



**Breaking of the Vessels:
Destruction and Creation in the Art of Anselm Kiefer**

Mary Wells Barron

*When will you learn, myself, to be
A dying leaf on a living tree?*

(Edna St. Vincent Millay)

Behind all of Anselm Kiefer's art sounds the leitmotiv of destruction and creation, both personal and collective. My first experience of his art was physical. I walked into the largest room of the St. Louis Art Museum shortly



Figure 2 *Breaking of the Vessels*
(detail)

after my return from almost six years in Zurich. I was seeking familiar and beloved images to help contain my re-entry anxiety. What I found was anything but familiar. I encountered this monumental sculpture that filled the wall between the two west doorways, rose almost to the ceiling, was made of metal, and seemed to pour out shattered glass that lay strewn on the floor in front of me.

I was stopped in my tracks in much the same way one might be who suddenly came upon a beautiful and dangerous animal. Frozen to the spot, stunned by what had seized me, I had no idea what stood before me. But my body said what my soul seemed to know, for a single tear ran down my cheek. It came from my right eye, the eye in which I have been blind since birth. Then there was only silence. By some fate, I was totally alone for the next twenty minutes. No visitors, no guards walked past. As

I began to emerge from my encounter with this “terrible beauty,” it felt as if I might spend a good part of my life exploring its mystery. “...The symbols of the Self,” Jung wrote, “arise in the depths of the body and they express its materiality as much as the structure of the perceiving consciousness. The symbol is thus a living body, *corpus et anima*” (CW91, par, 291).

Some months later I came upon the words of an art critic who spoke of seeing a woman acquaintance, on

catching her first glimpse of Kiefer’s work, almost fall down. He wrote:

What’s unclear is why so many of us experience Kiefer’s works—even in the first split second of a first encounter...as so much more than gratifying aesthetic presences. His big paintings instill a feeling of conviction bordering on religious faith, an intuition of knowledge which proves remarkably inarticulate when you try to debrief people about it. (Schjeldahl, March 1988, p. 119)

We recognize in these words a meeting with the numinous, that which is beyond all description. Silence is our response to the presence of the divine. Silence always cloaks those moments in our work as analysts when words are neither adequate nor necessary.

In writing about the overwhelming power of archetypal images which reflect the ultimate reality, Jung said, “They make one convinced that they actually express it and establish it as a fact. This makes discussion uncommonly



Figure 3 Breaking of the Vessels

difficult if not impossible” (CW11, par.558). Kiefer’s sculpture, the *Breaking of the Vessels*, is an archetypal image of the alchemical *opus*. One might say that it is a visual representation of *Answer to Job*. It is the Gnostic myth of creation. At its core all of Anselm Kiefer’s art is concerned with consciousness and the conscious suffering that fuels the process of creation. Kiefer invites us to see what is not visible, to discover the myth behind the history, the energy in the image. He shows us that meaning and madness spring from the same deep well, a well he often depicts containing nuclear fuel rods as metaphor for the energy that transforms consciousness.

Others that I have been with when they first saw the *Breaking of the Vessels* expressed the paradox of its power. One colleague and friend said, “It looks like a murder machine.” Another friend stood silently for a long time and then said, “I feel the blood running through my veins as I look at it.” A third voice was that of a child about five years old. She simply said, “It’s so broken.”

An epilogue came months later when I returned to the museum. I found that the area of broken glass on the floor was now cordoned off by a rope about two feet high. Inquiring why, I was told, “Because a few weeks ago a woman fell into the glass and cut her leg.” I was reminded of the passage in *Answer to Job*: “And just as there is a secret tie between the wound and the weapon, so the affect corresponds to the violence of the deed that caused it” (CW11, par.366). Had not one friend called this a murder machine? Yet, the other had invoked the very essence of life—the blood coursing in her veins. A mystery Dionysian and dismembering is evoked.

