

11th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference :

Title: Creativity/Creation at the Crossroads

Names of all Authors:

Karen Adler

Ourimbah TAFE, The Journey Journal, One Apple Recovery

Website: www.thejourneyjournal.webs.com

Email: karenadler222@gmail.com

Teresa McLaren

Teresa McLaren Art, Illustration and Design

Website: www.teresamclaren.com

Email: teresamclaren@gmail.com

Biographies:

Karen Adler - Dip. Transpersonal Art Therapy, Dip. Alcohol and Other Drugs/Mental Health/Community Services, Grad. Dip. Material Anthropology/Museology, B. Fine Art, Dip. Creative Writing, BA Library/Information Science

Karen is a Transpersonal Art Therapist, an artist, writer, curator, anthropologist. She is a firm believer in the inherent healing qualities of the Arts and their deeper significance in the world. She has completed the Camino de Santiago three times, this has reified for her the journey nature of life and she runs pilgrimage retreats in Australia.

Teresa McLaren - B. Sc., M.Sc., CMI

Teresa has a B.Sc. Human Nutrition from the University of British Columbia and an M.Sc. Biomedical Communications from the University of Toronto. She is a Certified Medical Illustrator and currently works as an art tutor, artist, and freelance illustrator. Teresa is a member of the Sacred Arts Guild of Alberta and the Calgary Jung Society.

Abstract:

During times of great change, cultures and individuals often create something to mark the process of transformation and the eventual integration of the old into the new.

There are many examples of this religious and cultural clash resulting in material culture which reflects this transition. The resultant edifices often become pilgrimage sites of deep significance to people from multiple faiths.

Individuals aren't exempt from culture clash and, for some, this results in chaos and confusion as a side effect of competing belief systems. When deep turmoil happens in an individual, this sometimes manifests as visions, voices, and/or connection with divine powers. Individuals often make art as a way of communicating their ineffable experiences.

When viewed from a biomedical perspective, this turmoil may be misdiagnosed as psychosis. When viewed from a cross-cultural, archetypal perspective, the 'symptoms' may be considered conversion experiences, spiritual transformations - transitory experiences which can be moved through.

We will look at this dual phenomenon of cultural and individual transformation using the examples of Norway's Stave Churches and the iconography of Ireland's St. Brigid.

Introduction:

This presentation is designed to highlight the deep, universal connections between Creation and creativity, pilgrimage, transformation and self-knowledge which is often the result of pilgrimage and the relevance of the arts, particularly the combination of visual art and storytelling, to these processes.

Artists have been associated with spirituality since time immemorial. This has changed in recent times due to the rise of individualism, materialism and the secularisation of society. This connection between the arts and spirituality is present in all cultures, being particularly evident in times of cultural transformation, a change from one belief system to another.

Artists bring forth and make visible from within, symbols which are universal, multi-layered, multi-faceted. The various depths of these symbols are evident dependant upon the individual's level of knowledge and of their stage of initiation. Material culture such as churches, shrines are the result of such connections with the divine. Often, they also incorporate symbols of emerging from the old ways to the new.

The pagan origins of Christianity are a perfect example of this transition from an old belief system to a new one. There is often great turmoil over a long period of time during which the old gives birth to or is

replaced by the new. The adaptation of the pagan goddess, Brigid, into Christianity as St. Brigid and the construction of Stave Churches containing Viking symbols are material culture representations of this transition from the old to the new.

This act of creation also happens on an individual level when a person experiences culture clash and/or is overwhelmed by mystical experiences. Often, the result is artwork which assists the individual to transition from an old way of being into a new one. The artwork usually draws from the Collective Unconscious, first identified by psychologist and psychiatrist, Carl Jung. This is quite often an unconscious act on the part of the individual, and the symbolism and deeper meaning is initially unrecognised.

