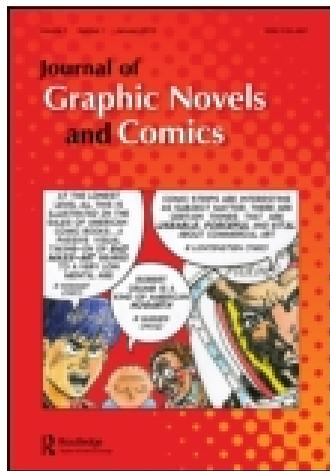


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## Seeing double: the transforming personalities of Alan Moore's *Promethea* and the *Ulster Cycle's* Cuchulain

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This article explores the physical and psychic transformation of Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup>, of Alan Moore's *Promethea*, and Cuchulain, of the Irish *Ulster Cycle*, into dual heroic identities, illustrating the psychological concerns present in the texts. This heroic process of establishing a dual identity dramatizes the creation of a balance between the conscious ego and the unconscious psyche, a pattern of individuation put forward by theorist Carl Jung and subsequently explored by Erich Neumann and James Hillman. The plot structure of the texts, as well as elements of visual/descriptive detail concerning transformation support this comparative examination and confirm a concern for an attempted resolution between conflicting psychological aspects of the heroic individual. This study highlights both the heroic failure of Cuchulain to attain this desired resolution and Moore's creation of a new paradigm for potential synthesis between the worlds of the ego and the psyche as illustrated through his character, Promethea<sup>®</sup>.

**Keywords:** transformation; heroic process; dual identity; individuation; ego; psyche

### Introduction

As Neumann has recognized, 'the hero myth is never concerned with the private history of an individual, but always with some prototypal and transpersonal event of collective significance' (1995, p. 197). In other words, and in Jungian terms, the hero is a 'transpersonal' and 'transhistorical' archetype (Doty 2000, p. 200). The 'private history' of any mythological hero, therefore, displays certain patterns in heroic development that are linked to patterns of development in individuation: our own private formation of identity. This heroic process of rebirth or self-transformation often features the development of multiple identities followed by a necessary reunification of these multiples through the heroic act. Achieving this unity is a creative and empowering act bringing together two worlds: that of the collective unconscious, also known as the psyche, and that of the ego, representing the conscious mind. This link between hero status and psychological unity has profound bearing on the investigation of super-heroes in mainstream graphic narratives. Examining mythic and modern texts for patterns in origination, transformation, and its aftermath illustrates the development of social concern for the process of establishing psychological unity.

Modern critical approaches to the superhero genre, such as the work of Peter Coogan (2006), Danny Fingeroth (2008) and Richard Reynolds (1992) form an interesting dialogue with a psychoanalytical approach to the heroic role. Though their works do not expressly

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engage with a pattern of ego-psyche unification, they highlight complementary details to a psychoanalytical study. Coogan focuses on defining superhero literature as a genre rather than speculating about ‘what superheroes tell us about ourselves’ (2006, p. 1), while Fingerhuth’s more psychological approach is concerned with ‘how the superhero has become part and parcel of modern pop culture’, however, his discussion of duality and anger may be useful to a discussion of characters seeking ego-psyche balance (2008, p. 23). Reynolds’ patterns of superhero development are illuminating regarding characters who have roles as ‘earthbound gods’, as well as his observations that elements like costume establish difference as a ‘sign for the inward process of character development’ (1992, pp. 16, 29). Assumptions appropriate to main-stream comics may not always hold true, however, as Reynolds’ claim that ‘the superhero has a mission to preserve society, not reinvent it’ (1992, p. 77). This contrasts with the basic movement of psychological unification, which focuses on individuation but contains the potential for dramatic social change.

### *Transforming texts*

Alan Moore has created, in his own words, a ‘Trojan Horse’ in his graphic character Promethea<sup>®</sup>, because she looks like ‘a main-stream superhero’ but expresses far more esoteric concepts than a physical struggle between good and evil (Khoury *et al.* 2008, p. 186). He describes the magical aspects of the work as a representation of ‘self-discovery’ and states that ‘in coming to know yourself you will have to come to know all of these entities that represent parts of you in the world of your mind’ (Khoury *et al.* 2008, p. 187). Such an overtly psychological purpose in the construction of a hero, and one that relates so closely to Moore’s own concepts of mind and magic, lends itself to very close study of heroic identity in cultural artefacts. Moore, a self-defined ‘magician’ who has come to the realization that ‘the very act of writing is a magical act’ in ‘bringing something out of nothing’, uses questions such as ‘where do ideas come from?’ in order to form the basis of a work like *Promethea* (2010). This also explains why both myth and magic form the texture of the series. They, like Promethea<sup>®</sup>, form an intersection with language, the communicative crucible of the relationship between the ego and the psyche.