What I offer you here is only a glimpse into the meaning and import of Anselm Kiefer’s art. I feel that he holds the place in our age that Michelangelo

held in his. The works arising from Kiefer's genius surpass all effort to define them and any pretension of facile symbolic reading, for his art is truly symbolic as Jung defined this word. It points to the yet unknown and unknowable while simultaneously evoking mythic metaphors and archetypal images of astonishing power.

Anselm Kiefer was born into the darkness of Germany just as World War II was ending. His early work was often a provocation to remember the horror of Nazi Germany. He once said, "I do not identify with Nero or Hitler but I have to reenact what they did just a little bit in order to understand their madness" (Rosenthal, 1987, p. 17). These reenactments were images of the artist giving the Nazi salute in various locations all over Europe.

As his work evolved, remembering became a re-memberment of broken psyche and shattered civilization. He painted works entitled *Osiris* and *Isis* in



Figure 4 *Anthonor*

that order, suggesting destruction and then creation. Another huge painting he

titled *Athanos*. Here the containing vessel appears as the ruin of a great imperial room—reminiscent of the room designed by Speer as the embodiment of the Reich that was to last a thousand years. Kiefer shows us this room as a scarred and burned out shell. We are invited to remember the mythic madness, the archetype gone berserk in the horror of the Holocaust. This once “great” room is the legacy of *Lebensraum*, its blackened walls reminding us of the crematoriums, the rooms of death.

Yet, Kiefer dares to title this *Athanos*. The destroyed room of power becomes an open air cathedral, a *temenos* which may serve as the vessel for collective transformation. In *Athanos* this hollow shell, like the void-like space of Gnostic myth made when God withdrew within himself, is the place in which creation becomes possible. Creation is for the sake of redemption we remember, not the other way around. The *deus absconditus* has left a void but in this emptiness the world is born. Does not the unparalleled destruction of our century require a

creation myth
adequate to it?

Today, at
the millennium,
God’s hand
reaching out
towards Adam’s
on the wall of
the Sistine



Figure 5 Creation of Adam by Michelangelo

Chapel seems a wildly innocent image. We have witnessed the Nazi Holocaust

and those that continue. In our work we see the inner holocausts of psyches where there is, as Winnicott called it, a fear of annihilation that has already happened (Little 1993, p. 135). Wolfgang Giegerich says that the bomb is God. Anselm Kiefer's art seems to bear a similar message. To redeem the horror of history, the archetype of creation must be imaged anew.

Does a creation myth that begins with brokenness rather than wholeness not offer us more hope of redemption? As we can see Michelangelo's hand of God reaching out to touch Adam's as an image of all that the Renaissance meant, so we might see Kiefer's *Breaking the Vessels* as a creation image for our age.

Before we explore this great sculpture, I wish to share two earlier works



Figure 6 *Reclining Man with Branch*

that are more personal in form and feeling. In this first painting, a watercolor titled *Reclining Man with Branch*, we are reminded of the image in *Psychology and Alchemy*, a page from the 14th

Century Ashburn manuscript. The manuscript shows a man with a flowering tree growing from his genitals. The tree Kiefer shows us here is a lifeless branch which emerges from a wound at the place of the heart chakra.

Pendent to Kiefer's painting is one of Kiefer's wife, titled simply, *Julia*. She becomes the image of the Feminine Principle. She stands in a void with only the watery outline of a downward pointing triangle touched by golden light behind. Beneath her feet the ground is like a sea of blood. The redness surrounds her like an aura. She is a goddess pulsing with the liquid of life. In her hands she holds a white marble heart. It is as if Kiefer shows us that this redness, this life force which surrounds her and forms the ground of her being, will infuse this stone heart



