios. A distinctive trait is an apparent preference for the nocturnal and a fascination with the nether world. Orphic cosmogony has Night for the mother of Ouranus and Gaia (Heaven and Earth), with Zeus and Hera only the fifth generation. Night is personified and very much the supreme deity.

We know that precisely at the time of Mandelstam’s intensive contact with Vyacheslav Ivanov, the latter was lecturing on Novalis and translating his poetry and, in particular, his *Hymnen an die Nacht*. In the very first of these hymns we find a “liebliche Sonne der Nacht,” translated as *Mne solntsem ty polunochnym siiiash’*, “You shine for me as a midnight sun” (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 4: 185). The not inconsiderable role played by Novalis in Mandelstam’s thought is surely due to Ivanov’s mediation. All of the examples of orphic imagery which appear in Mandelstam’s poetry appear in much greater concentration in Ivanov, where they are an integral part of an organic worldview. In the following brief poem the entire worldview of classical Orphism is expressed:

The Sun of Night

Truth is a luminous gift,
A gift of nocturnal Love.
Do not believe the truth of day;
Fear dark magic.
In the former, love is banned;
In the latter, there is no truth.
At midnight call the never setting light!
(*Sobranie* 4: 53)

Orphic truth is paradoxical: It is a luminous gift, yet it is a gift of nocturnal Love. Love is a hypostasis of Night. The light that will not set – the Sun of Night – is Dionysus-Nyctelios, as we learn from several other poems. The conflict of Euripides' *Hippolytus* is suggested in the lines that the truth of Day bans love, and is countered by the black magic of Night: the pure but loveless follower of Artemis, Hippolytus, falls victim to the machinations of vengeful Cypris-Night. In this, as well as in several other poems, the Sun of Night is said to be superior to the Sun of Day. It is *sole splendidior, candidior nive*, as the epigraph to "De Profundis" asserts (*Sobranie* 2: 237).

Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs & Peter James, *Saturn as the "Sun of Night" in Ancient Near Eastern Tradition*

Since the late 19th century scholars have been puzzled by a conspicuous peculiarity in the Babylonian nomenclature for the planet Saturn: a number of texts refer to Saturn as the "Sun" (dutu/20 or Šamaš), instead of its usual astronomical names Kayamānu and mulUDU.IDIM.1

This curious practice was in vogue during the period c. 750-612 BC and is not known from earlier periods, with a single possible exception, discussed below. Evidence for the association of Saturn and the Sun takes two forms. Direct attestations include the following cuneiform passages, in which Saturn is equated with other astronomical objects:

- #1 dUDU.IDIM.SAG.UŠ: MUL dUTU Saturn = the Sun
- #2 mulSAG.UŠ MUL ša dUTU Saturn = the Sun
- #3 mul.gi.gi = MUL kit-tú u me-šar mul-gi-gi = the star of truth and justice = dSAG.UŠ dUTU Saturn / the Sun MUL GE6 = AN ša-al-meDUL = MIN black (šalmu) star = statue (šalmu) = ditto
- #4 mulUDU.IDIM.SAG.UŠ KIMIN Saturn, also called the Scales mulzi-ba-ni-tu4 MUL dUTU (or) star of the Sun Kayamānu KIMIN Zibānītu kakkab Šamaš
- #5 MUL.GE6 = dZi-[ba-ni-tum] the black star = the Scales mulZi-ba-ni-tum = dUTU the Scales = the Sun

Saturn's solar association was also familiar to astrologers responsible for the omen literature, first edited by Reginald Thompson in 1900. In these passages it was not always directly stated, but can sometimes be inferred from the astronomical impossibility of the event if the "Sun" were to be interpreted in the literal sense – a reliable criterion introduced by Morris Jastrow. For example, a

reference to Jupiter (SAG.ME.GAR) appearing “in the Sun” surely refers to a conjunction with Saturn.

In quite a few cases, scribes added glosses which confirm that Saturn was referred to. In one text, a Babylonian commentator glossed “the path of the sun” (ḫar-ra-na dšá-maš) as that of “Saturn” (MUL.UDU.IDIM.SAG.UŠ).