The Promethea<sup>®</sup> story presents a duality in the heroic nature, between Sophie Bangs<sup>®</sup>, ordinary college student living mainly in the world of the conscious ego, and Promethea<sup>®</sup>, an agent and embodying principle of the imagination, hailing from the realm of the unconscious psyche. This duality is constructed through a process of physical transformation of Sophie into Promethea<sup>®</sup> and vice versa. In mythological and heroic terms, this kind of physical heroic transformation is rare, but compares in a significant manner to the Irish *Ulster Cycle*’s Cuchulain, who also manifests a physical transformation between two identities, and is associated in parallel with the conscious ego and the unconscious psyche worlds. Both sets of characters express a dual relationship, a tenuous relation of opposites, and evoke struggle between the worlds they represent. They also, however, illustrate a pattern of transformation with meaningful psychological overtones.

### *Jungian analysis*

In his seminal essay, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1954), Jung not only identifies an archetype of the hero in various forms, but also archetypes of situation which he terms the ‘archetypes of transformation’ that illustrate a symbolic process of transformation particularly suited to expression in images (1990, p. 38). These archetypes of transformation are, as he states, characterized by getting ‘stuck’ in an ‘impossible situation’

in which the final goal is 'illumination or higher consciousness' (1990, p. 38). Alchemical images are particularly suited to expressing this process, and magician-like figures often function as teachers of enlightenment. Some mythological figures most suited to bring the 'light of meaning' in this role are 'Hermes Trismegistus or Thoth of Hermetic Literature' (Jung 1990, p. 37).

Jung has also identified several types of rebirth in mythological and psychological terms. A being may undertake a rebirth which results in 'essential transformation' which is a 'total rebirth' akin to 'transmutation' capable of translating a mortal into an immortal being, the corporeal into the spirit, and the human into the divine (Jung 1990, p. 113). A being capable of this kind of transmutation represents a level of commerce between the spiritual, transcendent psyche and the rational, quantifiable world of the ego. Ancient rites of transformation, often involving symbolic death and rituals of name changing, instead seek to instate 'a semi-divine being with a new character and an altered metaphysical destiny' (Jung 1990, p. 129). In patterns of transforming dual-named heroes we may then see the psychological function of attempted transit between two worlds, with synthesis between them as a final goal.

The unconscious has traditionally acquired a topographical concept of being 'below' the conscious ego. Freud refers to this other 'mental province' as the base of the consciousness and Hillman as a 'psychological underworld' both limitless and timeless (Hillman 1979, p. 19). Jung contests Freud's definition of the unconscious as a 'gathering place of forgotten and repressed contents' of 'an exclusively personal nature' (Jung 1990, p. 3) and suggests an upper and lower topography containing the 'personal unconscious' and the 'inborn' collective unconscious which is 'not individual but universal' and contains 'archetypes' (1990, p. 3). In mythological terms, heroes who undertake a journey into the earth or the underworld are embarking on a journey into the 'psychological underworld' (Hillman 1979, p. 19), the roots of existence. A heroic achievement is, in its purest form, a reconstitution of the relationship between the world above and the world below undertaken by the hero. The hero, therefore, becomes a member of both worlds and dramatizes his own dual nature unified.

James Hillman, a neo-Jungian, addresses the issues associated with the intersections between psychoanalysis and culture, using myth to illuminate processes of individuation. Myth, as the 'supreme reality' is also, for Hillman, the 'supreme fiction' whose capacity to be both 'empty' and 'full' allows the individual to participate in the roles of mythical counterparts (Hillman 1989, p. 221). Consequently, myth becomes the ideal medium for culture to illustrate its exploration of individuation, as a story that is both 'full' of reality and 'empty' enough for a reader/audience to take on a participating role. In the case of a hero who successfully navigates the process of unifying his dual nature, the reader/audience may be instructed by example and also through a participating role in the difficulties and rewards of such an undertaking.