Figure 7 *Ashburn Manuscript, Psychology and Alchemy, p. 256*

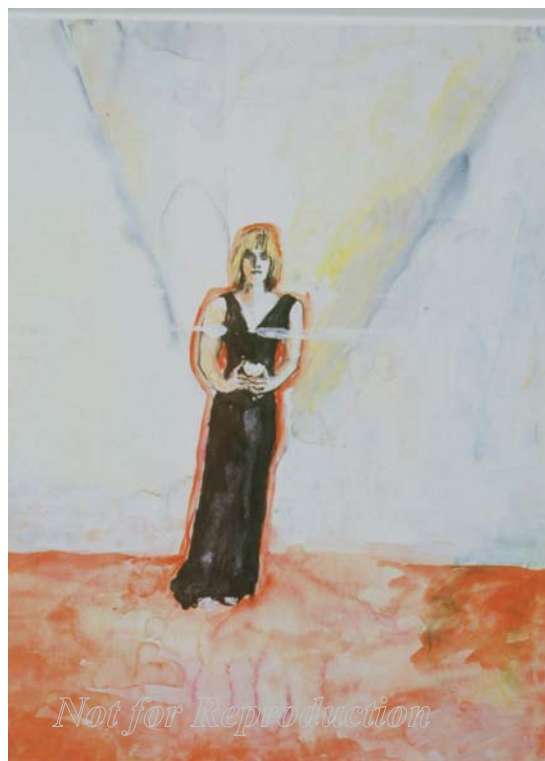


Figure 8 *Julia*

with its life. The calcinated heart, the *albedo*, will be filled by this anima image from the Red Sea. She brings a redness that might flower into greenness; a *viriditas* that can bud from the branch of the reclining man, transforming it into a tree of life. This Tree of Life, alchemy's Philosophical Tree, brings us back to the *Breaking of the Vessels*. This tree of metals is imaged as a bookcase, a container of knowledge.

Jung tells us that it is difficult for modern humans to remember that spiritual growth was once symbolized by metals (CW13, par. 119). Kiefer's *Breaking of the Vessels* reminds us of this deep resonance for he is truly a master alchemist, an alchemist of the 20th Century who is acutely aware of the fact that it is human consciousness, its transformation, that is the *opus*: that the metal to be forged is in the smithy of our soul. Kiefer's art is a joining, a *coniunctio*; it joins together word and image (he often writes across the



Figure 9 *Breaking of the Vessels*

surface of his paintings.), reminding us that as the word becomes flesh so the divine is made human. His work literally embodies the word as it reconnects the material and spiritual world, the visible and the invisible. He shows us these levels of reality in a way and to an extent that is unique in history. At one glance, Kiefer's art annihilates the Cartesian split. Its physical presence blurs the boundary between object and observer. We are pulled by matter into the depth of the collective unconscious. New meaning is given to Jung's idea of the archetype manifesting as both image and emotion.

Kiefer lives with the tension of the opposites. Tangible matter is the *materia* of his work. Lead, iron, copper, glass, straw, ash, and flowers become the ineffable. These alchemical elements, the particles of this world, create the one beyond. The *prima materia* is found everywhere and destruction is an opening to transformation. Kiefer's work might be seen as imaging anew the *Mysterium Conjunctionis*, the union of the opposites.

And this sculpture, the *Breaking of the Vessels*, is the beginning of the work. As we look at it, we feel the enormity of the *opus* in the sheer size of this piece. It stands seventeen feet tall and weighs over seven tons. It is a steel bookcase holding over forty-one folio-sized books of lead inter-leaved with glass. And shards of glass fallen from it lie strewn upon the floor. Its title refers to the Kabbalah's creation story. There are many variations on this myth but we know that Kiefer has based his work on the texts of Isaac Luria—the texts used by Jung in the *Mysterium Conjunctionis*. Let us reacquaint ourselves with this myth of creation.

According to Luria, the creation has three phases: In the beginning, God was Ain-Sof, i.e., without end. In order to make space for primordial creation, God contracted himself, withdrew into himself. This withdrawal into inner exile is known as the act of Tsimtsum. Divine light, the pleroma, was left behind and from it emanated the first ontological man, Adam Kadman, who was a configuration of light, God's first form. The light of the Ain-Sof streamed from his eyes ears, nose, and mouth. This was the light of the Sefirot, divine attributes which formed a matrix of the world made from the letters of the alphabet. The light emanating from Adam Kadman's eyes was too strong for the vessels which were to contain it. The vessels of the six lower Sefirot, therefore broke and the divine light returned to its source. However, a small portion of the light was left behind and mixed with particles of evil. Prior to creation, evil was part of divine power and then, while converging in the process known as Shivrat ha'kelim, or 'the breaking of the vessels,' it acquired its own identity and manifested itself in the world (Le Vitte Harten, p. 10)

The third phase of creation is called Tikun, the restoration of divine unity. In some places it is imaged as the restoration of the cleavage between the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life (Scholem, p. 108). In the Kabbalah it is the reunion of God and His Shekhinah—that is the redemption or return of the Divine Feminine from exile.