In another, Venus’ approach to “the Sun”, which would be quite a meaningless condition if taken literally, is clarified with reference to Saturn, “If Venus in month X comes close to the Sun: a great king, variant: a king [of the universe] will come to shame – Venus [comes close to] Saturn ...”

Jastrow applied his criterion to juxtapositions of the “Sun” and the Moon. Whereas the Sun and the Moon can be visible in the sky simultaneously, they can never do so in close proximity, when the former outshines the latter. Yet some Babylonian omens refer to Šamaš, at face value the Sun, as standing in the vicinity of the Moon. For example, “If the sun stays in the position of the moon: the king of the land will sit firmly on the throne. [If] a sun disk stands above the moon (and) below the moon: the foundation of the throne will become stable; the king of the land will stay in his truth.”

A comment on the reverse of the tablet reveals that the observation was made at night and concerns the planet Saturn, “Tonight the planet Saturn approached the Moon. Saturn is the star of the Sun, (and) the relevant interpretation is as follows: it means good for the king. Saturn is (namely) the star of the king (too).”

Five other omen texts refer to occasions when Šamaš is specifically stationed “in the halo of the Moon” (ina tarbaš Sin). As lunar haloes are only visible after sunset, Šamaš here cannot be the Sun. And in each case, a gloss clarifies that the omen was descriptive of Saturn in that position.

In the Greek world the planet Saturn was usually associated with the god Kronos, whom the Romans identified with the deity Saturn. However, following the Babylonian tradition, some classical statements identified it as the “star” of Hēlios or Sol, i.e. the Sun. Yet despite the familiarity of Saturn’s connection with the Sun, its rationale is still far from understood. So classicist Beck: “Why Saturn should be identified with the Sun is far from obvious.” Moreover, was the matter one of identification or of mere association? The designation of the real Sun in one omen as “Šamaš of the day” (Šamše u-mi) shows that Babylonian astronomers perceived a

contrast between the “Sun of the day” and a “Sun of the night”, which must clearly have been Saturn. Accordingly, in an old (but still the most thorough) discussion of this subject to date, Jastrow argued that Saturn was not supposed to be physically identical with the Sun, but of all planets was thought to resemble the Sun most closely. Nevertheless, some of the passages cited

above seem to clearly identify the two. In whatever way, the logic by which Babylonian scribes linked Saturn to the Sun remains elusive.

The very earliest attempt at an explanation, in keeping with the penchant for allegories current in his day, was made by the Roman writer Macrobius (5th century AD), who invoked the popular association of Kronos (Saturn) with Chronos (Time):

Moreover, Saturn, as Cronus, is identified with Time (χρόνος). ... It is said that Saturn used to swallow his children and vomit them forth again, a myth likewise pointing to an identification of the god with time, by which all things in turn are created, destroyed, and brought to birth again. And Saturn himself, the author of times and seasons (and therefore, by the change of a letter, called Κρόνος by the Greeks as though for χρόνος, time), must assuredly be understood to be the sun.

A final factor that could have played a role in the ancient association of Saturn with the Sun is its colour. It is known that, in Babylonian star lore, “Jupiter could signify the moon in what seems a contrived parallel to Saturn signifying the sun.” If the correspondence between Jupiter and the Moon was rooted in the conspicuous whiteness of both bodies, Saturn – as the only one of the naked-eye planets with a reasonably consistent yellow colour – might naturally invite comparison with the Sun.

Indeed, whereas the Babylonians variously linked the Moon with Mercury, for its agility, and with Jupiter, for its whiteness, the Sun would seem to agree with Saturn in respect of both its motion and colour. What colour do ancient sources attribute to Saturn? We start with an overview of Saturn’s colour in classical sources and then proceed to the more surprising Babylonian material.

In Greek myth, the deity Kronos was believed to have ruled the “golden race” (*chrýseon génos*) of a past age, as first recorded by the 8th-century BC poet Hesiod. From the Hellenistic period onwards, of course, Saturn was viewed as this god’s planet. As gold would, of course, suit the yellowish colour of Saturn, it is tempting to speculate that Hesiod’s Kronos already bore a relationship to Saturn, just as the succeeding “silver race” of Zeus might be paired to Jupiter. However, it is unclear whether an association of Kronos with the planet Saturn could go back this early.