The process of creativity inherently involves process, movement, exploration, mindfulness, recognition of internal states. These attributes are also present in pilgrimage. The split between the inalienable connection between the mind and body, humanity and the earth, is what has gone wrong and continues to go wrong in the world today.

We live in times of extreme and very visible change. Disaffection with the political system, the recognition of both powerlessness and the abuse of power, climate change, war, the refugee crisis, poverty are strong components of our world today. Some people, particularly the most vulnerable, shatter as a result of these forces.

Literature Review:

Because of the invisible, intangible nature of both the spiritual realm and of psychological processes, architecture, art and art-making are particularly effective in making these areas able to be viewed and therefore better understood. Despite the obvious connections, we were unable to find anything in the literature that directly combines all the components of spirituality, the arts, pilgrimage as transformation, Campbell's archetype of The Hero's Journey and spiritual emergency.

Our use of examples of material culture, Brigid/St. Brigid and Stave Churches was designed to build upon research which deals with the above areas of study separately and to combine them into a whole. The incorporation of snake symbols in Norway's Stave Churches is a particularly powerful example both of pagan beliefs being retained despite conversion to Christianity and of the change in meaning of the symbol itself. The pagan goddess, Brigid's, transformation into Saint Brigid exemplifies syncretism between prechristian/Christian symbols.

Most current teaching and research in psychiatry either negates the spiritual component of mental distress or views it as symptomatic of ‘disease’, evidence of a disordered brain. Our research comes from the perspective of lived experience, of storytelling as both a symbol of change, and an innate, cross-cultural, human structure - i.e. Campbell’s Hero’s Journey archetype.

Articles in Basu et al come from a western clinical perspective which favours diagnosis. They refer to potentially transformative experiences which could well be seen as spiritual emergencies if viewed through an informed, alternative lens, as mental ‘illness’. Those of us with lived experience in this area reject the validity of this lens as the dominant one.

Methodology:

Both the subject of the paper and the backgrounds of the authors necessitated a qualitative methodological approach, deliberately eschewing quantitative methods as incompatible with our approach to the subject matter. This latter decision is due to three reasons:

1. Observations by both authors and their observations that quantitative methods in this area have been influenced by vested interests, rendering the resultant research questionable.
2. As both religious tourism/pilgrimage and extreme states of consciousness are experiential, highly individual, subjective, body-based ‘experiences’, we decided that qualitative methods would yield a more nuanced appreciation of the area in question.
3. The authors are highlighting the ‘process rather than product’ and the storytelling, narrative nature of the arts, of journey/pilgrimage and of extreme states of consciousness - all of which are to do with movement, exploration rather than fixed state and assumptions. Quantitative methods in this particular area tend to result in fixed states and objectivity whereas fluidity and subjectivity are what is required.

Smith’s distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is relevant here. ‘Quantitative research perceives truth as something which describes an objective reality, separate from the observer and waiting to be discovered. Qualitative research ... is concerned with an evolving reality created through people’s experiences.’ [Smith, 2017] This distinction is particularly relevant to our paper. To illustrate: It may be relevant and useful to count the number of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago, divide them into gender, country of origin etc. But we believe that to compile a list of ‘symptoms’ that are typical of extreme states of consciousness, use that as a basis for diagnosis [often misdiagnosis], which then

becomes a label, requires medication and ultimately changes the person's sense of self is both dangerous and unnecessary.

Thus, our research methods included participant observation, historical research, unstructured interviews and personal communication with people aware of the connections between religious and spiritual tourism, the arts, Campbell's archetype of the journey and extreme states of consciousness. Cross cultural comparisons were essential due to the universal nature of the subject matter plus the two examples which the authors have chosen to illustrate their points.

Results:

Our research clearly shows the value of recognising the connections between the arts, pilgrimage, and Campbell's Hero's Journey archetype. The use of a cross-cultural, non-ethnocentric approach to the phenomenon of spiritual emergencies plus the application of myth, narrative and storytelling techniques enable a sense of movement, process and change to enter the awareness of the individual and to produce different consequences.