### **The transforming personalities of Setenta-Cuchulain**

According to Hillman (1979), the alternation between the ego and the psyche must have associations with the rational, conscious world and the unconscious other or underworld. As a descendant of both worlds, the Irish *Ulster Cycle's* Cuchulain manifests a dual personality. The men of Ulster, representing the rational ego world, have made a pact with the earlier god-like inhabitants of the island of Eriu, the Tuatha de Danaan, that the human beings will inhabit the 'upper' world of the island, and that the Tuatha de Danaan may inhabit the realm 'under hill', the realm below (Gantz 1985, p. 188). This directional

attribution further reinforces the association between the Tuatha de Danaan and the unconscious. These treaty divisions are clearly drawn but rarely maintained. Cuchulain represents an overlap in the treaty initiated by the world of the psyche.

### *Origin*

Cuchulain exists as the culmination of a mysterious, otherworldly process of triple birth. First, the Ulstermen are invited to stay in a magical dwelling, Brugh na Boine, during a snowstorm. During the night, the lady of the house gives birth and in the morning, Dechtire, the sister of the King, finds that she is responsible for fostering the boy who has been left with her. While fosterage is an integral aspect of the culture of the *Ulster Cycle*, the placement of the child with a member of the royal family is suggestive of high-status parentage. Shortly afterward, however, Dechtire's foster-son dies. Following his death, Dechtire drinks from a vessel, ingesting a 'tiny creature', and is then visited in a dream by the Celtic deity Lugh, often associated in mythography with the Roman Mercury. He informs her that she is pregnant with his son, and his name should be Setenta. This roughly translates as 'one who has knowledge of roads and ways' (Gantz 1985, p. 131). Dechtire wishes to terminate this unnatural pregnancy and successfully induces an abortion. Finally, as a married woman, she becomes pregnant 'at once', reputedly by her husband Sualtair, and bears a son. There is little doubt that this represents the intrusion of the otherworld on the Ulstermen, as evinced by Cuchulain's later miraculous abilities and the retained name Setenta (Gantz 1985, pp. 131–133).

### *Transformation*

The 'boyhood deeds of Cuchulain', are a distinctive aspect of Cuchulain's heroic achievement. As a young child, he journeys to his royal uncle's home, Emain Macha, to join other boys and 'play'. Because he fails to ask for the 'protection' of all of the boys at Emain Macha before joining them, he is immediately attacked by the entire troupe, 150 boys. It is in this moment that Cuchulain's otherworldly nature first manifests itself and he undergoes a physical transformation. His 'riarstarthae', variously rendered 'warp convulsion' or 'hero's moon', a phase of transformation, leads to drastic and terrifying alternations in his physical appearance (Gantz 1985, p. 136).

This episode displays a dominating visual aspect, as the poet of the text halts his narrative to give the transformation in detail, indicating the following: that every hair appears like a nail that has been 'driven into his head', that there hangs suspended 'a spark of fire on every hair', that one eye narrows to the point of a needle, that one eye opens and bulges to the size of a large 'wooden bowl', that his teeth are exposed up to his ears, that his mouth gapes so that his 'gullet' is 'visible', and that a visual mist of light and/or blood known as the 'warrior's moon' or 'hero's light' rises from his head (Gantz 1985, p. 136, Carson 2008, p. 38). Comparable accounts of 'battle rage' can be found in Norse medieval tradition in the case of 'berserker' figures that have 'animal like characteristics' and are 'impervious to wounds', however, berserkers are not traditionally known for visually 'transforming' in the manner of Setenta (Lindahl *et al.* 2002, p. 39). In this unique and altered condition, Setenta strikes down all of the boys and approaches his uncle, King Conchubhar. Peace only fully resumes when all of the boys agree to ask for Setenta's protection, not vice versa. This is a significant moment, since Setenta becomes, for the first time, an official protector of Ulster due to his capacity for transformation.

Another tale ascribed to his boyhood accounts for his dual naming, an aspect of his nature that suggests a dual identity. A smith, Culand, offers hospitality to the King and his retinue and Conchubar, forgetting that he has invited his nephew to the feast, informs Culand that the doors may be shut and his monstrous guard-dog unleashed. Setenta arrives after dark and is set upon by the hound, overthrowing him after a gruesome struggle. Barehanded, Setenta wrestles with the hound until 'he smash[es] it to pieces' (Carson 2008, p. 42). Culand is angered by the loss of his hound, and Setenta, eager to make peace, offers to take on another protector role until a hound can be reared to replace the one that he killed. He will function as the 'hound of Culand'; thereafter he is known by this role as Cuchulain.

