

Gaetano Roberto Buccola, *Forme del centro. Percorsi analitici dal
"Viaggio al centro della Terra" al nucleo dell'uomo* (Palermo: Nuova
Ipsa, 2013)

The passage above contains, in a nutshell, the core theme, the valuable strengths and the somewhat obvious weaknesses of the book reviewed hereby.

Buccola's volume is a token of Jungian analytic psychology, also known as 'deep' or 'complex' psychology. It opens by taking its moves from Jules Verne's 1864 *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* as a plausible allegorical novel to be mined for its numerous suggestive references to the exploration of strange, mysterious and sometimes terrifying deeper layers of reality. As Verne's heroes plunge into the dark, fascinating yet treacherous underbelly of the Earth that can be reached through the crater of an Icelandic volcano, so does Jungian analytic psychology probe the inevitably opaque, intriguing yet disquieting depths of the human soul that psychoanalysis can disclose to the inquiring mind. *Via* one preface, one *proemium*, one introduction, fifteen chapters, one epilogue and one postscript, Buccola's book enumerates and discusses a variety of interpretations of psychic phenomena orbiting around the pivotal notion of the individualising Self (i.e. a person's whole psyche, including the collective and individual unconscious) as distinguished from the ego (i.e. a person's consciousness). Allegedly, all of these interpretations are derived from Verne's novel, which seemingly provides an almost inexhaustible series of opportunities for reflection based upon conceptual associations, imaginative connections, phonetic resemblances or "coincidences" (173), metaphorical readings, historical analogies, and creative suggestions, which in turn engender many more. Thus, the book offers a vast collection of images relating primarily to ancient mythologies, cosmologies and philosophies, all of which should help the reader to unearth and meditate upon the magmatic psychic forces that are at work behind, beneath and beyond the conscious layer of conveniently clear, often computable and largely communicable abstractions of ordinary common sense and official science.

The plethora of images and related comments are rhapsodically yet helpfully ordered by the book's author, who tackles the suggestive notions of travel, new humanity, earth, island, unconscious, centre, fire, creation, verticality (or high-and-low), cavern, labyrinth, underground, hell, dream, water, and mermaid (here, I am limiting myself to the starting points of each of the book's fifteen chapters, which then subdivide into an even greater number of derived notions). Taken together, all of these suggestive notions constitute not only a rich collection of food for thought, but also a representative selection of imagery and conceptions about which much Jungian psychoanalysis has been concerning itself. Also, characteristically Jungian is the excavation and elucidation of these suggestive notions in light of mostly ancient mythical, religious and philosophical imageries and conceptions, which

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should grant us a better chance to approach and appreciate the deepest regions of human language and thought, if not the aboriginal fountainhead of the understanding of the world and human self-understanding i.e. the species' archetypes. The overall aim being not a clear-cut and conclusive reduction of deeper psychic phenomena to some standards of measurable objective knowledge, inter-subjectively univocal communication or nomological abstract categorisation, but rather a candid and courageous leap into the ineluctably ineffable realm of fundamental psychic substrata, which all clearer and better expressible ones presuppose and from which are themselves derived. When reading this book, a philosophically trained individual like myself is reminded of Vico's and Nietzsche's realisation of the ineluctably metaphorical nature of all human languages and systems for conceptualisation, the modern 'scientific' one included; as well as of Hegel's and Castoriadis' insistence on the socio-historical creativity of human cultures, which have produced across the centuries previously unforeseeable novel imaginational means for the plausible comprehension and alleged knowledge of reality. Not to mention Plato's and Kant's theories of forms, which Jung himself discussed extensively and adapted to his own description of the psychological structure common to all members of humankind.

Despite Jung's own medical studies and deep interest in both the theory of relativity and quantum physics, peaked in his collaboration with Nobel-prize laureate physicist Wolfgang Pauli, contemporary psychologists are rather sceptical *vis-à-vis* the scientific value of analytical psychology, if not of psychoanalysis in general, especially in the Anglophone world. Jung's research in the occult and paranormal phenomena, not to mention his quasi-mystical writings such as the posthumous 2009 *Red Book's* (or *Liber Novus'*) prophecies, have not worked in his favour. Equally negative are likely to have been his extensive studies on alchemy and possibly his familiarity with classical and medieval Latin, which most contemporary social scientists quite simply ignore. True to Jung's interests and legacy, Buccola's volume contains recurrent references to dead languages, ancient doctrines and archaic modes of experience, alchemic conceptions being particularly prominent. Quantitative methodologies are absent and standard qualitative ones reducible to the sole reporting of patients' dreams. If a mainstream psychologist or, more broadly, a typical academic social scientist were to dismiss this book as vague, unorthodox and essentially unscientific, then it would be hard to contradict her. Buccola seems to be aware of the issue of analytic psychology's questionable "scientificity" (73), but he is certainly not worried by it, for he leaves it aside, if not outside. Perhaps, admitting the unscientific character of Jungian analytic psychology would simply mean a loss for science, given also how important many rigorous yet academically unscientific pursuits can be in both individual and collective life

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(e.g. painting, drama, cinema, ethics, axiology, theology, jurisprudence).

Were I to point out any shortcomings in the book, I would rather opt for its author's choice of Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* as a declared pivotal reference. Whilst I cannot question Buccola's personal recollection and use of this novel as a source of inspiration, it is dubious that a positivist popular writer such as Jules Verne may have ever intended to probe the psychic depths that Buccola and Jungian psychoanalysts explore. Also, few significant passages or themes of Verne's novel are mentioned and discussed in the first, third and fifth chapter of the book, which deals largely and predominantly with *other* sources, passages and themes. The choice of Verne's 1864 novel as a point of reference worth mentioning in the book's subtitle ("Analytical journeys from *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* to the Nucleus of the Human Being") seems somewhat exaggerated, if not even misleading. Heraclitus, medieval and early-modern alchemy would have been possibly more relevant choices, given the frequent references to them, not to mention Jung himself, whom Buccola either quotes or refers to far more often and in a more poignant way than Verne's novel.

Finally, the book should be commended for the inclusion of an analytical index, which the scholarly-minded reader is going to find helpful.

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