Conclusion and Discussion:

Our use of the material culture of Ireland's Brigid/St. Brigid and Norway's Stave Churches shows the transition from an old belief system to a new one, with the resultant edifices still retaining the esoteric, hidden symbolism of the old ways. This historical, cultural phenomenon reflects the creation of artworks by individuals undergoing transformations known as spiritual emergencies/emergencies. Both are examples of deep processes of converting an intangible, invisible, spiritual phenomena or experience into physical form, of making the unconscious, conscious.

Being aware of these connections between cultural and individual transformation brings a greater understanding of both. This deeper understanding is essential for the recognition of natural but tumultuous processes which are, because of the current rapid rate of change, becoming more common in our world today.

The elevation of science over religion/spirituality has removed significant coping mechanisms of whole societies. There are grave consequences from this imbalance - individually, culturally and historically. A presentation on Fatima as a pilgrimage site at the 2018 IRTP conference gave me a confronting and very clear example of viewing the phenomenon of spiritual emergency from only a biomedical perspective. A

century of pilgrimage, prayer, belief, architecture as sacred site, would have been wiped from history if the visions of the Fatima children had been interpreted as delusions and hallucinations. A transformative experience, if viewed through the lens of scientific certainty, materialism, biomedicine, could have been misdiagnosed as indicative of severe mental illness requiring medications for life.

Viewing the past through the lens of Creation and creativity at the crossroads enables us to see methods of integration and survival. It enables us to view life as sacred, as incorporating multiple realities, both the invisible and the visible, and different interpretations of these realities over time and through space.

Bibliography:

Abramovitch, H., Kirmayer, L.J. (2003) *The Relevance of Jungian Psychology for Cultural Psychiatry*, *Transcultural Psychiatry* Vol 40(2): 155–163

Adler, K. (2016) *Dreampainter*, self-published, Erina, Australia.

Adler, K., McLaren, T. (2018) *Too Much Light: The Art of The Hero's Journey*, presentation at the 10th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage (IRTP) Conference, Santiago, Spain.

Arrien, A. (1995) *Spiritual Gates of Initiation Found in Myth and Art*.

Basu, H., Littlewood, R., Steinforth, A.S. (Ed's) (2017) *Spirit & Mind: Mental Health at the Intersection of Religion and Psychiatry*. Lit Verlag, Munich, Germany.

Billock, J. (2017) *Norway's Medieval Wooden Churches Look Plucked From a Fairy Tale*, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/explore-norways-wooden-stave-churches-180967021/>

Blick, S. (2012) *Art and the Medieval Pilgrimage for Grove Encyclopaedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, Oxford at https://www.academia.edu/3604133/Art_and_the_Medieval_Pilgrimage

Boisen, A.T. (1969) *Out Of The Depths: An Autobiographical Study Of Mental Disorder And Religious Experience*, https://archive.org/stream/outofthedepthsan012920mbp/outofthedepthsan012920mbp_djvu.txt, USA

Bucke, R. M., M.D. (1901) *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, E.P Dutton and Company, Inc.

Campbell, J. (1949) *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Campbell, J., Moyers, B. (1988) *The Power of Myth*, New York: Doubleday.

Coleman, S. (2012) *Memory as Absence and Presence: Pilgrimage, "Archeo-Theology," and the Creativity of Destruction*, *Journeys*, Volume 13, Issue 1, 1–20 at https://lookaside.fbsbx.com/file/Pilgrimage%20%26%20Archeo-Theology.pdf?token=AWyxTFoL_b3TwzcsKLttd-5hwNYm2e7gNO_r

ioPVCRYF3rbN20ULU7MZvo4faJQYDDPspRSIshBhyIIg3g_ymIhH5B6UJ7Odz1VwXtLrQXqj6jm8
DGbmQiOcruxjPP7ZICQK2-1ew1YkeZxhaXsUSSOY

Frey, L.R., Sunwolf. *Storytelling: The Power of Narrative Communication and Interpretation* in

Frey, N. (1998) *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Compostela*, UC Press.

