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Mystic Archetypes and Modern Minds: Nietzsche, Jung, and the Dionysian Path to the Übermensch

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Abstract

This paper investigates the convergence of mysticism, archetypal psychology, and tragic philosophy through a comparative analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Gustav Jung. Focusing on Dionysus as a central mythic archetype, it examines how Nietzsche's notion of ecstatic becoming and existential rupture resonates with Jung's concept of the mystic archetype, in which ego dissolution facilitates individuation and the attainment of psychic wholeness. Drawing on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, alongside Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*, the study explores the transformative roles of madness, suffering, and symbolic death in the mystical journey. Two primary questions guide the inquiry: To what extent can mysticism, traditionally framed as a religious phenomenon, be reconceptualized as a universal psychological and existential process? And how do Nietzsche's Dionysian intensity and Jung's process of individuation illuminate this contemporary

understanding of mysticism? The analysis identifies structural correspondences between these secular perspectives and classical mystical traditions, including Sufism and Christian mysticism, emphasizing shared motifs of ego death, symbolic rebirth, and union with a greater reality. By framing mysticism as a symbolic and psychological architecture rather than exclusively a theological construct, the study positions it as a vital lens for apprehending the human drive toward meaning, integration, and transformation. Ultimately, the paper contends that Nietzsche and Jung reclaim mysticism as a profoundly human endeavour, wherein myth, psyche, and existential insight converge, not in pursuit of religious orthodoxy, but in the quest for authenticity and wholeness in the modern world.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Jung, Mystic Archetype, Individuation, Ecstasy

Problem Statement

The study of mysticism has traditionally been confined to religious experience and theological frameworks. However, a fundamental question arises: can mysticism be reimagined as a universal psychological and existential process? Thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Gustav Jung, drawing on ancient and symbolic archetypes such as Dionysus, explore the human journey of transformation through ego dissolution, suffering, and symbolic death. Nietzsche emphasizes Dionysian intensity and ecstatic becoming, while Jung highlights individuation and the collective unconscious, offering parallel pathways in which ego death, symbolic rebirth, and union with a greater reality play central roles.

The main problem this study addresses is how mysticism can be understood beyond traditional religious boundaries, as a symbolic and psychological structure guiding the modern human quest for meaning, unity, and transformation. By comparing Nietzsche's and Jung's perspectives, this research aims to reveal structural parallels between modern mystical paths and traditional models,

demonstrating that mystical experience is not merely a religious phenomenon but a deeply human and universal process connected to suffering, madness, and inner transformation.

Research Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate the intersection of mysticism, archetypal psychology, and tragic philosophy through a comparative analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Gustav Jung. It examines how, in the modern world, individuals pursue a spiritual path toward self-knowledge and psychological refinement, drawing insights not only from Western thought but also from Eastern mystical traditions such as Sufism and Vedanta. Nietzsche's Dionysian vision of ecstatic becoming and Jung's concept of the mystic archetype illuminate how the human psyche transcends material concerns, undergoes processes of ego dissolution and symbolic rebirth, and attains a mystical elevation beyond the self.

This study demonstrates that mystical experience, informed by both Eastern and Western perspectives, constitutes a universal avenue for humans to seek wholeness, meaning, and transformation in contemporary life. These Eastern mystical traditions emphasize the cultivation of inner stillness, meditation, and the transcendence of ego-bound consciousness. By integrating these insights, modern individuals can navigate the psychological and spiritual challenges of contemporary life, moving beyond material attachments toward a higher, unified state of being.

Literature Review

Simultaneous study of Nietzsche and Jung in the fields of mysticism, psychology, and tragic philosophy, particularly focusing on the Dionysian archetype, has been limited in academic research. While studies such as *Nietzsche and Jung: The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites* by Lucy Haskinson examine the similarities and differences between the two thinkers' models of the self, they rarely address the connection of these theories to Islamic and Christian mystical patterns. Jung's psychological analyses of Dionysus as a positive and transformative force, especially in works such as *Psychology and Alchemy* and *Bong and Mysticism*, have received relatively little attention in scholarly texts. Moreover, *The Red Book* (Liber Novus, edited by Sonu Shamdasani) offers insights into Jung's personal experiences and his understanding of the collective unconscious and the mystical path of the individual. On the other hand, Nietzsche, in his classic works such as *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), explores the tragic experience, Dionysus as a symbol of life's ecstatic intensity, and the process of self-transformation, which contains notable quasi-mystical and psychological dimensions.