This renaming is not without controversy. Cathbad, Conchubar's arch-druid, proposes that the boy's name be changed to Cuchulain and Setenta, significantly, objects. He prefers the name Setenta, given to him by his otherworldly father, but Cathbad insists on the renaming, since this will be the name of a great Ulster hero. Setenta-Cuchulain is born, a dual hero. Society has taken ownership of him for its own ends, attempting to direct his powers and civilize his otherworldly aspects. Following this event, a second significant transformation occurs when he 'takes arms' as a warrior, receiving the status of manhood (Gantz 1985, p. 141). He rides out with his new weaponry and charioteer seeking conflict, upon his return carrying the heads of his foes. The watchmen who see him approaching are so terrified by his appearance that they send out troops of naked women to contravene his rage, admonishing 'These are the warriors you must take on today' (Carson 2008, p. 50). Several vast vats of cold water are then used to 'cool' him to a normal state. As Cuchulain declares, he will 'spill the blood of everybody in the fort' unless appeased in some way (Carson 2008, p. 50). Despite the social difficulty Ulster faces in negotiating Cuchulain's dual persona, he becomes socially assimilated to Ulster, marries, is named Conchubar's heir to Ulster, and thereafter functions as a pillar of the community's defence. It would seem the benefits of his presence outweigh the dangers.

Cuchulain, in turn, becomes the focus of otherworldly interest later in his short life and is given a unique opportunity to return to his father's land, rejecting the land of Ulster entirely. He learns that Fand, daughter of the Sea god Manaanan son of Lyr, is in love with him and agrees to go and help her people in battle, leaving his own wife Emer behind. The otherworldly people refer to him as 'the son of Dechtire's spectre' (Gantz 1985, p. 163), confirming his otherworldly status. Fand describes his remarkable physical appearance, possessing many colours in his cheeks, 'seven lights' in his eyes, and 'hair of three different colours' (Gantz 1985, pp. 171–172). Due to marital conflict over Fand, Setenta returns to Emer to take up his role as Cuchulain once more. The socializing aspect of the Ulstermen, and his commitments to them eventually win out, but the essential conflict between worlds remains.

Though both Cuchulain's power of transformation and his otherworldly beauty have been established in the text, the audience also receives a contrasting physical description of Cuchulain among the men of Ulster that contrasts sharply with Fand's lyrical observations. He is 'a small, dark-haired man, but very resplendent' (Gantz 1985, p. 188). This confirms in dramatic fashion the presence, not only of differences in personality, but also of physical alter egos in the person of Setenta-Cuchulain. When his otherworldly nature is engaged, as Setenta, he is alternately remarkably beautiful and remarkably terrifying in appearance, but when he is simply riding among the Ulstermen, as Cuchulain, he is a rather ordinary prince.

Even when Cuchulain is acting as a social being, however, there are those who are afraid of him, jealous of his qualities, and wish him personal harm. In the story of Bricriu's

feast, when the men of Ulster attack him, Cuchulain transforms, and this time his weapons churn ‘like a mill wheel’ (Gantz 1985, p. 229). Torn between opposites, Setenta-Cuchulain constantly attempts mediation, but is the object of fear and distrust to the social world.

### ***Duality***

This conflict may signal a struggle in Jungian terms: Cuchulain’s symbolic pre-birth deaths at the hands of his mother may represent the rational world of the ego attempting to bar or subvert the intrusion of the unconscious psyche. Brought up in the world of the ego, it is only a matter of time before Cuchulain manifests his dual qualities. He does so in stages, the final of which is physical transformation to represent his ‘otherness’, and unmistakable signal of the eruption of the psyche into the world of the ego.

As Jung (1990), Neumann (1995), and Hillman (1975) have documented, myths and rituals concerning aspects of spiritual or physical transformation typically dramatize an individual’s movement toward unity or the restoration of balance between the ego and the long-subverted psyche, ‘likenesses to happenings’ within the individual (Hillman 1975, p. 101). This process of self-exploration is in itself heroic, willingly seeking out conflict with primordial elements. The Cuchulain and Promethea<sup>®</sup> narratives dramatize the same process from slightly differing perspectives. Promethea<sup>®</sup>, indeed, struggles to establish balance between the world of the ego and that of the psyche, and like Cuchulain, she gets little thanks for her endeavour from the dominant ego-world. Cuchulain, likewise, struggles mainly to overcome ego foes in the ego world and escape retaliation for his subversive manifestation of the psyche world in unfriendly territory.