As for Saturn’s standard colour, this is almost invariably black – both in Babylonian sources and derivative astrological traditions in the Hellenistic world, medieval Judaism and India. In Babylonian astronomy, as in its successors, each of the planets was associated with such a “canonical” colour: the Sun with gold, the Moon with silver, Mercury with pale red or brown, Venus with blue or green, Mars with red, Jupiter with white, and Saturn with black.

This is especially clear in the following passage:

The white star is Jupiter, the Red Star is Mars, the Green star is Venus, the Black star is Saturn, variant: Mercury.

The 17th-century scholar Salmasius argued that Kronos / Chronos was black as Time obscures everything. This argument is clearly an elaboration of the classical word-play involving Kronos and Chronos, dealt with above.

In theory, ancient observers may have perceived a parallel between the yellow and black colours associated with Saturn and the transformation of the Sun into a pitch-black body as seen during solar eclipses, be they total or annular. The fleeting darkness experienced during a solar eclipse, superstitiously interpreted as a “miniature night”, may have suggested that the Sun at such times was showing its nocturnal face. At a time when people were still divided about the whereabouts of the Sun at night, observations of Saturn may have been interpreted as glimpses of the Sun on its way from the west back to the east. While a tempting speculation, it is completely unsupported by any ancient testimony and other possibilities remain to be explored.

Second, it might be suggested that Saturn was associated with black because, in classical mythology, the god Kronos/Saturn was thought to have been banished to some dark cosmic extremity – be it the depths of Tartaros, the dark underworld bereft of the Sun’s rays; islands at the edge of the world, thought by some to be in the far west where the Sun sets; in the midnight land of the southern hemisphere; or the outermost planetary sphere, furthest from the Earth. However, while these motifs may provide fascinating insights into ancient Graeco-Roman cosmological traditions, they have no bearing on Babylonian beliefs; no similar stories were related about the god Ninurta. Besides, inhabiting a dark place does not necessarily imply being dark oneself.

As another thought experiment, if the Babylonians regarded Saturn as a nocturnal counterpart to the Sun, they might have conceived it as black so as to match the darkness of the night and contrast it with the brightness produced by the “Sun of day”. Yet this is an *argumentum e silentio*, never spelled out in any of the sources. It would only work if Saturn’s natural appearance did suggest a dark component, just as the light of day does match the bright white or yellow colour of the Sun. The same objection applies to Winckler’s idea that Saturn’s dark colour represented winter, when the Sun is “dead.”

Thomas Vlasaty, *Origins of “kolovrat” symbol*

The symbol we now call “kolovrat” has been appearing in European material culture throughout the past three millennia, but very sporadically. It is crucial to note that it is evidently a version of the swastika, simply with more than four arms. During all the epochs from which we know the occasional appearance of “kolovrat” swastika was commonly used, in severely higher numbers. It is “a symbol of movement, growth, eternity, rhythmical time-flow measured by the Sun, and a symbol which brings good luck and provides protection from evil” (Váňa 1973: 210; Váňa 1990: 186–187). Thanks to this universal meaning, swastika can be found all over the globe. Its doubling (in the form of “kolovrat”) can thus be interpreted as an increase in its power. The eldest appearance of the symbol can be dated back to Ancient Greece, especially the so-called Geometrical art (900-700BC) applied in pottery industry. Such an example could be terracotta

statuettes from Thebes provenience (eg. Boston 98.891, Louvre CA 573) and amphoras with ears (Spanish National Archaeological Museum 19482, National Museum in Prague H10 5914). All of these examples depict eight-armed left-rotating symbols.

Völuspá 41

It sates itself on the life-blood of fated men,
paints red the powers' homes with crimson gore.
Black become the Sun's beams in the summers that follow,
weathers all treacherous. Do you still seek to know? And what?

Völuspá 57

The sun turns black, earth sinks in the sea,
The hot stars down from heaven are whirled;
Fierce grows the steam and the life-feeding flame,
Till fire leaps high about heaven itself.

ZPE 72, 1988, 245

When through the shadowy mountains, through the region of black radiances, from the garden of Persephone, at the hour of milking, the child brings by necessity the holy quadruped, companion of Demeter, the goat, to nurse at the fountain of inexhaustible milk, calling for torches for Hecate at the crossroads, the goddess with a terrible voice guides the stranger to the God.