With the *Breaking of the Vessels*, Kiefer invites us to contemplate anew this story.

Gone is the male created by Michelangelo in the image of the divine father whose touch imparts to this human



Figure 10 *Creation of Adam by Michelangelo*

biblical Adam all that the Renaissance, and then Enlightenment, man came to be: man, emerging from the darkness of the Middle Ages ennobled but ultimately to become inflated by the divine touch, soon forgetting the source of his power. Kiefer's sculpture calls us back to the catastrophe of creation, to a time before story and history began to divide into two separate rivers, when the great Babylonian library of Nineveh began the process of separating knowledge from the experience of the natural world, the world of the Great Mother, Sophia,

Isis, Shekhinah or the one Kiefer calls *The High Priestess* in an earlier sculpture formed of two joined bookcases.

In Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, we see a lovely image of Sophia, blonde, nestled protectively in the left arm of God. She has no body visible and is less than half the size of her divine partner. She has no real role in this drama of creation and there is no darkness about her.

And then we see *The Creation of Eve*. She is fear filled, intimidated,



Figure 11 *Creation of Eve by Michelangelo*

pleading with the great figure of God the Father.

Certainly these are images of enormous diminishment of the feminine, whether divine or human.

As one stands in front of Kiefer's great metal tree, it feels as if the glass is still falling. And I am told that from time to time museum employees do hear a piece of glass fall. Creation continues—it does so as long we are open to the breaking in of the numinous images of the unconscious, to what in Kabbalistic terms was the process of Emanation.

Kiefer imagines this continuing of creation in a painting titled *Emanation*.



Figure 12 *Emanation*

It is among the most beautiful images of all his work. Over thirteen feet tall, the energy of creation is imaged as molten lead pouring from a burned sky touching the tips of the sea waves below. Like Gideon's Dew in the eighth scene of the *Rosarium*, it refers to new consciousness. In Jung's *Psychology of the Transference*, we read, "...the water is the *aqua sapientiae* and the dew

falling from heaven, the divine gift of illumination and wisdom" (CW16, par.484). And of this stage of alchemical transformation Jung says, "The books must be 'destroyed' lest thinking impair feeling and thus hinder the return of the soul" (CW16, par.488).

With this destruction of the books, we return to the *Breaking of the Vessels*. Here, the books we see look as though they have been through some

great fire, charred and broken. Kiefer's metal tree is an image of terrible brokenness. It is a shattering experience, a beginning of a Night Sea Journey.

The Philosophical Tree, the work of the creation of consciousness is made of metals (CW13, par. 119).

Mircea Eliade reminds us that,

“The image of the Earth-

Mother pregnant with every

kind of embryo, preceded the

image of Nature as the image

of the Earth-Mother had

preceded that of Sofia. It is,

therefore, important to return

now to the exceedingly ancient

symbolism in which the earth

is compared to the belly of the

mother and the mines to her

matrix and the ores to her

embryos” (Eliade, 1978, p. 52).



Figure 13 *Breaking of the Vessels (detail)*

As we turn to the next images, we remember that the smith, like the alchemist, is a ‘master of fire.’ It is with fire that he controls the passage of matter from one state to another (Eliade, 1978, p. 79), from one level of consciousness to another. Here, we see Kiefer's great tree of metal. Its shelves or branches are made of iron. Its books are made of lead. And all the elements are joined by thin copper wire, the metal of the Goddess of Love. Copper we know is

the durable conductor of heat, the fire, the passion, the Eros, that makes transformation possible.