Both sets of heroes are on journeys of self-transformation, but as dual natures, face equivalent struggles in both versions of reality. This neat symmetry suggests the ultimate goal of such an undertaking: a radical balance between upper and lower, the ego and the psyche. It is essential that both parts of each dual nature progress toward this balance to create a unified individual with maximum potential. Though an audience might consider them heroic for enacting this struggle, they will only consider them heroes if they, whether in life or death, achieve some measure of success.

### **The transforming personalities of Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup>**

#### ***Origin***

The exact origin and nature of Promethea<sup>®</sup> becomes a mystery for the reader to untangle. Through flashbacks in the graphic text, Promethea<sup>®</sup> is presented as a child of the fifth century AD. Her father, a hermetic philosopher, saves her upon his death at the hand of a Christian mob by delivering her into the hands of Thoth-Hermes. Thoth-Hermes is a fused and double deity representing her father’s primary gods, the Egyptian Thoth and the Greek Hermes. They take her away, informing her that she will be ‘a story’ and live ‘eternally, as stories do’ in their realm, the Immateria<sup>®</sup> (Moore 2000a, p. 24). The Immateria<sup>®</sup> represents a version of the human collective unconscious, both a repository and generative source of all myth, language, and story. Her ‘enlightened magician’ figures from this realm correspond with those discussed as transformation guides by Jung, suggesting that she will be journeying not only into the realm of ‘story’ but into the realm of the unconscious on the path toward unity and enlightenment.

In later history, Promethea<sup>®</sup> is variously described as ‘walk-in’ and a manifestation of the imagination of writers and artists who evoke her, thereby enable her to wear human beings like ‘sandals’ in the ego world (Moore 2000b, p. 65, 2000a, p. 28). She co-habits

human bodies, but manifests a physical transformation as part of the process, altering her appearance and personality slightly with each new host. From the perspective of an individual Promethea<sup>®</sup> incarnation, such as Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup>, however, this relationship exists as a duality and functions as a dual-personality coinciding with visible markers of transformation. Methods for achieving incarnation are also, historically, various, including poetry, prose, and illustration. While previous versions of Promethea<sup>®</sup> have been invited to cohabit mortal women by an outside agent, such as a husband or lover, Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> takes shape by Sophie's own poetic agency, suggesting a difference in her role and status in the history of Promethea<sup>®</sup> incarnations (Moore 2000a).

Promethea's<sup>®</sup> appearance, as well as her given history and name, suggest mythological precedent. Her pedagogical figures, such as Thoth-Hermes, manifest in her appearance. The Greek god Hermes, both a messenger of the gods and a guide to the souls of the dead, functions as an equally guiding figure for Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> and humanity. Thoth, an Egyptian deity with similar functions, is often associated with Hermes, and referred to as 'Hermes Trismegistus' in Greek scholarship. A significant body of Greek tradition known as *The Hermetica*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, gave birth to mystical and alchemical study throughout Europe (Freke and Gandy 1999). One of the central concepts of the Hermetic writings is that God/Atum is in itself a 'big mind' within which human beings exist as a thought (Freke and Gandy 1999, p. xxxi). This is not dissimilar to the way in which Moore presents the Immateria<sup>®</sup> to his readers, as an overarching reality containing all physical reality as a manifestation of thought. Promethea's<sup>®</sup> Hermes caduceus visually reminds us of this link to guiding figures and concepts and the multivolume work is punctuated with images of a solar symbol, consistent with Ra, suggesting both Egyptian and Hermetic themes.

The name 'Promethea'<sup>®</sup> also calls upon another strand of mythical tradition. The Greek god Prometheus exists as an antique mythical rebel figure, cleverly stealing fire from Zeus to deliver it, and therefore all craft and art, to mankind. Carl Kerényi, in his study of the Prometheus story, also points out the suffering nature of Prometheus, embracing a nearly eternal span of punishment by Zeus in order to compassionately save humanity from an unjust death sentence (1997). He is a 'devious thinker' and 'fire stealer' who wilfully forms a bridge between the world of the ego, mankind's physical existence, and the psyche, the realm of the gods (Kerényi 1997, pp. 51, 77). Significantly, during Sophie's first transformation into Promethea<sup>®</sup>, she declares 'I bring you fire' (Moore 2000a, p. 28). Since Promethea<sup>®</sup> is also 'story', Moore seems to suggest a relationship between myth, language, and divinity, a connection long espoused in both alchemy and magical arts.