These gaps in research highlight the need for a comparative study that examines the applicability of these theories alongside traditional mystical models. Additionally, studies such as Ehsani Estahbanti and Shafiei Taban (2022) analyze the mystical psychology of religion based on Jung's theories, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between psychological and mystical patterns.

Introduction

Mysticism, across philosophical and religious traditions, represents not merely a theological experience but a profound psychological and existential journey toward transformation and unity. Figures such as Nietzsche and Jung reinterpret this path: Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy embraces inner chaos and ecstatic rupture, while Jung's

psychological mysticism employs archetypal symbolism to guide individuation and wholeness. This article compares their approaches, situating them within broader mystical traditions, including Sufism and Christian mysticism, and argues that mysticism—whether theological, philosophical, or psychological—remains a vital framework for understanding human self-realization. In the early twentieth century, experimentation in literature, psychology, and the visual arts reflected a shared interest in portraying inner life, dreams, visions, and fantasies. Writers sought to move beyond the constraints of representational traditions, while psychologists explored creative and unconscious processes similar to those examined by artists.¹

Gustav Fechner, a founder of psychophysics and experimental psychology, wrote about the soul life of plants and envisioned the earth as a living organism. Simultaneously, writers such as André Breton and Philippe Soupault studied the work of psychical researchers and abnormal psychologists, including Frederick Myers, Theodore Flournoy, and Pierre Janet, while W. B. Yeats employed spiritualistic automatic writing to develop the poetic psychocosmology presented in *A Vision*. Across all fields, these efforts reflected a quest for spiritual and cultural renewal.²

Mystical religious experiences involve encountering the sacred, individually or collectively, reflecting a natural human inclination. Jung (1875–1961) viewed these experiences as rooted in both consciousness and, more profoundly, the collective unconscious, which contains universal archetypes shared by all humans (Ehsani Estahbanti & Shafiei Taban, 2022; Moreno, 1991:6; Mousavi, 2015:105). Dreams and imaginations often express these archetypes, enriched by mystical traditions such as Islam.

Comparing Religious and Modern Mysticism

The term *religion* comes from the Latin *religio*, meaning conscientious reflection on the sacred. Jung's understanding of the sacred aligns with Rudolf Otto, who defines religious experience as awe—a mix of fear and fascination toward the divine. Otto views the sacred as a complex phenomenon, combining rational and non-rational elements, evolving from primitive emotions into institutionalized religion, and not bound by ethics (Otto, 1923/2001, p. 158). Despite various definitions, all agree that religion involves belief in a sacred or supernatural entity (Ehsani Estahbanti & Shafiei Taban, 2022).

Religious mysticism, rooted in established faiths such as Islam, Christianity, and Sufism, emphasizes experiential union with the Divine and is guided by ethical frameworks, ritual practices, and symbolic language. Mystical experiences are often ineffable, interpreted as encounters with God or archetypal forces, and aim at inner unity and spiritual realization (Schimmel, 1975; Underhill, 1911). In Islamic mysticism, the Alast covenant and Rumi's teachings illustrate the innate human predisposition toward divine knowledge, with the ultimate goal being the rediscovery of intrinsic religiosity and the manifestation of the divine within (Eslami Nodushan, 1973; Golkariyan, 2019).

Modern mysticism, in contrast, often emerges in secular or psychological contexts and emphasizes personal transformation, self-realization, and inner wholeness. Jung interprets mystical experiences as archetypal phenomena within the unconscious, contributing to the process of individuation, wherein the psyche integrates its layers and achieves balance through the realization of the Self as a manifestation of the divine archetype (Jung, 1959; Palmer, 2006). Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian similarly frames transformative experiences as chaotic yet life-affirming forces that enable existential authenticity and creative renewal (Kaufmann, 1966).