These lead books—are they not the knowledge of Saturn’s realm, melancholy, depression, and Mercurius himself? The books are the *prima*

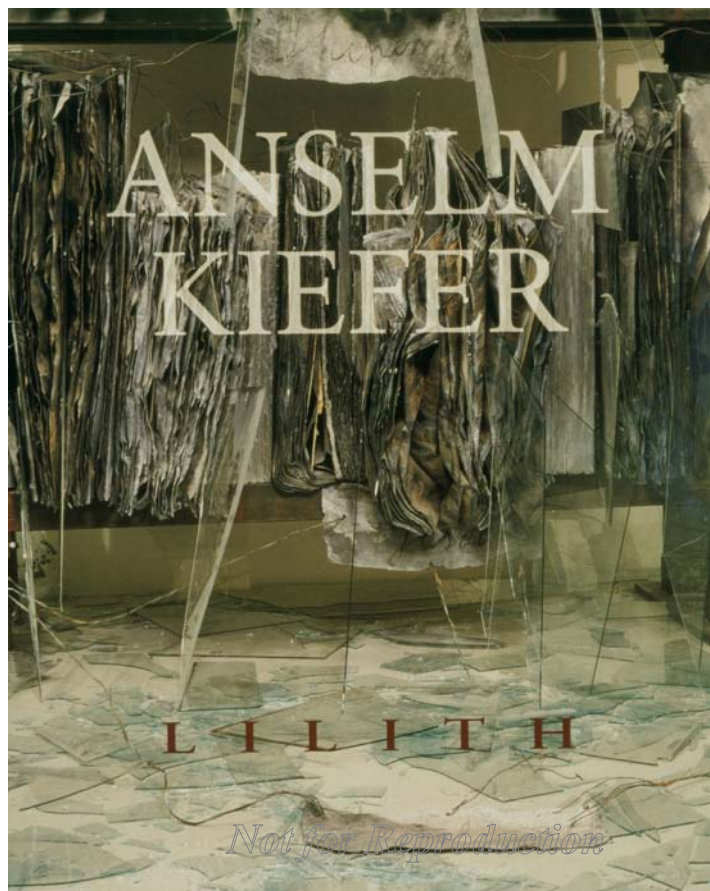


Figure 14 Catalogue Cover

materia—lead as the bringer of wisdom and the creative force of the artist. But here Kiefer joins Lilith to this image of creation. This is the cover of the catalogue of the exhibition in which *Breaking of the Vessels* was first shown. Lying amidst the shards of glass on the floor is the lead emblem inscribed Malchut, the last Sefiroth, the earthy divine Feminine. Across it boldly printed is the

name “Lilith.” It is she who is found amidst the brokenness, connected to the Tree of Life only by the wire transmitting the energy of love.

In Jung’s *Psychology and Alchemy* we read, “The Spirit Mercurius has to say the least a great many connections with the dark side. One of his aspects is the female serpent daemon Lilith or Melusina who lives in the philosophical tree” (CW13, par. 288). Lilith, unlike Michelangelo’s portrayal of Sophia in the crook of the creator’s arm, or of Eve abject before him, refused to lie beneath Adam.

She, who perfectly represented the shadow of an increasingly monotheistic and patriarchal world, was portrayed as dark, sensual, seductive, a witch, a biblical Medea. Here, Kiefer depicts her with planes, fighter bombers emerging from an ash covered dress.

The background of these paintings is a photograph of the skyscrapers of a modern city. Kiefer covers this with ash



Figure 15 *Lilith and her Daughters*

and then the ashen garment of Lilith. The devastation of war is present, the clash of inner opposites and the unleashing of raw archetypal energy into the world.