### **Transformation**

Sophie Bangs<sup>®</sup>, like Cuchulain, manifests several stages of development in projecting the psyche into her ego world before reaching further phases of transformation. The reader is made aware of her original fascination in researching the historical Promethea<sup>®</sup> *mythos* and the psyche world that Promethea<sup>®</sup> represents. Sophie initially perceives Promethea<sup>®</sup> to be a character in several literary works, passing through the hands of several authors over time, and is not yet aware that Promethea<sup>®</sup> is a historically incarnating figure connected to her writers and illustrators. She takes a further step toward contact with the psyche by interviewing Barbara Shelley<sup>®</sup>, the spouse of the latest, now deceased, Promethea<sup>®</sup> writer (Moore 2000a).

Her interest in the subject sparks reprisals from an anti-Promethea<sup>®</sup> contingent known as 'The Temple', and through her encounter with the demonic Smee<sup>®</sup>, a foe sent to stalk

her, the limitations of the ego world are revealed to Sophie (Moore 2000b, p. 5). Under stress she faces her first transformation, followed by the realization that she can enact transit between the worlds, also existing for periods of time as a traveller in the realm of the Immateria<sup>®</sup>. At the time of her first transformation, she describes herself in written and spoken verse as both a ‘God adopted one’ and ‘the child who stands/Between fixed earth and insubstantial air’ (Moore 2000a, pp. 26, 27). Both of these phrases are remarkably comparable to the origin and function of Setenta-Cuchulain, who is conversely the ‘human-adopted one’ of immortal stock and standing between two worlds.

Difference in physical appearance between Sophie and Promethea<sup>®</sup> is dramatically emphasized through costume and weaponry. Sophie’s appearance in street clothes during the first half of the work consists of a dark jacket, dark flare trousers, and a cropped light blue top (Moore 2000a). Promethea’s<sup>®</sup> appearance as Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup>, designed by J.H. Williams III, and based on designs by Alan Moore features: a serpent bracelet, a winged scarab tattoo on her back, a Thoth tattoo on the right side of the right leg, to be conveniently viewed by the reader in Egyptian profile, a caduceus staff made of white light with blue edging and live, moving serpents, and costuming that is ‘an elaborate combination of Greek (Hermes) and Egyptian (Thoth) stylings’ (Moore 2000c, p. 159). This consists of armour ‘in gold tones’ and ‘robing’ in ‘pure white with red edges and Greek key designs’ (Moore 2000c, p. 159). These culturally combined design features suggest equally blended elements of thematic content regarding Promethea’s<sup>®</sup> guiding, and also archetypal, figures.

We may note that Sophie initially finds herself in an archetypal situation in relation to archetypes of transformation (Jung 1990, p. 38). She is ‘stuck’ in an ‘impossible situation’ fighting an otherworldly being with an injured ally and is forced into necessary ‘illumination’ both literally and physically (Jung 1990, p. 38). These phases of transformation, as Jung remarks, are often particularly tied to ‘the history of language’ and throughout Sophie’s incarnation of Promethea<sup>®</sup>, there is a powerful linguistic association (1990, p. 33). The Immateria<sup>®</sup> itself is allied to language as a creative, magically generating faculty and ties into Moore’s concepts of creation as magic and an ‘almost entirely linguistic phenomenon’ (2010). Visual aspects of ‘image’, however, are also closely allied to transformation. According to Jung, transformation is an experience ‘in images and of images’ (1990, p. 38). We may also add that as an experience ‘of images’; transformation is consequently ideally represented in such a graphic medium. This may also serve to explain the predominantly visual focus of authors in the transformation of both Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> and Setenta-Cuchulain.

Physical transformation likewise acts as an unmistakable signal of difference from the ego world in the cases of both Setenta-Cuchulain and Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup>. Though Cuchulain’s monstrous battle-transformations can only hail from the otherworld, Promethea<sup>®</sup> can only be a ‘science heroine’ or ‘science villain’, different and dangerous, but necessarily ego-explicable (Moore 2000d, p. 61). The true explanation is too expansive for the modern ego mind to easily grasp. According to the ego world, the Immateria<sup>®</sup> itself cannot possibly exist; acknowledging its existence would drastically undermine the entire fabric of social reality. This rival reality is much bigger than any ‘science-villain’ to the ego world and highlights an intrinsic conflict between the two worlds.