Mystical Transformation in Jungian Psychology and Nietzschean

Philosophy

Mystical transformation in Jungian psychology involves experiences that shift consciousness through encounters with archetypal forces perceived as divine, numinous, or spiritually significant (Firoozi & Hosseini, 2017, p. 96; Fromm, 1980). Jung's concept of individuation, introduced in *Psychological Types* (1921), describes a process of self-realization in which the individual integrates unconscious contents, encounters the Self archetype, and achieves psychological wholeness by balancing opposites (Palmer, 2006, pp. 203–212; Argyle, 2003, p. 23). This process parallels Sufi notions of spiritual awakening, where recognition of the pre-existent, innate self leads to unity with the divine (Argyle, 2008, p. 336; Eslami Nodushan, 1973, p. 13; Golkariyan, 2019, p. 5).

Mystical experiences are often ineffable, transcending ordinary language and requiring symbolic expression (Plotinus, 2000, p. 84; James, 2002, p. 297; Winfield, 1883, p. 6; Hatab, 2015, p. 3). Jung interprets such experiences as archetypal phenomena emerging from the collective unconscious (Jung, 1959), guiding individuation through symbolic death and rebirth, akin to the role of Dionysus in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which emphasizes ecstatic dissolution and renewal toward existential authenticity (Kaufmann, 1966). Both Jungian and Nietzschean frameworks, as well as mystical traditions like Sufism and Christian mysticism, highlight transformative journeys toward unity, ego dissolution, and integration of unconscious elements (Schimmel, 1975; Underhill, 1911; Nasr, 2006; Smith, 2003; Forman, 1990).

He perceived it as an encounter with the "direct living God, who stands omnipotent and free above the Bible and Church." ³

He experienced profound solitude before God, realizing his true responsibility began in that moment, a direct encounter with the living God that his father had lacked. This sense of being chosen contributed to his disillusionment with the Church during First Communion, where he found "an absence of God and no religion"

(Nietzsche, 1872; Jung, 1959). Nietzsche and Jung both stress transformation through symbolic death and rebirth: Nietzsche through Dionysian ecstatic chaos and creative frenzy as a path to existential authenticity (Nietzsche, 1872; Kaufmann, 1966), Jung through individuation, the integration of conscious and unconscious elements for psychic wholeness (Jung, 1959). Dionysus serves as a shared archetype: for Nietzsche, the life-affirming power of chaos; for Jung, a guiding symbol from the collective unconscious (Nietzsche, 1872; Jung, 1959). Nietzsche's "God is dead" signals the death of external moral authority, paralleling mystical practices of ego-annihilation (*fanā'*) as a route to renewal (Nietzsche, 1882; Corbin, 1978). Both thinkers position symbolic death and rebirth as central to existential and spiritual transformation, mirroring mystical experiences (Eliade, 1964; Hillman, 1992).

Similarly, Jung's individuation parallels mystical integration of shadow elements and the transcendence of the limited ego, akin to Sufi concepts of *fanā'* (annihilation) and *baqā'* (subsistence) (Jung, 1969; Schimmel, 1975). Mystical narratives stress confronting chaos and paradox, reflected in Nietzsche's and Jung's notion of the 'inner abyss' or 'shadow' as essential to transformation (Eliade, 1958; Jung, 1959). Jungian archetypes guide individuals through existential trials toward wholeness, highlighting the enduring role of archetypal patterns in humanity's pursuit of transcendence (Neumann, 1954; Nasr, 2006).

Mystical Archetypes and the Unconscious: Logos, Eros, and the Primordial Dance (Sufi whirling: *Sama*⁴)

In the shadowed depths of the psyche, the eternal dialogue of Logos and Eros unfolds. The sage of wisdom confronts the maiden of desire, not as mere figures but as living archetypes, primordial forces shaping both thought and feeling. From the unconscious they arise like echoes of forgotten truths, awakening the Dionysian impulse toward transformation. Beneath their steps coils the serpent, dark