The *Mysterium Conjunctionis* says, “The Nigredo is called a ‘robe of destruction’...the garment of darkness” (CW14, par.43, note 72). Surely this is a description of these images of *Lilith* whose hands and feet are fighter bombers. Kiefer has given us an extraordinary new image of the Goddess of Destruction and Creation, a Kali for the Western world. She is the bearer of destruction and darkness. Yet, she is also the possibility for redemption, the source of new creation. All of Kiefer’s images of *Lilith* are covered with ashes which is

associated in alchemy with the *albedo*. “The white substance of the ash,” Jung says, “was described as ‘the diadem of the heart’” (CW14, par.319).

This painting is titled *Adelaide: Ashes of My Heart*. Alchemy called ash



Figure 16 *Adelaide: Ashes of My Heart*

the “white foliated earth” or the purified body. It is associated with consciousness of a previously unconscious content. Ash has a fertilizing power and was often sprinkled on fields to increase the crops. What is the

meaning of this Lilith called *Adelaide*? Adelaide is the feminine form of the German name Adelheid from the word *Adel* meaning the nobility and *Heide* meaning heathen or pagan. This noble pagan—is she emerging from the ashes of the city in the background or will she destroy these buildings in which we live high above the earth, communing only with the gods in the sky? I am reminded that Wolfgang Giegerich has spoken of the first nuclear fission as the time when the divine was split from the animal and ascended in overwhelming brightness extracting God from Nature. He likened the earthly sensuous left below severed from the ascended divine to what scientists call nuclear ash (Lecture: 1985, C.G.

Jung Institute, Chicago). But, remembering that ash is used to fertilize the earth, is Lilith emerging from it a message of hope? These works speak of Kiefer's personal encounter with her but also of some new fertility that may grow out of the fallow fields of our age. The ash of the *albedo* becomes the *rubedo*, the blood of passion and suffering and of life that comes with new consciousness of



Figure 17 *Lilith at the Red Sea*

personal and collective shadow.

Jung's *Mysterium* tells us that the Red Sea signifies baptism and is called an *aqua pontica*. We learn that at the Red Sea one encounters the animal soul "but at the same time and in the same place the meeting with the anima a feminine psychopomp." (CW14, par.282). For Kiefer, Lilith is this soul guide, the anima and the *anima mundi*. This work he titled *Lilith at the Red Sea*. In alchemy and in fairy tale, the Red Sea is the passage of transition from one world to another, from exile and bondage to unconscious forces to the *gnosis* of one's larger, deeper identity. In Gnostic symbolism, the sea represented the world of matter or the darkness into which the divine had sunk. And the Red Sea was

identified with Saturn with time and becoming (H. Jonas 1903, p. 117). This sea of the unconscious and the crossing out of exile is one of danger and suffering—made possible, we remember, only *deo concedente*.

In late Kabbalistic works, melancholic people are referred to as daughters of Lilith (Le Vitte Harten, 1990, p. 12). This is Kiefer's work titled *Lilith's Daughters*. Images of Lilith or Lilith and her daughters are the only paintings Kiefer exhibited with the *Breaking of the Vessels*. Lilith is the shadow or dark face of the Shekhinah. Like Isis or the



Figure 18 *Lilith's Daughters*

Shulamite, she is related to the nigredo of alchemy, to the darkness that is the beginning of the work of transforming consciousness.

The human soul in Gnostic myth was personified as the daughter of the Great Mother. And “the garment” represented the body as container of the soul. Kiefer represents Lilith and her daughters as garments, dresses covered in ashes. In this work titled *Lilith and Her Daughters*, we see a photograph attached to the largest garment. It appears to be the Milky Way, the path by which souls



Figure 19 Lilith and her Daughters

ascended to heaven. Below we see a snake skin draped inside another ash-covered dress. Kiefer reveals that she, the one associated with the heavy darkness of Saturnian time and depression, is the path of transformation, both personal and collective, that this is the Milky Way.

On the Tree of Life in the Kabbalah there is a place that is unrepresentable. It separates the upper triad of the Sefiroth from the seven below.

It is

the opening into the world called Emanation. We might call it the Self. This place is DAATH.