Grof, S., Grof, C. (Ed's) (1989) *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes A Crisis*,

Haugan, I. (n.d.) *Why are dragons and monsters carved into Norway's Stave Churches?*, The Historical

and Cultural Society of Clay County. (n.d.) *Hopperstad Stave Church*, [https://www.medievalists.net/](https://www.medievalists.net/2019/05/why-are-dragons-and-monsters-carved-into-norways-stave-churches/)

2019/05/why-are-dragons-and-monsters-carved-into-norways-stave-churches/, [https://](https://www.hcsconline.org/the-hopperstad-stave-church.html)

www.hcsconline.org/the-hopperstad-stave-church.html

Kahl, C., Ting, A.E. (2016) *Self Discovery and Backpackers: A conceptual paper about liminal*

experience, International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage, Vol. 4, Issue 1, [https://](https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1097&context=ijrtp&fbclid=IwAR32BMmWOiuu1taGwG4LHLwR4cN-8fWNltbEerMqo8yi6A0ax0tDiDLQfs)

[arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1097&context=ijrtp&fbclid=IwAR32BMmWOi-](https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1097&context=ijrtp&fbclid=IwAR32BMmWOiuu1taGwG4LHLwR4cN-8fWNltbEerMqo8yi6A0ax0tDiDLQfs)

[uu1taGwG4LHLwR4cN-8fWNltbEerMqo8yi6A0ax0tDiDLQfs](https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1097&context=ijrtp&fbclid=IwAR32BMmWOiuu1taGwG4LHLwR4cN-8fWNltbEerMqo8yi6A0ax0tDiDLQfs)

Lukoff, David. DSM-IV Religious & Spiritual Problems, [http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/dsm4/](http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/dsm4/dsmrsproblem.pdf)

[dsmrsproblem.pdf](http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/dsm4/dsmrsproblem.pdf)

McLaren, T. (2017) Review of 'Cultural Perspectives on Mental Wellbeing' by Natalie Tobert,

Paranthropology, Vol 8, No.1, <http://paranthropologyjournal.weebly.com/free-pdf.html>

One Apple Recovery. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/565027873599852/>

Phillips, R.E., Lukoff, D., Stone, M.K. (2009) *Integrating the spirit within psychosis: Alternative*

conceptualisations of psychotic disorders. The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 41(1), 61-80

Robinson, W.P. and Giles, H. (Ed's) (2001) *The New Handbook of Language and Social Psychology*,

pp119-135, NY.

Shades of Awakening. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1389895917996438/>

Shaia, A.J. (2019) Personal communication.

Shaia, A.J. (2017) *Heart and Mind: The Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation*, Second

Edition. Journey of Quadratos, New Mexico, USA.

Smith. S. (2017) *Appropriateness of Quantitative vs Qualitative Research*, unpublished paper for

Illumination : The Role of The Arts exhibition/public forum, Hardys Bay, Australia.

Too Much Light: The Art of The Hero's Journey. <https://www.facebook.com/toomuchlightTHJ/>

Appendix.

Definitions:

Extreme states of consciousness - aka spiritual crisis, spiritual emergency, conversion experience, spiritual awakening, anomalous experiences outside the realm of consensual reality.

Syncretism is the combining of different beliefs, while blending practices of various schools of thought. Syncretism involves the merging or assimilation of several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, thus asserting an underlying unity and allowing for an inclusive approach to other faiths. Syncretism also occurs commonly in expressions of arts and culture (known as eclecticism) as well as politics (syncretic politics). Origin: early 17th century: from modern Latin *syncretismus*, from Greek *sunkrētismos*, from *sunkrētizein* 'unite against a third party', from *sun-* 'together' + *krēs* 'Cretan' (originally with reference to ancient Cretan communities).