### *Unification*

Despite this intrinsic opposition between the ego and the psyche, Sophie makes decisions to journey further and further into the Immateria<sup>®</sup> as well as the realm usually travelled

by the dead in order to actualize herself, and forgive herself for the death of Barbara Shelley<sup>®</sup>. She displays an increasing balance of ego and psyche self through escalating challenges (Moore 2000e, 2000f). This is partly due to the tutelage, in the Immateria<sup>®</sup>, of previous versions of Promethea<sup>®</sup> (Moore 2001a). This adaptation, however, distinguishes her from previous incarnations of Promethea<sup>®</sup>, and suggests that she is, indeed, the herald of the final, integrating collision for humankind. She may, indeed, differ from previous Prometheas<sup>®</sup> specifically because she has the capacity to personally integrate the spheres of the ego and the psyche rather than simply acting as a messenger.

Sophie, while journeying into the Immateria<sup>®</sup> as her ego self on a personal journey to seek Barbara's soul, also fits Neumann's 'third type' of hero exclusive of either an 'Introverted' or 'Extroverted Type' (1995, p. 220). Instead, through focusing on herself, she attempts to 'transform the personality' and in essence offers humanity the opportunity to be 'molded' into 'shape by molding itself' (Neumann 1995, p. 221). She functions as an example-hero. As readers follow her journey through the Immateria<sup>®</sup>, they are given the opportunity to assume a new enlightenment that can bring the ego and psyche worlds closer together. One of the goals of Neumann's 'third type' of hero is 'conquest of death' which becomes a feature of Sophie's search for Barbara, her encounter with her own deceased father, and, finally, an integration of the material and spiritual worlds as a culmination of the story (1995, p. 221, Moore 2002b, 2003a).

The methods by which Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> seeks integration are various and variously represented by Moore. Through their initial instructions, previous Prometheas<sup>®</sup> imbue Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> with the 'four weapons' necessary to be a fully integrated human: the sword of 'reason', the cup of 'compassion', the pentangle of the 'spirit', and the disc or wand of physical existence, called the worldly 'carnival' (Moore 2000f, p. 154, Moore 2001a, pp. 7, 8). She also learns the secrets of the microcosm and macrocosm, the personal and collective unconscious, from 'Mike' and 'Mack' the twin serpents on her Hermes caduceus (Moore 2001c). This links the ideology of the *Hermetica*, a balance between the macrocosm of the mind of God and the microcosm of the individual, to Promethea<sup>®</sup> once again, but also ties into alchemical and magical doctrine.

We may also note that Moore suggests that this path toward understanding between the ego and psyche has been trodden before in magical terms. Sophie cannot learn enough about the Immateria<sup>®</sup> to navigate a full exploration until she accepts the guidance of human magician Jack Faust<sup>®</sup> (Moore 2001b). The instruction he provides, as well as a sexual initiation for Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup>, also mirrors a necessary balance between the material and non-material worlds of the ego and the psyche, and illustrates the role of magic in enabling this communication.

This instruction also initiates the beginning of the exploration of the limitless and changeable Immateria<sup>®</sup>, whose roads follow the 'map of awareness' beyond the spheres of the planets (Moore 2002a, p. 5). This journey is represented both as a 'tree of life' with coloured spheres and as a mathematical game of hopscotch representing the Kabbalah with its 22 connecting paths and glyphs (Moore 2002a, p. 6). When Sophie has personally achieved the journey of integration on these paths, her Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> appearance changes again. She is revealed as a 'scarlet woman' capable of bring about the 'world's destruction', meaning a forcible integration of the ego-world with the psyche (Moore 2003b, pp. 21, 18). Even this qualification does not convince Sophie, and she responds by attempting to prevent this cataclysm.

The dual nature of Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> and resultant physical changes both protect and expose her. Sophie can transform into Promethea<sup>®</sup> to use her powers, or hide within her own unremarkable ego for months on end if necessary. Her new degree of integration

as a 'scarlet woman', however, makes halting this integration for the rest of human kind impossible. Once aware that a final change into her altered state will result in the 'end of the world', she attempts to restrain the transformation (Moore 2005a). She is, however, no longer in complete control of the process and is forced into a final transformation, initiating worldwide integration (Moore 2005a).