In the painting titled *Daath*, Kiefer's image is of a bridge, a Jacob's ladder turned on its side. One Spanish Kabbalist gave an astonishing description of Lilith as "a ladder on which one can ascend to the rungs of prophecy" (Patai, 1967, p. 247). That she is the link to a world beyond time and space was known to a 13th Century writer. We call this

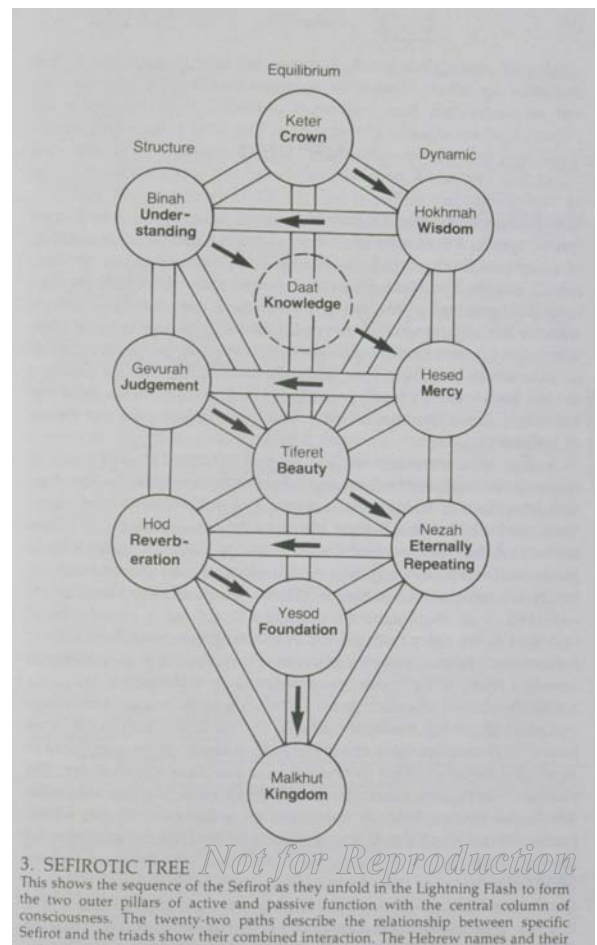


Figure 20 Sefirotic Tree



Figure 21 *Daath*

World of Emanation to the World of Creation. It is the transcendent function, the link between conscious and unconscious.

In this image we view a detail or portion of the bridge to which Lilith is attached. The airplane here is like a bird or image of spirit. But note, it is made of lead. Kiefer titled this work *Karfunkel Fee* or *The Carbuncle Fairy*. According to myth, new mines or an untapped vein are only discovered through the intervention of gods or divine creatures,

world the unconscious and he, the world of prophecy. “In medieval times, [DAATH] was called the veil or abyss before the face of God, but the notion of a ‘Black Hole’ like those found between the universes might give a sense of its mystery and function” (Halevi, 1986, p. 11). This place, DAATH, Kiefer depicts as a bridge extending from the left into a seemingly endless expanse towards consciousness—in Kabbalistic terms, from the



Figure 22 *Karfunkel Fee or The Carbuncle Fairy*

sometimes a fairy. Lilith, as *Carbuncle Fairy*, shows the way to the untapped sources of riches, the embryos in the great womb of the unconscious.

As the Carbuncle Fairy, she is related to the heart. We read, “the Shulamite’s heart too will shine like a carbuncle” (CW14, par.608). A carbuncle is a red sore or wound filled with poison, as well as a gemstone. In alchemy the poison, we remember, is transformed into medicine. The wound is also the jewel. This airplane, like those that carry us so rapidly that our souls need time to catch up, is like a fallen Icarus brought down to earth as it is caught in her energy field. Lilith as Carbuncle Fairy is a dark Venus whose bed chamber is lit by carbuncles (CW91, par 580, note 127). She is the sacred harlot cast out of the temple to return as demon and destroyer as all repressed energies do.