witness to instinct and the unknown. This inner drama mirrors the mystical dance of the Sufi dervish, whose whirling leads to *fana*, the dissolution of the self, and the realization of unity with the eternal. *Sama*, the instructive music of the Sufis, purifies the heart and transforms states, opening the way to *wajd* (ecstasy) and an illuminative perception of existence. From this practice emerge mystical concepts such as *tawajud*, *wajd*, *wujud*, *waqt*, *sukr*, and *shath* (Sabzevari, Saffari, & Heydari, 2024). Within such visions, Logos embodies the principle of order and foresight, while Eros carries the force of desire and becoming. Together they enact the tension that propels the psyche beyond the ordinary, toward creativity, transcendence, and the Dionysian embrace of the unconscious, where chaos and insight converge in the pursuit of the *Übermensch*. The sketches a cosmology tied to Jung's *Septem Sermones et Mortuos*. It describes the struggle of different ages: the present ruled by the "Frog God" (a union of Christian God and Satan), and a future age of harmony. The human being is depicted as a composite of animal (serpent), human soul, and divine/celestial soul, which can fall apart unless the Above and Below are united. Symbols like the serpent, phallus, moon, sun, and celestial mother represent instincts, sexuality, death, and transcendence. The sun and moon are "God's eyes," fullness and emptiness, while the planets embody other divine forces. The Gods are countless, impersonal cosmic forces that influence existence. The *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation) is the path to becoming a true individual, comparable to a star in the cosmos. Those who fail remain restless dead souls. At the centre stands Abraxas, the terrifying God of creation and destruction, both life and universal death. He must not be worshipped, only acknowledged, as he is inescapable. Opposed to him is the one inner God, solitary, peaceful, and guiding, who stands beyond death and change, offering wisdom and safety amid Abraxas's chaos.⁵

The imagery described in the visions conveys these psychic dynamics allegorically rather than as literal experiences. Dark, earthly depths signify the unconscious, while gazing into this darkness allows the

psyche's contents to emerge without interference from conscious expectation. Figures like the prophet and Salome step unexpectedly into consciousness, reflecting recurring mythological patterns in the human spirit. The progression from darkness to a sunny garden, with its blooming red trees and cool wells, symbolizes the development of Eros as a source of creativity and knowledge, while the wells represent the steadying influence of Logos. Moreover, emphasizes that repression of psychic principles leads to degeneration and moral or psychological suffering. Eros, when subjugated by Logos, assumes a distorted and morally questionable form, as seen in the negative traits associated with Salome. True psychic integration requires acknowledging and embracing the repressed aspects of the soul, allowing both Logos and Eros to fulfil their potential and achieve balance.⁶

Conclusion

This study frames mysticism not merely as an esoteric religious phenomenon but as a fundamental existential and psychological process with ongoing relevance in contemporary thought. By juxtaposing Nietzsche's Dionysian paradigm with Jung's concept of individuation, it identifies convergent symbolic structures in their approaches to transformation, ego dissolution, and creative renewal, elements rooted in classical mystical traditions such as Sufism and Christian mysticism. The analysis positions mysticism as a transdisciplinary language of transformation, bridging philosophy, psychology, and spirituality. Nietzsche's reevaluation of Dionysus challenges conventional rationality and morality, presenting ecstatic chaos as a catalyst for existential authenticity, while Jung situates mystical experience within the collective unconscious, emphasizing the integrative process of psychic wholeness. This synthesis highlights mysticism's enduring heuristic value for understanding the human condition beyond doctrinal boundaries and suggests its potential to inform contemporary psychotherapy, cultural studies,

and philosophical anthropology. The study advocates further interdisciplinary research to explore mysticism's transformative potential in both theoretical and applied contexts, fostering innovative approaches to healing, meaning-making, and self-realization in the modern era.

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Endnotes

¹See Jacqueline Carroy, *Les personnalités multiples et doubles: entre science et fiction* (Paris: PUF, 1993).

² See Gustav Theodor Fechner, *The Religion of a Scientist*, ed. and tr. Walter Lowrie (New York: Pantheon, 1946).

³ Memories, p. 57.

⁴ Sabzevari, Sh., Saffari, N., & Heydari, F. (2024). *Interpretation and Analysis of Persian Language and Literature Texts (Dehkhoda)*, Autumn, Issue 61, pp. 1–22.

⁵ This discussion occasionally draws directly on my analysis of the development of Jung's psychological theories, as detailed in *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology: The Dream of a Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Jung himself referred to this work both as *Liber Novus* and as *The Red Book*, the latter being the more widely recognized title. For the sake of consistency, I have used *Liber Novus* throughout, as evidence suggests it may be the original title.

⁶ Jung here employs a metaphor used by Jacob Burkhardt to describe the primordial images of Faust and Oedipus, which he had cited in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* (1912, CW B, §56n).