The final, unknown synthesis she achieves for human kind comes not without pain and personal risk. She is not longer Sophie Bangs<sup>®</sup>, Promethea<sup>®</sup>, or even a dual persona. She is instead something new and unknown that has brought the same potential to humanity by fusing the two worlds (Moore 2005b). The apocalypse of the physical ego worlds and the immaterial psyche worlds results in a new type of devastation. The reader is left questioning positive and negative outcomes, but one thing remains certain: the age-old opposition between the two worlds has been resolved. Her success is heroic as the potential rebirth of the individual becomes heroic. Moore presents this 'newness' and unity through a final, non-transforming Sophie who only vaguely resembles her former self, and no longer needs to manifest a physical duality (Moore 2005b).

### *Transitional figures*

Transitional figures such as Setenta-Cuchulain and Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> represent the potential for communication between the two worlds of the mind, but they also epitomize its dangers and the entrenched, essential conflict of opposites. Sophie, at first must leave behind her native world to journey further and further into the Immateria<sup>®</sup> in order to actualize herself. Cuchulain, by contrast, ventures further and further into the social ego world of the Ulstermen, marrying, and taking on a leadership position in the community. As Cuchulain journeys further into the ego world, the psyche erupts through him upon occasion. Society attempts to make sure that this eruption is ego-sanctioned and ego-protective. The restraints Ulster places on the psyche-nature of Setenta are too constricting, and in the end, this irreconcilable conflict between his otherworldly and ego natures results in his early death. Sophie's return to the ego-world with her new found integration can only result in even more cataclysmic conflict, the apocalypse itself. It seems to require a new world to eliminate a conflict that has become so essential and yet so disruptive to human potential.

Though mutually inverse in approach, the *Ulster Cycle* and *Promethea* texts present an attempted dialogue between the two worlds of the ego and the psyche and a suggestion of the potential of alliance. Cuchulain's story illustrates sympathy toward the psyche, throwing a cynical light upon the behaviour of the Ulstermen. *Promethea*, conversely, suggests sympathy focused on Sophie, an ego figure born into an ego world. She explores the psyche world, seeks her own enlightenment, tries to bring the psyche to the ego world, and succeeds because of her own acquired internal unity. In both cases, however, the psyche world functions as an intrusive, if not combative, element and faces an equally combative response on the part of the ego.

### **Conclusion**

Within the confines of the *Ulster Cycle*, the figure Setenta-Cuchulain is never fully understood by his community. In both life and death, he succeeds in maintaining mysterious and possibly limitless qualities associated with the psyche and unconscious. Through close observation, both the people of Ulster and the audience develop sympathy and awe regarding the power and emotion of the psyche nature, and also develop a desire to respond differently to it than the ego characters might. The audience is led to affirm the action of

psyche-driven figures and is left with a sense of loss upon the hero's death as well as a sense of failure concerning the struggle that his dual nature represents.

Sophie-Promethea<sup>®</sup> also challenges traditional ego responses to the psyche. Through observation of Sophie's personal journey into the psyche, the reader develops sympathy for her internal conflicts, as her limitations and mistakes encode teaching elements for other characters and for the reader. The world of the Immateria<sup>®</sup> that Promethea<sup>®</sup> represents is never fully known, since it is limitless and a matter of continual change. The reader receives suggestions of its sublime boundlessness, but the new synthesis world of the ego-psyche is the new unknown. Moore's new definition of the unknown is open to every individual to explore: the unified self, consisting of the union of ego and psyche, as an empire of directed potential. In *Promethea*, the duality is initially a necessary truth to emphasize, but the emphasis is a means to this end. The problem must be fully explored before Moore can illustrate a solution.

The Promethea moth, a recurring symbol in Moore's work, suggests the movement of larvae, through a cocoon of transformation to a final form (2003b). It also serves well as a striking explanation of the presence of these 'transforming personalities' in both *Promethea* and the *Ulster Cycle*. In this analogy, Setenta functions as a Promethea moth attempting to discourse with larvae through the persona of Cuchulain and Sophie functions as a larva in transit via Promethea<sup>®</sup> to her final 'new' scarlet self and beyond. While Cuchulain's determination to integrate is met with hostility and eventual failure, proposing no final solution, Moore's apocalypse levels this tragic struggle, allowing a redefinition of the possible. As such, the *Promethea* saga has its own harmonized duality, functioning as both a very old and very new heroic mythology with 'collective significance' in the illustration of the process of individuation (Neumann 1995, p. 197). Moore's statement that one may 'cross over the borderline of rationality and be in magic' illustrates just how fine a boundary he feels exists between the ego and the psyche, but his work *Promethea* exemplifies just how difficult, and how necessary it can be for a heroic individual to make that crossing (2010).

### Notes on contributor

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