Mankind has always known that images have the power to change consciousness, that it is images that create revolutions. All of these works are collective dreams which compensate the totalitarian grip of Apollonic consciousness. James Hillman calls it a myth of feminine inferiority that has permeated Western consciousness and says it has meant the loss of the bisexuality of the God-image and that we must take back these projections of inferiority, that to do so “frees the feminine and her body and matter itself from its Apollonic contempt and compulsive fascination” (Hillman, 1978, p. 294).

Lilith refused to be inferior. Anselm Kiefer’s images bring us face to face with her essential place at the base of the Tree of Life. She is the only way that God can be rooted in the world. Without her the act of *Tikun*, the conjunctio, the return of the Feminine from exile is not possible. She lives in the collective unconscious, the Red Sea, to which she fled when required to assume an inferior

place. She is the darkness that is a beacon. For Kiefer, Lilith, not Lucifer, is truly the light bringer.



Figure 23 *Tree of Life Window*

Seven years after exhibiting the *Breaking of the Vessels* and the *Lilith* paintings, Kiefer created a series called *The Palaces of Heaven*. Here glass is no longer broken but forms this great *Tree of Life* window. *Tikun*, a restoration of wholeness has come to pass. In front of this great window stands a glass case like those we find in a museum of natural history. Inside are dresses, feminine ethereal garments seeming to move up and down a ladder

in a kind of eternal return. These images touch me, for I have never felt comfortable with the notion that clothes in our dreams represent merely persona. No, they are soul clothes. In Gnosticism we read about the “heavenly Garment.” At death, an angel comes to meet the dying with a “garment of light.” This garment came to symbolize “the heavenly or eternal Self of the person, his original idea, a kind of double or *alter ego* preserved in the upper world while he labors down below.... It grows with his deeds and



Figure 24 *In front of Tree of Life Window*

its form is perfected by his toils. Its fullness marks the fulfillment of his task and therefore his release from exile in this world” (H. Jonas, p. 122).



Figure 24 The Unborn

And it seems, we are told with this image, called The Unborn, that there is a great work of consciousness yet to be done. In this powerful painting, we see a wasteland of garments not yet filled. Kiefer's museum of natural history is an image of the ascent and descent of the psyche in the alchemy of transformation. The window acts as the filter, the veil of eternal light into this world of history, personal and collective. We see the unmistakably feminine nature of the soul where the original image brightens with the light of consciousness and the dresses, the garments are filled with it.

Then Kiefer suddenly gives us this image. It is a window in the world of creation through which we see a “real tree.”



Figure 25 Tree of Life Window

Or is it? It is the same window we have seen before in the images of *The Palaces of Heaven* series. I feel that Kiefer says that all the windows are the same—it is only the light in which we see them that reveals which world we apprehend.

Epilogue I

In early December 2001, three years after I first gave this lecture in Florence, Italy to the International Congress of Analytical Psychology, a colleague and friend sent me a copy of a news item that had come across the Associated Press wire with the following excerpt from an article by Hanns Neuerbourg:

“BASEL, Switzerland, Nov. 26—A few hours before the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, Ernst Beyeler had what he called a ‘strange experience.’ He was completing preparations for a show at his Beyeler Foundation Museum of Key Works by Anselm Kiefer, when he was offered another painting by the celebrated German artist. It shows a three-dimensional plane made of lead, mounted on a cityscape, menacingly headed toward a group of high-rise buildings. The catalogue was already in print. But the work, which Beyeler said ‘brings to mind in an eerie way the destruction in Manhattan,’ was added to the exhibits as a warning of a threatening apocalypse. The painting is titled “Lilith, Adam’s first wife”.

This painting was done in 1997 and it shows the lead plane with a stream of black hair attached to it, heading towards the tall buildings of a city. The entire surface of the painting is covered in ash.

It is the final Lilith image that you see here.



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The sculpture, *Breaking of the Vessels*, and all the paintings of the Lilith series appear in the Catalogue of the Marian Goodman Gallery, 1991, text by Le Vitte Harten. *The Palaces of Heaven* images are from the catalogue *Anselm Kiefer* for the exhibition at the Museo Correr, Venice, 1997. All other paintings appear in the catalogue by Rosenthal, 1987.